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# “I don’t feel that my career status will bounce back soon”: Exploring the Impact of Wars and Conflicts on TESOL Educators’ Academic Mobility and Professional Life

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**Abstract.** Academic mobility has increased in the current globalized knowledge-based world where academics move between countries and institutions to gain, exchange and disseminate knowledge and expertise. TESOL educators have become more mobile in their career and professional development. While previous research has dealt with academic mobility under normal circumstances, little research has focused on mobility during wars and conflicts. The present study aims to fill this gap to advance research and contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon. Fifteen participants took part in the study. A qualitative methodology was adopted with an open-ended survey being used as the main method of data collection. Results revealed that most participants experienced both professional and psychological challenges. Participants also proposed the adoption of several strategies for fellow academics, educational managers, and policymakers to adopt in order to better address any similar circumstances should they happen in the future. The implications are presented and discussed.

**Keywords:** academic mobility; challenges; higher education; internationalisation; TESOL professionals; wartime

## 1. Introduction

Academia has become more globalized and as a result academics have become more mobile than ever before due to this changing nature of the academic profession. TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and applied linguistics professionals working in the higher education sector often

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leave their own countries and move to work abroad. Higher education institutions (HEIs) in different parts of the world have hosted TESOL practitioners belonging to different backgrounds. TESOL professionals are often tempted to move to institutions that have the most favourable research funding and work environment. International universities are currently viewed as a global magnet attracting talented professionals in different fields of knowledge. Through such mobility, HEIs would arguably enhance competitiveness by connecting cities and nations to global flows of knowledge and talent across continents – despite global challenges (Hassan et al., 2025; Qiang, 2016). Mobility is also triggered by the search of HEIs for diversifying their campuses through attracting and hosting academic staff from wide range of educational and cultural backgrounds to boost their profiles and ranking under internationalization and academic accreditation (Abasi et al., 2023; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Cheung & Chan, 2010; Ilieva et al., 2014).

The globalization of knowledge has indeed been widely noted as a key factor which increased mobility among the international scientific and academic research community (Saint-Blancat, 2019). While plenty of previous research has addressed academic mobility and brain circulation under normal circumstances, little research, thus far, seems to have focused on this mobility under exceptional times of hardship such as conflicts and wartime. The present study therefore attempts to fill this gap by investigating the experiences of HE TESOL professionals during wartime. The present study addresses three research questions; namely, (i) What impact does the current war in Sudan have on higher education TESOL professionals? (ii) How do they cope with the situation created by this war? (iii) What can be done to help them effectively deal with such war-affected situations?

## **2. Context of the study**

Sudan is a sub-Saharan Afro-Arab country situated in the North-East of Africa. The higher education system in Sudan consists of 128 institutions divided into 36 government universities, 20 private universities, 53 private colleges, and 19 technical university colleges. Khartoum state alone embraces 53 % of the higher education institutions with a total of 68 institutions including 12 government universities, 16 private universities, 39 private colleges, and one technical university college (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2025). Over the last two years, Sudan has been witnessing a devastating armed conflict between a para-military armed militia and the national army. The war erupted first in the capital Khartoum and then swept across eight out of eighteen states forming Sudan, causing wide-scale destruction with more than twelve million people internally displaced and forcing more than 1.5 million people to leave the country escaping the horrors of the war.

Education, among many other services, has been severely disrupted and educational institutions were forced to close and suspend their operations, especially in the war-affected states. Due to the war, HEIs professionals who remained in the war zone could not continue the education and research processes and were forced to depart from the conflict zones, due to the increasing risks, to settle in safer cities (Abdalla & Elatta, 2025). This situation created disruption and

discontinuation in the whole educational process for the students and a discontinuation in professional development for teachers. Shortly after the start of the war, some HEIs decided to continue the educational process virtually – regardless of whether students and teachers were inside or outside Sudan. This situation added extra burden on both teachers and students to cope with such adverse circumstances. Wars generally affect all people’s social, economic, well-being and emotional life and indeed the aspects of teaching, learning, research and serving the community in HEIs (Westerlund et al., 2023). For TESOL professionals, despite the many challenges, opportunities were also sought in the face of extreme adversity. Before exploring recent insights from Sudan, the study will first examine literature relevant to TESOL practitioner global mobility challenges and solutions in normal and turbulent circumstances.

### **3. Literature review**

There is indeed a paucity in TESOL studies that are devoted to the study of TESOL professionals’ experiences during wars and conflicts. Drawing upon literature on academic mobility during both normal and exceptional situations, the literature reports on previous studies with regards to academic mobility of TESOL and applied linguistics professionals working in the higher education sector.

#### **3.1 Academic mobility under normal circumstances**

Academic mobility, temporary or permanent migration, is often used to refer to the type of mobility that is professionally motivated by both students and academics in HEIs. Such movements include short-term conference visits, as well as long-term stays for study, research, sabbatical, and teaching leaves, and often, but not always, cross-national boundaries (Harvey, 2008; Shen et al., 2022). Academic mobility can take several shapes including physical mobility, for both students and academic staff as well as occasionally administrative staff. It is clearly the most visible international activity which aims at promoting internationalization.

Mobility may include student mobility for a short period or the whole study programme as well as scholars’ mobility for attending conferences, visiting research partners abroad, longer stays in other countries for research purposes, and even migration and international professional mobility (Shen et al., 2022; Teichler, 2015). While academic mobility contributes to improving the quality of education, creating a unified intellectual environment, and promoting tourism practices (Zaytseva, 2022), it is also often the consequence of transnational knowledge networks that create new academic linkages.

Importantly, the consequences of mobility go beyond knowledge transfer to incorporate being part of the new academic community with a diverse resource base and environment, to also include potential enrichment through wider social and cultural acclimatization. TESOL professionals’ mobility for professional development and beyond has been highlighted in the literature. For example, Bao’s (2021) study reported on the experiences of Chinese in-service TESOL professionals who moved to Australia for a ten-week teacher professional development programme. It was found that teachers benefited significantly from

such mobility in both teaching and research competences. Participants in this study also highlighted the difference in benefits when the same programme is run domestically, citing their preference for attending programmes abroad. Overall, despite challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic and some other crises in the world, academic mobility remains an integral part of the system of higher education (Kalenyu & Djakon, 2022).

### **3.2 Academic mobility during wars and conflicts**

Despite the paucity of studies on academic mobility for TESOL professionals during the time of wars and conflicts, the need for research to explore HEI experiences and challenges under circumstances of wars, conflicts, displacement, mobility and emergency education has recently gained prominence (Sengupta, 2024). To motivate such a research strand, Nelson & Appleby (2015) called for a new direction in TESOL research that can focus on TESOL peace-conflict studies to better prepare TESOL professionals to cope and operate in exceptional circumstances of wars and conflicts.

The present study duly aims to fill this enduring gap and contribute to the advancement of our knowledge and understanding regarding this under-researched area. Drawing on studies in war-affected areas such as Syria and Ukraine, the literature in this section reports on the experiences of TESOL professionals affected by wars and conflicts.

In a study in Ukraine, Lavrysh et al. (2025) investigated the Ukrainian TESOL professionals' experiences during the war in Ukraine. Teachers reported a range of challenges including mental health disturbances, social and psychological problems which resulted in poor mental and psychological health and wellbeing which, in turn, resulted in poor teaching quality. Teachers also reported their need for support to overcome such challenges. The study also indicated that educational policymakers should establish mechanisms whereby they could help both teachers and students to thrive and overcome such challenges. A call was made for changes to curricula and the establishment of wider international cooperation, allowing teachers access to resources and platforms to continue their teaching and professional development.

In a similar vein, Chugai (2024), looked at the ESL teachers' wellbeing during the wartime in Ukraine highlighting that teachers have suffered from burnout and emotional devastation while pushing themselves to continue their teaching duties under difficult circumstances. Teachers also reported that they used some strategies to keep themselves going such as walking, watching videos, and connecting with peers to share ideas and concerns. Teachers also reportedly stressed the importance of well-being as an essential component in teachers' professional lives, while also highlighting their professional needs to thrive as TESOL professionals during difficult situations of wars and conflicts.

Similarly, to help TESOL teachers cope with their teaching process during wartime circumstances, Haponenko (2024), provided a list of strategies teachers can use to make their teaching more effective, student-centred, and engaging. The

strategies included case studies, flipped classroom, peer instruction, and jigsaw activities. These approaches increased interactivity, critical thinking and student empowerment despite often disempowering circumstances surrounding students' and teachers' lives. Lavrysh et al. (2025) also emphasise that dealing with trauma was a major impact of wartime; thus, allowing students to discuss their concerns in classes is crucial. Given the communicative nature of TESOL, both teachers and students can support each other's mental health and emphasise core values as well as teaching content.

In the Syrian context, the relevant previous studies (e.g., Alyasin, 2018; Arar et al., 2019; Jesry et al., 2022) have also reported teachers' and their institutions' challenges, strategies and leadership during the conflict to operate at the time of war. Perhaps, in the case of Syria, unlike Ukraine, both teachers and learners left the country and then started teaching in camps in other countries like Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon. For instance, Alyasin (2018) investigated the challenges and coping strategies faced by Salam, an English teacher in a Syrian camp school in Southern Turkey. The teacher was found to have faced several psycho-affective challenges experienced by the teacher and the learners which affected her ability to motivate the learners.

Lack of training and professional development to teach war-affected learners was also reported as a challenge. To cope with this situation, the teacher relied on her own inner resources, namely, her prior language learning experience and her previous teaching approaches to language teaching. Jesry et al. (2022), focusing on HEIs, highlight the need to introduce a risk-management approach to quality assurance so that standards can be maintained and more efficient allocation of resources can be achieved during times of adversity and conflict. This approach certainly requires strong educational leadership, which was witnessed through the narratives of research in successful Ukrainian education settings.

Hudson et al. (2024, p. 281) assert that leaders showed a

*“Proclivity for building and sustaining collaborative and networked practices to build a sense of safety, stability and belonging for all members of their respective school communities”.*

It seems likely that Sudanese HEIs will require similar approaches. In Sudan, Hagley & Nooralidaim (2024) investigate participation of students and teachers in a virtual exchange whereby Sudanese university teachers and their students engaged with other international participants. Participants reported benefitting greatly from the experience. However, compared to other countries, the Sudanese context faced more disruptions due to the conflict combined with poor infrastructure and internet connection. This significantly hampered the project, and adaptations such as asynchronous activity and text-only based materials were often required.

Reviewing such studies clearly reveal the hardship and exceptional circumstances that educators experience at the times of wars and conflicts. We believe such area is worth researching to unpack the various challenges and propose operational

recommendations to ensure TESOL professional are well prepared and supported to effectively work in war and conflict-affected zones.

#### 4. Theoretical framework

The study adopted communities of practice (CoP) as a theoretical backdrop against which some of the study concepts and data are interpreted and understood. There are numerous CoPs in higher education, ranging from professional to learning, cultural, social and discipline-specific communities. Lave & Wenger (1991, p. 98) define communities of practice as a

*“Set of relations among persons, activity, and world over time and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice”.*

The present study adopted situated learning theory, namely, CoP as a theoretical underpinning to help in operationalizing its key concept and understanding the data interpretation of the study. Lave & Wenger (1991) believed that learning is a socially situated process involving the whole person. Therefore, people can learn and develop professionally through their participation in communities of practice whether these communities are virtual or non-virtual.

Furthermore, by participating in activities and by being part of increasingly active participants, professionals often find more opportunities for learning and mutual understanding. From this starting point, Wenger (1998) argued that the type of learning where individuals find to be the most transformative often occur through membership in communities of practice. Accordingly, individuals can create their identity through their belonging to such communities of practice. This would, in turn, suggest that the process of identity formation and learning can be viewed in three different modes of belonging, defined as the processes that shape and inspire individuals' learning.

The three dimensions include: *engagement*, active involvement in mutual processes of negotiating meaning; *imagination*, creating images of the world and making connections across time and space and *alignment*, coordination of energy and activity to contribute to broader enterprises (Wenger, 1998, pp. 173–174). Looking at these dimensions can facilitate consideration of the individual and psychological aspects concerned with how teachers perceive and (re)imagine themselves and their community of practice (Varghese et al., 2005; Varghese, 2016).

Accordingly, through their engagement with these communities, TESOL professionals use CoPs resources and experiences to develop themselves professionally, while becoming essential part of such social contexts or communities to both work and learn at the same time. Interaction and involvement through authentic participation in their communities are the means whereby they learn, develop, and build their identities, teaching, and research skills as TESOL professionals.

However, Sudanese TESOL professionals have resorted to different virtual CoPs to cope with the challenges presented by the current war in Sudan on their

professional development, scholarship, and academic mobility at large. According to Wenger (1998, p. 73), CoPs have three main components namely, mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, which all contribute to the growth and professional development of the members of the relevant CoP. Mutual engagement is considered the most important aspect of CoPs as it demands regular interaction with the community members to negotiate meaning over practice (Wenger, 1998).

During the ongoing war, Sudanese TESOL professionals were engaged in several virtual and non-virtual CoPs through mutual engagement with Sudanese and non-Sudanese TESOL professionals working aboard to negotiate meaning and develop themselves professionally. This engagement, as put by Lave and Wenger, 1991, can be enhanced and enabled through the sense of belonging to those CoPs and regular interaction. Indeed, another key aspect of CoPs is identity formation. Joining these CoPs by Sudanese professional does not entail only learning, but it goes beyond that to include learning to be. As professional identity is socially constructed through mutual engagement, regular interaction as identity is embedded in the context in which learners co-participate (Lave and Wenger 1991). Learning as participation helps the “*development and the transformation of identities*” (Wenger, 1998, p. 13).

In the context of this study, Sudanese TESOL professionals’ interaction with international professionals in a shared activity within their community is crucial for their learning and their new identity formation and construction. Furthermore, as Nkambule & Tang (2024) assert, communities of practice can be a key driver for innovative teaching in English medium instruction. Having reviewed the relevant literature and presented the theoretical underpinnings to situate and make the case for the present study, the following section presents and describes the study research design as well as the data coding and analytical procedures.

## **5. Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research design with a case study approach as it offers increased support to the research questions and enabled the researchers to gain deeper insights and understanding into the stated research problem. The data are generated using an open-ended survey which has afforded greater opportunities to elicit data, capturing the different perspectives of the study participants as insiders. Given that a case study approach allows for multiple perspectives gained from the study participants, this provides the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of real-life situations, which enhances the credibility of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Denscombe, 2010).

The study employed an exploratory descriptive case study to reveal Sudanese higher education TESOL professionals’ experiences and challenges in the context of the study during wartime, and to address the main study questions. The qualitative case study methodology was chosen because it offers tools to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Additionally, such a type of case study allows for the description of the phenomenon under investigation within its context (Yin, 2018). Whilst the sample is indeed not

representative of all Sudanese higher education TESOL professionals, it nevertheless offers a range of perspectives that help to better understand their experiences and challenges during wartime.

### **5.1 Participants**

An ethical approval for conducting the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Research Department at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Oman. Fifteen participants (P1-P15) voluntarily took part in the investigation. Participants were reassured that the collected data would be used for research purposes only. They were told that their identities would not be disclosed in the reporting of the findings. They were also reminded of the right to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. The participants were all Sudanese nationals teaching TESOL and applied linguistics in Sudanese HEIs. Their teaching experiences ranged from 10 to 25 years. They were informed about the research and its design and objectives, and they were asked to fill out, in writing, an online Google form-based open-ended survey.

Some of them were internally and externally displaced and some left Sudan fleeing the war. They were all working full-time in Sudanese public and private universities when the war erupted. Given the qualitative nature of the study, we believe that the number of participants is reasonably sufficient. Bearing in mind the study objective and research questions, the recruitment process involved a set of selection criteria (see below) to ensure our sample is purposive.

In this sense, the selected participants would potentially yield informative and in-depth accounts about the phenomenon under investigation (Miles and Huberman, 2019; Patton, 2015). Indeed, in such a qualitative study, a relatively small and purposively selected sample may suit the purpose of the study given that the overarching aim of the study to gain insights and in-depth understanding of a particular case with the view of increasing the depth rather than seeking generalisations (Patton, 2015).

The selected participants should meet the following criteria:

- 1) Sudanese nationality
- 2) Employed in higher education as a TESOL/applied linguistics professional working full-time in a Sudanese higher education institution
- 3) Teaching experience of 10-25 years
- 4) Resident in Sudan when the war erupted.
- 5) Experienced first-hand the early months of the war
- 6) Displaced within Sudan and/or refugee outside Sudan

### **5.2 Methods of data collection**

As mentioned earlier, a qualitative research design was adopted with an open-ended question survey was used as the main method of data collection (see Appendix). The survey, formed of three sections, was piloted before finally being administered. The first section includes a set of demographic questions; the second part comprises a set of questions about the experiences of mobility during the war—including both the benefits and challenges. The third part elicits the

participants' suggestions as to how TESOL professionals, institutions and policymakers would handle similar situations should they happen in the future. The survey ends by asking the participants a final open question to add or comment on anything that has not been covered in the survey. () To maintain validity, the open-ended survey was piloted before administration to ensure validity and clarity. Based on piloting, we made some modifications to the survey. For example, we added sub-points for question two in the survey to ensure participants can write as much as they can regarding the impact of war on them.

### **5.3 Data coding and data analysis procedures**

Guided by the study research questions and the theoretical framework, the survey data were coded and analysed thematically and inductively. The themes and categories generated from coding of the data were reproduced in the data analysis to accurately capture the TESOL professionals' insider emic perspectives (Richards, 2003) on their experiences following the war in Sudan. The most recurrent and salient themes were reproduced in the analysis. The open survey was suitable for this study since the purpose was to elicit written reflective accounts from the participants. The elaborated accounts would help the researcher gain the participants' views, understandings, interpretations, and experiences (Mason, 2017, p. 63).

The various prompts under the open-ended survey questions were intended to encourage participants to provide more detailed written responses that could fill in any potential gap in responses that can otherwise be bridged; for instance, through face-to-face interviews clarifications are gained via further follow-up question and probing unexpected responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2014; Robson & McCarten, 2015). The survey data were coded thoroughly, and an open coding strategy was used (Miles & Huberman, 2019; Saldaña, 2021) to allow for the generation of more themes related to the study research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Accordingly, a cross-sectional approach was also applied to the data coding and analysis to produce generate more themes, gaining the participants' views, as accurately as possible, about the issues under investigation (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Mason, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 2019). Additionally, to ensure accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness, the coding scheme was checked for inter-rater reliability by a second rater who is an applied linguist with a qualitative research background.

We followed an open coding approach (Miles & Huberman, 2019; Saldaña, 2025) to thoroughly code our data. This approach allowed us to generate more themes related to the study research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To produce more themes and to accurately capture the participants' emic perspectives about the issues under investigation, we further applied a cross-sectional approach to the data coding and analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Mason, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 2019). Additionally, to maintain accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness, our coding scheme was checked for inter-rater reliability by a second rater who is an applied linguist with a qualitative research background.

To ensure the reported findings accurately reflect and represent the perspectives of the participants as well as the analytical and interpretive perspective of the researchers, we used the member check strategy (Denzin et al., 2023) as an analytical triangulation crucial to ensuring the credibility of the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. After reporting our findings, we sent sample findings to a couple of participants whose responses are reproduced in the findings and asked for their feedback. They agreed with our report and no remarks were made.

## 6. Findings and discussion

Having described the methodology along with the data coding and analytical procedures, in this section, the recurrent and salient themes generated from the coding process are reported to address the research questions. Guided by the study research questions, the findings are presented and analysed thematically and inductively through comparisons, contrasts and linkages. Findings are also discussed and interpreted in relation to the findings of previous research and the CoPs as a theoretical underpinning. To support the analytical commentaries and accurately capture the participants' perspectives, representative quotes from the coded data transcripts are reproduced in this section.

### 6.1 Professional development disruption

As for the first research question about the impact of wars on the participants, several challenges were reported. These challenges ranged from professional development, teaching, research, to psychological, social, and financial challenges. Participants reported an abrupt and severe halt and discontinuation in their professional development activities due the eruption of war:

*The war has had a major impact on my professional development as everything has been disrupted. Universities have been closed, and the war has led to displacement and migration and most of university professors left the country and went abroad. (P6)*

In a similar vein, another participant highlights how their continuing professional development (CPD) plans have been affected and how their entire academic career has been jeopardised:

*My CPD activities have been significantly affected. I couldn't, for example, attend conferences and seminars and my research projects have also been badly affected. I couldn't find a stable job in my field apart from some part-time posts here and there. I don't feel that my career status will bounce back soon. (P7)*

Additionally, participants found it hard to carry on with their CPD activities due to the financial hardship caused by the war and conflicts:

*The current war has encapsulated my life with a negative impact in different aspects. Professionally, I couldn't develop due to the lack of money to go to conferences or subscribe to some paid training activities. I lost my savings, property and everything as I fled my town. (P5).*

Following the eruption of the war, some of these professionals carried out teaching online despite the challenges. Several changes are reported regarding online teaching activities whether run from inside or outside Sudan.

*The only academic activity I'm involved in during war is teaching online classes. I had challenges with the internet network as we had poor internet service; I used to wait hours and hours for the network to improve. (P1)*

Reflecting on the experience of teaching online during wartime, teachers also report the challenges they experienced with regards to delivery, intent connection, and online classroom management:

*Working from home teaching online is very tough and time consuming. Teaching more than four online courses is demanding. Continuous challenges of networking, internet connection, time management. I find it hard to manage teaching and students online and I really failed to do anything with them. (P2)*

Nevertheless, teachers also strived to carry on teaching despite their disengagement with their professional development and their restricted mobility in the countries where they are living as refugees:

*I cannot continue my professional development because I am refugee in Egypt. As a refugee, my mobility is very limited, but I am still committed to teaching my students via internet. (P3)*

These findings confirm previous research findings in war-affected areas in Ukraine, Syria, and Yemen, (e.g., Alyasin, 2018; Haponenko, 2024). Teachers in both Ukraine and Syria carried on teaching online despite the range of challenges they experienced. Teaching activities are run but under extremely challenging circumstances. These studies also reported several strategies that teachers deploy to cope with such challenges and make their teaching more engaging and appealing to learners.

Harrowing accounts of war also impinge upon the narratives of teachers' professional lives. Participants report how the war suddenly affected the norms of their professional life and made them isolated from the world.

*This war has halted the continuity of teaching and research since the scholars are cut off and lost connection to the whole globe and got isolated in a remote jungle or islands. I am one of the witnesses to the firing of the first bullet. I was in Khartoum on that day and was ready to go to university. Suddenly I heard the horrible sounds of guns and since then things have changed. (P8).*

Such findings echo similar findings from previous studies (e.g., Lavrysh et al. 2025; Nelson & Appleby, 2015) in that wars and conflicts have negative impact on the professional life of academics due to the sudden disruption and chaos they made to the normal course of life. Since professional development needs engagement and connection with people in the relevant CoP in normal circumstances (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), any disruption to normality would indeed have negative impact on the members of such communities and would necessarily result in discontinuity in their CPD activities. In line with Hudson et al. (2024), strong teaching leadership resulted

in continuity of classes; however, this does not appear to be sustainable for scholarship and CPD activities.

## 6.2 Impact on mental health and well-being

In addition to the professional challenges of both teaching and research, participants also experienced several challenges related to their psychological and mental health as well as their overall well-being:

*We went through isolation and terrifying moments when the war erupted in the capital of Sudan and life has suddenly changed resulting in disruption, fear and the horror and trauma of wars can have terrible consequences on academics' mental health and safety. (P9)*

Another participant reports life-threatening experiences for their families:

*We worked hard to secure the family and move them to areas far from the war affected areas. (P13)*

In the same vein, another participant describes their escape and displacement with their families from the capital to other places seeking safety:

*We got trapped in the area when the war erupted. After fourteen days of death's smell and lack of water and power cut in the capital city. We found the way to escape the capital to another city. We were lucky to find a truck to take us to that city for safety. (P8).*

Financial hardship and commitments to meet their own needs and their families is another negative impact reported by participants:

*[My] family and I are now safe away from the war zones, but we have lost our property and our job inside Sudan at the present time. Job stability during the war period requires looking for a job outside Sudan at the present time. Socially, I am trying to help my brothers, sisters, and friends financially to face the circumstances of the war. (P6).*

To make things worse, some participants also lost hope in maintaining and sustaining their career due to the devastating impact of the war on them:

*Due to ongoing firing, I lacked safety, well-being, and I feel that there is no job stability and sustainability for me. (P5).*

Indeed, such psychological, mental, health and well-being challenges experienced by teachers who are affected by wars and conflicts have also been reported and confirmed in the relevant literature (e.g., Alyasin, 2018; Chugai, 2024; Sharifian & Kennedy, 2019) on the impact of wars and conflicts on TESOL professionals. As in the case of the findings of the present study, these challenges have a negative impact on both teachers' and students' motivation and engagement in the teaching and learning process. This would necessitate that any support programmes, intended for TESOL professionals during wartime, should address such challenges.

### 6.3 Coping strategies

Furthermore, regarding participants' coping strategies, participants reported some coping strategies they employed to help them effectively operate in such exceptional circumstances:

*I tried my best to keep up to date with the development in the field of language teaching and learning through online CPD activities. I keep attending some webinars and workshops, but I still feel like I'm missing out on many things. For research activities, I tried to continue my work on my projects and papers. I also tried to network with colleagues for co-authoring. I also tried to contact some organisations recommended by some colleagues which provide some support for academics at risk. Such attempts somehow helped me to keep in touch with my career despite the lack of stable and proper jobs. (P7).*

This kind of networking and engagement with the wider TESOL of community of practice (Nkambule & Tang, 2024; Varghese et al., 2005; Varghese, 2016; Varghese et al., 2016; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002) to carry on CPD activities during the time of war, was also further confirmed by another participant:

*I used several survival strategies including contacting colleagues who are based abroad to get involved with them in joint research projects and their professional networks. (P13)*

For some participants, coping strategies were not only limited to the professional networking but also extended to collaborative and social relations to strengthen networking among family members inside and outside Sudan, thereby securing a safer haven for families fleeing the war and supporting each other financially:

*We worked hard to secure the family and move them to areas far from the war and support them financially. We also work on family bonding and helping each other to overcome the circumstances of war. (P6)*

To meet the financial family commitments, some participants even shifted their career course:

*I had to shift to non-teaching jobs such as farming, fishing and micro-business activities to support my family and pay some household bills. (P10)*

Such findings corroborate previous studies (e.g., Lavrysh et al., 2025; Muthanna et al., 2022; Nelson & Appleby, 2015) in that the impact of armed conflicts has multifaceted negative consequences on education, infrastructure and people working in the educational sector at large. Such findings would require certain measures by all educational stakeholders to ensure the smooth continuity of the educational process and that both teachers and students operate safely and effectively in war and conflict zones.

### 6.4 Institutional support

As for what can be done to help them effectively deal with such war-affected situations, in this section, participants provided their views and suggestions in

relation to how to better prepare the Sudanese higher-education institutions in order cope with any similar future situations. Because these HEIs seemed not to have any contingency plans to deal with such types of risks including reputational, managerial, logistical and financial risks, participants recommended various measures:

*[Institutions should] prepare their staff teachers for similar future situations through CPD such as the use of technology to support education in general and training in ICT in particular. Education for emergency and education after crisis and conflicts are basic issues to be handled in our situation. (P7)*

This comment shows the importance of having a contingency plan by preparing staff members through CPD sessions which can be run virtually to cope with such war situations. Appropriate risk management enables HEIs to increase goal-achieving probability, by identifying dangers, and coordinating internal norms and requirements with reality by adopting proactive measures as well as, continuous monitoring and re-assessment for any risk (Jesry et al., 2022; Khaw & Teoh, 2022; Ruzic-Dimitrijevic & Dakic, 2014).

Another participant added:

*We were not completely prepared for this situation. With the hindsight, I think HE institutions should have been prepared for such circumstances. They should have policies in place to deal with such unpredictable hardship and difficult times. They should have, for example, memos of understanding with regional and international universities to host academics in such circumstances. They can also establish some kind of funds in coordination with the governments and some relevant organisations to support academics financially at times of hardship such as pandemics, wars and conflicts. Academics themselves should establish a large network of contact and collaboration with colleges in international HE institutions so that they can keep working on their CPS through online teaching and research projects in case they find themselves in such circumstances. (P7)*

The view reflected by this participant clearly shows the importance of policies that could help to identify all types of potential risk. The financial and reputational risks ranked at the top of those lists (Ruzic-Dimitrijevic & Dakic, 2014). External risks which are beyond the control of HEIs should also be anticipated to prepare the possible coping strategies such as building strong links with international HEIs to help in offering CPD during such circumstances. This call to action is echoed in the literature (e.g., Kuhn & Youngberg, 2002; Liu et al., 2018) where it is emphasised that HEIs need to have complete policies with suitable management rules and practices to analyse risk and coordinate the efforts to respond to uncertainty.

Regarding the plight of academics, another participant offers the following recommendations:

*I strongly recommend that, and it is like an invitation to a self-reconciliation with ourselves first then spread and scatter the concept of this reconciliation among the society and get rid of hatred. We need to set*

*specific plans. Most of those academics do not even have their documents to prove even their identities and academic identities. I advise them to save their documents through their e-mails and do not give up their CPD in both teaching and research. They need to cope up with the latest development in the field otherwise we would be left out. We should get to know how to get adapted to all circumstances and manage to continue during hard times. (P13)*

A critical aspect evoked in this account is how most of the academic faculty were unable to take their academic credentials with them due to the sudden eruption of the war, jeopardising their academic mobility and ability to get hired by other HEIs in the region. Such forced mobility did not allow them find jobs that suit their qualifications and experiences. There is also a tone of encouragement and resilience by calling for engagement with CPD during hardship.

In a similar line, participants also called for their fellow academics to be part of an academic community so that they can survive and cope during such exceptional situations:

*The best thing that these academics could do is to seek alternative jobs abroad if this feasible and possible for them. If this is not possible, they need to create their own professional communities to continue their professional growth and development and to stay updated, otherwise, they will be left behind. (P15).*

This account clearly indicates that for these professionals, creating their own CoPs to deal with such risky situations is paramount. As supported by Wenger (1998), the key issue in a CoP is that individuals learn with each other collaboratively in a shared practice. Creating CoPs is undoubtedly one of the best recommended options for HEIs to deal with such war situation.

## **7. Conclusions, implications and limitations**

This qualitative study explored the experiences of Sudanese TESOL higher education professionals' experiences of academic mobility in the aftermath of the wars and conflicts in Sudan. Descriptions on the devastating impacts of war on their lives, which impinged upon teaching and professional life, as well as their coping mechanisms and solutions were elicited. The study was conducted in a single context with fifteen TESOL professionals and employed open-ended survey as a sole method of data collection. We initially planned to conduct online interviews; however, this could not take place due to the difficult circumstances experienced by the participants during the time of data collection process we could not conduct interviews. However, we tried our best to design our o.

Accordingly, the open-ended survey design was adapted to elicit more detailed written responses. Given the limited scope of the study, the findings are not intended to be generalizable nor are they comparable or representative to all other educational contexts. Future studies could expand both contextually and methodologically to gain wider and comparable perspectives on this under-researched area in TESOL literature. More perspectives can also be gained if educational stakeholders such as students, HE managers and policymakers are

included. Future studies could also use interviews and policy documents as part of data to gain in-depth perspectives from different stakeholders. However, despite these acknowledged limitations, the findings and insights gained from the present study can still provide us with implications that are illuminating, transferable and applicable in other similar educational contexts. Based on the study findings, some implications can be presented and discussed.

First, TESOL professionals operating during wartime experience hardship and exceptional circumstances that are not like their counterparts working at peace times. This would require that HEIs act differently to support teachers in overcoming such challenges. One way to do so is to design risk management policies and contingency plans to address such circumstances. These policies should clearly state the mechanisms through which support is provided for teachers during wars and conflicts. Teachers should be provided with the necessary training to effectively work under such difficult circumstances. Such training can draw on manuals of education in emergencies developed by the UN agencies such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Second, HEIs should establish relationships with both national and international HEIs to host and/or support TESOL professionals in case of wars and conflicts. They can provide the war-affected professionals with access to their platforms, resources, and facilities. Such access can help professionals with their teaching and research activities to maintain their continuing professional development. Third, TESOL professionals themselves should engage in and network with peers in the relevant professional organizations in the field as CoPs where they can share experiences and learn from their peers through discussion forums, access to resources, and engagement in collaborative research projects. They can also approach organizations that work to support academics at risk to help them continue their professional development. Dedicated educational leaders are needed to drive forward CPD and build international coalitions to support this (Hudson et al, 2024).

Fourth, maintaining teachers' mental health and overall well-being is essential during wartime. HEIs should therefore provide support in this regard by providing counselling and any necessary support to help teachers maintain good mental health and well-being. Social and financial support are also important in ensuring that teachers remain able to operate under difficult circumstances. Going through the horrors of wars can be devastating and painful experiences for individual teachers – they need to be supported throughout. HEIs should secure funding for both living and for publishing purposes to help transform the lives of these teachers and their students.

Additionally, this research paper contributes to our understanding of the issues related to teaching, learning and research during disruptive times, particularly in Africa as it opens paths for HEIs decision-makers to take precautionary measures and adopt risk mitigating strategies to alleviate such devastating effects. The findings of the study also showed the importance of external risk anticipation in

helping HEIs to survive and achieve their missions and visions. Finally, the study provides evidence that CoPs, at times, may not function well, particularly during wars and conflicts. and consequently, educators and their institutions need to find – whenever possible – other supporting means to continue their CPD during such times.

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## Appendix

### Open-ended survey

Dear academic faculty,

This survey aims at collecting data about your experiences and views of the impact of the current war in Sudan on your academic mobility, scholarship and professional development. Your participation in the survey is entirely voluntary and your identity will be kept anonymous. We would like to assure you that the results will be used for research and professional development purposes only; your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous. You are kindly requested to answer these questions honestly and objectively.

1. Can you tell us about your academic rank, teaching and research experience?
2. From your own experience, what kinds of impact and challenges does the current war in Sudan have on your academic career? Please make sure you cover and write as much as you can about the impact regarding the following points:
  - A. Continuing professional development (CPD)
  - B. Your mobility and current academic situation
  - C. Teaching and research activities
  - D. Community service
  - E. Your safety and well-being
  - F. Your overall job stability and sustainability
3. What have you done to address and overcome these challenges?
4. What would you recommend to your fellow Sudanese academics and the Sudanese higher-education institutions to better prepare and cope with any similar future situations?
5. Do you have any additional comments?