

DR. NIKHIT D'SA

Dr. D'Sa is a developmental psychologist with experience as an education technical advisor and applied researcher in low-resource, crisis, and conflict settings. His research focuses on the holistic learning and development of children who have experienced adversity, and the factors (like teacher professional development and well-being) that affect their resilience. He studies how the settings within which children/adolescents are embedded and the systems surrounding them can be activated to best support them leverage their assets and thrive.

EDUCATION

Doctor of Education in Human Development and Education

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Massachusetts, USA • 2015

Master of Education in International Education Policy

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Massachusetts, USA • 2012

Master of Arts in Developmental Psychology

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA • 2008

Bachelor of Arts in Human Ecology

College of the Atlantic, Maine, USA • 2006

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Assistant Research Professor

Institute for Educational Initiatives, University of Notre Dame • July 2021-Present

Design and lead evidence generation to address USAID's Education in Crisis and Conflict learning agenda • Consolidate learning on systems activation and child development programming in Chad, Haiti, India, Sudan, & Uganda • Research children's perspectives of play in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Uganda • Lead research to develop contextually appropriate ways in which to measure SEL and teacher well-being in low-resource and crisis settings

Director for Research

Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child, University of Notre Dame • Aug. 2019-Present

Lead strategic direction of measurement and rapid implementation learning for Center • Manage a team of research scientists • Develop new foundation and non-governmental partnerships • Leverage new funds for research on strategic directions of Center

Director for Research, Evaluation, and Learning

Save the Children • Sept. 2018–Aug. 2019

Established and managed team to support Education in Emergencies (EiE) learning agenda • Developed and led global EiE and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) research agenda • Leveraged new funds for EiE and SEL research through US government and foundation partnerships • Led design and testing of Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO) tool • PI on "proof of concept" for Social and Emotional Learning Foundations (SELF) program • Supported advocacy for EiE programming

Advisor, Research and Learning

Save the Children • Jul. 2015–Sept. 2018

Developed and led learning agenda (including impact evaluations) in five-country education and livelihood project • Managed design and launch of [IDELA website](#) and partnership management • Designed and tested International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment (ISELA) • Supported consolidation of research on impacts of ECD programs • Built global staff skills on qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods in applied research



Senior Specialist, Youth Research

Save the Children • Nov. 2014–Jul. 2015

Collaborated with country programs to incorporate learning from qualitative and mixed-methods applied research into adolescent education and livelihood programs • Mentored graduate students to conduct applied research with country offices • Supported consolidation of research on impacts of primary grade reading programs

Research Consultant, Education and Adolescent Development

Independent • Jan. 2013–Nov. 2014

Developed study protocols for adolescent education and livelihood projects • Led analysis of quasi-experimental study in ECD parent-training initiative • Provided guidance on SEL for Room to Read's Girl's Education Program

Senior Research Associate

Harvard Graduate School of Education • Sept. 2011–Aug. 2013

Led statistical analysis for the Un Buen Comienzo cluster-RCT in Chile • Supported logistics and planning for RCT

Research Associate

Harvard Graduate School of Education • Sept. 2009–May 2011

Supported secondary analysis of 4Rs program data • Supported review of SECURE—SEL program/curriculum

PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

- D'Sa, N., Ariapa, M., Nsubuga, E., Fontana, M., Chandler, H., & Bouwmeester, S.** (under review). *Well-being ASSETS: Establishing the psychometric properties of a context-specific measure of teacher well-being in Uganda. Compare.*
- D'Sa, N., Parvathy, S., Mills, A.L., Berino, M., Boothby, N., & Schuenke-Lucien, K.** (revise and resubmit). How much does it cost to impact the social and emotional development of young children in fragile contexts? Findings from a cluster randomized controlled trial in Haiti. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly.*
- Pyle, A., Zosh, J.M., D'Sa, N., Omoeva C., Robson, S.** (revise and resubmit). Teacher perspectives on the usefulness of a formative assessment tool to support their implementation of learning through play. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education.*
- Zosh, J.M., Pyle, A., D'Sa, N., Omoeva C., Robson, S., Ariapa, M., Giacomazzi, M., Dey, G., Escallón E., Maldonado-Carreño C., Pavel, K.F., Gomez RC., Dooley, B., & Newsome, E.** (2024). Applying the science of learning to teacher professional development and back again: Lessons from 3 contexts. *Trends in Neuroscience and Education.*
- Omoeva, C., Zosh, J.M., Pyle, A., D'Sa, N., Contreras-Gomez, R., Dooley, B., Giaomazzi, M., Ariapa, M., Maldonado, C., Escallon, E., Dey, G., & Pavel, K.F.** (2024). Teacher RePlay: a new toolkit to support playful learning in the classroom. *Frontiers in Education.*
- Krupar, A. & D'Sa, N.** (2024). Measuring learning during crises: Developing and validating the Holistic Assessment of Learning and Development Outcomes (HALDO). *International Journal of Educational Research Open.*
- D'Sa, N., Fontana, M., Ariapa, M., Chandler, H., Nsubuga, E., & Richardson, E.** (2023). "Well-being, that word is very wide": Understanding how teachers in Uganda define and navigate their occupational well-being. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 119. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2023.102185>
- Scales, P.C., D'Sa, N., Gebru, E., & Wu, C.** (2022). The links between a supportive environment and work readiness among rural out-of-school African youth: Longitudinal results of the Youth in Action initiative. *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 37(1).
- Bellino, M.J., Chopra, V., & D'Sa, N.** (2022). "Slowly by slowly": Youth participatory action research in contexts of displacement. *Teachers College Record*, 123(11), 145-171.
- D'Sa, N. & Krupar, A.** (2021). Developing and validating the International Social and Emotional Learning Assessment among Syrian Refugee Children in Iraq. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 7(2), 20-56.



- D'Agostino, T.J., D'Sa, N., & Boothby, N. (2021). What's faith got to do with it? A scoping study on local faith communities supporting child development and learning. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 81(2021).
- Lee, J., Zuilkowski, S., & D'Sa, N. (2020). Organising primary grade literacy environments in Mozambique. *Learning Environments Research*.
- Lee, J., D'Sa, N., & Zuilkowski, S. (2020). Integrating new knowledge into everyday practices: Teacher pedagogy in early grade literacy in rural Mozambique. *Literacy*, 54(3), 111-22.
- D'Sa, N., Press, S., Du Vent, A., Farahat, A., & Conklin, S. (2019). Gaining ground with gatekeepers: Leveraging the proximal enabling environment to support youth livelihood development. In Roelen, K., Morgan, R., & Tafere, Y. (Eds.), *Putting children first: New frontiers in the fight against child poverty in Africa*. Hamburg, Germany: ibidem Press.
- D'Sa, N., Krupar, A., & Westrope, C. (2019). Feasible measurement of learning in emergencies: Lessons from Uganda. *Forced Migration Review*, 60(March), 74–75.
- Krupar, A., D'Sa, N., Westrope, C., & Johna, J. F. (2019). Developing a holistic assessment of children's learning in the context of forced displacement: Case study from Dadaab, Kenya. *NORRAG*, 80–83.
- D'Sa, N., Scales, P. C., & Gebru, E. T. (2018). Developmental approach to work readiness for youth: Focus on transferable skills. In S. Verma & A. C. Petersen (Eds.), *Developmental science and pathways to sustainable development for children and youth* (pp. 207–221). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- D'Sa, N., Agaba, S., & Mchenga, P. (2018). Influence of community on youth transferable skills in livelihood development: A case study from rural Malawi and Uganda. In Nakkula, M. & Schneider-Muñoz, A. (Eds.), *Adolescent psychology in today's world: Global perspectives on risk, relationships, and development*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Yoshikawa, H., Leyva, D., Snow, C. E., Treviño, E., Arbour, M. C., Barata, M. C., & D'Sa, N. (2018). Evaluación experimental de Un Buen Comienzo. In Treviño, E., Aguirre, E., & Varela, C. (Eds.), *Un Buen Comienzo para los niños de Chile*. Santiago, Chile: Universidad Diego Portales.
- Dowd, A.J., Friedlander, E., Jonason, C., Leer, J., Sorenson, L., Guajardo, J., D'Sa, N., Pava, C., & Pisani, L. (2017). Life-wide learning for early reading development in twelve African and Asian sites. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 155, 31-49.
- Yoshikawa, H., Leyva, D., Snow, C. E., Treviño, E., Arbour, M. C., Barata, M. C., & D'Sa, N. (2016). Experimental impacts of a teacher professional development program in Chile on preschool classroom quality and child outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 51(3), 309-22.
- D'Sa, N. (2013). Making meaning of resilience: Understanding adolescent perspectives using written narratives and interviews. In P. Brindle (Ed.), *SAGE Cases in Methodology*. London, UK: SAGE.

SELECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS AND GRANTS

How does agency translate into action? Understanding the mechanisms of teacher agency and well-being in Uganda • Aga Khan Foundation, Schools2030

Principal Investigator • April 2024-Sept. 2025

Focus geographies: Uganda • Lead action research with teachers to understand what agency means to them in their schools • Lead social network analysis study of how teacher agency and well-being are associated with their network status

Continuity of Learning • USAID

Co-Principal Investigator • Dec. 2021-Dec. 2026

Focus geographies: Haiti • Lead research and learning agenda on the grant • Lead experimental and quasi-experimental studies on the impact of literacy and SEL curriculum (grades 1-4) on children's learning and development • Develop learning of distance learning opportunities for children in Haiti.

Supporting Holistic and Actionable Research in Education (SHARE) • USAID, HELIX SHARE

Co-Investigator • Aug. 2020-Aug. 2025



Focus geographies: Global • Lead and support research to address USAID E3 learning agendas in foundation skills and learning in crisis contexts

Project Sampoorna • Porticus

Co-Principal Investigator • Dec. 2020-Nov. 2024

Focus geographies: India • Support systems mapping and Whole Child Development framework development among Tribal and Social Welfare Society schools in Telangana • Lead the development, training, and implementation of a Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Methods (REALM) approach for the societies' schools

Bridges to impact through innovative EdTech: Forging links between policy, research, and practice • Global Partnership for Education, Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

Co-Principal Investigator • Jan. 2020-September 2024

Focus geographies: Chad, Sudan, Uganda • Co-lead randomized control trial of Can't Wait to Learn (CWtL, tablet-based reading and numeracy program) for forcibly displaced children in Uganda • Guide research on implementation fidelity, value for money, caregiver engagement, and policy analysis in Chad, Sudan, and Uganda

Contextually Relevant Emotional and Social wellbeing Tools (CREST) • USAID, sub-award of HELIX SHARE

Principal Investigator • Aug. 2021-June 2024

Focus geographies: Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Liberia • Lead mixed methods studies to understand context-specific definitions and prioritizations of children's social and emotional learning (SEL) and teachers' wellbeing, and use this information to develop and validate measures of these skills, competencies, and assets

Strong beginnings: Leveraging the home, school, and church to develop the whole child • USAID, Kellogg Foundation, and Porticus

Co-Principal Investigator • Mar. 2020-Mar. 2024

Focus geographies: Haiti • Develop and manage monitoring, evaluation, and learning system for grant • Lead quasi-experimental studies on the impact of SEL curriculum and ECD programming on children's learning and development

Assimilating development assessment information into policy and training (ADAPT): Adolescent 21st Century skills • Global Partnership for Education, Knowledge and Innovation Exchange

Co-Principal Investigator • Jan. 2022-July 2023

Focus geographies: Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania • Support partners in systems mapping exercise • Connect country-specific research and advocacy to global 21st Century skill initiatives

Systems activation in emergencies: Leveraging the home, school, and church to address early childhood development in Haiti • LEGO Foundation

Principal Investigator • Dec. 2021-May 2023

Focus geographies: Haiti • Lead implementation of a post-earthquake, resilience-focused early childhood development intervention • Lead the research and learning to understand how participants perceive impact of ECD intervention components

Play and learning in children's eyes (PALICE) • LEGO Foundation

Principal Investigator • May 2021-May 2023



Focus geographies: Bangladesh, Colombia, Uganda • Lead the development and validation of a field-feasible method of collecting and analyzing qualitative data regarding children's experiences of learning through play • Co-chair global research consortium focused on better understanding children's experiences of play

Be well, teach well: A locally defined and participatory approach to measuring teacher well-being • USAID, LASER PULSE

Principal Investigator • July. 2020-Mar. 2022

Focus geographies: Uganda • Lead global team studying teachers' perspectives of wellbeing in Uganda • Lead pilot study to understand validity and reliability of newly developed teacher wellbeing measure

Foster Resilience Project • Porticus

Co-Investigator • Jan. 2020-Nov. 2020

Focus geographies: Colombia, Haiti, Peru • Support research on resilient schools in Colombia • Lead validation of ISELA in Haiti • Lead research on adolescent life skills in Peru

Testing psychometric properties of ISELA • Porticus, 3EA

Principal Investigator • Sep. 2018-Mar. 2019

Focus geographies: Iraq • Lead the pilot study to understand validity and reliability of ISELA scores when used with Syrian refugee children in Iraq

Youth in Action • Mastercard Foundation

Principal Investigator • Sep. 2013-Aug. 2018

Focus geographies: Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi, Uganda • Develop and manage monitoring, evaluation, and learning system for grant • Lead studies on the effect of education and life skills curriculum on adolescent's livelihood development

TEACHING/CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Course Developer and Facilitator

University of Notre Dame and Osmania University • August 2004

Course: *Whole School Approach to Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)*

Module Developer and Facilitator

University of Notre Dame • Jan. 2020–Nov. 2020

Course: [Practical Measurement](#)

Massive Open Online Course Developer

LEGO Foundation • Jun. 2020–Oct. 2020

Course: [Coping with Changes: Social-Emotional Learning Through Play](#)

Lecturer in Education

Harvard Graduate School of Education • Aug. 2013–May 2014

Courses: *Adolescence in the Global Context: Salient Issues and Intervention Strategies*

Graduate Teaching Fellow

Harvard Graduate School of Education • Aug. 2010–Aug. 2013

Courses: *Risk and Resilience in Social Contexts from Birth to Young Adulthood, Adolescent Development, Applied Multilevel Data Analysis, Microeconomics*



MEMBERSHIP AND AFFILIATIONS

Advisory group member • SEL/SS Measurement Taskforce • USAID and UNICEF

Member • Global Executive Function Initiative • Stanford University and Jacobs Foundation

Member and reviewer • Comparative and International Education Society

Member and reviewer • Society for Research in Child Development

Member and reviewer • Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness

SELECTED DISTINCTIONS AND HONORS

Spencer Early Career Scholar, New Civics Fellowship

Harvard Graduate School of Education, Massachusetts, USA • Aug. 2012–May. 2015

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Graduate Scholarship

Jack Kent Cooke Foundation, Virginia, USA • Aug. 2007–May. 2015

Davis Project For Peace Fellowship

Kathryn Wasserman Davis Projects for Peace Foundation, Vermont, USA • June 2008

Watson Fellowship

Thomas J. Watson Fellowship Foundation, New York, USA • Aug. 2006-July 2007

