



Entrepreneurship Education as a Tool for Resilience in Conflict-Affected Regions: Why Durable Skills Matter in Humanitarian and Recovery Contexts



Around the world, conflict is reshaping the future of education. As of 2025, an estimated 234 million children globally are affected by conflict, with many facing prolonged disruptions to learning, economic instability, and displacement!¹ In these environments, education systems are not simply interrupted; they are fundamentally tested in their ability to prepare young people for uncertain futures. In many conflict settings, children lose years of schooling, contributing to what the World Bank describes as a global “learning crisis.”² As UNICEF’s Helena Murseli notes, “when schools close, children lose not only access to education but also the structure, safety, and stability that support healthy development.”³ In response, education is increasingly recognized as a core component of humanitarian intervention rather than a secondary priority.⁴

Yet, restoring access to education alone is no longer enough. In a world increasingly defined by disruption, education systems must also equip students with the durable skills needed to adapt, solve problems, make decisions under uncertainty, and create opportunity even in unstable conditions. This is where entrepreneurship education becomes especially powerful. By developing competencies such as problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, communication, and leadership, entrepreneurship education helps young people build agency and future readiness alongside academic knowledge.⁵ Research shows these skills not only improve employability but also strengthen individuals’ capacity for resilience, adaptation, and long-term economic mobility.⁶



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1 United Nations. (2025). Global estimates on children affected by conflict. <https://news.un.org/>

2 World Bank. (2020). The learning poverty report. World Bank Group.

3 United Nations. (2025). Children caught in conflict need urgent support as crises deepen worldwide. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/07/1165417>

4 Burde, D., Kapit-Spitalny, A., Wahl, R. L., & Guven, O. (2017). Education in emergencies: A review of theory and research. *Review of Educational Research*, 87(3), 619–658.

5 Bozward, D. (2024). The power of entrepreneurship education in developing businesses and resilient citizens.

<https://david.bozward.com/2024/06/the-power-of-entrepreneurship-education-in-developing-businesses-and-resilient-citizens/>

6 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *OECD future of education and skills 2030*. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org>

About NFTE

The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is a global education nonprofit that empowers partners to integrate entrepreneurial education across curricula and equips youth in under-resourced communities with the skills, connections, credentials, and real-world experiences needed to lead change and own their futures. Since 1987, NFTE has reached more than a million learners worldwide.

For organizations like the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), entrepreneurship education is not simply about preparing students to start businesses. It is about preparing young people to navigate complexity, persist through challenge, and shape their own futures in an increasingly unpredictable world. In fragile and conflict-affected environments, these capacities become even more critical, particularly when traditional institutions and labor pathways are weakened or inaccessible. Entrepreneurship education should be recognized as a critical component of education in humanitarian and conflict-affected settings. Experiential learning models can strengthen resilience, economic mobility, and long-term recovery for young people facing instability.

Why Entrepreneurship Education in Conflict Zones?

Entrepreneurship education is particularly well-suited to conflict-affected settings because it helps young people develop the skills needed to navigate instability, adapt to uncertainty, and create opportunities in rapidly changing environments. In many fragile environments, traditional education systems, which often rely on continuity, standardized curricula, and stable pathways into employment, are disrupted by violence, displacement, and institutional breakdowns. As a result, young people are often forced to navigate unpredictable economic and social conditions with limited systems in place.

While education remains critical for providing psychological stability, confidence, and a sense of future opportunity, it must also adapt to remain relevant in these contexts.⁸ Entrepreneurship education responds to this need by emphasizing adaptable, real-world skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, leadership, and financial literacy, helping students remain resilient and future-oriented even when formal systems are weakened.⁹

In conflict-affected environments, these skills translate into tangible economic and social outcomes. In environments where conflict is persistent, entrepreneurship is often driven by necessity, allowing individuals to generate income, support their households, and maintain a sense of economic agency. Research shows that entrepreneurship education strengthens self-efficacy, optimism, and decision-making capacity, which are key components of psychological resilience.¹⁰ In this way, entrepreneurship education not only supports immediate economic survival but also builds the long-term capacity to adapt, recover, and remain resilient amid prolonged uncertainty in fragile and conflict-affected environments. Yuliia Tkachenko, Kyrylo Martyniuk, Arina Khmeliuk, and Vadym Dobrovolskyi from the Ukrainian Future Business Incubator developed OUTEX, an AI-powered sports and rehabilitation trainer, while living in wartime conditions. Despite disrupted education, they won their national competition and attend NFTE's Global Challenge, demonstrating resilience, determination, and a commitment to building a future amid uncertainty.



Students from Ukrainian Future Business Incubator

Entrepreneurship education also plays a critical role in linking learning to economic opportunity. In environments where formal employment opportunities are limited or unstable, students are able to apply entrepreneurial thinking to generate income and support their households, reinforcing both individual and community-level stability. This connection is particularly important in regions where poverty and conflict intersect, as economic participation becomes central to long-term recovery. Research from Nigeria further emphasizes that resilience to poverty is strengthened through a combination of individual entrepreneurship, community support systems, and institutional backing, highlighting the importance of multi-level approaches to development.¹²

7 Naudé, W. (2010). Entrepreneurship, developing countries, and development economics: New approaches and insights. *Small Business Economics*, 34(1), 1–12.

8 Roger, M. (2002). The role of education in conflict-affected contexts.

10 Luthans, F., & Youssef, C. M. (2004). Human, social, and now positive psychological capital management: Investing in people for competitive advantage. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33(2), 143–160.

12 Exploring strategies for building resilience to poverty in Bauchi State, Nigeria. (2020). *UUM Journal of International Studies*.

However, entrepreneurship education is most effective when supported by a broader ecosystem of mentorship, community partnerships, financial resources, and local support networks. While programs can strengthen confidence and capability, students are more likely to translate intention into sustained action when supported by access to mentorship, financial resources, and local networks.¹³ This is particularly relevant when comparing active-conflict and post-conflict areas, where immediate survival strategies may evolve into longer-term goals. Together, these findings demonstrate that entrepreneurship education contributes not only to individual resilience but also to broader economic stability when integrated within supportive systems.

Why is Resilience Important?

In conflict-affected environments, resilience becomes one of the most important outcomes education can provide. In these contexts, resilience means more than coping with hardship. It involves maintaining motivation, pursuing long-term goals, and making decisions despite ongoing adversity. Education plays a central role in fostering this resilience by providing structure, emotional support, and opportunities to develop problem-solving and social skills.

By combining skill development with mindset formation, entrepreneurship education helps transform resilience from a passive response into an active, forward-looking capability. While entrepreneurship education builds foundational skills and psychological resilience, its impact becomes most visible in how students apply these skills under real-world constraints. In regions affected by war, entrepreneurship is often driven by necessity rather than opportunity, requiring individuals to make decisions under uncertainty and resource limitations.



Students from the NFTE-Unistream partnership in Israel

At the 2024 NFTE World Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge, Issa Odeh and Antony Saleh from Al Nayzak Organization won first place with Water World, a device that monitors water quality, purifies water, and remotely alerts users about contamination. The venture directly responds to a critical challenge in conflict-affected communities: reliable access to safe water. Their work demonstrates problem-solving, innovation, and community-centered entrepreneurship, while also highlighting how entrepreneurship education can help young people remain future-oriented and resilient despite instability.

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa further shows that participants in entrepreneurship education programs often develop adaptive behaviors in response to conflict, including strategic downsizing, adjusting long-term plans, and prioritizing stability over expansion.¹⁶ These patterns suggest that resilience in these contexts is not defined by traditional indicators of growth, but by the ability to remain adaptable, future-oriented, and responsive despite disruption.

The NFTE Model and Global Partners

The Network For Teaching Entrepreneurship's (NFTE) approach demonstrates how entrepreneurship education can remain relevant and impactful even in fragile and conflict-affected environments.¹⁷ By emphasizing experiential learning, NFTE helps students develop practical, durable skills through direct application rather than theory alone. In conflict-affected settings, this type of learning can strengthen self-efficacy, adaptability, and students' confidence in their ability to act on opportunities despite uncertainty. By embedding these skills within real-world scenarios, NFTE's approach reinforces the types of cognitive and behavioral skills that support resilience and long-term adaptability.

¹³ MDPI. (2024). Entrepreneurship education in fragile contexts: Bridging the intention–action gap through psychological and contextual pathways. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/16/7447>

¹⁴ Masten, A. S. (2014). Ordinary magic: Resilience in development. Harvard University Press.

¹⁵ Duncan, J. (2013). Entrepreneurship education in developing contexts.

¹⁶ Entrepreneurship education knowledge transfer in a conflict Sub-Saharan African context. (2018). Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development. <https://www.emerald.com/jsbed/article-abstract/25/4/591/248615>

¹⁷ MDPI. (2024). Entrepreneurship education in fragile contexts: Bridging the intention–action gap through psychological and contextual pathways. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/16/7447>

NFTE's partnerships with local organizations, educators, and programs around the world ensure that learning reflects regional realities, including labor market conditions, resource availability, and the impacts of conflict. This localized implementation is essential in fragile environments, where standardized approaches are often ineffective. Evidence from conflict-affected regions suggests that entrepreneurship education is most impactful when it is supported by contextual knowledge and community-based networks.¹⁸ By combining a consistent skill-building framework with flexible, partner-driven delivery, NFTE demonstrates how entrepreneurship education can be taught while remaining responsive to the needs of students operating in complex and rapidly changing environments.

NFTE Partner Perspectives

Iryna Bystrova Ukrainian Future Business Incubator

Iryna Bystrova, Ph.D, Associate Professor in Economics, Head of the Ukrainian Future Business Incubator, works closely with NFTE, and believes that entrepreneurship education builds both practical skills and resilience among youth in Ukraine. According to Bystrova, students need structured guidance because “you don’t just get up and say you’re starting a business.” Instead, students must be supported through real-world application from idea to implementation.

In her work, a key component of this process experiential learning, where students present their ventures before investors and professionals, where they must “defend their ideas”. This practice will ultimately strengthen their ability to persist through challenges. Despite barriers such as limited funding and unsafe learning conditions, Iryna said that student motivation has increased, with many driven by the idea that if “you cannot fight on the front line, you can support the economic front,” reframing entrepreneurship as a form of national contribution to recovery and reconstruction. She also believes in the long-term value of education in unstable environments. Iryna noted that as students recognize that “knowledge is something you can carry anywhere,” they are more likely to continue investing in learning even during war.



¹⁸. Entrepreneurship education knowledge transfer in a conflict Sub-Saharan African context. (2018). Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development. <https://www.emerald.com/jsbed/article-abstract/25/4/591/248615>

Tzviya Atias-Juravel Unistream's NFTE Program Manager



Israel's Unistream partnership is a prime example of how entrepreneurship education can be used to build resilience and social cohesion among youth in conflict zones. Tzviya Atias-Juravel, Unistream's Program Manager for the NFTE program in Israel, believes that, "by bringing together diverse groups across cultural, religious, and regional lines in Israel, the program fosters collaboration, open-mindedness, and community-building alongside business skill development". Despite significant disruptions caused by war, including school closures, constant safety threats, and psychological stress, programs and teachers continued to create adaptive methods to provide education. Unistream's team and network of teachers have taken NFTE curriculum and adapted it to help provide virtual education opportunities when being in a physical classroom isn't possible. Tzviya believes that "entrepreneurship education gets children into the place of doing and can help to find ways to move forward through hardship. Learning skills of resilience can help students take control of their time and become active change makers in their own lives and communities".

Olajumoke Familoni Professor of Entrepreneurship and Founder, President, Provost of ICLED Business School

Dr. Olajumoke Familoni was nominated for the 2026 UNESCO Women and Children's Education Award. Olajumoke, emphasizes the importance of structured, practical entrepreneurship education in building resilience and long-term success. Entrepreneurship must be taught through application, and she notes that "you cannot teach entrepreneurship like you teach mathematics... it has to be practical training," where students actively engage in building ideas and making decisions. Dr. Familoni describes resilience to be rooted in passion and belief, explaining that "resilience and passion go hand in hand" and that without belief, "you just give up at the slightest challenge". Entrepreneurship develops broader skills such as analytical thinking, communication, and decision-making, while creating real economic impact, with examples of individuals growing "from nothing to building something," demonstrating the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education when effectively delivered.



Policy Recommendations

Integrate Entrepreneurship Education into Humanitarian and National Education Systems

Entrepreneurship education should be integrated into both humanitarian education responses and national education systems, across the world, but especially in conflict-affected regions. While restoring access to schooling remains critical, it does not fully prepare young people for unstable labor markets. Globally, youth are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.¹⁹ In fragile contexts, where formal employment opportunities are limited, entrepreneurship education provides an alternative pathway by developing transferable skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and initiative.²⁰ Research from the World Bank further shows that entrepreneurship training can increase participation in self-employment and income-generating activities, particularly in low-income settings.²¹

Integrating entrepreneurship education into formal and emergency education systems enables a shift from short-term recovery to long-term resilience. Evidence indicates that students who receive entrepreneurship education are more likely to engage in economic activity and demonstrate greater confidence in decision-making and financial management.²² Embedding these programs into refugee education systems, post-conflict recovery strategies, and national curricula ensures that students develop durable skills that remain relevant even when institutions are weakened, positioning education as a tool for both learning and economic resilience.



Lesson taught by Iryna Bystrova at Ukrainian Future Business Incubator

Prioritize Experiential and Applied Learning Models

Education systems should prioritize experiential, project-based entrepreneurship learning rather than traditional theoretical instruction. In conflict-affected environments, where instability is constant, students must be able to apply knowledge in real-world situations. A 2024 study on entrepreneurship education in fragile contexts found that such programs significantly increase self-efficacy and entrepreneurial intention, with self-efficacy identified as the strongest predictor of whether students take action. These findings highlight the importance of learning approaches that build confidence and the ability to navigate uncertainty.²³

Additional evidence supports the effectiveness of applied learning models. Data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor shows that individuals who receive entrepreneurship education are more likely to engage in early-stage entrepreneurial activity than those without such training.²⁴ Experiential methods, such as business creation, pitching, and problem-solving, allow students to test ideas and adapt in real time, strengthening decision-making and resilience. In conflict zones, these applied skills are essential for enabling young people to remain economically active and responsive to ongoing disruption.

19 International Labour Organization. (2022). Global employment trends for youth 2022: Investing in transforming futures for young people. <https://www.ilo.org>

20 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). OECD future of education and skills 2030. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org>

21 World Bank. (2020). The learning poverty report. World Bank Group.

22 World Bank. (2013). Youth employment programs: An evaluation of World Bank and IFC support. World Bank Group. <https://documents.worldbank.org>

23 MDPI. (2024). Entrepreneurship education in fragile contexts: Bridging the intention–action gap through psychological and contextual pathways. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/16/7447>

24 Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. (2021). Global report. <https://www.gemconsortium.org>

Localize Entrepreneurship Education to Reflect Economic and Social Contexts

Entrepreneurship education programs should be tailored to reflect local economic conditions, cultural contexts, and the realities of conflict-affected environments. In many fragile economies, entrepreneurship is largely necessity-driven, with individuals starting businesses due to limited access to formal employment rather than opportunity.²⁵ As a result, standardized curricula are often ineffective because they fail to account for informal markets, resource constraints, and the immediate economic needs students face in these settings.

Aligning entrepreneurship education with local contexts improves both relevance and long-term outcomes. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) finds that education systems connected to local labor markets and economic structures produce stronger employment and entrepreneurship outcomes. Context-specific approaches such as focusing on small-scale enterprise development or community-based problem-solving, enable students to apply their skills in meaningful ways.²⁶ Policymakers should therefore prioritize collaboration with local educators, organizations, and industry partners to design programs that are practical, adaptable, and responsive to community needs, increasing the likelihood of sustainable economic participation.

Conclusion

As conflict continues to disrupt education for millions of children worldwide, entrepreneurship education continues to be a critical tool for rethinking how learning can remain effective and relevant in conflict-affected environments. Providing children with the opportunities to learn long lasting, durable skills and resilience enables them to adapt to instability and persist in adversity. Beyond simply supporting coping in uncertain times, entrepreneurship education equips students with the ability to make decisions under uncertainty, create economic opportunities, and remain actively engaged in shaping their futures despite disruption.

Entrepreneurship education should be recognized not as a supplementary addition, but as a core component of education in humanitarian and conflict settings. Investing in scalable, experiential models that empower young people to act, adapt, and innovate is essential to building long-term resilience, strengthening economies, and supporting sustainable recovery in conflict-affected regions.



Dr Olajumoke Familoni and Students from ICELD

25. Naudé, W. (2010). Entrepreneurship, developing countries, and development economics: New approaches and insights. *Small Business Economics*, 34(1), 1–12.

26. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2019). *OECD future of education and skills 2030*. OECD Publishing. <https://www.oecd.org>.

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