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Billah, Md Masum; Lee, Jack. *Navigating education in crisis : barriers and enablers of educational access for adolescent Rohingya refugee girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh*. (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), 2026 (Erasmus Mundus en Politiques Educatives per al Desenvolupament Global). 93 pàg.

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**NAVIGATING EDUCATION IN CRISIS: BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF EDUCATIONAL
ACCESS FOR ADOLESCENT ROHINGYA REFUGEE GIRLS IN COX'S BAZAR,
BANGLADESH**

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Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of International Master in
Education Policies for Global Development (GLOBED)

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July 2026

Acknowledgement

I start by thanking the Almighty for the blessings that have brought me through every stage of this academic journey.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr Jack Lee. He taught me the basics of research, pushed me to go beyond what I thought were my limits, and provided thoughtful feedback from the first day we worked together. His steady guidance has made this thesis what it is today. I am also thankful to all of my professors, classmates, and mentors in the GLOBED programme. Their encouragement came at moments when I needed it most, and I have carried that support with me throughout.

I remain grateful to the education team at BRAC HCMP for providing the ground support during my fieldwork. Moreover, I am thankful to all the research participants of this study. I am humbled by the cooperation from the adolescent Rohingya refugee girls, their parents, and educators who shared their time, their stories, and their trust. Their openness, despite cultural norms that could have made such conversations difficult, was humbling. This study also exists because of them.

On a personal level, I cannot fully express what my family has been to me during this journey. My wife, Afroza Sultana, has been a steady source of strength, even from miles away. My sisters especially, Sharmin Akter have believed in me more than I can put into words. My mother, Mazeda Begum's quiet pride, kept me going on my difficult days.

I think of my late father, Md. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan who passed away before I could finish my primary schooling. He always wanted me to reach the highest level of education I could. I hope this work honors that wish. Also, I remember my late uncle, Harunur Rashid Molla, who stood by my educational journey as a father figure. He passed away halfway through this degree. May his soul rest in peace. Thank you all.

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List of Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
EiE	Education in Emergencies
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAGE	Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence
HCMP	Humanitarian Crisis Management Programme
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISCG	Inter Sector Coordination Group
LCFA	Learning Competency Framework and Approach
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RRRC	Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Abstract

This dissertation explores how adolescent Rohingya refugee girls aged 16-18 experience and navigate barriers to education in Camp 8W, Ukhiya, Bangladesh. Although learning centres exist within the Rohingya education response, provision alone does not secure meaningful participation. For adolescent girls, education remains precarious where household responsibilities, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, marriage pressure, community judgement and limited post-primary pathways intersect.

The study used a qualitative case study design. Data comprised semi-structured interviews with five adolescent girls, two parents and two frontline educators, alongside one focus group with six additional girls. The data were contextualized using observation notes and field memos. Reflexive thematic analysis was used, with the Capability Approach as a sensitizing framework for examining how educational provision becomes or fails to become real opportunity.

Four findings emerged from the study. First, access was conditional on household permission, caregiving responsibilities, and safe movement within the camp. Second, adolescence reshaped the social legitimacy of learning, as puberty, community pressure and marriage expectations narrowed continued education. Third, girls' aspirations exceeded available pathways, creating a mismatch between valued futures and limited progression beyond grade 10. Fourth, learning was shaped by competing expectations of what was worth pursuing, including general education, Arabic and Quranic learning, household usefulness, protection and future aspiration.

The study contributes empirically by foregrounding older adolescent girls' voices alongside parents and frontline educator perspectives. Conceptually, it shows how conversion factors operate temporally, relationally and affectively in refugee girls' education. Practically, it identifies safe mobility, caregiver engagement, female staff, flexibility, culturally meaningful subjects and viable pathways as key to continued learning. Overall, the study argues that refugee girls' education depends on freedoms to convert learning spaces into safe, meaningful, socially legitimate and future-oriented opportunities.

Keywords: Education in Emergencies; Refugee Education; Girls' Education; Rohingya Refugees; Adolescent Girls; Educational Access; Capability Approach; Protracted Displacement

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Education is widely recognized as a human right and as a condition for dignity, protection and future opportunity. This right is affirmed in many international frameworks, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right to education obligations elaborated by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1948, 1989; United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1999). It is also reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which commits states and the global community to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). However, for displaced children and adolescents, this right remains unevenly implemented. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024) estimated that, among 14.8 million school-aged refugee children worldwide, more than seven million were out of school, constrained by legal, economic, social, linguistic and institutional barriers that limit access and progression.

In humanitarian settings, education is not only a development concern. It can provide routine, psychosocial support and safer spaces that reduce exposure to risks such as exploitation, child marriage, social isolation and unsafe movement (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies [INEE], 2024; Shohel, 2022). Nonetheless, education in emergencies remains vulnerable to recurrent funding crises, and weak political commitment. Approximately 3% of worldwide humanitarian funding is designated for education, resulting in vulnerabilities such as teacher shortages, the closure of learning centers, and limited progression pathways (European Commission, 2025; International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2025). These pressures matter, especially for adolescents, whose participation depends not only on basic access but also on recognized progression pathways, safe mobility, relevant learning and socially acceptable opportunities to continue.

Adolescent refugee girls face particular forms of exclusion, especially during the transition to secondary education, as costs, safety concerns, domestic responsibilities and social expectations limit many girls' opportunities to continue learning (UNHCR, n.d.). This gap is not simply a matter of

school existence because girls' education is shaped by household poverty, unpaid care work, early marriage pressure, gender-based violence and restrictions on mobility (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Melnikas et al., 2020). These barriers do not only reduce attendance. They restrict girls' substantive freedoms to learn, move safely, participate and imagine futures they value (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999; Unterhalter, 2007).

The Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar provide a critical context for examining these issues. Since the mass displacement from Myanmar in 2017, Bangladesh has hosted more than one million Rohingya refugees, most of whom live in Cox's Bazar district, including the camp areas of Ukhiya and Teknaf (UNHCR, 2025). The Rohingya are a stateless Muslim minority from Myanmar's Rakhine State. The UN fact-finding mission investigating the 2017 violence documented grave international crimes and identified evidence of genocidal intent by Myanmar's military (United Nations Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2018). Within the camps, education provision has been shaped by restrictive policies, humanitarian coordination, non-formal learning arrangements and uncertainty around accreditation and future progression (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2019; Shohel, 2022).

For adolescent Rohingya girls, educational access is especially fragile. Barriers include limited post-primary provision, lack of recognised pathways, household responsibilities, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, early marriage pressure and community expectations around gender, age and respectability (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Melnikas et al., 2020). At the same time, Rohingya girls should not be understood only through exclusion. Existing studies suggest that many continue to value learning, seek alternative forms of education and attach education to meaningful futures, including religious knowledge, literacy and professional aspiration (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020b; Shohel, 2022).

This thesis examines how adolescent Rohingya girls experience and negotiate educational barriers in a refugee camp in Ukhiya, Bangladesh. It focuses on older adolescent girls (aged 16-18) because later adolescence is often the stage when educational participation becomes socially and practically harder to sustain. The study also includes parents and frontline education staff because girls' educational possibilities are shaped not only by their own aspirations, but also by household demands, community norms, programme design and the everyday responses of education actors.

In this dissertation, 'adolescent girls' refers to the Rohingya refugee girls aged 16-18 who participated in the study. 'Adolescents' is used more broadly when cited literature or sector documents refer to girls and boys aged 10-19. 'Children' refers to legal or policy categories for those under 18, while 'youth' is retained where cited sources use that broader term.

1.2 Research problem and rationale

The central problem addressed in this study is that older adolescent Rohingya girls' educational access cannot be understood only through enrolment figures, learning centre availability or broad descriptions of refugee education provision. Existing assessments and policy reports document low attendance, literacy challenges, funding gaps and limited learning opportunities in the Rohingya response. These are important, but they offer less insight into how adolescent girls themselves interpret educational barriers, how they navigate household and community expectations, and how caregivers and frontline education staff shape what becomes possible.

The problem is not simply a gap in qualitative data. It is also about understanding education as a lived and negotiated process. Without hearing girls' own perspectives, education programming in humanitarian settings may rely too heavily on adult assumptions or aggregate indicators that miss how girls carry competing risks, responsibilities and opportunities. In the camps, a learning centre may physically exist, but this does not necessarily mean that a girl has the real freedom to attend regularly, continue meaningfully or connect education to a future she values.

The Capability Approach provides a useful framework for exploring this problem because it moves beyond accessibility and asks what people are actually able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). In this study, the approach helps analyse how social, institutional and household conditions act as conversion factors that either expand or restrict girls' educational capabilities. This is very relevant in the Rohingya refugee context, where learning is shaped not only by humanitarian provision, but also by gendered norms, camp governance, legal uncertainty and household level decision making.

This study therefore carries both academic and practical significance. Academically, it contributes to refugee education and gender in displacement literature by centring older adolescent girls' narratives while also examining the roles of parents/caregivers and frontline education staff. The focus on Camp 8W allows the study to explore these issues in a specific camp setting rather than treating the entire Rohingya education response as a single uniform context. Practically, the study offers evidence that can inform more gender responsive education programming in protracted displacement settings, especially at a time when funding constraints and learning centre closures risk further weakening already constrained educational opportunities for Rohingya children and adolescents (IRC, 2025; Reuters, 2025; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2025).

The research problem also emerged from my several years of professional engagement with education and humanitarian programming in Cox's Bazar. That experience repeatedly exposed a gap between the presence of learning provision and older girls' ability to use it. It informed the rationale for this study, while the assumptions and institutional familiarity it created required reflexive examination, addressed in Section 3.9.

1.3 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this study is to explore how adolescent Rohingya refugee girls (aged 16-18) experience and negotiate educational access in a refugee camp in Ukhiya, Bangladesh, and how parents and frontline education staff shape these educational possibilities.

The study has three objectives:

1. To analyse how household, social, spatial and institutional conditions shape adolescent Rohingya girls' educational access in Camp 8W.
2. To examine how girls understand the value of education, future aspirations and available learning pathways under conditions of displacement and gendered restriction.
3. To examine how parents and frontline education staff understand and respond to the conditions that enable, restrict or redirect girls' educational participation.

Together, these objectives allow the study to move beyond identifying barriers alone. They support an analysis of how educational access is negotiated, how aspirations are formed or constrained, and how communities influence girls' educational capabilities.

1.4 Research questions

The main research question is:

How do adolescent Rohingya girls experience and negotiate barriers to accessing education in a refugee camp in Bangladesh?

The sub-questions are:

- a. What barriers and enabling factors do adolescent Rohingya girls and their parents identify as shaping girls' access to education?
- b. How do adolescent girls adapt to and make sense of educational barriers, and what aspirations do they associate with learning?
- c. How do frontline education staff perceive and respond to the challenges faced by adolescent girls in accessing education?

These questions reflect the study's focus on lived experience, negotiation and the social conditions that shape educational possibilities. They also align with the Capability Approach by asking not only whether education is available, but whether girls have meaningful opportunities to pursue learning and futures they value.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is significant in three ways. First, it contributes empirically by foregrounding older adolescent Rohingya girls aged 16-18, a group whose experiences are often absorbed into broader categories such as children, youth or refugee learners. By focusing on later adolescence, the study examines a stage at which expectations around mobility, marriage, household work and reputation become especially important for educational participation.

Second, the study contributes conceptually by examining educational access as a problem of conversion rather than provision alone. It uses the Capability Approach to investigate how later-adolescent status and interacting household, community and institutional conditions shape whether available learning provision becomes a real opportunity. The study therefore treats conversion factors not as a static list, but as temporally conditioned and relationally negotiated features of educational capability.

Third, the study has practical significance for education actors working in Cox's Bazar and similar humanitarian settings. By examining the perspectives of girls, caregivers and frontline education staff together, the research shows where educational access becomes fragile and what forms of support may help sustain it. These include safer movement to learning spaces, caregiver engagement, female staff, flexible arrangements, acceptable learning content and more credible progression pathways. The study does not claim to offer a universal solution, but it provides grounded evidence for designing education responses that are more attentive to older adolescent girls' lived realities.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, background, problem, rationale, aim, objectives, research questions and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on Education in Emergencies, Rohingya education in Bangladesh, gendered barriers to adolescent girls' learning and the Capability Approach as the theoretical framework.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, including the field site, participants, data collection methods, language and translation, analysis, ethics, trustworthiness and researcher reflexivity.

Chapter 4 presents the findings across four themes, showing how girls' educational access is shaped by household permission, care responsibilities, safety, poor progression and competing ideas of worthwhile learning.

Chapter 5 discusses these findings using the Capability Approach lens, with attention to educational capability, gendered conversion factors, aspirations, religious learning and practical implications.

Chapter 6 concludes by summarizing the study's contribution, limitations and implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter is best understood as a critical narrative review that develops the study's theoretical framework. It combines peer-reviewed scholarship with policy and humanitarian sources because current programme arrangements and participation data are often reported through sector documents. Sources were selected for their direct relevance to Education in Emergencies, refugee girls' education, Rohingya education policy, gendered adolescence in Cox's Bazar and the Capability Approach. This was not a systematic review and does not claim exhaustive coverage, particularly of the limited literature on Rohingya girls aged 16-18.

Across these bodies of work, the chapter develops one central argument: educational provision does not automatically become meaningful access. For adolescent Rohingya girls, access concerns not only availability but also safety, social legitimacy, recognised progression and future possibility.

2.1 Education in Emergencies, refugee education and gendered exclusion

Research on Education in Emergencies increasingly frames education as more than service delivery. It is also understood as a rights based and protective part of humanitarian response. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) minimum standards describe education as life-sustaining and protective in crisis settings, with attention to access, learning, participation and accountability to affected communities (INEE, 2024). In this sense, education is not treated only as a post-emergency development concern. It can also provide routine, supervised spaces, trusted adults, psychosocial support, referral pathways and some protection from risks such as exploitation, early marriage, unsafe movement and social isolation (Burde et al., 2017; INEE, 2024; Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003).

This protective provision, however, is not always guaranteed. Studies of education in protracted displacement show that refugee education is often shaped by short funding cycles, weak political commitment, fragmented implementation and limited routes into recognised progression (Burde et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2016, 2017; Mendenhall et al., 2017). UNHCR's global education reporting

also shows persistent barriers in the transition from primary to secondary education, with adolescent girls especially likely to be excluded when age, gender, cost, safety and social expectations intersect (UNHCR, 2023, 2024). The literature therefore points to a gap between global commitments to refugee education and the everyday conditions under which refugee learners are expected to study.

Gender is central to this gap. It shapes not only whether girls enter education, but how education is accessed, valued and restricted. In the camps, participation in education for adolescent Rohingya girls is linked to household labour, mobility, protection risks, respectability, marriage expectations and future pathways, not only to the presence of learning centres (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Melnikas et al., 2020). Unterhalter (2007, 2023) argues that a narrow focus on enrolment parity can hide deeper inequalities in learning, safety, participation, voice and recognition. Her work moves the discussion away from whether girls are merely present in classrooms and toward whether education expands their real freedoms. This is particularly relevant in displacement settings, where girls' education is often valued instrumentally, for example as a way of delaying marriage, while the wider conditions limiting girls' choices may remain insufficiently addressed.

The refugee education literature therefore provides the first building block for this study. It shows that education can support learning, dignity, routine and protection in crisis settings, but only when learners can access it safely and meaningfully. A learning space may exist, but it may still be socially inaccessible, unrecognised or disconnected from future progression. For refugee girls, exclusion should therefore not be understood only as lack of access to a service. It also involves restrictions on the conditions that allow girls to move safely, learn meaningfully, remain in education and imagine futures that education can realistically support.

2.2 The politics and structure of Rohingya refugee education in Bangladesh

The Rohingya refugee context sharpens the tension between educational provision and real opportunity. Studies show that camp based learning provision in Bangladesh has been shaped by a policy environment that permits limited humanitarian education while restricting formal integration, recognized certification and durable progression. Human Rights Watch (2019) shows how Rohingya children were prevented from enrolling in Bangladeshi schools and how provision was limited to basic non-formal education inside the camps. Similarly, Hossain (2023) argues that the crisis reflects not only poverty or displacement, but also legal and policy restrictions that constrain schooling, certification and future opportunity.

These restrictions show why Rohingya refugee education cannot be understood only as service delivery. It is also political, because decisions about curriculum, certification, language and progression shape what futures education is able to offer. This connects with wider scholarship on the politics of education, which examines how power operates through policy, curriculum and institutions (Apple, 2019; Ball, 1990). In the Rohingya context, Prodip (2023) is particularly relevant because he asks “education for what?” and shows how Rohingya education in the camp is positioned between relief, development and integration. He argues that education is shaped by a politics of containment, where learning is carefully limited as humanitarian care but not as a route to integration, mobility or recognised citizenship claims. This matters because it shifts attention beyond household culture or individual motivation. When recognised progression remains uncertain, continued attendance becomes harder for adolescent girls, especially when navigating through family priorities, marriage pressure, household responsibilities and safety concerns.

Following the Rohingya refugee influx in 2017, the Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA) was introduced as an interim, non-formal framework for implementing Rohingya children’s learning through levels and competencies outside the Bangladeshi formal school system (Education Sector, 2022; UNICEF, 2022). The LCFA provided some structure during an emergency response, but it was not a full formal curriculum and did not offer nationally recognised certification. Studies and sector documents have raised concerns around implementation, language suitability, contextual grounding, limited content depth and progression pathways for older learners (Shohel et al., 2023; Translators without Borders, 2020). The later introduction of the Myanmar Curriculum was therefore presented as a step toward greater relevance and continuity with Myanmar’s education system. However, its implementation has also faced constraints, including limited infrastructure, teacher capacity gaps, Burmese language barriers and continuing uncertainty around recognition and future pathways (Guglielmi et al., 2024; Saha et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2024). These debates suggest that curriculum reform alone cannot resolve the deeper question of whether refugee learning is recognised, culturally meaningful and connected to viable educational futures.

Adolescents are disadvantaged in a distinct way within this policy environment. The education response has historically been built around basic non-formal provision, while older learners require recognized progression, certification, skills pathways and socially acceptable opportunities for continued study. Studies focused on Rohingya refugee education also describe a fragmented learning

environment that includes learning centres, home-based education, madrasa learning,¹ adolescent clubs and life-skills programmes (Devonald et al., 2021; Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020b). These initiatives can support some educational engagement, but they rarely offer a clear pathway beyond secondary education and thus many Rohingya adolescents and youth remain outside education (Hossain, 2023).

Therefore, the Rohingya specific literature modifies the broader EiE promise. In Cox's Bazar, education provision for Rohingya refugees is best understood as a constrained humanitarian compromise. Learning opportunities exist, but they are often non-formal, low-resourced, unevenly recognised and vulnerable to funding instability. Recent donor reductions and learning centre closures have made this fragility more visible. UNICEF warned in 2025 that the education of around 230,000 Rohingya refugee children was at risk because of an acute funding crisis, while Reuters reported that learning centre closures were pushing some children toward marriage and work (Reuters, 2025; UNICEF, 2025). For adolescent girls, this fragility is especially significant because continued education must be defended against household labour demands, marriage pressure, safety concerns and doubts about where schooling can realistically lead.

2.3 Gendered barriers, adolescence, aspirations and constrained choice in Cox's Bazar

Research on Rohingya adolescents in Cox's Bazar shows that gendered educational exclusion is produced through the interaction of household expectations, camp insecurity, marriage practices, mobility restrictions and limited educational pathways. The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme is important here because it foregrounds adolescent experience rather than treating children or youth as a single category. Guglielmi et al. (2019) show that Rohingya adolescents' capabilities are shaped by legal status, poverty, gender norms, limited mobility, protection risks and the restricted opportunity structure of the camps. This work is useful because it connects education to wider social and protection environments, rather than treating schooling as a standalone service.

For adolescent girls, puberty and later adolescence mark a turning point. The education focused GAGE study by Guglielmi et al. (2020b) shows how domestic responsibilities, restricted mobility and limited learning opportunities shape adolescents' education in Cox's Bazar. The age and gender based violence study by Guglielmi et al. (2020a) is more directly relevant to safety, harassment, fear and reputational

¹ Madrasa refers to an Islamic religious learning institution or setting. In this study, the term refers to religious learning spaces attended by some Rohingya girls in the camp context.

risks. These studies show that girls' access to learning changes as they grow older. Education may be valued, but girls' movement becomes more closely monitored through purdah expectations.² Parents may therefore value education in principle while still restricting attendance when safety, honour, marriage prospects or household labour are seen as more urgent.

Marriage is one of the strongest examples of this gendered turning point. Melnikas et al. (2020) show that early marriage among Rohingya girls is shaped by insecurity, economic uncertainty, social norms and displacement related vulnerability. Their study is relevant to education because marriage pressure narrows the period in which adolescent girls can continue learning. More recent research on family formation among Rohingya refugees similarly suggests that displacement conditions can heighten marriage-related risks and reshape adolescent life trajectories (Zimmerman et al., 2025). Educational withdrawal among adolescent girls is therefore embedded in wider expectations around age, gender, reputation and family strategy.

Safety and mobility are also central to educational barriers. Guglielmi et al. (2020a) show that adolescent girls' movement in and around the camps is shaped by fears of harassment, violence, kidnapping and reputational harm. A learning space may exist, but can be inaccessible if the route is perceived as unsafe or if girls' public movement causes scrutiny. This distinction is important for the present study. Education responses often focus on the availability of services, while actual participation depends on whether girls and families consider movement to those services safe and socially acceptable.

Together, Guglielmi et al. (2020a, 2020b) and Melnikas et al. (2020) shift attention from whether families support girls' education to how families weigh learning against safety, reputation, marriageability and household survival. This matters because parental decisions are not shaped by culture alone. They are made within conditions of insecurity, limited educational progression, household labour demands and community judgement.

At the same time, the literature cautions against portraying Rohingya girls only through vulnerability. Girls continue to express aspirations, seek alternative learning routes, support younger siblings, participate in informal learning and imagine futures as teachers, health workers, religious learners or community contributors (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020b). These responses should not be overstated as

² Purdah refers here to gendered norms and practices of modesty, respectability and seclusion that can shape girls' mobility, public visibility and participation in education.

free agency. They show aspiration, adaptation and limited room for manoeuvre within unequal family, community and institutional conditions.

This is particularly important for interpreting madrasa education, home-based learning, adolescent clubs and life-skills programmes. These spaces can provide continuity, psychosocial support, religious legitimacy or gender-sensitive access when formal learning is restricted (Guglielmi et al., 2020b; Shohel, 2022). At the same time, they may also reflect the limits of what is politically and socially permitted. For girls, movement from learning centres to religious or home-based learning may be neither simple empowerment nor simple exclusion. It may be an adaptation to limited pathways, family pressure and the need for socially acceptable forms of education.

The evidence therefore points to a central tension. Rohingya girls often value education and articulate aspirations, but their ability to act on those aspirations is shaped by family authority, safety concerns, marriage pressure, gender norms and the perceived usefulness of available education. Existing studies identify these barriers, but less is known about how older adolescent girls themselves interpret and negotiate them in relation to caregivers and frontline education staff in a specific camp context.

2.4 From access barriers to educational capability

The preceding sections show that adolescent Rohingya girls' education cannot be understood through access barriers alone. EiE literature frames education as protective and rights-based, Rohingya-specific literature shows how provision is shaped by policy restriction and limited progression, and gender-focused studies show how girls' participation is affected by mobility, marriage pressure, safety, reputation and household responsibility. The Capability Approach helps connect these issues by asking not only whether education exists, but whether learners have real opportunities to use education in ways they value (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

This shift is important for educational justice. In girls' education scholarship, Unterhalter (2007, 2023) argues that a narrow focus on enrolment can hide deeper inequalities in learning, participation, voice, recognition and freedom. This critique is relevant to refugee education because provision may exist while remaining too short, unsafe, socially contested or weakly recognised to support meaningful futures. A capability lens therefore helps move the discussion from simple access to the conditions that make education usable, valued and future-bearing.

Rohingya adolescent research also supports this shift. Guglielmi et al. (2019) show that adolescents' capabilities in Cox's Bazar are shaped by legal status, camp governance, poverty, gender norms, violence and restricted mobility. This matters because educational opportunity is not produced by learning spaces alone. It is shaped through households, community expectations, humanitarian programmes and state policy. For adolescent girls, aspirations may persist, but the space to act on those aspirations is often narrow.

At the same time, the Capability Approach must be used carefully. Scholars have questioned whether it can become too abstract, how capabilities should be selected and whether it pays enough attention to power and structural inequality (Alkire, 2005; Dean, 2009; Robeyns, 2005; Stewart, 2005). These critiques are useful for this study. They support using the Capability Approach as a sensitising framework rather than a fixed checklist. The point is not to impose a pre-set list of educational capabilities, but to examine which freedoms and constraints become visible through girls' narratives, caregiver accounts and frontline staff perspectives.

This section therefore prepares the theoretical framework developed in Section 2.6. The issue is not only that Rohingya girls face barriers to education. The deeper concern is that educational provision is filtered through social, gendered, institutional and political conditions before it becomes a real opportunity. This is why the study examines girls' accounts alongside caregivers and educators: not to override girls' voices, but to understand the wider conditions through which their educational possibilities are shaped.

2.5 Synthesis and research gap

The literature reviewed in this chapter shows that Rohingya girls' education in Cox's Bazar sits at the intersection of four connected debates. EiE scholarship frames education as rights-based and potentially protective, but also shows how education in crisis settings can remain unstable because of funding, implementation and continuity challenges (Burde et al., 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2016, 2017; Mendenhall et al., 2017). Rohingya education literature shows that learning provision in Bangladesh has been shaped by policy restrictions, non-formal arrangements, limited recognition and uncertain progression, particularly for older learners (Hossain, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2019; Prodip, 2023; Shohel et al., 2023; UNICEF, 2024). Gender and adolescence research demonstrates that girls' education is shaped by household labour, safety, mobility, marriage pressure, reputation and socially acceptable forms of learning (Guglielmi et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Melnikas et al., 2020). Capability-

based scholarship then provides a language for analysing these conditions not only as barriers to access, but as constraints on real educational freedom (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999; Unterhalter, 2007, 2023).

Across these bodies of work, one central issue becomes clear: the presence of education services is not the same as the presence of educational capability. The deeper question is whether adolescent Rohingya girls have real opportunities to attend safely, continue meaningfully, learn in ways they value, and imagine futures that available pathways can support. Existing studies have documented many structural, policy and gendered barriers facing Rohingya adolescents. These studies are valuable, especially for identifying wider patterns in education provision, mobility, protection risks and adolescent well-being. However, less is known about how older adolescent girls themselves interpret these barriers, how they make sense of household authority, and how they navigate competing expectations around formal, religious and future-oriented learning.

The gap, therefore, is not the absence of research on Rohingya education. Rather, it is the need for a focused qualitative account that centres adolescent girls aged 16-18 in one camp setting, reads their narratives alongside caregiver and frontline education staff perspectives, and uses the Capability Approach to examine aspiration, adaptation and constrained educational choice alongside structural restriction. Because this gap concerns meaning and interpretation rather than prevalence alone, a qualitative case study design is appropriate. This study addresses the gap by exploring how adolescent Rohingya girls in Camp 8W experience and negotiate educational barriers, what they identify as enabling or constraining participation, what aspirations they attach to learning, and how caregivers and frontline education staff perceive and respond to these challenges.

2.6 Theoretical framework: the Capability Approach

This study uses the Capability Approach as a sensitising theoretical framework for understanding adolescent Rohingya girls' educational access in displacement. The preceding sections have shown that learning provision in Cox's Bazar is shaped by humanitarian policy, gendered adolescence, mobility restrictions, household responsibility and uncertain progression. The Capability Approach is appropriate because it allows the study to ask not only whether education services exist, but whether girls have real opportunities to attend, continue, participate meaningfully and pursue futures they value. Sen (1999) provides the open and context-sensitive foundation for this study by understanding development as the expansion of substantive freedoms and the removal of constraints that limit people's ability to live lives they have reason to value. Nussbaum (2011) offers a more explicitly

normative account, asking what each person is actually able to do and to be, and emphasising the conditions needed for a life of dignity. In this study, the framework helps analyse the gap between educational provision and educational capability.

Other frameworks could also have informed the study. Tomaševski's (2001) 4As framework is useful for analysing availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. A rights-based approach would foreground obligations, discrimination and legal entitlement, while ecological systems theory could map the layers shaping girls' lives. These approaches are valuable, but the Capability Approach better fits this study's concern with how adolescent girls experience and evaluate educational possibilities shaped by displacement, gendered restriction and household authority (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

The Capability Approach distinguishes between resources, functionings and capabilities. Functionings are achieved beings and doings, such as attending a learning centre, becoming literate or feeling safe. Capabilities are the real opportunities to achieve valued functionings. This distinction matters because a learning centre may exist without being equally usable for every girl. In capability terms, it is a resource that becomes an educational capability only when girls can convert it into attendance, learning, safety, participation and future possibility.

Conversion factors are therefore central to the analysis. These are the personal, social, institutional and environmental conditions that shape whether resources can be converted into valued functionings (Robeyns, 2005; Unterhalter, 2007; Walker, 2006). At this stage, the concept was used to pose sensitizing questions rather than establish predetermined categories: what forms of learning girls valued, which opportunities appeared usable, and what conditions enabled or constrained their pursuit. The specific conversion processes operating in Camp 8W were identified through analysis rather than fixed in advance.

Nussbaum's (2011) distinction between internal and combined capabilities is also useful. Girls may have internal educational capabilities such as interest in learning, literacy, confidence or future aspirations. Yet these do not become combined capabilities unless the surrounding conditions allow girls to act on them. This helps the study take aspirations seriously without treating aspiration alone as agency. Girls' hopes for future work, religious learning, community service or continued study are important because they reveal valued futures. Whether these hopes become real opportunities depends on household, community, institutional and policy conditions.

This study draws mainly on Sen's open and context sensitive approach because the research is empirical and grounded in a specific camp setting. I do not impose a fixed list of capabilities in

advance. Instead, I use girls' narratives, caregiver accounts and frontline staff perspectives to identify which educational freedoms and constraints matter in this context. Nussbaum's work is used more selectively as normative support, especially her emphasis on dignity, bodily integrity, combined capabilities and adaptive preferences. The distinction is important here because Sen helps keep the analysis responsive to context, while Nussbaum helps prevent restricted choices from being treated as sufficient freedom. Her discussion of adaptive preferences is useful for interpreting acceptance or normalisation of restriction without invalidating girls' accounts. It helps examine how household duty, age norms and restricted pathways shape what girls and families come to see as possible (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Used in this way, the Capability Approach focused attention on substantive educational freedom without supplying a fixed coding frame. Because questions of value, choice and constraint were theory-informed, however, the analysis was not theory-neutral. Section 3.6 therefore distinguishes the inductive development of codes and themes from their subsequent capability-based interpretation.

The next chapter explains how this theoretical framing informed the qualitative case study design, participant selection, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains how the study was designed and conducted to explore adolescent Rohingya girls' experiences of educational access in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. It outlines the research design, field site, participant selection, data collection methods, language and translation process, data analysis, ethical safeguards, trustworthiness and my positionality as a researcher with prior professional experience in the Rohingya camps.

The study used a qualitative case study design, drawing on semi-structured interviews, one girls-only focus group discussion, observation notes and contextual field memos. The analysis followed reflexive thematic analysis and was informed by the Capability Approach. This allowed me to examine not only whether educational opportunities existed, but how girls experienced, negotiated and valued them within household, community, institutional and camp level constraints.

3.1 Research design and methodological orientation

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine how adolescent Rohingya refugee girls experience and negotiate barriers to education in Camp 8W, located in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the research focused on meanings, experiences, relationships and everyday negotiations rather than measurement alone. The study required close attention to how girls described their educational histories, how they understood restrictions on movement, how family and community expectations shaped attendance, and what futures they associated with learning. This emphasis on participants' meanings and situated accounts is consistent with qualitative research that seeks to understand social experience from the perspectives of those directly involved (Lareau, 2021; Patton, 2002).

A survey design would have been less suitable because the study did not aim to measure the prevalence of barriers, but to understand how girls interpret and negotiate them in everyday life. A full ethnographic or longitudinal design could have provided deeper observation over time, but was not feasible within the ethical, access and time constraints of a Master's dissertation in a camp setting. A

qualitative case study therefore offered the most appropriate balance between depth, feasibility and ethical sensitivity.

The study was interpretivist in orientation. I approached participants' accounts as situated narratives shaped by social, gendered and institutional conditions. This mattered because educational access in the camp was not only a question of whether a learning centre existed. It was shaped by permission, safety, reputation, care work, age, family expectations and the perceived value of different forms of learning. An interpretivist stance therefore allowed me to treat girls' explanations as central to the analysis.

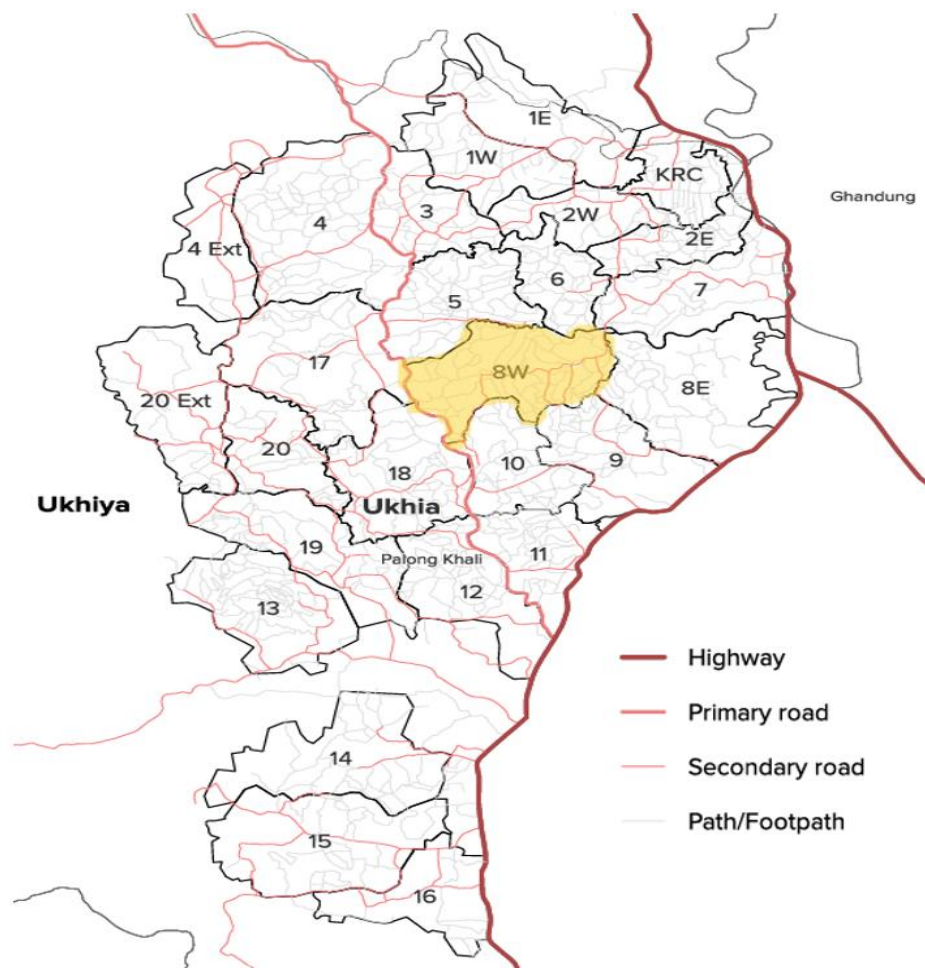
A case study design was suitable because the research focused on a bounded phenomenon within a real-life camp context. The case in this study is adolescent Rohingya girls' educational access in Camp 8W during the January 2026 fieldwork period. Camp 8W, located in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, provides the spatial boundary of the study. Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar and Bangladesh are used here to locate the camp within the wider Rohingya refugee response, but they are not treated as the case itself. The study therefore does not examine Rohingya education across Cox's Bazar or Bangladesh more broadly. It examines how educational access was experienced and negotiated by girls aged 16-18 within one camp setting, where household decision-making, routes to learning centres, safety concerns, programme arrangements and community expectations shaped participation. Yin (2014) argues that case study research is useful when studying a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly separable. Stake (1995) similarly emphasises the value of case study for understanding complexity and particularity. The aim was therefore not statistical generalisation, but a grounded account of how educational access is lived and negotiated in one camp setting.

3.2 Field site and study context

The study was conducted in the Rohingya refugee camp context of Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, with fieldwork centred on Camp 8W. Cox's Bazar hosts one of the world's largest refugee settlements, where Rohingya refugees displaced from Myanmar live under conditions of protracted uncertainty, restricted mobility and humanitarian governance. Within this setting, education is largely organised through non-formal and humanitarian provision rather than full integration into the national education system, reflecting wider policy restrictions on formal schooling, certification and durable educational progression for Rohingya refugee children (Human Rights Watch, 2019; Hossain, 2023; Prodip, 2023; Shohel, 2022).

Although learning centres were located within the camp setting, access was not experienced as a simple matter of physical distance. For adolescent girls, reaching the learning centre could involve moving through hilly pathways, passing tea-stall or shop areas where men and boys gathered, and walking through spaces where girls' movement was visible to neighbours. For this reason, mobility in this study refers not only to distance, but also to terrain, public visibility, perceived safety and social acceptability. Figure 3.1 shows the location of Camp 8W within the wider Ukhiya camp area.

Figure 3.1. Location of Camp 8W within the wider Ukhiya camp area.



Note. Adapted from Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), Bangladesh, Cox's Bazar: Road Connectivity inside the Rohingya Camps, September 2025. The map has been cropped and simplified for spatial orientation.

Camp 8W was selected purposefully for both practical and analytical reasons. Practically, it was accessible through coordination with BRAC, which acted as a gatekeeper NGO with support, including

safe navigation, venue planning and safeguarding arrangements. Analytically, the camp offered a relevant setting for examining how barriers to girls' education operate in everyday life. Its education services, household settlements, hilly pathways and community spaces allowed me to explore access as something produced through interactions among the household, learning centre, route to school and wider social environment.

Before data collection, I secured formal camp access permission and coordinated with BRAC as the field gatekeeper. Permission alone was not enough as the fieldwork required careful planning, coordination, venue selection, scheduling flexibility and careful explanation of the study's purpose to all stakeholders.

Observation notes helped situate the data. I recorded learning spaces, access routes, movement patterns and hilly terrain, not as background description alone but as part of how educational access was experienced. This use of fieldnotes supported contextual interpretation by linking participants' accounts to the everyday settings, routes and social spaces in which educational access was negotiated (Emerson et al., 2011; Lareau, 2021).

3.3 Participants and sampling

I used criterion-based purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), with attention to variation in attendance status and participant standpoint. The main sampling logic was to select information rich participants who met criteria directly relevant to the research questions, rather than to produce statistical representativeness (Patton, 2002; Suri, 2011). Adolescent girls were included if they were aged 16-18, lived in Camp 8W, and had direct experience of regular, irregular or interrupted participation in learning. Parents or guardians were selected because they were involved in education related household decision making, while frontline education providers were selected because they had direct knowledge of girls' attendance patterns, programme conditions and community concerns.

Girls aged 16-18 were the primary participants because later adolescence is often when restrictions around mobility, household responsibilities, marriage expectations, safety, reputation and the perceived value of schooling become more intense. The final sample included five individual interviews with adolescent girls: three who were regularly attending learning centres and two who had stopped attending or were not currently attending. This allowed the analysis to examine both continuation and interruption. I also interviewed two parents or guardians, one linked to a regular-attending girl and one

linked to a girl who was not currently attending. Two frontline education staff members were interviewed to capture institutional and programme-level perspectives. In addition, I conducted one girls-only focus group discussion with six participants who were separate from the individual interview participants, bringing the total number of participants to fifteen. Table 3.1 summarizes the participant groups and data sources.

Table 3.1. Participant groups and data sources.

Data source/ participant group	Number of Participants	Method	Analytical purpose
Adolescent girls	5	Individual semi-structured interviews	Individual educational histories, barriers, decisions, aspirations and meanings of learning
Adolescent girls	6	Girls-only focus group discussion (these six participants are different girls than the individual interview girls above)	Shared norms, collective experiences and common concerns around education and mobility
Parents/guardians	2	Individual semi-structured interviews	Household permission, protection concerns, care responsibilities and perceived value of learning
Frontline education staff	2	Individual semi-structured interviews	Attendance patterns, programme constraints, community perceptions and support strategies
Observed learning spaces, access routes and fieldwork events	Contextual	Non-participant observation and post-session field memos	To contextualize learning spaces, routes, hilly terrain, public visibility and movement and safety arrangements.

This multi perspective design allowed me to examine how girls, caregivers and educators understood similar issues from different standpoints. I did not treat convergence as the goal of analysis. Differences and tensions between accounts were also treated as analytically important, especially where caregivers, educators and girls placed different emphasis on safety, household responsibility, religious learning or future pathways. Recruitment was facilitated through BRAC as the field gatekeeper. BRAC supported safe access, venues, safeguarding arrangements and communication with potential participants, but its role was facilitative rather than persuasive. I explained that the study was independent, voluntary and not connected to services, benefits or future support. The sample size allowed careful attention to individual accounts, translation decisions, field notes and comparison across participant groups.

3.4 Data collection methods

Data collection combined semi-structured interviews, one girls-only focus group discussion, observation notes and field memos. These methods were selected because the research question required both individual narratives and contextual understanding. Educational access in Camp 8W could not be understood only by asking whether girls attended learning centres. I needed to understand how girls described their educational histories, how families made decisions, how educators interpreted attendance patterns and how the camp environment shaped movement and participation.

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection method. This format provided consistency across participants while allowing space for each person to explain what mattered in their own terms, an important principle in qualitative interviewing where listening carefully to participants' meanings is central to producing grounded and credible accounts (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015; Lareau, 2021). I used separate but related interview guides for adolescent girls, parents or guardians and education staff. Before fieldwork, I informally piloted the guides with two of my past colleagues familiar with the Rohingya response and simplified the wording where needed. I avoided abstract terms such as capability or conversion factor and instead asked concrete questions about daily routines, decision-making, safety, learning and aspirations.

With girls, the interviews explored educational histories, attendance and dropout experiences, family permission, safety, household responsibilities, aspirations and support mechanisms. With parents and guardians, I explored household decision-making, concerns around safety and reputation, and perceptions of what kinds of learning were useful or appropriate for adolescent girls. With education

staff, I focused on attendance patterns, programme constraints, community perceptions and strategies used to support girls' participation.

The focus group discussion was conducted with six different adolescent girls who had not taken part in the individual interviews. I used it to explore shared experiences, common concerns and collective meanings around girls' education, mobility and safety in the camp. Focus groups are useful for examining social norms because interaction among participants can reveal shared assumptions and points of difference (Morgan, 1997; Krueger & Casey, 2015). Given the sensitivity of the setting, I framed questions collectively, asking what girls in the camp commonly experience or worry about rather than inviting participants to disclose private family experiences. I did not use the focus group to elicit personal accounts of family conflict, marriage pressure or safety incidents, as such disclosure could have created discomfort or social risk in a group setting.

Observation notes and field memos were used to contextualize the interviews and focus group discussion. This was not an ethnographic study, and I did not observe participants as individual subjects. Instead, I recorded features of the learning environment and camp setting that shaped educational access, including learning spaces, access routes, hilly pathways, gendered movement and visible safety arrangements. Field notes helped explain why distance, terrain, escort support and public visibility appeared repeatedly in participants' accounts (Emerson et al., 2011).

3.5 Language, interpretation, transcription and translation

Language was central to the research process. In the Rohingya camps, education provision has moved from the non-formal Learning Competency Framework and Approach (LCFA) to the Myanmar Curriculum, which was first introduced in late 2021 (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2024). Myanmar/Burmese is the formal language of instruction under this curriculum, while English is taught as an additional subject. However, many Rohingya learners and teachers have limited proficiency in Burmese, so classroom teaching is often mediated through Rohingya speech in practice (Saha et al., 2024; UNICEF, 2024; UNESCO, 2026).

During fieldwork, most conversations took place in Chittagonian Bangla, which is close to Rohingya language and commonly used between humanitarian workers and Rohingya communities in Cox's Bazar. Participants mostly used Rohingya-influenced expressions, while education staff also used occasional English programme terms. Because of my previous work in Cox's Bazar, I was able to

conduct most conversations directly. When needed, I also sought assistance from a female interpreter, especially to clarify meaning or help girls feel more comfortable.

I treated language support as both a practical and methodological issue. Cross-language qualitative research involves interpretation during interviewing, transcription, translation and analysis (Squires, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004). I therefore paid attention to how meanings moved between Rohingya-influenced speech, Chittagonian Bangla, Bangla and English. This was especially important for terms linked to permission, reputation, modesty, safety, religious learning and marriage.

After data collection, I labelled the recorded audio files using participant codes rather than their names. I also prepared English working transcripts from the recordings, translating where needed. For clearer sections, I worked close to verbatim. For overlapping speech, background noise or focus group interaction, I used a near-verbatim approach that preserved meaning without claiming perfect word for word accuracy. Where a culturally specific expression could not be translated neatly, I used the closest English meaning and recorded additional reflections in analytic memos. I avoided turning participants' words into formal English, while still making translated excerpts clear for readers. Transcription and translation were therefore part of the analysis itself, not simply preparatory steps before analysis.

3.6 Data analysis

I used Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach to analyze the data. This approach was appropriate because the study aimed to identify patterned meanings across participants' accounts while still allowing attention to difference, contradiction and context. Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis provides a flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), while their later work emphasizes the researcher's active role in producing themes through reflexive engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2021).

I started the analysis by listening to the recordings several times and carefully reading the transcripts, field notes, and post-session memos. For each interview and the focus group, I wrote short summaries that highlighted key points about barriers, enabling factors, aspirations, household decision making, and how people valued different types of learning. This approach helped me stay close to each participant's account before comparing patterns across participant groups and data sources.

Initial coding was primarily inductive and remained close to participants' language. I coded recurring ideas concerning family permission, household work, safety, community pressure, adolescence,

marriage expectations, religious learning, limited progression and future aspirations. I then compared codes across participant groups. Girls' interviews remained central, while parent, educator, focus-group and observation data were used to deepen, contrast and sometimes complicate their accounts.

The overall analysis therefore combined inductive coding with theory-informed interpretation. After initial coding, I returned to the Capability Approach as a second interpretive layer, asking what the codes suggested about resources, valued functionings and real opportunities (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999; Unterhalter, 2007). The framework did not supply the four themes in advance. Instead, it helped interpret patterns developed from the data. Contrasting parental positions and girls' simultaneous valuing of religious learning and regret over lost formal pathways complicated emerging explanations. Theme development therefore moved iteratively among transcripts, codes, memos, field notes and theory.

3.7 Trustworthiness and research quality

I approached research quality through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was strengthened by using multiple participant groups and methods, while keeping girls' individual interviews at the centre of the analysis. Parent, educator, focus group and observation data were used to add context, comparison and nuance, rather than to search for one single truth. Transferability was supported through careful description of the field site, participant groups, learning centre routes and social conditions shaping mobility. Dependability was addressed by keeping records of interview guides, participant codes, transcript summaries, initial codes, analytic memos and theme development. Confirmability was supported through reflexive memo-writing, particularly where my previous humanitarian experience could have shaped interpretation. These strategies did not remove subjectivity, but made the analysis more transparent and grounded in the data.

3.8 Ethical considerations

I obtained ethical approval for the study from the University of Glasgow's School of Education before starting my fieldwork in Bangladesh. During the whole duration of the fieldwork, I followed the approved guidelines. As the study involved adolescent refugee girls (aged 16-18) in a camp setting, maintaining ethical sensitivity was important. I paid special attention to informed consent,

voluntariness, safeguarding, confidentiality and minimising distress (Alderson & Morrow, 2011; British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2024).

I used a dual consent and assent process. Guardians were informed about the study, and girls were also asked directly for their own assent in plain language. I explained that participation was voluntary, that they could skip any question, stop the interview or withdraw without any effect on services. I also made clear that the study was independent from BRAC and other service providers, and that there was no financial or material benefit attached to participation.

Interviews and the focus group were conducted in safe NGO supported venues. A female interpreter or community volunteer supported communication when needed, and a female safeguarding adult remained within sight but out of earshot during sessions with girls. This arrangement helped balance privacy with safeguarding and was particularly important given my position as a male researcher.

During the field-work, confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms, coded files, and removal of identifying details and secure storage of recordings and transcripts. I also explained the limits of confidentiality, especially if serious risk of harm was disclosed. Although the study focused on education, topics such as safety, harassment, marriage and household pressure could still be sensitive. If a participant appeared uncomfortable, I was prepared to pause, redirect or stop the session.

3.9 Positionality and reflexivity

My positionality shaped this study from the beginning. I entered the field with several years of professional experience in education and humanitarian programming in Cox's Bazar, including work with the World Food Programme and the Norwegian Refugee Council. This gave me familiarity with camp education systems, NGO coordination, operational constraints and the everyday language around access, safety and mobility. It also helped me notice practical details such as escort support, hilly pathways, learning-centre routes and gatekeeper coordination.

My position cannot be captured by a simple insider/outsider binary. Prior humanitarian work and linguistic familiarity gave me partial knowledge of programme language and institutional procedures, but I remained external to Rohingya identity, refugee status and the gendered experiences of adolescent girls. As a Bangladeshi male researcher affiliated with a university and formerly connected to humanitarian organisations, I may also have been perceived as linked to authority or assistance. This could encourage socially desirable accounts, while NGO-facilitated recruitment may have favoured

girls already visible to education actors. Familiarity also risked premature interpretation. A female Rohingya researcher might therefore have developed different forms of rapport and disclosure.

Reflexivity focused on how these relationships shaped access, disclosure and interpretation. I clarified the study's independence from services, used simple and non-leading questions, and recorded assumptions and uncertainties in field memos. I also examined accounts that complicated my expectations. The contrasting parental positions and girls' simultaneous attachment to religious learning and regret over interrupted formal education challenged any simple view of families as barriers or learning-centre attendance as the only valuable education. These steps did not remove positional influence; they made its effects more visible and helped keep the claims proportionate (Berger, 2015; Finlay, 2002).

3.10 Methodological limitations

This study has several methodological limitations. The sample was small and fieldwork was centred in Camp 8W, so the findings cannot be generalised statistically to all Rohingya adolescent girls in Cox's Bazar. Although I included both regularly attending and girls who had stopped attending, the sample may still under represent those who are most socially isolated or least visible to education actors.

Language and translation also involved interpretive choices, especially when moving from Rohingya influenced speech and Chittagonian Bangla into English. The field setting shaped what was possible. Scheduling depended on gatekeeper's availability, safe venues, participant comfort and broader camp conditions, including disruption caused by the unexpected fire at Camp 16. Social desirability may also have shaped some responses because access was facilitated through a gatekeeper NGO. I mitigated this by repeatedly clarifying that the study was independent, voluntary and not linked to assistance or future support. These limitations define the scope of the study and frame how its findings should be interpreted.

The next chapter presents the findings, showing how girls' education in Camp 8W is shaped by household permission, care demands, safe movement, age and marriage expectations, limited pathways and competing ideas about valuable learning.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents findings from the qualitative case study of educational access among adolescent Rohingya refugee girls in Camp 8W. The analysis draws on individual interviews with five girls (G1-G5), two parents (P1-P2) and two frontline educators (T1-T2), together with one focus group involving six additional girls. Girls' interviews form the core of the chapter; parent, educator and focus-group material is used to deepen, extend and sometimes complicate their accounts.

The findings are organised across four themes. These themes do not represent frequency across all Rohingya girls, but identify analytically important patterns within this small qualitative case study. Together, these themes show that adolescent Rohingya girls' education in Camp 8W was neither officially absent nor guaranteed. Girls valued learning and connected education to meaningful futures, but participation remained dependent on household permission, care responsibilities, safe movement, age related expectations, limited pathways and competing ideas about worthwhile learning. Girls who were still attending described uncertain continuation, while those who had stopped attending described educational redirection into Arabic or Qur'anic learning. Parents and educators also differed in how they understood girls' education. Therefore, access was shaped not only by the physical existence of a learning centre, but by household decisions, safe mobility through camp space and wider judgements about what kind of learning was appropriate for adolescent girls.

Theme 1: Access to education is conditional on household permission, care demands and safe movement

One significant finding is that girls' access to education was conditional rather than secure. Several girls were attending learning centres, but attendance was not described as automatic or fully within their control. It depended on permission at home, household responsibilities not taking priority, and the route to the learning centre feeling safe enough to travel. Access was therefore worked out day by day through family authority, domestic need and mobility conditions.

Permission was central to how girls described attending learning center. Girls rarely described attendance as something they could decide alone, even where families were supportive. One participant explained this while sharing a recent absence:

“Recently, I missed my classes because my mother was sick. She needed to go to the hospital, so I had to stay with her and could not attend the learning centre until she recovered.” (G1)

This quote shows that barrier to learning is not always caused by open opposition to education. It also happens because family need becomes more important than learning. Another girl described a similar pattern of interruption. Her parents usually support her education, but attendance is still conditional:

“My mother normally decides whether I can attend learning center or not. It mostly depends on whether she needs support from me at home. Both my parents are usually supportive, but if they need my help, then I have to stay at home instead of going to the learning centre.” (G2)

These accounts from the girls show how family support and family authority worked together. Family support helped girls remain connected to education to some extent, but it did not assure uninterrupted access to learning. Girls’ time remained available to the household when illness, chores, care for siblings, elderly persons or other family events required their presence. It was surprising to see that girls often described these interruptions as ordinary family responsibilities rather than as explicit unfairness, suggesting that such restrictions were sometimes normalised within everyday household life. This does not make the interruptions unimportant. Instead, it shows how deeply care responsibilities were built into girls’ everyday understanding of education.

Safe movement to and from the learning centre formed another condition of access. Girls did not describe the route as safe space. They spoke of it as socially exposed and sometimes frightening. One girl explained how route based verbal harassment affected girls’ attendance:

“There are also shops and tea-stalls on the way to the learning centre where boys and men sit around. When we pass by, we hear bad words from there. Some of my friends stopped coming to school to avoid such harassment.” (G3)

Some girls referred to distance, hilly terrain and fear linked to rumours of adolescent girls being kidnapped. These accounts show that safety was not only an abstract protection issue. It was experienced during ordinary movement through public spaces inside the camp. For girls, walking the path to the learning centre could involve fear, shame and family restriction before the learning could started.

The role of the accompanying sister or girls’ volunteer shows how fragile access could be. Several girls spoke positively about being escorted to the learning centre by a girls’ volunteer. During the focus group discussion, one participant said:

“My elder brother allows me come to learning center only when the girls’ volunteer comes to pick me up. If the volunteer Apa³ misses out one day, my family does not allow me to go to learning center.”
(Participant from Focus Group).

Escort support was more than practical assistance for girls to make it to the learning center. Girls’ volunteer became part of the permission structure. The presence of the volunteer Apa helped make attendance look safer and more acceptable to families.

This theme shows that educational access for adolescent girls in Camp 8W was conditional in a concrete sense. Attendance depended on permission being granted, care work being postponed and movement being considered safe enough. The learning centre may have been physically present, but participation was not guaranteed by provision alone. Girls’ education remained possible, but it had to be sustained within the unstable space between household responsibility and safe movement inside the camp.

³ The word “Apa” means sister. It is a local term that girls use to address or call the girls’ volunteer who accompanies the girls to and from their learning centers.

Theme 2: Adolescence reshapes the social legitimacy of girls' learning

The second major finding is that adolescence changed the terms on which girls' continued education was judged. It was clear from the interviews that schooling did not carry the same meaning for younger girls and older adolescent girls. As girls moved further into later part of adolescence, especially from around 16 onward, their participation came under sharper questioning. Families, neighbours and community members began to question whether a girl was now too old to continue, whether her movement outside the home remained acceptable, and whether her place should shift toward marriage, increased modesty expectations or religious learning. Adolescence therefore emerged not only as an age category, but as a social threshold.

Girls described puberty and age as moments when pressure around education became stronger. One of the interviewed girls, coded as G3, gave one of the clearest accounts of how this pressure works.

“The community wants girls to get married early, especially when we turn 16 or above. Girls keep receiving marriage proposals, which becomes pressure for parents. They worry about marrying their daughter before becoming too old. That is why many parents stop their daughters from going to the learning centre once they turn 18.” (G3)

This quote shows that educational interruption was not caused only by practical barriers such as household chores, illness or distance. It was also shaped by community decision about what the older adolescent girls should do. It was clear from her account above that marriage pressure did not come from the household alone. It was created by a wider social environment, in which parents were aware of neighbours' comments, marriage proposals and community expectations about girls' age.

Another girl, coded as G4, who had already stopped attending the learning centre, described a similar shift but connected it more directly to religious learning. Her words echoed with many others:

“Once I turned 16, the community wants me to stop going to the learning centre. They put pressure on my family to get me married off. Or I should go to a Madrasa (religious learning space) and learn Arabic until I get married.” (G4)

Her account is important because it shows that stopping learning centre attendance was not always framed as stopping learning altogether. Rather, adolescence could redirect girls toward a form of learning seen as more appropriate for older girls. In this context, Arabic or Quranic learning became part of the social negotiation around age, respectability and marriage. This does not mean all girls or families understood education in the same way, but it shows how formal learning became harder to justify once girls were seen as grown up.

Community surveillance acted as a key factor to this shift. Girls described parents as being influenced by what neighbours said once a daughter became older. The concern was not only that girls might miss classes or fall behind. It was also that their visible movement to and from the learning centre could become a source of comment. As a result, educational decisions were not made privately within the household alone, rather shaped by the community pressure as well.

Frontline educators, who play a key role facilitating learning inside the camp, recognised this age-related pressure as a recurring pattern as one teacher explained:

“When girls reach 16 and above, the community starts putting pressure on the family, saying that the daughter has grown up and needs to stop learning. Families then feel the pressure to stop the girl from attending learning centre. Parents, relatives, and elder brothers also keep saying that girls need to stop coming to the learning centre because they are now older.” (T1)

This educator perspective supports the girls’ accounts while also showing how age-related withdrawal becomes visible at programme level. Educators did not describe dropout among older girls as accidental. They linked it to community pressure, family authority and early marriage expectations. This matters because it shows that adolescence was not only experienced by girls as a personal stage of life. It was also recognised by education staff as a point when attendance became more fragile.

Overall, this theme shows that adolescence reshaped the legitimacy of girls’ education. Age changed how their participation was understood, valued and contested. Once a girl was seen as older, her movement, public visibility and presence outside the home became more tightly regulated.

Theme 3: Girls’ aspirations pointed beyond the educational pathways available to them

The third major finding is that many girls attached education to meaningful futures, but the pathways available in the camp were too limited to fulfil those aspirations. Girls did not describe education as only a daily routine. They imagined futures as doctors, scientists, pilots and teachers, or as people able to serve their communities through knowledge and skills gained from education. These aspirations were not always detailed plans, but they show that girls linked education with hope, purpose and contribution. At the same time, these valued futures repeatedly encountered the same limit: learning opportunities inside the camp ended too early and lacked the depth, recognition and progression girls associated with meaningful advancement. One participant shared an example of how aspiration was connected to her lived experiences. She said:

“Growing up, I saw my mother struggling with health problems. She did not receive proper treatment for her illness. So, now that I am studying, I want to become a doctor in the future. I want to serve my family and my community because in the camp we do not get proper treatment when we need.” (G3)

Her aspiration extended beyond personal ambition as she wanted to serve a community with limited access to doctors and medical care. In her account, education was connected to care, service and the health-related needs she had witnessed. Other girls expressed similarly future-oriented hopes. G1 also wanted to become a doctor, while G2 connected her interest in science with ambitions to become a scientist or pilot. These aspirations should not be read as claims that the learning centre could directly prepare each girl for every profession she named. Rather, they show what education represented to girls in the camp: continuation, knowledge, contribution and the possibility of a better life beyond camp.

The problem was that the educational options available to girls did not match these valued futures. The clearest example was the Grade 10 ceiling. The girls interviewed for this study explained that educational provision inside the camp did not provide a sufficiently recognised route for continuation:

“I need more learning opportunities, not just until Grade 10, which is our limit because there is no other grade after 10. Learning opportunities outside the camp would also help me a lot, if I want to fulfil my dream, becoming a doctor or a pilot, but there is no way for us to study further, not inside the camp, nor outside.” (G1)

This account shows that the barrier was not a lack of motivation. Girls wanted to continue, but they could already see that the available pathway would end before it could support the futures they imagined. For girls such as G1, the difficulty was not only entering education but knowing where it could realistically lead.

Another girl coded as (G2) raised a related concern from the perspective of science learning. She explained:

“To become a scientist or a pilot, more facilities are needed in the camp. I need facilities like laboratories with sufficient equipment so that I can do practical work along with my studies.” (G2)

This points to a broader limitation in the learning pathway. Girls wanted not only more years of schooling but richer forms of learning, including practical classes, books, libraries, skills and recognised progression. Focus group participants reflected this wider desire for meaningful, future-oriented learning, requesting storybooks, sewing skills, libraries, practical classes and access beyond Grade 10. Educators also described the Grade 10 ceiling, limited certification, and the lack of laboratories and the absence of advanced grades as barriers to retention.

This theme therefore shows a mismatch between girls’ aspirations and the educational pathways available to them. The data do not suggest a lack of desire for education. They show that desire was present, but the route ahead was narrow.

Theme 4: Girls’ learning was shaped by competing expectations of what was worth continuing

The fourth finding is that girls’ participation in education was influenced not only by access barriers but also by competing ideas about the usefulness, social appropriateness and value of different forms of learning. Learning centre education was not the only educational experience in girls’ lives, nor was it always considered the most socially acceptable. Tensions arose among general education, Arabic and Qur’anic study, domestic usefulness, and protection and future aspirations. The question was not simply what girls could learn, but what they were permitted, encouraged or expected to learn as they grew older.

This tension was visible in the accounts of girls who had stopped attending the learning centre. For example, although G5 stopped going to the learning center, she had not stopped learning altogether. Her daily routine had shifted from general education toward madrasa and Arabic study:

“In the morning, I go to madrasa first for Arabic lessons, then I come back home around 11 am. I study Arabic at home until lunch. In the afternoon, I again go to a women’s madrasa to study Arabic.” (G5)

This example is important because withdrawal from general education in the learning centres was not always experienced as complete educational abandonment. In some cases, it was a redirection towards a form of learning that families considered more appropriate for older girls. G5 explained that, after she entered adolescence, her parents prioritized Arabic learning in a madrasa and considered her previous learning centre education sufficient. Another girl, G4, described a similar shift, but with stronger emphasis on family authority:

“My family said that in our Muslim religion, once girls grow up, we do not need to study anymore. I also did not want to continue. The learning centre is far from my house. Also I do not like the subjects being taught in the learning center. I like Arabic lessons. My family also gives importance to Arabic learning.” (G4)

These accounts reveal the layered nature of educational withdrawal. Distance, individual preference, family authority and religious expectations interacted. G4’s account therefore should not be reduced to a simple story of coercion. She expressed a preference for Arabic lessons, but that preference developed within a family context in which formal learning was no longer considered necessary for older girls.

At the same time, this redirection was not emotionally neutral. G5’s account revealed tension between her current pathway and an earlier educational future. As G5 shared:

“Now I want to become a Hafez,⁴ by learning the Holy Quran. But when I was going to the learning centre, before shifting to madrasa, I wanted to become a doctor. Sometimes it makes me feel sad.” (G5)

⁴ Hafez refers to a person who has memorized the Holy Qur’an.

She also reflected that English and Myanmar curriculum learning would have helped her fulfil her dream. This does not mean that her desire for Quranic learning was not genuine. Rather, the shift involved both a valued present pathway and a sense of loss concerning an earlier educational future. G5 valued the pathway available to her while still remembering another future that had become harder to pursue.

The parent interviews sharpened this contest over educational value. For example, one parent coded as (P1) treated Quranic and Arabic learning as the appropriate route for older girls. She said:

“Everyone wants girls to study the Quran, or in other words, Arabic and Islamic studies. In my opinion, we do not need education in other things or general education. Whatever girls achieve before becoming adolescents that is enough for maintaining life and livelihood.” (P1)

However, the second parent I interviewed, coded as (P2) offered a different view. He supported continued general education and linked it to progression and certification:

“I want to support my daughter as long as she gets the opportunity to study, whether that is up to Grade 8, Grade 10, or even Grade 12. We need a certificate for her studies so she can do something.” (P2).

These two interviews with parents do not represent all the parents or caregivers in the camp. However, they show that parental views were not uniform. While P2 valued continued study and formal recognition, P1 saw general education after adolescence as unnecessary. This contrast helps avoid treating families as either simply supportive or simply restrictive. Parents were weighing different concerns, including religion, safety, household need, marriage, certification and future opportunity.

The focus group discussion with adolescent girls also complicated a simple opposition between formal and religious learning. Girls in the group expressed wishes for female teachers, libraries with different books beyond textbooks such as storybooks, practical skills and more learning opportunities beyond

Grade 10. When asked if they had any opinion for further improvement of the educational provision, one girl suggested that Islamic studies or Arabic could be included as a subject alongside what they study now. This suggests that some girls did not necessarily see formal and religious learning as mutually exclusive. For them, the issue was not choosing one form of learning against the other, but whether the learning centre could become more acceptable, relevant and meaningful.

Together, these accounts show that girls negotiated unequal educational options rather than choosing freely among equivalent pathways. Girls' learning was shaped by competing expectations around learning centre based education, Arabic and Qur'anic study, household usefulness, protection, respectability and future aspiration. Girls were not passive, but they were not choosing freely among equal options. Therefore, education was not only interrupted by barriers, but also redirected through changing ideas of what learning was acceptable and worthwhile.

Overall, the four themes show that education for adolescent girls in Camp 8W was layered and conditional rather than shaped by a single barrier. Access depended on permission, care responsibilities and safe movement, while adolescence changed the social acceptability of continued learning. Girls valued education, but participation remained fragile within limited pathways and competing expectations. Families and educators were not simply barriers or providers, but constrained actors negotiating safety, respectability, religion, domestic need and future possibility.

The next chapter moves from findings presentation to interpretation. It discusses these findings in relation to the wider literature on refugee girls' education, the social and institutional conditions of learning in protracted displacement, and how the Capability Approach is guiding this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter returns to the main research question, which asks how do adolescent Rohingya refugee girls experience and negotiate barriers to accessing education in a camp in Bangladesh. It also responds to the sub-questions by discussing the barriers and enablers girls described, how they made sense of education and future aspirations, and how caregivers and educators understood these challenges. The findings show that educational access in Camp 8W is not guaranteed by the presence of learning centres alone. Access is shaped by household permission, care responsibilities, safe movement, age-related expectations, limited progression and competing ideas about valuable learning.

The Capability Approach helps interpret these findings because it shifts attention from educational provision to real educational opportunity. In Sen's terms, the question is not only whether a service exists, but whether people have the substantive freedom to pursue lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Nussbaum adds a more explicitly normative concern with what each person is actually able to do and to be, and with the conditions required for dignity and combined capability (Nussbaum, 2011). This chapter therefore discusses what the findings reveal about the conditions that allow, restrict or redirect girls' educational capabilities in the camp context.

5.1 From access to capability: daily fragility, permission and safe movement

The first contribution of the findings is that they make visible the gap between educational access as provision and educational access as lived opportunity. The learning centres existed in the camp, and several girls in this study were also attending them. However, attendance was not assured or fully within girls' control. It depended on permission at home, care responsibilities, route safety and escort arrangements. This supports a central point of the Capability Approach that resources alone do not show what people are actually able to do and be (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). A learning centre may be physically present, but its existence does not create the capability to attend, learn and continue.

This is important because refugee education is often discussed through access indicators such as enrolment, attendance, number of learning centres or number of children reached. These measures are

useful, but they can hide the daily fragility of access. In this study, permission was not a one-time decision. It could change when a mother became ill, when younger siblings or elderly members of the family needed care, when cooking or ration related responsibilities took priority, or when the girls' volunteer did not arrive. These interruptions were not outside girls' education. They were part of how education was organised in daily life.

The concept of conversion factors helps interpret this pattern. Household permission, care work and safe movement shaped whether the resource of a learning centre could become a real educational opportunity. Escort support from the accompanying sister or girls' volunteer was especially important. Her role was not only to make the journey safer. Her presence helped families see attendance as acceptable. Without her, the same route could become risky in the eyes of parents, brothers or other family members.

The findings are consistent with specific studies from Cox's Bazar showing that adolescents' education is shaped by domestic responsibilities and limited learning opportunities (Guglielmi et al., 2020b), while girls' mobility is also affected by safety concerns and reputational risks (Guglielmi et al., 2020a). However, this study adds a more local account of how these pressures combine in everyday attendance. Household need, permission and safe movement did not appear as separate barriers. They often operated at the same time. A girl could value learning, have a learning centre nearby and still miss lessons because the conditions for using that opportunity did not hold together on a particular day.

Nussbaum's idea of adaptive preferences also helps interpret the way some girls described these interruptions as ordinary family responsibilities rather than as explicit unfairness (Nussbaum, 2000). This does not mean their accounts should be doubted. Rather, it suggests that repeated restrictions can become normal within everyday life. The point is not that girls lacked educational desire, but that their opportunities were shaped by expectations about care, family authority and household need.

Educational access, then, was not simply delivered by humanitarian provision. It was made possible, or interrupted, through the relationship between the learning centre, the household, the route and the social meanings attached to girls' movement. This is why access must be understood as a capability issue, not only as a service-delivery issue.

5.2 The gendered meanings of adolescence as a conversion condition

The second analytical argument is that the gendered meanings attached to later adolescence operate as a temporal conversion condition. Age itself did not restrict education; rather, girls' growing visibility, perceived marriageability and expected future roles changed how families and communities judged their movement and learning. A resource acceptable to a younger girl could therefore become harder to use as she grew older. This temporal change in social legitimacy is more precise than treating adolescence itself as a fixed conversion factor.

This finding can be linked alongside Guglielmi et al.'s (2020a) discussion of age and gender based risks in Cox's Bazar, where adolescent girls' movement is shaped by concerns about safety, harassment, reputational harm and appropriate public visibility. The contribution of this study is to show how these concerns entered everyday educational decisions in Camp 8W. Community comments did not remain outside the household. They travelled back into family decision making and shaped whether parents or elder brothers allowed girls to continue attending the learning centre.

In capability terms, these social meanings affected the conversion of educational provision into real opportunity. Pressure to stop, marry, remain at home or shift towards Arabic or Qur'anic learning was therefore not external to access; it altered whether a formally available learning centre could be used. Girls' public movement, safety, reputation and perceived marriageability became part of how educational opportunity was judged.

Marriage pressure was the sharpest expression of this threshold. Melnikas et al. (2020) show that child marriage among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh is shaped by insecurity, poverty, social norms and displacement related vulnerability. In this study, marriage pressure also appeared as an educational issue. It shaped how long girls were expected to continue learning, what kind of learning was considered suitable, and when families felt that education should give way to marriage or stricter seclusion. Adolescence therefore created a narrowing window in which continued learning had to remain socially acceptable as well as practically possible.

This finding also helps explain why older adolescent girls require more than general access to learning centres. If education programmes do not respond to the changing social conditions girls face after puberty, they may remain formally available but practically difficult to use. Adolescent sensitive education therefore requires more than age-appropriate curriculum. It requires safe mobility arrangements, caregiver engagement, female staff, flexible timing and pathways that make continued learning both meaningful for girls and socially defensible for families.

5.3 Aspirations, limited progression and weak recognition

The third analytical argument concerns the mismatch between girls' aspirations and the educational pathways available to them. The findings challenge any assumption that Rohingya girls' educational exclusion is mainly caused by low motivation or weak interest in learning. Girls in this study expressed hopes of becoming teachers, scientists, pilots and doctors who could serve their community. They also asked for books, libraries, English learning, practical skills, laboratories and opportunities beyond Grade 10. These aspirations were not detached from their lives. They were often connected to illness in the family, limited access to services and the desire to help others. Guglielmi et al. (2020b) similarly show that disrupted education can narrow adolescents' aspirations while leaving a continued desire for learning. This point connects especially with Sen's emphasis on the lives people have reason to value, while Nussbaum's distinction between internal and combined capabilities helps show why aspiration alone is not enough (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Girls may have interest, confidence and future hopes, but these only become real opportunities when the surrounding conditions allow them to continue learning. The Grade 10 ceiling was one of the clearest limits. Girls and educators recognized that continuing beyond the available grades was difficult within the camp. Frontline educators also pointed to limited certification, weak recognition, and lack of laboratories, few practical learning opportunities and the absence of advanced pathways.

This finding relates to critiques of Rohingya education provision that highlight constraints around infrastructure, language, recognition and uncertain progression (Shohel, 2022; Shohel et al., 2023). It also connects to Hossain's (2023) argument that Rohingya children's educational exclusion is shaped by policy and legal restrictions, not only programme capacity. Prodip's (2023) question, "Education for what?" is especially relevant here. In this study, that question was not only a policy debate. It appeared in girls' and families' everyday decisions about whether continued learning was worth defending.

The issue is not that a learning centre should directly prepare each girl for every profession she names. It would be unrealistic to expect one camp-based programme to produce direct pathways into every career. The concern is more basic. If education stops early, lacks recognition and/or certification and offers few links to further learning or skills, then it becomes harder for girls and families to see where it can lead. For adolescent girls already facing pressure to marry, stay home or shift toward religious learning, weak progression makes formal education more difficult to justify.

The findings therefore point to limited progression and weak recognition rather than simply a lack of aspiration. Girls could imagine futures that required continued learning, but the available pathway did not give them a credible route forward. This also carried an emotional cost, visible in regret and sadness when earlier ambitions no longer seemed reachable. From a capability perspective, this matters because blocked aspiration is not only disappointment. It shows a gap between what girls value and what the education system enables them to pursue.

5.4 Educational value and competing ideas of worthwhile learning

The fourth analytical argument is that girls' educational participation was shaped by competing understandings of what counts as valuable learning. The findings show that learning centre based general education⁵, Arabic and Quranic learning, household usefulness, protection, respectability and future-oriented schooling did not sit neatly together. Girls, caregivers and educators often valued education, but they did not always value the same kind of education in the same way.

This finding avoids a simple binary between education and barriers. Some girls who moved away from learning centre education did not stop learning altogether. They shifted toward Arabic or madrasa-based learning, often because this was seen by families as more appropriate for older girls. This complicates a narrow access-based reading of dropout. Withdrawal from a learning centre may mean exclusion from one educational pathway, but it may also involve movement into another pathway that carries stronger moral or social legitimacy within the household.

At the same time, this redirection should not be romanticized as free choice. In one girl's (G5) account, Quranic learning had become meaningful, but she also remembered wanting to become a doctor and felt sadness about losing English and Myanmar curriculum learning. This tension matters. It shows that a girl may come to value the pathway now open to her while still carrying the memory of another future that has become harder to pursue.

Sen's open version of the Capability Approach is useful here because it avoids imposing one single model of valuable education. It asks whether people have the freedom to pursue lives they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). Nussbaum's more normative account is also useful because it reminds us that choice must be assessed in relation to the conditions that make real freedom possible (Nussbaum, 2011). From this point of view, Arabic or Quranic learning should not be treated as inherently less

⁵ General education means that the learning center offers education across subjects like mathematics, science, English etc.

valuable than formal learning. For some girls and families, it may support identity, dignity, moral development and family acceptance. The key question is whether it expands girls' real options or becomes the only acceptable substitute once formal learning is restricted.

Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) discussion of adaptive preferences helps interpret this tension. Preferences can be shaped by unequal or restrictive conditions. This does not mean girls' stated values should be dismissed. Rather, it means that acceptance of a limited pathway should be read alongside the conditions under which that pathway becomes acceptable. A decision to leave learning centre education for religious learning may involve preference, adaptation and family pressure in tandem.

This has practical significance for education programming. Treating formal and religious learning as oppositional may miss what girls and families are negotiating. Some girls valued learning centre education while also wanting Islamic or Arabic learning to be included. This suggests that acceptability matters. However, inclusion of Arabic or Islamic studies should complement broader learning, not replace it. It should not make girls' access to literacy, languages, science, practical skills or recognised progression conditional on formal education being justified only through religious legitimacy.

A gender responsive education response therefore needs to hold two commitments together. It should understand the social boundaries in which families make decisions, including concerns around religion, respectability and safety. But understanding those concerns does not mean accepting the removal of girls from meaningful education as neutral. The aim should be to expand their real options, so that religious learning, formal study and future-oriented pathways do not compete with one another.

5.5 Contributions to the research questions and the Capability Approach

The main research question asks how adolescent Rohingya girls experience and negotiate barriers to accessing education in a refugee camp in Bangladesh. The study answers this by showing that access is not secured by learning centres alone. For the girls in this study, it was conditional on household permission, care responsibilities, safe movement, age related expectations, family judgement, limited progression and competing ideas about valuable learning. This shifts the analysis from whether education is available to the conditions under which it becomes usable and socially acceptable.

In relation to the first sub-question, girls and caregivers did not experience barriers and enablers as separate issues. They were weighed together in everyday household decisions: permission alongside care work, safety alongside reputation, and age alongside marriage pressure and religious expectations.

Enablers such as escort support, parental encouragement, female teachers, flexible arrangements and acceptable learning content mattered because they helped make attendance possible and defensible. They helped convert a learning centre into an opportunity girls could use.

In relation to the second sub-question, girls responded to barriers through aspiration, adaptation and limited room for maneuver. Some continued attending while family permission and safe movement held together. Others held onto professional or community-oriented aspirations despite weak pathways, or shifted toward Arabic learning when formal study became less acceptable or viable. These responses should not be overstated as free agency. The evidence shows girls making sense of education within a narrow capability set shaped by family authority, community pressure and limited progression.

In relation to the third sub-question, frontline education staff recognised many of these pressures and responded through community engagement, family counselling, attendance follow-up and support for escorted movement. However, their room to act was limited by wider humanitarian and policy constraints, including funding uncertainty, limits to certification and the absence of stronger post-primary pathways. Educators were therefore important but constrained supporters.

The study makes two broader contributions. Empirically, it adds a focused account of girls aged 16-18 in Camp 8W, particularly the contrast between fragile continuation and redirection into Arabic or Qur'anic learning. Conceptually, it shows that conversion factors are not a static inventory external to the learner. Here, the gendered meanings of later adolescence changed the convertibility of an existing resource: stronger surveillance and marriage expectations affected household permission, while weak recognition and progression reduced the value families attached to continued attendance. Social legitimacy therefore mediated whether provision became educational capability.

This process was temporal because access conditions changed as girls grew older; relational because opportunities were negotiated through caregivers, siblings, escorts, educators and community judgement; and affective because narrowing opportunities carried fear, sadness and lost imagined futures.

In retrospect, the Capability Approach distinguished learning provision from the substantive freedom to use it and allowed aspiration to be analysed alongside real opportunity. It was less effective on its own in explaining how state policy, humanitarian governance and unequal power relations produced those conditions (Dean, 2009; Prodip, 2023; Stewart, 2005). Its emphasis on individual opportunity therefore required a relational reading. Drawing on Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) account of adaptive preferences also required caution: applying the concept too readily could treat religious learning as inauthentic

when girls sometimes valued it. The framework was therefore a sensitizing, not exhaustive, explanation; rights-based and political perspectives remain necessary complements for locating institutional responsibility.

5.6 Implications and summary

The findings suggest several grounded implications for education actors working in Cox's Bazar and similar protracted displacement settings. Education programmes for older adolescent girls should not be designed around provision alone. They need to address the conditions that allow girls to turn existing learning spaces into real educational opportunities.

First, safe mobility should be treated as part of educational access, not as a separate protection issue. Harassment, distance, terrain, fear and public visibility shaped whether girls could attend learning centres. Escort support made attendance safer and more acceptable to families. Education and protection actors should therefore work with caregivers and community volunteers to make movement to learning spaces predictable, trusted and safe.

Second, caregiver and community engagement is essential. Since household permission was a major condition of attendance, programmes cannot focus only on learners. Mothers, fathers, elder brothers and relevant community actors need clear information about safety arrangements, learning content and the value of continued education. Engagement should avoid blaming families, while still beginning from their concerns around safety, reputation, religion, domestic labour and uncertainty.

Third, education provision for adolescent girls needs more credible pathways. This does not mean learning centres must directly prepare each girl for a specific profession. Rather, girls and families need to see that education has a route forward. Practical steps could include recognised documentation of learning, clearer progression beyond Grade 10 where possible, stronger links to skills or further learning, practical science exposure, libraries, language support and information about what different pathways can realistically lead to.

Fourth, adolescent-sensitive programming must recognise that puberty and later adolescence change the social terms of participation. Girls aged 16-18 do not face the same conditions as younger children. Female staff, safe spaces, flexible timing and caregiver reassurance can help make continued learning more defensible for families and more meaningful for girls.

Finally, religious and formal learning should not be treated as simple opposites. Arabic or Islamic studies may improve acceptability for some girls and families, but they should complement, not

replace, broader learning. Programme acceptability should not be achieved by narrowing girls' education only to what is already socially comfortable. The aim should be to expand girls' real options.

Overall, this chapter has argued that adolescent Rohingya girls' educational access is best understood as a capability question. Education is not only whether provision is present, but whether girls can convert provision into safe, meaningful, socially legitimate and future oriented learning (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation examined how adolescent Rohingya refugee girls (aged 16-18) experience and negotiate barriers to accessing education in a refugee camp in Ukhiya, Bangladesh. The study began from a central concern: the physical existence of learning centres does not, by itself, guarantee girls' educational participation. For girls, access remains uncertain because learning is shaped by household responsibilities, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, marriage pressure, community judgement and uncertainty about future pathways. Drawing on interviews with adolescent girls, caregivers and frontline education staff, alongside one focus group discussion, observation notes and field memos, the study explored not only what barriers girls face, but how they understand and respond to these barriers in everyday life.

6.1 Summary of key findings

The study found that educational access for adolescent Rohingya girls is conditional rather than secure. Participation depends on household permission, temporary release from care responsibilities, safe movement through camp space and support such as accompanying sisters or girls' volunteers. These conditions determine whether educational provision becomes a real opportunity or remains only formally available.

A second finding is that adolescence reshapes the social legitimacy of girls' education. As girls grow older, especially after puberty, their movement, visibility, reputation and marriageability come under closer scrutiny. Education must then compete with concerns about modesty, safety, family honour, marriage prospects and religious expectations. Adolescence therefore operates not only as an age category, but as a social threshold that narrows the terms on which continued learning remains acceptable.

Third, girls' aspirations pointed beyond the educational pathways available to them. Participants expressed wishes of wanting to become doctors, teachers, scientists, pilots and people who could serve their communities. Yet these aspirations were constrained by limited progression beyond Grade 10,

weak certification, limited practical learning and the absence of clearer future routes. This shows that the problem is not a lack of ambition or motivation among girls. Rather, the available pathway often fails to sustain the value girls attach to education.

Finally, girls' education was shaped by competing expectations of what learning was worth continuing. Learning centre based general education, Arabic and Quranic learning, household usefulness, protection, respectability and future oriented schooling carried different meanings for girls, caregivers and educators. This complicates simple narratives of dropout, resistance or parental opposition. Girls were not passive, but neither were they choosing freely among equal options. Their responses involved aspiration, adaptation and limited room for manoeuvre within unequal conditions.

6.2 Contribution of the study

The main contribution of this study is to show that educational access for adolescent Rohingya girls aged 16-18 is a capability question, not merely a matter of service availability. Learning centres become meaningful opportunities only when girls can convert provision into safe attendance, socially acceptable participation, meaningful learning, recognised progression and future-bearing possibilities (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999).

Empirically, the study foregrounds a group often hidden within broader categories such as children, youth or refugee learners. Reading girls' narratives alongside caregiver and educator perspectives shows that educational possibilities are produced relationally through household decisions, community expectations, programme responses and wider policy restrictions. Conceptually, the study shows that capability conversion is not static: the gendered meanings attached to later adolescence alter the social legitimacy and practical usability of learning, while weak progression reinforces household doubts about its value. Educational capability is therefore temporally changing, relationally negotiated and affectively experienced.

Practically, the study suggests that safe mobility, caregiver engagement, female staff, flexible arrangements, credible pathways and culturally meaningful learning content are key to continued education. Credible pathways mean recognised progression, clearer routes beyond Grade 10 where possible, practical learning, language support, certification and stronger links to future opportunities. Religious learning should complement rather than replace broader learning and recognised progression.

6.3 Limitations and further research

The study was conducted in one camp only, with a small purposive sample, and cannot be statistically generalised to all Rohingya girls in Cox's Bazar. Access was facilitated through an NGO gatekeeper, which may have made it harder to reach girls who are more isolated or disconnected from education services. The research was cross-sectional, capturing experiences at one moment rather than following girls over time. Language and translation involved interpretive choices, particularly when moving from Rohingya-influenced speech and Chittagonian Bangla into English. Despite efforts to remain attentively reflexive, my own positionality as a Bangladeshi male researcher with prior humanitarian experience also shaped the research process. In addition, the literature related to adolescents, especially on older adolescent Rohingya girls' educational experiences remains limited, which meant that the study had to read Rohingya specific research alongside broader refugee education, gender, adolescence and capability scholarship.

Future research could use longitudinal methods to examine how girls' educational capabilities change as they move through adolescence, marriage, family responsibilities or transitions into adulthood. Comparative studies across camps could explore how different programme models, parents/caregivers engagement strategies, female teacher availability or safe mobility arrangements affect girls' participation. Further research should also examine how Arabic, Islamic and formal learning can be brought into more constructive dialogue without narrowing girls' right to broader educational futures.

Despite these limitations, the main message of this dissertation is that provision alone cannot guarantee education for refugee girls. Access for adolescent Rohingya girls in Camp 8W is shaped through everyday negotiations over permission, safety, community judgement, age, respectability, educational value and aspiration. A learning centre may physically exist, but does not guarantee meaningful learning. Therefore, education in emergencies should not be assessed only by service delivery, but by whether girls can safely and meaningfully claim education as part of a future they value.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval

A. Ethics approval Letter



05/11/2025

Dear Masum Billah

School of Education Research Ethics Committee

Project Title: Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Adolescent Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Application No: 402250005

The School of Education Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your application and has agreed that there is no objection on ethical grounds to the proposed study. It is happy therefore to approve the project, subject to the following conditions:

- Start date of ethical approval: 05-11-2025
- Project end date: 25-09-2026
- Any outstanding permissions needed from third parties in order to recruit research participants or to access facilities or venues for research purposes must be obtained in writing and submitted to the School of Education Research Ethics Administrator before research commences. Permissions you must provide are shown in the reviewer feedback form, titled *Notification of Ethics Application Outcome*, that has been sent to you.
- Data collected should be held securely for the period you indicated in the application and any personal data collected should be appropriately managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation.
- The research should be carried out only on the sites, and/or with the groups and using the methods defined in the application.
- Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted for reassessment as an amendment to the original application. The *Request for Amendments to an Approved Application* form should be used, which can be found in the 'Download Templates' section of the [Research Ethics System](#). Provided on behalf of: School of Education Research Ethics Committee. The University of Glasgow, Education-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk

B. Camp access approval from Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC)

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner
Cox's Bazar
www.rrrc.gov.bd

No: 51.04.2200.009.16.14.25-4556

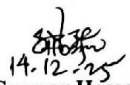
Date: 14 December 2025

Sub: Permission to enter FDMN camps.

Ref: Your letter dated 9 November 2025.

In response to the above-mentioned subject and letter, this office is pleased to grant you permission to enter FDMN Camps-3, 4, 5, 8W, 9 and 13 in Cox's Bazar to conduct research project titled: "Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Education Access for Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh". This permission shall remain valid from 20 December 2025 to 31 January 2026 subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. You are requested to inform and coordinate with the concerned CiCs (Camp in-Charges) before commencing the activities;
2. You must follow the applicable Govt. Policy, Rules and Laws;
3. You are not allowed to enter the camps during the government holidays;
4. You must leave the camps before 3.30 pm;
5. The content/report must be submitted to RRRC Office as well as to CiC Office, before publishing;
6. No statements or Comments that undermine the interests of the government, Local communities or the Rohingya may be included in the report;
7. This office may revoke this permission anytime without any prior notice;


14.12.25
Md. Sanwar Hossain
(Senior Assistant Secretary)
Email: contact@rrrc.gov.bd

Md. Masum Billah
MA Candidate, Erasmus Mundus GLOBED
University of Glasgow,
United Kingdom
Copy for Information and necessary action:

1. Additional Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner, Cox's Bazar;
2. Camp-in-Charge, Camps- 3, 4, 5, 8W, 9 and 13 in Cox's Bazar;
3. PS to RRRC (For kind information of RRRC);
4. Assistant Programmer (For publishing in website);
5. Office Copy.

Note. RRRC approval covered several camps as a contingency for possible access disruptions. Following consultation with the supervisor of this study and coordination with gatekeeper organization, BRAC, data collection was conducted only in Camp 8W.

C. Collaboration with gatekeeper organization BRAC

13 January 2026

Education Manager,
BRAC HCMP, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Ref: Request for BRAC's support for University of Glasgow MA thesis fieldwork in Rohingya camps.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Md. Masum Billah, and I am currently pursuing the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's (GLOBED) and undertaking my MA thesis under the University of Glasgow, School of Education, supervised by Dr. Jack Lee. I am writing to formally inform you about my planned fieldwork in the Rohingya camps and to request BRAC's support in a limited, light-touch role.

My study is a qualitative MA thesis examining how adolescent Rohingya girls (aged 16-18) experience and navigate barriers and enabling factors to access and continue education in the camp context, incorporating perspectives from caregivers and frontline education providers. The purpose is academic: this is not a programme evaluation, donor reporting exercise, or staff performance review. I have secured formal permission from the RRRC to conduct camp-based fieldwork, and the University of Glasgow ethics committee has approved the study. Participation will be fully voluntary, with informed consent/assent procedures, strict confidentiality, and do-no-harm safeguards.

I would be grateful for BRAC's collaboration in a minimal way, primarily to support with access and safe navigation without requesting significant logistics or resources. Specifically, I kindly request:

1. Nomination of one BRAC focal person to coordinate access and advise safe & appropriate procedures;
2. Support to disseminate a neutral study invitation and eligibility information through appropriate BRAC education channels, so interested participants can opt in without any pressure;
3. Where feasible, accompaniment by a BRAC volunteer/focal person on selected days to help navigate;
4. 1-2 short interviews (30-45 minutes) with BRAC frontline education providers (e.g., facilitators/teachers/supervisors), scheduled at BRAC's convenience to avoid disruption to program.

Please note that the study does not provide financial assistance to participants. A small snacks pack will be offered only as a courtesy gesture, clearly communicated as non-conditional and non-coercive.

In return, and subject to BRAC's preference, I would be pleased to acknowledge BRAC HCMP as the gatekeeper organisation that supported ethical access in my final dissertation. If useful, I can also share a brief summary of key findings after thesis submission, focusing on practical insights.

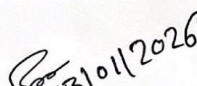
I would be grateful for an opportunity to meet at your convenience to brief you and share the study pack (RRRC permission, ethics approval confirmation, participant information sheet/consent forms, eligibility criteria, and interview guides). Thank you very much for considering this request

Sincerely,

Md. Masum Billah

MA Candidate (GLOBED) | University of Glasgow, School of Education

Email: 3073932B@student.gla.ac.uk | Cell: +8801684404558


Md. Kamal Hossen
Project Manager
BRAC-HCMP-Cox's Bazar.

Note. This letter explains the collaboration with BRAC HCMP as a gatekeeper support for field access, safe navigation and coordination. Although the request referred broadly to Rohingya camps, data collection was conducted only in Camp 8W. BRAC's role was facilitative only; the study remained independent of the researcher.

Appendix 2: Fieldwork Documents and Data Collection Tools

A. Plain Language Invitation for Young Participants



Invitation to take part in a project

My name is Md Masum Billah and I am a researcher at the University of Glasgow. This will help me to find out the barriers refugee girls face in the camps and what can be done for better opportunities. Also, this study will help me write my dissertation which will be shared as a summary with you and the relevant stakeholders that may help NGOs working in the camps to understand girls' education need better.

I would like to hear what you think about your experiences of going to school or learning in the camps.



I would like to meet you to have a chat about this.



We can meet at a learning center in your camp supported by BRAC.



I would like to record our chat so I can remember what we all said.



You do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to.



Online Interview Protocol (if needed due to access issues):

If we meet online, interviews will still be conducted from a private room at the learning centre. At the start, we'll do a brief privacy check to ensure headphones are on, the door is closed, and no one else is present. You will also receive contact details for a female safeguarding focal point, available to speak with during or after the interview if you wish. You may stop at any time.



If you would like to talk to me about this project you can call or text me on +8801684404558.



Or email me at 3073932b@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you.

End _____

B. Consent Form



Consent Form

Project Title: Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Adolescent Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Researcher: Md Masum Billah, (School of Education, University of Glasgow), Email: 3073932B@glasgow.ac.uk,

Course: MA in Education Policies for Global Development- GLOBED

Supervisor: Dr. Jack Lee, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Glasgow, Email: Jack.Lee@glasgow.ac.uk

Please tick as appropriate

Yes ☐ No ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I consent to interviews being audio-recorded

Yes ☐ No ☐ I understand this is a group discussion and others will hear what I say. I will not use names, and I will not share what others say outside the group.

I agree that:

Yes ☐ No ☐ All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymized.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage always.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Yes ☐ No ☐ The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other authenticated researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Yes ☐ No ☐ Other authenticated researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs, if agreed to preserve the confidentiality of information.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this study project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐ I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant:

Signature:

Date:

Name of Researcher: Md Masum Billah

Signature:

Date:

C. Guardian Consent



Guardian Consent Form (For Girls Aged 16-18)

Study: Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Adolescent Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Researcher: Md Masum Billah, MA (GLOBED), School of Education, University of Glasgow

Participant ID:

Age:

Date:

Parents/guardian name:

Relationship to the participant: Mother/Father/Older Sister/Brother/Other

Please read and tick each statement

- ☐ I read/expained to me the Participant Information Sheet & the Privacy Notice for this study.
- ☐ I understand that participation is voluntary and my child can stop at any time without any negative consequences.
- ☐ I understand the interview will take about 30-45 minutes (or an FGD about 60-75 minutes).
- ☐ I understand the researcher will not use my child's name in notes or the final report.
- ☐ I understand that if there is a serious and immediate safety risk, the researcher may seek help to protect my child.
- ☐ I understand my child will receive a small snacks pack (approximately BDT 200) as a courtesy for her time. There is no other payment or benefit.

Audio recording (tick one)

- ☐ I give permission for the session to be audio recorded.
- ☐ I do NOT give permission for audio recording (notes will be taken instead).

Use of anonymised quotes (tick one)

- ☐ I agree that anonymised quotes from my child may be used in the thesis/report.
- ☐ I do NOT agree to use of quotes (information will be summarised without quotes).

Signatures

Guardian signature:

Date:

Researcher signature: Md Masum Billah

Date:

D. Participants information sheet



Participant Information Sheet (Parents/Guardians)

Title of project: Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Adolescent Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Researcher: Md Masum Billah, (School of Education, University of Glasgow), Email: 3073932B@glasgow.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Jack Lee, Senior Lecturer, School of Education, University of Glasgow, Email: Jack.Lee@glasgow.ac.uk

Course: MA in Education Policies for Global Development- GLOBED

Your child is being invited to take part in a research project into about the educational experiences of adolescent Rohingya refugee girls in Ukhiya, Bangladesh.

Before you decide if you want your child to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the information on this page carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish your child to take part.

I hope that this sheet will answer any questions you have about the study.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

This research is being done as part of my Master's dissertation at the University of Glasgow. The aim is to understand the educational experiences of adolescent Rohingya refugee girls living in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, including the challenges they face and the supports that help them continue learning.

2. Why has my child been chosen?

Your child has been invited because she is a Rohingya adolescent girl aged 16-18 living in Ukhiya camp. Her voice is important in helping us understand barriers and opportunities in education.

3. Does my child have to take part?

Your child does not have to take part in this study. If you decide that they should not take part, or if your child does not want to take part, they will still receive the same support and services from the NGOs in the camp exactly the same as just now and will take part in their usual daily activities or learning sessions. If, after your child has started to take part, you or they change your mind, just let me know and I will not use any information they have given me in my writing.

4. What will happen to my child if they take part?

If you agree, your child may be invited to a short interview or focus group discussion (60 minutes maximum). These will take place in a safe (learning center) agreed with you and facilitated with the support of NGO staff. The room/venue will be arranged by one of the operating NGOs for example, BRAC at your camp site. She will be asked about her experiences of education, what helps, and what makes it difficult. A female safeguarding adult will be nearby (in sight but out of earshot).

If we need to conduct the interview online due to access issues, we will ask your child to sit in a private place (headphones; door closed; no one else is present including parents). Your child will receive the contact of a female safeguarding focal should your child want to speak to her during or after the interview.

I will be finished gathering data by January/February 2026.

5. Will the information that my child gives you in this study be kept confidential?

Yes. What your child says will be kept confidential and her name will not be used in any report.

We will meet in a private room so that others cannot hear the interview. We will not share names or identifying details in notes or reports. If a group session is held, we will ask everyone to keep the discussion private, though confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a group. We will reduce the risks by not using names, keeping the group small, and having a female safeguarding adult nearby (not listening).

However, if your child tells me something that suggests she or another person is at serious risk of harm, I may need to share this with an appropriate support service to help keep her safe.

6. What will happen to the results of this study

I will analyse the data I collect from the children and present this in the dissertation which I am writing for my qualification, MA in GLOBED. I will destroy the data at the end of the project.

7. Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been reviewed and agreed by the School of Education Ethics Forum, University of Glasgow, Scotland.

8. Who can I contact for further Information?

If you have questions, please contact me: 3073932b@glasgow.ac.uk.

You can also contact my supervisor: Jack.Lee@glasgow.ac.uk.

Or the School of Education Research Ethics Committee education-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk.

If your child feels upset by any questions, support is available from NGO partners (BRAC, NRC, CODEC, UNWFP in Cox's Bazar).

Thank you for reading this.

End _____

E. Privacy Notice



PRIVACY NOTICE

Privacy notice for participation in research project: *Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.*

Your Personal Data

The University of Glasgow will be what's known as the 'Data Controller' of your personal data processed in relation to your participation in the research project "*Navigating Education in Crisis: Barriers and Enablers of Educational Access for Adolescent Rohingya Refugee Girls in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.*" This privacy notice will explain how The University of Glasgow will process your personal data.

Why we need it

We are collecting basic personal data such as your name and contact details in order to conduct our research. We need your name and contact details to arrange interviews, focus group discussion, confirm eligibility, and follow up if needed. This personal information will be kept separate from your interview or focus group responses. Your research responses will be de-identified and coded (e.g., GIRL01), with the key stored securely and separately.

Please note: confidentiality will be protected wherever possible, but it may not be guaranteed due to the small size of the participant group or the camp setting.

Please see accompanying Participant Information Sheet,

Legal basis for processing your data

We must have a legal basis for processing all personal data. As this processing is for Academic Research we will be relying upon Task in the Public Interest in order to process the basic personal data that you provide. For any special categories data collected we will be processing this on the basis that it is necessary for archiving purposes, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes

Alongside this, in order to fulfil our ethical obligations, we will ask for your consent to take part in the study. Please see accompanying Consent Form.

What we do with it and who we share it with

All the personal data you submit is processed by the researcher (student) and the supervisor at the University of Glasgow in the United Kingdom. In addition, security measures are in place to ensure that your personal data remains safe as the data will be securely stored using password protection, encryption, and pseudonymisation. Audio recordings will be transcribed and then deleted. Signed consent forms will be stored in a locked cabinet separate from research data.

Please consult the Consent form and Participant Information Sheet which accompanies this notice.

We will not share your personal data with anyone outside the project team. Research data will be reported only in anonymised form.

If you would like a copy of the study findings or any future publications, you may request this from the researcher.

What are your rights?

You have the right to request access to the information we hold about you, to ask for corrections, and in some cases to request deletion or restriction of processing. You also have the right to object to processing. However, as the data is collected for research, some rights may be limited by research exemptions under GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, please submit your request via the [webform](#) or contact dp@gla.ac.uk

Complaints

If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been handled, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at: **dataprotectionofficer@glasgow.ac.uk**.

If you remain dissatisfied, you can lodge a complaint with the UK Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, University of Glasgow.

How long do we keep it for?

We keep personal data only as long as needed for this project. After that, personal data will be securely deleted.

All personal data, audio, and transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the project. Specific details in relation to research data storage are provided on the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form which accompany this notice.

End of Privacy Notice _____

F. Interview Guide for Learners



Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Adolescent Girls 16-18)

Session type	Individual interview	Date	
Participant ID		Start time	
Location type	☐ Learning centre ☐ NGO office ☐ Other:		

Consent obtained	Audio recording	Interpreter/Safeguarding
☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	Interpreter used: ☐ Yes ☐ No Safeguarding adult (in sight, out of earshot): ☐ Yes ☐ No

Purpose: To explore the lived experiences of adolescent Rohingya refugee girls (16-18), and the perspectives of caregivers, educators, and NGO staff regarding barriers and enablers to girls' education in Rohingya refugee camps in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar.

Format: Each interview will take 30-45 minutes in a safe, private place, with a female interpreter if needed. We will begin with consent/assent, confirm confidentiality, and remind participants they can skip questions or stop anytime.

Introductory Questions:

- Can you tell me a little about yourself (e.g., age, who you live with)?
- Can you tell me how do you usually spend your day?

Themes & Prompts:

1. Educational Background

- Are you currently going to any learning center (LC)?
- Can you tell me about the last time you went to school or a learning centre? What happened from morning to the end of the day?

2. Daily Life & Study Routines

- On a normal day, when do you get time for learning at home?
- When and where do you usually study or read?
- Who helps you with learning at home?

3. Barriers to Education

- What makes it difficult for you to go regularly or to continue learning?
- Think about the last time you missed a session (or couldn't go). What happened that day?
- In your home, who decides if you can go? What are common reasons they say yes? What are common reasons they say no?
- Girls face different difficulties. Which are most true for you: household responsibilities, permission at home, timing of the centre, health, worries about moving around, or something else?
- Some girls worry about moving around the camp to attend learning. What kinds of worries do girls talk about?
- Are there any community expectations for girls your age that make learning harder?

4. Support & Enablers

- Who encourages or helps you with your studies (family, teachers, friends, NGOs)?
- What makes it easier for you to continue learning?
- What subjects or activities did you enjoy most?
- Can you share an example of a time when someone supported you with your education?
- What one change would make it easier for you to continue learning?"

5. Aspirations & Future

- What would you like to do in the future?
- How do you think education could help you reach your goals?
- What is one dream you have for yourself?

Closing:

- Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences with school or learning?
- Thank the participant for their time.

G. Interview Guide for Educators/Teachers



Semi-Structured Interview Guide (Educators)

Session type	Individual interview	Date	
Participant ID			
Location type	☐ Learning centre ☐ NGO office ☐ Other:		

Consent obtained	Audio recording	Interpreter / Safeguarding
☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Yes ☐ No	Interpreter used: ☐ Yes ☐ No Safeguarding adult (in sight, out of earshot): ☐ Yes ☐ No

Themes & Prompts:

1. Current Opportunities

- What opportunities currently exist for adolescent girls' learning in the camps?
- What has changed recently (access, content, attendance, staffing)? How have these changed in recent years?

2. Barriers Observed

- What are the main barriers you see affecting girls' attendance and retention?
- What usually triggers dropout or irregular attendance, what happens first?
- Which barriers are hardest because they are outside education actors' control?
- Which barriers are programme-related (timing, space, staffing, materials) vs household/community-related?"

3. Policy & Curriculum

- How does the curriculum/content offered affect girls' interest and attendance?
- How do policies (e.g., the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot) affect adolescent girls?
- Are there gaps in provision (e.g., for older girls, life-skills training)?

4. Support Mechanisms

- What approaches have worked best to improve attendance for older girls?
- "What role does female staffing, safe learning spaces, and community engagement play?

5. Recommendations

- If you could suggest three changes to improve girls' education in the camps, what would they be?
- What role should NGOs, government, and international agencies play?

End

H. Fragment of an adolescent Rohingya refugee girl's interview transcript

Context note: This interview was conducted with a 17 year old Rohingya adolescent girl currently studying at Level 8 in a learning centre in Camp 8W. Her responses suggest regular attendance but also reveal how schooling is shaped by household responsibilities, community pressure, safety concerns, and limited progression opportunities beyond Grade 10.

Interviewer: Thank you for speaking with me today. Can you tell me a little about yourself, such as your age and who you live with?

Participant: I am 17 years old. I live with my family. In my family, I have my father, my mother, and my younger sister. I have a brother as well but my brother stays in a different place.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how you usually spend your day?

Participant: I wake up early in the morning, around 5 am, and then I offer the morning prayer and recite the Quran. After that, I check whether my homework is done. By the time I finish breakfast, it is almost 9 am, which is time for school. Then the accompany apa comes to my home and takes me to the learning centre. I go to the learning centre and return home around 12.

Interviewer: Are you currently going to any learning centre?

Participant: Yes. I am studying at Level 8. In our learning centre, we can study up to Grade 10. Boys and girls can both study up to Grade 10, but separately. It is not co-education.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the last time you went to school or the learning centre? What happened from morning to the end of the day?

Participant: The last time I went was yesterday.

Interviewer: What does a normal day look like for you? When do you get time for learning at home?

Participant: On a normal day, after waking up and doing some work at home, I go to my learning center. The learning centre runs from 9:30 to 12. We study six subjects, including English, Science,

History, Math, and Geography and each day there are two or three classes. I return home around 12, then I take some rest. After that, I help my mother with household chores. Then I do my homework, after I finish helping her.

Interviewer: When and where do you usually study or read?

Participant: I usually study both in the learning centre and at home. I mostly study by myself. My parents do not know how to read or write, so they cannot help me. But sometimes I get support from my elder brother. He studies in Grade 9, one grade above mine. It would have been better if my parents were educated too.

Interviewer: Who helps you with learning at home?

Participant: Only my brother helps me when I need help.

Interviewer: What makes it difficult for you to go regularly or continue learning?

Participant: Some students miss school because they need to stay at home when their parents work outside. Girls also need to take care of sick people at home and younger siblings. There is also discouragement from neighbours. They say, “What will you do by studying?” and that affects girls negatively. There are also shops on the way to the learning centre where boys sit around, and we hear bad words from there. Because of that, some girls stop coming to school.

Interviewer: Think about the last time you missed a session. What happened that day?

Participant: Some days ago, I missed class because my mother was sick. I had to take her to the hospital, so I had to stay with her and could not attend the learning centre.

Interviewer: On a difficult day, what is the first thing that stops you from going?

Participant: Family priority. If my family needs me to stay at home, then I have to skip the learning centre.

Interviewer: In your home, who decides if you can go? What are common reasons they say yes, and what are common reasons they say no?

Participant: My father and mother normally decide. For example, if they need to go to the hospital, they ask me to skip school. If there are household chores and they need my support, then I have to stay home instead of going to the learning centre.

Interviewer: Girls face different difficulties. Which are most true for you: distance, work and time, permission at home, timing of the centre, health, worries about moving around, or something else?

Participant: Community pressure starts when girls reach puberty. Distance, household chores, and family responsibilities are also reasons.

Interviewer: Some girls worry about moving around the camp to attend learning. What kinds of worries do girls talk about?

Participant: There are incidents where older girls have been kidnapped by members of rebel groups, and that makes me scared. Girls feel afraid to go outside and attend the learning centre. Because we have an accompanying sister, I feel more relieved.

Interviewer: Are there any community expectations for girls your age that make learning harder?

Participant: The community wants girls to get married as soon as they reach puberty, especially when they turn 18. Parents say that neighbours start gossiping, saying that a girl has become older once she turns 18. Because of that, many parents do not encourage girls to continue studying, and instead they push for marriage. Girls keep receiving marriage proposals, and that becomes a pressure on parents. They worry about getting their daughter married before she becomes too old, meaning older than 18. That is why many parents stop their daughters from going to the learning centre once they turn 18.

Interviewer: Who encourages or helps you with your studies? Is it your family, teachers, friends, or NGOs?

Participant: At home, my brother helps me with my studies. When I do not understand anything, I ask my brother to help me. He usually helps.

Interviewer: What makes it easier for you to continue learning?

Participant: My family's continuous support helps me. Also my teachers at the learning centre also encourage us to study, which helps a lot.

Interviewer: What subjects or activities do you enjoy most?

Participant: I like Science very much because I want to be a doctor.

Interviewer: Can you share an example of a time when someone supported you with your education?

Participant: My brother has been a constant support.

Interviewer: What one change would make it easier for you to continue learning?

Participant: We need more learning opportunities beyond Grade 10 inside the camp. Learning opportunities outside the camp would also help me a lot if I want to fulfil my dream of becoming a doctor, because there is no way to study further inside the camp after Grade 10. We can only study up to Grade 10. If we had more opportunities to continue learning inside the camp, it would be better for further study. To fulfil my dream, I know the study opportunities we have inside the camp are not enough. We need more opportunities. We also do not have enough female teachers, because there are not many educated women who can be appointed as teachers. If we had more female teachers, learning would be easier for us. We could discuss sensitive issues more easily with a female teacher, and more girls would feel encouraged and motivated to come and study.

Appendix 3: Theme Development Table

This appendix provides an overview of how the final themes were developed from the refined codebooks and cross-group comparison.

It does not reproduce the full coding process in detail. Instead, it summarises the movement from refined codes to candidate themes and from candidate themes to the final theme structure used in the Findings chapter.

Guide to reading this appendix:

There are two different tables. The first table shows how broader candidate themes were built from refined code clusters and then sharpened during theme review. The second table presents the final four-theme structure used in the Findings chapter. Together, the two tables provide a transparent map from code-level analysis to final thematic interpretation.

Table 1: From candidate themes to refined final themes

Candidate Theme	Main Code Clusters	The refining process
Girls' education is conditional, not guaranteed	Family permission; household need; care work; unsafe movement; escort support; attendance interruption	Refined into Theme 1 by sharpening the focus on access as conditional on household permission, care demands, and safe movement.
Adolescence changes what education is seen as acceptable for girls	Puberty; age 16-18; gossip; veiling; marriageability; restriction of movement; community pressure	Refined into Theme 2 by clarifying adolescence as a social threshold that reshapes the legitimacy of girls' learning.
Girls' aspirations are constrained by limited educational pathways	Aspiration for professional futures; service to community; Grade 10 ceiling; lack of progression; weak infrastructure	Refined into Theme 3 by emphasizing the mismatch between valued futures and the limited educational pathways available in the camp.
Learning-center education competes with alternative expectations of what girls should learn	Arabic/Quranic learning; family preference; curriculum legitimacy; girls wanting both; teacher pragmatism	Refined into Theme 4 by focusing on competing expectations of what counts as valuable learning and how girls negotiate them.
Support is present but partial and uneven	Encouragement from family, teachers, siblings, escort support, female teachers, parent meetings	Not retained as a stand-alone final theme. Instead, support was woven across the four final themes because it functioned differently in different analytic contexts.

Table 2: Final thematic structure used in the Findings chapter

Final Theme	Core organizing idea	Participant groups	Key study contribution
Theme 1. Access to education is conditional on household permission, care demands, and safe movement	Educational access exists, but participation depends on permission, domestic labor, and mobility conditions.	Girls, frontline education staffs, parents, focus group	Shows that access is not guaranteed by provision alone.
Theme 2. Adolescence reshapes the social legitimacy of girls' learning	As girls grow older, continued learning becomes more socially judged and less automatically acceptable.	Girls, frontline education staffs, parents, focus group	Explains why adolescence is a turning point in participation.
Theme 3. Girls' educational aspirations exceed the pathways available to them	Girls value education and imagine meaningful futures, but the camp system offers limited progression routes.	Girls, frontline education staffs, parents, focus group	Shows the gap between aspiration and available educational pathways.
Theme 4. Girls negotiate education within competing expectations of what is worth learning	Girls' participation is shaped by competing values around formal learning, Arabic/Qur'anic learning, protection, household usefulness and future ambition.	Girls, frontline education staffs, parents, focus group	Highlights educational legitimacy, negotiation, and constrained choice.

Appendix 4: Cross-Group Comparison Matrix: Girls and Frontline Education Staff

Area of Comparison	Girls' interviews	Frontline education staff interviews	Analytical significance
Household permission and control	Girls described attendance as dependent on whether mothers, fathers, or brothers allowed them to go.	Teachers identified family withdrawal and household authority as recurring influences on attendance.	Shows that access is negotiated within family power relations rather than simply determined by school availability.
Domestic and care responsibilities	Girls missed school because of cooking, sibling care, illness in the family, and hospital visits.	Teachers described household chores, ration days, sibling care, illness, and menstruation as common attendance interruptions.	Demonstrates strong convergence between lived experience and provider observation.
Unsafe movement to the learning centre	Girls described fear on the route, verbal harassment, distance, and kidnapping rumours.	Teachers framed these as broader protection concerns, including bullying, verbal harassment, and unsafe camp areas.	Reveals the same barrier operating at different levels: embodied experience for girls and structural concern for teachers.
Adolescence and marriage pressure	Girls described age, gossip, and marriage proposals as making continued learning harder.	Teachers saw older age and early marriage as major reasons for withdrawal from education.	Shows strong cross-group agreement that adolescence reshapes girls' educational participation.
Female teachers and acceptability	Girls associated female teachers with comfort, safety, and easier communication.	Teachers linked female staffing to parental trust, retention, and social acceptability.	Illustrates shared concern with different emphasis: girls focused on comfort, teachers on legitimacy and participation.
Grade 10 ceiling and progression	Girls linked their future ambitions to the frustration of not being able to study beyond Grade 10.	Teachers described limited progression beyond Grade 10 as a structural retention problem.	Shows how the same institutional limit is experienced as blocked futures by girls and as shallow pathways by teachers.
Formal learning and Arabic/Qur'anic learning	Girls varied, some wanted both forms of learning, while others were redirected toward Arabic study as they grew older.	Teachers suggested that Arabic/Qur'anic content could make learning centres more acceptable to families.	Highlights how educational legitimacy is contested and negotiated across groups.

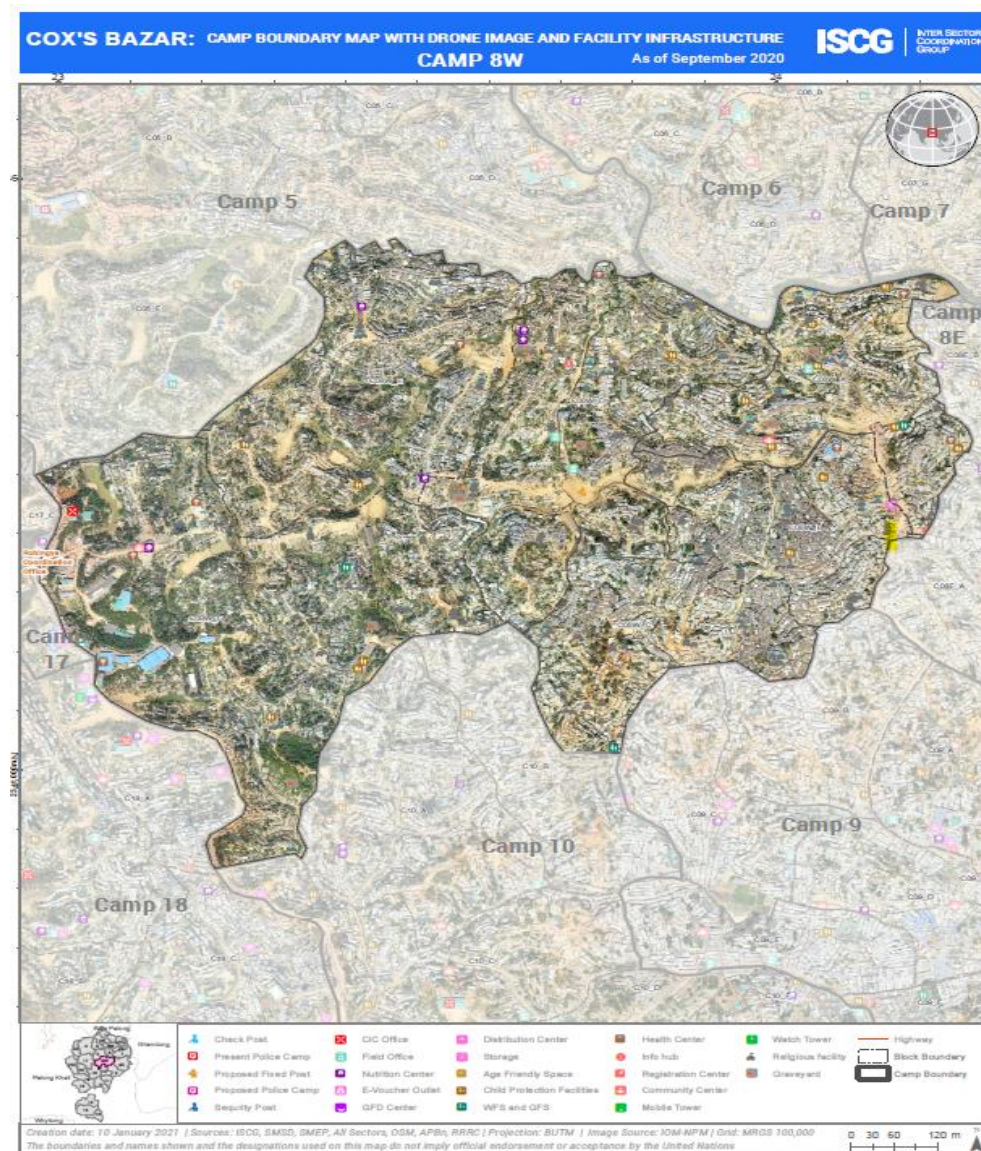
The “Appendix 4: Cross-Group Comparison Matrix: Girls and Frontline Education Staff ” above presents a brief excerpt from the girls versus teachers comparison matrix used during the analytic process.

The purpose of this matrix was not to produce a numerical comparison, but to identify areas of convergence, divergence and difference in emphasis between girls’ lived accounts and frontline education staff perspectives.

Additionally, this matrix supported theme development by helping distinguish between shared patterns and differences in framing. It was especially useful for clarifying the relationship between girls’ lived experience and educators’ interpretations, and it informed the development of the four final themes reported in the Findings chapter.

Appendix 5: Field Site and Learning Center Context

A. Camp 8W boundary map developed by Inter Sector Coordination Group (ISCG)



Note: Reproduced from Inter Sector Coordination Group (2021), Bangladesh: Camp Boundary Map with Drone Image and Facility Infrastructure: Camp 8W (as of September 2020). Included for serving contextual orientation only.

B. Learning centre seating arrangement in a girls-only classroom.



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note: This image illustrates the classroom seating arrangement in an adolescent girls' learning centre session facilitated by a male teacher. Some participants indicated that female teachers would make learning spaces more comfortable and acceptable for girls.

C. Exterior view of a learning center



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note: This is an exterior view of a learning centre serving adolescent girls and boys in separate classroom spaces.

D. Hilly pathway and mobility conditions in Camp 8W.



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note: This image illustrates one hilly pathway in Camp 8W, contextualising participants' accounts of mobility difficulties, particularly during monsoon conditions.

E. Field familiarization during participant recruitment



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note. Home visits supported participant invitation, eligibility confirmation and contextual understanding of household location, terrain and mobility conditions. The image is included for contextual orientation only.

F. Individual interview setting inside a learning centre



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note. This image shows the interview setting for one individual interview with an adolescent girl. The participant's face is not visible, and the image is included only to illustrate the fieldwork setting.

G. Focus group discussion setting with adolescent girls



Source: Author's field photograph, January 2026, Camp 8W

Note. This image shows the girls-only focus group discussion setting, conducted with an interpreter and safeguarding adult present. The image is included to contextualise the classroom environment and seating arrangement.

Declaration: All photographs reproduced in Appendix 5, except the Camp 8W map sourced from ISCG, were taken by the researcher during fieldwork in Camp 8W, Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar, in January 2026. Images involving participants are included only where appropriate consent and assent were obtained.