

WORKING PAPER

ERICC RESEARCH AGENDA FOR COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh remains one of the world's most difficult places for education delivery in conflict and protracted crises, as Rohingya communities who fled state violence in Myanmar face multiple barriers to education access, quality, and continuity under a coherent system. Despite this situation, there is a critical lack of systematic evidence on the development, implementation, and impact of education interventions among host and Rohingya communities. Informed by the ERICC Conceptual Framework and consultations with local stakeholders, our research agenda tackles the problem by developing a series of studies on three key aspects of education in Cox's Bazar: ongoing responses to the recently introduced Myanmar curriculum, the current role of madrasas and their potential as partners for education interventions, and an analysis on continuing education for girls and older adolescents. These studies will collect novel data on little-understood areas of education in host and refugee communities, fill knowledge gaps at policy system and local system levels, and provide much-needed insights to inform policy and research on education under conflict and protracted crises in Cox's Bazar and beyond.

Disclaimer

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ACRONYMS

ABAL	Ability Based Accelerated Learning
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
AMAN	Association for Mass Advancement Network
CODEC	Community Development Centre
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DC	District Commissioner
DCA	Danish Church Aid
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ERICC	Education Research in Conflict and Crisis
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FDMN	Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals
FIVDB	Friends In Village Development Bangladesh
GBP	Great British pound
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISCG	Inter Sectoral Coordination Group
JCF	Jagorani Chakra Foundation
JRP	Joint Response Program
KG	Kindergarten
LCFA	Learning Competency Framework Approach
LF	Learning Facilitator
MC	Myanmar Curriculum
NGO	Non Government Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RDRS	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service
RPN	Reaching People In Need
RRRC	Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
RtR	Room to Read
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
SKUS	Samaj Kalyan O Unnayan Shangstha
ToT	Training of Trainers
TPD	Teachers' Professional Development
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United nations
VERC	Village Education Resource Center
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
YPSA	Young Power in Social Action

I. BACKGROUND

Among the one million Rohingyas who fled Myanmar to refuge in Ukhiya and Teknaf of Cox's Bazar district, approximately 481,000 are children and adolescents of school-going age (Education Sector, 2022). Providing proper education for refugee children and adolescents has been an incredible challenge for the humanitarian community. The slim prospect of safe repatriation in the foreseeable future has only added to this challenge. In Cox's Bazar, access to learning has been limited to non-formal education opportunities provided by the humanitarian sector, or religious education provided in Madrasa. The government of Bangladesh does not allow Rohingya children to attend schools in the host community and has banned the use of the Bangla curriculum in the camp. The government recently approved the use of the Myanmar curriculum in camp learning facilities, creating the potential for access to age-appropriate learning, but has not shifted its position on providing the Rohingya with any certification.

The quality of learning in Cox's Bazar has always been a challenge given the lack of qualified instructors, teaching and learning materials, complex language issues, and constant changes in the curriculum, from an Ability Based Accelerated Learning (ABAL), to a Learning Competencies Framework Approach (LCFA), to the Myanmar curriculum. An ASER-Plus assessment led by Room to Read (2018) with 179,922 Rohingya children, ages 4-14, found that over 76% of children assessed in their knowledge of Burmese, English and math were in ASER level 1 (can read letters, can recognize numbers from 0 to 9), 22% in level 2 (can read words, can recognize numbers from 10 to 99) and less than 1% in level 3 (can read paragraphs, can solve multiplication problems) and none in level 4 (can respond comprehension question, can solve division problems). These results indicate extremely low levels of literacy in Burmese, English and math. An IRC study that used EGRA and EGMA also found similar learning deficiencies among the Rohingya with 78% of children classified as non-readers and 59% unable to answer any simple addition question correctly. The study also documented large gender gaps, in which girls are significantly behind boys in all reading and numeracy skills (Diazgranados et al, 2022).

The influx of refugees in such great numbers over a short span of time has also affected education in the host community. An analysis of Annual Primary School Census reports between 2016 and 2021 shows that after a gradual reduction in dropouts up to 2018, the number of students dropping out of school increased from 22% in 2020 to 23.5% in 2021. Girls were particularly affected, with their dropout rate increasing by two percentage points from 18% to 20% from 2019. (APSC, 2021). 37% of school-going age children are out of school. Cox's Bazar ranked second to last in reading and math skills in the most recent National Student Assessment (IRC, 2020). While we do not have evidence to support the claim that the Rohingya influx contributed to the plight of local education; education experts, providers, and administrators unanimously blame the influx for deteriorating educational outcomes.

There is no denying the fact that education in Cox's Bazar faces unique challenges due to the Rohingya crisis. Without a systematic analysis of the evidence gap, education policymakers have been unable to improve education quality in the region. IRC-ERICC was commissioned to complete a country scan exercise to highlight education research priorities and empower policymakers and practitioners to design and deliver cost-effective education interventions in Cox's Bazar.

II. THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR COX'S BAZAR

The IRC-ERICC Bangladesh team undertook a stakeholder-driven country scan exercise informed by the [ERICC Conceptual Framework](#) (Kim, H. Y. et al., 2022). The goal of this scan was to understand the gaps in evidence that critically constrain the ability of education policymakers and providers in Cox's Bazar to

respond to the education needs of the Rohingyas and the host community. From September 2022 to January 2023, the ERICC Bangladesh team:

- Mapped key stakeholders;
- Conducted key informant interviews with a subgroup of 35 people that were deemed to be both influential and engaged in the education sector, including education experts and officials of INGOs, NGOs, the government, teachers and community leaders, and members of donor organizations that invest in education. These interviews brought to light the challenges of designing and delivering education in the protracted crisis context of Cox's Bazar;
- Developed a literature review by collecting and reviewing all published and unpublished but publicly available research and policy reports on education to collate all available evidence and identify evidence gaps;
- Mapped data-systems in Cox's Bazar by interviewing data management personnel in 17 NGOs that provide education in Cox's Bazar to identify the nature of the available data and needs for additional data;
- Mapped available programs in Cox's Bazar. These activities helped us to identify major evidence gaps related to the access, quality and continuity of education, as well as the coherence of education policies, priorities and accountability.

In November 2022 and January 2023, the team organized separate stakeholder workshops with the NGO/UN organizations and government officials respectively to present the evidence gaps across various education issues. In doing so, we collectively identified the most pressing evidence gaps for building a new priority research agenda.

Stakeholders broadly agreed on the priority of evidence covering three themes:

1. Effective delivery of the new Myanmar Curricula to Rohingya children;
2. Improved understanding, coordination and collaboration with Madrasa education to maximize learning for refugee and host community children;
3. Access and continuity of education for older adolescents and girls in the refugee and host community.

Based on these priorities, the IRC-ERICC Bangladesh research team reviewed the evidence for each theme. The team then developed a set of indicative research questions using a systematic, methods-based approach to building evidence using four types of research:

- **Formative Research:** When there is little information available about a context or when we need a greater basic understanding of existing needs, we conduct formative research to identify the characteristics of a setting and the factors influencing it. By conducting descriptive and correlational research we can better understand a problem, context, population, and what may influence key outcomes. This helps us to develop clear hypotheses about the need to intervene.
- **Design research:** When we have enough information about a problem in a given context, we conduct a survey of existing local solutions and engage in design research to refine them and/or develop feasible, potentially cost-effective and innovative interventions to improve education outcomes. Through design research, we uncover users' needs, values and existing behaviors in relation to specific interventions or products. We engage users in every step of the process of designing solutions to their problems; from generating ideas, to rapidly prototyping, testing and refining them. At each stage, desirability, scale, impact and cost-efficiency are the core goals.
- **Implementation research:** To test whether feasible and desirable solutions are implemented in cost-efficient ways, we conduct pilot studies by implementing a strategy, policy or program on a small scale. We collect qualitative, quantitative and monitoring data to confirm that different

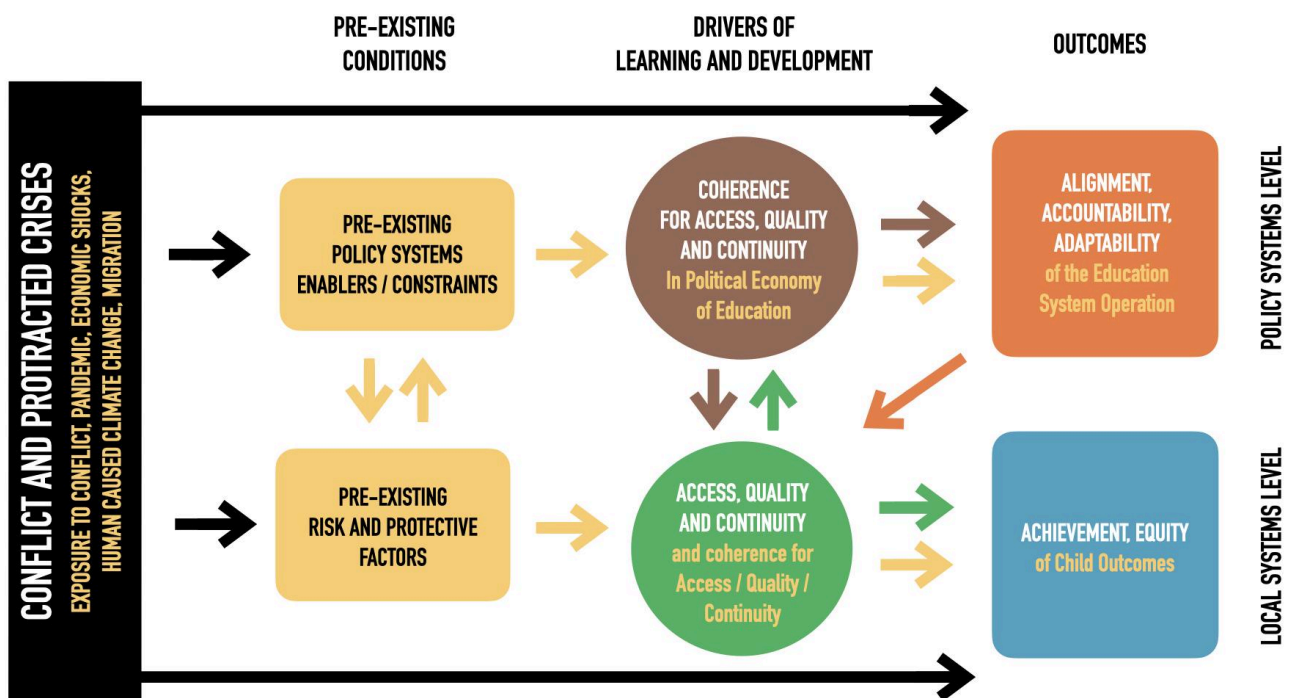
components of the proposed intervention are implemented as intended, and we use the information to identify the degree to which their theory of change assumptions are met or not on the ground. We identify the dosage, quality and fidelity of implementation, and the factors affecting it to determine the weaknesses and strengths of a particular implementation strategy.

- **Effectiveness research:** When we have enough evidence that a strategy, policy or program is feasible, desirable and cost-efficient, we rigorously test to determine whether the intervention is effective, and assess the mechanisms by which it promotes change in key outcomes. We conduct experimental or quasi-experimental studies to compare the changes in the outcomes of participants who received the opportunity to benefit from an intervention (treatment) with the outcomes of those who did not receive the opportunity (control). We also collect costing data to determine whether the observed effects are worth the cost by comparing them with the impact and cost of other available interventions.

III. ERICC’S RESEARCH AGENDA FOR COX’S BAZAR

We developed research questions based on the state of the evidence in order to fill the evidence gaps that stakeholders in Cox’s Bazar have chosen to prioritize. We developed research questions to address specific drivers of learning (access, quality, continuity and coherence), following the ERICC Conceptual Framework.

Figure 1. ERICC Conceptual Framework



We used a systematic research methods approach to help us understand the needs, existing practices and associated factors needed to design, pilot and rigorously test solutions. Our goal was to find evidence for the

most cost-effective ways to improve access, quality, continuity, coherence and education outcomes – including academic, SEL, mental health and wellbeing – for Rohingya and host community children in Cox’s Bazar.

Table 1: Priority research themes selected by stakeholders in Cox’s Bazar

Education Research Agenda in Cox’s Bazar		
<p>Theme 1 Delivery of the Myanmar Curricula to Rohingya children in Cox’s Bazar.</p>	<p>Theme 2 Improved understanding, coordination and collaboration with Madrasa education to maximize learning for refugee and host community children.</p>	<p>Theme 3 Access and continuity of quality education for adolescents girls and overaged Rohingya and host community children.</p>

IV. RESEARCH AGENDA THEME 1: MYANMAR CURRICULA

Delivery of the Myanmar Curricula (MC) to Rohingya Children in Cox’s Bazar	
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the needs, challenges and opportunities of implementing the new MC in Cox’s Bazar with teachers and students who have limited proficiency in Burmese language. 2. Evaluate the feasibility, cost-efficiency and scalability of solutions to improve Burmese language instruction and subject matter knowledge of teachers delivering the MC to Rohingya children in Cox’s Bazar. Refine these solutions as needed through design research and rapid prototyping to ensure improved uptake and quality. 3. Evaluate the impact and cost-effectiveness of interventions to improve delivery of MC in Cox’s Bazar.
Target Population	Education sector, RRRC office, Rohingya teachers and students
Links to ERICC Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-existing conditions: The government of Bangladesh approved the use of the MC for Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar. However, teachers in the region currently lack the Burmese language skills and knowledge of the curriculum’s subjects to deliver it effectively. ● Target system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy-systems level: Government authorities (RRRC Office), Informal school systems (Education sector) ○ Local systems: Schools, teachers, classrooms and children participating in the MC ● Drivers of Learning and Development: Access, Quality and Coherence ● Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy systems level: Alignment

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Local systems: Academic learning
Contribution to policies, programs, and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research under this theme will help the education sector to develop strategies and resources to effectively implement the Myanmar curriculum. It will also find solutions to existing barriers related to training teachers in Burmese language and curriculum subjects. • Research under this theme will contribute to the literature of teachers' training in emergency contexts, especially when language and subject matter knowledge are barriers for quality.

A. Background and existing evidence

In the refugee camps of Bangladesh, there are about 481,000 school-aged Rohingya children. Formal education remains restricted for displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh. Bangladesh has accepted stateless Rohingyas into the country for decades, while purposefully enacting rules that deny them access to public services, including the national education system. In this context, the National Task Force for dealing with Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) produced guidelines to provide FDMN children and adolescents with informal learning opportunities in either Burmese or English. For the first five years of the response, these policy constraints restricted access to education to informal learning centers provided by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and NGO partners. These centers used an Ability Based Accelerated Learning (ABAL) approach, which grouped children in centers according to their age.

In 2018, UNICEF and NGO partners started implementing a major education program that shifted this approach to one in which the majority of the children started learning through the non-formal Learning Competency Framework Approach (LCFA) which grouped roughly 300,000 of the children attending learning centers according to their competencies. The LCFA includes levels one to four and caters largely to children aged 4-14. After nearly two years of delay, the Bangladeshi government finally approved the Myanmar Curriculum (MC) for use with refugee learners in January 2020, providing children with the opportunity to learn from the curriculum of their native country, even though they will not receive accreditation. A pilot of the new curriculum, which must be delivered in Burmese, started in 2021, involving 10,000 students in grades six to nine.

Unfortunately, the majority of Rohingya do not speak Burmese and as such are not familiar with the curriculum's language unless they attended lessons at schools in Myanmar taught in Burmese. This language barrier presents a considerable challenge in the Rohingya context because most Rohingyas do not speak Burmese, or speak a Rakhine dialect of Burmese loosely related to the national curriculum's language. Using Arabic, Urdu, Hanifi, or Latin characters, there are only a few non-standard Rohingya writing conventions. The Rohingya language is mostly used orally, and not in written form by the majority of the population, similar to the more than 100 other ethnic languages spoken in Myanmar and many more spoken worldwide. This presents a significant challenge in this context. However, 93% of the Rohingyas in the camps prefer the Myanmar Curriculum (MC) over the Learning Competency Framework Approach (LCFA) and therefore welcome the introduction of the MC (Rahman et al., 2022).

Initially, the MC roll-out focused on five core subjects: Burmese, English, Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, History and Geography. The MC pilot for Grades 6, 7, 8, and 9 is ongoing with 10,915 learners among whom only 1,803 are girls. For kindergarten, first grade, and second grade students, the MC scale-up has been rolled out. There are approximately 4000 learning centers that introduced MC curricula in the camps. There are 4649 Rohingya facilitators and 3649 host facilitators teaching in these learning centers. They were

trained to deliver the LCFA and now have to deliver the MC, a curriculum in which they have not been trained, and were not hired for. (REACH, 2021).

In this regard, there are two major challenges that the sector is facing to effectively deliver the MC. First, the MC needs to be delivered in Burmese language, but the dialect of facilitators is Rohingya and there is little information on their Burmese language competency. A rapid language assessment of Cox's Bazar carried out in November 2017 by Translators without Borders showed that the predominant language among locals in and around Cox's Bazar is Chitagonian (TWB, 2018). We did not find published information on the number of facilitators who speak Burmese, and their levels of fluency or previous exposure to the Burmese language. The absence of data on learning facilitators' language skills in Burmese and subject matter knowledge is a major hindrance to planning and designing appropriate need-based learning facilitators training. There is no baseline Myanmar language literacy testing conducted in Cox's Bazar. Additionally, we found no published information on the demographics, qualifications and level of experience of the existing Rohingya learning facilitators. While we found during our data system mapping that some organizations previously collected some data on existing learning facilitators quality, we couldn't confirm if the data could be accessed and used to establish a baseline of teachers' qualifications. Also, we did not find any existing interventions or research around the improvement of Burmese language proficiency among learning facilitators in Cox's Bazar. There is a consensus among the education practitioners that Burmese language skills are the primary barrier for the successful implementation and roll out of the MC. Until teachers' Burmese Language skills are better known and understood, selecting the most effective methods to teach the MC to Rohingya students in primary level, accelerated or remedial classrooms risks being haphazard.

Second, existing learning facilitators in Cox's Bazar have only been trained to deliver the LCFA, which does not require the subject matter knowledge and professional expertise that delivering a subject level national curriculum, such as the MC, requires. During our data system mapping, we found that some organizations collected data on existing teachers' education and teaching experience, but that such data is not shared externally. We also learned that the Education Sector developed a method to assess learning facilitators' professional competencies in delivering LCFA. The objective was to map learning facilitators' existing capacity to professional development needs. The assessment included a multiple-choice question paper, covering general pedagogical knowledge, and a lesson competency rubric (TWB, 2020). UNHCR, Save the Children, and BRAC have implemented teachers' professional development programs but as of now it is not clear how their programs will be modified to replace the LCFA with the MC (TWB, 2020). Many organizations who have actively worked in Cox's Bazar for Education Programs since 2017 organize individual training and capacity building activities for the learning facilitators recruited by that organization. These organizations include Save the Children, BRAC, Mukti, VERC, CODEC, JCF, DAM, RISDA, Room to Read, IRC, NRC, DRC, DCA, YPSA, Plan International, SKUS, World Vision, CARITAS, Friendship, CARE, HI, RDRS, FIVDB, Educo, VSO, JAAGO Foundation, COAST Foundation, BASTOB, Prantik Foundation, Shushilan, Obat Helpers, AMAN, RPN etc.

Training module and capacity building activities vary from organization to organization, and there is no common collaborative initiative for learning facilitators training across organizations. It is important to emphasize that 12–14 resource learning facilitators from UNICEF who formerly worked in Myanmar are currently working in the camps. On the other hand, CODEC has two Burmese language focused technical officers employed in the camp. Additionally, there are two language laboratories in two registered refugee camps where instructors can access resources to improve their Burmese language skills, and these laboratories help to develop Myanmar textbooks for primary school students. British Council, Room to Read, and BRAC initially worked on the development of materials and teaching guidelines for the LCFA curriculum, and the documents are developed both in English and Burmese language.

Both the MC roll-out and the continuation of the LCFA will continue for some time so that young students can enroll in the MC in KG, Grade 1, Grade 2 directly. Children who were in level 3 and 4 will continue at LCFA, and older learners can continue education with the ALP. The question of integration of older adolescents who are

out of school, or who go to Madrasa but want to enroll in the MC, or who are transitioning out of the LCFA into the appropriate MC grades still remains. We have seen a consensus among the stakeholders that accelerated learning programs for integrating overage learners in the MC and remedial education programs for low achievers could be effective solutions. However, this transition to the MC will be an insurmountable challenge as these potential learners do not speak Burmese. Currently, accelerated learning programs under the MC are available in the camps but we did not find any evidence on their efficacy in improving learning outcomes in general, or in catch-up learning competency for the MC grades in particular. We also do not know which accelerated education model can work in a context of high language barriers.

B. Type of research needed and Indicative Research Questions

Aim 1. Identify the needs, challenges and opportunities of implementing the MC in Cox’s Bazar with teachers and students who have limited proficiency in Burmese language – Formative Research

The following questions need answers in order to develop solutions to challenges in the implementation of the MC.

- What is the existing teaching capacity of the community to support the delivery of the MC in terms of both Burmese language and subject matter knowledge?
- What are learning facilitators and students’ competency levels and previous exposure to the Burmese language?
 - What reading and learning materials are available in Burmese in the camps?
 - What skill development programs in Burmese and the MC are available for learning facilitators in Cox’s Bazar, and how do facilitators feel about existing support?
- What are learning facilitators’ previous exposure and experience with the MC before displacement?
- How many educators have been certified as learning facilitators for the MC? A What is their proficiency in MC subject matters across grade levels?
- What pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities have learning facilitators received? On what content? Using what delivery method? What is their perception of these TPD opportunities? To what degree are those TPD opportunities aligned or not with the skills needed to deliver the MC? Is there any competency framework for teachers developed for delivering the MC?
- What support are learning facilitators receiving to deliver the MC? What are learning facilitators’ perceptions of the relevance and effectiveness of these supports?
- How are learning facilitators delivering the MC with limited proficiency levels? What are existing best practices to deliver the MC in Cox’s Bazar?

Aim 2. Devise solutions for improving learning facilitators’ Burmese language competencies and the subject matter knowledge required for successful rollout of MC – Design Research

- What are feasible, relevant, desirable, potentially cost-efficient and scalable solutions to improve learning facilitators’ subject matter knowledge and Burmese language competencies in the camp?
 - What protocols can be developed to identify, recruit and train community members who speak Burmese to implement or support the implementation of the MC?
 - What type of Teacher Professional Development Program (TPD) can be a desirable and potentially cost-effective way to improve learning facilitators’ competencies to deliver the MC? How can the TPD frameworks be delivered and implemented on ground level for the MC? What resources, modules and content are needed to support TPD activities around the MC? How can

they be made easy and relevant for learning facilitators with little teaching experience and very low levels of subject and language competency in Cox's Bazar?

- How can technology be leveraged to support the effective delivery of the MC. How can it help learning facilitators develop basic Burmese language competencies in the camp and aid in uptake of the MC?
- What innovations can aid in the implementation of subject/curriculum-based education and improve learning outcomes for different levels?
- What incentives and behavioral change communications can be used to improve uptake of innovations to improve learning facilitators' skills and performance?

Aim 3. Assess implementation quality of solutions to improve teachers' training and programs on Burmese language training - Implementation research

- If any of the design research above produces promising results, we will do implementation research to measure quality, fidelity, sustainability, scalability, and replicability of the intervention. We will answer the following questions.
- Are the designed language acquisition and TPD interventions cost-effective?
- Is the TPD intervention implemented as intended? With what levels of quality and fidelity? What are the risks to implementation as intended?
- What are the barriers and enablers of the quality and fidelity of implementation?
- What baseline-endline changes do we observe in teachers and learning facilitators' Burmese language competencies and MC subject matter knowledge? What baseline-endline changes do we observe in teacher instructional practices and subject content delivery in learning centers delivering the MC?
- What relationships exist between dosage, quality and fidelity with teacher-level outcomes?

Aim 4. Test the impact and cost-effectiveness of solutions to improve teachers' training and Burmese language training - Effectiveness research

If we find promising interventions at the design research level or any interventions based on a well-reasoned theory of change that can help alleviate challenges related to learning facilitators' Burmese language competencies and MC subject matter knowledge and delivery, we will undertake impact evaluation research to answer the following questions.

- What is the impact of TPD models on Burmese and subject matter knowledge and delivery for the MC on teachers' competencies and children's access, learning (academic, SEL and wellbeing) and continuity outcomes?
- How does the impact of TPD vary for different subgroups of teachers by age, gender, education, teaching experience?
- How does the impact of TPD vary for different types of children, by gender, socio-economic status, disability, and previous exposure to Burmese language?
- Are the interventions cost-effective?

V. RESEARCH AGENDA THEME 2: MADRASA EDUCATION

Madrasa education and opportunities for collaboration to maximize learning opportunities for both the Rohingya and the host children.	
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand existing practices and education needs of Madrasa students in Cox's Bazar 2. Design and pilot strategies to increase collaboration and interaction between the government, private and NGO-led school system and the madrasa education system. 3. Assess the implementation quality and cost-efficiency of quality foundational learning experiences for madrasa students. 4. Test the cost-effectiveness of Madrasa/government/private and NGO-led school system collaboration initiatives on children's access, learning, wellbeing, and continuity.
Target Population	Host and refugee children attending Madrasa and teachers, private school students, government school students, their teachers, parents and religious leaders.
Links to ERICC Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Target system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy systems level: Madrasa Education Board, Education Sector, Department of Education, Deputy Commissioner Office (DC office) ○ Local level: Madrasa children, their parents, teachers and religious leaders ● Pre-existing conditions: High level of community acceptance of madrasa education but madrasa graduates remain under-employed. The proportion of female students increases at higher classes in Madrasa. ● Drivers of learning and development: Access, Quality, Continuity and Coherence ● Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy systems level: Policies on teaching-learning in Madrasa for foundational skills; older girls and their continuity in education. ○ Local systems level: Academic outcomes, SEL and wellbeing, and improved equity in the education outcomes of students in the Madrasa, private and government and NGO-led school systems.
Contribution to policies, programs, and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop strategies and/or interventions to improve quality education for Madrasa students, who comprise a third of the children of school-going age, through cross-fertilization between Madrasa and mainstream education. ● Test cost-effectiveness of interventions that collaborate with Madrasa to reach out-of-school children and girls to offer foundational competencies. ● Contribute to the literature of how alternative education systems (e.g. religious education) can be leveraged to improve foundational skills for children who do not go to the mainstream or remain out-of-school.

A. Background and existing evidence

There are a total of 67 Madrasa across the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar with 4599 female students and 5298 male students. This may be an underestimate as these numbers only consider students who are

regularly attending madrasa. Survey data shows that approximately 30% of Rohingya children go to Madrasa for education (UNHCR, 2018). 62% of Madrasa in the camps teach exclusively religious education, 11% teach Arabic language, 16% have provisions for teaching general knowledge, and 1% have provisions for teaching science and life skills. (UNHCR, 2018) A survey conducted by GAGE shows that the Rohingya community trusts madrasa education highly.

There are many types of madrasa but the majority belong to Alia Madrasa and Dakhil Madrasa in Bangladesh. Alia Madrasah is a type of madrasa which provides religious education along with basic education, humanities, ICT, and in some cases, vocational courses. Alia Madrasah are government or semi-government administrations run under the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. Dakhil Madrasa is primarily an Islamic religious educational institution whose main aim is to teach the Qur'an and Hadith (BMED, 2022).

In the host community, there are 144 Alia Madrasa {There are five stages in Aliya Madrasah, 1. Ibtedayi (primary, 5 years long), 2. Dakhil (secondary, 5 years long), 3. Alim (higher secondary, 2 years), 4. Fazil (undergraduate, 2 years) and 5. Kamil (post-graduate, 2 years)} that provide both religious and general education. At the secondary level, approximately 35,000 students are enrolled in Madrasa compared to 155,000 students enrolled in secondary schools (19% of all secondary students). Although there are no statistics available from Qawmi Madrasa that exclusively teach religion, some education experts estimate that the number could be the same as Dakhil Madrasa or higher. Most importantly, 72% of all Dakhil/secondary madrasa students are women (BANBEIS, 2021).

We do not know much about targeted learning outcomes, pedagogy, learning experience, teachers' training and qualifications in Madrasa although the communities in Cox's Bazar regard Madrasa highly. (Olney et al., 2019). We also do not know what language is used in delivering the curriculum to the Rohingya students. Similarly, we did not find education programs delivered in Madrasa by NGOs to improve the quality of education there. Due to lack of interaction and knowledge about Madrasa, there are tensions between the madrasa and the learning facility/school-based education. Stakeholders in Cox's Bazar believe that working collaboratively with the madrasa education system could be a powerful way to provide out-of-school children with education opportunities, to keep older girls in the education system, and to improve the learning experience of students in both systems.

B. Types of research, needed and Indicative Research Questions

Aim 1: Understand existing practices in Madrasa in Cox's Bazar, identify education needs and associated factors - Formative Research

We do not know much about the curriculum followed by different madrasa education systems or the learning outcomes they target. Answers to the following questions will help inform the design of both programs to improve learning experience in Madrasa and exchange programs between Madrasa and schools.

- What perceptions do Rohingya and host parents, children, and other relevant stakeholders have of the education opportunities that are available to them in Cox's Bazar? Which opportunities are perceived as the most and least desirable and effective? What skills are seen as important and relevant for different age groups?
- Why do some families express preference for Madrasa over other types of learning experiences?
 - What are the incentives and barriers that influence Rohingya/host parents' decision to choose Madrasa for their children over other learning experiences?
 - To what degree is the Madrasa education system pulling Rohingya children away from other education opportunities in Cox's Bazar?

- What education are Rohingya/host children receiving in Madrasa?
 - When are children attending Madrasa? Where do children attend Madrasa? Where are the spaces? What are the spaces? How do these spaces overlap or link with other schooling spaces?
 - Is there a curriculum for Madrasa education? What are the learning outcomes that Madrasa wants to produce?
 - What is the profile of the Madrasa teachers in Cox's Bazar, in terms of their age, gender, education background and training?
- What are the structures of Madrasa (networks/associations? Individual centers) in Cox's Bazar?
- Are there any existing collaboration initiatives between Madrasa, government and NGO-led school systems?
 - What are the perceptions of key local stakeholders –parents, learning facilitators from government and NGO-led schools, Madrasa teachers and children about these initiatives?
- What protection risks/benefits exist for children in Madrasa? What benefits/harms interaction with other educational systems available? How do madrasa students enter in the competitive income generating market after completing Madrasa education?

Aim 2. Design solutions to improve access to quality foundational opportunities for students in Madrasa – Design Research

Madrasa could be an effective way to:

- Reach to out-of-school children who do not come to school but can be willing to go to Madrasa;
- Extend general/traditional/quality education to more than 30% children who do not come to schools but attend Madrasa;
- Keep older female adolescents in the education system whose parents believe Madrasa are the right and safe education for older girls.

By conducting design research we want to answer:

- What are feasible and potentially cost-efficient and scalable models to use to work with the Madrasa education system to increase access and quality education opportunities in Cox's Bazar?
 - Is it possible to reach Rohingya/host children, especially older girls, through Madrasa to improve foundational skills?
 - What programs (interaction/exchange) between madrasa and school-based education can help improve the skills (academic and SEL) of students from both systems?
 - What are feasible, desirable and cost-efficient ways to strengthen the madrasa education system (e.g. Low and high EdTech, professional development, etc.) to support foundational skills, SEL and wellbeing? What content and delivery models would be feasible and desirable?
 - What protection interventions can be used to mitigate the risks of harm in Madrasa in cost-efficient ways?

Aim 3: Assess the quality and cost-efficiency of solutions to improve access to quality foundational opportunities for Madrasa students – Implementation Research

If at the design stage we conclude that there are promising strategies or interventions to enhance madrasa education, we will conduct implementation research to address the following questions.

- What levels of attendance and implementation quality and fidelity do we observe in Madrasa education enhancement models (e.g. MC or national curriculum collaboration, EdTech interventions, child safety interventions, exchange programs, etc.)? To what degree are attendance, and quality and fidelity of implementation of these models associated with students’ learning, SEL, wellbeing outcomes?
 - What are the enablers and barriers to uptake and quality implementation of these Madrasa education enhancement models?
 - What is the cost–efficiency of implementing Madrasa education enhancement interventions to improve foundational skills?

Aim 4. Test the impact and cost–effectiveness of solutions to improve access to foundational skills for Madrasa students – Impact evaluation and cost–effectiveness research

We plan to identify cost–effective models to collaborate with Madrasa for increasing access to quality education for Rohingya and host children in Cox’s Bazar and promote their learning, wellbeing and continuity of education by answering the following:

- What is the impact of Madrasa strengthening programs on children’s foundations skills, SEL and wellbeing?
 - How does this impact vary for different subgroups of children, by age, gender and disability status?
- What is the impact of programs that create paths and linkages from Madrasa into the MC/national curricula on the foundational skills, SEL and wellbeing of Rohingya and host children?
 - How does the impact vary for different subgroups, by age, gender and disability status?
- Is strengthening the Madrasa education system more cost–effective in terms of learning, SEL and wellbeing than creating linkages to the MC and other learning programs?
 - Is Madrasa a cost–effective model to educate older adolescents and girls?

VI. RESEARCH AGENDA THEME 3: KEEPING GIRLS AND OLDER ADOLESCENTS IN SCHOOL

Access and continuity of quality education for older adolescents and girls in the refugee camp and host community	
Aims	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understand priority skills areas for older adolescents and girls (15+) in the refugee camp and host community of Cox’s Bazar. 2. Design solutions to provide out-of-school adolescents (15+) and girls with second-chance education. 3. Design solutions to reduce drop-out rates among in-school children. 4. Test the impact and cost-effectiveness of education programs for out-of-school older adolescents and girls in Cox’s Bazar on their foundational, vocational and SEL skills and wellbeing.

Target Population	Older adolescents (15+) and girls who have never been in school or who dropped out of school and their parents
Links to ERICC Conceptual Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Target system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy systems level: Education sector, Department of Education, Technical Education Board, Deputy Commissioner Office (DC office), RRRC ○ Local level: Older adolescents, parents, teachers, skills training providers ● Pre-existing conditions: Parents put lower value on girls' education than on boys' education. As they grow up boys face pressure to earn. and education opportunities for older adolescents are limited in camps. ● Drivers of learning and development: Access and Continuity ● Outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy systems level: New education policies and programs in academic, SEL and vocational skills training for older adolescents and girls ○ Local systems level: Academic outcomes, SEL and wellbeing, and reduction of out-of-school adolescents
Contribution to policies, programs, and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our research will help to fill a gap in cost-effective strategies and/or programs that provide access to quality education opportunities for older adolescents and girls. It will influence the education ecosystem to invest in the provision of alternative educational opportunities for them. ● Our research will contribute to the literature of adolescent education through alternative learning opportunities, and education-to-work transition. Contribute to the literature of how alternative education systems (e.g. religious education) can be leveraged to improve foundational skills for children who do not go to the mainstream or remain out-of-school.

A. Background and existing evidence

According to JRP (2019), 97% of adolescents and youth aged 15–24 years in the camps are not attending any type of education facility. Data from the GAGE program shows that all forms of informal education are heavily weighted towards young adolescents (10–12 years), with 68% of young adolescents in the camp sample enrolled in informal education compared to only 15% of older adolescents (15–17 years). Since arriving, only 4 percent of girls aged 15–18 have attended a learning facility, compared to 14 percent of boys. In general, girls in the GAGE survey camp sample were 35% less likely than boys to participate in informal educational learning, reflecting gender disparities that have persisted from Myanmar's Rakhine State, where the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh originally come from. While some adolescent girls attend school, there is little evidence that girls over 15 have access to formal education (Education Sector, 2020). The scenario in the host community is also dim. According to the Cox's Bazar Panel Survey 2020, enrolment rates in secondary education for boys and girls are 55% and 68% respectively and the drop-out rates for boys and girls are 29% and 37% respectively. (CBPS, 2021).

In the refugee camp, older adolescents have been excluded from the existing school system from the very beginning. One major challenge for access to education is the absence of age-appropriate learning materials (Guglielmi et al., 2021). The LFCA is not suitable for older adolescents who want to learn progressively advanced materials (ISCG, JRP, 2019). Evidence also shows that older adolescents are subjected to a wide range of protection concerns, including safety, trafficking, early and forced marriage,

child labor, and abuse and exploitation risks. Rohingyas are also not allowed to work. With few possibilities for education and work in the camp, older adolescents remain inactive, resulting in negative psychological outcomes, especially among those between the ages of 15 and 18 (Global Education Cluster, 2019). A study shows that among Rohingya refugees, 61.2% had signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, 88.7% had symptoms of depression, and 84% had symptoms of emotional distress. In addition, a high percentage of Rohingya said they occasionally felt anxious or depressed, including "worrying too much about things" (92.5%), "feeling sad" (91.3%), "losing interest in activities they used to enjoy" (89.5%), and "feeling tense or irritated" (88.7%) (Fortify Rights, 2020).

In the host community, inability to cover educational expenses and pressure to earn are two common barriers for older boys to continue education. Inability to cover educational expenses, social restrictions, and marriage are major reasons for adolescent girls not attending schools (CBPS, 2021). In the GAGE study, 32% of adolescent boys from host communities have worked for money in the last 12 months, compared to 7% of girls. Adolescent boys are widely viewed as a family's main source of income in Cox's Bazar host community. But for adolescent girls, a wide range of barriers combine to limit access for host community adolescent girls (Global Education Cluster, 2019). These barriers include a lack of female teachers, security concerns, care responsibilities, household duties, movement restrictions and negative parental and community attitudes towards girls' education.

In the camp, we did not find information or evidence on solutions to ensure safe and quality education for adolescent girls. Additionally, we did not find holistic education programs that include opportunities for learning and developing skills to expand livelihood options. Stakeholders are not sure how to create livelihood or vocational educational opportunities for older Rohingya adolescents when they are not allowed to work in Bangladesh and the possibility of repatriation is uncertain. However, the Bangladesh government may be open to making livelihood skills development an important element of the Rohingya education as long as programs are consistent with the Myanmar labor market (ISCG, 2022). In this regard, there seems to be a consensus that the MC could create age-appropriate, progressively advanced learning opportunities for Rohingya children if they can transition into the system through appropriate accelerated learning programs and community engagement. Additionally, many education stakeholders believe that integration of SEL in the curricula could be helpful to retain students when they face an uncertain future.

Regarding older adolescents in the host community, stakeholders widely believe that referral between the secondary schools and vocational schools could be a way to transition at-risk older adolescents from school to work. However, we did not find research to better understand how existing skill development programs are contributing to the community demand for income generation or the degree to which they are cost-effective. It is worth continuing engaging communities in educational activities and SEL. Some stakeholders also believe that the education system is least accessible to disabled adolescents, and school-based vision-screening or hearing-screening may help many students to continue their education.

B. Types of research needed and Indicative Research Questions

Aim 1: Understand priority skills areas for older adolescents and females (15+) in the refugee camp and host community of Cox's Bazar– Formative Research

We need information on the skills and qualities that adolescents, parents and community members in the refugee camp and host community value and desire to learn. The following questions will help us understand the needs of Rohingya in the refugee camp and host community members in Cox's Bazar and inform the design or improvement of existing programs:

- What do out-of-school older adolescents do? What are their expectations and life goals?
- What skills do parents, adolescents and the community value for older boys and girls?

- What are the existing formal/non-formal opportunities for adolescent boys and girls over 15? To what degree do existing programs instill desirable skills? Who are taking these opportunities and what are their experiences? Where there are no opportunities available, what are the reasons?

Aim 2. Design feasible, desirable and potentially cost-effective and scalable education solutions to improve access, learning, wellbeing and continuity of education for out-of-school older adolescents (15+) and girls in Cox's Bazar – Design research

We will engage in design research to develop desirable, feasible and potentially cost-effective and scalable solutions to improve access to safe and quality adolescent education opportunities for out-of-school children that the community values. We would like to answer the following questions.

- What strategies/programs can increase the perceived value of education for older adolescents, especially females and their parents? (Path I2)
- What are the most feasible, desirable and potentially cost-effective and scalable strategies/programs to provide safe quality education for out-of-school older adolescents in Cox's Bazar? An indicative list of questions include:
 - Can community engagement interventions lead to changes in the perceived value of education and increase support for older adolescents and females attending school?
 - Are existing Accelerated Learning Programs a desirable solution to bring out-of-school older adolescents back to school and help transition children in the LFCA into the relevant MC level? What changes in the design (e.g. curriculum enhancement with SEL and vocational skills, delivery, teacher and training supports) are needed to improve desirability, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness?
 - Can Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) be a cost-effective education alternative that parents and adolescents value? What should be the structure of such second chance and TVET programs? (Path I3)
 - Can EdTech interventions improve access and learning for out-of-school older adolescents and girls in Cox's Bazar?

Aim 3. Confirm that interventions are implemented as intended by assessing the quality, fidelity and cost-efficiency – Implementation research

If we find promising interventions in the design research stage that address access and continuity of education for older adolescents and females, we will conduct implementation research to answer the following questions.

- What levels of dosage (attendance and/or engagement), implementation quality and fidelity do we observe in programs that aim to increase access to education opportunities for older adolescents and female learners in Cox's Bazar (e.g. community engagement, referrals systems, ALP, TVET, EdTech, etc)? To what degree are attendance and/or engagement, quality and fidelity of implementation of these programs associated with students' learning and continuity?
- What levels of implementation quality and fidelity do we observe for programs (e.g. community engagement, integration of SEL, ALP, EdTech) that aim to bring back out of school older adolescents and females? To what degree are attendance, and quality and fidelity of implementation of these programs associated with students' learning and continuity?
- What are the enablers and barriers to uptake and quality implementation of these models?

Aim 4. Assess the impact and cost-effectiveness of education programs on the foundational, vocational and SEL skills and wellbeing of older adolescents in Cox's Bazar – Effectiveness research

We will identify cost-effective models to increase the perceived value of education, create conditions that enable adolescents and female students to continue, and offer educational choices that meet adolescents' socio-cultural expectations and economic realities by answering the following:

- What is the impact of programs that aim to improve access to education opportunities for out-of-school children (e.g. community engagement, referral systems, ALP, TVET, EdTech, etc) in Cox's Bazar?
 - How does the impact vary for different subgroups, by age, gender, socioeconomic and disability status?
 - What is their cost and cost-effectiveness?

VII. CONCLUSION

After an elaborate process of co-creation of research agendas with education stakeholders in Cox's Bazar, we prioritized three themes for research given our budget constraint. The first theme, quality delivery of the MC curriculum, is specific to the Rohingya children. Under this theme, we propose completing much needed research to find solutions to improve Burmese language skills among teachers and students. Moving away from LCFA, we need to focus teachers' training on subject matter knowledge. This may involve new recruitment, teachers' professional development, and retention strategies. In other words, our research under the first theme will focus on the Burmese language and teachers' capacity development.

The second theme, Madrasa education, has been a neglected issue although it covers 30% of all children who attend an educational facility. Madrasa could be a cost-effective way to reach older adolescents, especially girls. Among secondary level students in Madrasa, girls number twice as many as boys. Under this theme, we focus on improving the learning outcomes of madrasa students and provide foundational education skills to out of school children through Madrasa.

The third theme, access and continuity of education for older adolescents, is a perennial problem in Cox's Bazar. The proportion of out-of-school older adolescents in the host and refugee communities is daunting and yet programs targeting them lack evidence. We will focus on mapping alternative education pathways that older adolescents can follow in Cox's Bazar. These will focus on support programs including community engagement, ALP, referral systems between alternative education, EdTech, etc. as means to reach out-of-school children and bring them back to education to develop foundational skills at the very least.

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The Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crisis (ERICC) Research Programme Consortium is a global research and learning partnership that strives to transform education policy and practice in conflict and protracted crisis around the world – ultimately to help improve holistic outcomes for children – through building a global hub for rigorous, context-relevant and actionable evidence base.

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Countries in focus include Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar), Jordan, Lebanon, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.



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