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Obtaining a Second Chance: Education During and After Conflict

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## **Second-chance Education in Post-conflict Timor-Leste: Youth and Adult Learners' Motives, Experiences and Circumstances**

Taro Komatsu \*

### **Abstract**

Timor-Leste is a post-conflict nation that marked its independence in 2002, becoming the newest sovereign state in Asia. Due to prolonged periods of armed conflict and poverty worsened by the conflict, one-fifth of the population (200,000 people) were unable to complete their basic education. Against this background, the Timor-Leste government started the Equivalency Program (EP) in 2010, an accelerated education program for youths and adults whose education was interrupted. The program offers a condensed basic education curriculum that is equivalent to primary and pre-secondary education.

This paper examines the motives, experiences and circumstances of the youth and adult learners who have had the opportunity to receive second-chance education (SCE) in Timor-Leste. The study describes their life journeys in a conflict-affected environment with the goal of understanding the meaning of learning as they attend an education program. This study utilized a mixed methods approach, with life-story interviews being the primary data-collection method, complemented by focus-group interviews and a questionnaire survey.

The study finds that many participants indicate a longing to learn again, primarily from an intrinsic desire to seek greater knowledge and gain self-confidence, a desire that grew with the emergence of the post-war society. Their life-stories illuminate the ordeals of losing the opportunity for schooling amidst conflict, with many despairing that they had become a 'lost generation.' EP restored their chance to attain the inner satisfaction of learning and a sense of self-worth as they gained a sense of autonomy and agency. Their desire to learn was bolstered by the post-conflict euphoria and the advent of a new society that seemed to promise a better future. This euphoria offers a momentum that can be used to achieve learning for all and promote human dignity.

**Keywords:** Second-chance education, Timor-Leste, conflict, life-story interviews, youth

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## **1. Introduction**

Youth and adult learning programs in post-conflict settings are meaningful, since they provide this population with a second chance for education. These programs are one means of fulfilling Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promises inclusive, equitable and life-long learning opportunities for all. Considering that there are a number of young people who have missed the opportunity for schooling or had their education interrupted by conflict, adult learning programs in the form of a condensed curriculum (accelerated education programs) may help governments and citizens realize this goal: the fundamental human right to basic education (Inter-Agency Accelerated Education Working Group, 2016).

Timor-Leste is a post-conflict nation seeking to meet the goal of Education for All. Since its independence in 2002, Timor-Leste has been struggling to provide youths and adults with education. The country's youth population is large due to a fertility rate of 5.9 (World Health Organization, 2015), making it one of the highest in the world. However, the adult literacy rate is 57.8%, meaning that roughly half of Timorese citizens are illiterate (Government of Timor-Leste, 2015). The net enrollment rate for primary schools reached 92% in 2013, but the rate for lower secondary enrollment, referred to locally as 'pre-secondary,' was 34%, and that of upper secondary, known as 'secondary,' was as low as 25%, leaving a large number of youths out of school (Government of Timor-Leste, 2015). The drop-out rate is also high, and it is estimated that one-fifth of the population, or 200,000 people, abandoned their studies or had no access to education before the country's independence (Government of Timor-Leste, n.d.).

This paper examines the motives, experiences and circumstances of the individual learners who attended second-chance education (SCE) in Timor-Leste. In 2010, the country initiated the Equivalency Program (EP) as an accelerated education program for youths and adults whose education was interrupted, in many cases due to conflict-related causes. The study describes their life journeys in a conflict-affected environment, seeking to understand the

meaning of learning for those once again attending an education program. The study is unique in that it examines the role, meaning and significance of SCE by focusing on and valuing the stories told by the learners themselves. The study aims to add to the knowledge base concerning education in emergencies, reconstruction and peace-building, and to help inform policy-makers and practitioners responsible for designing second chance education programs in such contexts.

The paper first briefly reviews the literature on second-chance education (Section 2). Then, it provides a brief history of Timor-Leste and the Equivalency Program, Timor-Leste's term for SCE (Section 3). Section 4 describes the methodology of this research. The three-phase research approach included focus-group interviews, a survey, and life-story interviews, with the last method being the primary means of investigation. Section 5 presents the research findings by first presenting detailed profiles of EP participants. Then, in Sections 5.2 through 5.4, their life paths are described in detail. Understanding the journey of these learners, including the factors that encouraged them to attend EP, is crucial to comprehending the learners' motivations to attain further education—specifically addressed in Section 5.5. The discussion and conclusion (Section 6) summarizes the research findings and discusses how SCE can potentially enhance the human dignity of people affected by violent conflict. It also considers policy implications and offers recommendations for similar programs.

## **2. Second-chance education (SCE)**

SCE, as a form of recurrent education, offers a condensed basic education to older youth and adult learners. It promotes equity, an important goal of sustainable development. The OECD Conference on Policies for Education Growth in 1973 noted that recurrent education, provided through governments or non-governmental organizations, ensures inter-generational equity by offering the older generation learning opportunities that were not available when they were at school age (Schuller & Megarry, 2005). Responding to this call, state and non-state actors have

been offering SCE as a remedial measure to provide the population older than school age with life-long learning opportunities, an essential human right. Community colleges in the USA, ‘second-chance schools’ in the European Union countries (UNESCO, 2011), and ‘night schools’ in Japan (Komatsu et al., 2009) are considered to have been successful in reaching over-aged youths, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. In nations with fewer resources, however, SCE is often given a lower priority. With the current global drive to promote the universalization of primary education and improve the quality of formal education, SCE has been allocated less government and international funding. Where SCE is provided, non-state actors often deliver it in intermittent ways and with limited coverage.

This situation is particularly alarming in conflict-affected contexts, given their demographic characteristics and the generally low level of educational attainment. UNESCO highlighted the plight of youths in conflict-affected contexts in its 2011 Global Monitoring Report. According to this report, over 60% of the population in conflict-affected countries was younger than 25 years of age; this contrasts with a rate of less than 25% in industrialized countries. The organization also noted that the youth literacy rate for conflict-affected countries was 79%, compared with 93% for other developing countries. They warned that the combination of a ‘youth bulge’ (Beehner, 2007), which refers to the large proportion of youth in a society, and the failure to provide education for them would pose a serious risk of instability and might harm long-term recovery and development (UNESCO, 2011).

In recent years, international agencies engaged in emergencies commissioned studies that examined accelerated education programs (AEPs) in conflict-affected contexts. They noted the need to document AEP practices and attempted to collect evidence showing the successful implementation of such programs (Burde, Guven, Kelcey, Lahmann, & Al-Abbadi, 2015; Inter-Agency Accelerated Education Working Group, 2016; Nicholson, 2006; Baxter, Ramesh, Menendez, & North, 2016; UNESCO-IIEP, 2009). These studies were generally interested in identifying ‘best practices’ in terms of program operations, learning assessment, and evaluation.

Data was typically collected from donors, government officials and program implementers. What has been missing in these studies is a focus on the learners' motives, experiences and circumstances regarding their loss of education, and their pursuit of a second chance for education.

In a review of studies and practices associated with SCE from around the world, Velloso & Vadeboncoeur (2013) noted that research is urgently needed to examine the reasons that students decide to enroll or leave, and the effects of potential privilege or stigma resulting from attendance. Since participation in SCE is voluntary, learners' motivations are important in helping us understand the program's significance and meaning. This paper examines the reasons why youth and adult learners in one conflict-affected society attended a SCE program. The study describes and analyses the multi-faceted values of education, thereby challenging the dominant development discourse that emphasizes the role of education as an investment expected to yield monetary returns and improve livelihoods.

### **3. Background of Timor-Leste**

#### **3.1 Brief history**

The history of Timor-Leste is marked by occupation and violence, dating back to the Portuguese rule that began in the 16th century. The populace fought for years against the colonial power but, as Portugal was withdrawing in 1975, the country was annexed by Indonesia. The violence intensified as many East Timorese people organized themselves and engaged in resistance-related covert activities, which were violently opposed by the Indonesian military. The Indonesian military's violations of human rights in Timor-Leste were widely reported, further uniting pro-independence activists within and outside Timor-Leste to intensify their campaign against the occupation.

During the Portuguese colonial period, educational opportunities were limited to elites who would then work for the colonial administration. Under Indonesian rule, educational opportunities expanded, but were used to assimilate East-Timorese people into the Indonesian national culture. By 1985, all villages in Timor-Leste had a primary school that used the Indonesian language as the language of instruction. All the textbooks were imported from Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. According to Beazley (1999), fewer than 12% of school teachers were East Timorese during this period, while most of the other teachers came from Indonesia (as cited in Jones, 2003).

Due to the Indonesian assimilation policy, schools were also sites of resistance. As the interviewees of this study testify, Timor-Leste people who were associated with the pro-independence political party FRETELIN boycotted education and engaged in covert activities, such as passing information and providing logistical support to guerrilla members. A number of students dropped out because of the perceived irrelevance of the school curriculum in light of the country's long struggle for independence (Shah, 2012). FRETELIN's crusade for literacy education was a center point of its campaign against Indonesian rule. The organization sent students to rural areas to conduct literacy classes using pedagogy inspired by Paulo Freire's conscientization approach. Basurewan (2004) reports that the text used in these classes was called "Timor is Our Country," authored by Timorese university students studying in Portugal (as cited in Boughton, 2010). Thus, education within and outside of schools encompassed the complex roles of both assimilation and resistance under Indonesian rule.

Timor-Leste finally gained independence in 2002, but its people continued to suffer from violence. In August 1999, a referendum was conducted under the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) to determine its sovereign status. The majority of East Timorese people voted for independence. Immediately after the event, massive violence was initiated by the pro-integration militia supported by the Indonesian army. As a result, 90% of the schools were destroyed and massive displacement occurred (UNDP, 2002). In 2006, a group of



disgruntled soldiers from the western part of the country attempted a coup that led to violence in the capital city and other parts of the country. The conflict ended in the same year, following military intervention by several foreign nations.

### **3.2 Equivalency Program (EP)**

As access to primary and secondary education is currently expanding, alternate routes to basic education, such as the Equivalency Program, will provide increasingly viable options for citizens who missed schooling at the typical ages (Global Partnership for Education, 2011). The demand for EP is expected to increase significantly now that the Ministry of Education has decided to restrict students beyond certain ages from enrolling in formal schools (World Bank, 2010). The Timor-Leste government, in its development plan for 2011-2030, will extend access to EP through the creation of 65 Community Learning Centers, one in every sub-district (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011).

This Equivalency Program (EP) is based on a condensed formal school curriculum and is managed by the Timorese government, so its role, meaning and significance need to be understood within the framework of the country's formal education system. Currently, the education system in Timor-Leste consists of two years of pre-school, six years of primary education, three years of 'pre-secondary education,' three years of secondary education (either general academic or technical/vocational), two years of polytechnic education and/or three to four years of higher education. The Equivalency Program currently offers two levels of basic education. EP I covers the core components of the 6-year primary education curriculum in three years, while EP II offers the core components of the 3-year pre-secondary education curriculum in two years.

Beginning in 2010, EP has been administered by the Directorate of Recurrent Education within the Timor-Leste Ministry of Education and supported by the World Bank. Currently, EP is a tuition-free program operating in six districts in diverse areas of the country, including the

western regions of Lautem and Baucau, the capital city of Dili, and the eastern regions of Bobonaro and Ermera, including Oecusse, an enclave in the territory of Indonesia. The day-to-day operations of each EP are managed by an EP coordinator in that district. While the program has been well attended, its enrollment is far below the number of uneducated youths and adults in the country. For example, a government document reports that EP enrolled 1,041 students in 2010 (Government of Timor-Leste, 2011), while nearly 200,000 youths and adults are eligible for the program. This suggests that far more resources and programs are needed.

The requirements required to join EP are regulated by the Decree Law passed in July 2016. According to the Law, participants must be between 15 and 17 years old and have not attended primary or pre-secondary school for more than twelve months, or be 17 years old or older and have not attended or completed primary education. Enrollment in the program is determined by official documents showing the level of education achieved and the knowledge acquired. In case applicants cannot produce such documents (as is often the case when conflict occurs), a professional assessment is conducted to determine their candidacy and the level of entry. Women are given preferential access to EP (Government of Timor-Leste, n.d.).

The curriculum is defined by the Ministry of Education. The subjects covered by EP are mathematics, natural science, social science, history and geography, life and work skills competence, vocational training, arts and culture, and three languages—Portuguese, Tetun, and English. With the passing of the Decree Law, EP is expected to become an integral part of Timor-Leste's education system.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the Law guarantees that EP learners between 15 and 17 years old who can show sufficient competencies can re-enter the formal school system at their appropriate level (primary or pre-secondary) (Government of Timor-Leste, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At the time this article was written (October 2016), the government had budgeted to expand EP into wider areas (interview with the head of the Directorate of Recurrent Education that manages the program, September 27, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Decree Law, Article 5.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Research design and analytical framework**

This study seeks to understand the motives, experiences and circumstances of individuals who attended a second-chance education program in post-conflict Timor-Leste, thereby gaining insights into the meaning and significance of youth/adult learning programs for individual learners in a conflict-affected context.<sup>3</sup> In order to achieve the research objective, the author attempted to answer the following research questions: What caused the interruption to education for participants and how did it occur?; What was their life path to obtaining SCE?; What motivated and encouraged individuals to attend SCE?; and How does SCE potentially enhance their human dignity? These questions are meant to provide an understanding of the life paths of these individuals from the time they discontinued their education until the time they enrolled in SCE and help us comprehend their motivation to return to education. Their answers will clarify the meaning and significance of SCE for these learners. The study sheds light on the role of education in enhancing human dignity, defined as an individual's sense of self-worth and self-efficacy and inner satisfaction that can be achieved when individuals' basic needs and rights are met, including the ability to choose their destiny.

A mixed methods approach was used, with life-story interviews being the primary data-collection method, complemented by focus-group interviews and a questionnaire survey. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) noted that mixed methods are useful when a researcher needs to answer a broad range of questions and provide stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings. The present study attempts to describe the general profiles of SCE participants, as well as the patterns of their life paths and their motives for pursuing education, while seeking a deeper understanding of their struggles, hopes and

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper, violence and conflict generally mean those that occurred during the Indonesian occupation, in the aftermath of 1999 referendum, and during 2006.

aspirations as affected by their respective living contexts. The latter objective was achieved by the life-story interviews, since this method is useful in understanding the subjective meaning of participants' experiences, the contexts and social relations that affected their choices (Bertaux & Kohli, 1984; Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). Life-story interviews can also reveal their agency by allowing them room to convey their own aspirations and actions (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997). It should be noted that mixed methods can be time-consuming (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), but this weakness was overcome with careful planning and the financial and logistical support of the JICA Research Institute and the Japanese Embassy in Timor-Leste.

#### **4.2 Research process**

The details of the research process are as follows. First, research approval was obtained from both the Director-General of Corporate Services and the Director-General of Policy, Planning and Cooperation in the Timor-Leste government. Then, in March 2016, a preliminary study was conducted with two focus groups to obtain a general sense of the life paths that EP participants had taken before enrolling in their program. The outcomes of the focus-group interviews, one conducted in an urban area of Dili (6 females and 2 males) and the other conducted in the rural town of Maliana in the district of Bobonaro (2 females and 1 male), were included in the research data set used for analysis and incorporated into the design and construction of the survey. Most of the questions asked during these interviews were open-ended, with the intention of capturing each interviewee's subjective account of their experiences and their views. Focus group participants were selected by EP coordinators on a voluntary basis.

During the months of July-August 2016, a survey was conducted in all six EP locations. The survey aimed to determine the general characteristics of EP participants, the patterns of life experiences leading to their enrollment in SCE and their motives. The survey was also used to identify potential interview participants who matched the profiles that the investigator was seeking, such as those whose education was interrupted due to conflict. The survey was

anonymous, with the exception of respondents who volunteered to be interviewed and noted their contact addresses.

The survey was administered by a local research assistant. He traveled to each of the locations where EP I and EP II programs were conducted. EP coordinators assisted with the implementation of the survey. The survey was given to those attending the programs at the time of the assistant's visit. A total of 214 responses were collected.<sup>4</sup> The chart below shows the geographical and gender distribution of survey respondents, as well as their average ages.

**Table 1 Survey respondent demographics**

Characteristics	District						Total	%
	Oecusse	Bobonaro	Ermera	Dili	Baucau	Lautem		
Gender								
Male	32	5	5	4	25	7	78	36.4
Female	46	9	9	7	46	19	136	63.6
Average age	35.7	28.8	35.9	25.2	37.4	41.6	36.6	

*Source:* Author.

The survey was followed by life-story interviews conducted by the researcher and his assistant, a graduate student trained in social science research. In total, 18 life-story interviews were conducted in two locations during the month of September 2016. Interview participants were primarily identified by the fact that their education had been interrupted due to the conflict

<sup>4</sup> The total number of EP participants was difficult to ascertain as the figures differed depending on sources. In a correspondence with a staff person of an international agency assisting EP in 2016, the number 800 was mentioned for EP I and 231 for EP II.

with Indonesia. From the pool of survey respondents available for interviews, candidates were identified randomly and invited to Dili for interviews. Due to other engagements and logistical issues, most candidates from outside Dili were unable to travel to the city. The research team thus decided to travel to Baucau to conduct 15 interviews in the Community Learning Center. Baucau was chosen because of its conflict-affected character, the large number of survey returns and logistical considerations. Four other interviews were conducted, with two students from Dili and two from Bobonaro; these were conducted in Dili. The profiles of the interview participants can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2 Interview participant demographics**

No.	Gender	Age	District	Profiles		
				EP Level	Last education	Job status <sup>a</sup>
1	Female	18	Dili	II	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	N
2	Female	24	Dili	II	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	N
3	Female	39	Baucau	II	Primary (dropped out)	N
4	Female	35	Baucau	I	Primary (dropped out)	Y
5	Female	33	Baucau	I	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	N
6	Male	38	Baucau	II	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	Y
7	Female	29	Baucau	I	Primary (dropped out)	Y
8	Female	40	Baucau	I	Primary (dropped out)	N
9	Female	39	Baucau	I	No prior education	Y
10	Male	36	Baucau	I	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	N
11	Male	54	Baucau	II	Primary (dropped out)	N
12	Female	20	Baucau	II	Primary (dropped out)	N
13	Male	39	Baucau	I	Primary (dropped out)	Y
14	Male	43	Baucau	I	No prior education	Y
15	Female	32	Baucau	I	Primary (dropped out)	N
16	Female	20	Baucau	II	EP I	N
17	Female	29	Bobonaro	II	Primary (dropped out)	N
18	Female	23	Bobonaro	II	Pre-sec. (dropped out)	N

Source: Author.

<sup>a</sup> Y indicates that the participant was working while attending EP at the time of interview. N indicates that he/she was not.

The interviews traced participants' lives from the time they stopped attending school up to the present. Questions were arranged in chronological order so as to help interviewees construct their stories. Such a narrative approach enables individuals to arrange their life events into a meaningful whole, while giving each event a unique place and significance (Hertz-Lazarowitz & Shapira, 2005). Each interview typically lasted two hours. Interview data was recorded, then later transcribed and translated. In order to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and translation, two interpreters were hired to check each other's work.

The analytical process was essentially inductive. First, the author went through all the interview summary notes to gain a general sense of the EP participants' lived experiences. Then, interview data was analyzed by categorizing responses and finding their patterns, while also attending to the specific context of each person and the diversity of their experiences and perspectives. Surprising findings were assigned new codes and later analyzed inductively.

In addition to the survey and life-story interviews with EP participants, the researchers visited stakeholder organizations to exchange views concerning the research topic. These organizations included the Directorate of Recurrent Education and the Equivalency Program unit within the Directorate, the World Bank, which has been supporting EP over the last few years, and UNESCO, which has been providing support for the Community Learning Centers. The conversations with the staff of these organizations informed the design of this research and the process of data analysis.

## **5. Findings**

In this section, the research results are presented through several themes. In Sections 5.2 through 5.5, symbolic quotes from select interviews are chosen to illustrate a particular theme. However, the life-stories described in these sub-sections have some overlapping elements. It is the author's

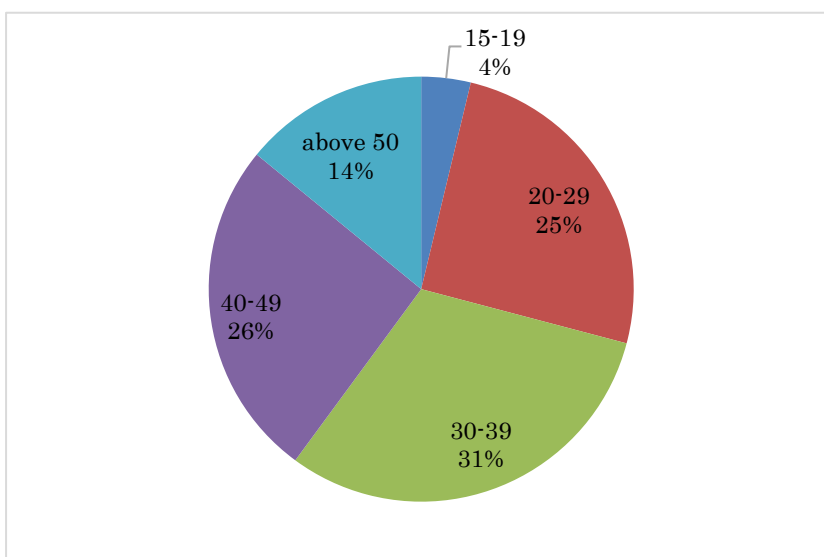


judgment that the stories should be told in their entirety, since a theme—such as the interruption of education, the paths to attend SCE, and the motivating factors—should be understood in the continuum of life experiences. When presenting the analysis of the individual stories, pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity. This section begins with a description of the general characteristics of EP participants, as indicated by the survey data.

### 5.1 Participants

First, data indicates that more females than males are participating in EP. Of the 214 survey respondents from the six EP locations, 136 of them, or 64% of the total, are females. This corresponds to the Timor-Leste government policy to favor female admissions to the program. The age distribution of survey respondents is shown in Figure 1. The average age is 36.6, with the youngest being 16 years of age and the oldest being 67. In this group, 14% are above 50 years old. This suggests that EP attracts a wide range of age groups, including those who have passed their most productive age for labor. Additionally, most of the EP participants are above the age that would normally be admitted for re-entry into formal schooling.

**Figure 1** Age distribution of EP participants



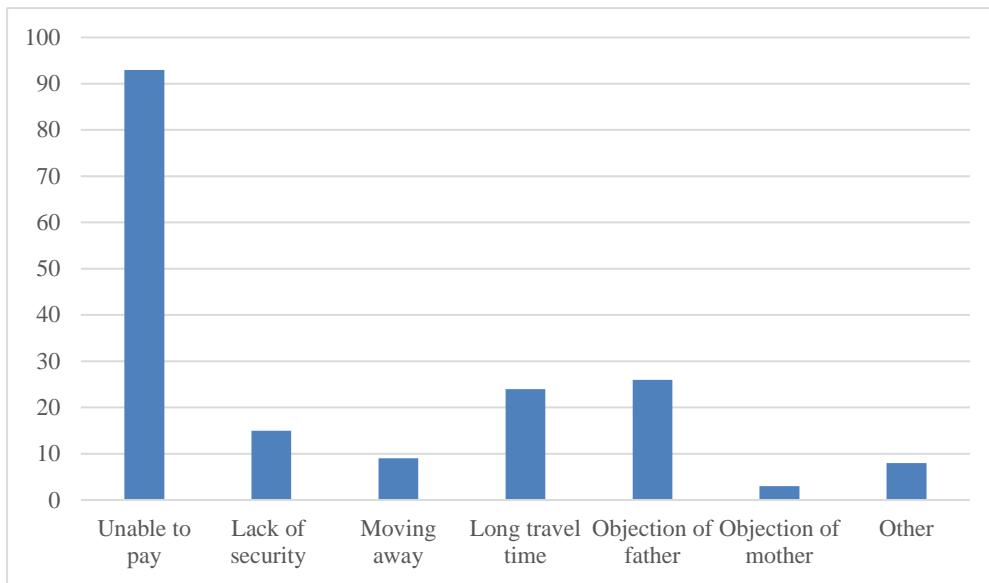
Source: Author.

The backgrounds of the EP participants are also diverse. A high percentage (39%) of them are homemakers, the majority of those being females. Another 39% were employed at the time of enrollment, either for wages or on their own. Of those employed, 17% of the respondents are working while attending EP, which implies that the others left their jobs to attend EP. 15% of them are 'students,' which means that they were most likely to have been EP I students before registering in EP II. The remaining 7% are unemployed.

There were various reasons given for dropping out or not attending school at all. Many participants cited the inability to pay for school expenses, such as textbooks and stationery. This was an issue during the Indonesian occupation and the emergency phase of the conflict in 1999, when schools charged tuition. Other reasons included physical constraints, such as the lack of safety preventing attendance at the school, moving away/dislocation, and travel distance. An additional reason was the objection of their parents (mostly fathers), which might have been cultural or simply a fear based on the physical constraints mentioned above.

It should be added that half of those who chose "other" specified that they did not attend school because of the violence associated with the conflict. Considering that violence has historically been prevalent in Timor-Leste, it is possible that many of the physical constraints mentioned above could have been induced by the conflict. As interview data reveals, for some, even the inability to pay school expenses was due to the conflict, since it caused their households to fall into poverty. This suspicion is confirmed by the responses to another survey question that asked whether the disruption of their education was related to the conflict. 45% of respondents confirmed that was the case.

**Figure 2 Reasons for dropping-out / not going to school**



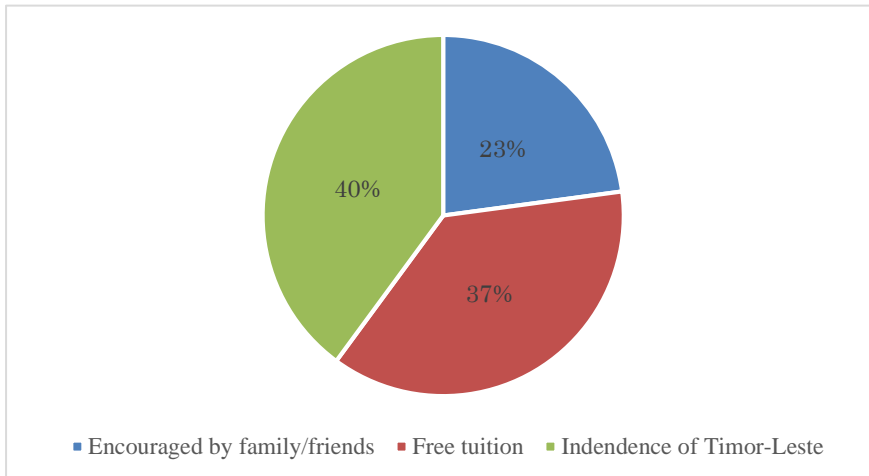
Source: Author.

Participants shared similar reasons for their decision to enroll in EP. Given that EP participants are youths and adults who tend to be occupied with household tasks (39%) and work (17%), accessibility is an important factor. According to the survey, 70% of respondents live within 30 minutes of the EP locations. It is important to note, however, that some do travel a long distance to attain their second-chance education. In the district of Oecusse, where road infrastructure is undeveloped, as many as 27% of EP participants travel more than an hour to attend the program.

The survey results also provided interesting insights into the factors that encouraged these participants to enroll in the program. Based on the outcomes of the two focus-group interviews, four survey choices were given as to their reason for enrolling in EP: encouragement from family/friends, free tuition, the independence of Timor-Leste, and other. Figure 3 shows the distribution of responses. Perhaps not surprisingly, free tuition was an important factor. An intriguing finding is that a majority (40%) of survey respondents chose the independence of

Timor-Leste as a reason to attend EP. This theme will be discussed later, when the results of the life-story interviews are shared.

**Figure 3** What encouraged you to learn again?



Source: Author.

## 5.2 Interruption of education

*Sati, a male EP participant (36 years old) from Baucau:*

*“My father was afraid that the (Indonesian) military would find out about his involvement in the independence movement, like secret activities. He escaped to the jungle in the Matebian Mountain. When he returned from the jungle, he found that people did not like him, especially the supporters of autonomy. It was quite hard for my family to earn money. Even when we had something to sell, nobody would buy it. I had lots of siblings, so it was hard for me to go to school and study. When we came back from the mountains, our belongings had been taken by those people who supported autonomy. Our house was also burnt and nothing remained, so we stayed temporarily at the village hall.”*

While the interview data confirms the survey finding that many EP participants stopped going to school due to the conflict, it also illustrates the complexity of the circumstances

contributing to the interruption of their schooling. The majority of interviewees noted that poverty was their main reason for dropping out of school. One female interviewee described her family duty to collect firewood for her household, leaving her with no time or energy to attend school. School-related expenses were also a burden for these families, especially in the upper grades, since students needed to purchase more textbooks as there were more subjects. Poverty was exacerbated when income earners, normally fathers, became sick or died. Of the 18 EP participants interviewed, 5 of them mentioned that a parent's death was the major factor causing them to fall into poverty, thus forcing them to drop out. Most of these parents' deaths were related to the lack of quality medical services, as the country's long history of conflict has delayed the development of a basic health care infrastructure.

The story of Sati, shared above, was illustrative of the inter-connection between conflict, poverty and schooling. Sati, the 7th of 8 siblings, had to give up schooling when he was in the 1st grade because his family could not pay his school expenses. His father was involved in the pro-independence movement, which made it difficult for his family to afford daily needs. Since the family was very poor, the father built them a house on his own, using coconut trees. Sati remembers his primary school as a fun place, since he enjoyed reading and counting. He is currently working as a carpenter on an irregular basis, earning US \$100~150 a month. He divides his time between studying in EP and his work.

Veronica, a female EP participant (33 years old) from Baucau, told a similar story. She was studying in EP I at the time of the interview. During the post-referendum conflict in 1999, she dropped out of pre-secondary school at the age of 16. She fled to the jungle with her family to escape the violence that was ravaging the nation. When she returned to her town, she found their house completely burned down. She lost everything, including a school certificate that would have guaranteed her return to school. At that time, many of her friends faced a similar fate. Some bought 'fake' certificates that cost \$15-20 so that they could re-enroll in school wherever they happened to be living. Unfortunately, Veronica did not have the luxury of purchasing such a

certificate. Veronica enjoyed her school, but she also felt insecure about traveling a long distance to attend and uncertain about the future of TL as the violence continued.

Other participants described the conflict as a direct cause of their school interruption. A striking case provides an illustration of this, although this situation was rare among the 18 EP interviewees. Dina is a young female, 18 years of age, and studying in EP II in Dili. Her education was disrupted just after her final exams in the 3rd grade. This was in 2006, when major post-independence violence occurred in Dili. Her school principal was shot dead as he attended a school principals' meeting. Her school was closed and she was also displaced. During her displacement, she stayed with relatives in the mountains and helped with the agricultural work. She kept her textbooks and often read a book on the history of the crocodile, a favorite reading book during her school life. She missed her schooling, and she no longer had any contact with her friends. A year later, she was able to return to school in the 4th grade. However, her ordeal did not stop there. In 2009, she dropped out of school again when she was in the 6th grade after both her parents died in a car accident. She had subsequently been out of school for six years before enrolling in EP II in 2015.

These stories describe the hardships that EP participants endured in this conflict-affected environment. Dropping out of school was not the result of their under-appreciation of education; on the contrary, many wanted to return to school. Such findings confirm existing global studies that indicate children and youths drop out due to economic, cultural, and security factors—factors beyond their control (UNESCO, 2011). These life stories indicate that their reasons for leaving school were complex, often created or worsened by the violence.

### **5.3 Obstacles and paths to attending SCE**

*Julio, a male EP participant (38 years old) from Baucau:*

*“At the time, when I dropped out from school, I was about 18 years old, I was involved in covert activities by doing fundraising to buy noodles, cigarettes and etc. with other comrades in order to bring them to the jungle. An organization was created in order to encourage young people to become involved in the covert activities, so that they may become stronger with spirit in attending demonstration against Indonesia military. ... I was unhappy when I stopped my study, and I was still feeling unhappy about the decision I had made. I thought that one day I could continue my study again, but I was afraid to go back to school because it was already three years (that I missed schooling).”*

*“It is really connected to the situation and the conflict at that time. I did not have a good idea about what I should do with my life, so I left school and joined the organization and engaged in covert activities. I thought that I could learn after independence somehow... “*

*“And now, I feel happy because our government has created this program. I learned about EP from the coordinator. Many people cannot come to EP though, because they do not know about this program, so I would like to say that it is important to spread information so that others will learn about this program because it is very important.”*

*“I enjoyed learning, most of all, how to write and read. When I learn how to read and write some new words, I get really excited.”*

The paths to obtaining a second-chance education vary among the individuals, but some common patterns of experience can be found as well. Many indicated a strong desire to learn and even attempted to return to school, but were often faced with insurmountable challenges, such as the violence and their age, before finding EP. Maria’s case is illustrative in this regard. Maria, a 29-year-old female from the district of Bobonaro, is an EP II participant. She did not attend

school during the period of Indonesian rule due to poverty. During the conflict in 1999, she fled to West Timor (Indonesia) to escape the violence. In 2001, she returned to Maliana, and enrolled in a primary school for the first time at the age of 14. Her sister was a primary school teacher and encouraged Maria to go to school by explaining that Timor-Leste had become independent and everyone should be educated. She figured that, since her older brother and sisters had finished their schooling, it was her turn to go to school. In the 2nd grade, however, she dropped out after falling ill. She recovered a year later but did not feel comfortable attending the class with younger children. She is now part of the first group of EP students and wishes to continue on to 'EP III' if this level is offered in the future.

After their education was interrupted, many did not return to school because, as seen in Veronica's story, they feared the continuation of violence. A few female interviewees noted the risk of traveling a long distance to school due to the conflict. Even a 15-minute walk was considered too risky, especially during the 1980s and 1990s when the violence intensified.

Some males were engaged in precarious activities that further distanced them from education, as in the story of Julio, the respondent quoted at the beginning of this section. Julio was in the 4th grade (9 years old) when he dropped out of primary school. When he was 16~18 years old (1992~1994), Julio and his older brother along with some other children were recruited by a pro-independence activist to engage in covert activities. Without their father's knowledge, they procured food and cigarettes for guerrillas in the jungle until 1999. He regrets his decision to join these covert activities, since they deprived him of his education.

Despite obstacles, these EP participants never lost the desire to study again. Antonio is a 43-year old male in Baucau. Due to poverty, he received no education as a child. In 1999, during the conflict, he fled to the jungle for eight months. Now he works as a security guard at a government office and earns US \$137 per month. Previously, he had no hope of going to school since he was over-age. Now he attends EP in the morning and works in the afternoon. He realizes that he did not have many choices in his life when violence was frequent. With independence, he



felt that he would have more opportunities. However, he had never considered the possibility that adult education comparable to formal schooling could be available until he heard about the Equivalency Program. He is now one of the most serious of the participants attending EP I.

#### **5.4 Encouraging factors**

*Maria, a female EP II participant (29 years old) from the district of Bobonaro:*

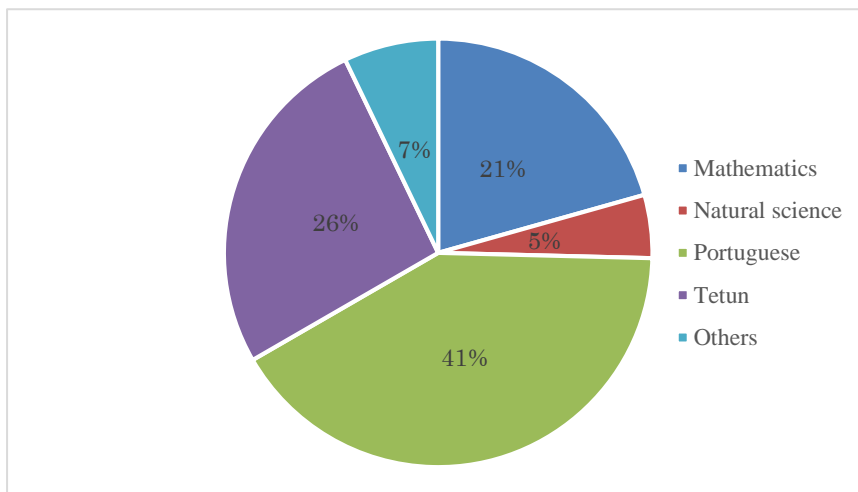
*“I think the independence of Timor-Leste was important. It gave us hope and a sense of pride. We feel we can control our destiny. Now I want to learn even more.”*

Participants' narratives on the factors that encouraged them to attend EP confirm the survey findings. The survey results indicate that many of the EP participants cited free tuition and the independence of Timor-Leste as the strongest motivating factors for them. The independence of Timor-Leste is particularly intriguing and merits further analysis. Maria, who was discussed in Section 5.3, was encouraged to attend school by her sister, a primary school teacher, because of Timor-Leste's newfound independence. Such a sentiment was widely shared among interviewees. Adelia, a 40-year-old female EP participant from Baucau, recounted her expectation that “something will change” due to the dawn of independence. Then EP started and she decided to seize the opportunity. Antonio, a male participant who was working while attending EP, also thought that new opportunities would open up for him. Above all, Maria's remark captures the effect of the post-conflict dynamics that undergirded the participants' decision to gain SCE. She thinks the independence of Timor-Leste is significant because it gives people a sense of pride and ‘control of their destiny.’ Thus, a sense of social renewal and self-efficacy are key factors that affected their decision to attend school again.

The theme of the previous paragraph is supported by the survey responses regarding EP participants' favorite subject, as shown in Figure 4. Portuguese language was overwhelmingly the most popular subject. This is somewhat surprising, given the fact that the language is still not

widely used, especially in rural areas, despite its status as an official language. Silvia, a 39-year old female EP participant from Baucau, was in EP II at the time of the interview. During the conflict in 1999, she dropped out of the 5th grade in a primary school for various reasons: her father’s death due to illness, the resulting poverty, and the fear of walking to school during the conflict. She now has three children and is enrolled in EP because she feels that her society is now different than it was during the Indonesian occupation. This sense of social renewal appears to have encouraged her to learn Portuguese, the language of a new nation.<sup>5</sup> Julio, a previously-mentioned male participant who had been engaged in covert activities, is also eager to learn Portuguese because he wishes to talk to foreigners and possibly find a job abroad.<sup>6</sup> A sense of expanded freedom triggered by his nation’s independence encourages him to talk to anyone and move to wherever he chooses; this appears to have affected his decision to attend EP.

**Figure 4 What is the subject most meaningful to you?**



Source: Author.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Leach reported that, in his survey conducted in 2012, youths in Timor-Leste associated the ability to speak Portuguese language with the national identity of East-Timorese (Leach, 2016). This is indicative of East-Timorese people’s general attitude towards the language.

<sup>6</sup> It is also possible that some saw the benefit of acquiring Portuguese language skills to gain a public sector job in Timor-Leste. Portuguese language was given an overwhelming priority as the official language of instruction in schools by the post-conflict Timor-Leste government until the introduction of mother-tongue-based multilingual education in 2008 (Taylor-Leech, 2016). Portuguese continues to be the dominant language used in administrative offices.

## **5.5 Motivation**

*Focus-group participants, EP II learners:*

*“I just want to learn. I want to know more about what I didn’t know. If I am not learning, my world is confined to inside my house.”*

*“My friend received an education and I didn’t want to ask her to read and write for me.”*

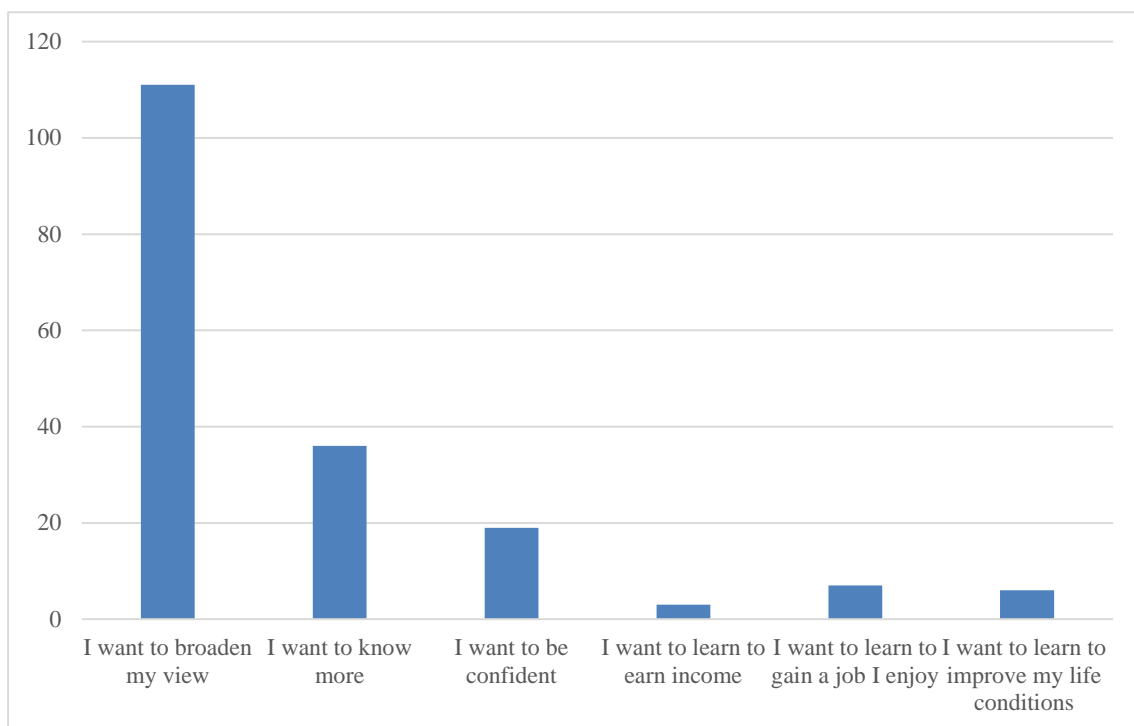
*“I’m learning here to be a teacher in my future to share my knowledge with other people.”*

One of the most striking findings of this study was the motivation of EP learners, which defies the development community’s widely shared belief that education is the means to build human capital and improve livelihoods. Development agencies have elaborated on the benefits of education, mostly in terms of its extrinsic purposes. The World Bank, for example, stated in its strategy paper that “Simply put, investments in quality education lead to more rapid and sustainable economic growth and development. Educated individuals are more employable, able to earn higher wages, cope better with economic shocks, and raise healthier children” (World Bank, 2011, p.v). The UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, featuring education in conflict-affected contexts, mentions that “education improves child and maternal health because it equips women to process information about nutrition and illness, and to make choices and take greater control over their lives” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 5). Although these are important education benefits, the learners’ perspectives in the present study revealed a somewhat different motivation for education.

The survey and interview data show that EP participants generally choose to attend classes due to an intrinsic motivation. In the survey, respondents were asked what motivated them to attend the Equivalency Program. They were given six choices based on the outcome of

the two focus group discussions. Figure 5 shows the result.<sup>7</sup> Survey respondents overwhelmingly selected the choices “I want to broaden my view,” followed by “I want to know more” and “I want to be confident of myself.” The other three choices were related to the extrinsic values of education, such as obtaining a job, increasing income or improving living conditions; these were chosen by very few respondents.

**Figure 5 Motivation to learn**



Source: Author.

The life-story interviews generally confirm this finding. A typical answer to the question that asked their motivation to attend EP was “I just want to learn,” “I want to know something I did not know before,” “Learning makes me happy.” The deprivation of education opportunities during their younger years may have made their aspirations to learn even stronger. By the time

<sup>7</sup> The figure excludes responses to the 7th choice “other” since the number of responses to this choice is negligible.

they became adults and were able to live on their own, they were over-aged and no longer able to return to regular schools, both due to the government regulation and their sense of embarrassment about learning with younger students. Now they can continue their disrupted education with other older learners.

Their intrinsic motivation to learn is not limited to their desire for enjoyment, however. Some interviewees expressed embarrassment about growing up without education. The fact that their friends were educated and they were not was a source of shame. Mothers with school-aged children wanted to understand their children's studies and even help them with homework. An interviewee explained the discomfort she felt when she had to turn to her literate friend to read letters sent to her. Being literate and knowing about the world provided self-confidence. This desire seems further strengthened by the sense that they were now living in 'a new world' in independent Timor-Leste.

The fact that many learners were motivated for intrinsic reasons is further supported by their attitude towards the certificate that graduates of the program might receive. An education certificate is generally regarded as a 'ticket to a job.' When educational attainment is closely linked to employment, people may want to learn primarily because they want to obtain the certificate. 'Diploma disease' (Dore, 1976) is a term that aptly describes the situation where the inflation of educational attainment occurs and students become extrinsically motivated to attain as high an education as possible to increase their chances of gaining employment. This does not seem to be the case among EP learners. Since the program began, the status of the certificate has not been clear.<sup>8</sup> The 11 focus-group participants, from both urban and rural locations, were asked whether they would still continue attending EP if they would not receive a certificate. While a few wanted a certificate as a symbol of their effort, the great majority of them

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<sup>8</sup> In March 2016, the government was debating the nature of a certificate to be awarded to the graduates of EP.

unequivocally affirmed their desire to continue attending the program without a certificate of completion.

It should be noted, however, that people normally attend classes for multiple reasons, including extrinsic ones, and their motivation is affected by their socio-economic environment. It is also possible to argue that EP participants' intrinsic desire to learn is explained by the general lack of employment opportunities; thus, they do not strongly associate education with employment. Those who do see a clear link between education and a job, as in the previously mentioned case of Julio, see the program completion certificate as very meaningful. Julio has been working as a security guard at a public primary school since 2006. He has been periodically asked by the government to submit education credentials. While his colleagues can do so, it has not been possible for him. He also thinks that, with a certificate from EP II equivalent to a pre-secondary education, his salary will increase. However, he also simply enjoys learning.

In addition, some learners are extrinsically motivated for the benefit of others. For Adelia, a female EP participant previously mentioned, obtaining a certificate means that she can support her family, just as many men do. Adelia dropped out of primary school in 6th grade just before finishing her studies and never considered returning to school during the conflict. At the time of the interview, she was studying in EP I and wants to continue in EP II. She believes women need education so that they can get a job and support their families.

A few other interviewees mentioned that their learning benefits others—for example, by becoming a teacher. Mothers want to learn so that they can help their school-age children with their homework. Their children were learning the Portuguese language, a language unfamiliar to their parents; thus, they had a desire to learn Portuguese, the language of a post-independence society. Pedro, who was—at 54 years old—one of the oldest EP participants from Baucau, wants to send a message to youths. He lived through the anti-colonial struggle against Portugal and had the privilege of attending a primary school, rare at that time. As the struggle intensified, he fled to the jungle. When he returned after three years of hiding, he found himself living in poverty

and could not return to school. In 2000, he enrolled in a literacy program taught by a Brazilian and later joined EP. He wants to acquire skills to obtain a job, but above all, he is learning to convince youths of the value of education by setting an example of his own life.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

Second-chance education in post-conflict Timor-Leste provides youths and adults with a viable option to regain the education that they lost. Many of them dropped out of school due to conflict-related issues, including insecurity and poverty. The paths to obtaining a second-chance education varied among the individuals. Males were often engaged in covert activities, while females were prevented from returning to school due to the continuing violence. Still, they never entirely lost the desire for education, primarily from an intrinsic desire to seek more knowledge and gain self-confidence. Thus, they decided to enroll in SCE when the opportunity presented itself, and their social and economic circumstances allowed them to attend. Their desire to attend SCE was bolstered by a sense of social renewal—the post-conflict euphoria that a new society has arrived, a society that they believe will be better than the previous one. In this section, the author further analyzes the significance of SCE in conflict-affected contexts and considers how it can potentially promote human dignity. Policy recommendations are also offered to enhance the accessibility of SCE in Timor-Leste and similar contexts.

The study shows that EP participants were intrinsically motivated by their enjoyment of learning and a sense of autonomy and agency, which all contribute to the advancement of human dignity. It should be noted that their *extrinsic* motivations, such as increasing their chance for employment and their life choices, may also contribute to their increased agency. According to Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation can enhance the innate psychological needs for competence and autonomy that are characteristic of intrinsic motivation. These two scholars also contend that education can meet the basic human needs that support the

innate desire to feel connected, effective, and agentic, as one is exposed to new ideas and exercises new skills (Ryan & Deci, 2000). EP in Timor-Leste seems to provide such an opportunity.

As demonstrated by the quotes throughout this paper, females particularly benefit from EP, which is significant since they are generally in a disadvantaged position in Timor-Leste society. Silvia, a female EP participant from Baucau, dropped out of primary school during the 1999 conflict, a year before her graduation. During her interview, quoted below, she remarked on her transformation, as witnessed by her personal decision to attend the interview; then, she alluded to education's role in changing women's roles in Timor-Leste. Silvia's remark captures the views of many other EP participants, noting that the EP program strengthens their basic capabilities and enables them to live with a sense of dignity and pride.

*Silvia, a female EP participant (39 years old) from Baucau:*

*“Traditionally in Timor-Leste, men tell women to just cook. Now with EP, I feel that I can make more decisions on my own. In fact, I am now sitting down in front of you. I made a decision by myself to come and take this interview. Women are in general not willing to find a job and do not even decide on their own to attend an interview like this. Education is changing our lives.”*

The life stories of EP participants suggest that second-chance education meets fundamental human needs, including a desire for formal learning and enhanced dignity. EP restores their opportunity to attain the inner satisfaction of learning and a sense of self-worth from transforming their lives and contributing to their society as it emerges from violent conflict. This finding is not limited to the case of Timor-Leste.<sup>9</sup> Overall, 28 million children are not

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<sup>9</sup> JICA Research Institute has also commissioned other case studies of SCE in conflict-affected contexts from around the world, including Rwanda, Uganda, Bosnia & Herzegovina and Palestine. The findings of these studies seem to share some similarities with this study.



attending primary schools in conflict-affected societies around the world (UNESCO, 2015); they may soon become another ‘lost generation.’ Urgent policy attention is needed to address the educational needs of these young people.

In expanding the access to SCE, three policy recommendations are offered for Timor-Leste and for similar contexts elsewhere. First, SCE might include a vocational training component to increase participants’ employable skills.<sup>10</sup> As poverty is a major factor inhibiting people from returning to education, such training, along with the acquisition of basic literacy and numeracy, life and civic skills can help youth and adults gain meaningful employment. This could further encourage the vast majority of this ‘lost generation’ to return to education for the second time.

Secondly, in order to reach the vast number of youths and adults still without education, innovative approaches will be required. Recently, the Timor-Leste government has been experimenting with a new approach where learners can combine self-study and schooling, so they do not need to discontinue their work to join the program. Ideally, the programs should continue to be offered at no cost. From the viewpoint of program sustainability and wider coverage, however, a small fee could be levied against those who can afford to pay.

Third, the role of the government is important. A few life-story interviewees noted that they joined EP because the government was responsible for the program, which strengthens the credibility attached to it.<sup>11</sup> In post-conflict societies, the legitimacy of the national government is critical to the nation-building process (Komatsu, 2013; 2017). In such a context, the government is expected to address inequality, patronage and corruption, along with the lack of employment opportunities for educated youth (Babacan, 2007). In Timor-Leste, the local

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews with government officials revealed that discussion was under way to include a component of vocational training in EP (Interview with officials in the Directorate of Recurrent Education, September 27, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> In the survey, the majority of respondents (92%) thought that EP could help them to obtain a job and earn income. This may be because the program is run by the government.

populace expected their government to be more involved in the provision of community services, including water and education, as these sectors were often excluded from donors' aid (Tanaka, 2018). As Timor-Leste society moves into a long-term reconstruction and development phase, the role of the external actors decreases, and consequently the national government's role in providing basic services increases; thus, ensuring human security and promoting inter-generational equity is increasingly important.

As indicated by the data presented in this study, EP participants are highly motivated to learn. The fact that many of them suffered from violence may at least partially explain such a high level of motivation.<sup>12</sup> This is a perfect opportunity to fulfill the basic human right to life-long learning “to know, do, be and live together” (International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, & Jacques Delors, 1996). People in the new Timor-Leste society—and other societies emerging from conflict—should be offered all the necessary support to gain a second chance at education. They deserve it after so many years of conflicts that deprived them of their essential human rights and dignity.

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that a recent study that examined the impact of conflict on school attendance in Timor-Leste showed that girls who were affected by the violence were more likely to complete primary education than those who were not (Justino, Leone & Salardi, 2014).

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## Abstract (In Japanese)

### 要約

東ティモールは、紛争を経て 2002 年に独立したアジアで最も新しい国家である。長期にわたる暴力と貧困により、人口の 5 分の 1 (約 20 万人) が基礎教育を受けていないとされる。この状況下で、東ティモール政府は 2010 年に公教育同等プログラム (EP: Equivalency Program、以下 EP) を開始した。EP は、教育が断絶された若者や成人を対象にした、初中等教育同等の基礎教育カリキュラムを短期間で学べる速習型教育プログラムである。

本論文は、東ティモールで教育機会を再び得た (セカンド・チャンス教育) 若者や成人の学習動機、および学びの機会を再獲得するまでの経験やその社会環境を明らかにするものである。研究では、紛争体験を経た若者や成人にとっての「学び」の意味を、彼ら自身による人生の語り (ライフストーリー) の中で理解することとした。EP 受講者に対するライフストーリー・インタビュー (無作為抽出、N=18) を主要な調査方法とし、フォーカスグループ・インタビュー (2 回) および質問票調査 (N=214) を補完的に用いた。

データ分析によれば、EP 受講者の多くがセカンド・チャンス教育の機会を希求し、その理由は、主に知ることへの欲求や自尊心の向上といった学びの内的動機に基づくことが分かった。彼らのライフストーリーの語りからは、紛争下における通学路の危険性やゲリラ活動への参加、社会の混乱やそれに起因すると思われる貧困のために教育を断念せざるを得なかった苦難、学齢を過ぎて自身が教育を受けていない「失われた世代」となることへの絶望感が明らかになった。セカンド・チャンス教育によって、彼らは学びによる内的満足感や自己決定権・行為主体 (エージェンシー) 感の向上による自己肯定感を得る機会を獲得していた。また、彼らの学びへの欲求は、国家の独立による「新しい社会の到来」という紛争後の高揚感によって更に強まっていた。

本研究は、学びが生産性の向上という人的資本の形成のみならず、内的満足感や自己肯定・効力・決定権といった人間の尊厳に関わる便益をもたらすことを示している。人間の基本ニーズの充足や権利の実現を困難にしていた紛争が終わり、復興期の高揚感や将来への期待感が続いている現在の東ティモールは、普遍的教育を達成し人間の尊厳を実現する契機にあると言える。

**キーワード:** セカンド・チャンス教育、東ティモール、ライフストーリー・インタビュー、若者