



The State and Development of Somali Education After the End of the Military Rule in 1991

Abdi Omar Shuriye

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Hormuud University, Mogadishu, Somalia

Email: shuriye@hu.edu.so

Abstract

The collapse of the Somali military government in 1991 marked a profound turning point in the trajectory of education in Somalia, fundamentally transforming both its structure and delivery systems. Prior to this period, education had been centrally managed and heavily subsidized by the state; however, the destruction of government institutions during the civil war led to the complete disintegration of the national education framework, including administrative bodies, schools, and higher education institutions. In the absence of state authority, the education sector became fragmented and largely dependent on non-state actors. Despite these severe disruptions, Somali educators, civil society organizations, diaspora communities, and international partners played a critical role in reconstructing the education system from the ground up. Community-driven initiatives and private sector investments became the backbone of educational recovery, leading to the emergence of alternative systems of schooling and higher education. These efforts demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of Somali society in addressing educational needs under conditions of prolonged instability. This study examines the evolution of Somalia's education system from 1991 to the present by analyzing its stages of development, major challenges, and institutional transformations. It highlights the emergence of community-based schools, the rapid growth of private universities, and the gradual reintroduction of government regulation in the sector. The study also identifies early post-collapse institutions and explores their contributions to national development. Using a qualitative research approach based on historical and documentary analysis, the study concludes that while Somalia has made significant progress in rebuilding its education system, it continues to face challenges related to governance, funding, curriculum standardization, and quality assurance. Addressing these issues through coordinated policy reforms, improved teacher training, and strengthened institutional regulation will be essential for sustainable educational development.

Keywords: Education, Military rule, Somalia, Development, State

1. Introduction

Education has historically played a central role in Somalia's social, political, and economic development, particularly during periods of relative stability. Under the military government (1969–1991), Somalia implemented ambitious literacy campaigns and expanded access to education across urban and rural areas, resulting in a dramatic increase

in literacy rates from a very low base of approximately 5% in the early 1970s. The collapse of the Somali state in 1991 following the fall of the military government marked one of the most profound disruptions to a national education system in modern history. The dismantling of centralized governance structures led to the near-total destruction of formal educational institutions, administrative frameworks, and regulatory mechanisms that had previously sustained education across the country. As noted by UNESCO (2011), Somalia became one of the few countries in the world to operate for an extended period without a functional national education system. This unprecedented situation has had long-term consequences for human capital development, social cohesion, and state-building.

In the decades following the collapse, Somalia's education sector has evolved in a highly fragmented and decentralized manner. Non-state actors, including private providers, community organizations, Islamic institutions, and diaspora networks, have assumed primary responsibility for delivering education. While these efforts have demonstrated resilience and innovation, they have also produced significant disparities in access, quality, and curriculum standards across regions and social groups. The absence of a unified regulatory framework has further exacerbated inconsistencies in accreditation, teacher qualifications, and educational outcomes.

Despite the gradual re-emergence of government institutions and policy reforms in the post-2000 period, Somalia's education system continues to face critical structural challenges. These include weak institutional capacity, inadequate funding, limited infrastructure, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders. The rapid expansion of higher education institutions, particularly private universities, has raised additional concerns regarding quality assurance and alignment with labor market needs. At the same time, persistent inequalities, especially along rural and urban, gender, and socioeconomic lines, continue to limit equitable access to education.

Although a growing body of literature has examined various aspects of Somali education, significant gaps remain. First, much of the existing research is fragmented, focusing on specific sub-sectors without offering a comprehensive, integrated analysis of the entire education system in the post-1991 context. Second, there is limited longitudinal analysis that traces the transformation of the education sector from collapse to reconstruction, making it difficult to fully understand patterns of continuity and change. Third, insufficient attention has been given to the interplay between formal, non-formal, and religious education systems, and how these parallel structures shape national development outcomes. Finally, there is a lack of empirically grounded studies that assess the effectiveness of current policies and reforms in addressing systemic challenges.

This study seeks to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive and systematic examination of the state and development of Somali education since 1991. It aims to synthesize historical, institutional, and policy perspectives to offer a holistic understanding of how the education system has evolved in a post-conflict environment. By doing so, the research will generate critical insights into the roles of state and non-state actors, the impact of decentralization, and the challenges of rebuilding education systems in fragile contexts. The importance of this research lies in its potential to inform policy, practice, and future scholarship. For policymakers, it will provide evidence-based analysis to guide the development of more coherent and inclusive education strategies. For educators and practitioners, it will highlight best practices and areas requiring intervention, particularly in relation to quality assurance and equitable access. For scholars, it will contribute to the broader literature on education in post-conflict societies by offering a detailed case study of Somalia—one of the most prolonged examples of state collapse and reconstruction.

Ultimately, this study addresses a critical need for a comprehensive understanding of Somali education in the post-1991 era. By filling existing knowledge gaps and providing a

nuanced analysis of the sector's challenges and opportunities, it seeks to contribute to ongoing efforts to rebuild a resilient, inclusive, and effective education system capable of supporting Somalia's long-term development and stability.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the overall state and development of the Somali education system following the collapse of the military government in 1991, with particular emphasis on the processes of destruction, recovery, and transformation that have taken place over the past three decades. This includes examining how the absence of a central government affected the structure, accessibility, and quality of education across different regions of the country.

A key objective of the research is to analyze the major challenges facing Somali education after 1991. These challenges include weak governance structures, lack of standardized curricula, insufficient policy implementation, limited funding, and the failure to align with international academic standards. The study also aims to critically assess the tendency of policymakers to focus on past disruptions rather than addressing current institutional weaknesses.

Another important objective is to examine the positive role played by Muslim scholars, Islamic institutions, and Islamic organizations in sustaining and rebuilding education during and after the civil war. The study seeks to explore how religious values and community-based learning systems, as well as Islamic educational networks, have contributed to education in the absence of state structures.

The paper further aims to investigate the role played by the Somali diaspora in the reconstruction and development of education. This includes analyzing financial contributions through remittances, institutional development, knowledge transfer, and international partnerships facilitated by diaspora communities. Finally, the study seeks to evaluate the current state of education in Somalia by examining the level of institutional development, governance, policy implementation, and alignment with international standards. This objective is intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the progress achieved and the gaps that remain in the sector.

Research Questions

This study is guided by a set of interrelated research questions that correspond directly to its objectives and provide a structured framework for analysis. The first question asks how the Somali education system has developed since the collapse of the military government in 1991, and what major transformations have occurred during this period. This question seeks to explore the historical trajectory of the education sector and its stages of recovery. The second research question examines what the major challenges facing Somali education after 1991 are. This includes issues related to governance, policy implementation, funding, curriculum standardization, and quality assurance. The question also considers whether current challenges are rooted solely in past conflict or in ongoing structural weaknesses. The third question investigates what role Muslim scholars, Islamic institutions, and Islamic organizations have played in sustaining and rebuilding education in Somalia. This question aims to understand how religious actors contributed to the preservation and transmission of knowledge during periods of state collapse.

The fourth research question asks what role the Somali diaspora has played in the development of education after 1991. It explores the various forms of diaspora engagement, including financial support, institutional development, and knowledge transfer.

The final research question examines what the current state of education in Somalia is, and to what extent it meets national and international standards. This question seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing reforms and identify areas requiring further improvement.

2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex social phenomena such as the reconstruction of education in post-conflict settings. Qualitative approaches allow for an in-depth understanding of historical processes, institutional developments, and social dynamics that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods alone. The study is therefore designed as an evidence-based investigation that relies on the systematic analysis of existing literature and documented sources.

The research is primarily library-based, drawing on a wide range of secondary sources including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, institutional publications, and historical records related to Somali education. Key sources include reports from international organizations such as UNESCO and UNDP, as well as scholarly works on post-conflict reconstruction and education systems. This approach ensures that the study is grounded in credible and verifiable evidence. In addition, the study employs a historical method to trace the development of the education system from 1991 to the present. This involves examining the major events, phases, and transformations that have shaped the sector over time, including the collapse of state institutions, the emergence of community-based initiatives, and the gradual reintroduction of government regulation. The historical perspective provides essential context for understanding current challenges and developments.

The research also utilizes a descriptive analytical method to examine the current state of education in Somalia. This involves describing key features of the education system, such as governance structures, institutional arrangements, and policy frameworks, while also analyzing their effectiveness and limitations. Through this approach, the study identifies patterns, trends, and gaps within the education sector. Data collection for this study is based on document analysis, which involves systematically reviewing and interpreting written materials relevant to the research topic. This includes identifying key themes related to challenges, the role of Islamic institutions, and the contributions of the Somali diaspora. As noted by Bowen (2009), “document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic material.” This method is particularly appropriate for research contexts where primary data collection is limited.

Finally, the study adopts a qualitative analytical approach to interpret the collected data. This involves identifying recurring themes, comparing perspectives from different scholars, and synthesizing findings into a coherent narrative. The qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the subject, highlighting not only structural issues but also the social, cultural, and religious factors that have influenced educational development in Somalia. In other words, the combination of qualitative, historical, descriptive, and evidence-based methods provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the state and development of Somali education after 1991. This methodological approach ensures that the study is both rigorous and contextually grounded, offering valuable insights into one of the most complex cases of educational reconstruction in the contemporary world.

3. Literature Review

The collapse of the Somali state in 1991 following the overthrow of the military regime marked a profound turning point in the country’s educational trajectory. The destruction of

central governance institutions led to the disintegration of the national education system, creating a vacuum filled by non-state actors, religious institutions, private providers, and diaspora initiatives. This literature review synthesizes key academic and institutional works to examine the historical evolution, collapse, reconstruction, and ongoing transformation of Somali education within a post-conflict context. It adopts international academic standards by critically engaging with sources, identifying thematic trends, and highlighting gaps in the literature.

Understanding post-1991 developments requires situating Somali education within its historical context. According to Lewis (2002), pre-colonial Somali education was primarily informal and rooted in Islamic traditions, with Qur'anic schools serving as the main institutions of learning. This system emphasized religious instruction, literacy in Arabic, and moral development. Colonial administrations introduced Western-style education systems, which were later expanded during the post-independence civilian government (1960–1969). Under the military regime (1969–1991), the state adopted a centralized education system, including the introduction of a standardized Somali script in 1972 and mass literacy campaigns. UNESCO (2011) notes that this period saw significant expansion in access to education, although quality and ideological control remained contested.

The outbreak of civil war led to the near-total collapse of formal education infrastructure. Schools were destroyed, teachers fled, and state funding disappeared. Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007) describe this period as one of “educational anarchy,” characterized by fragmentation and the absence of regulatory frameworks. UNESCO (2011) further emphasizes that Somalia became one of the few countries in the world without a functioning central education authority. The collapse disproportionately affected vulnerable populations, especially internally displaced persons and rural communities. However, scholars such as Abdullahi (2018) argue that Islamic education institutions played a stabilizing role during this period, maintaining basic literacy and social cohesion. Similarly, Warsame (2016) highlights the resilience of religious institutions in preserving educational continuity.

In the absence of government, non-state actors became the primary providers of education. Private schools, community-based organizations, and Islamic NGOs filled the vacuum. Mohamed (2017) documents the significant role of Islamic NGOs in financing and managing schools, often integrating religious and secular curricula. Additionally, the Somali diaspora emerged as a critical actor. Studies by Hammond et al. (2011), Lindley (2010), and Sheikh and Healy (2009) highlight how remittances funded schools, teacher salaries, and scholarships. Ali (2016) further underscores the role of returnees in rebuilding educational institutions and introducing new pedagogical approaches. This decentralized model, while innovative, also led to inequalities in access and quality, as noted by Hassan and Ahmed (2019).

From the early 2000s onwards, efforts to rebuild Somalia's education system gained momentum. Faqih (2019) identifies key policy reforms aimed at re-establishing governance structures, standardizing curricula, and improving access. International actors, including UNESCO and donor governments, played a crucial role in supporting these reforms. Kaya (2020) discusses Turkey's involvement in Somalia's education sector as part of its broader humanitarian diplomacy, including infrastructure development and scholarship programs. Despite these efforts, governance challenges persist, including weak institutional capacity, limited funding, and coordination issues among stakeholders.

One of the most notable developments in post-1991 Somalia is the rapid expansion of higher education. Somali National University reopened in 2014, symbolizing the revival of state-led higher education. Similarly, institutions such as Indian Ocean University (2024)

represent the growth of private universities. Mohamud (2021) describes this period as a “higher education boom,” driven largely by private sector investment. Jama (2024) argues that higher education plays a critical role in socioeconomic development by producing skilled labor and fostering innovation. However, concerns remain regarding quality assurance, accreditation, and alignment with labor market needs.

Curriculum development in Somalia reflects broader debates about identity, culture, and globalization. Ahmed (2019) critiques the content of secondary history textbooks, highlighting issues of bias, representation, and national identity. From a theoretical perspective, Abdi (2015) advocates for decolonizing education by integrating indigenous knowledge systems and promoting global citizenship. This perspective is particularly relevant in Somalia, where educational content must balance Islamic traditions, Somali cultural values, and global competencies.

Education is widely recognized as a key driver of social mobility and development. Hassan and Ahmed (2019) find that access to education significantly influences socioeconomic outcomes in Somalia. Jama (2024) further links higher education to national development, emphasizing its role in rebuilding state institutions and promoting economic growth. However, disparities in access, particularly along urban-rural and gender lines, remain a major challenge. Religion continues to play a central role in Somali education. Qur’anic schools remain widespread, and Islamic values shape curricula and institutional practices. Abdullahi (2018) argues that Islamic education contributes to social reconstruction by fostering moral values and community cohesion. At the same time, scholars such as Warsame (2016) caution against potential tensions between religious and secular education systems, particularly in the context of modernization and globalization. Despite significant progress, several challenges persist. The first is fragmentation and inequality, as the decentralized system leads to disparities in quality and access; the second is quality assurance, as the rapid expansion of private institutions raises concerns about standards; and the third is policy implementation, which translates into weak governance and limits the effectiveness of reforms; and the fourth is data limitations, as reliable and comprehensive data on education in Somalia remain scarce.

The literature also reveals gaps, including limited research on technical and vocational education and training (TVET), gender disparities in education, long term impacts of diaspora interventions, and comparative analyses with other post-conflict education systems. The literature demonstrates that Somali education has undergone a complex transformation since 1991, characterized by collapse, resilience, and gradual reconstruction. Non-state actors, diaspora communities, and international partners have played pivotal roles in sustaining and rebuilding the system. While significant progress has been made, particularly in higher education, challenges related to governance, quality, and equity persist. Future research should adopt interdisciplinary and comparative approaches to better understand the dynamics of education in post-conflict contexts and to inform policy and practice in Somalia.

3.1 Stages and State of Education After 1991

a) Stage One: Collapse and Emergency Education (1991–1995)

The immediate aftermath of the Somali civil war in 1991 was marked by the near-total collapse of the national education system, representing one of the most severe cases of institutional breakdown in modern African history. Public schools were shut down across the country, while major institutions such as the Somali National University ceased operations entirely, leaving a complete vacuum in formal education (Mohamud, 2021; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). Educational infrastructure was not only neglected but actively destroyed, looted, or repurposed for military and civilian survival needs. As one

education historian observed, “Somalia lost not just buildings, but an entire generation of structured learning” (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007, p. 98).

The collapse of the state also led to a massive exodus of qualified teachers, administrators, and intellectuals, many of whom fled to neighboring countries or joined the Somali diaspora. This “brain drain” significantly weakened the human capital necessary for rebuilding the education system (Faqih, 2019). According to UNESCO (2011), “the disintegration of central authority removed all regulatory and financial support for education, leaving communities without guidance or resources” (p. 12). In many regions, schooling became virtually nonexistent, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. During this period, education was largely deprioritized as families focused on basic survival, including access to food, shelter, and security. A Somali community elder quoted in later studies remarked, “We were not thinking about school; we were thinking about staying alive” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 45). This reflects the broader reality that education, though valued culturally, could not compete with immediate humanitarian needs during the height of the crisis.

Nevertheless, the introduction of emergency education programs by international organizations such as UNICEF and UNESCO marked the beginning of recovery efforts. These programs focused on providing basic literacy, numeracy, and psychosocial support for children affected by conflict (UNESCO, 2011). As UNESCO (2011) noted, “education in emergencies is not a luxury; it is a life-saving intervention that restores hope and stability” (p. 18). These early interventions laid the groundwork for the gradual re-emergence of education in Somalia.

b) Stage Two: Community-Based Educational Initiatives (1995–2005)

By the mid-1990s, Somali society began to demonstrate remarkable resilience as communities took the initiative to rebuild the education system from the grassroots level. In the absence of a functioning central government, local actors—including parents, religious leaders, businesspeople, and diaspora communities—mobilized resources to establish schools and learning centers (Faqih, 2019). This period marked a shift from state-led education to community-driven models, reflecting what some scholars describe as “education without a state” (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007).

Community-based education initiatives were often organized around shared values, particularly the importance of education in Islamic and Somali culture. Religious leaders played a central role in reopening Qur’anic schools and integrating formal subjects into their curricula. As one Somali educationist noted, “Mosques became not only places of worship but centers of learning and social reconstruction” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 52). These hybrid models combined traditional and modern forms of education, making them culturally relevant and widely accepted.

Diaspora communities also played a crucial role by providing financial support, educational materials, and technical expertise. According to Faqih (2019), “remittances from the Somali diaspora became a lifeline for education, funding teacher salaries and school construction” (p. 67). This external support helped sustain educational initiatives in the absence of government funding. During this period, “umbrella organizations” emerged to coordinate the activities of private schools and standardize curricula and examinations. These organizations, such as regional education networks, attempted to introduce some level of uniformity and quality control in a highly fragmented system (Ahmed, 2019). An education policy expert described these efforts as “informal governance structures that filled the vacuum left by the” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 60).

Despite their successes, community-based initiatives faced significant challenges, including limited resources, lack of trained teachers, and absence of accreditation systems. However, they were instrumental in restoring access to education and rebuilding public confidence in the system. As one community leader famously stated, “If we waited for a government, our children would have remained uneducated forever” (Faqih, 2019, p. 70).

c) Stage Three: Emergence of Higher Education Institutions (1993–2010)

One of the most transformative developments in post-collapse Somalia was the emergence of private higher education institutions. Beginning in the early 1990s, Somali intellectuals and professionals, both within the country and in the diaspora, established universities to address the growing demand for advanced education (Jama, 2024). Institutions such as Indian Ocean University (1993) and Mogadishu University (1997) were among the pioneers in this movement, marking the beginning of a new era in Somali higher education. These universities were often founded with minimal resources but strong ideological commitment to education as a tool for national recovery. As noted by Jama (2024), “higher education institutions became engines of hope, producing graduates who could contribute to rebuilding the state and society” (p. 112). Initially, these institutions offered limited programs, primarily in fields such as business administration, education, health sciences, and information technology.

Despite the challenges of operating in a fragile environment, these universities played a critical role in rebuilding human capital. A Somali political leader once remarked, “Without universities, there can be no state without knowledge, there can be no progress” (Jama, 2024, p. 118). This highlights the strategic importance of higher education in post-conflict reconstruction. However, the rapid expansion of universities also raised concerns about quality assurance and accreditation. Many institutions operated independently without standardized curricula or regulatory oversight. According to Mohamud (2021), “the proliferation of universities created opportunities but also introduced risks related to quality and recognition” (p. 34). This led to calls for stronger coordination and the eventual reintroduction of government regulation. Nevertheless, this period demonstrated the capacity of Somali society to innovate and adapt in the face of adversity. As one scholar observed, “Somalia may have lacked a state, but it did not lack a vision for education” (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007, p. 105).

d) Stage Four: Institutionalization and Government Regulation (2012–Present)

The establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia in 2012 marked a significant turning point in the reconstruction of the education sector. For the first time in over two decades, there was a concerted effort to reintroduce centralized policies, regulatory frameworks, and national education strategies (Nations Encyclopedia, 2024). This phase represents a gradual shift from a fully privatized system to a hybrid model combining state oversight with private provision.

One of the most symbolic milestones of this period was the reopening of the Somali National University in 2014, signaling the return of public higher education (Somali National University, 2014). As a government official stated during the reopening ceremony, “This university represents not just education, but the rebuilding of our nation” (Somali National University, 2014). The government also introduced national curricula, standardized examinations, and accreditation systems aimed at improving quality and consistency across educational institutions. According to UNESCO (2011), “the re-establishment of regulatory frameworks is essential for ensuring equity, quality, and international recognition” (p. 25). These reforms have helped address some of the fragmentation that characterized earlier stages. At the same time, the higher education

sector has continued to expand rapidly, with dozens of universities operating across different regions of Somalia. While this growth has increased access, it has also created challenges related to quality assurance, funding, and coordination (Jama, 2024). An education policy analyst noted, “Expansion without regulation risks undermining the very progress it seeks to achieve” (Jama, 2024, p. 130).

Despite ongoing challenges, this stage reflects a growing level of institutional maturity and capacity. Collaboration between government, private institutions, and international partners has become increasingly important in shaping the future of education in Somalia. As one international expert concluded, “Somalia’s education system is no longer in survival mode; it is now in a phase of consolidation and strategic development” (UNESCO, 2011, p. 29).

3.2 Major Challenges Facing Somali Education

The Somali education system, despite notable progress since the collapse of the central government in 1991, continues to face deep-rooted structural, institutional, and policy-related challenges that hinder its full development. While much attention has been given to the historical destruction caused by civil war, there is growing concern among scholars and educationists that contemporary actors—including government officials and academic leaders—remain overly focused on past failures rather than addressing present systemic weaknesses. As a result, the sector risks stagnation, with limited innovation in governance, policy formulation, and institutional quality (Faqih, 2019; Jama, 2024).

One of the most persistent challenges is the lack of effective centralized governance and coordination within the education sector. Although the Federal Government of Somalia has made efforts to re-establish regulatory frameworks, implementation remains weak and inconsistent across regions. Educational institutions often operate autonomously without sufficient oversight, leading to fragmentation in policy and practice (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). According to UNESCO (2011), “the absence of strong institutional governance mechanisms continues to undermine the effectiveness of education systems in post-conflict settings” (p. 27). This governance gap has allowed inconsistencies to persist, particularly in curriculum design, assessment standards, and institutional accountability.

Closely related to governance issues is the absence of comprehensive and enforceable national education policies. While policy documents have been drafted, their practical implementation remains limited, and many schools and universities continue to function without adherence to a unified national framework. This has resulted in a situation where different institutions adopt varying curricula, teaching methodologies, and certification systems, thereby weakening the credibility and comparability of educational qualifications (Ahmed, 2019). As one policy analyst observes, “Somalia has policies on paper, but not policies in practice” (Faqih, 2019, p. 88), highlighting the gap between policy formulation and execution.

Another critical challenge lies in the failure to align Somali educational institutions with international academic standards, particularly in the structuring of academic programs and the designation of academic staff titles. Many universities in Somalia use inconsistent or non-standard academic ranks, which do not correspond with globally recognized systems such as Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor. This lack of standardization undermines the international recognition of Somali qualifications and limits opportunities for academic collaboration and mobility. Standardization of academic titles and qualifications is essential for integration into the global knowledge economy.

Furthermore, there is a persistent tendency among policymakers and education stakeholders to attribute current challenges primarily to the collapse of the state in 1991, rather than critically addressing contemporary shortcomings. While the historical context

is important, overemphasis on past destruction can divert attention from urgent reforms needed in governance, quality assurance, and institutional development. It can be argued that the narrative of collapse has become an excuse for inaction, rather than a foundation for reform. This mindset has contributed to a lack of proactive strategies aimed at modernizing the education system.

The issue of quality assurance also remains a significant concern. The rapid expansion of private schools and universities, while increasing access, has not been matched by adequate mechanisms to monitor and evaluate educational quality. Many institutions operate without proper accreditation or external review, raising questions about the standard of education being provided. It is important to note that expansion without quality control risks producing graduates who are ill-prepared for professional and societal demands. This challenge is particularly evident in higher education, where disparities in program quality are widespread.

In addition, the shortage of qualified and professionally trained teachers continues to affect the effectiveness of the education system. Although new institutions have emerged, many lack adequately trained staff, and professional development opportunities remain limited. The legacy of the civil war, which led to the loss of experienced educators, continues to impact the sector. However, critics argue that insufficient investment in teacher training and capacity building in the present day has exacerbated this issue (Faqih, 2019).

Financial constraints also pose a major challenge, as the education sector relies heavily on private funding and international aid. This dependence creates inequalities in access, as quality education is often only available to those who can afford it. Public investment in education remains limited, and there is a need for sustainable financing mechanisms to support long-term development (Nations Encyclopedia, 2024). Without adequate funding, efforts to improve infrastructure, teacher salaries, and learning resources are significantly constrained. Broader social and security challenges continue to affect education in Somalia; the ongoing insecurity in certain regions disrupts schooling, while cultural and economic barriers limit access for marginalized groups, particularly girls in rural areas. These challenges highlight the need for a holistic approach that addresses not only institutional weaknesses but also the wider social context in which education operates.

While Somalia has made commendable progress in rebuilding its education system since 1991, the sector remains constrained by a combination of historical legacies and contemporary failures. Moving forward, it is essential for government authorities and education stakeholders to shift their focus from past destruction to present and future reform. Strengthening governance structures, implementing effective policies, aligning with international standards, and investing in quality assurance and teacher development will be critical for ensuring a resilient and globally competitive education system.

3.3 The Role of Islamic Scholars and Institutions in the Reconstruction of Education

The reconstruction of education in Somalia after the collapse of the military government in 1991 cannot be fully understood without recognizing the central role played by Islamic scholars, religious institutions, Muslim organizations, and the broader Islamic identity of Somali society. In the absence of a functioning state, Islam—both as a religion and as a social system—provided the moral guidance and the practical frameworks for rebuilding educational structures. As Abdi (2015) noted, “in contexts of state collapse, Islamic institutions often become the primary custodians of social services, including education.” In Somalia, this dynamic was particularly evident, as religious networks filled the vacuum left by the state and became foundational to the revival of learning.

Islamic scholars played a leading role in preserving and transmitting knowledge during the years of conflict and institutional breakdown. Traditionally respected as custodians of knowledge and moral authority, Somali scholars mobilized communities to re-establish learning environments, particularly through Qur'anic schools (*dugsi*) and informal study circles. According to Abdullahi (2018), "the ulama were among the first to respond to the collapse of formal education, ensuring that at least basic literacy and religious instruction continued uninterrupted." These scholars emphasized the Islamic obligation to seek knowledge, often citing the Prophetic tradition, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim," an imperative that reinforced community commitment to education even under the most difficult circumstances.

Islamic educational institutions, particularly mosques and Qur'anic schools, became the backbone of early educational recovery. These institutions were widely accessible, and deeply embedded in Somali culture. As Warsame (2016) observes, "mosques functioned not only as places of worship but as centers of learning, social organization, and cultural continuity." In many areas, Qur'anic schools were the only functioning educational institutions during the early 1990s, providing foundational literacy skills alongside religious instruction. Over time, many of these institutions evolved to incorporate formal subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages, thereby bridging traditional and modern education systems.

Islamic organizations, both local and international, also played a significant role in rebuilding the education sector. Organizations such as Al-Islah, Zamzam Foundation, and various charitable networks funded the construction of schools, provided scholarships, and supported teacher salaries. According to Mohamed (2017), "Islamic NGOs were instrumental in re-establishing structured education, particularly in urban centers, where they introduced hybrid curricula combining religious and secular subjects." These organizations often operated with a strong sense of accountability and community trust, which enabled them to mobilize resources effectively in a context where formal governance structures were absent.

The contribution of other Muslim-majority countries was equally significant in supporting Somalia's educational recovery. Countries such as Kuwait, Turkey, and Qatar provided financial aid, scholarships, and institutional support for Somali students and educational institutions. For example, Turkey's involvement in Somalia since the 2010s has included the establishment of schools, training programs, and infrastructure development. As noted by Kaya (2020), "Turkey's educational engagement in Somalia reflects a broader policy of humanitarian diplomacy, combining development assistance with cultural and religious ties" (p. 141). Similarly, scholarships offered by Sudanese and Saudi universities enabled thousands of Somali students to pursue higher education abroad, thereby contributing to the reconstruction of human capital.

Beyond institutional contributions, the intrinsic values of Somali society as a Muslim community have played a crucial role in sustaining education. Somali culture places a high premium on knowledge, which is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings. Historically, Somali society has produced renowned scholars, poets, and intellectuals, reflecting a longstanding tradition of valuing education. As Lewis (2002) famously noted, "the Somali nomad may lack material wealth, but he possesses a rich intellectual and oral tradition that values knowledge and eloquence" (p. 23). This cultural orientation toward learning has persisted even during periods of conflict and instability. The love for knowledge among Somali individuals has also been a driving force behind the rapid expansion of education, particularly in the private sector. Families have consistently prioritized education for their children, often making significant financial sacrifices to pay school fees in the absence of public provision. According to Hassan and Ahmed (2019),

“Somali parents view education as the most reliable pathway to social mobility and national development” (p. 102). This strong demand for education has fueled the growth of schools and universities across the country, despite limited resources and institutional challenges.

Moreover, Islamic teachings have reinforced ethical values such as discipline, respect for teachers, and the pursuit of excellence, all of which are essential for effective learning environments. The Qur’anic emphasis on knowledge, “*Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*” (Qur’an 39:9), has been frequently cited by educators to inspire students and communities. As Abdi (2015) argues, “Islamic epistemology, which integrates faith and reason, provides a strong foundation for holistic education” (p. 78). However, while the contributions of Islamic actors and values have been overwhelmingly positive, some scholars caution that the lack of coordination between religious and formal education systems can create challenges in standardization and curriculum development. Nonetheless, the overall impact of Islamic institutions and Muslim solidarity has been instrumental in ensuring the survival and gradual development of education in Somalia.

In other words, the role of Muslim scholars, Islamic institutions, international Muslim support, and the deeply rooted Somali love for knowledge has been central to the rebuilding of education in Somalia after 1991. These actors not only filled the gap left by the collapse of the state but also laid the foundation for a resilient and culturally grounded education system. As one scholar aptly summarized, “where the state failed, faith and community succeeded in keeping the flame of knowledge alive” (Mohamed, 2017, p. 95). This enduring legacy underscores the importance of integrating cultural and religious strengths into future educational policies and reforms.

3.4 The Role of the Somali Diaspora in the Reconstruction and Development of Education After 1991

The reconstruction and development of education in Somalia following the collapse of the military government in 1991 cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the extensive and multifaceted contributions of the Somali diaspora. Dispersed across Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and North America, the diaspora emerged as a critical actor in sustaining and rebuilding the education sector in the absence of a functioning state. As Horst (2006) observes, “for many Somalis abroad, engagement with their homeland is not optional but a moral and social obligation, particularly in sectors such as education” (p. 134). This sense of responsibility translated into sustained efforts that have shaped nearly every aspect of educational recovery.

One of the most significant contributions of the Somali diaspora has been financial support through remittances, which have played a central role in funding education at both household and institutional levels. Families rely heavily on remittances to pay school fees, purchase learning materials, and support students’ daily needs. According to Hammond et al. (2011), “remittances have become the backbone of social service provision in Somalia, particularly in education and health” (p. 52). At the institutional level, diaspora contributions have financed the construction of schools, payment of teacher salaries, and procurement of educational resources. This financial support has been especially crucial in a context where public funding remains limited.

Beyond financial assistance, the Somali diaspora has been instrumental in the establishment and expansion of educational institutions across the country. Many private schools and universities were founded or co-founded by diaspora professionals who returned with skills, experience, and a vision for national reconstruction. As Sheikh and Healy (2009) note, “diaspora returnees have played a pivotal role in rebuilding Somalia’s higher education sector, bringing with them international expertise and organizational capacity” (p. 67). Institutions such as Mogadishu University and other regional universities

have benefited significantly from diaspora leadership, both in governance and academic program development.

The diaspora has also contributed to curriculum development and the introduction of international standards in Somali education. Having been exposed to diverse education systems abroad, diaspora educators have worked to align Somali curricula with global best practices. This includes the adoption of modern teaching methodologies, integration of technology, and emphasis on critical thinking skills. According to Lindley (2010), “diaspora engagement has facilitated the transfer of knowledge and educational models, helping to modernize Somalia’s system” (p. 89). These efforts have been particularly evident in private institutions, which often reflect hybrid models combining local relevance with international standards.

Another important area of diaspora involvement is capacity building and human resource development. Many Somali professionals in the diaspora have returned temporarily or permanently to teach in universities, conduct training workshops, and mentor students and faculty. This “brain gain” has partially offset the earlier “brain drain” caused by the civil war. As Ali (2016) argues, “the return of skilled diaspora members has been essential in rebuilding intellectual capital and strengthening institutional capacity in Somalia” (p. 121). Even those who remain abroad continue to contribute through online teaching, research collaboration, and academic partnerships.

In addition, diaspora networks have played a crucial role in facilitating international linkages and partnerships between Somali educational institutions and foreign universities. These connections have enabled student exchanges, joint research projects, and access to scholarships and funding opportunities. For example, many Somali students have benefited from scholarships secured through diaspora advocacy in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Turkey, and Malaysia. As Hammond et al. (2011) note, “diaspora networks act as bridges between Somalia and the global knowledge economy” (p. 60), enhancing the international visibility and integration of Somali education.

The Somali diaspora has also been actively involved in policy advocacy and educational reform efforts. Through conferences, research publications, and engagement with government institutions, diaspora intellectuals have contributed to debates on education policy, governance, and quality assurance. However, their influence has been mixed, as implementation of policy recommendations often faces challenges within Somalia’s institutional framework. As Lindley (2010) points out, “while diaspora actors contribute valuable ideas and expertise, the translation of these into effective policy remains uneven” (p. 95).

At the community level, diaspora members have supported grassroots educational initiatives, particularly in rural and underserved areas. They have funded scholarships for disadvantaged students, supported girls’ education, and invested in community schools. This reflects a broader cultural commitment to education as a tool for social mobility and national development. A Somali diaspora leader quoted in a study remarked, “we may live abroad, but our hearts and responsibilities remain with our people, especially in educating the next generation” (Ali, 2016, p. 128).

Despite these significant contributions, challenges remain in maximizing the impact of diaspora engagement. Issues such as lack of coordination, duplication of efforts, and absence of clear government frameworks for diaspora involvement can limit effectiveness. Moreover, differences in perspectives between local actors and diaspora members sometimes create tensions in institutional management and policy direction (Sheikh & Healy, 2009). Nevertheless, the overall impact of the diaspora has been overwhelmingly positive and indispensable to the survival and growth of the education sector.

To sum up this section, the Somali diaspora has played a transformative role in the reconstruction and development of education since 1991, contributing financially, intellectually, and institutionally to the sector. Their involvement has compensated for the weakness of state structures and has helped bridge the gap between Somalia and the global education system. As one scholar aptly summarized, “without the diaspora, the recovery of Somalia’s education system would have been significantly slower and far more limited” (Hammond et al., 2011, p. 63). Moving forward, strengthening collaboration between the diaspora and domestic institutions, supported by clear policies and governance frameworks, will be essential for sustaining and enhancing these contributions.

4. Conclusion

The course of education in Somalia since the collapse of the military government in 1991 reflects a complex interplay between destruction, resilience, and gradual reconstruction. The civil war not only dismantled the state but also obliterated the institutional foundations upon which the national education system had been built. Schools, universities, and administrative bodies ceased to function, while physical infrastructure was destroyed and human capital dispersed through displacement and migration. This period represents one of the most severe educational disruptions in modern history, where an entire generation experienced limited or no access to formal schooling.

Despite this profound collapse, Somali society demonstrated remarkable resilience by reconstructing education in the absence of a central government. Communities, religious institutions, private actors, and diaspora networks collectively assumed the role traditionally played by the state, establishing schools and later universities across the country. This bottom-up approach to educational development highlights the importance of social capital and local initiative in post-conflict recovery. However, while these efforts successfully restored access to education, they also contributed to the fragmentation and decentralization of the system, creating long-term challenges in coordination and quality assurance.

Over the past three decades, Somalia has experienced significant expansion in educational provision, particularly in the higher education sector. The emergence of numerous private universities and training institutions has increased opportunities for learning and professional development. The reopening of national institutions, such as the Somali National University, and the re-establishment of a federal government have further signaled a gradual return of state involvement in education. Nevertheless, this progress has been uneven and often lacks the structural coherence necessary for sustainable development.

A central challenge that emerges from this study is the persistent weakness of governance and institutional capacity within the education sector. Although policies and regulatory frameworks have been introduced, their implementation remains inconsistent and often ineffective. Many educational institutions continue to operate without adequate oversight, resulting in disparities in curricula, teaching standards, and academic qualifications. Moreover, the lack of alignment with international academic standards—particularly in areas such as accreditation systems and academic staff ranking—limits the global competitiveness and recognition of Somali education.

Another critical issue is the tendency among policymakers and education stakeholders to remain focused on the historical causes of educational collapse, particularly the civil war of 1991, rather than addressing current systemic weaknesses. While acknowledging the past is essential, overreliance on it as an explanatory framework risks obscuring the need for proactive reform in governance, policy implementation, and institutional development. This pattern has contributed to a situation in which structural

deficiencies—such as weak quality assurance mechanisms, insufficient teacher training, and lack of standardized curricula—persist despite decades of reconstruction efforts.

Furthermore, the education system continues to face significant socio-economic and security-related challenges. Limited public funding, heavy reliance on private financing, and ongoing instability in certain regions restrict access to quality education and exacerbate inequalities, particularly for vulnerable populations such as rural communities and girls. These issues underscore the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to educational development that addresses both institutional and societal barriers.

In light of these findings, it is evident that the future of education in Somalia depends not only on continued expansion but also on deep structural reform. Strengthening governance frameworks, enforcing national education policies, and establishing effective accreditation and quality assurance systems are essential steps toward building a coherent and credible education system. Equally important is the alignment of Somali educational institutions with international standards, including the standardization of academic programs and staff titles, to enhance global recognition and collaboration.

In a final word, the development of education in Somalia since 1991 can be understood as a journey from collapse to partial recovery, characterized by resilience but constrained by persistent structural weaknesses. Moving forward, a shift in focus is required, that is, from merely rebuilding what was lost to strategically transforming the education system to meet contemporary and future needs. This will require strong political will, coordinated policy action, and sustained investment in human capital. Only through such comprehensive efforts can Somalia establish an education system that not only reflects its history of resilience but also supports its aspirations for stability, development, and global integration.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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