

# Teaching and Learning in Fragile Contexts (TLFC) Research Paper

## Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp

Team of investigators

Prof. Alphonse Uworwabayeho (PI)

Dr. Celine Byukusenge

Mr. Fidele Ukobizaba

Mr. Ezechiel Nsabayezu

Mrs. Marianne Uwamariya

Mr. Aloys Iyamuremye



Promoting every  
child's right to read



In partnership with

Canada

## Plain-language summary

### Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

This report looks at a project that introduced trauma-informed teaching in schools serving children living in Mahama Refugee Camp in eastern Rwanda. Many children in the camp have lived through war, displacement, family separation, and ongoing hardship. These experiences often affect how children feel, behave, and learn in school.

The project aimed to help teachers better understand trauma and to create safe, supportive, and inclusive classrooms where students feel emotionally secure and ready to learn. The study focused on three main questions:

1. How students experience their learning environment after trauma-informed teaching was introduced
2. How teachers use trauma-informed approaches in their classrooms
3. What changes parents notice in their children's emotional well-being and learning

The study took place in five schools that serve learners from Mahama Refugee Camp. A total of 125 people participated, including 75 Grade 5 students, 25 teachers, and 25 parents. Teachers were provided with a custom-designed training program in trauma-informed teaching. Researchers then collected information through classroom observations, surveys, interviews, and group discussions.

The findings show clear positive changes. After the teacher training, many students said they now feel safer, more supported, and more confident in class. They reported that teachers listen to them, help them manage their emotions, and encourage respectful relationships with classmates. Students also said they feel more motivated to learn.

Teachers reported that the training helped them recognize signs of trauma, respond more calmly to challenging behaviour, and use strategies such as emotional check-ins, flexible discipline, group work, and calming activities. Many teachers said they now try to understand why a child is struggling instead of punishing them.

Parents noticed improvements as well. Some said their children were happier, calmer, and more interested in school than before.

The project also faced challenges. The teaching intervention lasted only one school term, which made it difficult to see long-term effects. Not all teachers in the schools received the training, and large class sizes and limited resources made it harder to support every child consistently. A small number of students also reported that harsh discipline still occurred in some cases.

Overall, the report concludes that trauma-informed teaching can significantly improve learning and well-being for refugee children, even in difficult conditions. The authors

recommend extending the program over a longer period, providing ongoing teacher support, involving school leaders and parents, and integrating trauma-informed approaches into national teacher training programs so the benefits can be sustained and expanded

### Acknowledgements

The project team extends heartfelt gratitude to the financial support provided by CODE which made the implementation, assessment, and evaluation of this project possible. We also extend our gratitude to school leaders, teachers, students, and parents at Mahama Refugee Camp for their enthusiastic participation and valuable contributions. Special thanks go also to the local education authorities for their collaboration and support throughout the project.

The views expressed in this work are those of the creators and do not necessarily represent those of CODE, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) or the Government of Canada. This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from Global Affairs Canada.

## Executive summary

This implementation, assessment, and evaluation report presents the findings of a project aimed at enhancing the learning environment in Mahama Refugee Camp through trauma-informed teaching practices. The project sought to improve the socio-emotional and academic well-being of learners affected by trauma through training teachers in the use of trauma-informed pedagogy to create safe, supportive, and inclusive classrooms. The assessment focused on three core objectives: exploring students' perceptions and experiences of trauma-informed learning environments, understanding how teachers integrated trauma-sensitive strategies into instruction, and gathering parents' observations of emotional and academic changes in their children.

The study was conducted in five purposively selected schools within Mahama Refugee Camp in Kirehe District serving diverse learners from Primary to Secondary levels under the Twelve Years Basic Education (12YBE) system—and involved 125 participants, including 75 Grade Five students, 25 parents, and 25 teachers. All the 25 teachers were observed while teaching their respective subjects. Data were collected using survey questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Findings revealed an enhanced teachers' effectiveness in enhancing socio-emotional and academic well-being of learners affected by trauma through the use of trauma-informed pedagogy. Students reported feeling more emotionally secure and engaged, while teachers demonstrated an increased understanding and application of trauma-sensitive practices, such as emotional check-ins and flexible discipline.

Despite these encouraging results, the project faced challenges, including a short implementation timeframe and the absence of a control group, which limited the ability to measure long-term and comparative impacts.

Nevertheless, the assessment underscored the potential of trauma-informed pedagogy to foster inclusive education in crisis-affected settings. Key recommendations include extending the implementation period, providing continuous teacher support, involving school leadership and parents, and integrating trauma-informed practices into national teacher training programs for greater sustainability and scale.

## Table of Contents

Plain-language summary.....	i
Acknowledgements .....	ii
Executive summary.....	iii
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Project objectives.....	2
3. Methodology.....	2
3.1 Methodology used to conduct project activities .....	2
3.2 Implementation of activities.....	3
Requesting ethical consideration.....	3
Identifying and confirming participants .....	3
Developing the research instruments .....	4
Piloting and revising research instruments .....	4
Conducting and analyzing pre-assessment data and writing the conference manuscript.....	4
Developing training manual for trauma-informed teaching approach.....	4
Training of teachers.....	4
Writing mid-term report .....	4
Dissemination of the mid-term research findings.....	4
Lessons observation and reporting .....	5
Conducting an endline assessment and analyzing data.....	5
Writing a final report .....	5
3.3 Project implementation design.....	7
3.4 Sample and sampling procedure.....	7
3.5 Data collection methods .....	11
3.6 Methods of data analysis .....	12
3.7 Ethical considerations .....	12
3.8 Limitations of the assessment of the intervention impact.....	12
4. Achievement.....	13
4.1 Accomplished activities .....	13
4.1.1. Ethical clearance.....	13
4.1.2. Participant identification and confirmation .....	13

4.1.3. Development of research instruments.....	14
4.1.4. Piloting and revision of instruments .....	14
4.1.5. Pre-assessment data collection and analysis .....	14
4.1.6. Learning observation/Initial findings .....	15
4.1.7. Trauma-informed pedagogy training manual .....	18
4.1.8. Training of teachers on trauma-informed approach.....	18
4.1.9. Mid-term report writing .....	18
4.1.10. Dissemination of research findings .....	19
4.1.11. Lessons observation and reporting .....	19
4.1.12. Conducting endline assessment and analyzing data .....	19
4.1.13. Data analysis and writing final report.....	19
4.2. Endline assessment results .....	19
4.2.1. Students' perceptions about teacher's application of trauma-informed pedagogy.....	19
4.2.2. The teacher's self-efficacy in applying trauma-informed pedagogy.....	23
4.2.3. Students' perceptions of their teachers' support on ' social and emotional needs .....	27
4.2.4. Teachers' insights on the trauma-informed pedagogy .....	29
4.2.5. Teachers' suggestions to effectively implement trauma-informed pedagogy.....	32
4.2.6. Teachers' experiences in applying trauma informed pedagogy (written experiences from teachers' notebooks).....	33
4.2.7. Effectiveness of trauma-informed pedagogy on teachers' pedagogical practices in the classroom.....	36
4. Challenges and lesson learned.....	43
5. Implications to the policy and future research .....	43
6. Conclusion and key recommendations.....	44
References.....	46
Appendices.....	47
Appendix one: Ethical clearance from the University of Rwanda College of Education .....	47
Appendix two: Research permit from Kirehe district.....	48
Appendix three: Research tools .....	49
i) Interview guide with parents (Kinyarwanda).....	49
ii) Student Questionnaire .....	52

iii) Baseline survey questionnaire for teachers.....	54
iv) Baseline focus group discussion with students.....	61
v) Classroom observation tool.....	63
vi) Endline questionnaire for teachers .....	65
vii) Endline semi-structure interview for teachers.....	66
viii) Endline interview with students .....	68
ix) Endline questionnaire for students.....	69
Appendix four: Evidence of the project implementation .....	72

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Approved action plan..... 6  
Table 2. Participants involved in the study..... 8  
Table 3. Demographic information of participants subjected to survey ..... 9

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Ages of learners who participated in FGD..... 9  
Figure 2. Students’ number of years spent in the camp..... 10  
Figure 3. Students’ number of years being enrolled within the school..... 11  
Figure 4. Educational traumatic symptoms of learners in Mahama Refugee camp ..... 15  
Figure 5. Causes of trauma-related behaviors among refugee learners in Mahama camp ..... 16  
Figure 6. Psychological and emotional effect of traumatic behavior to the effective learning for refugee students..... 17  
Figure 7. Teachers' empathetic and emotional awareness .....20  
Figure 8. Teachers fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment.....21  
Figure 9. Teachers providing active emotional support and individualized responses ...22  
Figure 10. Teachers’ empathy and emotional awareness.....24  
Figure 11. Teachers’ active emotional support and individualized responses .....25  
Figure 12. Teachers’ use of strategies supporting emotional safety .....26  
Figure 13. Identification of trauma-informed pedagogy .....37  
Figure 14. Peer support and positive social interaction .....38  
Figure 15. Creating a safe and inclusive classroom .....39  
Figure 16. Addressing social emotional needs .....41

# 1. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful driver of social transformation, economic development, and individual well-being (UNESCO, 2019). For refugee and displaced children, education provides not only knowledge and skills but also a sense of normalcy, structure, and hope amidst crisis (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). However, refugee learners often face overwhelming barriers to accessing and benefiting from quality education. These include inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, language difficulties, economic hardship, and, crucially, the psychological impact of trauma (UNHCR, 2023). Globally, over half of all school-aged refugee children remain out of school, and only 6% go on to access higher education (UNHCR, 2023).

In sub-Saharan Africa, where many countries host large displaced populations, education systems are frequently overstretched and under-resourced. Rwanda, with its own historical legacy of displacement, currently hosts over 126,000 refugees mainly from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (MINEMA & UNHCR, 2022). Mahama Refugee Camp, the largest in Rwanda, is home to more than 47,000 refugees, a significant portion of whom are school-aged children. Despite Rwanda's inclusive education policies, schools in Mahama Camp continue to grapple with severe challenges including teacher shortages, limited psychosocial support services, and a lack of trauma-sensitive teaching strategies (Kagoyire & Rutakamize, 2021).

The baseline study conducted in early 2025 under the project "Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced Learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach" revealed that upper primary learners in Mahama Camp face multiple layers of trauma, ranging from exposure to conflict and displacement to chronic uncertainty and economic instability. These experiences manifest in behavioral issues, emotional dysregulation, and reduced academic engagement factors that significantly compromise learning outcomes (Hassan et al., 2018). It also became evident that while teachers were committed to supporting their students, many lacked the training and tools necessary to implement trauma-informed practices effectively.

In response, a designed training program was implemented to equip educators with the knowledge and skills to recognize trauma symptoms and create supportive, emotionally safe classrooms. The trauma-informed teaching approach introduced was grounded in best practices from global contexts such as Uganda and Lebanon, where integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) and trauma-sensitive pedagogy has improved student attendance, engagement, and academic performance (Windle Trust, 2021; Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2016).

This report assesses and evaluates the impacts of trauma-informed teaching in Mahama Camp. Data collected from 125 participants across five schools 75 Grade 5 learners, 25 teachers, and 25 parents indicate positive initial outcomes. Teachers reported increased confidence in identifying trauma-related behaviors and applying responsive teaching strategies. Students, in turn, described feeling safer and more supported in the classroom environment. Focus group discussions highlighted improvements in student-teacher relationships, emotional expression, and classroom participation. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring consistency across schools and scaling psychosocial support to meet growing needs.

By synthesizing qualitative and quantitative insights, this assessment and evaluation report provides critical evidence on the role of trauma-informed education in enhancing learning outcomes and emotional resilience among refugee learners. It underscores the need for sustained teacher training, institutional support, and community engagement to ensure the long-term success of inclusive and healing-centered educational practices. As Rwanda continues to lead regional efforts in refugee integration, the findings from this study offer valuable lessons for policymakers, educators, and international partners working to create more equitable and trauma-sensitive learning environments.

## 2. Project objectives

The study had the following objectives:

1. To explore students' perceptions and experiences of the current learning environment following the introduction of trauma-informed teaching practices.
2. To understand how teachers have begun integrating trauma-informed approaches into classroom instruction, as captured through their self-reported practices and reflections.
3. To gather parents' insights on the emotional and academic changes they observe in their children since the initiation of trauma-sensitive teaching strategies.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Methodology used to conduct project activities

The project activities were carried out by the team of investigators under the coordination and leadership of the Principal Investigator (PI). These activities were implemented through a series of structured workshops and field engagements, designed to promote collaborative planning, execution, and reflection among the research team. Each workshop followed a well-organized format that combined plenary sessions, group work, and individual tasks. The plenary sessions, served to clearly outline the objectives and

expectations for each workshop. These sessions ensured that all investigators were aligned in their understanding of the project goals and the roles they were expected to play.

Following the plenary sessions, the investigators engaged in group discussions where specific tasks were collaboratively addressed. These group sessions created a platform for team members to exchange ideas, share experiences, and contribute their expertise toward the development of project outputs. Additionally, individual tasks were assigned to each investigator to encourage personal responsibility, reflection, and contribution to the overall project objectives. All tasks, whether group-based or individual were guided by clear instructions provided by the PI. Upon completion, results from both individual and group efforts were presented, discussed, and refined. This process not only ensured quality control but also fostered a participatory approach to decision-making and learning within the team.

To safeguard the integrity of project data and materials, all outputs, field data, and relevant documents were systematically documented and stored. Digital copies were saved both on the PI's personal computer and in a dedicated Google Drive folder accessible to the team. This dual storage strategy was employed to mitigate the risk of data loss and to enhance ease of access for all investigators.

In addition, supporting documents, including the approved project implementation plan, the research instruments developed during the workshops, and draft training manual manuscripts are provided in the appendices of this report. For purposes of accountability and institutional reporting, hard copies of relevant administrative documents such as concept notes, mission order requests, signed and stamped mission orders, and mission allowance payment lists were submitted to the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). These materials serve as official records of the project's implementation and the use of received funds.

### 3.2 Implementation of activities

Project activities were implemented in a logical chronological sequence..

#### **Requesting ethical consideration**

The project team initiated the process by formally requesting ethical approval from the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE) Research and Innovation Unit. Simultaneously, authorization was sought from District Education Officers to access schools and engage with selected participants.

#### **Identifying and confirming participants**

The team developed criteria for participant selection and worked closely with local education officials (School Head teachers and Directors of studies) to identify suitable

teachers and schools. Invitations were issued, and confirmations were secured to ensure a representative and committed group of participants.

### **Developing the research instruments**

Researchers collaboratively designed data collection tools aligned with the project objectives, including questionnaires, interview guides, and observation checklists. These instruments were reviewed for content relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness.

### **Piloting and revising research instruments**

A pilot study was conducted in selected schools to test the functionality and reliability of the developed instruments. Based on feedback and observed limitations, necessary revisions were made to improve the tools' effectiveness and accuracy.

### **Conducting and analyzing pre-assessment data and writing the conference manuscript**

The team collected and analyzed baseline data to understand the existing conditions related to the research focus. Findings from the pre-assessment were synthesized into a scholarly manuscript submitted and will be presented at the 3rd UR-CE International Conference on Re-shaping Education for Sustainable Development.

### **Developing training manual for trauma-informed teaching approach**

Based on pre-assessment findings and literature review, the team developed a contextualized training manual for teachers on trauma-informed pedagogy. The manual included practical strategies, theoretical foundations, and classroom application guidelines.

### **Training of teachers**

Selected teachers participated in intensive training sessions facilitated by the project team using the developed manual. The training aimed to build teachers' capacity to recognize and respond effectively to trauma-related student needs.

### **Writing mid-term report**

The team documented all project activities, challenges, and preliminary outcomes in a comprehensive mid-term report. This report will also be submitted to UR-CE for accountability, monitoring, and guiding the next phase of implementation.

### **Dissemination of the mid-term research findings**

The dissemination of research findings was conducted through presentation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> international conference on reshaping education for sustainable development organized

by the University of Rwanda-College of Education in May 2025 and the development of a research paper. These activities aimed to share key insights with both academic and professional audiences. The conference presentation allowed the team to engage stakeholders and gather feedback, while the research paper was prepared for publication to contribute to scholarly discourse and support evidence-based practices in trauma-informed teaching.

### **Lessons observation and reporting**

Lesson observations were carried out at GS Paysannat L A, B, C, D, and E in Kirehe district, for Grade 5 classes. Twenty-nine teachers were observed delivering various subjects using trauma-informed teaching methods. Each lesson had a duration of 40 minutes. The classroom observation was based on four themes formulated based on the content of the training manual. These include the teacher's ability to identify trauma in students, the teachers' abilities to promote Peer support and positive social interaction, the teachers' abilities to create a safe and inclusive classroom, and the teachers' effectiveness in addressing social and emotional needs.

### **Conducting an endline assessment and analyzing data**

The project team conducted a comprehensive endline assessment to evaluate the impact of trauma-informed teaching practices. This process involved the administration of pre- and post-test questionnaires to measure changes in awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions. Additionally, classroom observations were carried out to assess the practical application of trauma-informed strategies, and interviews were conducted to gather in-depth insights from both students and teachers. The data collected through these methods were systematically analyzed to inform the final evaluation of the project outcomes.

### **Writing a final report**

After completing data analysis, the project team proceeded to write the final report. This involved organizing the findings, drawing evidence-based conclusions, and formulating practical recommendations. The report was structured to clearly present the research process, key outcomes, and implications, ensuring it served as a comprehensive record of the project's implementation and impact.

All the mentioned activities were planned based on the action plan approved by the CODE (Table 1), and based on the signed contract

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

Table 1: Approved action plan

Activities	Date	Data collected (tool/instrument)	Research question	Result/Outcome	Who was involved
Research ethics application/approval	May-2024			Obtained ethical clearance letter	PI
Identifying and confirming participants	May-2024			Confirmed research participants	PI, Co, RA
Meeting with the community and stakeholders	June-2024			Community and stakeholders are met	PI, Co, RA
Data collection for pre-assessment (interviews and FGDs)	June-2024			Data for interview and FGDs are collected	RA
Students' holidays	July-August, 2024	-	-	-	-
Development of research instruments	September, 2024	Interviews, FGDs	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Interviews and FGDs are developed	PI, Co, RA
Piloting and testing the research instruments	October, 2024	Interviews, FGDs	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Interviews and FGDs are piloted	PI, Co, RA
Revising the research instruments	November, 2024	Interviews, FGDs	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Interviews and FGDs are revised	PI, Co, RA
Developing training manual	December-2024	Training Manual		Developed training manual	PI, Co, RA
Writing and submitting mid-term report	January-February, 2025			Mid-term report is developed and submitted	PI, Co, RA
Collecting data for interviews (post-assessment)	March- April, 2025	Interviews	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Data from interviews	Co, RA
Collecting FGDs data (Post assessment)	May-2025	FGDS	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Data from FGDs	Co, RA
Interview's 'data analysis	June-2025	Interviews	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Analyzed data from interview	PI, Co, RA

FGDs’ data analysis	July-2025	FGDS	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, RQ4	Analyzed data from FGDs	PI, Co, RA
Writing report and submit	May 2025	May-October2025		November 2025	PI, Co, RA
Conference presentation, policy brief, and meeting with guardians, teachers, school leaders, and local government authorities to present the research findings	Presenting preliminary findings at the 3 <sup>rd</sup> international conference on reshaping education for sustainable development organized by URCE	-Writing final report policy briefs, and publishable papers. -Looking for any convenient conference whose theme accommodates our findings for presentation		-Submission of final report -Submission of journal papers: each research questions should generate a journal paper.	PI, Co, RA

### 3.3 Project implementation design

This evaluation adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, wherein quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and analyzed independently. This methodological approach was chosen to ensure a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the educational experiences and perceptions of learners, teachers, and parents within the context of Mahama Refugee Camp. Specifically, we intended to: (1) identify the major educational barriers affecting refugee learners in Mahama Camp, (2) examine the psychological and emotional effects of trauma on refugee students' learning experiences, (3) assess the effectiveness of current teaching methodologies in addressing trauma-related challenges, and (4) evaluate the level of teacher preparedness and training in trauma-informed education.

### 3.4 Sample and sampling procedure

The study was carried out within five schools hosting all students living in Mahama Refugee Camp, in Kirehe district. These schools are commonly known as GS Paysannat A, B, C, D, and E. Mahama refugee camp is one of the largest refugee settlements in Rwanda. These schools were purposively selected based on their large student populations and the cultural and socio-economic diversity present within the camp. The schools accommodate students from Primary level through secondary level. This is commonly known as Twelve Years Basic Education (12YBE).

The study targeted students in Grade 5 (Primary 5) with their parents and teachers teaching in Grade Five. Grade 5 students were involved in the study because they are at a critical stage of developing foundational academic and social-emotional skills that can be significantly affected by displacement and trauma. Their participation provides valuable

insights into how trauma-informed teaching approaches influence learning and inclusion at this formative level. Additionally, engaging this group helps design targeted interventions that address their specific educational and psychosocial needs for improved quality and inclusive education. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of various subgroups within the camp. This sampling strategy allowed the research team to gather a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences aligned with the study’s objectives. In this regard, at each school, 15 students were sampled. Depending on the number of Grade 5 classes, the researcher calculated the average of students to be sampled in each class to ensure that all Grade 5 classes are represented. In this regard, students had to count from one up to the last number in class. An interval was determined and considered while sampling participants.

For parents, if the student is sampled, automatically one of his/her parents became the study’s participant. In general, 75 parents signed the informed consent forms. However, only 25 parents were randomly selected from the list and called for interviews.

For teachers, a random sampling was used. In this regard, researchers availed sheets of papers on which 15 of them are marked “Yes” while the remaining are marked “No”. Teachers chose randomly those sheets of papers. Those who chose “Yes” became the study’s participants. A total of 125 participants were involved in the study, comprising 75 Grade Five learners (Primary 5 students), 25 parents, and 25 teachers. This sample was found suitable for a qualitative study because it allows for diverse perspectives from key stakeholders; learners, parents, and teachers who directly experience and influence education in the refugee camp. Such a sample size ensures depth of understanding rather than statistical generalization, aligning with the purpose of qualitative research to explore experiences and meanings in context.

Table 1 shows the participants involved in the study.

Table 2. Participants involved in the study

Province	District	Name of primary school	Sample of students	Numbers teachers	Number of parents
Eastern	Kirehe	GS Paysannat LA	15	5	5
		GS Paysannat LB	15	5	5
		GS Paysannat LC	15	5	5
		GS Paysannat LD	15	5	5
		GS Paysannat LE	15	5	5
Total		5 schools	75	25	25

Table 3. Demographic information of participants subjected to survey

Aspects	Categories	Teachers	Students
Gender	Male	15	22
	Female	10	29
	Total	25	51
Working experience	1-2 years	1	-
	3-5 years	19	-
	More than 5 years	5	-
	Total	25	-
Age	Below 18 years	-	51
	18-25 years	2	
	26-35 years	19	
	36-45 years	3	
	46-55 years	1	
	Above 56 years	0	
	Total	25	

To collect qualitative data, 15 students at each school were randomly assigned in two groups. Each group was made of at least six participants. Thus, 33 students were involved in the FGD. The figure 1 shows age distribution of participants involved in a focus group discussion (FGD). From the figure, one can observe a range of age from 10 to 17 years old. However, no student with 16 years old.

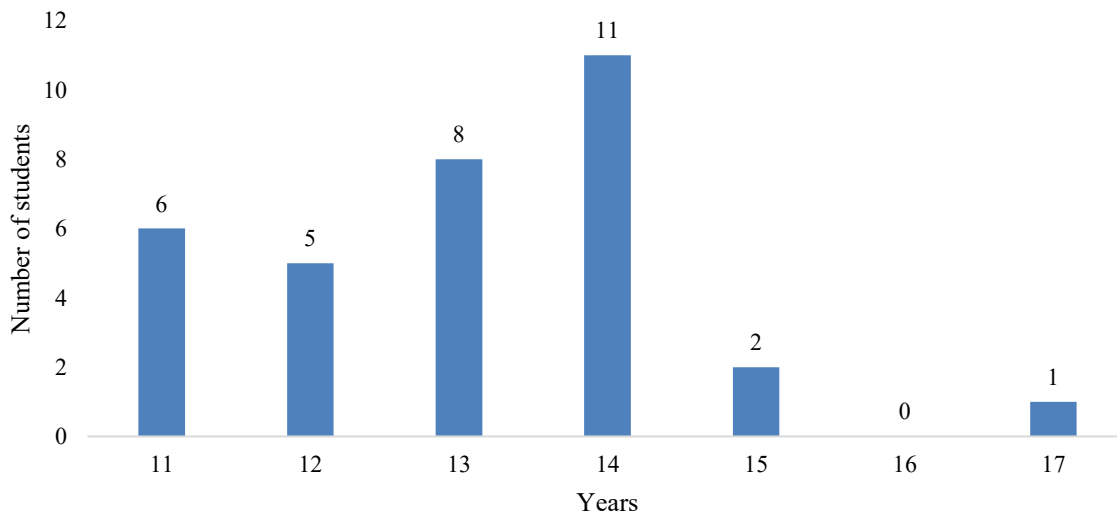


Figure 1. Ages of learners who participated in FGD

The ages of learners who participated in the FGD shows a diverse age range, with the majority of participants are 14 years old with 11 students. This suggests that young adults were the most represented demographic in the discussion. Smaller proportions of participants were observed for students aged with 15 and 17 years with 2 and 1 students, respectively. The distribution indicates a predominantly youthful cohort, which may reflect the typical age profile of learners engaged in the program or subject under study.

Figure 2 displays number of years that students spent within the camp. The range of years is in the range of 1 up to 10 years.

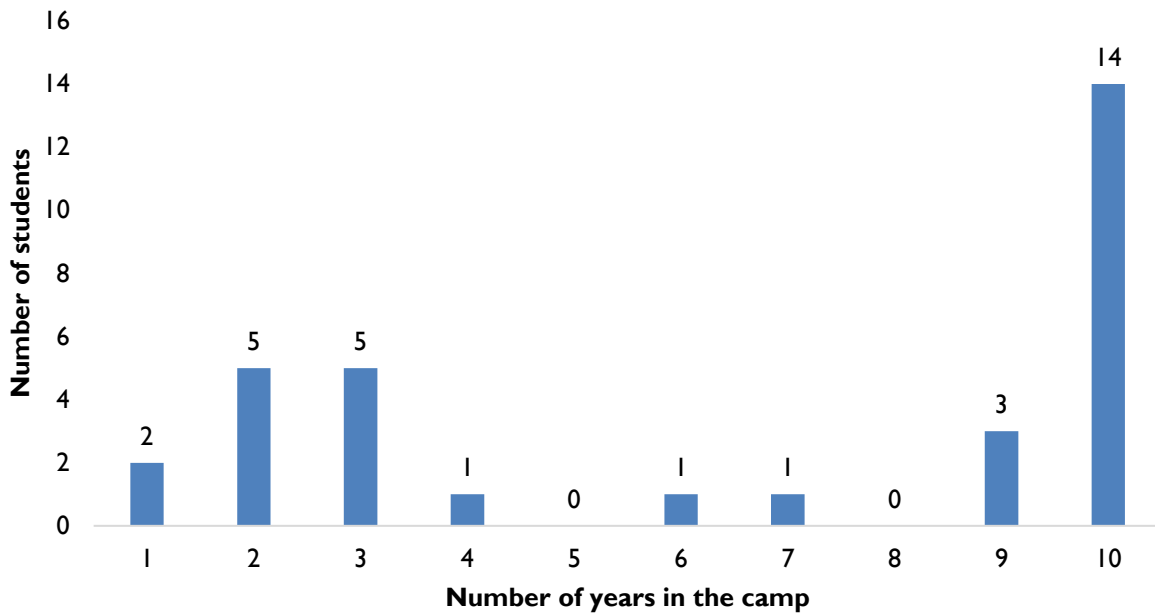


Figure 2. Students’ number of years spent in the camp

As shown in Figure 2, majority (14 students) of students 10 years in the camp. This indicates that students have sufficient information to provide what really happened in the camp over 10 years. Few years in the camp were observed for 2 and 1 who spent 1, 4, 6 and 7 years, respectively.

Figure 3 shows the number of years since learners are enrolled in the school. The range of years is between 1 and 15.

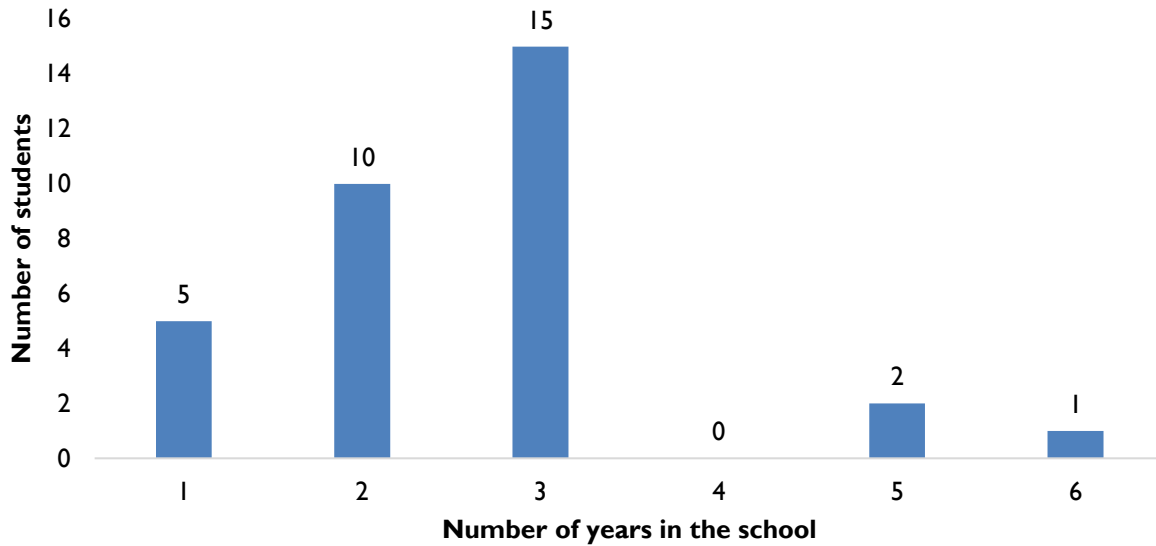


Figure 3. Students’ number of years being enrolled within the school

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of students spent 3 years in the school. Three years are enough for students to be familiar with the school situation. Ten students have spent 2 years in the school. Few students were found spending 5 and 6 years with 2 and 1 students, respectively. Further, five parents at each school were randomly selected from 15 students, respectively. Due to the type of data being collected (qualitative data), a sample of five parents at each school was considered to exhaust data being collected at that particular school.

### 3.5 Data collection methods

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data were obtained using a structured classroom observation, questionnaire administered to teachers and Grade Five students. This instrument was designed to capture information regarding students’ academic experiences, learning environments, and their perceptions of educational challenges and opportunities. Simultaneously, qualitative data were gathered through two complementary methods: focus group discussions (FGDs) with learners and semi-structured interviews with parents. The FGDs were conducted in small groups of 6 to 8 students to foster open dialogue and encourage participants to express their views in a supportive setting. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with parents, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on the education system, their involvement in their children's learning processes, and the specific challenges encountered within the refugee context.

### 3.6 Methods of data analysis

Quantitative data collected from classroom observation and questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including the calculation of percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations. This analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel 2016, which facilitated the clear presentation and interpretation of learners' responses. Qualitative data collected from focus group discussions and interviews with parents were transcribed, systematically organized, and analyzed through thematic analysis. This method involved identifying, coding, and interpreting recurring patterns and themes within the data. The analysis was supported by Taguette, an open-source qualitative analysis software, which enabled rigorous and systematic coding of the textual data.

### 3.7 Ethical considerations

This research project adheres to the ethical guidelines outlined by the University of Rwanda and the research policies established by the Ministry of Education. Within this regard, the PI applied and obtained a research clearance letter from the University of Rwanda-College of Education Directorate of Research and Innovation (UR-CEDRI). An ethical clearance was used to apply permission to carry out the study within the district. The permission to conduct the research was granted on 13/12/2024.

Before data collection, all participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained from both parents and teachers. For student participants, assent was also obtained. However, since this study involved participants below 16 years old, informed consent forms were given to students' care givers/parents who signed on behalf of them for voluntary acceptance participation in the study. Participants were ensured that all information provided will be kept confidential. Moreover, utmost care was taken to prevent any harm or discomfort to the participants, and the confidentiality of the gathered information were rigorously maintained. Throughout the research process, confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and participants were assured that all responses would be used exclusively for academic purposes.

### 3.8 Limitations of the assessment of the intervention impact

One of the main limitations of this assessment was the short duration of the intervention, which lasted only one academic term (April–June 2025). This limited timeframe made it difficult to assess the long-term impact of trauma-informed teaching practices on student behavior, emotional well-being, and academic performance. Sustainable change, especially in trauma-sensitive education, often requires prolonged implementation and continuous support. As a result, some potential effects may not have fully emerged during the assessment period, leading to an incomplete picture of the intervention's overall influence.

Another key limitation was the absence of a control group, which restricted the ability to compare outcomes between students exposed to trauma-informed teaching and those who were not. This made it challenging to draw definitive causal conclusions about the intervention's effectiveness. Furthermore, the study relied heavily on self-reported data from teachers, students, and parents, which may be influenced by social desirability or recall bias.

Despite efforts to ensure data reliability through triangulation and qualitative methods, these limitations highlight the need for a stronger evaluation design in future studies, possibly incorporating longitudinal tracking and control comparisons.

## **4. Achievement**

### **4.1 Accomplished activities**

This section outlines the key activities undertaken before the project implementation. These activities were designed to establish the foundation necessary for effective implementation of all project activities.

#### **4.1.1. Ethical clearance**

The project team initiated the ethical approval process by submitting a detailed research proposal to the University of Rwanda - College of Education (UR-CE) Directorate of Research and Innovation, which oversees ethical compliance (Ref: DRI-CE/046(a)/ENG/gi/2024; see Appendix 1). At the same time, formal authorization letters were sent to the Kirehe District Education Office and the Nyamagabe District to request permission to conduct research activities at selected sites. Ethical approval was granted by Kirehe District only, ensuring adherence to research standards and the protection of participants' rights. The research permit from Kirehe District is included in Appendix 2. It is important to note that all schools hosting learners from Mahama Camp are located outside the camp and serve both displaced and local students. As such, these schools fall under the supervision of the respective district authorities.

#### **4.1.2. Participant identification and confirmation**

In collaboration with school leaders (head -teacher and deputy head teachers in charge of studies), and teachers, participants were identified. These included parents, teachers, and students within the Mahama Refugee Camp. The participants were selected in five schools that serve learners residing in Mahama Refugee Camp, in Kirehe district, one of the largest refugee settlements in Rwanda. This activity was done from 13 to 15 January 2025. These schools were purposively selected based on their large student populations and the cultural and socio-economic diversity present within the camp. Thus, the sample schools

involved GS Paysannat L A, B, C, D, and E. A total of 125 participants were identified, comprising 75 Grade Five learners (Primary 5 students), 25 parents, and 25 teachers. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation of various subgroups within the camp. Learners were stratified according to gender and school to enhance sample diversity. Teachers and parents were randomly selected from lists provided by the respective school administrations (See details in 3.4).

#### **4.1.3. Development of research instruments**

Based on the project objectives and trauma-informed approach principles, the project team designed research instruments including questionnaires, interview guides, and observation protocols. These tools were developed in both English and Kinyarwanda to ensure linguistic accessibility and cultural relevance. The developed tools are interview of parents, questionnaire of teachers, and focus group discussion of students. The developed research instruments are attached in the appendix three.

#### **4.1.4. Piloting and revision of instruments**

One school was randomly selected for piloting research instruments. The school leader was informed a week before that some teachers teaching in Primary Five, some students, and their parents will be employed while piloting research instruments. The school leader was informed the number for each category of participants. The school head teacher in collaboration with the DOS randomly sampled five primary teachers, 25 students, and 25 parents who were sampled based on their availability (conveniently). A plan including a date and time was made and all participants were communicated. During the pilot, the research instruments such as survey questionnaires with teachers, parents, and students, and a focus group discussion (FGD) with students were piloted. All participants except learners, were given consent forms to sign for the acceptance to participate in the study. Since this study involved learners below 16 years old, informed consent forms were given to learners' parents and care givers to sign on behalf of the learners allowing their children to participate in the study. Participants were given incentives (transport fees) after data collection. The pilot was conducted from 13 to 15 January 2025. The team of participants organized a workshop conducted from 28 to 31 January 2025 to analyze data from pilot. To this end, some items which seems confusing were revised to make them understandable. Some items seemed repeating were removed. The survey questionnaire for parents was changed into a semi-structured interview since the pilot showed that parents were struggling with reading and writing.

#### **4.1.5. Pre-assessment data collection and analysis**

Pre-assessment data was collected to establish a baseline understanding major educational traumatic symptoms found on refugee learners in Mahama Refugee Camp,

perceived causes of trauma-related behaviors among refugee learners, and current teaching practices related to trauma-informed pedagogy. The tools were administered during organized field work done from 02 to 08 February 2025. In addition, from 11 to 15 February 2025 a workshop was organized to transcribe and analyze data collected from baseline study. Collected data was analyzed descriptive statistical and thematic analysis.

#### 4.1.6. Learning observation/Initial findings

The finding in the figure 4 shows educational major traumatic symptoms found in Mahama refugee camp. The most common symptom reported was difficulty engaging in learning activities due to overwhelming stress (20.73%), followed by difficulty controlling emotions (19.51%), indicating a high level of emotional distress among learners. Additionally, many students reported challenges in collaborating with peers (14.63%) and a loss of interest in enjoyable activities (13.41%), which suggests social withdrawal and emotional impassiveness, commonly associated with depression. Anger and irritability (10.98%) were also prevalent, highlighting difficulties in emotional regulation that can disrupt classroom environments. Symptoms such as insomnia and being easily frightened (each 6.10%) reflect ongoing anxiety and hyper arousal, while fewer learners reported experiencing indiscreet memories (4.88%) and persistent hypervigilance (3.66%), which are signs of post-traumatic stress. Thus, these results underscore the profound impact of trauma on the emotional, cognitive, and social development of refugee learners living in refugee's camps.

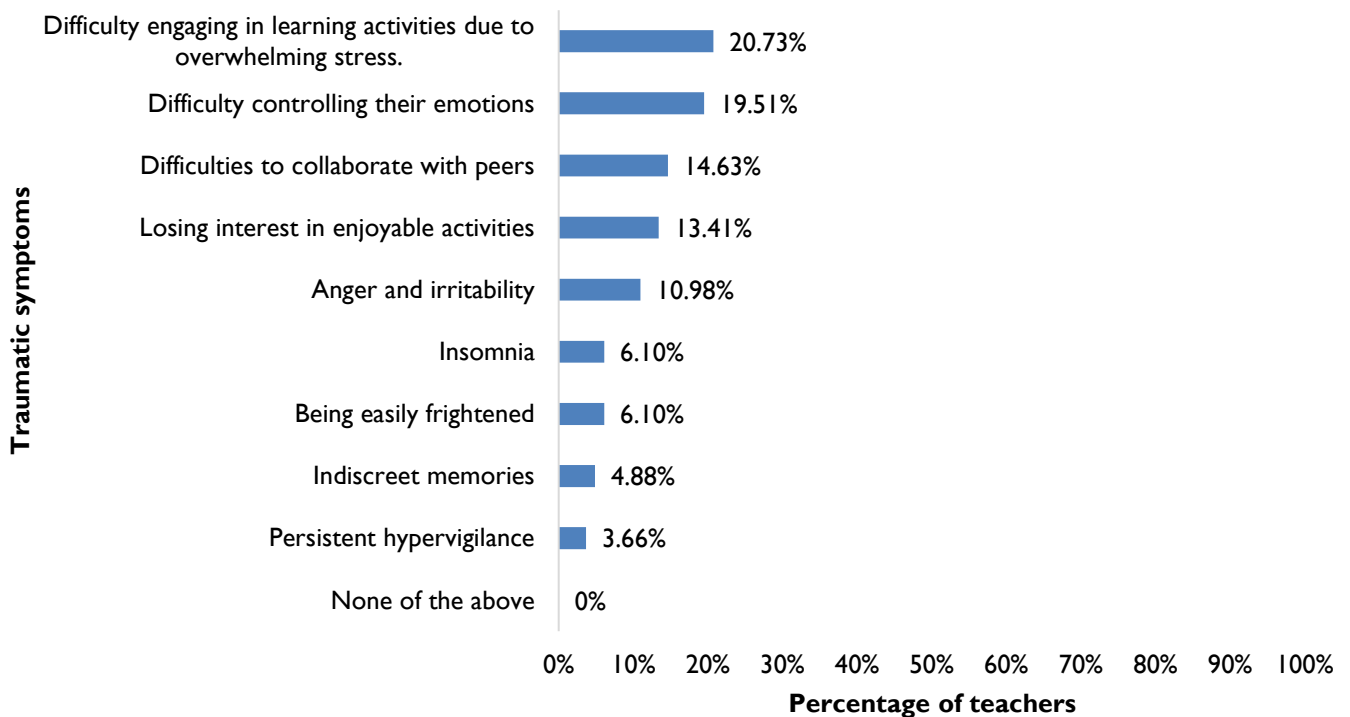


Figure 4. Educational traumatic symptoms of learners in Mahama Refugee camp

From the analysis of the data on traumatic symptoms among refugee learners in Mahama Refugee Camp reveals a range of emotional, behavioral, and cognitive challenges that negatively impact students' educational participation and performance. The figure 5 highlights the key factors that teachers believe contribute to trauma-related behaviors among refugee learners in Mahama Refugee. The most commonly cited causes were poor living conditions in the camp (25.26%) and family separation due to wars or conflicts (24.21%). Conflict and violence in learners' home countries was also significant (15.79%). Additionally, issues like harassment and lack of access to quality education (each at 9.47%) further contribute to learners' stress and behavioral difficulties. Less frequently reported but still notable were bullying and lack of access to healthcare (each 6.32%), and marginalization at school (3.16%). These findings point to a combination of pre-displacement trauma and ongoing challenges within the camp environment as key drivers of the learners' negative behavioral symptoms that hinder their learning.

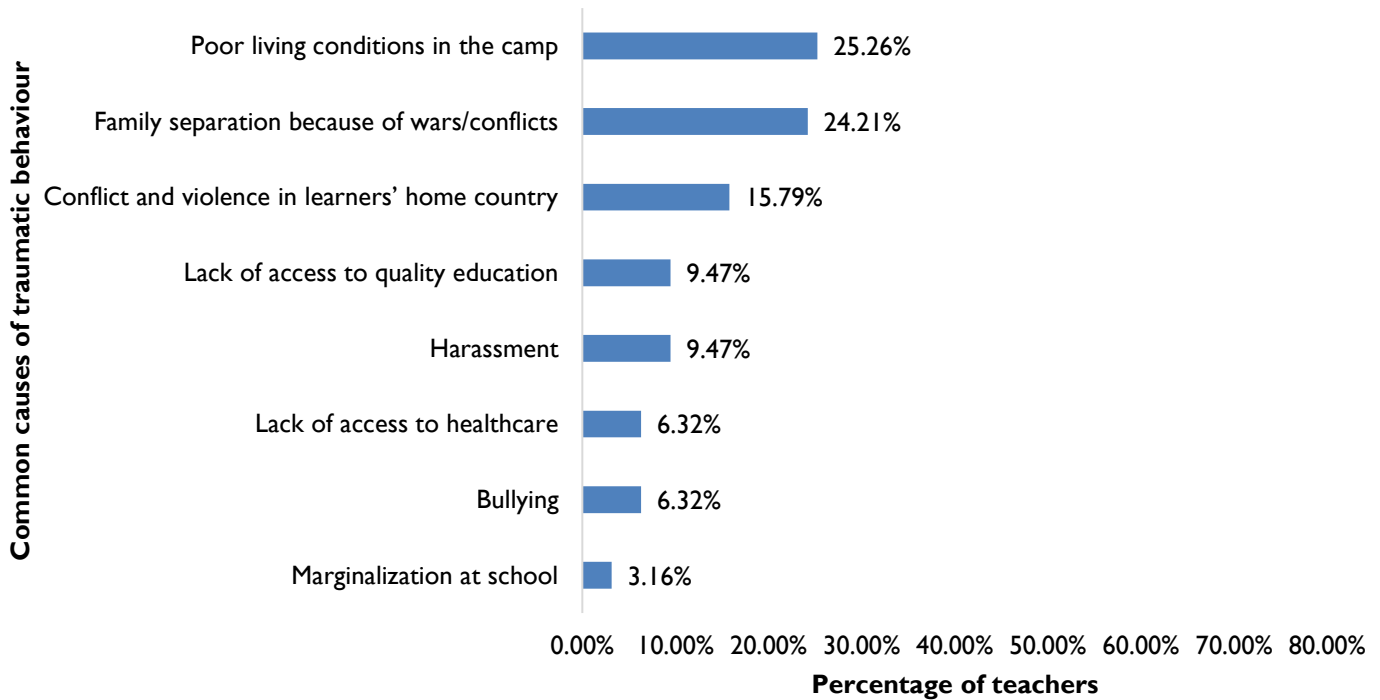


Figure 5. Causes of trauma-related behaviors among refugee learners in Mahama camp

Teachers also highlighted psychological and emotional effect of traumatic behavior to the effective learning for refugee students. The results in Figure 6 highlights the psychological and emotional effects of traumatic behavior on the effective learning of refugee students. The most frequently reported impacts include low self-esteem (19.51%), difficulty regulating emotions (15.85%), and sudden changes in behavior (15.85%), all of which significantly hinder students' capacity to engage and perform academically. Other notable effects include difficulty concentrating (14.63%), anxiety and depression (9.76%),

hypervigilance (6.10%), and constant self-doubt (4.88%). These findings suggest that trauma deeply affects emotional stability and cognitive functioning, ultimately impeding the learning process for refugee students.

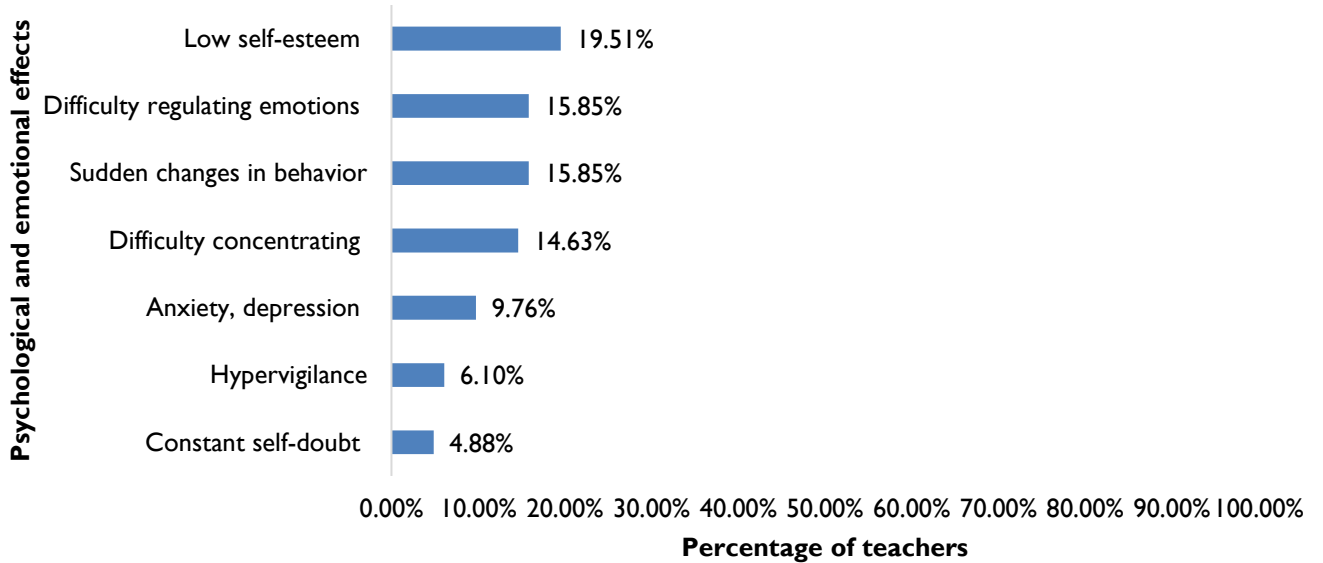


Figure 6. Psychological and emotional effect of traumatic behavior to the effective learning for refugee students

From the teachers and student response, the analysis of the teacher’s responses reveals that they employ a variety of teaching approaches to address trauma-related challenges among students. A predominant strategy involves providing counselling and emotional support, with many teachers emphasizing the importance of listening to students, offering advice, and helping them manage emotional difficulties. Teachers also highlight the need to motivate learners, build trust, and create strong relationships by engaging in conversations, showing empathy, and promoting collaboration among peers. Teachers also mention involving parents and school leaders, indicating an awareness of the broader support network needed to address complex psychological issues, even though access to professional mental health services may be limited in these settings. They describe their attempts to foster environments where students feel valued, protected, and heard often through strategies like building friendships, encouraging collaboration among peers, and motivating students to participate in social and learning activities. These methods help mitigate the isolation and fear that often result from displacement and trauma. Some teachers emphasize interactive and participatory methods, such as using play, forming student groups, and promoting open communication, all of which can help rebuild students' confidence, social skills, and emotional regulation. However, a few responses also reveal the limitations and frustrations teachers face such as a lack of student motivation driven by hopelessness about their future which underscores the urgent need for more

structured, trauma-informed pedagogy and systemic support. Therefore, while the teachers demonstrate compassion and adaptability, their efforts would be significantly strengthened by professional training in trauma-sensitive approach and by integrating psychosocial support services into the school system.

#### **4.1.7. Trauma-informed pedagogy training manual**

A series of workshops was organized to develop research instruments and training manual. Trauma informed teaching approach is the intervention for this study. Thus, the training manual about trauma informed teaching approach was also developed by the team of investigators with one person with expertise in educational psychology. The person is also a lecturer of psychology at the University of Rwanda-College of Education (UR-CE). This person remained with the team of investigators for consultancy purposes. To develop research instruments and drafting a training manual, a workshop was organized and conducted from 15 to 22 October 2024. The manual incorporates culturally responsive content, practical teaching strategies, and self-care approaches for educators. The manual is structured into modules to facilitate step-by-step delivery during the training phase.

#### **4.1.8. Training of teachers on trauma-informed approach**

The training of teachers on the trauma-informed approach was conducted using a specially developed manual designed to the needs of teachers working in refugee settings. This manual served as the foundational resource for training and was created through a collaborative process involving the research team and a specialist in educational psychology from the University of Rwanda – College of Education (UR-CE). The training included practical teaching strategies for recognizing and responding to trauma symptoms in learners, as well as self-care techniques to support teacher well-being. The training sessions equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to create emotionally safe and supportive learning environments, directly addressing the behavioral and psychological challenges faced by displaced learners in Mahama Refugee Camp. More information about training including photos, and others resources are attached in appendix four.

#### **4.1.9. Mid-term report writing**

The writing of this mid-term report was undertaken in late from 07 to 09 May 2025. This report consolidates the achievements, challenges, and lessons learned from the first phase. It serves as a key document for reflection, accountability, and planning for the next phase of the project. It is intended for submission to stakeholders including funders and UR-CE.

#### **4.1.10. Dissemination of research findings**

From 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025 the project team attended 3<sup>rd</sup> International conference on Reshaping Education for Sustainable Development for exhibition and presenting the developed abstract. The abstract titled “Understanding Displace Learners’ Experienced Trauma towards Inclusive Education: A Case of Mahama Refugee Camp.” Within this regard, from 20<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025, the project team wrote the paper and presented it in the conference. The presentation of the paper aimed also at disseminating research findings to the academic and professional communities.

#### **4.1.11. Lessons observation and reporting**

Lesson observations were carried out at GS Paysannat L A, B, C, D, E in Kirehe, focusing on Grade Five classes. Twenty-nine teachers were observed delivering various subjects using trauma-informed teaching methods. Each lesson had a duration of 40 minutes. The classroom observation was based on four themes formulated based on the content of the training manual. These include the teacher’s ability to identify trauma in students, the teachers’ abilities to promote peer support and positive social interaction, the teachers’ abilities to create a safe and inclusive classroom, and the teachers’ effectiveness in addressing social and emotional needs.

#### **4.1.12. Conducting endline assessment and analyzing data**

The end-line assessment data were collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the trauma-informed approach across the same schools in Kirehe. In this context, interview with teachers and questionnaire of students and teachers were conducted from 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2025 across the same schools in Kirehe.

#### **4.1.13. Data analysis and writing final report**

From 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> July 2025, the project team analyzed the collected data to assess evaluate the implemented project through trauma-informed pedagogy. During this period, the project report was also prepared and finalized for submission.

### **4.2. Endline assessment results**

#### **4.2.1. Students’ perceptions about teacher’s application of trauma-informed pedagogy**

To assess the students’ perceptions about teachers’ application of trauma informed pedagogy, on 09 June 2025, 62 students (28 males and 34 females) were given a survey. The age of students ranges between 9 and 16 years old. Data were analyzed following three themes: (1) teachers’ empathetic and emotional awareness, (2) fostering a safe,

respectful, and inclusive learning environment, and (3) providing active emotional support and individualized responses. Students' perceptions were measured on five Likert scales (Strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree) for each item. The following are the provided results.

a) Teachers' empathetic and emotional awareness

Students have provided their perceptions about the teachers' empathetic and emotional awareness. Under these six items were assessed and analysed. The results showed that students have positive perception of teachers' empathetic and emotional awareness in general.

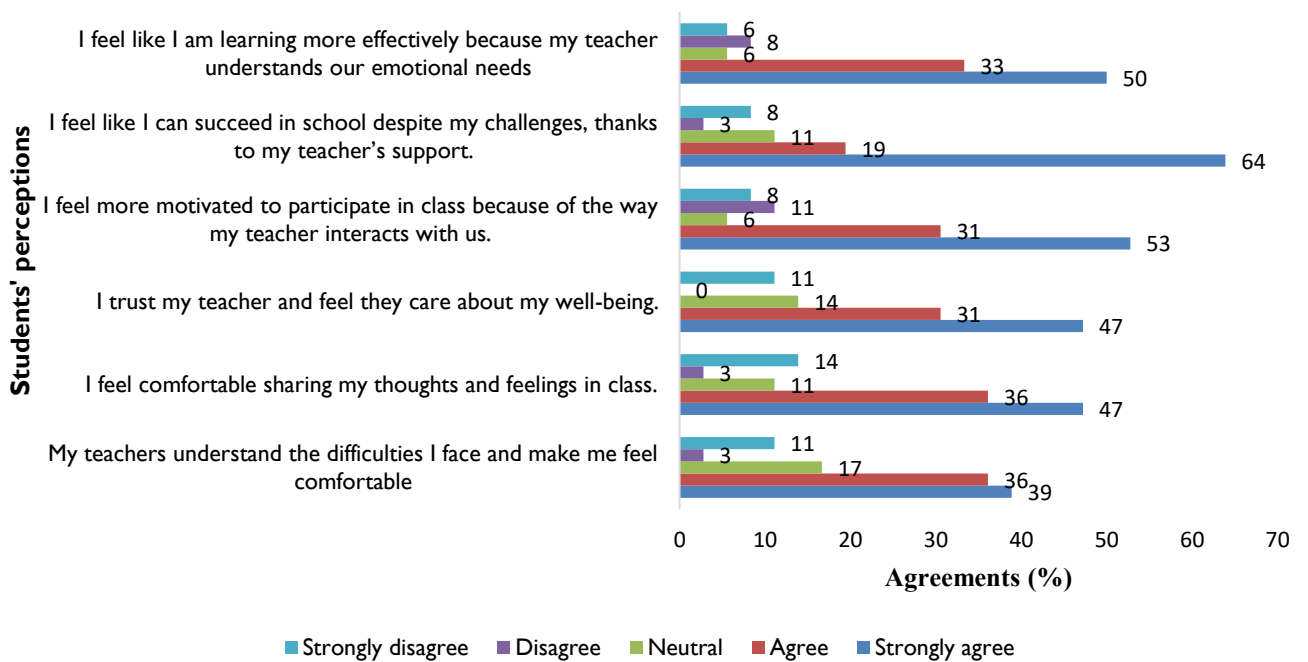


Figure 7. Teachers' empathetic and emotional awareness

The data in Figure 7 show that 83% of students either "strongly agree" or "agree" that they feel comfortable sharing their feelings, and 78% trust their teacher and feel cared for, indicating strong relational safety. 84% report feeling more motivated due to their teacher's approach, and 83% feel like they can succeed despite challenges, reflecting a supportive classroom climate. Notably, 83% feel they are learning more effectively due to the teacher's understanding of emotional needs. These findings highlight the importance of consistently embedding social-emotional responsiveness and trust-building strategies in teaching practices to reach all learners, especially those still feeling emotionally disconnected.

b) Teachers fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment

To respond to students’ social and emotional needs, students have provided their perceptions about the teachers’ abilities to foster a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment. Six items were assessed under this point. The data demonstrates that teachers foster a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment.

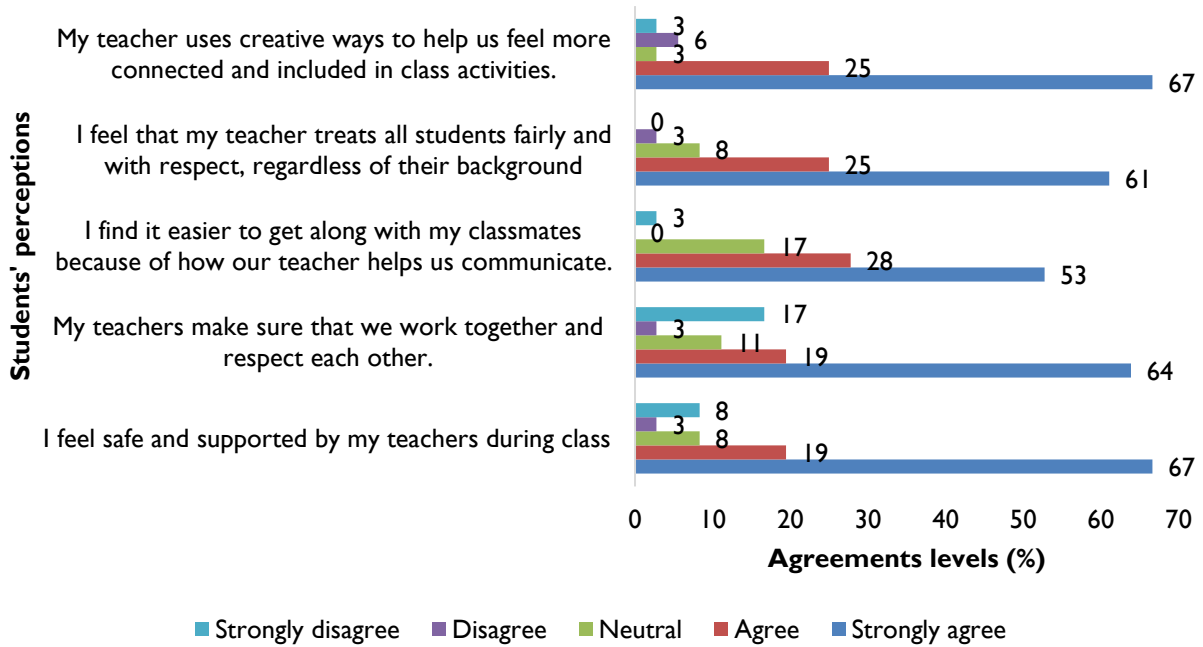


Figure 8. Teachers fostering a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment

Specifically, 86% feel safe and supported, and 83% believe their teachers promote respectful collaboration, which reflects strong classroom management and emotional safety. Additionally, 81% agree that their teacher helps improve peer communication, and 86% feel that all students are treated fairly regardless of background, indicating equitable and inclusive practices. Pedagogically, this implies that while most teachers are successful in creating predictable routines and safe spaces, there is a need to reinforce consistency and extend these practices to ensure that all students, including those on the margins, feel equally included, respected, and supported. Intentional focus on restorative practices, inclusive dialogue, and consistent behavioral expectations can further enhance classroom equity and psychological safety.

c) Teachers providing active emotional support and individualized responses

Students have provided their perceptions about the teachers’ abilities to provide active emotional support and individualized responses. Six items were assessed. The results indicate teachers provide active emotional support and individualized responses.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

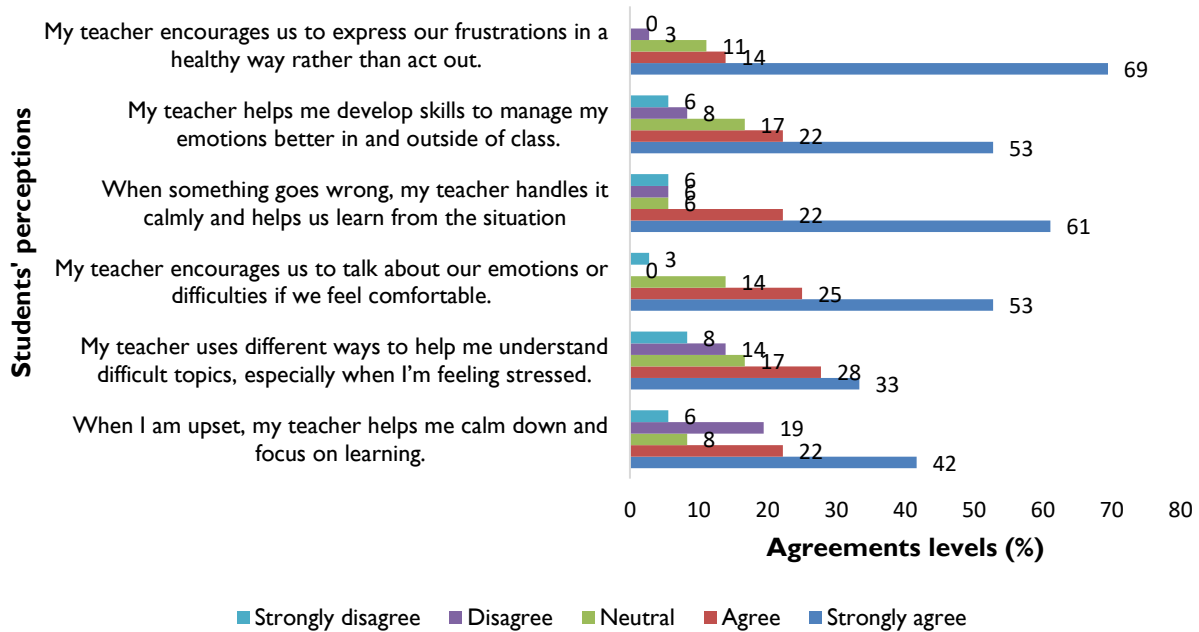


Figure 9. Teachers providing active emotional support and individualized responses

As shown in Figure 9, a majority of students 83% "strongly agree" or "agree" that they feel encouraged to express frustrations in healthy ways. Additionally, 78% say their teachers help them manage emotions inside and outside class, while 78% feel supported in discussing emotions when comfortable, highlighting emotionally responsive teaching, and 83% also believe their teachers handle difficult situations calmly, fostering emotional regulation and learning. However, support is slightly lower when it comes to calming students when upset (64%) and using varied teaching strategies under stress (61%). This suggests that while many teachers are implementing trauma-sensitive and emotionally supportive strategies, some students may still struggle with receiving adequate, individualized support during high-stress moments or challenging academic content. Teachers should therefore be equipped with adaptive strategies for emotional co-regulation and differentiated instruction, especially during emotionally charged or cognitively demanding times, to ensure no student is left behind emotionally or academically.

Students were given an open question where they were asked to provide a change they noticed in their teachers to support them solve their social-emotional problems. Several students observed that their teachers now actively listen, offer emotional support, and treat all students fairly, regardless of background. Many noted that teachers have become more nurturing, acting like parents and have adopted creative and inclusive approaches to classroom activities, encouraging emotional expression and teamwork. However, a few students reported no noticeable change, and one mentioned continued use of corporal

punishment. There is a need for sustained and school-wide commitment to trauma-informed and emotionally responsive practices, ensuring that all students experience consistent care, inclusion, and emotional safety in their learning environment.

In addition, students were asked what they like about the way your teacher support to deal with your social-emotional problems. Students expressed appreciation for a wide range of supportive behaviors from their teachers. Some students valued how teachers listen to their problems privately, solve conflicts peacefully, and provide personalized academic support. Others appreciated the encouragement to collaborate, the provision of advice and motivation, and the creation of a classroom atmosphere that feels safe, happy, and included. These responses suggest that students deeply value teachers who combine empathy, respect, and practical support. The findings underscore the importance of integrating emotional care into daily teaching practices to foster student well-being and learning success.

Further, students were asked what they dislike in their teachers about the way your teacher support to deal with your social-emotional problems. Some students revealed physical punishment explaining that teachers beat them or harshly discipline learners. Students reported that such practices sometimes lead to fear, withdrawal, or anger. Others noted emotional neglect, such as teachers ignoring students' problems, not supporting slow learners, or failing to clarify difficult content. While a few students reported no issues, the students provided information calls for strengthening teacher training in emotional regulation, non-punitive discipline, and inclusive practices. This may ensure that all students feel understood, supported, and safe.

#### **4.2.2. The teacher's self-efficacy in applying trauma-informed pedagogy**

During endline assessment, 24 teachers (13 females and 11 males) were given surveys to assess their self-efficacy in applying trauma informed pedagogy after training. Among respondents, 89% have a teaching experience of 3-5 years while 11% have more than 5 years of teaching experience. Data were collected on 19 June 2025. During analysis, teachers; self-efficacy were grouped into four themes. These are: (1) Teachers' empathy and emotional awareness, (2) Teachers' active emotional support and individualized responses, (3) Classroom strategies supporting emotional safety. Under themes are items rated on five Likert scales (very high, high, moderate, low, and not at all).

##### **a) Teachers' empathy and emotional awareness**

Figure 10 represents data about the teachers' empathy and emotional awareness. This theme is made of four items. Each item is rated and measured in percentages.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

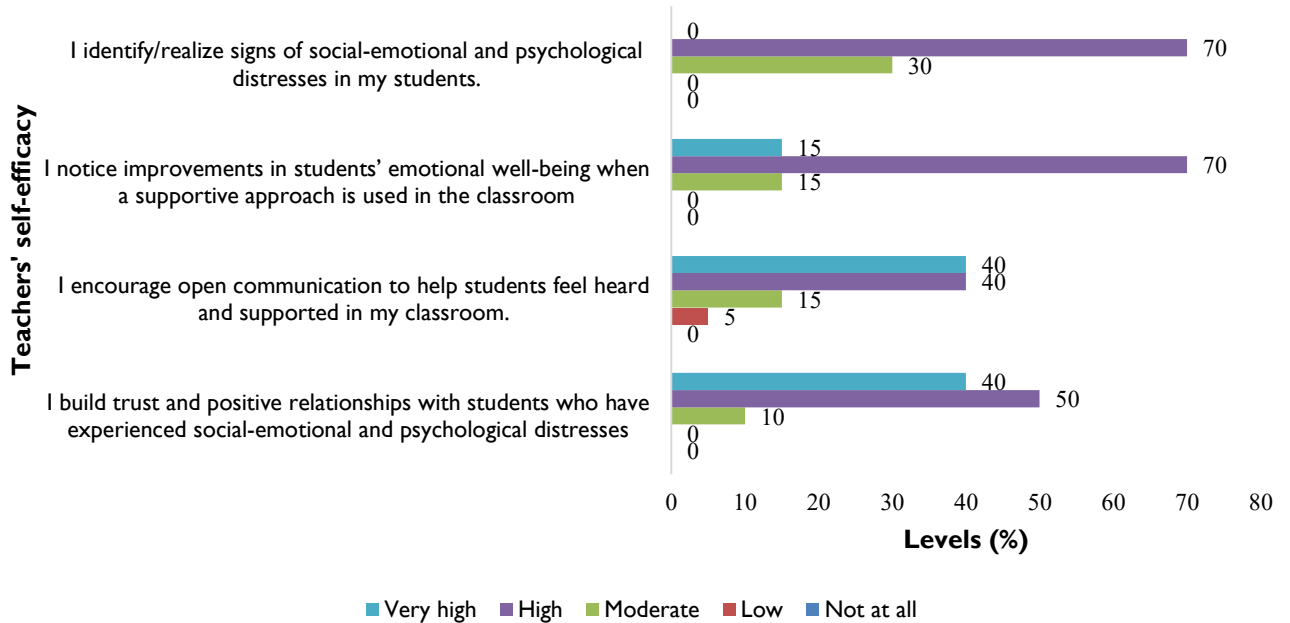


Figure 10. Teachers' empathy and emotional awareness

The data in Figure 10 shows that a majority of teachers rate their empathetic and emotional awareness as either "high" or "very high" across most indicators. Specifically, 90% report building trust and positive relationships, and 80% encourage open communication, indicating strong relational and communication skills. Furthermore, 85% observe improvements in students' emotional well-being when using supportive approaches, suggesting a clear recognition of the impact of emotionally responsive teaching. However, in identifying signs of emotional distress, only 70% report "high" awareness, and 30% self-rate as "moderate", with no responses in "very high." This suggests a gap in teachers' confidence or skill in detecting hidden or early signs of distress, which is critical for early intervention. There is a clear need for targeted professional development in identifying subtle emotional or psychological distress, ensuring that all students especially those suffering silently receive timely and appropriate support.

### b) Active emotional support and individualized responses

Figure 11 represent data about the teachers' active emotional support and individualized responses. This theme is made of four items. Each item is rated and measured in percentages.

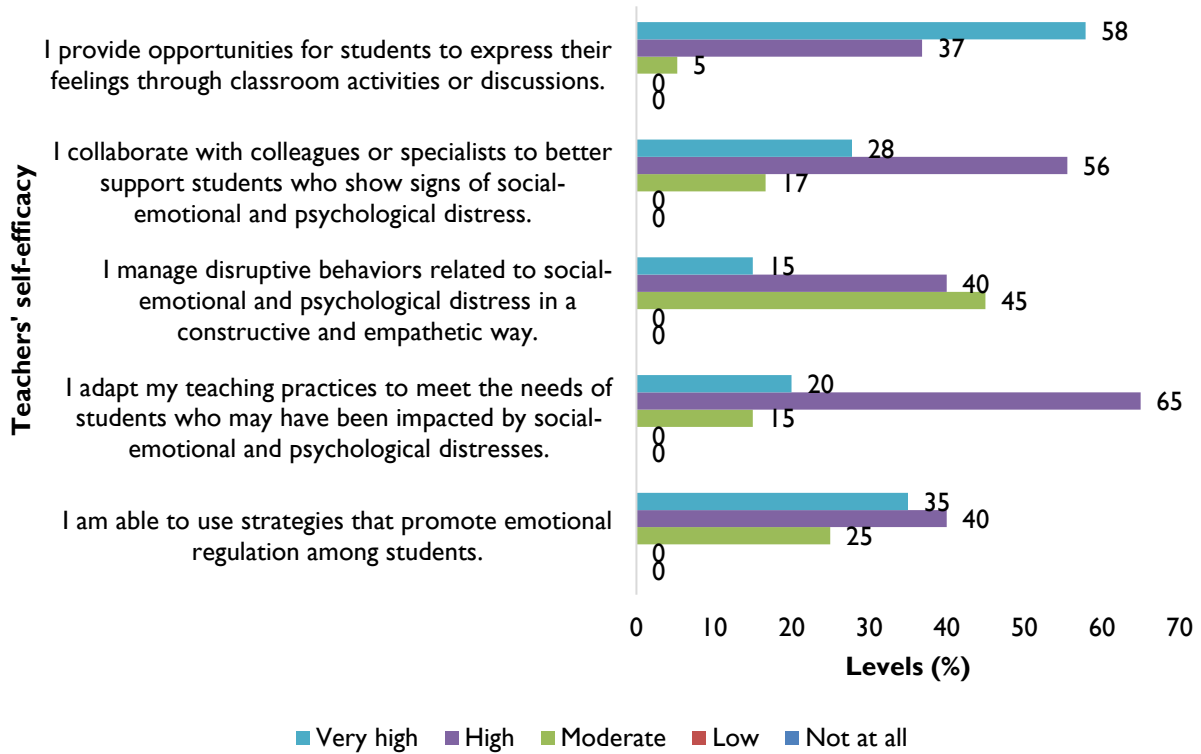


Figure 11. Teachers’ active emotional support and individualized responses

The data in Figure 11 indicates that most teachers demonstrate strong capacities in providing active emotional support and individualized responses. Notably, majority 95% rate themselves “high” or “very high” to provide opportunities for students to express their feelings, reflecting a high commitment to emotional openness in the classroom. Similarly, 93% adapt teaching practices for students affected by emotional distress, and 84% use strategies that promote emotional regulation. However, managing disruptive behaviors empathetically shows a weaker area, with only 55% rating themselves “high” or “very high” and 45% indicating “moderate” ability suggesting discomfort or uncertainty in handling emotionally driven disruptions. This points to a strong foundation in proactive emotional support, but also a need for focused training on trauma-informed behavior management strategies. Overall, sustained capacity building in behavior management and collaborative practices can ensure that emotional support is both consistent and inclusive across all learner profiles.

c) Use of strategies supporting emotional safety

Teachers were assessed about their self-efficacy in using strategies supporting emotional safety. This theme is made of three items. Levels of self-efficacy are calculated in percentages.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

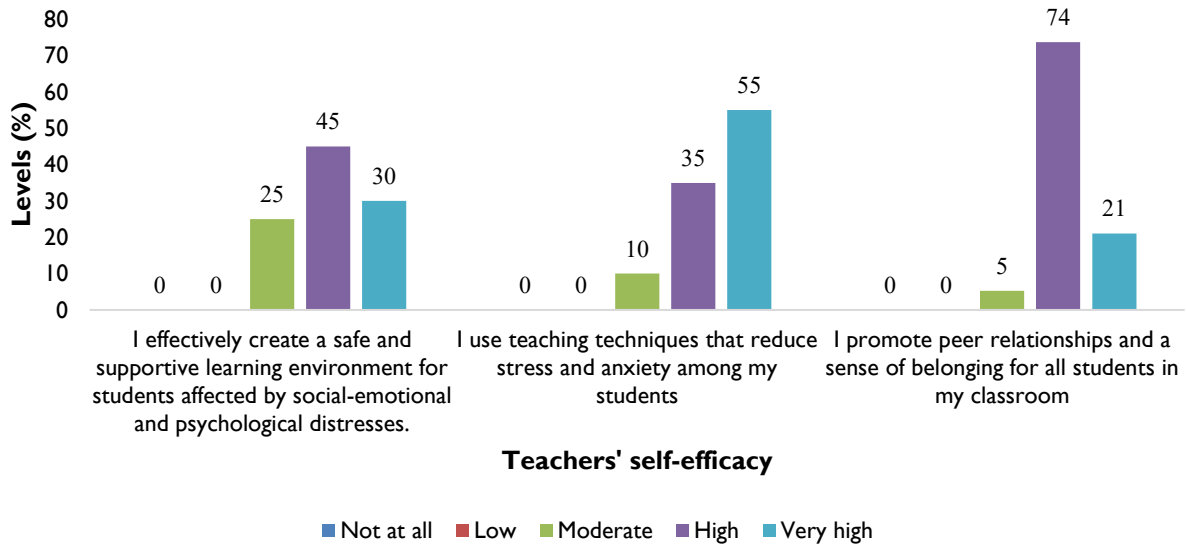


Figure 12. Teachers' use of strategies supporting emotional safety

The results in Figure 12 demonstrate that a significant majority of teachers feel confident in applying classroom strategies that support emotional safety. 75% reported “high” or “very high” effectiveness in creating a safe and supportive learning environment, and 90% using techniques that reduce stress and anxiety. Additionally, 95% promote peer relationships and a sense of belonging, with 74% at the “high” level, indicating a strong emphasis on inclusive social dynamics. However, 25% rated themselves as only “moderate” in creating emotionally safe environments, suggesting that some teachers may still lack the confidence or skills to fully support students affected by trauma or distress. These results indicate that the targeted professional development should focus on equipping the remaining teachers with practical, trauma-informed classroom strategies such as routine-building and cooperative learning.

Teachers were asked to provide skills they have developed to support students in their social-emotional problems because of training they received about trauma-informed pedagogy. Many teachers emphasized the development of skills in building positive and trusting relationships, improvements in self-awareness, effective communication, and problem-solving, identifying signs of trauma, provide guidance and counseling, and use positive reinforcement to foster emotional stability, among others. These responses suggest that the training may have empowered teachers to create emotionally safe and inclusive classrooms. However, an ongoing professional development should continue to reinforce these skills, with a focus on sustaining consistent trauma-informed practices.

As additional comments to their responses, teachers were also asked to share anything else about the way you handle students' problems at their school. The teachers highlighted the importance of understanding students' backgrounds and root causes of behaviors,

providing consistent routines, and encouraging students to openly express their feelings. They emphasized that training on trauma-informed pedagogy increased their awareness of students' emotional and social challenges, which enabled them to support learners more empathetically. Teachers further stressed involving all staff in creating a supportive environment to make students feel safe to share their problems.

### **4.2.3. Students' perceptions of their teachers' support on ' social and emotional needs**

Based on the focus group discussions with fifth-grade students at Mahama Refugee Camp, several key themes emerged reflecting how teachers support students' social and emotional needs through trauma-informed pedagogy. These findings offer rich insights into pedagogical practices that promote emotional well-being and inclusion for displaced learners, highlighting both strengths and areas for growth. The reported are the analysis of data collected from three group discussions.

#### a) Empathetic and emotional awareness

Across all three schools, students frequently emphasized their teachers' sensitivity to their emotional states. Students appreciated when teachers recognized signs of sadness or distress such as being quiet, not smiling, or withdrawing from group activities even when they hadn't spoken up. During FGD, the first students said, *"Yes, I was sad because my brother was sick. I didn't want to talk. My teacher noticed and gave me time to rest in the back. She later asked me how I was doing, and that helped.* Another student added, *"One day, I cried because I missed my parents. My teacher saw me and gave me a drawing activity to help me feel better. She also told me it was okay to cry."* A student further added, *"I was upset after someone pushed me during break. My teacher helped by listening and telling us how to solve problems peacefully."* The teachers' emotional awareness helped students feel noticed and valued. Such recognition is a cornerstone of trauma-informed pedagogy, which emphasizes creating emotionally safe learning environments where students' inner experiences are validated.

#### b) Safe spaces and predictable routines as anchors

Students described feeling emotionally safe during structured and predictable classroom moments, such as morning meetings (circles), storytelling time, during break time, during classroom discussions, on playground, or in the school library. These routines foster a sense of stability in an otherwise uncertain refugee context. During the FGD, one student revealed, said, *"We feel safe at the playground. There, we practice sport and we feel happy. Another student added "We feel safe when we are in the library. In the library, we read stories of children and we feel happy."* For many students, the classroom became a sanctuary where feelings could be expressed without judgment. This approach aligns with trauma-informed

principles, which prioritize consistency and predictability as mechanisms for restoring a sense of control in students' lives.

c) Active emotional support and individualized responses

Students reported that teachers responded to students' distress in proactive and compassionate ways, offering quiet spaces, comforting words, calming strategies like deep breathing, drawing, singing, and even physical proximity to soothe fear. For instance, a student during FGD reported, *"Yes. We learned to breathe in and out slowly. With the teacher we practices stretches and we sang a soft song. It made us feel happy again."* Another student added, *"Yes. The teacher told us to close our eyes and imagine a safe place. That helps me feel peacefully."* Another student further complemented, *"Yes. One day we all felt tired. With the teacher we practices stretches and we sang a soft song. It made us feel happy again."* These individualized responses indicate an understanding of each child's emotional triggers and coping mechanisms, a critical skill in supporting trauma-affected learners. These techniques equip students to navigate immediate emotional challenges and built long-term resilience. Integrating emotional regulation into classroom activities shows teachers are not only responsive but also preventative, preparing students for future challenges.

Teachers' efforts to build inclusive social dynamics were clearly recognized and valued by the students. Many students expressed feeling a sense of belonging when teachers encouraged peer support and inclusivity. Activities like group work, shared story-reading, and class discussions fostered positive peer interactions and reduced feelings of isolation. These moments are especially crucial for refugee learners, who may struggle with disconnection.

d) Students' suggestions for teachers' emotional and social support

To help students who are having a hard time with their feelings or problems, students have different suggestions. These include *giving them* more time to play when we feel stressed, helping shy students speak by giving them a chance to speak in front of others, giving them more time to relax when we feel bad, not just keep learning all the time, and providing more fun activities or games when people feel stressed would help.

e) Barriers to equity and unresolved conflicts

Despite these strengths, some students highlighted significant concerns, particularly related to favoritism, inequitable treatment, and unresolved peer conflicts. These instances undermined their sense of fairness and emotional safety. For example, one student noted how teachers gave more rewards to class representatives and neglected distracted students. During FGD, student 4 said:

*"I would suggest the teacher avoids favoritism. For instance, the teacher does not like my habits/behaviors. The teacher gives marks to some students and not for others. For*

*example, the teacher gives 2 additional marks to the class representative, while others are given 1 mark.*

*The teacher does not care for students who are distracted. The teacher leaves them and concentrates only to those who are following his/her lesson.*

*When there is a misunderstanding between two students, the teacher leaves them with their problems, and tells them ‘Go! The problem will be solved by yourselves’.*

These patterns, if unaddressed, could retraumatize students and damage trust. Trauma-informed teaching requires fairness, consistency, and the equitable distribution of teacher attention and resources.

In several cases, teachers successfully mediated conflicts between students, helping them resolve disputes calmly and peacefully. However, other responses like ignoring conflicts or allowing students to resolve issues alone were seen as dismissive. This inconsistency suggests a need for more training in restorative practices and conflict resolution, which are central to trauma-informed education. Students benefit when teachers guide them through social-emotional learning, rather than leave them to navigate conflict independently.

f) Pedagogical implications for displaced learners

Students expressed a desire for teachers to check in more frequently about their feelings and to offer more opportunities for self-expression, especially during emotionally difficult times. This reflects a key principle of trauma-informed pedagogy: empowering students by giving them voice and choice.

The findings underscore the importance of trauma-informed strategies in refugee settings, where children carry diverse and complex emotional burdens. Teachers in Mahama Refugee Camp are making commendable strides in supporting students’ emotional well-being through empathetic listening, emotional regulation strategies, and inclusive practices. However, gaps in equity, conflict resolution, and consistent emotional check-ins remain. Professional development programs should focus on strengthening these areas to ensure that all students not just the vocal or well-behaved feel seen, supported, and emotionally secure. These insights should inform teacher training, classroom design, and school policy within and beyond Mahama Camp.

#### **4.2.4. Teachers' insights on the trauma-informed pedagogy**

Based on the endline interviews with four teachers, several key themes emerged regarding their understanding, application, and experience with trauma-informed pedagogy. These findings have strong pedagogical implications for improving inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments, especially for displaced learners. The results from interviews revealed how teacher training, support, and collaboration with researchers

fostered a meaningful change in teaching approaches and student outcomes. However, challenges and suggestions were also provided.

a) Shifting perceptions of trauma and emotional awareness

Before the training, teachers held limited or narrow views of trauma, often associating it only with physical violence or visible psychological disorders. However, post-training, all four teachers described a broader and more nuanced understanding of trauma as stemming from various life adversities, including displacement, family loss, or interethnic conflict. This shift also changed how teachers interpreted student behaviors, not as signs of disobedience, but as possible expressions of emotional distress. The implication is that trauma-informed training can transform teacher mindsets, equipping them to respond with compassion rather than punishment. While explaining their view changes, the Teacher 2 said,

*“Before the training, I mostly focused on discipline and academic performance. I didn’t really consider how past trauma might affect student behavior. After the training, I realized many of my students have experienced serious emotional hardship, and their actions have impact in in class. I now try to look beyond the behavior and understand what might be causes.”* Teacher 3 added,

*“Before the training, I thought trauma as a historical background that a person went through. But because of training, I learned that our children have gone through difficult situations in different environment and they have fled because of different dangerous experiences. At the beginning in my experience in a class, ethnicity was a serious problem. Students could not sit on the same desk. Due to training, I tried to explain to them that there is no problem with sitting together.”*

The teachers emphasized that trauma-informed pedagogy reshaped their role, not just as educators, but as caregivers and emotional supporters. They highlighted the importance of connecting teaching and learning with healing. One teacher noted that learning for displaced learners cannot occur without addressing their trauma first. Indeed, the core philosophy of trauma-informed education, which sees emotional safety as a prerequisite for meaningful academic engagement.

b) Enhanced skills in identifying social-emotional distress

Several teachers reflected on their own transformation after training. They acknowledged that before the training, they often reacted with anger or punishment. After the training, they began to respond more calmly and empathetically, even in difficult situations. The Teacher 1 argued during interview,

*“Now I try to understand the reason behind the students’ behavior instead of getting angry. For example, a boy got very angry and threw a chair. If it was before training, I*

*would have punished him. Rather, I stayed calm and spoke to him later. When asked, the student said that he had seen something violent at home. I helped him through counselling.”*

This self-awareness and emotional growth among teachers reflect the power of reflective pedagogy. Teachers not only change their methods but also evolve in their emotional understanding of students.

Teachers demonstrated increased sensitivity in recognizing emotional or behavioral distress. They reported noticing subtle indicators such as withdrawal, sleeping in class, sudden emotional changes, or refusal to eat. For instance, during interview the Teacher 2 said,

*“I pay attention to sudden changes in behavior, such as withdrawal, crying, anger, or restlessness. Some students become quiet and isolated, while others act out or struggle to concentrate. I usually approach them gently and ask how they are feeling. I sometimes give them space and then check in later. It’s about being observant and patient.”*

Their responses included approaching students gently, providing space, and engaging in patient listening. This suggests that the training effectively enhanced their diagnostic awareness, an essential skill in trauma-informed teaching that enables timely and appropriate intervention.

c) Implementation of classroom strategies supporting emotional safety

All four teachers reported integrating trauma-informed practices into their daily teaching. Examples included using kind and calming language, setting up quiet corners, encouraging student expression, and providing emotional support through dialogue. For instance, Teacher 2 said, *“Yes. I’ve used several strategies. I created a quiet corner in the classroom where a student can go when feeling overwhelmed. I try to use calming language and remind students that it’s normal to feel upset.”* These strategies help them feel safer. During interview, one teacher (Teacher 3) witnessed to have taken extra steps to support a student without proper refugee status by providing food and care. The teacher argues,

*Yes. I applied it (trauma-informed pedagogy). I asked students to tell me the problem. The case was of a child who do not have refugee status documents. The child does not have refugee documents because her parents have different nationalities and status. The father’s child (refugee) has died while the mother has Rwandan nationality. Because of that the child is not supported as a full refugee. To support the child, we call her and share food.*

These adaptations demonstrate how trauma-informed pedagogy can be practically implemented in low-resource settings to build trust, safety, and emotional regulation in classrooms.

d) Teachers' collaboration with researchers

Teachers valued their collaboration with researchers, citing classroom observations, feedback, and reflection sessions as helpful. These interactions provided them with constructive guidance and reinforced their learning. This suggests that partnerships between schools and research teams served as ongoing professional development.

e) Positive changes in student behavior and engagement

Teachers observed noticeable improvements in student behavior, emotional regulation, and participation. They reported that previously withdrawn or disruptive students began to express themselves, attend school regularly, and form better relationships with peers and teachers. Teacher 1 argued,

*"Students feel safer, talk more, and behave better. For example, one student who used to cry and miss school, is regularly coming to school and even helps other students. More students now feel they can speak up and ask for help when needed be." Teacher 2 added,*

*"I've noticed that students are more engaged and less aggressive. Those who used to stay silent are now speaking up in class. There's more cooperation during group work, and even students with behavioral issues have started to calm down faster. I think the consistency and emotional support have made a difference."*

This indicates that trauma-informed approaches are not only emotionally beneficial but also academically and socially effective. Through trauma-informed pedagogy, students become more ready to learn since they were feeling emotionally supported.

f) Barriers to implementation: Time, resources, and culture

Despite the positive outcomes, teachers faced several challenges. Overcrowded classrooms, lack of materials, and uneven training access across staff limited full implementation. During interview, Teacher 1 argued, *"It's hard when you have too many students or not enough time. Some teachers don't believe in this method. With more than 70 students, it's hard to help each student.* Teacher 2 complemented by saying,

*"One challenge is the lack of resources. We don't have enough space or materials to create safe and quiet corners. Also, not all teachers in the school received the training. Therefore, this teaching approach is not common for all lessons in all classes."*

These barriers point to the general challenges that trauma-informed pedagogy faces in refugee settings. Addressing these challenges requires investment in teacher-student ratios, resources like emotional regulation tools, and whole-school training models.

#### **4.2.5. Teachers' suggestions to effectively implement trauma-informed pedagogy**

i. Calls for broader and more inclusive training

All teachers called for expanded training, not only for themselves but also for all teachers, school leaders, and even parents. For its implementation, teachers suggested inputs such as follow-up coaching, ongoing workshops, and more practical resources. Sustained capacity-building and whole-community involvement are essential to institutionalizing trauma-informed practices in school systems.

ii. Enhancing potential students' trauma awareness and research

Teachers expressed a forward-looking vision for their schools. Suggestions included availing classroom charts on trauma, the creation of trauma-support clubs, and the inclusion of trauma as a cross-cutting issue in education. One teacher stressed the need for more in-depth research to understand how trauma affects student well-being. These insights point to a growing teacher-led movement advocating for system-wide transformation.

The interviews with teachers showed a profound shift in understanding, practice, and commitment among teachers trained in trauma-informed pedagogy. These changes carry strong pedagogical implications: classrooms become safer, students more engaged, and teachers more reflective and compassionate. To sustain this impact, however, greater institutional support, training access, and a collaborative culture among educators and researchers are essential.

#### 4.2.6. Teachers' experiences in applying trauma informed pedagogy (written experiences from teachers' notebooks)

The shared experiences among teachers reflect a profound shift in understanding students' behavior through a trauma-informed lens. For instance, at School LA, Teacher T1 encountered a student who frequently displayed sadness, absenteeism, and classroom fatigue was approached with empathy and personal connection. By offering warm-ups,

**Experience 2 (Teacher1, School LA):** UH [names were anonymized] is a student in P5B. She has been enrolled in a school for a year. She lives in Mahama Refugee Camp. When I was in a class I observed her and found her with strange behaviors which pushed me to find the problem she might have. For instance, the student was sometimes absent at school. She was not happy to be at school. She used to sleep in a classroom. One day, I tried to care and show friendship. The student come to school late, I asked what happened, and the student started crying. Later, the student stopped crying and explained to me what made her being late [the teacher did not want to reveal what was happened]

regular conversations, and personal storytelling, the teacher nurtured a sense of belonging. The teacher observed that *“the student loves the school and she is a friend of mine,”* indicating that personalized attention and emotional validation helped transform the student's experience at school. This is a powerful example of how emotional safety can lead to behavioral improvements and re-engagement in learning for trauma-affected students.

**How I (the teacher) dealt with this situation:** *During the lesson, I try to use warm-ups to prevent students sleeping in class. I call in her names when I am teaching. We sometimes meet and talk to each. I share with her my life experiences which are also linked to hers.*

**Impact on a student:** *I saw this approach made her feeling at home when she at school. The student loves the school and she is a friend of mine.*

Teacher T1 also encountered learners who avoided interaction or were overly sensitive. One such student, who had been violently attacked in the past, showed withdrawal and academic decline. The teacher responded by fostering peer friendship, frequent check-ins, and encouraging self-expression. These actions exemplify trauma-informed practices like creating strong peer support systems and promoting emotional regulation. The outcome was clear: *“The learner now loves studying... and performs academically.”* This demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted relational strategies in promoting recovery and academic resilience among traumatized learners.

**Experience 4 (Teacher 1, School LA):** Once time in the first term, there was a learner called IL [names anonymized]. The learner is always quiet be it in or outside the class and dislike to work in groups. The learner always wants to be in groups of girls only. The learner was absent minded and failed academically.

**How I(the teacher) dealt with the situation:** *I tried to talk to him asking why he has such behaviors, but I was not convinced with what he told me. I called his father to discuss on the child's behaviors. The father told me that the child was once violently attached, which makes him always think about those hard times, subsequently causing him to behave in that way.*

*As a class teacher in P5B, I created a friendship atmosphere with him and I started showing care. I also looked for him a person to become an everyday friend. I encouraged him to be open up and express his thoughts during the lesson. I regularly make check-ins, asking how he is doing and if any help me from me is needed.*

**Impact on a student:** *The learner now loves studying. When you observe the learner, he enjoys learning perform academically.*

From School LD, Teacher T5 shared a compelling example of how family dynamics directly impacted a child's classroom behavior. A student who routinely slept in class revealed that night-time domestic violence disrupted sleep. Rather than punishing or ignoring this, the teacher engaged the family directly, advocating for a change in home behavior. This kind of holistic intervention aligns with trauma-informed principles of family engagement and environmental awareness, which proved impactful in restoring the child's learning capacity and classroom participation.

**Experience 1 (Teacher 5, School LD):** One day when I was teaching, I saw a student sleeping in a class. I approached and talked to him/her. The learner told me that s/he did not sleep overnight because of conflicts in family. The learner said that parents sometimes fight each other during the night and children cannot sleep.

**How I(the teacher) dealt with the situation:** *After sharing me that experience, I told him/her to bring one of his/her parents. Fortunately, her mother came. I talked to her, and asked her to stop conflicts because they have negative effect to them and their children.*

**Impact on a student:** *Currently, the learner is settled and learn effectively. The learner follows lesson and will succeed academically due to my commitment to talk to the child and to the parent.*

**Experience 2 (Teacher 5, School LD):** I have also a learner in P4. The learner always comes to school late. I often used to punish the learner because I did not have other means to correct the learner. After training on trauma informed pedagogy, I got an initiative to know the reason why the child comes to school late. I therefore talked to him/her and told me that s/he was traumatized. The learner told me: "I firstly fetch water when I wake up. Then, I prepare my young brothers before they also go to school.

**How I(the teacher) dealt with this situation:** *After collecting that information, I reported the case the Save the Children [an NGO operating within the refugee camp], and the problem was sorted out. Currently, the learner attends lessons on time.*

**The teacher's acknowledgment:** *To conclude, I thank you [a team of researchers] who gave us training. In reality, training came when we needed them. The training helped us in our career as teachers to offer quality education when types of traumas are identified and addressed.*

*I advise my colleagues to do their job as teachers and educators of Rwanda by taking into consideration different problems of their students. They can also make advocacy for the problems that they cannot solve themselves.*

**Experience 2 (Teacher 2, School LD):** There is a student, instead of coming in a class and learn, he/she chooses to go to the cemetery or Rusozi.

**How we (the teacher and colleagues) dealt with the situation:** *We have called his/her parents who told us that the student has no problem while at home. The parents explain that whatever happens to the child is when the child is coming to school.*

*We took a decision to ask school leaders take the student to relocate to another school to see if the student can learn effectively.*

Teacher T2 from School LD confronted complex issues including hunger, bullying, emotional distress, and early parenthood. In one case, a bullied child who refused to speak was supported through anonymous peer input, which helped identify the issue and allowed for collective correction.

**Experience 4 (Teacher 2, School LD):** I have another child with an always covered mouth. When asked to talk, the student refused. This made a student perform poorly in a class. We talked to the student, but the students refused to talk. We asked students to write what might be the reason on a sheet of paper. Majority of students wrote that the student is bullied by classmates because the student has big mouth

**How we (the teacher and colleagues) dealt with the situation:** *We have talked to students and told them that bullying is bad. Other strategies: I make sure students are interested in me and is my friend. In that case every student is open up to tell me all his/her problems even if I cannot find solutions to all them.*

These instances reflect how trauma-informed practices can incorporate peer, school, and external support networks. The teacher's personal philosophy to build student trust and openness has served as a key strategy for surfacing and addressing trauma-related barriers to learning.

#### 4.2.7. Effectiveness of trauma-informed pedagogy on teachers' pedagogical practices in the classroom

Twenty-nine teachers were observed while teaching different subjects for Primary (Grade 5) students. Each lesson had a duration of 40 minutes. To analyze data, four themes were generated based on the content (chapters in the training manual) teachers were trained on. These include the teacher’s ability to identify trauma in students, the teachers’ abilities to promote Peer support and positive social interaction, the teachers’ abilities to create a safe and inclusive classroom, and the teachers’ effectiveness in addressing social and emotional needs. The following are the obtained results with pedagogical implications.

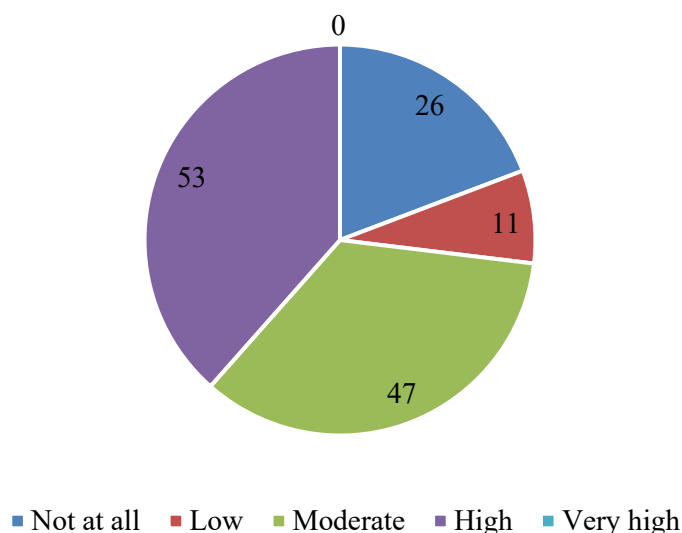


Figure 13. Identification of trauma-informed pedagogy

The data show that out of 29 teachers observed after receiving training on trauma-informed pedagogy, only 53% demonstrated a high ability to recognize signs of trauma in students, while 47% operated at a moderate level. Alarming, 11% showed low ability and \*26% were unable to recognize trauma at all (not at all category). No teacher reached the very high proficiency level. Pedagogically, this indicates that while just over half of the teachers are developing the necessary sensitivity to identify trauma indicators, a substantial number still struggle with this core skill. This limitation can negatively impact how promptly and effectively students in distress are supported. In contexts like refugee camps where trauma is widespread teachers’ inability to detect signs of trauma may lead to missed opportunities for intervention and healing. Thus, ongoing training, mentoring, and classroom-based observation practice should be prioritized to deepen teachers’ diagnostic capacity and responsiveness to students’ emotional and behavioral needs.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

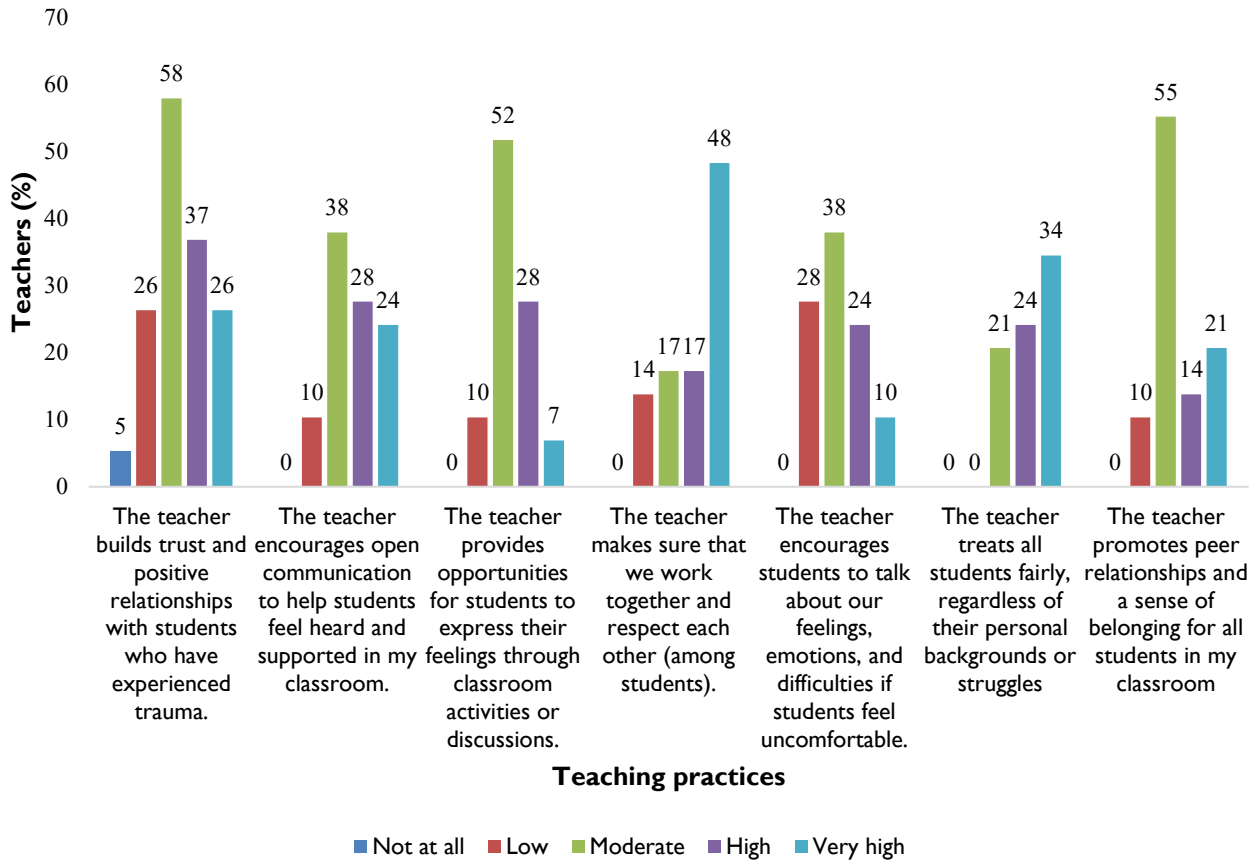


Figure 14. Peer support and positive social interaction

The classroom observation data reveal varied levels of teacher effectiveness in fostering peer support and emotional expression among students living in Mahama Refugee Camp after trauma-informed pedagogy training. A strong majority of teachers (58%) were rated as moderate in building trust and positive relationships, with only 26% reaching very high and 37% high. This indicates that while many teachers are making progress, deeper relational trust with trauma-affected students still needs strengthening. Encouraging open communication followed a similar pattern, with 38% at moderate, 28% at high, and 24% at very high, suggesting growing but uneven ability to create emotionally open classrooms.

When it comes to giving students opportunities to express feelings through classroom activities, 52% of teachers were rated moderate, 28% high, and only 7% very high. This shows that although expressive activities are being used, they may lack frequency, depth, or emotional safety needed for trauma healing. In contrast, peer respect and cooperation were notably stronger: 48% of teachers reached very high, with 17% at both moderate and high. This suggests that creating respectful, cohesive classroom cultures is one of the more developed aspects of teachers' trauma-informed practice.

However, in terms of encouraging open emotional talk when students feel uncomfortable, 38% of teachers remained at a moderate level, while 28% were still at low, and only 10% reached very high. This implies a gap in teachers' comfort or skill in facilitating difficult conversations—a key component of emotional support in trauma-sensitive teaching. Meanwhile, the ability to treat all students fairly regardless of their background had more positive ratings, with 34% very high, 24% high, and only 21% moderate, reflecting a solid understanding of inclusive practice.

Lastly, promoting peer relationships and belonging showed that 55% of teachers were still at a moderate level, with 14% at high and only 21% at very high. This highlights the need for more intentional community-building strategies in classrooms, especially since peer support can serve as a protective factor for trauma-affected students. These results point to progress, especially in fairness and peer respect, but they also reveal critical areas like emotional expression, empathy-based communication, and creating belonging where additional coaching and support are needed for teachers to fully translate trauma-informed theory into transformative classroom practice.

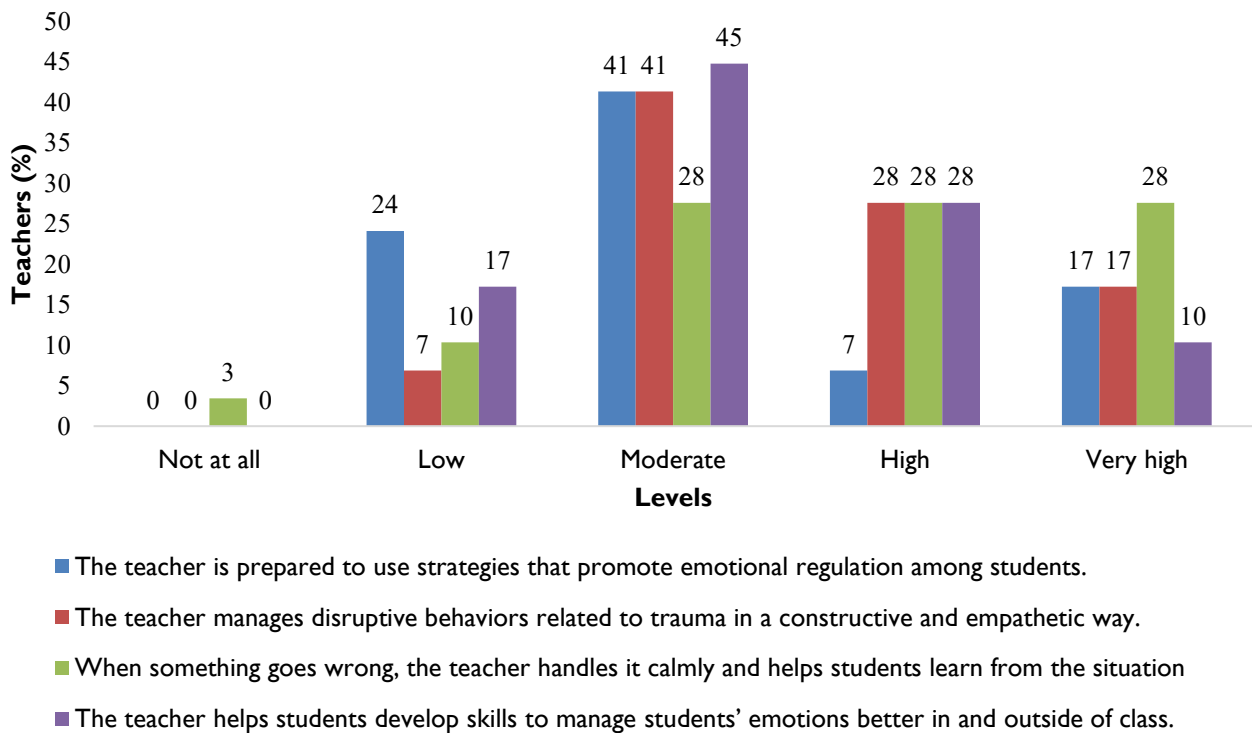


Figure 15. Creating a safe and inclusive classroom

The data on teachers' preparedness to use strategies that promote emotional regulation show that while 41% are operating at a moderate level, only 24% remain at the low level and 17% have reached very high. Just 7% are at high, and encouragingly, none are rated not at all. This distribution suggests that many teachers understand the importance of

helping students regulate emotions a critical skill in trauma-informed education but may still lack the full toolkit or confidence to apply these strategies consistently. There is a need for more hands-on training in techniques such as grounding exercises, self-calming strategies, and emotional check-ins, especially given the heightened emotional distress refugee students may carry.

In terms of managing disruptive behaviors related to trauma, 41% of teachers are again rated at a moderate level, with 28% at high, and 17% at very high. This pattern reflects a growing shift from punitive approaches to more empathetic, trauma-sensitive behavior management. Only 7% scored low and none not at all, which shows promising progress. From a pedagogical standpoint, this suggests teachers are starting to view misbehavior through a trauma lens, recognizing it as communication of unmet needs rather than deliberate defiance. However, to further strengthen this capacity, professional learning should focus on restorative practices, positive behavioral supports, and understanding trauma triggers.

When asked whether teachers handle problems calmly and help students learn from them, responses were more evenly distributed: 28% rated both moderate and high, and another 28% reached very high, while 10% remained at low and 3% not at all. These results show that nearly two-thirds of teachers are handling classroom challenges in a calm and constructive way. Pedagogically, this is a crucial achievement, as it models emotional self-regulation for students and creates a psychologically safe space for learning. Continued coaching and reflection may help those still rated at lower levels to recognize the value of de-escalation and problem-solving as teachable moments rather than disruptions.

Lastly, for the ability to help students manage their own emotions, 45% of teachers are rated moderate, with 28% at high and only 10% at very high. However, 17% scored low, which points to a common challenge in trauma-informed pedagogy: moving beyond teacher-driven regulation to student-led emotional skill-building. This capacity is essential for long-term resilience, especially for refugee learners who must navigate emotional challenges beyond the classroom. Pedagogically, it underscores the importance of equipping teachers with explicit strategies for teaching social-emotional skills such as emotion labelling, conflict resolution, and self-reflection within academic lessons and daily routines.

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

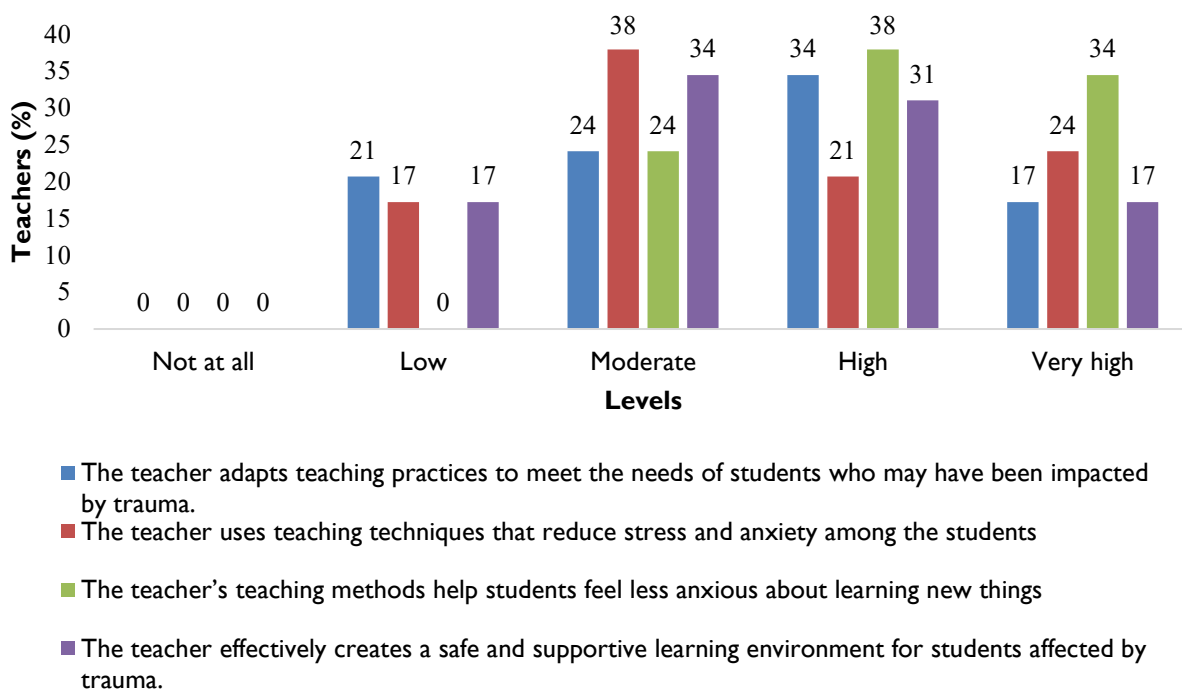


Figure 16. Addressing social emotional needs

The data indicate that teachers are showing encouraging progress in adapting their teaching practices to meet the needs of trauma-affected students, with 34% rated high and 17% very high. However, 24% remain at moderate and 21% at low, indicating that a significant portion still requires support in applying flexible, student-centered instructional strategies. Pedagogically, this suggests that while many teachers are beginning to differentiate instruction and accommodate students' emotional states, additional coaching is needed to deepen their skills in planning trauma-sensitive lessons, adjusting pacing, and using inclusive language and visuals that affirm student identities.

Regarding the use of teaching techniques that reduce stress and anxiety, the distribution is mixed: 24% of teachers scored very high, 21% high, and the largest group 38% was rated moderate. The presence of 17% at low suggests that while a majority of teachers are attempting to lower classroom stress levels, not all have mastered strategies that help students feel safe and relaxed. These strategies may include predictable routines, calm tone, reduced performance pressure, and emotionally neutral environments. Pedagogically, this highlights the need for more practical demonstrations and modeling of calming classroom practices, especially in refugee contexts where students may be hyper-vigilant or emotionally sensitive.

Teachers' ability to help students feel less anxious about learning new things is more promising. A combined 72% of teachers were rated high or very high (38% and 34%, respectively), with only 24% rated moderate and none low or not at all. This reflects strong

integration of trauma-informed methods that promote confidence and reduce fear of failure. Techniques such as gradual release of responsibility, scaffolded instruction, and a focus on progress over performance likely contributed to these results. Pedagogically, this suggests that teachers are increasingly aware of how trauma affects cognitive risk-taking and are adjusting their methods to create psychologically safe learning experiences.

Lastly, in terms of creating a safe and supportive classroom environment, 31% of teachers were rated high and 17% very high, while 34% were moderate and 17% still at low. Although most teachers are fostering emotionally secure spaces, the number at the lower end suggests inconsistency in classroom climate. A supportive environment is foundational for trauma-affected learners, who may otherwise struggle to engage academically or socially. These results imply the need for sustained emphasis on building trust, establishing clear expectations, and showing consistent empathy, so that all students especially those with emotional wounds can thrive within a stable and nurturing learning environment.

The general comments provided by the observers during classroom observation showed the teachers' abilities to apply trauma informed pedagogy with some weaknesses. Regarding teachers' abilities to promote peer support and positive social interaction, many teachers demonstrated encouraging practices such as promoting collaboration, encouraging group activities, and using energizers to foster class unity and engagement. Teachers were seen facilitating peer learning, praising students, and building a culture of appreciation through symbolic rewards like "giving flowers." One powerful example involved students working together and raising their joined hands to signal task completion, indicating a healthy sense of teamwork. However, some teachers still need to improve follow-up with students who arrive late or remain disengaged. These observations imply that while many teachers are fostering collaboration, consistent attention to all learners, especially the passive ones is essential for inclusive peer support.

About the teachers' abilities to create a safe and inclusive classroom, several examples highlight emotionally safe and respectful environments. Teachers handled conflicts, such as disputes over seating, peacefully and monitored classroom presence, demonstrating care and responsibility. Some teachers were observed addressing student emotional needs calmly—for instance, by discussing with students who appeared disengaged or were sleeping in class and coordinating with others to ensure they received support. These practices reflect a growing awareness of trauma-informed responses that promote safety and belonging. However, some teachers still struggle with classroom management and miss signs of distress or disengagement. This observation highlights the need for ongoing support in creating physically and emotionally safe environments where all students feel seen, respected, and valued.

Regarding teachers' effectiveness in addressing social and emotional needs, several teachers showed strong engagement by identifying students showing signs of trauma (like

sleeping or disengagement), counseling them, and reintegrating them into learning. Learner-centered strategies, student motivation, and emotional support were often observed. Nevertheless, there were instances where teachers did not notice passive students or failed to respond to visible signs of distress, such as students lying on desks or being disorganized. In these cases, the teacher-centered approach limited emotional connection and responsiveness. While progress is evident, especially in teachers who actively support and follow up with distressed learners, some educators still require coaching to fully implement trauma-informed practices that identify and meet the emotional and behavioral needs of all students in a refugee setting.

## **4. Challenges and lesson learned**

The implementation of the project encountered some challenges that affected both the timeline and the smooth execution of activities. One of the primary challenges was the limited timeframe allocated for the intervention. With only one academic term (April-June 2025) available for implementation, it was difficult to fully assess the long-term impacts of trauma-informed teaching practices. This short duration restricted opportunities for iterative feedback and adjustments to the strategies being introduced. Another key challenge was coordinating with schools amidst their already packed schedules. Balancing project activities such as workshops, classroom observations, and assessments with regular school routines proved demanding for both teachers and school leaders. This sometimes led to delays or reduced participation in key activities. Additionally, some students were not present during both the pre- and post-assessments, which may have affected the completeness and consistency of the data collected. From these experiences, several lessons were learned. First, the importance of early and thorough engagement with school leadership became evident. When school leaders are actively involved from the start, it enhances coordination and helps ensure smoother integration of project activities. Secondly, there is a clear need for longer-term interventions to allow trauma-informed practices to take root and show measurable effects. A single term is insufficient for meaningful behavior and mindset change among students and teachers. Lastly, the project highlighted the value of ongoing support and mentorship for teachers.

## **5. Implications to the policy and future research**

The findings of this assessment and evaluation report has important implications for both education policy and future research, particularly in contexts affected by displacement and trauma. The positive outcomes observed from the short-term implementation of trauma-informed teaching practices underscore the urgent need to integrate such approaches into

mainstream education policy, especially in refugee and crisis-affected settings. Policymakers should consider incorporating trauma-sensitive pedagogical strategies into national teacher training curricula and continuous professional development programs. Doing so would not only enhance teacher capacity but also promote inclusive and supportive learning environments across the education system. Additionally, school leaders and education authorities at all levels should be sensitized to the benefits of trauma-informed practices and encouraged to institutionalize supportive structures, such as teacher mentoring, regular reflective practice, and community engagement. The role of parents and caregivers in supporting emotionally resilient learners should also be emphasized in future programming. From a research perspective, this study highlights the need for longitudinal research to assess the sustainability and long-term impact of trauma-informed teaching strategies. Future studies should consider using control groups and more robust evaluation designs to better establish causal relationships between interventions and observed changes in student outcomes. Moreover, further investigation into culturally relevant trauma-informed models suitable for refugee and low-resource settings is essential to ensure effectiveness and contextual appropriateness.

## **6. Conclusion and key recommendations**

The implementation of trauma-informed teaching practices within the target schools demonstrated promising initial outcomes in creating emotionally safe and supportive learning environments for learners, particularly those affected by trauma. Both teachers and students reported positive experiences, including improved classroom relationships, greater emotional awareness, and increased student engagement. The integration of trauma-sensitive strategies such as socio-emotional check-ins, flexible discipline, and positive reinforcement contributed to a shift in school culture toward empathy and inclusion. Despite the short implementation period, the assessment revealed notable improvements in teacher understanding of trauma and its impact on learning, as well as increased student comfort and participation in classroom activities. However, limitations such as the absence of a control group and the short duration of intervention suggest that more comprehensive, longer-term studies are needed to fully evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of these approaches. To build on these initial successes, future studies would cater for the following key suggestions:

- a) To extend the implementation period to allow for deeper integration of trauma-informed practices and stronger evaluation of long-term impact.
- b) To provide continuous professional development and mentorship for teachers to reinforce and expand trauma-sensitive instructional strategies.
- c) To involve school leaders and parents more actively in trauma-informed initiatives to strengthen community-wide support for learners.

- d) To integrate trauma-informed approaches into national teacher training programs to ensure widespread adoption and sustainability.
- e) To develop monitoring tools and feedback mechanisms to track progress and guide ongoing improvement in trauma-informed education practices.
- f) To encourage peer learning among teachers through professional learning communities or exchange visits to promote the sharing of effective practices.

## References

Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2016). Trauma-informed positive education: Using positive psychology to strengthen vulnerable students. *Contemporary School Psychology, 20*(1), 63–83.

Dryden-Peterson, S. (2016). Refugee education: The crossroads of globalization. *Educational Researcher, 45*(9), 473–482.

Hassan, G., et al. (2018). Mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of children affected by the Syrian conflict. *UNHCR Reports*.

Kagoyire, J., & Rutakamize, J. (2021). Refugee Education in Rwanda: Policy Implementation and Challenges. *Journal of African Educational Studies, 5*(2), 48–66.

MINEMA & UNHCR. (2022). Rwanda: Refugee Response Plan.

UNHCR. (2023). Education Report: Refugee Access to Education.

UNESCO. (2019). Global Education Monitoring Report: Migration, displacement and education – Building bridges, not walls.

Windle Trust. (2021). Supporting Teacher Well-being and Student Learning in Uganda's Refugee Settlements.

## Appendices

### Appendix one: Ethical clearance from the University of Rwanda College of Education

 UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

---

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION OFFICE

Rukara, 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2024  
Ref: DRI-CE/046(a)/ IN/gi/2024

Prof. Alphonse Uworwabayeho (PI),  
School of Education  
UR-CE

RE: RESEARCH ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR YOUR STUDY

Following your application for ethical clearance of your research entitled: **"Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced Learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A Case of Mahama Refugee Camp,"**

Having reviewed your application and being satisfied with your protocol (research topic, data collection schedule, and informed consent), your study is ethically acceptable. This ethical clearance shall last for twelve months (18 months); and is renewable upon request and presentation of the progress report to the UR-CE Research Screening and Ethics Clearance Committee (RSEC-C) through the Research and Innovation Unit. Kindly note that you will have to apply for ethical clearance before making changes in the protocol during the implementation phase. The Research and Innovation Unit shall receive a final copy of your research report.

We wish you success in your study.


Assoc. Prof. Eugene NDABAGA  
Chairperson, UR-CE RSEC-C  
Director of Research and Innovation Unit  
Tel.: 250788308862  
Email: [nlabaga@ur.ac.rw](mailto:nlabaga@ur.ac.rw)  
UR-College of Education

Cc:

- The Principal
- Dean, School of Education
- HoD, BCPH

---

EMAIL: [dri.ce@ur.ac.rw](mailto:dri.ce@ur.ac.rw) P.O. Box 33, Kigali, Rwanda WEBSITE: [www.ur.ac.rw](http://www.ur.ac.rw)

## Appendix two: Research permit from Kirehe district



Republic of Rwanda  
Eastern Province  
Kirehe District

Kirehe 13/12/2024  
No. 2458/07.05.05

Prof Alphonse UWORWABAYEHO  
Telephone: 0788576566  
E-mail : [a.uworwabayeho@ur.ac.rw](mailto:a.uworwabayeho@ur.ac.rw)

**RE: Authorization to conduct research in Kirehe District**

Dear Sir,

Reference is made to your letter requesting for authorization to access Paysannal L schools for academic research purpose, The Principal Investigator of the research entitled '**Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp**' in Rwanda and project aims to investigate the effects of wars and conflicts that upper primary students face that may prevent them from accessing quality education.

Reference also is made to Research ethical clearance for your study of University of Rwanda College of Education specifying that you are a Lecturer of this University.

I am pleased to inform you that the Administration of Kirehe District has authorized your research in Kirehe District in specific Schools mentioned in your request.

We wish you a fruitful research.

Sincerely

**RANGIRA Bruno**  
The Mayor of Kirehe District  
**CCi:**



- The Vice Mayors (Both)
- Act. District Executive Secretary

## Appendix three: Research tools

### i) Interview guide with parents (Kinyarwanda)

Mubyeyi,

Turimo gukora ubushakashatsi kugirango dusobanukirwe uko abana bashyigikirwa mu myigire ndetse no mu buzima bwabo bwa buri muni muri iyi nkambi ya Mahama. Ubu bushakashatsi bugamije kumenya amakuru yuzuye ku bijyanye n'ihungabana ry'abana baba mu nkambi n'ingaruka bigira mu myigire y'abo bana mu nkambi y'impunzi ya Mahama. Byongeye kandi, turimo gukora ubushakashatsi kugirango twumve uburyo umutungo wabaturage ushobora kunozwa no gukoreshwa neza, no gusuzuma ingaruka zuburyo bw'imyigishirize y'ihungabana ku ireme ry'uburezi mu mashuri y'impunzi. Ubu bushakashatsi burimo ibibazo byuzuye kandi byujuje ubuziranenge kugirango twumve neza imyumvire yawe nubunararibonye.

Ubushishozi bwawe n'imyumvire yawe ni ingirakamaro kuri ubu bushakashatsi. ibisubizo byawe bizabikwa mu ibanga kandi bikoreshwa gusa mubushakashatsi.

Igice cya mbere: Umwirondoro w, ubazwa

1. Ese wabanza ukatwibwira muri make, imyaka umaze muri iyi nkambi ya Mahama, ukadusangiza muri make n,ubuzima mubayemo muri iyi nkambi?

Igice cya 2: Imyumvire ku ihungabana ry, abana baba mu nkambi n'impamvu ziritera .

2. Ni iyihe myitwarire abana bawe bagaragaza hano mu nkambi muri iyi ikurikira : kwigunga , kutita ku byo bakora , amarangamutima adasanzwe ? **Ubona se biri nko kihe kigero? Ni izihe mpamvu ubona zibitera?**

3. Watubwira imwe mu myitwarire idasanzwe abana bawe bagaragaza iyo musabana ? urugero wenda : Ingorane zo kugenzura amarangamutima yabo , Agahinda n,ubwoba bikabije , Ibibazo byo kutizera abandi , Ingorane zo gukorana n, abandi mu myigire kubera guhangayika cyane, Niyindi itavuzwe?

Ese ubona biri nko ku kihe kigero? **Utubwire n,impamvu ubona zibitera.**

a) **Muri izi mpamvu zikurikira tubwire izo wumva zaba zitera ihungabana abana baba mu nkambi?** Amakimbirane n'urugomo mu gihugu bavuyemo. Imibereho mibi mu nkambi, Kubura uburyo bwo kwiga, Kubura uburyo bwo kwivuza, Gutandukana n, umuryango kubera intambara amakimbirane, Gutotezwa, Guhabwa akato , Gutesha agaciro ishuri.

b) Tubwire **izindi mpamvu** zaba zitavuzwe zishobora gutera abana baba mu nkambi ihungabana rishobora kubangamira imyigire yabo?

**5) Sobanura ikigero abana bawe bagaragaza iyi myitwarire ndetse n,impamvu**

**ziyitera :** Kudasabana n,abandi,kutisanzura no kudatera imbere, Gusinzira hatu na hatu ,Kugira imyitwarire idasanzwe bitewe n, ibyo banyuzemo ,Kugira isoni n' umujinya ,Kutagera aho abandi bari?

6. Ni kangaha abana bawe berekana **inzitizi** zururimi ndetse no mu kubaka ituze? Utange n, igitekerezo cy,impamvu zitere ibyo bibazo?

7. a)Sobanura **imyitwarire** ituruka mu baturanyi abana bawe bagaragaza aho utuye cyane cyane iyo ukorana nabo? Kwisuzugura , Kudasabana , kutagenzura neza amarangamutima , Kwigunga ,Ubwoba n'agahinda ,Gushidikanya ,Imyumvire yo yo kwishinja ibibazo, kubera ibikomere bigaragara nko gukomeretsa, kwiheba ,Ubwoba bukabije bw'uwahohoteye,Kutizera abandi Kudasinzira neza , kutagira ubushobozi bwo kwibanda ku kintu Kutagira icyo yitaho , Guhinduka mu myitwarire bya hatu na hatu.

b) Ese ubona **impamvu** ari izihe zitera abana kugaragaza iyo myitwarire twavuze haruguru?

8. Ni iyihe **myitwarire** abana bawe bagaragaza ku kigero cyo hejuru muri iyi ikurikira aho muba mu nkambi Kutaha agaciro, kudasabana, kugenzura amarangamutima, kutagira ubushobozi bwo kwibanda ku kintu, Guhinduka mu myitwarire bya hatu na hatu ? Ese ubona impamvu zibitere ari izihe ?

10. Usibye ibibazo biterwa n,ihungaban twavuze haruguru hari **ibindi bibazo bidasanzwe** abana bawe bagaragaza muriyi Nkambi? Sobanura.

Igice cya 3: Ubufasha buhabwa abanyeshuri

11.Ni ubuhe **bufasha** wahawe kubibazo by'abana bawe muri ubu bukurikira, Ubuvuzi,Ubujyanama bwo mu mutwe,Inkunga n,abayobozi,Inkunga itangwa n'imiryango itegamiye kuri leta cyangwa imiryango mpuzamahanga, Ibikorwa byo kwidagadura , Inkunga yo kwiga.

a)Sobanura **ubundi bufasha** wahawe butavuzwe haruguru.

b) Sobanura uko ubona **ubwo bufasha bukoreshwa muri make** ni gute wagereranya imikorere yabwo?

12. Ni izihe **mbogamizi** uhura nazo mu kubona ubwo bufasha muri muri iyi nkambi? Sobanura uhereye kuri izi zikurikira ,Kubura amakuru,Intera iri uvuye murugo,Serivisi zidahagije,Inzitizi z'umuco cyangwa ururimi, Inzitizi z' amafaranga , Tanga nizindi zitavuzwe

.13. Hari ikindi **kintu** wifuzaga gusangira kubijyanye nubunararibonye bwawe cyangwa imyumvire yawe ku bijyanye n'ihungabana n'ubufasha butangwa mu miryango mu nkambi y'impunzi ya Mahama?

Igice cya 4: Guteza imbere no gukoresha ubufasha

14. Sobanura **ikigero** wanyuzwe cyangwa **utanyuzwe** n' ubufasha n'ibikoresho bihabwa abaturage mu nkambi ?

15.Ese wumva ari iki gikenewe kongerwamo **imbaraga** muri gahunda zikurikira : Gahunda nziza yo gutumanaho no kumenyekanisha ubukangurambaga-, Kongera uburyo bwo kuboneka no kubona ibikoresho mu muryango,Gukoresha abakorerabushake ,Kuzamura ubuziranenge na serivisi zitandukanye , Sobanura nibindi bikwiriwe kongerwamo imbaraga.

16.Haba hari ikindi wifuza **kudusangiza** kigendanye n' ubu bushakashatsi?

17 Ni ubuhe **buryo bw'inyongera** cyangwa inkunga utekereza ko bukenewe kugira ngo dushyigikire neza imibereho myiza y'abana hano mu nkambi ?

Urakoze cyane kugira uruharie muri ubu bushakashatsi!!!

## ii) Student Questionnaire

Dear students,

We are conducting a study to understand how teaching methods that consider students' social-emotions and psychological past experiences affect your education. Please answer the following questions honestly. Your responses will help improve the quality of education for students like you. There are no right or wrong answers, and your identification and your answers will remain confidential.

Student's identification

School Name:

Student's number:

Gender:

Age:

Please tick (V) in the cell reflecting to your responses for each statement below.

Statements	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
1. I feel safe/comfortable and supported by my teachers during class.					
2. I usually feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings in class.					
3. When I am distressed, my teachers help me calm down and focus on learning.					
4. My teachers make sure that we work together and respect each other (among students).					
5. I trust my teachers and feel they care about my well-being.					
6. My teacher's teaching methods help me feel less anxious about learning new things.					
7. My teachers encourage us to talk about our feelings, emotions, and difficulties if we feel uncomfortable.					
8. I feel like I can succeed in school despite my stresses because of my teacher's support.					

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

9. When something goes wrong, my teacher handles it calmly and helps us learn from the situation					
10. My teachers help me develop skills to manage my emotions better in and outside of class.					
11. My teacher treats all students fairly, regardless of their personal backgrounds or struggles					
12. I feel like I am learning more effectively because my teacher understands our emotional feelings.					
13. I feel that my teachers treat all students fairly and with respect, regardless of their background					
14. I feel satisfied with my teachers' support in dealing with social-emotional, and psychological difficulties.					

15. What do you appreciate about the way your teachers facilitate you in and outside the classroom?

16. A) List things that you hate about the way your teachers treat you?

b) How do you think your teachers should treat you to learn conveniently?

Thank you for participation

### iii) Baseline survey questionnaire for teachers

Dear Teachers,

We are conducting a research study to understand the experiences and support systems available for upper primary refugee learners in Mahama refugee camp. This survey is designed to capture comprehensive insights from you as a teacher regarding trauma in Mahama refugee camp. In addition, we are conducting a research study to understand how community resources and support can be provided and utilized more effectively. The study seeks to evaluate the impact of trauma-informed teaching methods on the quality of education within refugee camp schools. This survey questionnaire includes both quantitative and qualitative questions to ensure a thorough understanding of your perceptions and experiences.

Your insights and perceptions are invaluable to this study. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. Your responses will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes.

Thank you for your participation.

#### Part 1: Demographic information

1. Age:

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56 and above

2. Gender:

- Male
- Female

4. Teaching experience:

- Less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- More than 5 years

#### Part 2: Perceptions of trauma and causes

5. Do you observe which behaviors among your learners at school? Select all that apply.

- Difficulty concentrating
- Depression

- Fear
- Anxiety
- Changes in mood and behavior
- Irritability
- Changes in alertness and reactions
- None

5.1. If yes, select the extent at which such behaviors may manifest among those learners?

- Always
- Often,
- Sometimes
- Rarely

5.2. What do you think are the main causes of those behaviors?

6. When interacting with your learners, what kind of behaviors do they show? Select all that apply:

- Difficulty controlling your emotions
- Insomnia
- Being easily frightened
- Anger or irritability
- Losing interest in enjoyable activities
- Indiscreet memories
- Persistent hypervigilance
- Difficulty engaging in learning activities due to overwhelming stress.

6.1. At which level do those behaviors appear among your learners?

- Low,
- Moderate,
- High,
- Very high

6.2. What should be the causes of such behaviors. Select all that apply?

- Conflict and violence in your learners' home country
- Poor living conditions in the camp
- Lack of access to education
- Lack of access to healthcare
- Family separation because of wars/conflicts
- Bullying
- Harassment,
- Marginalization at school
- Other (Please specify)

7. What are negative behaviours your learners do manifest in the class? Select all that apply

- Attachment difficulties with peers,
- Making integration and progression difficult,
- Sleep disorder,
- Reenactment of traumatic event/past,
- Feelings of shame and guilt,
- Avoidance of places and people.

8. How often do you perceive that your learners display those negative behaviors?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very often

7.1. What do you think are the main causes of those behaviors?

8. How often do your learners show the language barriers and challenges in building stability

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often

8.1. May you please suggest some causes of those problems:

9. Do your students show also such behaviors from the classroom, where you live especially when working with them? (physical effects)

- Tendency to blame oneself for problems, because of visible injuries like bruises, cuts, or burns
- Extreme fear of the abuser
- Sleep disturbances

10. Do your learners show also such behaviors from the classroom, ? (social effects)

- Tendency to blame oneself for problems
- Difficulty trusting others
- Withdrawal from social activities

11. Do your learners show also such behaviors from the classroom, when working with them? (psychological and emotional effect)

- Low self-esteem
- Hypervigilance

- Difficulty regulating emotions
- Feeling isolated
- Anxiety, depression
- Constant self-doubt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sudden changes in behavior.

12.1 May you propose some main reasons of such kind of problems :

13. a. How do you handle students' problems in your class?

13.a. What kind of support provided to your learners when having social-emotional and psychological problems? (Select all that apply)

- Medical help
- Psychological counseling
- Support from classroom leaders
- Other (Please specify): .....

13.b. If no, why no support is provided (Open ended)

14. A part from the above mentioned psychological, emotional, social behavioral problems are there other special problems that your learners show within school environment?

Part 3: Community resources and support networks

15.a. Are there any community resources available and accessible for displaced learners?

- Yes
- No

16.b. If yes, which resources are available? (Select all that apply)

- Educational support (coaching, instructional materials)
- Health services (clinics, hospitals)
- Psychological support (counseling, therapy)
- Recreational activities (sports, arts)
- Other (Please specify): .....

17. a. Have your learners received any of the above resources in 16.b?

- Yes
- No

18. b. If yes, how would you rate the effectiveness of these resources?

- Very ineffective
- Ineffective
- Neutral
- Effective

- Very effective

19. What challenges do your learners face in accessing these resources? (Select all that apply)

- Lack of information
- Inadequate services
- Cultural or language barriers
- Financial constraints
- Other (Please specify): .....

20. What additional resources or support do you think are needed to better support displaced learners and their families? (Open-ended)

Part 4: Improvement and utilization of community resources

22. Are you satisfied with the current community resources available in the school community?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

23. Which community resources do you think are needed for the most improvement? (Select all that apply)

- Educational support
- Health services
- Psychological support
- Recreational activities
- Other (Please specify): .....

24. Explain why for your choice in 23? (Open-ended)

25. How can these resources be better utilized to provide holistic support for learners? (Select all that apply)

- Better communication and awareness campaigns
- Increased accessibility and availability of classroom resources
- More trained professionals and volunteers
- Enhanced quality and variety of services
- Other (Please specify): .....

26. Is there any barrier preventing from helping students to utilize community resources?

Yes

No

26. b. If yes, what barriers preventing you from helping students to utilize community resources? (Select all that apply)

- Lack of information
- Distance from home
- Inadequate service
- Cultural or language barriers
- Financial constraints
- Other (Please specify): .....

27. What additional resources or support do you think are needed to better support the well-being of learners within their communities? (Open-ended)

28. The teacher’s use of trauma-informed approaches

SN	Statements	Not at all	low	Moderate	High	Very high
1	I recognize signs of trauma in my students.					
2	I build trust and positive relationships with students who have experienced trauma.					
3	I effectively create a safe and supportive learning environment for students affected by trauma.					
4	I am prepared to use strategies that promote emotional regulation among students.					
5	I adapt my teaching practices to meet the needs of students who may have been impacted by trauma.					
6	I use teaching techniques that reduce stress and anxiety among the students					
7	I manage disruptive behaviors related to trauma in a constructive and empathetic way.					
8	I promote peer relationships and a sense of belonging for all students in my classroom					
9	I encourage open communication to help students feel heard and supported in my classroom.					
10	I collaborate with colleagues or specialists to better support students who show signs of trauma.					

Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

11	I notice improvements in students' emotional well-being when a supportive approach is used in the classroom					
12	I provide opportunities for students to express their feelings through classroom activities or discussions.					

Thank you for your participation!!!

## iv) Baseline focus group discussion with students

### Introduction

Hello, everyone! Thank you for joining this discussion. We are here to understand the challenges you might be facing and how they affect your education. Your honest responses will help us create better support systems for you. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to share your thoughts openly.

### Warm-Up Questions

1. Can you tell us your name?
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. Can you tell us something you like about school?

S/N	Names	Class	Age	No. of years being in the camp	No. of years as a student in the school	Home country	Your favorite subject
1.							
2.							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

Let me tell you a short story about a student named Amina.

### Amina's Story:

Amina is a 12-year-old girl who lives in Mahama Refugee Camp with her family. They fled their home due to war violences and now share a small tent with several other families. Every day, Amina wakes up early to help her mother fetch water and prepare a little breakfast.

At school, Amina struggles to concentrate because she often feels hungry. Her family doesn't always have enough food, and sometimes she has to go to bed with an empty stomach. Amina loves to learn but finds it hard to keep up because she doesn't have the necessary school materials like notebooks and pencils. Despite these challenges, Amina tries her best to attend school every day, hoping that education will help her build a better future. Before fleeing her home, Amina has seen and heard many troubling things such as rapes and killings that sometimes gives her nightmares. She worries about her safety and

the safety of her younger siblings. Yet, she remains hopeful and finds comfort in playing games and sharing stories with her friends after school.

#### Questions on Amina's Story

1. Amina worries about her safety and has trouble sleeping because of it. Do you ever feel unsafe in the camp? How do these feelings affect you during the day, especially at school?
2. Amina sometimes has nightmares and finds it hard to sleep. Do you ever have trouble sleeping or feel scared because of things you've seen or heard? How do you cope with these feelings?
3. Amina finds comfort in playing games and sharing stories with her friends. What activities help you feel better when you are stressed or sad? Do you have friends, a teacher, or family members you can talk to?
4. Despite her challenges, Amina dreams of a better future through education. What are your hopes and dreams for the future? How do you think education can help you achieve them?
5. If you could ask for one thing to make your school life easier, what would it be? How can teachers and staff better support you in achieving your educational goals?
6. Do you know other students in the camp who face similar challenges like Amina's? How do they handle these challenges? Have you learned any tips from them?

#### Other questions/General questions

7. Have you ever felt like you don't want to be around other people (friends, classmates, and teachers)? When does that happen? / Why?
8. Have you ever seen or experienced something that made you feel fearful or upset, after coming to this camp? Can you describe what happened?
9. How do you project about your future life after schooling?
10. Do you find it difficult to concentrate or participate in classroom activities because things you experienced in the past? Please explain?
11. What are the things that make you feeling down or anxious? When you're feeling down or anxious, what helps you feel better?
12. Do your friends, teachers, parents or any other people do anything that helps you feel more comfortable or safe at school? Can you share an example?
13. What are effects (impacts) of the support provided by your friends, teachers, parents or any other people when you feel anxious?
14. What could be done to make school better for students who have gone through difficult times like you?

15. What advice would you give to other students who are facing similar challenges?

16. If you could tell your teachers one thing that would help you learn better, what would it be?

17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your life experience and what you have learned from it?

Thank you for your participation

## v) Classroom observation tool

### A. Preliminary information

- |                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. School Name:.....    | 5. Number of students: .....                                   |
| 2. Teacher's Name:..... | 6. Number of special cases to cater for: ...<br>Mention: ..... |
| 3. Class: .....         | 7. Date: .....   |
| 4. Lesson Title: .....  | 8. Lesson starts at: .....ends at.....                         |

### B. Classroom observation

The teacher's use of trauma-informed approaches. Tick under "Not all, low, Moderate, High, very high" cell to show your level of agreement for each statement.

SN	Statements	Not at all	low	Moderate	High	Very high
1	The teacher recognizes signs of trauma within students.					
2	The teacher builds trust and positive relationships with students who have experienced trauma.					
3	The teacher effectively creates a safe and supportive learning environment for students affected by trauma.					
4	The teacher is prepared to use strategies that promote emotional regulation among students.					
5	The teacher adapts teaching practices to meet the needs of students who may have been impacted by trauma.					
6	The teacher uses teaching techniques that reduce stress and anxiety among the students					
7	The teacher manages disruptive behaviors related to trauma in a constructive and empathetic way.					

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

8	The teacher promotes peer relationships and a sense of belonging for all students in my classroom					
9	The teacher encourages open communication to help students feel heard and supported in my classroom.					
10	The teacher collaborates with colleagues or specialists to better support students who show signs of trauma.					
11	The teacher notices improvements in students' emotional well-being when a supportive approach is used in the classroom					
12	The teacher provides opportunities for students to express their feelings through classroom activities or discussions.					
13	The teacher makes sure that we work together and respect each other (among students).					
14	The teacher's teaching methods help students feel less anxious about learning new things					
15	The teacher encourages students to talk about our feelings, emotions, and difficulties if students feel uncomfortable.					
16	When something goes wrong, the teacher handles it calmly and helps students learn from the situation					
17	The teacher helps students develop skills to manage students' emotions better in and outside of class.					
18	The teacher treats all students fairly, regardless of their personal backgrounds or struggles					

General comments:

Thank you for your participation!!!

## vi) Endline questionnaire for teachers

Project: Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp - RWANDA (CODE Project)

Purpose: Assessing the teacher’s application of Trauma-informed pedagogy

### Part 1: Demographic information

1. Teacher’s Name: .....
2. Telephone number: .....
3. Age: a.18-25 b. 26-35, c. 36-45, d. 46-55, e. 56 and above
4. Gender: a. Male, b. Female
5. **Teaching experience:** a. Less than 1 year, b. 1-2 years, c. 3-5 years, d. More than 5 years

### Part 2: Teacher’s use of Trauma -informed pedagogy

Please put a tick “V” in the cell corresponding to the level of agreement for each statement below.

SN	Statements	Not at all	low	Moderate	High	Very high
6	I identify/realize signs of social-emotional and psychological distresses in my students.					
7	I build trust and positive relationships with students who have experienced social-emotional and psychological distresses					
8	I effectively create a safe and supportive learning environment for students affected by social-emotional and psychological distresses.					
9	I am able to use strategies that promote emotional regulation among students.					
10	I adapt my teaching practices to meet the needs of students who may have been impacted by social-emotional and psychological distresses.					
11	I use teaching techniques that reduce stress and anxiety among my students					
12	I manage disruptive behaviors related to social-emotional and psychological distress in a constructive and empathetic way.					
13	I promote peer relationships and a sense of belonging for all students in my classroom					
14	I encourage open communication to help students feel heard and supported in my classroom.					

15	I collaborate with colleagues or specialists to better support students who show signs of social-emotional and psychological distress.					
16	I notice improvements in students' emotional well-being when a supportive approach is used in the classroom					
17	I provide opportunities for students to express their feelings through classroom activities or discussions.					

18. What skills do you think you have developed to support students in their social-emotional problems because of training you received about trauma-informed pedagogy?

19. Would you like to share anything else about the way you handle students' problems at your school? Please, share.

Thank you for your participation!!!

### vii) Endline semi-structure interview for teachers

Project: Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp - RWANDA (CODE Project)

**Participants:** Teachers trained in Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

**Format:** One-on-one interview (45–60 minutes)

**Purpose:** To gather teachers' insights on the trauma-informed training, their application of the approach in the classroom, and the nature of their involvement with researchers.

**Dates:** 06-08/06/2025

#### Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your understanding of trauma-informed pedagogy now, compared to before the training? **Probe:** *Has your perspective on student behavior or emotional needs changed?*
2. How do you identify when a student might be struggling with a social-emotional problem? **Probes:** What signs do you look for? How do you respond?
3. Since the training, how have you ever applied trauma-informed practices in your classroom? **Probes:** Can you give specific examples of strategies you've used? What worked well? Were there specific strategies you relied on?
4. In what ways do you feel the trauma-informed approach has helped you support students experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties? **Probe:** *Has it changed how you respond to certain situations?*

5. What kind of impact (if any) have you noticed in your students when you used trauma-informed approaches? **Probe:** *Changes in behavior, engagement, relationships, or emotional regulation?*
6. What challenges did you face when trying to implement trauma-informed strategies in your teaching? **Probe:** Time, resources, school culture, student needs, or personal confidence?
7. How did you collaborate with researchers during the implementation of this approach? **Probe:** What kinds of support or activities were involved (e.g., observations, feedback sessions, data collection)?
8. What suggestions do you have for improving the support given to teachers during future trauma-informed pedagogy initiatives or research collaborations? **Probe:** *Training improvements, better communication, more resources, or ongoing coaching?*
9. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience with trauma-informed pedagogy?

Thank you for your time and insights!

### viii) Endline interview with students

Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp - RWANDA (CODE Project)

**Purpose:** Gathering data on students' perceptions of teacher support using trauma-informed practices

**Grade level:** Fifth Grade

**Number of participants:** Six to eight students

**Duration:** Between 30 and 40 minutes

Date: ...../06/2025

S/N	Names	Class	Age	No. of years being in the camp	No. of years as a student in the school	Home country	Your favorite subject
1.							
2.							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							

Warm-up question

1. Let's start with something easy: What do you like most about being in fifth grade?

Main questions:

2. Have you ever had a day when you felt upset, sad, or worried at school? Can you tell us what happened and how your teacher helped you (or didn't help you)?
3. When you're having a hard time, what do your teachers usually do to make you feel safe or better?
4. Do you feel like your teachers understand how you're feeling, even when you don't say anything? Can you give an example?
5. Have your teachers ever taught you ways to calm down or handle big feelings (like breathing, taking a break, or talking to someone)? What did you think about that?
6. Are there places or times at school where you feel especially safe and supported? What makes those times or places feel that way?
7. i. If something bad or stressful happens at school or at home, do you feel like you can talk to your teacher about it? ii. Why or why not? lii. What was your teacher's reaction?

8. What would you like your teachers to do more of to help students who are having a hard time with their feelings or problems?
9. Is there anything else you want to share about how your teachers help you when you're having a hard day?

Thank you for your time and insights.

### ix) Endline questionnaire for students

Research title: Riding the Waves to Quality and Inclusive Education Amidst Displaced learners through Trauma-Informed Teaching Approach: A case of Mahama Refugee Camp

Student Questionnaire: Assessing the teacher's application of Trauma-Informed Teaching to deal with students' social-emotional behaviors

Identification:

- 1) Name: .....
- 2) School Name: .....
- 3) Sex: .....
- 4) Age: .....
- 5) Date: ...../06/2025

Please fill in cell with a "V" for each of the following statements to show your level of agreement

SN	Statements	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
1	I feel safe and supported by my teachers during class.					
2	My teachers understand the difficulties I face and make me feel comfortable					
3	I feel comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings in class.					
4	When I am upset, my teacher helps me calm down and focus on learning.					
5	My teachers make sure that we work together and respect each other.					
6	My teacher uses different ways to help me understand difficult					

## Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

	topics, especially when I'm feeling stressed.					
7	I trust my teacher and feel they care about my well-being.					
8	I feel more motivated to participate in class because of the way my teacher interacts with us.					
9	My teacher encourages us to talk about our emotions or difficulties if we feel comfortable.					
10	I feel like I can succeed in school despite my challenges, thanks to my teacher's support.					
11	I find it easier to get along with my classmates because of how our teacher helps us communicate.					
12	When something goes wrong, my teacher handles it calmly and helps us learn from the situation					
13	My teacher helps me develop skills to manage my emotions better in and outside of class.					
14	I feel like I am learning more effectively because my teacher understands our emotional needs.					
15	My teacher encourages us to express our frustrations in a healthy way rather than act out.					
16	I feel that my teacher treats all students fairly and with respect, regardless of their background					
17	My teacher uses creative ways to help us feel more connected and included in class activities.					

18. What a change have you noticed in your teacher to support you to solve your social-emotional problems?

19. What do you like about the way your teacher support to deal with your social-emotional problems?

What don't you like about the way your teacher support to deal with social-emotional problems?

Thank you for participation

## Appendix four: Evidence of the project implementation

The photos below show participants and research team in the workshop on the trauma informed pedagogy



# Trauma-Informed Teaching in a Refugee Camp in Rwanda

