

The Educational Needs of Displaced High School Students: The Case of Olposimoru Forest Evictees in Narok County, Kenya

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Abstract

Climate change is a worldwide debate affecting humanity. The Kenyan government is evicting people who have encroached on forests, thereby leading to internal displacement. The condition of displacement affects governments' ability and willingness to provide basic protection and services such as education. The study sought to investigate the schooling experiences of displaced high school students, with a case of the Olposimoru forest evictees. Based on a current study carried out, this paper discusses the findings on the educational needs of displaced high school students. The target group for this study was displaced high school day-scholar students. Hermeneutics phenomenology theory guided this research. The research was carried out in Olposimoru District of Narok County. Displaced students were the key participants in this research, while class teachers and head teachers were the key informants. The snowballing technique was used to select the students for study, while class teachers were sampled using a simple random sampling technique. The study was conducted using a descriptive case of Olposimoru forest evictees. Five schools were selected through purposive sampling. The researcher used questionnaires and oral interviews to collect data. The raw data from the students' responses was organized, coded, and keyed on the SPSS program. The study found that displaced students have varied educational needs in addition to their normal adolescent growth and development challenges. They mostly need psychological motivation and support. They also need money to pay school fees. Students also have other material and sociological needs, such as teaching and learning materials, housing, and a sense of family.

Keywords: Climate change, displaced high school students, educational needs, Olposimoru forest evictees, Narok county

Introduction

Over the last half-century, the number of unwarranted human settlements in forest-reserved areas has risen globally. Due to the world's population explosion, people tend to look for free sites to settle. Since 2012, conflict has been on an upward trajectory after a decline in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the conflict between the government of the day and forest eviction is an avoidable battle.

Displacement poses risks to the social, political, and economic well-being of individuals, communities, and even entire nations. Some of the risks associated with displacement include joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of common lands and resources, increased health risks, social disarticulation, the disruption of formal educational activities, and the loss of civil and human rights (Downing, 2002). Displacement involves the physical eviction from one's dwelling place and the expropriation of productive lands and other assets to make possible an alternative use (Cernea, 2000). Affected people (APS) are those who stand to lose all or part of their physical and non-physical assets as a consequence of the project. APS may also include host communities when a large population is displaced onto the land of

a smaller existing (host) population. A research study by Arjjumend and Fakana (2018) noted that uncontrolled human settlement in the Nechisar forest in Ethiopia has risen. Rapid human population coupled with immigration was the overt factor that encouraged illegal forest settlement. Such forest encroachment is associated with a lack of public awareness and inadequate valuation of forest ecosystem services, among other factors.

Approximately 600 million people have been exposed to conflict in 2023. Out of this, about 412 million were exposed to incidents of armed violence against civilians (Danish Refugee Council, 2024). The factors that force people to leave their homes are common in developing countries. As noted by Gakunga and Gathinye (2020), displaced girls and children from indigenous ethnic groups and those living with any form of disability tend to face myriads of education challenges. Education is a human right enshrined in the international and national laws and guidelines.

Kenya is among the signatory countries that have ratified international treaties to protect its citizens' education and environmental conservation rights. The schooling of students is affected by several internal and external factors. The displacement of the population is one of the important external factors. Forced evictions have been carried out on a massive scale in forest areas, and the Ministry of Environment has stated that these actions will continue. Climate change calls for restoring water catchment areas, including Olposimoru forests. However, the government has also failed to make allowance for traditional forest dwellers, such as the Ogiek in Kenya.

Forced evictions at Olposimoru forest were carried out in places where schools had already been established. This affected the students' schooling patterns. The point of concern for this study is the educational needs of the same students and the psycho-social support accorded to displaced students. Access to education is a right of every child, and this study was conducted to provide mitigation measures to the Ogiek community, which is regarded not only as a minority but also among the marginalized communities in Kenya. Hence, this study should be useful to educational stakeholders and government officials as they carry out mass eviction among the populations, thereby affecting the education of students. The study, therefore, sought to investigate the schooling experiences of displaced high school students in Olposimoru forest in Kenya. Specifically, it purposed to examine the educational needs of displaced high school students in this area.

The Theoretical Framework

The hermeneutic phenomenology theory guided this study. Van Manen (2019) posits that the practical utilization of hermeneutic phenomenology is to make sense of the world as the participants experience it. This helps the researcher become cognisant of the hurdles that impede their access to human lived experience. Human experiences are shaped by events that were experienced in a particular epoch. Furthermore, concepts are employed to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation, where phenomenology questions are formulated to collect experiential data directly from the participants who experience it.

Leela (2018) argued that in hermeneutic phenomenology, personal experiences and interpretations of the experiences are performed to give a clear understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. He also noted that hermeneutic phenomenology, as a method of inquiry, focuses on participants' lived experiences and that personal interpretations that form the participants' lenses are critical. This theory was relevant to this research since the educational needs of displaced high school students were collected directly from the participants who experienced forced eviction at Olposimoru Forest.

Conditions in Displacement

Displacement tends to heighten existing vulnerabilities. Internal displacement does not occur as a result of individual choice; it constitutes a situation of non-freedom (in terms of agency and opportunity) as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have 'been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes' (UNOCHA, 2004). Stichick (2001) argues that in order to meet the survival needs of the family, many IDP parents are forced to spend a great deal of time away from their children in search of work or humanitarian distributions. She observed that these parents are constantly balancing attempts to find work, the humiliation of not being able to make ends meet, and being exhausted, along with efforts to spend time with their children. Living in the settlements' social, economic, psychological, and physical conditions are entangled in such a situation.

A study by Merdin (2022) in the USA sought to investigate the challenges facing students who identify as refugees and have experienced interrupted education and trauma. The study utilizes a narrative qualitative research approach by focusing on students' pre-migration and post-migration experiences to obtain data for analysis. A total of nine refugee high school students attending one charter school in City Heights were sampled for the study. A random sample of 10 students from a focused sample was selected for the study. The research found that the most support students needed was social-emotional needs. Refugees felt hurt by displacement, which affected their sense of security. In addition, there was the absence of a qualified counsellor who could take care of the psychosocial needs of the students, which had had their mathematical skills, such as multiplication, greatly affected. However, the research solely relied on qualitative techniques for collecting data. To bridge the gap, this research utilizes a questionnaire as a research tool to corroborate the interview schedule, thereby improving the reliability and dependability of the research findings.

Aimee (2018) studied the educational needs of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) in the UK in one local authority in England. The study was guided by social constructionist interpretive epistemology and was qualitative in nature. Data was collected using structured interviews and focused groups. Aimee noted in her research findings that the respondents faced social and emotional turmoil due to the uncertainty of the future of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Specifically, caring and trusting relationships with carers, peers, and educational staff were the major concerns in meeting the social and emotional needs of the UASC. She described the challenges the UASC faced with their emotional states as fluctuating between 'happy' and 'sad'. She also reported them using suppression strategies in order not to think about their past. In her conclusion, Aimee (2018) noted that all of the UASC feared the uncertainty of their asylum status. The research relied on social constructionist interpretive as a theoretical underpinning of the research. To bridge the gap, this study adopted the phenomenological theory, which has the advantage of getting data from the participant's perspective through direct verbatim of their responses; the validity and the data collected were deemed reliable.

In India, Manuj (2019) focused his study on the education and human rights of internally displaced persons in Assam. He chose Assam due to its propensity for displacement. Thousands of people are internally displaced because of erosion, floods, ethnic clashes, and militant activities. As a result of displacement, human rights are violated. This includes the right to education. He found out that students missed school as a result of internal displacement. Schools were wiped out by erosion, and the school land turned into an infertile space, known as a 'char' area, which is unsuitable for learning. He concluded that the education community who are affected by displacement faces various challenges in their new resettlements. He relied on a literature review to present his findings in his study. However, this study collected first-hand information through questionnaires and scheduled interviews, which were then descriptively analysed, hence filling the evidence gap left.

In Africa, internal displacement is a common phenomenon occasioned by armed conflicts and natural as well as development-related displacement. Desmond (2014) noted that more than one-third of the global number of IDPs hail from Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the majority of the IDPs are concentrated in areas that are in active conflict zones and insecure remote areas. Places such as Mali, eastern Chad, and western and southern parts of Sudan, among others.

Gilbert (2020) studied Internally Displaced and Refugee Students and pedagogical proposals in Cameroon, West Africa. He noted that the Minawao Refugees Camp hosted over 60,000 refugees and IDPs. Class sizes in the refugee camps had become unmanageable due to high student-to-teacher ratios ranging to around 150-200 against the recommended 50-100. He further noted that students had knowledge inconsistency due to abandoned school abandonment for up to two to three years. He identified special pedagogy for the learners as an education need. Additionally, the displaced learners had experienced the trauma of armed conflicts because of sleeping in thickets and bushes and trekking long distances. However, his study dwelled on the paradigm shift in the pedagogical approach to instruction and teaching. To bridge this gap, this study analysed the educational needs in terms of physiological and psychosocial needs, which are key in influencing the motivation of internally displaced learners.

In the East Africa region, Ester (2018) Kenya examined the factors that influence the integration of IDP learners in primary schools in Raveda Sub county of Nyeri County in Kenya. Specifically, her study sought to determine the psychosocial support by teachers to IDP learners in public primary schools. The study, whose research design was descriptive, had a target population of 1,024 class seven and eight learners. The targeted head teachers were 6, while the teachers were 72. Ester (2018) employed consensus sampling for the head teacher, while purposive sampling was used to sample both the pupils and teachers. She further analysed data using descriptive statistics. The study found that the host school bullied the IDP learners, and they received little or no guidance and counselling. Her research was confined to primary school children who may require a psychosocial specialist who can interview the minor to elicit reliable data. However, the current study concentrated on high school students who were assumed to be able to comprehend the demands of the questionnaire presented; thus, the data collected were dependable and reliable.

Role of a School in Alleviating the Challenges faced by Displaced Children

More often, IDP families with children have been placed in areas where no schools are located, or the children have been sent to schools that have no resources to meet their educational needs and have little or no experience of receiving refugees (Pinson & Arnot, 2010). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is committed to education and supports refugee primary and secondary schools as well as other refugee education programmes.

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016), providing access to quality education to adolescents and young adults in conflict-affected areas in Iraq was necessary. The funds provided by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia opened five new schools for students of IDP communities. Moreover, to increase and improve quality space for students, prefabricated school premises were provided, and the community became involved in renovating existing schools, including making school desks. Teachers and members of Parents-Teachers Associations received training on minimum standards, and textbooks, teaching aids, equipment, stationery, and school running costs were also provided. UNESCO contracted a company to build 450 school desks, an activity expected to secure the children's education and form part of the educational journey of the whole community. The construction of the desks not only helped 1000 students receive a better-quality education but was a significant income-generating activity for many families.

The provision of education in emergency situations needs to factor in the psychosocial needs of children and adolescents affected by trauma and displacement, the need to protect them from harm, and the need to maintain and develop study skills and disseminate key messages such as how to avoid HIV/AIDS, landmine awareness, environmental education and education for peace and citizenship. All these are aspects of the rights of the child. A key principle for education in situations of emergency and crisis is a rapid response, using a community-based approach, with capacity-building through the training of teachers, youth leaders, and school management committees. Education should support durable solutions and should normally be based on the curriculum and languages of study of the area of origin. Formal and non-formal education should incorporate survival and peace-building messages and skills. Programmes must progressively promote the participation of underrepresented groups, including girls, adolescents, and persons with disability.

According to Nicolai (2003), bringing together children and adolescents for structured activities has a protection role in early emergencies and thereafter. Apart from revealing that some children have severe physical or mental health problems that need specialist attention, a serious attempt to bring all young persons into these activities may reveal children subject to abuse, such as harmful labour, exploitation of foster children for domestic labour (so that children of the household can attend school), and so on. Education can provide a constructive alternative for young people who might otherwise find their fulfilment in joining armed forces or militias, especially if confined to a refugee or IDP camp and without access to employment opportunities. Education is likewise a forward-looking activity that can lessen the incidence of alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, prostitution, and so on.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out in Narok County's Olposimoru District in Kenya (see Figure 1 for the location of the study area). Olposimoru forest is one of the areas covered by the Mau Forest Complex. The research was conducted through a descriptive case study. The target population for the study was the displaced secondary school students in the Narok North sub-county. Four schools were selected for this study through purposive sampling. A total of 96 students were selected as participants in the 4 schools; 25 students were sampled through snowballing techniques from each school. In each school, 8 students were selected using snowballing sampling from Forms 2, 3, and 4. The principals and class teachers of Forms 2, 3, and 4 were interviewed. In this study, the researcher used questionnaires and structured interviews. The raw data from the students' responses were organized, coded, and keyed into the SPSS computer program. This program generated percentages, frequency, and mean for the data. Interviews were organized based on the respondents' arguments.

The collected data were coded and analysed thematically. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse quantitative data. The participants' responses were interpreted to give meaning to their experiences, including phonological, social, emotional, and financial needs, which are critical in affecting educational experiences.

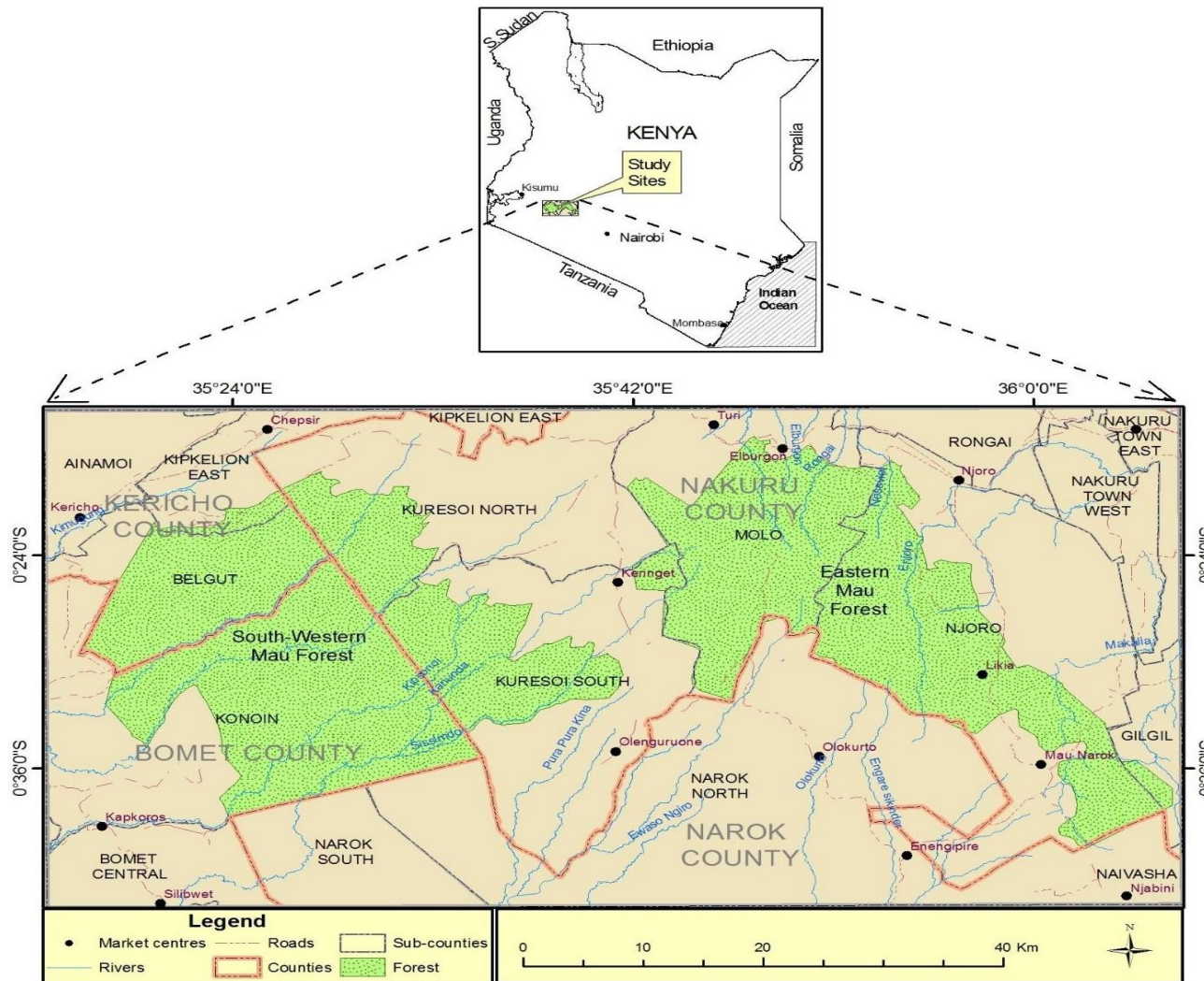


Fig. 1: The Location of The Study Area

Educational Needs of Displaced High School Students

The research sought to establish the educational needs of displaced high school students in Olposimoru in Narok County. As a first step to achieving this objective, the respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements on educational needs. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Teachers' Perceived Educational Needs of Displaced High School Students

| Variable | | Yes | No | Do not know | Total |
|---|---|-----|----|-------------|-------|
| Do displaced students feel de-motivated academically? | F | 20 | 4 | 2 | 26 |
| | % | 77 | 15 | 8 | 100 |
| Displaced students do not seem to have enough time to do their homework. | F | 19 | 4 | 3 | 26 |
| | % | 73 | 15 | 12 | 100 |
| Displaced students need psychological counselling | F | 25 | 1 | 0 | 26 |
| | % | 96 | 4 | 0 | 100 |
| Guidance and counselling are held regularly to address the needs of displaced students | F | 16 | 10 | 0 | 26 |
| | % | 62 | 38 | 0 | 100 |
| Displaced students have a unique problem that destabilizes their schooling | F | 18 | 6 | 2 | 26 |
| | % | 69 | 23 | 8 | 100 |
| Do displaced students attend school regularly? | F | 9 | 17 | 0 | 26 |
| | % | 35 | 65 | 0 | 100 |
| Displaced students seem do not have enough learning materials | F | 19 | 4 | 3 | 26 |
| | % | 73 | 15 | 12 | 100 |
| Displaced students tend to be anti-social when they are among others | F | 19 | 4 | 3 | 26 |
| | % | 73 | 15 | 12 | 100 |
| Displaced students who have not been counselled properly to cope with displacement deteriorate academically | F | 24 | 2 | 0 | 26 |
| | % | 92 | 8 | 0 | 100 |
| Most of the displaced students fear they will drop out of school because of a lack of basic needs. | F | 19 | 5 | 2 | 26 |
| | % | 73 | 19 | 8 | 100 |

From the findings, 77 percent of the teachers interviewed believed that displaced students feel de-motivated academically. An unstable psychological environment causes the learners to be demotivated. Another 96 percent of the teachers interviewed agreed that displaced students need psychological counselling. However, displaced students would deteriorate academically if they did not receive adequate counselling services. Moreover, 65 percent of the teachers said displaced students did not attend school regularly. This could be attributed to a lack of motivation by the student towards learning. However, 16 (62%) of the teachers said they held regular guidance and counselling sessions with displaced students, while 10 (38%) of teachers said they never held these sessions.

The teachers also reported that most displaced high school students (50%) performed below average. Of the teachers, 3 (12%) rated the findings as poor, 13 (50%) said their

performance was below average, and 10(38%) said it was average. The displaced students confirmed these views, with 90 percent of them agreeing that they never got sufficient time to study at home. They said that this challenge had resulted in their poor academic performance. Of all the respondents, 73 percent strongly agreed that displaced students lack adequate study time at home.

Table 2: Displaced Students' Responses on their Educational Needs

| EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF DISPLACED STUDENTS | | Mean | Std Dev |
|--|---|-------------|----------------|
| 1 | I would feel motivated to be in school if we were not evicted. | 4.34 | 0.85 |
| 2 | Displaced pupils do not get sufficient study time at home. | 4.28 | 0.95 |
| 3 | At times, displaced pupils lose concentration or are absent-minded in class. | 4.22 | 0.96 |
| 4 | I need special support to get along with my friends. | 4.19 | 1.02 |
| 5 | Displaced students need psychological counselling to cope with trauma caused by forced eviction | 4.19 | 1.12 |
| 6 | I feel disturbed when my friends talk about forest evictions. | 4.17 | 1.06 |
| 7 | I find myself thinking about the demolition of our home in the forest. | 4.07 | 1.26 |
| 8 | We lost our source of livelihood after eviction. | 4.07 | 1.20 |
| 9 | Since I was evicted, I find it difficult to pay school fees. | 4.06 | 1.21 |
| 10 | Displaced pupils feel de-motivated to attend school. | 4.04 | 1.12 |
| 11 | I lost textbooks and school materials during the eviction | 3.88 | 1.40 |
| 12 | I have problems getting basic needs at home | 3.86 | 1.26 |
| 13 | I have a challenge coping with friends due to my status as an IDP person | 3.47 | 1.36 |
| 14 | Parents rarely visit displaced students to assess their academic performance. | 3.41 | 1.26 |
| 15 | At times I feel to absent myself from school because I feel de-motivated. | 3.37 | 1.45 |
| 16 | Since I was displaced, I have performed poorly academically. | 3.25 | 1.48 |
| 17 | I sometimes receive basic needs from well-wishers to keep me in school. | 3.15 | 1.52 |
| 18 | I fear that displacement might occur in the future. | 3.06 | 1.49 |
| 19 | At times, I engage in small businesses to cater for my personal needs. | 2.96 | 1.38 |
| 20 | Since we were evicted, I have been receiving bursary from the government or well-wishers. | 2.01 | 1.14 |

The study established that most respondents agreed with the statements provided, as indicated in Table 2. This was attested to by an overall mean range of 4.34 to 2.96, which stood for Strongly Agree or Agree (mean > 2.5). Students' motivational needs constituted displaced high school students' most desired educational need. The teachers averred that the students would feel more motivated to be in school if they were not in their displaced state. On the aspect of motivation, 50 (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed, 42 (42%) agreed, 4 (4%) were undecided, 3 (3%) disagreed, and 2 (1%) strongly disagreed, all of which had a mean of 4.34.

Financial needs were also an important variable in this objective. The respondents were thus asked to indicate the financial challenges they experienced due to displacement. A majority, 84 (83%) of the students' respondents agreed that they lost their sources of livelihood. They explained that this had affected their ability to pay the required school fees. On further probing, 50 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, 27 percent agreed, 5 percent were undecided, 14 percent disagreed, and 4 percent strongly disagreed that eviction had resulted in difficulties in paying school fees. The respondents also said that displacement had resulted in chronic absenteeism among displaced high school students. Even though the government of Kenya had subsidized secondary education, 65 percent of the teachers confirmed that displaced students did not attend school regularly due to difficulties in school fee payment and, more importantly, a lack of basic needs.

The above view was supported by the student respondents, of whom 42 percent strongly agreed, 30 percent agreed, 7 percent were undecided, 17 percent disagreed, and 5 percent strongly disagreed that displaced students experienced difficulties in getting basic needs at home. Of the teachers, 69 percent strongly agreed that displaced students had unique problems destabilizing their schooling. McKinney-Vento Act (US Congress, 2012) notes that for children and youth who are displaced by natural disasters, the destabilizing impact of losing a home is exacerbated by changing schools. Every time students are forced to change schools, the disruptive effects intensify, threatening the students' social, emotional, and academic well-being.

When the displaced students were asked if they feared future eviction, 19 percent strongly agreed, 31 percent agreed, 15 percent were undecided, 9 percent disagreed, and 27 percent strongly disagreed with a mean of 3.06. On the other hand, 73 percent of the teachers agreed that most of the displaced students feared they would drop out of school for lack of basic needs. Nevertheless, 19 percent thought that displaced students might not drop out of school due to displacement.

Socialization is a very important aspect of schooling. Displaced students tend to exhibit anti-social behaviour. In this study, 73 percent of the teachers agreed that displaced students tended to be anti-social around the school community. Such behaviours included the use of abusive language and shows of aggression. This anti-social behaviour was attributed to the stereotypes ascribed by the community to internally displaced persons. A majority (61%) of the students agreed that they had a challenge coping with friends due to their status as IDPs. Another group (78%) of the displaced students confirmed needing special support to get along with friends. They added that parents of displaced students rarely visited their children in school to assess their academic progress, as 55 percent of the students agreed that parents rarely visited them in school. However, 31 percent of the students reported that their parents regularly visited schools to assess their children's academic progress.

It has been observed that learning entails becoming someone with the abilities, tools, and resources needed to improve life (Scalon, 2011). This means that educational institutions require all the necessary equipment to support effective learning. In line with this, the study sought to ascertain the influence of forceful eviction on the infrastructure of educational institutions in the study area. From the research results, 48 (48%) strongly agreed, 27 (27%) agreed, 3 (3%) were undecided, 12 (12%) disagreed, and 11(11%) respondents strongly disagreed that their respective schools lost materials and equipment during eviction. The majority of the students and teachers said their schools had lost textbooks. The students could not provide report forms, medical reports, birth certificates, and exercise books because, as they reported, these materials had been destroyed during the eviction. The students further said that they found it difficult to enrol in new schools since the teachers in their former schools could not provide written evidence to confirm a student's actual level of education, as these materials had been lost.

The study also sought to establish whether or not displaced students had been provided with counselling services. The majority of the respondents reported that the displaced students had not been counselled properly to cope with the challenges associated with displacement. Even though guidance and counselling services were provided in school, 42 percent of teachers agreed that the counselling was inadequate. Based on the above research findings, it is clear that most of the psychological needs of the displaced students had not been met in their new schools and communities.

Conclusions

Based on the study findings, it is clear that displaced students have varied educational needs in addition to their normal adolescent growth and development challenges. They mostly need psychological motivation and support. They also need money to pay school fees. Students also have other material and sociological needs, such as teaching and learning materials, housing, and a sense of family. The study provides an in-depth understanding of the schooling experiences of displaced high school students. It is evident that displaced high school students are struggling with unmet psychological, physiological, economic, and sociological needs. Although the school community can provide for the needs of displaced students, the needs are so numerous that various stakeholders require intervention.

The government should develop a realistic and sustainable approach to ensuring that displaced high school students continue with their schooling. Displaced students need financial support to sustain their stay in school. In a nutshell, the government's eviction should not disadvantage the schooling of high school students. Based on the issues that arose during this research, it is suggested that further research be conducted using survey design to establish the effect of armed displacement on the socialization process of high school students.

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