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Parental role in the learning process of children in conflict-affected area

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ABSTRACT

This study adds meaningful insight to the limited knowledge on parental roles in conflict-affected areas and supports efforts to improve education for children in vulnerable settings. In light of the intensification of military conflicts in recent years, understanding how parents support their children's education has become increasingly urgent. Parental role plays a crucial role in children's educational success, yet in conflict-affected areas, this role faces significant challenges. This study investigates the factors associated with parental role in education within the Kurdish region of Iraq, an area characterised by displacement and ongoing regional conflicts. Using a correlational research design, this study explores the relationships between financial status, family size, child labour, and parental perspectives on learning responsibilities in shaping the parental role. Through a mixed-methods approach involving a survey of 567 parents (219 displaced and 348 from the host community), the research explores the complex dynamics of educational decision-making, child labour, and parental perspectives on learning responsibilities. The findings reveal that while most parents strongly support their children's education, displaced parents are more likely to consider interrupting schooling due to immediate economic pressures. A significant correlation was found between financial status and educational intentions, with parents facing financial constraints more likely to consider their children's school withdrawal. Interestingly, parents with larger families demonstrated a stronger commitment to educational continuity. The study emphasises a sophisticated comprehension of parental roles in knowledge acquisition and the joint responsibility of parents and teachers in moral and value education. These insights highlight the essential requirement for collaborative educational frameworks that are culturally relevant and assist families facing difficult socio-economic circumstances.

1. Introduction

Engagement of parents in learning means that parents share the responsibility to help children in achieving learning goals and provisions of the learning environment at home, school, and community level. Parental role not only improves the grades of children but also creates confidence, socialisation skills, and good classroom behaviours (Kamal et al., 2022). A large body of research over the past decades has emphasized that the parental role is crucial for children of all ages to receive a quality education (Epstein, 2001; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Jeynes, 2005, 2007; Wilder, 2023). According to Epstein (2018), there are different ways parents can contribute to their children's education. These include creating a conducive home environment for learning, keeping parents informed about their children's academic progress in class, attending PTA meetings and other school events, helping their children with homework and other home learning tasks, and being involved in school-based decision-making through committees.

Some studies have focused on specific aspects of parental role, such as attendance at school-related events or support for school activities (Goshin et al., 2021), while others have adopted a more comprehensive approach, considering the various dimensions of parent involvement (Yang et al., 2021). Although the term "parental involvement" is widely used in the educational literature, this study adopts the broader concept of "parental role." This term is intended to encompass not only parents' observable engagement in school-related activities, but also their perceived responsibilities, values, and the contextual limitations that influence their capacity to participate particularly in conflict-affected settings. In such contexts, traditional measures of involvement may not fully reflect the realities of parents' contributions to their children's learning.

However, in conflict-affected areas, parental role in a children's education may differ significantly from more stable regions. Conflict and displacement can disrupt the home environment, limit access to schooling, and create both economic and psychological barriers to

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meaningful parental engagement.

Iraq has experienced multiple crises in recent years, resulting in a complex array of consequences. One of these consequences was the disruption of children's education due to child labour. The International Rescue Committee and the United States Department of Labour have documented the presence of child labour in Iraq in their respective reports (IRC, 2022; US Department of labor, 2021). The Kurdistan Region was not exempt from this phenomenon. A televised statement by the KRG Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in 2021 reported the presence of 1400 children engaged in active labour just in Sulaimani province (Rudaw, 2023). In addition to the legal implications associated with this phenomenon, there are several dimensions requiring investigation, including the involvement of parents.

This study is situated in Iraqi Kurdistan, a region affected by decades of conflict in the Middle East. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq hosts a large population of internally displaced persons and Syrian refugees who have fled violence and instability. The parental role in such conflict-affected settings has rarely been examined in the literature. This article aims to provide insights into the factors that shape the parental role and how it relates to children's education and child labour in these contexts.

To address this gap, the study explores the following research questions: What are the key factors shaping the parental role in their children's education in conflict-affected areas? How do parents perceive their responsibilities in the learning process? And how do they view the issue of child labour?

While the parental role is often associated with direct educational support, such as helping with homework or attending school functions, this study broadens the definition to include parents' educational decision-making under conditions of hardship. In conflict-affected settings like Iraqi Kurdistan, parents are frequently forced to make difficult choices between continuing their children's education and responding to economic survival needs. Therefore, this study examines three interrelated dimensions of the parental role: parents' intention to let their children quit school, their intention to allow them to work and resume school later, and their perceptions of who holds responsibility for children's learning. These areas were selected to reflect both the pressures parents face and the values they assign to education, which together shape how they engage with their children's schooling in unstable contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on an under-researched topic, particularly its examination of how parents engage with their educational roles in a setting marked by displacement and socio-economic uncertainty.

2. Literature review

The relationship between parents and their children's learning process is complex and multifaceted, with parents often playing a pivotal role in shaping their children's educational journey. Parents are typically the first and most influential teachers in a child's life, instilling values, imparting knowledge, and guiding their development (Enteria & Tagyam, 2020). As children's primary caregivers, parents are responsible for meeting a wide range of their needs from providing economic resources to fostering social and emotional well-being (Estojero, 2022). The parental role in learning can take many forms, from offering basic educational resources and creating a supportive home environment for study, to actively collaborating with educators and participating in decision-making processes.

The literature has consistently highlighted the importance of the parental role in children's education. Research demonstrates that active parental engagement is associated with higher academic achievement, improved attendance, and improved behaviour in students (Fan & Chen, 2001; Wilder, 2023). Elshanum (2024) further links parental role to increased motivation and self-esteem in children, which contributes to long-term academic and personal success.

Home-based parental support plays a particularly significant role in children's learning. Parents contribute by establishing a conducive learning environment for study, assisting with homework, and communicating regularly with teachers to stay informed about their child's progress (Li et al., 2020). Through active involvement, parents help cultivate a love for learning and foster essential skills that benefit children throughout their lives. Ultimately, a strong partnership between parents and educators is vital to ensuring that children reach their full potential (Feiler, 2009).

Several factors influence how parents engage in their children's education. These include the parent's own educational background, work schedule, cultural beliefs, and familiarity with the education system. Some face significant barriers, such as language barriers or lack of resources which can restrict their ability to support their children as fully as they would like (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Peña, 2000). One of the most critical factors is socio-economic status. Families with fewer economic resources often have reduced opportunities to participate actively in their children's education (Oranga et al., 2022). Many low-income parents must prioritise economic survival, leaving limited time or energy for educational engagement (Jabar, 2021).

Socioeconomic constraints are particularly impactful. Financially struggling parents may work multiple jobs, which limits their availability for school involvement (Avvisati et al., 2010; Hartas, 2011). Parents who did not have positive educational experiences may sometimes feel unprepared to support their children academically; however, in some cases, this can also lead to a compensatory effect, where such parents become especially committed to ensuring their children receive what they themselves were denied.

In conflict-affected areas, these challenges are even more pronounced. Parents may encounter severe obstacles to participating in their child's education due to instability, displacement, and insecurity. Sim et al. (2018) note that violence and unrest often prevent parents from prioritising education or being physically present to support their children. Additionally, children in these regions may be expected to assume household responsibilities or begin working at an early age, further undermining their ability to focus on schooling (Habib et al., 2019).

Recent studies continue to underscore that parents' perceptions of child labour are deeply influenced by socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms, and educational aspirations. In developing countries, poverty remains a significant driver, compelling families to rely on their children's labour for household survival. Limited access to quality education and weak institutional support further exacerbate this issue, leaving families with few viable alternatives. For instance, a study conducted in less developed provinces of Iran found that higher maternal fertility rates and lower maternal education levels were strongly associated with increased child labour participation. This suggests that enhancing parental education could be pivotal in reducing child labor rates (Homaie Rad et al., 2015). Similarly, research across thirty countries highlighted that poverty positively correlates with child labour incidence, whereas social progress and educational attainment have an inverse relationship with child labour. This indicates that improvements in social development and education can mitigate child labour practices. (Chauhan & Ul Ain, 2017). Furthermore, a systematic literature review focusing on social norms and family child labour revealed that cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence parents' decisions to involve their children in labour. Norms related to gender roles, apprenticeship, and obedience were identified as key factors perpetuating child labour within families (Abdullah et al., 2022).

In summary, the existing literature highlights that while the parental role is crucial in supporting children's academic and personal development, it is shaped by a range of factors including socioeconomic status, cultural norms, and contextual challenges such as conflict and displacement. Prior studies have examined how economic hardship, limited parental education, and institutional barriers influence parents' ability to support their children's learning, as well as how these factors relate to early school leaving and child labour. However, there is limited

research that brings these dimensions together, particularly in conflict-affected contexts like Iraqi Kurdistan.

In the specific context of Iraqi Kurdistan, cultural factors add another layer of complexity to parental educational decision-making. Kurdish culture traditionally places high value on education, particularly for economic mobility (Basil & Aziz, 2024), yet this intersects with practical cultural norms around family responsibility and gender roles (Alizadeh et al., 2022). The influx of IDPs into the region is particularly diverse, reflecting different community groups with their own opposing cultural environments and political perspectives, including education policy (Shanks, 2019). This cultural diversity creates complex dynamics in educational settings, where traditional values and practices intersect with displacement experiences. In Middle Eastern cultures, including those represented among displaced populations, children's involvement in family farms and other economic activities is seen as a way to prepare them for adulthood by teaching them important skills and values (Abdullah et al., 2022). These cultural perspectives on childhood, work, and education can significantly influence parental decision-making regarding schooling, particularly when families face economic hardship in displacement contexts.

3. Methodology

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire administered simultaneously. The quantitative component consisted of Likert-scale items measuring parental attitudes toward children's education. In parallel, participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their reasons for supporting or not supporting their children's schooling. The qualitative responses were systematically coded and categorised into thematic groups, and quotations were used to provide contextual depth. The quantitative component involved analysing structured survey items, while the qualitative component involved thematic analysis of open-ended responses to capture parents' perspectives. The questionnaire was administered to parents in Iraqi Kurdistan. Responses were collected from 567 parents of children in the 8th and 9th grades of basic school across three conflict-affected governorates in Iraqi Kurdistan, including both displaced and non-displaced parents. Of the total sample, 337 participants were male (59.4 %) and 230 were female (40.6 %). The majority were married (91.2 %) and lived in nuclear family households (79.9 %), with smaller proportions belonging to extended families (8.5 %), single-parent families (7.9 %), grandparent-led families (1.4 %), and stepfamilies (1.2 %). In terms of education, most participants had completed either primary school (34.7 %) or a high school degree (39.9 %). Additionally, 23.1 % held a university degree, while a small percentage (2.3 %) had completed postgraduate studies. Financial conditions varied across the sample. Financial status was self-reported using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Very bad" to "Very good." More than half of the respondents rated their situation as "Average" (56.4 %), followed by "Good" (18.9 %), "Bad" (13.1 %), "Very bad" (8.6 %), and "Very good" (2.8 %). This ordinal data was used to examine correlations with variables including intention to allow children to work or withdraw from school.

The study includes three distinct yet overlapping groups: the host community (local Kurds), Syrian Kurdish refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs), primarily Iraqi Arabs. The host community and Syrian Kurds share ethnic and linguistic ties, which foster a degree of cultural familiarity. However, Syrian Kurdish refugees have been shaped by different national experiences, legal systems, and histories of marginalization, all of which may influence their expectations regarding education and institutional engagement. Iraqi Arab IDPs, while differing in language and some cultural traditions, share many of the same socio-economic realities as Syrian refugees particularly those linked to displacement, such as poverty, disrupted education, and psychological stress.

Across both displaced groups, similarities in their lived experiences

such as prolonged instability, economic precarity, and limited familiarity with the host region's institutional frameworks often outweigh cultural distinctions. Acculturation in the host region occurs gradually. Syrian Kurds may experience relatively easier integration due to shared language and ethnicity, while Arab IDPs often encounter greater cultural and linguistic barriers. For both groups, socio-economic adaptation is constrained by legal status, limited employment opportunities, and restricted access to services, all of which influence how they perceive and carry out their parental roles in their children's education.

The questionnaire gathered information on the parents' backgrounds, the challenges they face in supporting their children's education, and their perceptions of the factors that enable or hinder their educational roles. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure the sample was representative of the population. To achieve adequate representation, participants were divided into local and displaced groups. The distribution and collection of the questionnaire took place between October 2021 and February 2022.

The research was conducted in three provinces of Iraqi Kurdistan Erbil, Sulaimani, and Dohuk including displaced populations living in formal camps. This region was selected due to the high prevalence of displaced persons, including Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs, which underscored the relevance of comparing the host community with displaced groups. The sampling design involved selecting both camp schools and local schools in the same region. Several local schools were selected through random sampling to serve as a comparison group. A total of 567 parents participated in the study (displaced = 219, host community = 348).

The questionnaire was carefully designed to translate the study's aims into precise and accessible questions. Each item was aligned with the research objectives to facilitate accurate analysis and interpretation. Efforts were made to encourage participants to engage with the questions meaningfully. A courteous introductory letter accompanied the survey, explaining the study's purpose and significance, and assuring participants of the confidentiality of their responses.

To ensure accessibility, language experts in Kurdish and Arabic revised the questionnaire to make the terminology clear and free of ambiguity. The length and structure of the items were considered to minimize fatigue and maintain respondent engagement.

To enhance response honesty and reduce social desirability bias, several strategies were implemented. The introductory letter emphasized the anonymous and voluntary nature of participation, assured participants that no personal identifiers would be collected, and clarified that data would be used solely for academic purposes. The wording of survey items was kept neutral and non-judgmental. Participants were also informed that they had the freedom to skip questions or withdraw from the study at any time. However, despite these precautions, one methodological limitation of this study is the absence of a lie scale or other statistical controls to account for social desirability bias in participants' responses. Although efforts were made to minimize bias through anonymous data collection and neutral wording of items, we acknowledge that parental self-reporting, particularly on sensitive topics such as child labour and educational intentions, may be influenced by socially desirable response patterns.

3.1. Ethical considerations

Before beginning the study, the researcher addressed several ethical considerations. Approval was obtained from the Doctoral School of Education and the International Office at the University of Debrecen. Confidentiality of participants' personal information and responses was ensured, and all data were used solely for academic purposes. Both students and their parents were informed of their rights, including the freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time, particularly if they experienced discomfort or concerns related to the data collection process. Permissions were also secured from relevant authorities and individuals responsible for protecting participant rights

such as governorates, educational directorates, camp security personnel, and school boards to ensure respect for institutional protocols and minimize disruption at research sites. These steps were taken not only to uphold ethical standards but also to reduce potential researcher bias and foster trust with participants and local communities.

3.2. Data analysis

The analysis of the collected data followed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques. For the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires, we applied statistical methods to examine and interpret the results meaningfully. Frequency analyses, Chi-square tests, and correlation analyses were conducted to explore potential relationships between variables. This allowed for the identification of significant associations and patterns within the dataset. For the qualitative data collected through open-ended questions, we employed thematic analysis. A structured method used to identify, analyse, and report recurring themes. This approach helped capture detailed insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. To establish trustworthiness in the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses, several strategies were implemented. First, credibility was enhanced through the use of thematic analysis as a structured analytical approach to identify, analyse, and report recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses. The analysis involved careful reading and systematic coding of the open-ended responses to ensure comprehensive coverage of participants' perspectives. Confirmability was addressed by selecting illustrative quotes that directly represented the main viewpoints expressed by participants, allowing readers to trace findings back to the original data. Dependability was strengthened through the systematic categorisation of responses into clear thematic frameworks (e.g., financial issues, child's choice, securing child's future). By combining these quantitative and qualitative strategies, the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the research questions, supporting both statistical interpretation and contextual exploration.

4. Results

4.1. Parental perspectives on school withdrawal

Two questionnaire items were used to assess how parents think about their children quitting school and working. "Do you think about letting your child quit his or her study at the present time?", "Do you want your child to work at the current time and resume studying later?" These items were constructed using Likert-type frequency scales. Parents responded on a 5-point scale ranging from "always" to "never." Following each question, an open-ended "why?" was included to allow respondents to explain their opinions. Their answers were carefully read and analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. Illustrative quotes were selected to highlight the main viewpoints expressed by participants.

Table 1 shows parents' perspectives concerning their children quitting school, classified into five frequency categories: "always," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." "Never" was the most common response, accounting for 85.0 % of all replies. A total of 7.6 % of respondents indicated "rarely," while 3.9 % reported "sometimes."

Table 1
Parents' responses regarding their intention to let their child quit school.

Response	N	%
Always	11	1.9 %
Often	9	1.6 %
Sometimes	22	3.9 %
Rarely	43	7.6 %
Never	482	85.0 %

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine whether the type of parent group (displaced or non-displaced) was associated with parents considering school withdrawal. The test revealed a significant difference, χ^2 (4, $N = 567$) = 48.886, $p = .001$. Host community parents were less likely to consider letting their children quit school than displaced parents.

An open-ended question was used to explore parents' reasoning for supporting or not supporting school withdrawal.

A total of 149 respondents answered the open-ended question. Among them, 27 participants considered letting their children quit school, citing three main reasons: financial problems, the child's own choice, and the need to work. Of these, financial problems were the most frequently mentioned. Meanwhile, 116 participants expressed support for their children's continued education, citing various reasons, as presented in Table 2 (see Table 3).

Parents were then asked whether they intended for their children to work and resume their studies later, along with their reasoning (see Table 4). The responses were categorised accordingly. The analysis also sought to determine whether there were associations between the two parental groups in relation to this issue.

A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed to assess the association between parent groups and parents' intention for their children to resume studying after working. The results indicated that displaced parents were more likely to express the intention for their children to work and resume their studies later.

Parents were also asked an open-ended question about their reasons for either supporting or opposing the idea of their children working and then returning to school. Responses in favor of this idea were categorised into themes including financial problems, helping the family, health-related issues, and exposure to the world of work. Responses opposing the idea were categorised under themes such as commitment to education, concerns about child labour, and the importance of completing school on time.

4.2. Socioeconomic factors affecting educational decisions

To examine whether financial status and the number of children were related to parents' intentions regarding school withdrawal, a correlation analysis was conducted. Given the ordinal nature of the variables and the fact that the data was not normally distributed, Spearman's rho was used. The results indicated a moderate, positive correlation between intention to have children work and financial status $rs = .142$, $p = .001$, $N = 566$, suggesting a relationship between economic condition and schooling decisions. Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between intention to work and number

Table 2
Parents' reasons to consider letting their children quit (Support)/not quit (Not support) their studies.

Parents answers	
Support	Financial issue: "We're struggling financially, and it's making us consider whether we can continue to support our child's education"
	Child's choice: "Our child has expressed a strong desire to leave school, and we're considering his wishes if he will not be good at school."
	To start working: The child can start working so he can contribute to the household income."
Not support	Securing the child's future: "We believe that education is crucial for securing our child's future, so quitting school is not an option."
	Priority of education: "Education is our top priority; it's the key to our child's success."
	Life success through education: "We firmly believe that our child's success in life is closely tied to their education."
	Educational and personal development: "Education isn't just about academics; it's also about personal growth and development."
	Serving the community: "We understand that an educated child can make a positive impact on our community."
	Child's right: "We know that education is a basic right for our child, and we're committed to upholding that right."

Table 3

Parents' intention on their children's working and resume studying later, frequency and percentage, N = 567, p = .001.

	always	often	sometimes	rarely	never
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Displaced	9 4.1 %	9 4.1 %	16 7.3 %	18 8.2 %	166 75.8 %
Non-displaced	6 1.7 %	3 .9 %	12 3.4 %	15 4.3 %	310 89.1 %
Total	15 2.6 %	12 2.1 %	28 4.9 %	33 5.8 %	476 84.0 %

Table 4

Parents' reasons for supporting/against working and resume studying later.

Parents' answers	
Support	Financial issue: "Due to financial challenges, we're pondering the feasibility of our child's continued education."
	To help family: "Our family needs additional help, and we're considering the possibility of our child contributing to family responsibilities."
	Health issue: "Considering our child's health concerns, we're thinking about adjustments to their schooling."
	To understand the world of work: "We believe that gaining real-world work experience is important for our child's development, and we're considering options."
Not Support	Future success: "We believe that staying in school is essential for our child's future success."
	To complete study in time: "We want our child to complete their studies on time and have a bright educational future."
	Education is priority: "Education is a priority for us, and we're committed to ensuring our child receives a good education."
	Suspense in study will have bad affect: "We're concerned that interruptions in our children's education could have negative consequences."
	Working is not appropriate for a child: "We believe that work is not suitable for a child's development and education."
	Parents' responsibility to support: "As parents, it's our responsibility to support our child's schooling."

of children $rs = -.111$, $p = .008$, $N = 567$, indicating that family size may also play a role in shaping parental choices.

The correlation analysis revealed that parental intentions regarding child labour are significantly associated with both financial status and family size. Better financial conditions were correlated with lower likelihood of intending children to work. This is consistent with the established relationship between economic hardship and child labour. Conversely, larger family size was associated with reduced intention for child labour. It suggests that parents with more children demonstrate stronger commitment to educational continuity. This counterintuitive finding exists in literature (Liddell et al., 2003) and may reflect either a collective family investment strategy in education or a distribution of economic responsibilities that protects younger children's schooling opportunities.

4.3. Parental perceptions of educational responsibility

The roles of parents and teachers are crucial in facilitating children's educational development. Understanding the responsibilities of those involved in imparting knowledge and values to children is essential when exploring this area. In this study, parents were asked to share their perspectives on the respective roles of teachers and parents in the educational process. Two questionnaire items focused on how parents perceived the division of responsibility between parents and teachers in supporting their children's learning both in terms of academic subjects and values, morals, and habits. The items included: "According to you, who is responsible for a child's education (acquisition of knowledge about school subjects)?" and "According to you, who is responsible for a child's education (learning about values, morals, ethics, and habits)?" Respondents were given five response options: "Totally the parents' responsibility," "Mostly the parents' responsibility," "Equal

responsibility between parents and teachers," "Mostly the teachers' responsibility," and "Totally the teachers' responsibility."

Table 6 presents the frequency of parental perspectives regarding their children's learning responsibilities (see Table 5). It focuses on two distinct domains: "knowledge and information" and "values, morals, and habits." In the area of "knowledge and information," a substantial majority of parents (75.3 %) believe that the responsibility is shared equally between parents and teachers. This finding underscores a widely accepted view of education as a collaborative effort, where both parents and teachers are seen as essential contributors to children's academic development. However, it is important to note that a smaller but notable group (12.7 %) of parents perceive that teachers play a more dominant or even exclusive role in this domain.

In contrast, when it comes to "values, morals, and habits," parents demonstrate a heightened sense of responsibility. A large portion of parents (41.8 %) believe they play a greater role than educators in this area, and 18.5 % assign full responsibility to themselves. These responses reflect the deep cultural importance placed on the family's role in shaping a child's moral character and ethical values. Although some parents recognise the role of teachers in this domain, only a very small proportion (3.4 %) believe that teachers have greater influence. This suggests that moral education is deeply rooted in both societal and familial structures.

A Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted to examine the association between parent group (displaced vs. host community) and parents' views on the roles of parents and teachers in their children's academic learning. The test revealed a significant association between the two variables, χ^2 (4, $N = 563$) = 10.661, $p = .03$, indicating that parental group membership influenced perceptions regarding responsibility for school subject learning. However, when the same analysis was applied to parents' views on values, morals, and ethics education, the results were not statistically significant (Fisher's exact test, $p = .18$), suggesting that both groups held similar beliefs in this domain.

5. Discussion

5.1. Parental role in conflict-affected context

The findings of this study illustrate a complex and often difficult reality for many families in conflict-affected and low-income contexts. While most parents place a high value on their children's education, their ability to act on this value is frequently constrained by external pressures such as financial hardship, displacement, and limited access to quality schooling. These structural challenges intersect in ways that complicate parental engagement, moving the conversation beyond individual motivation or belief in the importance of education.

Previous research has shown that early school leaving can be attributed to a range of factors, including gender, religion, household responsibilities, economic conditions, geographic location, and family-related issues (Momo et al., 2019). For displaced families, these factors are often intensified. Instability in housing, lack of steady income, and weak institutional support systems increase the likelihood of school

Table 5

Correlation between the three variables: child work intention by parents, number of children and financial status.

			Intention to work	Number of children	Financial status
Spearman's rho	Intention to work	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	−.111[a]	.142[a]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.008	.001
		N	567	567	566

[a] Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6

Parents' perspectives on learning responsibility, frequency and percentage, N = 563, p = .03

	Knowledge and information		Values, morals and habits	
	N	%	N	%
Parents completely	29	5.1 %	105	18.5 %
Parents more	35	6.2 %	132	23.3 %
Both equally	427	75.3 %	306	54.0 %
Teachers more	33	5.8 %	6	1.1 %
Teachers completely	39	6.9 %	13	2.3 %

interruptions. Mapiko and Chinyoka (2013), for example, found that displaced children, particularly girls, were more likely to drop out due to domestic duties or the need to contribute to household income.

In this study, despite hardship, many parents expressed a strong belief in the value of education not only for academic and economic advancement, but also for personal development and social contribution. This highlights the aspirational side of the parental role, even in circumstances where daily survival is a pressing concern.

5.2. Parental attitudes towards child labour

The results also underscore how economic pressures shape parental decisions about child labour. In many cases, even minimal educational expenses such as uniforms, transportation, or learning materials become significant barriers. Faced with these constraints, some parents may view child labour as a necessary, if temporary, alternative. According to scarcity theory (Shah et al., 2012), financial hardship can create tunnel vision, narrowing decision-making to immediate needs and limiting cognitive capacity for long-term planning. This may explain why some parents despite valuing education resort to temporary child labour to manage urgent survival challenges. Chugh (2011) and Gibbs and Heaton (2014) emphasize that informal work can appear more practical in the short term especially when education systems are perceived as poor in quality or lacking relevance to future employment.

While some parents mentioned their children's academic struggles or disinterest in school as reasons for considering school withdrawal, these were often entangled with broader socioeconomic constraints. Limited awareness of child development, insufficient access to guidance, and a lack of information about long-term educational outcomes can lead parents to underestimate the benefits of continued schooling. Cultural norms also play a role; in regions where education is disconnected from local needs, formal schooling may be perceived as an uncertain investment. Displacement and relocation further compound these issues, disrupting educational continuity and access.

The findings reflect a persistent tension between long-term educational aspirations and the immediate demands of family survival. Parents must navigate these conflicting pressures with limited institutional support, which reinforces the need for policies that are both economically and culturally responsive.

From a psychological perspective, prolonged exposure to poverty and uncertainty can lead to chronic stress and decision fatigue among caregivers, which significantly impacts parental judgment and emotional responsiveness (Carneiro et al., 2025; Goodwin et al., 2022). When parents operate under constant threat to their basic needs, their cognitive and emotional bandwidth becomes limited, often resulting in reactive decision-making focused on immediate survival. Moreover, trauma and stress can affect a parent's sense of control and agency, reducing their confidence in supporting long-term goals such as education (Eltanamly et al., 2022). In such contexts, parental attitudes toward child labour should not be seen merely as pragmatic or cultural choices, but as psychologically constrained responses shaped by adversity and a diminished sense of efficacy.

5.3. Parental perceptions of learning responsibility

The study also examined how parents perceive their role in their children's learning, particularly the distinction between academic knowledge and moral development. Most parents in this study see themselves as primarily responsible for their children's moral and ethical upbringing, while academic learning is viewed as a shared responsibility between the home and school. This is consistent with Kohlberg's stages of moral development (1981), which emphasize the foundational role of family in shaping early moral reasoning and value formation. In traditional societies, parents are often expected to serve as the child's first moral educators.

This distinction reflects deeply rooted cultural expectations in which families, especially parents, are seen as the central figures in moral guidance. In conflict-affected or rapidly changing environments, these identities may be challenged or destabilized, causing stress or resistance toward external influences such as schools (Akar, 2023).

Prior research supports this division of roles. Arrow, (2012) notes that value transmission in education requires collaboration between parents, teachers, and students, but this process is often hindered by cultural and institutional barriers. Idema and Phalet (2007), studying Turkish families in Germany, found generational tensions between traditional parental expectations and adolescents' adaptation to new cultural norms. Similarly, Pusztai and Engler (2020) showed that parental alignment with a school's values improves coherence between school and home goals.

Although only a small portion of parents in this study assigned moral development responsibilities to teachers, their role remains critical. Teachers support not just academic learning, but also ethical development by fostering inclusive classroom environments and encouraging empathy, reflection, and responsible decision-making.

In conflict-affected and diverse settings, where displacement may disrupt traditional family roles, the importance of collaboration between educators and parents is heightened. For children's development both academic and moral to be supported effectively, schools must engage parents as active partners rather than passive recipients.

6. Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into how parents perceive their role in their children's education, particularly in conflict-affected contexts marked by displacement and economic hardship. It reveals the complex interplay between socioeconomic pressures, parental attitudes, and decisions around educational continuity. Despite these challenges, most parents expressed strong support for their children's education, viewing it as a key to securing a better future, enabling personal and professional growth, and contributing positively to their communities.

However, the findings also highlight clear differences between displaced and non-displaced parents. Displaced families were more likely to consider interrupting their children's schooling due to immediate financial pressures and survival needs. A significant correlation was observed between lower financial status and a higher likelihood of considering school withdrawal. In contrast, families with more children tended to prioritise educational continuity, suggesting that parents with larger families may be more committed to maintaining their children's schooling.

Beyond concerns about access and finances, parents also demonstrated a deep awareness of the broader value of education. Their reasons for supporting education went beyond academic achievement, reflecting an appreciation for its role in moral development, character formation, and future livelihood. These findings point to a more holistic understanding of education among parents, even in challenging circumstances.

The study further highlights how parents view their responsibilities in their children's learning. While knowledge acquisition is seen as a shared responsibility between parents and teachers, moral and ethical

development is perceived as a predominantly parental role. A substantial number of parents believed they played a greater role in their children's moral education, and many others felt they held full responsibility. This reflects the cultural centrality of the family in shaping children's values and ethical outlook.

The research underscores that effective education in conflict-affected settings cannot be achieved through institutional efforts alone. It requires a collaborative, culturally sensitive approach that honors the unique contributions of both parents and teachers. Recognising these distinct yet interconnected roles is key to developing inclusive and resilient educational strategies that support children's full development academically, morally, and socially.

6.1. Practical implications

The findings of this study highlight the critical role parents play in supporting children's education in conflict-affected areas. Given the significant financial and displacement-related challenges many families face particularly those who are refugees or internally displaced schools should adopt collaborative educational frameworks that actively engage parents in both academic and moral aspects of learning. Strengthening communication channels between teachers and families, offering culturally responsive parental guidance programs, and providing flexible learning support can help accommodate diverse family circumstances.

Since parents see themselves as key moral educators, educational institutions should promote partnerships that align school curricula with family values where possible, to reinforce both academic growth and ethical development. Supporting these partnerships is essential in ensuring educational continuity and resilience in communities affected by displacement and socioeconomic instability.

6.2. Policy recommendations

The study identifies financial hardship as a major barrier to the parental role in children's education, with displaced families being especially vulnerable to school interruptions. Policymakers should consider targeted financial support programs such as educational subsidies, free school meals, and transportation assistance to ensure continued schooling for children from poor backgrounds. In addition, culturally responsive education policies should be introduced, offering adaptable teaching models that accommodate the unique needs of refugee and internally displaced families. Schools should also collaborate with community organizations to prevent child labour by providing families with alternative economic support and raise awareness about the long-term value of education.

6.3. Future research development

Further research is needed to build on the findings of this study. First, including high school students in future investigations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the parental role evolves as children grow older. Second, a comparative analysis of parental roles across public and private school settings may offer insights into how institutional contexts influence family engagement in education.

Finally, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term impact of the parental role on students' academic achievement, social development, and career trajectories particularly in conflict-affected and economically vulnerable regions. Expanding research in these areas would contribute to more responsive educational policies and targeted interventions for displaced and marginalised communities.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Peshawa Bibani: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ágnes Engler:** Supervision, Methodology. **Gábor Erdei:** Supervision.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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