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Researching Ethically in Conflict-Affected Contexts: Examples from Educational Research Practice in the Global South and Global East*

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< Abstract >

This paper reflects on the authors' experiences conducting educational research in conflict-affected contexts, and the implications it holds for ethical research practices today. Critically examining ethical dilemmas encountered in research in conflict settings, the paper deepens the discussion on research ethics for working in/with participants from conflict-affected contexts. Insights are offered across different stages of a project from design to dissemination. The paper is organized into five sections: an initial section outlining the study background, methodology, and positionality of the authors. This is followed by the theoretical background. Then, six design principles for ethical research in conflict-affected contexts are presented. Next, the principles are illustrated in practice through reflecting on examples from the authors' recent research in Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, Korea, and Somalia/Somaliland. Before concluding, a discussion and implications are offered. The main contribution of the paper is toward generating dialogue on ethical research practices in conflict zones, emphasizing the importance of contextual flexibility, reflexivity, and reciprocity.

Key words: ethical research, conflict zones, Afghanistan, Cyprus, Somalia/Somaliland

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갈등과 분쟁을 겪는 사회에서 윤리적 연구 수행: 글로벌 사우스(Global South)와 글로벌 이스트(Global East)의 교육 연구 사례를 중심으로*

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< 요 약 >

본 논문은 분쟁의 영향을 받는 상황에서 교육 연구를 수행한 저자들의 다양한 경험을 통해 현행 윤리적 연구 수행을 위한 시사점을 고찰하고자 한다. 이는 분쟁 상황에서 연구 수행 중 발생하는 윤리적 딜레마를 비판적으로 검토함으로써, 해당 지역의 참여자들과의 연구 과정에서 나타나는 윤리적 고려사항을 심도 있게 논의하기 위함이다. 이를 통해 본 논문은 연구 설계부터 확산에 이르기까지 각 단계에서 얻은 통찰력을 제공한다. 본 연구는 총 다섯 부분으로 구성되어 있다. 첫 부분에서는 연구의 배경, 방법론, 저자들의 위치성에 대해 서술하고, 이어서 이론적 배경에서 분쟁 상황에서 윤리적 연구를 위한 여섯 가지 기본 원칙을 제시한다. 이 원칙들은 아프가니스탄, 중국/대만, 키프로스, 한국, 소말리아/소말릴란드에서의 저자들의 최근 연구를 통해 실제 적용 사례로 구체화된다. 논문의 마지막 부분에서는 연구 결과에 대한 토론과 시사점을 도출하며, 결론을 제시한다. 이 논문은 분쟁 지역의 윤리적 연구 수행에 있어서 맥락적 유연성, 성찰적 사고, 호혜성의 중요성을 강조하며, 윤리적 교육 연구 관행에 대한 논의를 촉진하는데 기여한다.

주제어: 연구윤리, 분쟁 지역, 아프가니스탄, 키프로스, 소말리아/소말릴란드

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I. Introduction

The global community, through the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has set as a priority to support access to quality education, at all levels, for people everywhere. Yet, there are more than 250 million children out of school globally (UNESCO, 2023), and the greatest barrier to achieving the SDGs lies in providing access to education in conflict settings in the Global South and Global East (Muller, 2020; UN, 2020; UNESCO, 2011). Moreover, it is expected that by 2030 nearly 80% of the world's poor will be in fragile, conflict-affected contexts (Kester et al., 2022). Additionally, there are more than 110 million forcibly displaced persons around the world (UNHCR, 2024a). This highlights that conflict is a concern for all countries and communities. In turn, there have been calls for greater research into education in conflict-affected settings (Mazurana et al., 2013; World Bank, 2011). However, current research ethic's guidelines for scholars working in fragile, conflict-affected areas have been criticized for being too abstract and not fitting to the specific contexts of the research (Cremin et al., 2021; Shanks & Paulson, 2022).

Moreover, research on education of and for individuals who experienced conflict is also highly relevant and important to Korea. Over 34,000 North Korean refugees and more than 3,500 persons granted humanitarian status currently reside in South Korea (Ministry of Unification, 2024; UNHCR, 2024b). Furthermore, as Korean society is becoming increasingly diverse, there has been a corresponding rise in multicultural education to support these new members of Korean society (Ahn & Kim, 2017; Jho, 2014). Yet, despite the increase in Korean scholarship discussing the need for equitable educational opportunities and fostering an inclusive learning environment for all, surprisingly little research focuses on the ethical considerations of conflict-sensitive research involving participants in/from conflict zones (Cho, 2018; Jho, 2014). With the implementation of the Korean Bio-Ethics and Safety Act in 2013, the establishment of Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and research ethics regulations have become mandatory for all research projects involving human subjects. Yet, there is criticism that current regulations and deliberation procedures are uniform and inflexible (Koh, 2020).

Furthermore, the Korean Educational Research Association's ethics regulations (2009) do not provide separate guidelines for research involving participants with experiences of conflict. This is a critical omission as researchers may encounter various challenges and ethical dilemmas during research, especially in conflict-affected contexts, that cannot be resolved

simply by receiving IRB approval or complying with existing research ethics regulations (Koh, 2020; Park, 2016). Thus, in this paper, we reflect on our own recent experiences working in conflict-affected settings, and discuss challenges and lessons learned. This includes navigating the demands of local and global partner institutions, funding bodies, and ethics committees, as well as building positive rapport and reciprocity with those participating in the research, and ensuring safety and security for all across the entire life cycle of a project.

The theoretical ideas and empirical research that we share in this paper draw on the intersecting yet distinct fields of 'education and conflict' and 'peace education', which are the primary fields that we work within. We build theoretically on decolonial thinking to inform our analysis. The driving research questions for the study include:

1. What are some ethical challenges that researchers face when conducting research in conflict-affected contexts, and how might Korean scholars respond?
2. How does the researcher's background factor into ethical research practices?
3. What guiding principles could support more fit-for-purpose research ethics in conflict-affected settings?
4. What are some ongoing challenges and limitations to applying ethical research principles in conflict zones?

As an overview, we will begin this paper with our methodology and positionality statements and the background that has brought us into this work, which we do to ground ethical research through a process of inner reflection, a process that we argue is critical to center ethical practices in all research. We then discuss the critical and decolonial theory that informs our comments and offer six design principles for developing ethical research in conflict-affected settings. Before concluding, we illustrate the six principles through examples from our recent studies. We additionally provide two further cases at the end for readers to reflect on in terms of the way that readers might respond if they were to encounter these issues. The primary contribution of the paper is toward generating discussion on ethical research practices with Korean scholars working in/with participants from conflict-affected settings.*

* A Korean-language translation of this article is available. Contact the authors for a copy.

1. Methodology

Before we proceed, a note on methodology is necessary. To be clear, this is a reflective and conceptual piece, not empirical, although the comments we make draw on our experiences working for more than 10 years in several conflict-affected settings, including Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, Korea, and Somalia/Somaliland. The methods in those studies include qualitative semi-structured interviews, participatory workshops, document analysis, and observations across the period of 2014-2024. This involved semi-structured interviews and observations with more than 170 participants across the contexts reflecting on the intersections of education, conflict, peacebuilding, teaching, and research. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and beneficence were ensured. The details for each study will be described in more depth when introduced throughout the paper. Those studies are shared for the point of illustration of the six ethical design principles that we introduce. Importantly, from our experience, there can be no single research methodology or 'one-size-fits-all' methodology for doing ethical research. It is a process that requires the type of contextual flexibility, reflexivity, and reciprocity that we are demonstrating in this paper.

Hence, we are not proposing a specific recipe for an ethical research methodology, but we are offering principles and raising questions for readers to reflect upon in developing their own ethically-informed methods for conducting research in conflict settings and with participants in Korea from conflict zones. This work is particularly important today for all education researchers, including those who work abroad in conflict settings and domestic scholars who research with 'multicultural' or 'refugee' students - as Korea itself, as detailed above, has a number of residents who are conflict-affected. Hence, the principles are important in Korea as well, and a review of the Korean Educational Research Association's (2009) ethical guidelines indicates a lacuna in this regard. There are no guidelines for designing research for working with participants in/from conflict zones. We turn now to our positionality statements.

2. Our Positionalities

Here, we present our own positions as researchers within Korean and international academia. We do so to ground our comments throughout the paper, a process that is common

in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Jho, 2014; Kim et al., 2019). All of the authors have worked in a variety of conflict zones. In presenting our positionalities, we additionally aim to practice the decolonial research ethics that we promote (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2021) and to illustrate our diverse yet overlapping voices. This is offered to assist readers in comprehending the personal and professional backgrounds from which our ideas emerge and to support readers in evaluating the usefulness of the proposed practices for their own educational research projects.

To begin, Kevin comes from a socioeconomically disadvantaged family with a migratory background. He grew up in the Eastern United States, and in his youth moved with his family from state to state trying to find a place to settle. At the time, his parents were struggling to find employment, and his family was homeless for several periods of time until they eventually settled in Southeastern Kentucky. It is there that he grew up and was educated within the racial narratives of the White and Black communities of the US in the 1980s and 1990s, and the collective traumas and the successes of the civil rights movements. He grew up with family stories about picking yourself up by your bootstraps – or working hard – and that anything is possible with hard work and positive thinking. He also grew up with his relatives' painful experiences of living in poverty and violence-ridden US communities. This background and these experiences with conflict and poverty inform his work. But, he also recognizes his privilege: that he is a White man, cis-gender, able-bodied, and was educated in elite universities in the US, Canada, and the UK. Additionally, he works at a prestigious Korean institution. Thus, he acknowledges these privileges and the opportunities that they afford him. Yet his studies and experiences living in a number of different countries and working in developing and conflict-affected contexts – such as Afghanistan, Cyprus, Korea, Papua New Guinea, and Somalia – have been formative in developing for him a critical distance from singular and hegemonic discourses of culture, conflict, diversity, inclusion and peacebuilding, hegemonic concepts that typically are coming from the Global North and the West.

Next, Bomi is a South Korean-born Canadian immigrant educator. She mainly researches about the discourse surrounding the educational disparities faced by North Korean refugee students and the lived experiences of Dedicated Unification Educators within South Korea's schooling system. Yet, her personal odyssey as both a minority scholar and a mentor to immigrant learners in North America resonates with the systemic impediments confronted by North Korean refugees in South Korea's predominantly monocultural educational milieu. Consequently, her own advocacies for equity, both as a pupil and as an instructor, endow her

with the requisite insight to interrogate pervasive pedagogical inequities and to champion the rights of those marginalized in non-egalitarian educational structures. Her tenure as an international student diverges sharply from her prior experiences as a conforming, high-achieving student in South Korea. Initially, she attributed her scholarly achievements to personal diligence; however, reflection has led her to acknowledge the substantial role played by the cultural, economic, and educational capital bequeathed by her family. The absence of such capital places one's academic prospects in jeopardy, imperiling educational welfare. This "oppressive" paradigm severely curtails the educational potential of minority learners, impeding their full integration into society.

In her capacity as an educator previously to immigrant students in the Greater Toronto Area, Bomi developed a profound empathy for the educational adversities they encounter. Through consultations with their families, she had often encountered frustrations stemming from the systemic constraints that affected her as an immigrant, too. This tutelage experience has intimately aligned her with the locus of this endeavor to facilitate more ethical research working in/with participants from conflict zones. The impetus for her inquiry emanates from a profound solidarity with North Korean students and Dedicated Unification Educators grappling with the tribulations of being refugees and diasporic pedagogues within the South Korean educational framework. Their struggles, largely unnoticed within the ambit of policies aimed at multicultural families, mirror her own as a member of an immigrant household and as a mentor to minority students. As an educator of South Korean origin, she is committed to attentively heeding their voices, interpreting and conveying their insights to mainstream educational policymakers in the quest to realize an inclusive and democratic pedagogical vision for all.

For her part, Christine has studied and worked in diverse educational contexts, from prestigious private schools in South Korea and the United States to resource-limited schools in rural China and Ecuador. Her experiences in these diverse settings exposed her to the stark inequities in learning opportunities, which often hinder students from pursuing their dreams, and led her to acknowledge her privileged upbringing in a family that deeply valued education. Her research interest has focused on examining the roots, patterns, and consequences of social and educational inequality and identifying policies and practices that can help ensure every student, regardless of background, has the opportunity to reach their fullest potential. Christine has been involved in designing and evaluating international cooperation projects aimed at improving access to quality education in low-and middle-income countries while working for

regional and international development banks. Her project experience in various countries including conflict-affected states, such as Cambodia, Colombia, and Lao PDR, has reinforced her commitment to education as well as ethical practices. She has strived to engage with everyone involved with sensitivity and respect, acknowledging the diversity, complexity, and vulnerabilities inherent in each situation and adhering to the principle of first 'doing no harm'.

Kiwoong grew up in a relatively progressively-minded family in one of the more conservative regions of South Korea. He works for a public institution that promotes various projects related to digital education in and outside of Korea. Specifically, he has worked on digital education ODA projects in 18 fragile and conflict-affected countries, including Cambodia, Nepal, Rwanda, and Serbia. In his work, he is tasked with codifying and 'transferring' South Korea's digital education experience and development path to the Global South and Global East. This work has led him in recent years to critically reflect on the promises and pitfalls of digital education and peace education in conflict-affected settings.

Finally, Youngjae grew up calling South Korea, China, and the USA home. Developing her sense of identity in three different school systems, cultures, and languages planted within her a curiosity in the relationship between the global and the local. Her approach to research reflects a similar interest in observing the underlying mechanisms of both the things that unite us, and the things that set us apart. Working as a school counselor with international school students in Ghana and South Korea equipped her with a deeper awareness of the tensions and challenges that exist in working towards peace in education at the personal, interpersonal, and societal levels.

Hence, the comments that we make throughout this paper are informed by the work that we have been doing in relation to specific issues of race/racism, gender inequality, poverty, war, violence, and colonialism in more than 30 countries across six continents, including Afghanistan, Botswana, Cambodia, Colombia, Cyprus, Ecuador, Ghana, Lao PDR, Namibia, Nepal, Rwanda, and Somalia, among many others. Thus, our approach to ethical educational research is one coming from our personal and professional experiences in the related fields of 'education and conflict' and 'peace education'. In the research that we do, our attempt is to facilitate deep and difficult conversations about identity, ethics, and peace. Because what we believe is that difficult conversations often elicit discomfort, and when individuals and communities are uncomfortable this discomfort helps to question essential and core beliefs (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2019). This process then reveals the values that each researcher or community member holds on to, and it pushes researchers/communities beyond rational ways

of knowing, challenging each to know, and more importantly, to be different (Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Kester, 2023a). Moreover, much of the work that is conducted in conflict zones is framed around the idea of an external intervention, where external researchers have the "solutions" to "problems", and these solutions are within "how to" manuals of a set of skills, best practices, or facts on how to do this work (Cremin et al., 2021). Yet, difficult conversations and ethical research toward peacebuilding in conflict settings cannot be properly understood unless it is also viewed through a lens of positionality, emotion, and affect (Zembylas, 2015, 2024). In practice, we understand this to be an emphasis on emotions, research positioning, and awareness of how each is affected by fluid positionalities that may be expressed differently in different contexts (Schulz, 2021).

The goal, then, is to develop a set of intellectual, affective, and relational research spaces within which this exploration of research ethics, identity, values, and difficult conversations can take place, with attention to power and authority, politics, economics, culture, gender, religion, and geopolitical knowledge production (Alatas, 2000; Connell, 2007; Cremin & Kester, 2020; Santos, 2018). In this approach, as we have been hinting at, we think we need to recognize that there is no "how to" manual to get us through it. We need to start by admitting that we often don't know the answer, but if we work together in contextually relevant and collaborative ways – with co-researchers and research participants – then we can come up with creative and transformative responses to ethical challenges to educational research in contexts fraught with conflict, and with participants in Korea (and elsewhere) from such settings.

Ⅱ. Decolonial Thinking

We are each a member of the Education, Conflict and Peace (ECP) Lab at Seoul National University, which the first author directs. The ECP Lab focuses on research and practice in the fields of peace education, global citizenship education, global education policy, and decolonizing higher education practices. Specifically, our work on decolonizing education has aimed to bring into conversation theoretical concepts offered by critical and decolonial theories with the literature on peace education, global citizenship education, and higher education (Kester, 2019; Kester et al., 2020; Kester et al., 2021; Kester et al., 2022; Park, 2022). More

recently, this has turned to introspection on ethical scholarly practices in empirical research projects in conflict zones (Kester, 2024; Kester et al., 2022; UKRI/UNICEF, 2021), which this paper continues.

In this paper specifically, we want to focus on reflections from our decolonial, social justice, and peace research – as relates to issues of research ethics in conflict zones – to offer some new ways of thinking about the design of ethical research projects when working with participants from conflict-affected settings. To theoretically ground our comments, we first present some theoretical distinctions between various paradigmatic approaches to education research, building on regular education projects, critical education projects, and postcolonial/decolonial projects. Elements of these theoretical perspectives are embedded within the six design principles that we share and illustrate in the following sections. We now turn to look at the distinctions.

1. Distinctions between regular, critical, and postcolonial/decolonial education

First, regular education projects are different from critical education projects in that critical education brings in theoretical frameworks and concepts from social justice, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, postmodernism, and poststructural thinking, such as issues of racial/gender equality, equity, fairness, participation, and voice (Apple, Au, & Gandin, 2009). Hence, central to the projects in critical education is attention that is paid to structural inequalities, and that aims to advance transformative agency among teachers and learners (Zembylas, 2018). That transformative agency in turn seeks to create new cultural, political, economic, and epistemic responses to structural inequalities that can further justice, inclusion, peace and human rights. At the core of this work is the writing of Paulo Freire (1970) and critical pedagogy, which helps to remind educators that schools are possible sites of oppression and liberation. In other words, education – and education research – can be both part of the problem and part of the solution (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000).

Here, Andreotti (2018) builds on Freire's work and reminds scholars that the goal of critical education and education research is to dismantle structures of inequality, not just to affect attitudes and behaviors. Attitudinal and behavioral changes are often not sustainable, as they

do not address the structural problems of violence and inequality. In research, this entails clarity with the theoretical purpose and orientation of a study, that is, linking a particular research project to a broader agenda of social change and equity. Andreotti gives a good metaphor for this. She calls it "up the river" work. Ethical educational researchers need to be "up the river", meaning that they not only respond to the manifestation or the symptoms of social problems, but instead try to address the root causes of social issues to stop inequity and violence – in education and educational research – at its origins. In this metaphor, Andreotti talks about a group of humanitarians who are pulling drowning children out of a river. They are committed to an action to save the children one-by-one, but if the humanitarians do not address the root causes that are putting children into the river in the first place, then they will face the same situation repeatedly.

This is where postcolonial/decolonial thinking aligns well with critical education research in the sense that each is trying to highlight structural inequities in and through educational scholarship (Zembylas, 2018). A critical detail here is the import of matching the methods of research with the intended ends (Raekstad & Gradin, 2020). Yet, postcolonial/decolonial thinking goes further than critical education to look critically and reflexively at the assumptions of modernity and lingering colonial relations in education and education research (Connell, 2007; Quijano, 2000; Santos, 2018). In particular, postcolonial/decolonial theory is fundamental to dismantling the "othering" practices that support unethical conduct of data mining and extraction from conflict-affected settings, often within contexts of the Global South and Global East, by researchers from abroad who operate under a colonial logic. Thus, both critical and postcolonial/decolonial projects share similar goals in bringing attention to local contexts amidst larger social, political, and economic realities, designing methods that match the ends, and promoting knowledge and strategies for supporting transformative agency among communities (Bajaj, 2015; Zembylas, 2018).

In summary, we have just presented perspectives on regular education, critical education, and postcolonial/decolonial education and education research. The latter push critical education further to address issues of coloniality/modernity. Here, decolonization is an umbrella term that seeks to resist all forms of colonization – such as expropriation, extractive capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism – to ensure systemic and sustainable solutions to social issues. It seeks to enact transformation in reference to past and present effects of colonization to create and keep alive ways of knowing and being that these processes aim to extinguish (Grosfoguel, 2008; Sriprakash et al., 2020; Stein & Andreotti, 2016). There are two key issues

in this regard for education researchers. The first is to resist the reification of research/knowledge hierarchies, such as Eurocentrism and acknowledge the contributions of colonized and marginalized populations by engaging them in knowledge co-construction. The second is a moral imperative to right the wrongs of colonial domination, as well as an ethical stance in relation to this work (Kester et al., 2021; Mackinlay & Barney, 2019).

Our goal then, and what we have been presenting thus far, is to bring into conversation postcolonial/decolonial thought with critical education theory in order to open the possibilities for alternative research conduct that aims toward enhancing ethical research practices in conflict zones and with participants who come from conflict settings. This means promoting theories and practices that move away from the dominant categories of Eurocentric (and Korean-centric) thought to dismantle and disengage with the ways in which epistemologies and methodologies of education research may be implicated within exclusive and harmful practices (Kester, 2023b; Novelli, 2023; Takayama & Lee, 2024; Zembylas, 2018, 2024). See a summary of these theories and their implications for research in Table 1, where we highlight the illustrative cases that we use in the remainder of the paper.

<Table 1> Summary of theories and implications for research

	Summary of theory	*Implications for research*	*Illustrative cases*
Regular education research	Data collection and analysis is driven by the researcher alone.	Data collection in/with participants from conflict zones (without concern for power dynamics), and analysis at home institution.	N/A.
Critical education research	Data collection and analysis is reflexive on power dynamics.	Where possible the study involves participants in the design, collection, and analysis of data. May also involve co-authorship with research participants.	Afghanistan and Somaliland case (pp. 21-23); North Korea refugee case (pp. 24-26)
Postcolonial/decolonial education research	Data collection and analysis is reflexive on power dynamics, particularly related to modernity and lingering colonial relations. Aims to delink from colonial research practices.	Where possible the study involves participants - especially from the Global South and conflict contexts - in the design, collection, and analysis of data. May also involve co-authorship with research participants.	South Korea case (pp. 19-21); China/Taiwan, Cyprus, and Somalia/Somaliland case (pp. 23-24)

Ⅲ. Designing Ethical Research in Conflict Zones

Next, we turn to share six principles of design for ethical education research in conflict zones. These principles resonate with what we have just presented from the theoretical standpoint of critical and decolonial thinking. In this section, we are presenting specifics on how to practice decolonial ethical research. The design principles in this section are borrowed from the UKRI/UNICEF (2021) guidelines on ethical research in fragile and conflict-affected settings as developed by Shanks and Paulson (2022). It is the only currently existing framework addressing educational research ethics in conflict-affected contexts. As ethical issues that are important to all research can be amplified in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, here we further illustrate these design principles through reflection on our own previous research in fragile conflict zones. We also consider implications for working with participants in Korea who come from conflict-affected settings.

1. Six Principles of Ethical Research Design

These six principles come from a UKRI/UNICEF report (2021). The principles are integrated in their entirety without modification, except the report's third principle, "comprehensive protection protocol in place", which concerns safety and security of the participants and their data. As this is a cross-cutting issue that should be considered throughout the entire research process, we have reflected it within the other principles. We are applying the principles here to the Korean context and illustrating through our previous studies. Principle one is a clear and robust commitment to creating and maintaining fair and equitable partnerships throughout an entire research project. The second principle is systematic consideration of inclusion and diversity at the design phase, and then the third is at the implementation phase, the fourth at the dissemination phase, the fifth in terms of monitoring and evaluation, and the sixth includes a flexible, fair, and transparent budget and timeline. An outline of these six principles is presented in <Table 2>. We first present each of these and then show them through our recent research.

<Table 2> Six principles for ethical research in conflict-affected settings

Principle 1. A clear and robust commitment to maintaining fair and equitable partnerships throughout the research process with communities in conflict-affected contexts.
Principle 2. Research plan details systematic consideration of ethics at the design phase.
Principle 3. Research plan details systematic consideration of ethics at the implementation phase.
Principle 4. Research plan details systematic consideration of ethics at the dissemination phase.
Principle 5. Research plan details systematic consideration of ethics during monitoring and evaluation.
Principle 6. A flexible, fair, and transparent budget and timeline that meets the complex needs of ethical research in conflict-affected settings.

(Adapted from UKRI/UNICEF, 2021)

As seen above, principle one involves a commitment to creating and maintaining fair and equitable partnerships. The primary issue that is addressed here is the question of "who controls the narrative?" From a critical and decolonial standpoint, it is crucial that local partners are equally involved in projects, as much as possible, to help inform the questions asked in research, the means used to study the questions, and the end objectives. In theory, this should help prevent the omission of key local concerns (or the amplifying of local divisions) through research, ensuring that it is a study that is not just externally driven (or driven by elite local groups) but that the whole local community serves to benefit from the project (as much as possible). This makes respect for the perspectives and expertise of beneficiaries – including the most marginalized and vulnerable – of primary concern throughout the project. Additionally, principle one concerns the question of "who controls the funding?" Many scholars are aware that funding is often secured by leading institutions and/or by leading scholars within the metropole. If it's an international project, this may entail privileging actors from the Global North. Yet, funding inevitably determines priorities, so in making projects more equitable and transformative, it is necessary to foreground the perspectives and expertise of those from the Global South and to find ways for the funding to support this (Higgins & Novelli, 2020; Novelli, 2023).

With these questions in mind, there are several ways to intervene. One is to ensure that local partners have an equitable role, and here the roles of the lead researchers from abroad can be shared with local researchers to ensure that they are benefiting equally. Additionally, researchers should spend significant time in the local research contexts to get to understand

the settings and the participants well, and to build relations with local researchers. When education researchers do this – working with partners in this way – it helps clarify power dynamics between and among global and local stakeholders. If scholars ensure the co-design and co-production of research, it helps to assure that the questions being asked and the research that is being done actually needs to be completed within that setting. In other words, local participants have something to benefit from the study. Equally, working with local partners fosters mutual benevolence. And finally, the results that are produced in these projects should belong equally to the community participating as much as to the international/domestic researchers who are involved with the projects. Open access publishing is one way to achieve this. So, this is the issue of equal relations in education research.

The second principle is around diversity at the design phase. This is about the voices that are silenced within research projects, which are often coming from marginalized and vulnerable communities, or if it's an international project these voices are often coming from the Global South. External bodies and researchers who drive the design of a study may lead to research questions not being relevant to the given context, as mentioned above. This situation threatens to exclude local knowledge and local perspectives on the problems being addressed (Chen, 2010; Connell, 2007). To mitigate this, researchers should work with local scholars and institutions to ensure diverse representation of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religion, and political background, among other factors, so that the research does not lead to unintentional biases or exclusion of certain perspectives. Also, at the design stage, it is exigent to make sure that researchers are doing what they claim, that is, that projects are realistic and can actually achieve what researchers claim to be possible. This is an issue about managing expectations and not over-committing or claiming greater advancements than are possible. More importantly, it is an issue of ethics and moral responsibility not to benefit from false promises (Goodhand, 2000). So, who gains most from the work that is being proposed? This is a question that needs to be asked, especially when projects are externally driven, internationally funded, short in duration, and time sensitive.

At the implementation stage, the issue is research ethics training and the need for researchers who are going into these projects to have been properly trained in research ethics beforehand. It's critical that researchers are ensuring this before the research begins, and that they are clearly articulating the potential risks and benefits for participants, as well as for the local researchers who may be involved. As is common in general research ethics, it is fundamental to maintain the practice of informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, to protect

the data and the sources, and to ensure a process of transparency (Knott, 2019). But this is especially sensitive and critical in conflict-affected contexts where the stakes may be higher (Moss, Ulug, & Acar, 2019; see also the Afghanistan, Somaliland, and North Korea refugee cases below). This means that everybody who's involved knows how long the project is going to go on, the various roles that are involved, and who to go to if concerns arise that require oversight. They may need to go to an institutional oversight board or someone else other than the lead researcher, so that information needs to be clear.

Additionally, when conducting research involving marginalized and vulnerable groups in conflict contexts, or with participants from such settings, researchers need to go further than 'doing no harm'. Given the moral complexity inherent in working with marginalized groups, researchers may encounter issues that challenge established research procedures related to access, consent, reciprocity, and confidentiality (Bailey & Williams, 2018; Hugman, Pittaway, & Bartolomei, 2011). In such cases, flexibility, continued reflexivity, and a focus on beneficence helps guard the interests of local participants. Similarly, researchers in conflict-affected areas commonly face ethical challenges linked to the unpredictability and change that emerges during research. Safety of the researchers and participants must remain a priority (Campbell, 2017; Kaplan, Kuhnt, & Steinert, 2020; Kostovicova & Knott, 2020; Moss, Ulug, & Acar, 2019). Equally, it is fundamental to ensure collection of diverse perspectives and sources of data, crossing racial/ethnic, gender, sexuality, religion, age, education levels, and other demographic variables. Like the design stages before, this helps promote multi-perspectivity and diversity of views (INEE, 2013). A fascinating example here of research that aims to include youth perspectives is the use of photovoice as a mechanism for young people to invite researchers into their daily lives through photo storytelling (Cremin, Mason, & Usher, 2011). The point at the implementation stage is to creatively find ways to include different – especially lesser heard – voices into the research all the while protecting participants.

Next, at the dissemination stage, this concerns an emphasis on collaborative sharing of knowledge. This may include dissemination to local communities and researchers, local conferences, international conferences, blogs, newspapers, journals, etc. What are all the different venues that perhaps we haven't thought about that would help us to amplify the dissemination and effect of our research with local and global communities? This includes language sensitivity to ensure that some outputs are written in local languages so that the dissemination of findings benefits participants and doesn't exacerbate exclusions, divisions, or harm them in any way (Moss, Uluð, & Acar, 2019). One of the ways to do this is for education

researchers to continually ask this question: Are the facts and stories that researchers are telling in published papers, are they framed in a way that enacts positive change locally? Are they framed in a way that local participants have informed the perspectives, and that those participants' identities are properly anonymized?

At this stage, researchers may also consider co-authorship with participants or local scholars, where possible. Additionally, researchers should question whether or not the outputs are accessible, that is, are they open access or put behind journal paywalls that make the knowledge inaccessible to the community that contributed to that knowledge? Community participants are frequently prevented from accessing the outputs of research studies for several reasons, including language inaccessibility (i.e., papers not written in local languages) (see Curry & Lillis, 2018); or, economically, as outputs may not be accessible to the local population because they're behind an expensive journal paywall that local communities cannot afford (Moss, Uluð, & Acar, 2019). Ethical research practices, then, may mitigate this through open access publishing, or publishing in local newspapers and online sites that make the knowledge accessible to the local community. Another barrier is that the outputs may not be appropriately written in accessible language devoid of jargon, for example, the results may be too theoretical. So, scholars should consider ways to make the language of the work comprehensible to local communities. This may mean publishing both scholarly work in open access periodicals and less theoretical research meant for public consumption. Now, there is a caveat here, of course, because researchers should not over-simplify and 'speak down' to a public audience. Instead, education researchers should have faith in the wisdom and ability of local communities to grapple with complicated concepts. So the point here is to collaborate around dissemination, to include local researchers and participants in the process, to enact positive change, and to ensure equal access to the outputs.

The next stage is monitoring and evaluation. Here, some of the issues that come up are incorporating feedback loops so that participants can continue to inform the research study throughout its various stages. Researchers may provide progress reports back to the community so that they see at what stage the study has progressed, or to use participant check-ins so that participants can check the analysis and findings that researchers are coming up with to provide feedback and perhaps change some of the ways that scholars see the data. This supports the validity of the work, but it also allows continued engagement with communities. For example, one challenge that came out of the first author's recent study in Afghanistan was with a participant who expressed her concern about the unintentional

consequences of the US-based higher education in the country. From her perspective, this education – based on values of liberal democracy, human rights, and gender equality – which she helped deliver, she now felt may have helped to lead in some perhaps small ways to learners, and by extension citizens, being disarmed and unable to fight back against the Taliban. While her perspective may be unique, by implementing the feedback loops and continued engagement with the community, this provided the first author the opportunity to hear this novel standpoint and to ponder further the unintentional consequences of higher education for peace in conflict zones.

Finally, the sixth principle is ensuring a fair and transparent budget. This involves creating a budget and timeline that allow for a diverse team of researchers and participants to guide the study, as well as to provide flexibility to work with complexities that may arise in the process of the research (Shanks & Paulson, 2021). Often, researchers in conflict zones – or those working with participants from conflict settings – may find that some local voices have been excluded unintentionally from the study, due to time constraints, access issues, or funding limits. When certain voices are not being heard from local communities, such as certain racial/ethnic or gender groups, it is critical to make the time and space to include these voices (Zembylas, 2024). To mitigate this challenge, it is important for researchers to ensure that they budget for extra time and expenses to allow flexibility in the research project. This allows more for the inclusion of diverse participants within a well-designed ethical research project. So, at the stage of the budget and timeline, researchers need to provide significant enough time and funding allocated to allow for flexibility to deal with complexities that may arise. In other words, researchers should be cautious to not rush projects to quick completion, and instead prioritize issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity to facilitate a more ethical (and equitable) study.

In summary, in this section we have introduced six principles of design for ethical research projects in conflict-affected contexts. These principles emphasize upholding high ethical standards to plan diverse and inclusive projects, to ‘do no harm’, take time to know the contexts well, receive informed consent, maintain confidentiality, anonymity, protect the data and sources, seek local partners, ensure that projects serve the community, and that knowledge is given back in equitable and accessible ways to those who participated in the research (Knott, 2019; Krause, 2021; Moss, Uluð, & Acar, 2019). In the next section, we turn to illustrate these principles in action.

Ⅳ. Examples from Practice

In this section, we share examples from our recent research on education in conflict-affected societies, including studies from Afghanistan, China/Taiwan, Cyprus, Korea, and Somalia/Somaliland, to illustrate the six principles in practice. These cases were selected as they are educational research studies that the first and second authors (Kester and Park) have personally been involved in within the past 10 years in conflict-affected contexts of the Global South and Global East (Muller, 2020). Through these studies, we reflect on our own work in conflict settings by applying the six ethical principles outlined above. We begin with South Korea, an example familiar to many of the readers of this journal.

1. South Korea

The first is a research project that the first author completed with more than 100 university educators in South Korea (Kester et al., 2020). It began with a commitment to be inclusive and to practice decolonial methods. That was the starting point for the research. But the project also sought to be informative and creative in bringing decolonial thinking to a number of different scholars across the country in order to seek ways to learn from them, how they may already be practicing decolonial work without calling it as such. For example, what practices do the educators employ that are already resonant and consistent with decolonial scholarship that those educators and others can lean into and amplify?

So, the commitment was already there to inclusion and equitable research from the start, and this was practiced in a number of different ways through equitable partnerships and co-authorship. The first author was responding to a very specific contextual need that universities in Korea, like in many other countries, are becoming highly diverse, yet the pedagogical responses and strategies of working with students are not adapting to the changing environment quick enough. Educators need to adapt teaching and learning strategies to work with different students - so the project was very contextually focused. It further employed participatory workshops as a methodology to address the issue of decolonial thinking and to collectively think about how to apply it in classrooms and beyond (Fisher, 2004; Mariella et al., 2009).

In practicing this type of inclusive and equitable research, the research questions were designed around the participants. The first author did six workshops around the country in Chuncheon, Daegu, Daejeon, Gwangju, Seoul, and Yongin, across most but not all regions of the country. Many of the participants at the workshops then chose to become co-authors with Kester on the project. Five of them eventually joined as authors making the outputs more diverse and inclusive (see Kester et al., 2020).

Additionally, the first author partnered with local and national organizations to access participants (through a national education society with local chapters), which in the end led to the dissemination of the project back to those same participants across the country – through follow-up workshops and conferences – and ultimately to a publication that was an output with the co-authors from the workshops. The publication went to the national journal associated with the society that supported the research. It was an ethical decision by the researchers to prioritize the needs of the community. Hence, reciprocity was built into the project from the very beginning.

The inequalities in risks and benefits in project design that we have mentioned between researchers and practitioners from the Global North and the Global South, or practitioners from majority groups and those from minority groups, are primarily structural inequalities. Scholars may not be able to solve such broad structural inequalities through small research projects, but what researchers can do is mitigate some of these issues by maximizing the positive impact and minimizing the negative. Whereas structural inequality is a long-term issue that many researchers are trying to address, in the meanwhile small actions can be taken to mitigate these problems on the ground. In the first author's research elsewhere, he and his co-authors write about this as the difference between structural change with a 'little s' and Structural Change with a 'Big S' (Kester et al., 2023). Ultimately, the goal of 'little s' structural change within the communities that researchers work with is to eventually contribute to 'Big S' Structural Change, but if scholars start with the 'Big S' they may become exhausted and potentially come across as naïve and unrealistic.

The short-term solution, then, is to involve on an equal basis as much as possible members from all groups that scholars are working with, whose interests the researchers are trying to represent in the research, to involve them from the planning stage throughout all the way through to the implementation and evaluation stages, to have their voices heard and to involve them equally in the projects. This is a step-by-step approach, but by keeping the bigger picture in mind – i.e., 'Big S' Structural Change – this approach can be tremendously

transformative in the long run.

2. Afghanistan and Somaliland

The next example is a project from Afghanistan and Somaliland (Kester, 2024; Kester & Chang, 2022; Kester et al., 2022.). This project is a comparative case study conducted with 12 faculty members at two universities in those countries. The data collection methods were semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and digital artifacts. The first author was planning to go to the countries to conduct ethnographic observations (and received funding to do so), but because of the arrival of COVID-19 in 2020, and then the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, it was not possible to do so. The participants in the Afghanistan and Somaliland project are presented in <Table 3>. As is evident from the participant list, the design principles were inclusive of different genders, ethnicities, international and domestic stakeholders. The first author had domestic partners in Kabul and Hargeisa supporting the study, which facilitated his introduction and trust with many of the participants.

<Table 3> Study participants

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Ethnicity/Region	Level of Education	Discipline	Domestic or International Faculty	Roles within the University
Participant 1 (Afghanistan)	Female	40–49	White European	PhD	Political Science and International Relations	International	Teaching, Research, and Administration
Participant 2 (Afghanistan)	Female	30–39	White North American	MA	English Language and Literature	International	Teaching and Administration
Participant 3 (Afghanistan)	Female	60–69	White North American	MA	Business Studies	International	Teaching, Research, and Administration
Participant 4 (Afghanistan)	Female	60–69	White European	PhD candidate	Geography and General Education	International	Teaching, Research and Administration
Participant 5 (Afghanistan)	Female	50–59	Black North American	MA	Counselling and General Education	International	Teaching and Administration
Participant 6 (Afghanistan)	Male	50–59	White European	PhD candidate	English Language and Literature	International	Teaching and Administration
Participant 7 (Somaliland)	Male	30–39	Black African	PhD	Political Science and International Relations	Domestic	Teaching, Research, and Administration
Participant 8 (Somaliland)	Female	20–29	Black African	MA	Economics	Domestic	Teaching and Research
Participant 9 (Somaliland)	Male	40–49	Black African	PhD	Business Studies	Domestic	Teaching, Research, and Administration
Participant 10 (Somaliland)	Female	30–39	White North American	PhD	Anthropology	International	Teaching
Participant 11 (Somaliland)	Male	20–29	Black African	PhD candidate	Education	Domestic	Teaching, Research, and Administration
Participant 12 (Somaliland)	Male	40–49	White European	PhD candidate	Political Science and International Relations	International	Teaching

(From Kester, 2024, p. 625)

This project engaged local knowledge by promoting multi-perspectivity, looking at issues through local perspectives, and being cautious not to homogenize the viewpoint of domestic participants as all being the same. The first author also implemented feedback loops through

member-checking and strictly protected the participants' identities. Additionally, he got funding from the National Research Foundation of Korea to support open access publishing to ensure that the results were published so that anyone in Afghanistan or Somaliland could access the research. Some of the outputs were also published in Korean to inform Korean university educators on evidence-based strategies for working sensitively with students from migrant and conflict-affected backgrounds. The first author has moreover maintained an ongoing partnership with the university in Somaliland, ensuring that he continues to give back to the community through lectures, consultations, course offerings, and the development of new curriculum. In 2023, he initiated a new curriculum development project with the Somaliland partners. This reciprocity is intended to keep the work from becoming extractive. Although it is not always possible, education researchers working in conflict-affected contexts should consider how to make projects and interpersonal relations more just and sustainable.

Some challenges that the first author encountered in doing this study: this project was quite different from the one presented before on decolonizing higher education in Korea. The Korean project was very smooth, inclusive, and a decolonial project that practices all the values of the six ethical research principles, but the one in Afghanistan and Somaliland was much more challenging on several levels. First, it was more difficult to engage local partners. The first author couldn't bring them on as equal collaborators due to funding constraints of the organization that was funding the project. It wouldn't allow him to send money to Afghanistan or to Somaliland. This is an unfortunate reality of the complexity of what researchers are dealing with when trying to practice ethical research in conflict contexts. All the funds had to be funneled through his home university, which had preventive barriers toward sending funds overseas, particularly to difficult contexts. It was also challenging to get local responses in Afghanistan, so all of the participants in Kabul were international. One of the reasons for this is because the first author was doing the study from Korea (due to Covid-19), and local participants had much more limited technological access than the international participants in Kabul.

The first author was also unable to co-author with the local gatekeepers that gave him access to the participants, because he needed to protect the identity of all participants. And if he named any of the participants as co-authors, it would have revealed the universities by extension that participated in the study. In Afghanistan, in particular, this would pose a huge security risk for the interviewees. So as much as he wanted to co-author with participants and give them equal authorship and recognition, he could not. Furthermore, the strict publishing

requirements and high expectations of the grant funding body meant the need for elite publications. Publishing in local journals was not really an option as it was in the case of the Korean decolonial study. Finally, the fragility of the Afghanistan context after the Taliban takeover was a significant barrier to continuing the study, and it remains so today.

3. China/Taiwan, Cyprus, and Somalia/Somaliland

The first and second authors (Kester and Park) recently completed a research project examining higher education teaching for peace in divided and conflict-affected contexts, including Cyprus, China/Taiwan, and Somalia/Somaliland. That project involved interviews with 40 university educators across the contexts. In the process, the first author (who collected research data in each of the countries) encountered sensitivities to language that he was unaware of as an 'outsider' researcher. Local participants pointed these issues out, but it is exigent for scholars working in conflict zones to be careful with the cultural and political assumptions that are embedded within the use of specific language. For example, in Cyprus the island is divided between the Greek Cypriot community in the south, and the Turkish Cypriot community in the north. The first author referred to these regions as 'South Cyprus' and 'North Cyprus' throughout fieldwork. And, having read the literature on the conflict prior to the study, this subtle nuance in language was not apparent in the extant literature. But several participants in Cyprus indicated that the use of 'North Cyprus' signified acceptance of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus's claim to independence. For some of the participants, who experienced the Turkish invasion and war of 1974, this was unacceptable. Hence, researchers should be careful of what seemingly innocuous language may convey within a particular context.

Additionally, in fieldwork with participants in China and Taiwan, Chinese participants emphasized that 'China/Taiwan' is an inaccurate depiction of the division. Similar to the Cyprus case, for Chinese participants, this writing suggests that Taiwan is an independent country. These participants, thus, implored the authors to write 'Mainland China/Taiwan' in the report rather than 'China/Taiwan'. Many of the Taiwanese participants, on the other hand, prefer 'China/Taiwan'. The same situation was encountered with participants in Somaliland and Somalia, as well. In response, the first and second authors sought to convey the perspectives

of participants in their own language, and emphasized this in the report and feedback to participants when a diversity of perspectives were offered. In other words, participants often did not share a consensus on how the conflict or language should be articulated, thus Kester and Park sought to present the multiple views that they encountered from the perspectives of the participants. All in all, these cases reinforce the need for researchers to familiarize themselves thoroughly with the research settings – through reading literature and context reports – prior to fieldwork, and for scholars practicing in conflict zones to engage in a process of reflexivity throughout their research.

4. North Korean Refugees

The last example is from research for a doctoral thesis (Park, 2022). This research is a qualitative study interviewing 18 Dedicated Unification Educators (DUEs) – on-site paraeducators for North Korean refugee students in South Korea. This research project exhibited a profound commitment to the six principles of ethical research design as outlined above, with particular emphasis on creating equitable partnerships and including diverse perspectives throughout the research process. Central to the study is the engagement of DUEs, who are from the North Korean refugee community themselves. This approach ensures that the narrative is co-constructed, honoring the lived experiences and expertise of those who have navigated the very systems under examination. By positioning these educators not only as participants but as crucial collaborators in the research, the study challenges traditional power hierarchies and fosters a more balanced and reciprocal research relationship.

In terms of inclusion and diversity, the study intentionally addresses a gap in the current understanding of multicultural education policies by focusing on a group historically marginalized in policy development in South Korea – specifically referred to as North Korean refugees. The reference of ‘refugees’ is deliberately chosen to convey the nuanced circumstances of North Korean students and their families, distinguishing them from the politically charged label of ‘defectors’. Yet, it acknowledges the existing terminology used in the training program’s title, reflecting the pragmatic consensus in practice and highlighting the disparity between the ideal perceptions of North Korean students and the realities of their situation. By recognizing this dichotomy, the research yielded culturally relevant insights

reflective of the unique experiences of North Korean refugees, thus enriching the academic discourse with nuanced perspectives that often remain unexplored. This commitment to diversity extends beyond mere representation; it is an effort to reshape the conversation to better reflect the complex realities of a changing demographic landscape in South Korean society, while also acknowledging the perceptual gaps that exist between policy ideals and educational practice.

The ethical implementation of the study is evident in the meticulous approach to informed consent, the use of pseudonyms to ensure participant anonymity, and language accessibility. Recognizing the sensitive nature of the subject matter, particularly the risk of identification by the North Korean government, the study took careful measures not to disclose identifiable information. This includes a deliberate omission of a demographic chart of participants, which is typically standard in qualitative research but was excluded here to eliminate any possibility of recognition, even when requested by thesis committee members. By conducting the research in the participants' native language and allowing for flexibility in the interview settings, the study upheld the dignity and respect for the agency of the DUEs. Such sensitivity is paramount, especially in a context where political dynamics could otherwise exert undue influence on the participation and responses of those involved, and where the personal safety of participants could be jeopardized by inadvertent exposure.

The dissemination aspect of this doctoral thesis is particularly focused on amplifying the voices of DUEs and influencing future educational policies for North Korean refugee students in South Korea. By presenting the findings and policy recommendations derived from in-depth interviews with DUEs, the research sought to ensure that their lived experiences and insights are not only heard but also acted upon. The study advocates for systemic changes, including the direct involvement of DUEs in decision-making processes and a redefinition of educational goals towards greater equity. This approach to dissemination was not just about sharing research outcomes but actively geared towards promoting a more inclusive and democratic educational policy framework, thereby bridging the gap between the realities of DUEs and the ideal practices in multicultural education.

The monitoring and evaluation of the research was implicitly built into the methodology, with in-depth interviews allowing for ongoing participant feedback. This dynamic approach also served to validate the findings and ensure they remain grounded in the actual experiences and challenges faced by the DUEs. Such continuous engagement is essential for the integrity and relevance of the research. In sum, the study stands as a compelling example of ethical

research in action. By centering the voices of DUEs and rigorously applying principles of equity, inclusion, and ethics throughout the research process, the project not only contributes valuable knowledge to the field but also upholds the dignity and agency of its participants. The study's approach aligns with good practices for research in conflict-affected contexts, and its findings have the potential to inform and transform educational policies for North Korean refugees in South Korea, contributing to a more equitable and just educational landscape.

In conclusion, while the Korean higher education case was very smooth, as it built positive relationships with participants and research outputs were equitably shared, the Afghanistan and Somaliland case, on the other hand, posed several difficulties. For instance, the first author had to find creative ways beyond the study to remain in collaboration with those partners and to give back in reciprocal ways that have gone beyond the parameters of the research itself. The China/Taiwan, Cyprus, and Somalia/Somaliland case highlighted the importance of a nuanced use of language and awareness of local context. In the North Korean refugee study, one key challenge was ensuring the protection of the participants' identities due to threats of exposure to the North Korean government. All these cases reveal that practicing ethical educational research in conflict zones is a demanding and complex ongoing process that necessitates vigilance, equitable relations in research production and dissemination, and a commitment to contextually flexible, reflexive and reciprocal practices. Before concluding, we now turn to discuss two further dilemmas we have faced in recent months while seeking to practice these ethical research principles, thus illustrating their ongoing and dynamic nature.

Ⅴ. Challenges and Limitations of Applying Ethical Principles in and Beyond Conflict-Affected Contexts

Practicing ethical research in and beyond conflict zones is not a straightforward endeavor. Here, we share two recent cases of challenges that we have faced in practicing the six principles on ethical research design. We share these two examples to illustrate the complexity of practicing ethical research in and beyond conflict zones, in particular the need to navigate issues in ways that demand flexibility and thoughtful responsiveness rather than a technocratic (checklist) approach to ethics.

The first dilemma involves an article that the first author recently wrote with international

colleagues from Cyprus and the US. Coming out of a conference in Germany, he wanted to continue the discussion and write a paper together with co-authors from the gathering. The conference was on the topic of 'decolonizing peace education', so the first author and his co-authors sought to continue that conversation. The three sat down to write the work. Yet reflexively aware that they are all white, middle-aged, cis-gendered, able-bodied men – and equally aware that these rigid categories do not in themselves prevent diverse theoretical thought, and that there are other invisible identity markers – they sought to engage a wider community of scholars in writing the chapter on decolonizing peace education. But due to time constraints set by the publisher, it was difficult to get other scholars to join the project. Routledge wanted the chapter produced and submitted within three weeks, an unusually fast turnaround for an academic article. Nonetheless, because the authors were writing the article to support some of their junior colleagues, they felt a commitment to their colleagues to complete the paper within this timeframe. Doing so was possible only because the three authors are close; they were able to do the writing back and forth across three continents in the three-week timeframe.

But getting other scholars – beyond the core group of three – to join in such a short time period proved to be much more difficult, hence at first limiting inclusive and diverse perspectives across genders, ages, and race/ethnic backgrounds. Facing this dilemma, the authors considered several alternatives: to write an acknowledgement in the chapter that inclusive processes were attempted and unsuccessful; to give up on the chapter entirely and discard it, thus letting down their colleagues who were expecting a book chapter; or to invite one of the editors of the book (a young female scholar from the Middle East) to join the writing of the chapter. In the end, in consultation with the editors, the third option was selected. This produced a positive outcome to ensure inclusion and diversity as a scholarly principle while also delivering the chapter to colleagues. But all of this illustrates that practicing inclusive, equitable, and ethical research is a difficult and ongoing negotiated process. Authentic ethical educational research is messy, but when scholars are committed to inclusion, diversity, and equitable scholarship, it is possible to find creative ways around some of these issues.

The second case is from Harvard Business Review (HBR). Harvard Business School, where HBR is housed, uses case studies to teach in their programs. They have a set of authors that they ask to write those cases for them, that they then sell – they're proprietary – so they sell them at a very high price to the consumer: students and business schools elsewhere.

Recently, they wrote a case study on Korea, which became very controversial. So, they reached out to the first author for his opinion on the controversy. But this is a sensitive topic of course, so the first author asked HBR about their journalistic ethics. He needed to know for example, what HBR was attempting to do with the project and how they would report it. His first request was that HBR first interview Korean scholars for their comments, and afterwards they could interview the first author. After agreeing to this process, HBR sent the first author a copy of the Korean case study, which he then read. There are two things that make the case study so controversial. First is the claim that Korea was a tributary state of China. The second issue is the case study claims that the Japanese period of colonization helped the rapid development of Korea post-World War II.

From what the first author read the controversial statements are not entirely untrue. The statements are based in a degree of fact. However, it is not just a matter of presenting facts that is the concern. It is a matter of framing, of what Harvard is attempting to teach through the case study and why Harvard is selecting certain historical details over others. The Harvard case study is a pedagogical instrument, so what is it teaching the students? And there are two big issues that arise from this, related to the ethical principles presented herein. First, the document is paternalistic; the idea that Korea was a tributary state of China, or that the Japanese colonial period helped develop Korea, does not acknowledge that Koreans were sovereign and helped develop the state themselves. It was not external parties that did it for them. Furthermore, the Japanese colonial period was brutal. The Harvard case study should not whitewash colonialism. It was a difficult period, so it is important that the Harvard case offer critical, balanced perspectives. Thus, in the first instance, the problem with the case study is its paternalistic and one-sided framing.

Second, back to the six design principles that have been presented, the second issue pertains to the lack of representation among the authors of the case study. None of the six authors are from Korea, where the study is focused. Instead, the authorship includes one researcher from Japan and another from China. This composition raises concerns about representation and the perspectives being conveyed in the case study, which is further exacerbated by historical tensions that are represented by authors from China and Japan across a region that has been conflict-affected for generations. The case, thus, seems to present omission on the part of HBR to the historical legacies and tensions of past and present conflict across Asia, with the main issue arising from the authors of the case study not acknowledging the potential bias in their understanding of (controversial) history based on their own positionality. This case, then,

highlights the critical need for researchers to consider the six design principles for ethical research in conflict zones that have been presented throughout this paper, to prevent from researchers contributing to further exacerbating already existing tensions in conflict-affected landscapes. It is for this reason that we have practiced and continue to advocate for reflexive educational research throughout this paper. We offer these two cases as examples of some challenges present in doing ethical research in conflict-affected contexts and beyond. Finally, we now turn to conclude the paper.

VI. Conclusion

Having now presented the background, design principles, and several illustrative cases of ethical research in conflict-affected settings, we want to end with some questions for further reflection. As ethical research is an ongoing process, we do not aim to end conclusively here, but instead pose further inquiry for ethical practices in (and beyond) conflict settings that have emerged as we have attempted to practice the six design principles. As we have experienced in our own research, even with the best of intentions and a well-designed study for research in conflict settings, ethical challenges often arise. These ethical challenges require researchers, then, to display contextual flexibility, reflexivity, and a concern for reciprocity for research participants. Importantly, as our research indicates, ethical research especially cannot conform to a universal methodology due to its inherently contextual and reflexive nature. Thus, rather than prescribing a definitive ethical research methodology, this paper invites readers to consider these principles to develop their own methods for conducting ethically responsive research in conflict settings and/or with participants in Korea from conflict zones.

In the end, the significance of this paper lies in helping to prepare other scholars for more contextually flexible, reflexive, and reciprocal research practices in/with participants from conflict settings. We hope that the questions below will further support this endeavor. Specifically, we suggest that researchers should ask themselves these questions (adapted and expanded from Cremin et al., 2021, pp. 1114-1115):

- How do we ensure that roles and expectations are clear from the outset, both our own, those of our institutions and those in the field, and that these expectations are clearly

communicated to participants?

- How do we choose theories and methodologies that empower those we meet, and that seek to understand and represent their worlds in ways that make sense to both them and us?
- In what ways might we practice more nuanced analysis of controversial topics in contexts where these topics are polarized, and livelihoods and lives are under threat?
- How do we allow ourselves to be transformed by the struggles that we have become part of, and how do we assimilate new knowledge and epistemologies from the research contexts into our work?
- How can we practice ethical and critical research practices in authoritarian societies that do not allow state criticism or civil disobedience?
- How do we acknowledge our own complicity within historic and current power structures that might benefit us, and harm those we meet? How do we communicate about this and ensure transparency?
- How do researchers hold to their values while also remaining open to change and alternative possibilities, especially when so much of critical and decolonial research is based on values and norms that may seem non-negotiable?
- What types of reflexivity are needed to engender social change and prevent researchers from becoming complicit in harmful practices?
- How do we ensure that the processes and outcomes of research are inclusive, equitable, reciprocal, and sustainable?

These questions are not exhaustive but provide further critical introspection on the part of researchers that go beyond the typical demands of Institutional Review Boards (IRB) and ethical protocols for research, as typically practiced in the Global North. Drawing from our own experience with research in conflict zones, we trust that readers will find the six design principles we have presented herein to be useful for conducting ethical research in conflict contexts and beyond. We also posit that these principles are helpful for designing equitable, inclusive, and reciprocal teaching and learning. Ethical research that is sensitive to conflict and crisis is especially important today in the midst of ongoing war and armed violence around the world, climate catastrophes, and growing inequalities within societies. Ethical educational research practices that are conflict-sensitive, do no harm, and support sustainable peacebuilding are essential in the present-day.

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