

Chapter 4

Leading the Policy Landscape of Somali Private Education System in a Conflict Zone: Views of Somali Headteachers

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Abstract

The aim of this chapter is to understand the policy liberties and constraints within which school headteachers, and teachers aspire to promote high-quality education for their pupils in private schools in Somalia in the context of conflict in the country. This chapter develops this understanding of headteachers particularly in low-cost primary private schools in Somalia. The analysis in this chapter is informed by Mumford et al.'s Skills Model, as this approach combines the notion of knowledge and abilities necessary for effective leadership. First, using interview data with headteachers, we critique how headteachers in private schools in Mogadishu, Somalia, lead and manage schools when there is a crisis and conflict surrounding them, by unpacking the concepts of *leadership* and *management*. Second, we shed light on how well they are prepared and developed professionally to manage in such a turbulent environment caused by the war in Somalia. Here, we consider the role of the Federal Ministry of Education in the level of support that headteachers get in enacting their education policy. Third, this chapter discusses the impact of such crises on the quality of education provision for local private schools. Finally, this chapter identifies lessons to be learnt through suggested recommendations for headteachers in leading and managing education in times of turbulence and conflict. Here, we

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pose a suggestion for headteachers to consider if globalisation, as a phenomenon, may offer a way to resolve local crises with local solutions in providing high-quality education for their students.

Keywords: Crises; private schools; headteachers; leadership development; education management

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to understand how school leaders in Somali private schools lead high-quality education in the context of conflict in the country. Several researchers discuss the significant impact of armed conflict on the provision of education in some countries, like Somalia. A number of authors highlight the physical destruction of the education system, while others have looked at the extent to which these conflicts affect social development, human resources in education, and the emotional well-being of children in conflict (Tarah & Sood, 2022; Tooley & Longfield, 2017). Globally, of the 28.5 million primary school-aged children out of school in conflict-affected countries, 12.6 million live in sub-Saharan Africa, 5.3 million in South and West Asia, and 4 million in the Arab States. The vast majority, 95%, live in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Girls, who make up 55% of the total, are the worst affected, as they are often victims of rape and other sexual violence that accompanies armed conflicts (UNESCO, 2023).

There are many barriers faced by children living in armed conflict areas. These barriers include non-availability of schools in the worst-affected areas of a country, lack of recruitment of staff, or convincing former staff to return to teaching (Save the Children, 2013). The *Attacks on Education* published by Save the Children (2013) further explains that the quality of basic skills in children is 'diminished' due to poor resource availability in schools, leading to low attendance as the learning environment is not conducive. In such a difficult context then, it is understandable how and why these factors/barriers can lead to student drop-out, making the provision of high-quality education a major headteacher challenge.

4.2 Benadir Regional Administration

The research took place in Mogadishu, which is the main area of the Benadir Administration and is the capital city of Somalia. It has an estimated population of 1.6 million people which accounts for about 13% of the total population of Somalia, and it is the headquarters of the federal government and the small number of schools it manages (Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), 2017). The city has the largest private primary and secondary schools in the country, and these are members of a large umbrella association. Despite the government restoring its role in the education sector, the position of umbrella associations remains strong, as important providers of education and guarantors of a

minimal quality of education. Government data indicate that there are over 1,000 umbrella-affiliated schools in Somalia, providing education to over 250,000 students (MOECHE, 2017, p. 22). Unlike Puntland and Somaliland, the Benadir Regional Administration does not have its own education policy although it has recently been mandated to take over 23 public schools which were under the direct management of the MOECHE of the federal government. These schools were part of the Benadir Administration's initial statutory responsibilities with a view to subsequent progress.

4.3 Conceptualising Leadership

Gardner (1990, cited in Baker, 2014) defines leadership as an assembly of people for action, facilitated through persuasion. Since most leaders are also engaged in management, it is useful to distinguish between these two interrelated processes: leadership and management. **Bush and Coleman (2000)** think two terms are not synonymous, as 'one can be a leader without being a manager' (p. 18). Citing **Bush and Coleman (2000, p. 19)**, **Schon (1984)** further explains that the doing of leadership can happen without 'the formal burdens of management' (p. 19).

A central element in many definitions of leadership is that there is a process of influence. **Wasserberg (2002)** claims leadership is more about unifying staff around key values. From his perspective as a secondary headteacher, he argues that these core values come down to: a) schools seen as centres of excellence in learning, and all members of the school community are learners; b) every member of the school community is valued as an individual; c) the school exists to serve its students and the local community; and d) learning is about the development of the whole person and happens in and out of classrooms.

In discussing the strategic dimension of leadership, **West-Burnham and Harris (2015, p. 8)** suggest three things that enable us to understand the strategic dimension of leadership: principle – the values informing an organisation's culture and priorities; purpose – the dominant view of the most important reason for the existence of the school; and people – their engagement, motivation, and performance in securing principles and purpose. They further suggest that the operational aspect of leadership, by contract, is about strategy and action, the management of doing.

Sood et al. (2018) note that in England, there are many good schools with good infrastructure and with adequate resources. This may not be the case in parts of Africa, like Somalia, which is the focus of this chapter, where headteachers are managing schools with little or no facilities/resources, untrained teachers, and students who are often hungry (**Bush & Oduro, 2006**). Under such a context, providing quality, sustainable education remains a challenge, and here, education holds the key to survival and remaining competitive (**Wylie & Mitchell, 2003**). There is no one model of 'doing' leadership or management in one or other way, it is context related, and in the Somalian context, the glocalised model of leadership may be more relevant and applicable. This allows headteachers in Somali schools to recognise and address how much inequality remains in education in the twenty-first century. It may be that inequality may be much greater in developing

economies, due to the factors hinted at earlier, and the challenge for headteachers is how to manage socioeconomic divisions reproduced by education (Reay, 2010).

The headteachers in the private schools in Mogadishu are addressing such complex ideas, especially in the context of war crises, finite resources and little professional development or support for staff to lead and manage effectively; thus, each requires appropriate solutions in a localised manner. But slowly, headteachers are recognising the need to manage high-quality education provision drawing on the concepts of glocalisation – global issues, local actions (Robertson, 1992), with other authors preferring the term *globalisation* (Bottery, 2008; Mistry & Sood, 2012) which has resonance with reaching out to others as education is a global interest and concern for all. Such an opportunity for local actions is important in addressing issues of sustainable development in the climate of conflict.

4.4 School Leadership in a Conflict-Affected Environment

The enormity of the effects on education during and after armed conflict was felt everywhere. These effects included the complete destruction of education in both physical and human forms, and the voices of many frontline people were ignored (Pherali, 2016). There is a high prevalence of attacks on schools during armed conflict, with a commonality of deaths among pupils, teachers, and school leaders. Although there is an increasing literature that deals with relationships between education and armed personnel, there remains a gap in the literature on how to address the complex effects of trauma experienced by teachers and school leaders within the context of conflict and crisis of war (Pherali, 2016).

In their previous study on Somali headteachers' experience in operating in an active conflict environment, Tarah and Sood (2022) found despite community mobilisation to safely reopen schools, several school leaders face challenges in recovering school buildings for a safe return for children. Somali headteachers' experiences of the conflict in managing their schools, how they have faced violence and having to work in a challenging environment are further reported in Tarah and Sood (2022). One example was that of a school leader, who, with help from local communities and school staff, had to clear debris and dead bodies from school buildings before it was safe for students and staff. The staff removed 17 dead bodies from his school ground before the community had the trust to send their children there. These were not isolated cases but sadly, rather common ones. Another headteacher revealed that it took more than two years to negotiate with militiamen to vacate the school premises, and the deal on which they agreed to leave was a monthly share of 50% of the collected revenue.

Tarah and Sood (2022) also reported that headteachers experienced trauma and other psychological disturbances, with no support being available to them during those challenging times. Their study also found that school leaders were compelled to pay financial support to grieving families, even though the schools themselves were in financial difficulties. Waiting for unwelcome news of the death or injury of a member of staff or a student who was on the way to school was their daily expected briefing. Another effect of the conflict on schools was a shortage

of teachers sometimes impelled school leaders to teach, especially those who possessed teaching skills. These turbulences impact on schools' overall subscriptions, as parents can remove their children if a school does not have sufficient teachers to teach them (Tarah & Sood, 2022).

As a result of the absence of government regulation and support, there are no institutions that prepare and develop headteachers in Somalia. Also, there is no formal training and leadership development for public and private primary headteachers in Somalia, whereas, in contrast, there is a growing recognition of the significance of school headship preparation through professional development and training across the world. Comparatively, the procedures used in appointing and offering pre-service training in many countries, particularly in Africa, are inadequate. Induction and in-service training for headteachers are also inappropriate in developing countries, especially those within the continent of Africa (Bush & Odoro, 2006). Globally, Kayiwa (2011) notes that headteachers do not receive training before taking up their post and often 'work from experience' (p. 1), which does not give confidence to the provision of education.

Although there are no specific Somalia-related studies on the availability of professional development opportunities for school leaders or a skills audit of current leaders of low-cost private schools in Somalia, the World Bank (2018) want them to have 'the required competencies and skills to lead, support, and challenge members of their institutions' (p. 72). It is important to acknowledge the link between the leadership competencies of school leaders and their positive impact on the success of schools (Davis et al., 2005, p. 3). In discussing this further in the context of school improvement and students' learning outcomes, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between different sections of schooling, including leadership and management. In addition to the role they play in improving students' achievements, they also lead on developing effective relationships among staff members, acquiring and allocating resources, promoting teacher development, improving student outcomes, and building mutually supportive school community relations.

At times of crises which school leaders and their staff are managing, their collective efficacy has to be considered as their psychological state may not be at its best. The staff have to talk about their feelings and experiences in a safe space, and this requires school headteachers to find time for tough conversations about teachers' self-efficacy and offer support in a school climate that is collaborative (DeWitt, 2017). Listening to staff voices helps in the process of mindfulness and building teachers' self-efficacy, motivation and belief in the process of collaborative trust building and willingness to share ideas.

According to a recent document published by the federal government of Somalia, one of the key components of its ESSP is the enhancement of the quality of education and children's learning outcomes through the provision of school-based coaching for headteachers to improve school performance (ESSP, 2017). To achieve this, it will develop comprehensive and consolidated headteacher training programmes. This strategy only applies to the education sector in Somalia (Benadir Region and Federal Member States), as Somaliland has its own ESSP. Although Somaliland's ESSP has extensive references to increasing female

headteachers in Somaliland, there is nevertheless no mention of any direct government policy for preparing, developing, and training headteachers. The realities of school leadership in Somalia are complex. There are neither post-secondary educational headship programmes nor school-based apprenticeship programmes in Somalia. This makes it more difficult for school leaders to learn how to enact any type of leadership other than daily unavoidable managerial tasks (Khalifa et al., 2014, p. 236). Furthermore, it leaves headteachers untrained and with no professional development programmes available to them. We therefore need further study to understand the role of headteachers in post-conflict education in Somalia (World Bank, 2018, p. 72).

4.5 Methodology

It was important to collect the lived experiences of headteachers through a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013). An approach advocated by Drever (1995), helped in refining our data collection involving sampling 30 private primary school headteachers in Somaliland, Puntland, and Banadir regions using a purposeful sampling method for interviews and observations, with 80 respondents completing the questionnaire. A select number of policy documents of the Somali Ministry of Education and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank, were reviewed (Best & Kahn, 1993). Such triangulation allowed comparison of sources of evidence to determine the accuracy of information or phenomena (Cohen et al., 2018).

After data collection and data sorting, analysis was undertaken following Creswell's (2013) data analysis guide. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the field as it allowed the exploration and sensitive probing of a series of specific questions or issues with the headteachers (Creswell, 2013). These were the headteachers who would provide the richest information and those who were the most interesting (Best & Kahn, 2006). We next present the findings based on Mumford's Skills Model: competencies and managing environmental changes.

4.6 Findings

Sixty percentage of those interviewed were headteachers before the civil war erupted. Of that 65%, 55% are currently in this role, while 10% have retired; 35% indicated that there were no headteachers before the armed conflict, and only 15% of this cohort were working in education, while 20% of this group were in education or school management. The vast majority of the participants serving as headteachers range in age from 36 to 60 years old. Over 80% serve more than 10 years as a headteacher, while 20% are in this role for more than six years.

In responding to the question regarding school operation during active armed conflict, only 20% stated that their schools were in operation at the start of the conflict, while 62% indicated that their schools were irregular in terms of operation due to school premises being occupied by armed militia or influential people who were not associated with any armed groups; 65% of the participants have indicated that they were headteachers during armed conflict, after successful reopening of their schools on an on-off basis due to ongoing conflict. In their

responses to the negative impact on school operations, including staff and children's safety, recruiting teachers, and managing teaching and learning resources, participants indicated that their personal skills and experience played a significant role in the way they managed the effect of the conflict. Participants further explained the direct impact of the conflict on their role as headteachers and stated that these impacts include reopening of schools, concerns about safety to and from school for staff and children, safety during school time, teacher recruitment and retention, lack of means to manage staff performance and support, lack of resources, lack of support for teachers and other staff from outside the school, managing and maintaining external relations, and volatility of the situations and instabilities and lack of means to manage teaching and learning assessment.

In their responses to the question related to the strategies or managerial responses that participants undertook to minimise any impact of the armed conflict on their roles as headteachers, their responses varied, some were too generic and less detailed, while three provided detailed responses to the question. These are presented next for illustrative purpose:

Participant (HT06)

My school was reopened as a result of community-led **mobilisation**, and this has enabled me to count on the **support** of the community. I led the school in **partnership** with the community and like-minded individuals. This was the best approach to managing the school during a crisis. Joint planning and organisational management with members of the community have enabled the management of the school to create a protected and **positive learning environment** for staff and children. **Personal qualities and competencies** have had a great influence on the way I applied this strategy.

Participant (HT09)

I believe the **effective outcome of a leader** during a crisis is influenced by their **personal and professional skills** in dealing with challenges faced by the school. The skills include how you treat your staff, deal with significant issues, including safety and resources, and manage internal and external disputes. If teachers and staff are not happy, they will leave, and no teacher means no students. There is a **high demand for teachers**, pay, and safety in certain areas where conflict may still be active. **Shortages of teachers** sometimes force school leaders to teach, especially those who possess teaching skills. These **staff turbulences** have a knock-on effect on schools' overall subscription as **parents remove their children** if a school does not have any teachers to teach their children.

Participant (HT12)

Every **school leader** must be **equipped with skills** that help him or her to **deal with people** who are experiencing many challenges

in life, including trauma and different personalities. The school leader must understand the circumstances surrounding the school during a crisis, including the armed conflict. Social skills, knowledge, and **spiritual competency** are vital skills for me and for others when it comes to being a leader. My personal experience during the armed conflict was that **staff faced repercussions** from parents and relatives of students if they failed or gave low marks to their children. In some cases, staff had to choose between life and death situations in assessing students, particularly those whose parents or relatives are part of the **militia group**. Communities will have greater respect for leaders who hold stronger spiritual competencies, compassion, and knowledge of education.

4.7 Discussion and Conclusion

The enormity of the effects on education during and after armed conflict was felt everywhere. The most affected were pupils who had disrupted education due to the armed conflict and constant threat of militia groups. This also impacted on parents as they were constantly worried about the safety and well-being of their children at school. The main priority for any parent or community during a crisis was the continuation of education. However noble this effort of reopening schools, this was not without a challenge. Most schools were not used for years during the conflict because they were in areas where armed conflict continued to be active. The consequence of conflict led to the complete destruction of education in both physical and human forms.

In responding to the question related to managing external environmental factors and their direct impact on education, few participants were explicit with their responses to the question. The headteacher's skills in dealing with these changes mattered significantly. They must have the ability to reconsider the operating systems that existed before the conflict and revisit these systems and their relevance to the changing environment. A considerable number of participants were headteachers before the civil war and felt the negative impact of the conflict immediately. Although participants' responses varied in strategies, they were used to continue providing education during armed conflict, and they strongly agreed that the conflict had a negative impact on schools' day-to-day operations.

There is unambiguous evidence that the headteachers' approaches to responding to external changes varied, and these were influenced by their skills, experience, and personal and professional competencies. These responses are linked with the statement by [Mumford et al. \(2000\)](#), who suggest that an effective performance by a headteacher during a crisis is determined by their capability and skills in problem-solving, social judgement skills, and knowledge. These skills included understanding and resolving complex problems ([Northouse, 2016](#), p. 48). Defining these problems included how headteachers paid attention to these changes and their impact on school life and worked with others and communities to mobilise a collective response. Good social skills, knowledge, and spiritual competencies were vital when it came to collaborating with people from diverse groups, such as school staff, parents, and the wider community.

Participants also acknowledged that their key role as headteachers was to ensure that a normative environment was maintained, and effective relationships among staff members were maintained by acquiring and allocating resources, maintaining effective external relations, and building a mutually supportive school community. This is what Day and Sammons (2016) highlighted earlier, 'headteachers do this through building community leadership' (p. 7).

In conclusion, participants agreed with the notion that headteachers' successes in leading and managing schools during conflict depends on how they redefine culture and structure, resource management, the roles and responsibilities of staff, and their own, as well as managing external relations, which are vital in the case of armed conflict. Headteachers must gain the necessary competencies for effective 'karti', and these require a set of skills including personal and professional, cultural, and spiritual competencies, as well as experience and knowledge.

4.8 Recommendations

This chapter acknowledges the uniqueness of Somalia's education system, which has experienced total destruction for more than two decades. The enormity of the effects on education during and after armed conflict was felt everywhere, including in the teacher training provision as well as in the preparation and development of schools and school leaders. There is a proposal that headteachers are enacting policy through the concept of glocalisation, centred on local issues, local solutions, and in addition to providing high-quality education, they must remain focused on progressing ideas on international sustainable development. The authors make the following recommendations:

- Further research is needed on the impact of conflict on school management during conflict and what support is made available to them.
- There is a need for comprehensive education policies that guide all stakeholders in the provision of education services that support school headteachers.
- Training and development for school headteachers is imperative.
- School owners and the wider community support keeping children, staff, and school leaders safe during crises.
- For the headteachers, they create distributed leadership opportunities for middle managers. This helps middle leaders step in in the event of a headteacher absence.

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