



Pedagogical Approaches to Teacher Professional Development in Contexts of Mass Displacement: An Agenda for Research and Practice

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LEARNING IN
CONTEXTS OF FORCED
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ABSTRACT

Educational providers frequently respond to learning disruptions encountered by refugees, internally displaced persons, and migrant communities through online platforms. Learning modules in these digital spaces are often remotely designed, prescriptive and lack full appreciation of challenging circumstances faced by teachers and learners. To sustain meaningful learning in conflict and crisis, the crucial role of teachers cannot be overestimated. Drawing on research into teacher professional development (TPD) through Co-designed Massive Open Online Collaborations (CoMOOCs) in Lebanon, which have global reach, we critique decontextualised and rigid approaches to TPD and highlight the importance of enabling local solutions through dialogue and collaboration with refugee educators. We argue for working from local needs, trialling and harnessing local solutions, and sharing these methods and outcomes globally so that others can consider their relevance and adapt them to their own contexts. We illustrate this approach through presenting our current work with teachers of refugees and migrants from Myanmar now in Thailand, highlighting the research agenda and potential of CoMOOCs to support TPD in this context by: 1) supporting teachers to collaborate with peers in similar contexts; 2) understanding how scholars in the Global North can help facilitate South-South collaborations through global online learning infrastructures; 3) addressing linguistic barriers for teachers learning in online environments; and 4) planning teacher certification to recognise their pedagogical knowledge and skills. The paper describes our “Theory of Change” for widening access to quality tertiary education through TPD in contexts of mass displacement, thereby fostering hope, empowerment, and resilience in the face of adversity.

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Globally, an estimated 224 million children and young people are affected by humanitarian crises and in need of urgent educational support, and 72 million of them remain out of school (Valenza & Stoff 2023). With progression from primary to secondary and tertiary levels of education, educational access rapidly declines with approximately one-third of lower-secondary-aged and almost half of the upper-secondary-aged children being unable to access education. Around 58% of school-aged learners in contexts of mass displacement are out of school, while refugee youths' enrolment in tertiary education is only 7% compared to the global average of 40% (UNHCR 2023a). Children and young people in crisis-affected contexts are consequently deprived of cognitive and personal development opportunities to help navigate complex social, economic and political barriers to their wellbeing and development (Kim, Tubbs Dolan & Aber 2022). Whilst widening access to quality education in contexts of mass displacement is vital, it is equally vital to innovate models of educational provision to address structural challenges posed by conflict and displacement. Connected learning can mitigate barriers to learning when the physical world fails due to ongoing violence, internal displacement, and migration. However, the potential of these new modes of learning will only be realised through enhancing the capabilities of teachers to develop their own innovations for supporting learning in local contexts. Our focus is therefore on new forms of teacher professional development (TPD).

In conflict and protracted crises, there is a chronic shortage of qualified and motivated teachers, and those available often lack the necessary qualifications to teach learners who have experienced displacement, trauma, and hostility in host communities (Mendenhall, Gomez & Varni 2018). Our previous work has shown how teachers in these settings are poorly incentivised, work with limited resources, and are often denied permanent contracts or even the right to work (Pherali & Mendenhall 2023). They endure violence, hostilities, and limited access to basic professional support (Pherali, Abu Moghli & Chase 2020). Nonetheless, teachers play a crucial role in maintaining education during emergencies and facilitating the retention of vulnerable students who might otherwise drop out permanently (Hure & Taylor 2023; Valenza & Stoff 2023). In this sense, teachers' roles in crisis-affected educational environments transcend pedagogical practices and require them also to navigate their own and their students' complex social circumstances outside of school settings.

Given the scarcity of face-to-face professional development opportunities and accredited qualifications for teachers in contexts of mass displacement, multiple global online education initiatives have sought to reach large numbers of otherwise unsupported professionals and learners (UNHCR 2019). However, online education demands significant engagement by participants, which may be difficult to sustain in challenging circumstances (Halkic & Arnold 2019; Witthaus 2023). Collaboration between educational providers, researchers, and teachers online is vital, but is most effective when complemented by locally situated in-person educational activities (Dryden-Peterson, Dahya & Adelman 2017). Such provisions are emerging through processes of contextualisation, co-learning, co-reflexivity and co-design. Examples include: The University of Geneva's InZone programmes in a refugee camp in Kenya (O'Keeffe & Lovey 2023); the TIDE programme in Myanmar, in which The Open University UK worked with local partners to co-produce contextually relevant open educational resources (OERs) (Farrow et al. 2023); programmes in Scotland, where refugees co-produced OERs with experienced learning designers (The Open University in Scotland and Bridges Programmes 2017); Kiron in Germany, which co-curates learning pathways into and through higher education with refugees, using existing Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) (Witthaus 2018); and an experimental study in refugee camps in Kenya and Malawi by the Jesuit Commons (Crea 2016). More usually, however, crisis-affected communities are inadequately supported to engage with online learning platforms and adapt them to their own contexts, leading to their limited success.

Recognising these shortcomings, we have been conducting Design-Based Research for 7 years, which has enabled us to develop a model of online and blended professional development, co-designed with professionals and using a social and collaborative learning approach that facilitates the sharing of applied knowledge between professional participants within and across contexts. The model for these *Co-Designed Massive Open Online Collaborations (CoMOOCs)* has evolved from work with researchers, teachers, educational practitioners and NGOs in refugee

settings in Lebanon where, to date, we have developed and evaluated five CoMOOCs (Kennedy et al. 2019; Pherali, Abu Moghli & Chase 2020). The focus of this paper is to illustrate how we are currently extending this research-based, co-design approach to a new context of the Thai Myanmar border where local non-governmental organisations are working with displaced communities from Myanmar, emphasising the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this work and highlighting some of the inherent complexities of moving between local and global contexts. We begin with a critical reflection on an experience of online learning targeted at teachers among displaced communities along the Thai Myanmar border. In response, we argue for South-South-North knowledge exchange supported by CoMOOCs and embedded within a consultative and collaborative methodology to develop a “connected learning” research agenda for TPD in contexts of ongoing conflict and mass displacement. We draw on theoretical concepts of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1989) underpinned by the notion of teaching as a transformative process (Aronowitz & Giroux 1993, 1985) to conceptualise TPD in terms of a social-ecological model (Pherali, Abu Moghli & Chase 2020). Methodologically, we combine ideas about connected learning with a process of co-reflexivity, creating a new vision for educational development through blending critical self-reflections of our research knowledge, experiences, and educational practices in contexts of mass displacement. We adopt the concept of co-reflexivity as a dialogical tool that involves researchers and educational practitioners in crisis settings in a participatory process of collective co-reflection and co-creation of new, contextually relevant approaches to TPD. Hence, the approach focuses on learning from, with and through the reflections of multiple stakeholders, disrupting notions of “knowledge transfer” and moving from knowledge exchange to knowledge co-creation.

This paper discusses the potential of adopting the CoMOOC model, developed in the context of teachers of refugees and NGOs involved in their education in Lebanon, and using our Theory of Change to support TPD within refugee and migrant communities from Myanmar living on the Thai Myanmar border (Rinehart & Tyrosvoutis 2023). We begin with a brief analysis of the context of education and conflict in Myanmar and illustrate how well-intended, but decontextualised and externally designed educational initiatives are deemed to create little value for the local education community. Then, we highlight the significance of promoting dialogue between researchers in the field of education, conflict and learning technology and educational stakeholders from different contexts of protracted crises. This leads to a discussion about our co-designed methodology and the Theory of Change in TPD. Finally, we conclude with an agenda for research and development for TPD in educational settings of mass displacement.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON A CASE OF MIGRANT YOUTH ON THE THAI MYANMAR BORDER

Educational challenges in contexts of mass displacement arise from various political, social, and economic barriers that hinder educational access for migrant and refugee learners in host communities. These challenges are intricately linked to the conflict dynamics and protracted crises specific to each context, shaping the nature and severity of the educational obstacles. Online learning can provide an alternative approach to bridging the educational gap, particularly when educational programmes are collaboratively designed and implemented with input from local communities and educational stakeholders.

EDUCATION AND ONLINE LEARNING IN THE THAI MYANMAR BORDER CONTEXT

Since the *coup d'état* in February 2021, nearly two million people have been internally displaced within Myanmar, with additional scores forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, including 22,400 to Thailand (UNHCR 2023b). This situation has severely disrupted the provision of education for displaced learners. Education in Myanmar is provided by many actors: a tapestry which reflects diverse and multi-ethnic communities with pluralistic histories since independence from British colonialism in 1948. The homogenising educational policies and “ethnicization” of the state education system in favour of the Bamar majority has fuelled political divisions and reinforced the role of education as a tool of resistance among the diverse ethnic minority communities of Myanmar (Bigagli 2019). Non-governmental, ethnic and

refugee education institutions provide mother tongue-based multilingual education through curricula that are grounded in ethnic communities' distinct cultural backgrounds and the contextual realities of near-constant armed conflict, political unrest, and natural disasters (Migrant Educational Coordination Center 2023). The overarching educational goal of these parallel systems is to preserve communities' ethnic history, cultural identity, and political autonomy against the assimilative educational policies of the Myanmar government (South & Lall 2016). Teachers in these contexts rarely possess accredited qualifications, which limits their career progression or mobility, leading to many leaving the profession (Johnston 2016; Tyrosvoutis et al. 2021).

Against this backdrop, over 13 million children are struggling to access education in contemporary Myanmar (OCHA 2023), of which an estimated 3.7 million are out of school (Save the Children 2022). Schools in the areas controlled by Ethnic Armed Organisations are targeted by Tatmadaw, the Myanmar's military, for violent attacks. According to the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, from 2021–2022 there were over 450 attacks on education, including 190 on schools (GCPEA 2022). Despite these challenges and resource constraints amid the overwhelming scale of demand, ethnic education providers have fought to maintain educational continuity and to support ongoing TPD. Rinehart and Tyrosvoutis (2023) argue these systems are “designed for disruption”, requiring decentralised management, iterative feedback and learning cycles, and adaptable, needs-based, and contextually relevant teaching modalities. As families from Myanmar increasingly disengage from an education system controlled by the military dictatorship (Frontier 2021), ethnic, refugee and migrant parallel education systems assume responsibility as mainstream education providers for Myanmar children.

In Northern Thailand, a network of Migrant Learning Centres (MLCs) has provided education to the children of approximately 150,000 migrant workers from Myanmar living in Tak Province for more than three decades (International Organization for Migration 2022). These complementary, yet unregistered, schools provide mother tongue-based education, largely using curricula from Myanmar (Lowe, Win & Tyrosvoutis 2022). In 2023, the enrolment in MLCs increased by more than 30% to over 15,000 students in a single year (Migrant Educational Coordination Center 2023). Additionally, schools in the nine “temporary shelters”¹ (refugee camps) along the Thai Myanmar border provide learning spaces for over 20,000 school-aged children (The Border Consortium 2023). However, a new plan by the USA to resettle 10,000–20,000 refugees from East Asia (US Department of State 2023), threatens to decimate institutional knowledge in the camps, with thousands of teachers and education staff seeking to move to a third country.

Access to professional development opportunities for teachers of refugees in Thailand is therefore urgently needed, including digital education and its associated infrastructures of devices and technical partnerships to support online learning (Lwin, Sungtong & Auksornnit 2022). Furthermore, since dominant digital infrastructures prioritise official languages such as English, Burmese, and Thai, and few minority language speakers possess keyboard literacy in their first language, there is a need for urgent investment in educational technologies that can overcome the limitations around quality translation of online learning resources and can enable teachers from diverse linguistic backgrounds to engage in professional development in their own languages.

IMPORTED ONLINE LEARNING

Given current widespread educational disruptions throughout Myanmar, there is a pressing need to provide online learning opportunities. However, there are also risks involved in uncritically adopting existing opportunities without considering their relevance, appropriateness, and value in the contexts into which they are imported. We illustrate some of these challenges through an example from the context of migrant youth studying on the Thai Myanmar border.

¹ As a non-signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, refugees in Thailand are not afforded the rights available to refugees in other contexts of displacement. As such, ‘temporary shelters’ denotes the long-established refugee camps, and ‘stateless migrant’ refers to those who reside within. Education in these camps was established and continues to be staffed and managed by refugee-led entities. The Karen Refugee Committee – Education Entity (KRCEE) oversees education in 7 camps and The Karenni Education Department (KnEd) administers the remaining 2 camps.

An established online education provider from the Global North offered their English language programme at no cost to a local education non-profit organisation on the Thai Myanmar border to use as part of their educational programme for migrant youth. The course had reportedly been used previously with great success in other contexts and the local organisation was told that they would need to provide little oversight or facilitation of this self-paced and user-friendly provision. The young people eagerly logged in, ready to begin their new educational journey. Within weeks, the learners (and their programme coordinator) started to realise the degree of rigour and time commitment needed to complete the course. Students became demotivated due to the lack of contextualised examples and educational contents they could relate to. It became clear that an in-person facilitator was needed to provide some “wraparound” support and accountability to ensure the learners on the programme could manage their time effectively. The local organisation could not clearly articulate the progression model of the course nor the overall expected outcomes as they had no ownership over the course materials and required training and opportunities to collaborate with the online education provider to tailor the delivery of the course to the needs of the students. In the end, none of the young people completed the course. What on the surface seemed to be a “quick win” to improve learners’ English proficiency proved to be an exercise in futility.

Scenario 1 A failed educational intervention.

Scenario 1 highlights several shortfalls in a well-intended approach to providing free-to-access online learning on the Thai Myanmar border that have been documented elsewhere too. First, it illuminates the limitations of standalone online courses with no wraparound support for learners including in-person facilitators nor adequate access to digital technologies (Fincham 2020; Halkic & Arnold 2019). Second, it shows how imported learning materials which fail to reflect the context and realities of learners’ lives leave them feeling disconnected and outsiders to the learning space, demotivated and more likely to drop out from the course (Crea 2016; Younes 2020). Third, the lack of involvement of learning communities in the design of the content and materials mirrors a top-down colonial approach to learning and education which other modalities of learning have worked hard to redress over the past decades (Adam 2019; Bali & Sharma 2017; Shahjahan et al. 2022). Fourth, the approach outlined fails to adequately engage with the complex social landscape of ethnic minority groups and the fact that many learners use languages that are not scripted (Horváth et al. 2023; Trancozo Trevino 2020), hence requiring creative innovations to engage learners in meaningful ways. Finally, learners need to see how their engagement in learning on one course is part of a broader set of opportunities for developing a coherent, recognised learning trajectory which can offer opportunities for a viable future. Standalone, one-off “quick fixes” are not the solution (Addam El-Ghali & Ghosn 2019; Dushime, Manirafasha & Mbonyinshuti 2019; Knoth, Lorenz & Rampelt 2018). An appropriate response to the needs of learners on the Thai Myanmar border requires, therefore, a more sophisticated understanding of the context of learners and a long-term vision to serve their educational needs.

SOUTH-SOUTH-NORTH KNOWLEDGE CO-CREATION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Development aid and technical support from institutions and governments in the Global North have long influenced educational development in low-income contexts. After decades of development practice, there is a growing critique of the Northern-centric approach to development. In response, there has been a flourishing of regional South-South cooperation and partnerships in educational development, with low-income countries now building economic and other cooperative relationships between each other at an unprecedented rate (UNESCO 2021). Increasingly, collaborations are characterised by South-South-North cooperation in which partners in two or more low-income contexts collaborate with a third partner in a high-income country to access research and development funding, technology, and knowledge platforms, whilst the Southern partners set the agenda for research and development in which Northern partners play a role as an ally or technical facilitator (Lengfelder 2019). This is the collaborative model we emulate.

In order to build teacher capacities and motivations, TPD programmes in the Global South need to promote the idea of connected learning by enabling teachers to understand students in context and engage in education that empowers students to navigate complex social, political, and economic barriers. In this process, teachers’ roles go far beyond the delivery of educational content towards conscientizing students to the structural inequalities and injustices shaping their lives and developing their potential for collective transformative social action (Pherali, Abu Moghli & Chase 2020).

The following table summarises how we might redress some of the integral shortfalls in the more orthodox approaches to online TPD provision currently available and how we might better connect local needs to more global responses (see Table 1).

APPROACHES NOT WORKING	REQUIREMENTS FOR LEARNERS: TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
“One time, one off” courses	A course progression leading to professional certification is needed for participants to see how completing the TPD course will open doors for them.
“There’s an app for that”	A more creative approach is needed to reach ethnolinguistic minority groups.
“Build it and they will come”	Wraparound support from local educators is needed by course participants in contexts of mass displacement.
“One size fits all”	Contextualisation of content and relevant examples are needed by participants located in different environments from the course providers.
“Top-down”	A sense of ownership , and opportunities for collaboration on the development of materials, are needed to empower teachers and students to decolonise courses.

Table 1 A summary of requirements that address the failures of imported online courses.

Educators in the Global South who have contextual, theoretical, and practical knowledge of local societies and educational environments should take the lead in identifying the professional development needs of teachers, formulating the aims of the training programme and suggesting contextually relevant and conflict-sensitive contents of the course. The design of the TPD curriculum and pedagogy is then decided through dialogue and co-construction of knowledges, which are mutually shared between all participants irrespective of their locations.

Centring this localising rationale, we intend to bring together researchers and educational practitioners in Lebanon and the Thai Myanmar border, providing a space for teachers from diverse Global South contexts affected by conflict, displacement, and emergencies, to exchange pedagogical and theoretical knowledges, share conflict-sensitive approaches to teaching and learning, and build a sense of solidarity as educators working in emergency situations.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEXTS OF DISPLACEMENT

In this section, we set out the underlying principles and methods for a co-reflexive, consultative and collaborative approach to developing an open access “connected learning” TPD space for teachers across the world who are working in contexts of ongoing conflict and mass displacement. The TPD@Scale Coalition, for example, defines this as the scope for the massive task of meeting the challenge of global TPD, as set out in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The pedagogical approach to TPD must be sensitive to local contexts, responding appropriately to the needs of professionals learning in complex and challenging circumstances. Co-design enables us to include localised theoretical innovations and insights, while bringing together explanatory theory and helping to build community knowledge. Our “Theory of Change” shaped our methodology for developing the CoMOOC concept in Lebanon (Kennedy & Laurillard 2024) and will guide the Thailand CoMOOC adaptation. At the centre of the Theory of Change are teachers working across formal and non-formal education systems, who are recognised as experts within particular contexts, and are best positioned to drive innovation in accordance with localised needs and realities.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

Our work is primarily located within the literature on *connected learning*, defined as “an innovative form of higher education that uses information technology to combine face-to-face and online learning” (UNHCR 2023c: 1). Connected learning is frequently used to support forced migrants in refugee camps, and usually involves partnerships between external higher education institutions (HEIs) and local organisations (UNHCR 2023c). The key underlying principle here is partnership: typically, the external partner provides a standardised curriculum and enables certification of outcomes achieved, while the local partner facilitates the learning by helping learners to interpret unfamiliar content and overcome technical, linguistic, and cultural barriers (Addam El-Ghali & Ghosn 2019; Dridi et al. 2020; O’Keeffe & Lovey 2023). *Connected learning* is associated with Open Educational Resources (OERs), which can reach wide and remote audiences (Colucci et al. 2017). Some OERs have been criticised for unquestioningly disseminating Global North biases and replicating colonial relationships between content providers and learners, while promoting the myth that merely by virtue of being freely available online, they are accessible to all (Bayne, Knox & Ross 2015; Moustafa 2022). The aforementioned scenario from Thailand illustrates this point. Accordingly, our research emphasises the importance of the human relationships between learners and local facilitators or peers, in keeping with much of the connected learning literature (Dridi et al. 2020; Halkic & Arnold 2019).

Transformative education (Freire 2013; Aronowitz & Giroux 1993, 1985) underpins our philosophical approach to connected learning. This shifts the focus away from transmitting knowledge to passive learners and instead seeks to engage learners in processes of continuous critical reflection and dialogue to challenge existing knowledge and ideologies, uncover hidden power dynamics and oppressive systems, generate new understandings of their worlds, and ultimately bring about social change for equity and justice.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1989) *social ecological model*, in its various iterations (Tudge et al. 2009), has its origins in theories of human and child development but has been applied to many other fields, including education in contexts of displacement (Stewart et al. 2019). The social ecological model enables an analysis of the multi-level factors shaping educational experiences and outcomes over time. It also offers a theory of action, enabling educational programmers and practitioners to identify at which level and how they might enhance access, quality and continuity of education in complex settings (Pherali, Abu Moghli & Chase 2020).

A final underlying principle is the centrality of a methodologically iterative process, which we call *co-reflexivity*. We define co-reflexivity as a respectful process of sharing our knowledge, experiences, and pre-dispositions towards educational work, and using these to co-create new educational tools that can better respond to the lived experiences of teachers and teacher educators in diverse contexts. Co-reflexivity learns from critical self-reflection and combines this with others’ processes of reflection to develop shared knowledge. It pushes the boundaries of orthodox collaboration, involving a joint analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of our work as researchers, practitioners and teachers at individual, team and organisational levels.

To summarise, our underlying principles guide each stage of the planning, development, and evaluation of an intervention, using the concepts of connected learning, transformative education, a social ecological lens and co-reflexivity.

THE CoMOOC AS A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO TPD IN CONTEXTS OF MASS DISPLACEMENT

The UN ambitions for global education articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 include the training of 44 million teachers needed to support every child to access primary and secondary education by 2030 (UNESCO 2023). This requires a programme of teacher training on a massive scale. Only technology can support that scale of demand at speed (Laurillard & Kennedy 2017). To tackle the issue of scale, massive, open, online course (MOOC) platforms are distinctive in their capacity to give teachers access to professional development without being enrolled at an institution, while the network of participants amassed by the platforms means they have a global reach. MOOCs with good discussion support have been used successfully to create flexible social learning for education professionals (Smith et al. 2016). They also provide social and emotional benefits for teachers, support them to make changes within their organisations, build

communities of practice, and help them validate existing practices (Yurkofsky, Blum-Smith, & Brennan 2019). MOOC platforms increasingly offer an on-demand, unrestricted learning mode, providing flexibility in contexts of displacement, where professional development is constantly in demand. They also provide low-cost non-accredited certification, although this remains unaffordable to many professionals in the Global South without financial support.

Several studies have shown that online social learning environments foster TPD social networks and facilitate peer-supported learning (Khalid & Strange 2016; Lantz-Andersson, Lundin & Selwyn 2018), while our own research demonstrates the need for large-scale TPD (Laurillard & Kennedy 2017). The RELIEF Centre² has been collaborating with teacher educators, researchers, and teachers in Lebanon to co-design large-scale online support for teachers, specifically in using digital technologies in challenging contexts of mass displacement. We have found that what professionals need most in such situations is practical, situated knowledge (Kennedy et al. 2022), and other teachers experiencing similar challenges are often the best sources of such knowledge (Avalos 2011; Kennedy 2014). It was important to challenge the top-down “expert talking head” style videos in most MOOCs, while moving beyond the early “connectivist” approach that relied on self-organising peer interaction (DeWaard et al. 2011). Connecting teachers through networks is valuable, but especially in the challenging contexts of refugees and migrants, the community must also develop new knowledge of how to use online methods in the face of losing their physical infrastructures. Therefore, we emphasise video case studies, co-designed with professionals working in the environments we target, digital tools for sharing and building on each other’s learning designs, and a social and collaborative learning design that makes the MOOC less of a standard “course” and more of a collaborative learning experience that democratises knowledge development. The design deploys digital pedagogies of discussion, collaboration, design, and assessment, enabling participants to experience these types of teaching-learning interactions and then adapt them for their own learners. We call this a Co-designed Massive Open Online Collaboration, or CoMOOC. The Bronfenbrenner model provides a conceptual framework both for the partners involved in co-developing the CoMOOC, and for teachers who subsequently participate in the CoMOOC, to reflect on their practice. This model has succeeded in engaging tens of thousands of teachers in active learning and social interaction in several CoMOOCs, aimed at teachers working in challenging contexts, demonstrating that it can support applied learning, realised impact and transformation at an individual and organisational level (Kennedy et al. 2022; Kennedy, Laurillard & Zeitoun 2023; Kennedy & Laurillard 2024).

Having applied the approach to co-designing the *Transforming Education in Challenging Environments* CoMOOC in Lebanon, the next stage is to consider jointly how those insights cohere or differ from those of our colleagues working as educators and practitioners on the Thai Myanmar border. This co-reflexivity is a crucial element of co-design moving forward.

THE CO-DESIGN APPROACH AS A THEORY OF CHANGE

Our research in Lebanon aimed to establish a generalisable approach to scaling up TPD using co-reflexive CoMOOCs to engage teachers and other stakeholders (e.g., Ministry of Education and Higher Education, universities and NGOs) in developing new knowledge about online methods at local and global levels. Through this research, we generated a Co-design Theory of Change, which explains the process of change towards transformative education³ through five iterative stages, as illustrated in Figure 1: engage; develop; extend; embed; sustain. The aim is to guide the research and development of each intervention. Both the process and its outcomes are evaluated by building a portfolio of data to evidence the progress of each stage.

The *engage* stage enacts the co-reflexivity through collaborative engagement and dialogue with local stakeholders from the beginning of the project to build a shared conceptualisation of what is needed and what is to be designed. This was a critical component of the research in Lebanon since we aimed to scale up connected learning for TPD while emphasising the importance of collaboration.

² The RELIEF Centre, now Prosperity Co-Laboratory Lebanon, is an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research collaboration between University College London and partner universities, NGOs and the Lebanese government, aiming to improve the quality of peoples’ lives.

³ For example, the CoMOOC ‘Transformative Education in Challenging Environments’ (TECE) on both FutureLearn (En), and Edraak (Ar) platforms.

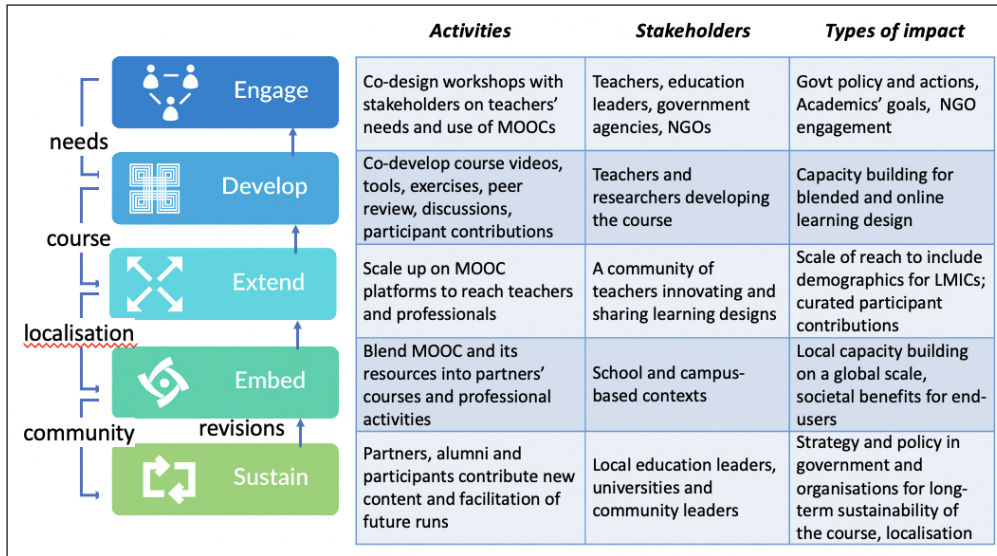


Figure 1 The Co-Design Theory of Change for educational interventions, in five iterative stages.

The *develop* stage involves collaborative learning design and development work. In the Lebanon project, this took place through co-design workshops with 57 Lebanese stakeholders (Kennedy & Laurillard 2019), which ensured active involvement of participants in the co-design of curricula and the development of learning activities and resources for the CoMOOCs. Participants included Syrian refugees who taught in non-formal schools, as well as teachers from public and private schools, and stakeholders from Lebanese American University (LAU), The Lebanese University (LU), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and education focused NGOs such as Multi-Aid Programs (MAPs) and Jusoer. These individuals facilitated the filming of video case studies of teachers across Lebanon, in which they discussed their practice and their responses to the social ecological factors influencing teaching and learning. The process began by jointly negotiating the curriculum and learning design for the CoMOOC, identifying what and whom to video, editing videos, and developing written text, discussion prompts and interactive and collaborative online exercises to support teachers in developing transformative pedagogies. This involved capacity bridging as the co-designers in Lebanon learnt how to create online courses that foregrounded peer-to-peer learning, and the core project team developed a deeper knowledge of the contexts within which they were working. Here, it reinforced the *engage* stage, since many participants in the process were excited to learn more about digital pedagogies and technologies.

The *extend* stage involves connecting the local to the global through extending the professional development activities of the CoMOOC, previously run for small groups of teachers, to others across the world through large scale connected learning, using a MOOC platform. The educators and mentors moderate and stimulate the discussion in the CoMOOC, analysing the emergent digital data, and using it to refine and adapt it for later runs. The scale is large (a total of ~50,000 active learners have engaged with the 6 CoMOOCs developed so far).

The *embed* stage provides wraparound support to participants for using the CoMOOC activities and resources in their local in-person TPD groups. They can then contribute their own localised versions of the adapted learning designs, teaching solutions, and digital ideas to the community online space, using free online tools, as part of the knowledge development process. This stage builds towards the *sustain* stage, as it supports co-design partners in embedding the CoMOOC within the TPD courses or workshops they are running. This is critical to achieving sustainability since partners become invested in the continued running of the courses to achieve their own outcomes.

The Theory of Change is fully enacted when partners themselves are leading the CoMOOC design and embedding processes, as well as providing ongoing support to the course as mentors at the *sustain* stage. The embedding of the CoMOOC within local professional development contexts addresses the global/local tension inherent in such a large-scale collaboration by enabling creative responses to the specific needs of a community of educators.

The Co-Design approach is now being extended by adapting existing CoMOOCs to new contexts. There is great value in bringing insights from other teachers to promote the exchange of knowledge between teachers located in different settings in the Global South. Applying the Theory of Change in the Thai Myanmar border context will address the prior challenges experienced by those teachers who attempted to learn through wholly online courses, since it emphasises the importance of co-designing both the online learning experience and in-person support for teachers on the CoMOOC. Teacher educators there are now exploring how CoMOOCs developed with stakeholders in Lebanon can be adapted to the specific needs of the Myanmar refugees, building on our tested methodology (Kennedy, Laurillard and Zeitoun 2023). Participants will experience highly relevant and familiar content through the adaptation and addition of video case studies drawn from the Thai Myanmar border, and social and collaborative learning activities which can support these new participants to apply or adapt techniques developed in a different context from their own.

The revised CoMOOC, newly enriched with video case studies from a very different context from Lebanon, enables teachers in other global migration contexts to discern more easily where they share similar problems and solutions, and where there are differences that need localisation. Like Lebanon, the educational context of the Thai Myanmar border suffers from severely limited or no direct access to internet or digital learning devices, so the adaptation will include design for different modalities (e.g. blended learning where engagement with CoMOOC content and activities can be facilitated by mentors from local organisations in face-to-face settings).

Teacher educators across the world, who know the needs of teachers and the multi-level factors affecting their teaching practices, can then create large-scale connected learning by designing blended courses, using the CoMOOC and its resources to increase the motivation of teachers to engage and provide flexible and supportive routes for professional development. The involvement of local stakeholders in co-design builds capacity for learning design and creates genuine ownership of the experience, and therefore investment in its success. This sense of ownership is evidenced through the ways our co-design partners in Lebanon have embedded the CoMOOCs in their existing education and training portfolio, for example by designing blended courses around the CoMOOCs (Garland et al. 2023). This is how sustainability of the initiative can be achieved.

In the context of Lebanon, where the two preferred languages were English and Arabic, we endeavoured to create learning experiences that were equivalent in these two languages, on the two platforms, FutureLearn (English) and Edraak (Arabic). This required creativity in engineering the platform. For example, unlike most of the corporate MOOC platforms, FutureLearn has an inherently social design, allowing for discussions in every “step” of an activity, while Edraak is more content-focused which required us to pin discussion forums beneath each step on Edraak to support a comparable learning experience despite the different technological provisions within the learning platform (Kennedy & Habib 2020). In the Thai Myanmar context, the need to support linguistic diversity is even more complex, with multiple language requirements that are not well supported in a digital environment. For example, the writing systems of ethnolinguistic minority groups in Myanmar do not easily map onto conventional keyboards. Yet, support for ethnolinguistic minority groups has important human rights implications for education within these groups. The language issue requires major research and development for the rapidly growing field of educational technology. This is an aspect of the field with which we are engaging both methodologically and empirically through collaboration with local education stakeholders on the Thai Myanmar border, the learning from which will have global relevance for digital learning. Opening the possibility for a path to professional certification through the co-designed learning experiences is another critical issue. This accreditation will come from local TPD providers along the Thai Myanmar border, and teachers in the region are particularly enthusiastic about the CoMOOCs providing potential pathways into a UK-based Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. While there is a risk that accreditation from a Global North-based higher education institution could perpetuate existing power relations, this can be balanced with the personal ambitions of teachers who are motivated by access to both local and internationally recognised qualifications. More importantly, teachers’ life trajectories in migrant and refugee settings are far from static and internationally recognised qualifications are viewed as portable assets, maximising the livelihood potential, and enabling spatial mobility. Our aim is to encourage teachers to view teaching as a career, rather than as

CONCLUSION AND A RESEARCH AGENDA

We began this paper with an example of how well-intended models of widening access, quality, and continuity of education in complex situations through online platforms can fall short of their intended outcomes. Through analysing the pitfalls in previous online interventions, we have tested an alternative response to supporting TPD in challenging contexts. Our underpinning principles include:

- connected learning to achieve global reach and local support for teachers,
- transformative education to support teachers in designing new pedagogies,
- a social ecology for planning action by teachers to address critical factors, and
- co-reflexivity to coordinate the co-design process with key stakeholders.

Having established some of the limitations of orthodox, top-down approaches to online learning in complex international contexts, we have presented our Co-Design Theory of Change for collaborative online spaces for learning and interaction. Given that these ideas were co-developed with educators, practitioners and researchers in Lebanon, our research agenda now continues with facilitating the South-South adaptation to the new location.

Similar to Lebanon, we are starting with the process of co-reflection and co-design of TPD so that it responds to the needs of teachers and educational providers on the Thai Myanmar border. To do this we are adapting an existing CoMOOC, proven to be successful in similar contexts of displacement and protracted crisis in Lebanon, and facilitating adaptations for the Thai Myanmar border through continuous dialogue and co-design workshops with teachers and educators working in that context. Our assumption is that this adaptive approach will be valuable for other contexts of protracted mass displacement as well, establishing clear opportunities for further adaptation and fostering South-South collaborations. In this way, we hope to redress the identified problems of lack of contextualised and relevant learning materials for diverse teachers, and indirectly, their learners.

We also need to develop a better understanding of the complexity of language issues that the Thai Myanmar border will open up as a new and exciting research project on how best to cater for linguistic diversity in online learning spaces, and the fact that not all languages are scripted. This is an important part of the research puzzle if we are to find ways of supporting learners and teachers in ethnic minority communities globally and is as much a political question as it is a practical one. Working creatively with colleagues in migrant learning centres, refugee camps and NGOs on the Thai Myanmar border enables us to co-design potential solutions to this important issue.

Finally, our new phase of work will also seek solutions to the critical question of how best to promote the accreditation and professional certification of teachers' learning so that they can build recognised portfolios of knowledge and expertise to support career progression and sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their communities.

Through the process of co-reflective Co-Design described in this paper, we aim to connect insights, knowledges and learning from diverse educational actors across conflict-affected and crisis settings, while fostering valuable South-South-North partnerships which seek to redress power imbalances and counter the colonising practices often found in online education today.

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