Somaliland Education Partners Policies and School Leadership Practices Improvements: Case Studies from Hargeisa, Somaliland

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the policy gap in Somaliland Education Partners and Improvement Programs of school leadership practices. Six urban public primary schools in Hargeisa sub-districts were taken as case studies to observe how international education policies and programs improved targeted schools' leadership practices. A purely qualitative research design, with a case study research approach, was employed. Thus, the key policies and programs from various foreign partners and how they promoted those schools' principal leadership practices were emphasized. Through school continuous professional development (CPD), context-fit capacity-building seminars, upgrading courses, and school leadership experience-sharing arrangements were used as the elements of reference. During the primary data collection, 37 sample units were reached as participants. These samples were chosen using a purposive cluster sampling technique. The sample units were 12 members from school principals and deputy principals, 12 from school supervisors and Community Education Committee (CEC), and 6 schools' sub-district education office heads. Additionally, 1 person from Hargeisa district education office and 6 representatives from school foreign partners participated. The primary data were collected using observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion methods. Additionally, dozens of educational policies, strategies, and programs from education partners were scanned and analyzed as secondary data. Primary data were thematically analyzed, while the secondary data were examined using themes, patterns, and content analyses. Finally, the results revealed a significant disparity between the documented policies and programs and the actual school leadership practices. The actual school leadership practices were more authoritarian, autonomous, and dictatorial in style. Finally, lack of decentralization, weak accountability, and uncoordinated and inconsistent continuous professional development remain the studied schools' leadership challenges. As a recommendation, Somaliland education partners should coordinate, decentralize, and contextualize their school improvement programs.

1   Introduction

Global education leadership policies are increasingly focused on fostering quality in education systems worldwide. In reference to the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM 2024/5), strong leadership is crucial for ensuring that educational goals are met, with a particular focus on empowering school and system leaders. The report calls for investment in and empowerment of school and system leaders. Yet, all research points toward

the critical need for strong leaders to continuously improve education quality. According to Tan, C.Y. (2024), school leaders are second only to teachers in transforming student outcomes. Meanwhile, politicians wield huge influence in making equitable and inclusive education a national priority. Thus, this study explored the Somaliland education policies, procedures, and practices employed by international school partners to support public primary schools in the country, as the government has consistently relied on external partners to complement its efforts to provide quality schooling to its next generations.

By gathering data from various sources, including educational policies, education sector strategic plans, analytical education reports, and curriculum frameworks, the study offers a comprehensive outlook on the roadmap for the education sector over the next five years to identify the gaps and shortcomings of these documents. The education policy gap refers to the difference between what is intended by education policy and what is implemented, and this gap can hinder educational progress and contribute to illiteracy (Angrist, N. & Dercon, S., 2024). This gap can pertain to areas such as quality, quantity, compliance, and utility (Mrema, T.V., 2024). Therefore, school leadership practices are activities that involve intentionally influencing activities and relationships based on a clear sense of direction taken by school principals (Schlicht-Schmälzle, R., 2024). Unfortunately, the 2021 Education Sector Analysis report highlighted significant setbacks in primary education delivery and in achieving the learning outcomes set out in Vision 2030. However, the Ministry of Education and Science developed its own vision in 2015 (Vision 2015–2030). In this vision, it recognized education as a critical pillar that facilitates achieving its national developmental goals.

Nevertheless, Somaliland, officially the Republic of Somaliland, is a de facto state in the Horn of Africa, recognized internationally as a de jure part of Somalia. It is located on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden and bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the south and west, and Somalia to the east. Based on Somaliland's National Development Vision (2030), it envisions its citizens enjoying inclusive and quality education. Supporting this vision, the Somaliland Education Act (2018), Somaliland National Education Policy (2021), Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan (SESSP), and Somaliland Education Partnership Compact (2023) were produced and showed how the government is committed to its educational policies.

On top of that, the government considers its educational partners crucial players in realizing its educational policies, programs, and interventions (Somaliland Education Act, 2018; Somaliland National Education Policy, 2021; Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2024; Somaliland Education Partnership Compact, 2023). For instance, SEPC (2024) articulates a shared commitment between the government of Somaliland and its partners. During the fiscal year of 2024, the government allocated around 14% of its national budget to public education (Somaliland National Budget, 2024). This budget was in addition to the support provided by educational partners to its education system. In the preceding year, 2023, the Minister of Education and Science (MoES) mobilized educational stakeholders, both local and international, such as the Educational Sector Committees, Educational Task Teams, Civil Society Organizations, and International Partners like UN Organizations (MoES, 2021; UN Somalia, 2024).

Currently, more than 20 UN and other international agencies, funds, and programs operate throughout Somaliland. For example, according to James, S. (2021), between 2019 and 2020, WFP alone injected more than $50 million into Somaliland, with education taking a lion's share. Similarly, from 2017 to 2021, the UN Joint Program on Local Governance (JPLG) was a five-year project combining five UN agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN-HABITAT, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). These projects worked to strengthen the role and capacity of local governments to deliver services to citizens in Somaliland, such as primary education (UNDP, 2013).

Correspondingly, according to the Girls' Education

Challenge Report (GEC, 2022), the annual Joint Review of the Education Sector (JRES, 2024), the Education Sector Analysis (ESA, 2021), and the Education Master Action Planning (EMAP, 2020), all have not produced proportionate results at the primary education level as required. These various documents failed to promote school leadership practices and, consequently, school academic performance. Similarly, the Education Management Information System, National Learning Assessments, Joint Reviews of the Education Sector, and the Education Sector Strategic Plan proved the country's education services rely heavily on donations from international partners.

Nevertheless, a major gap in Somaliland's education policies, plans, and frameworks is the failure to adequately address the improvement of school leadership practices. In primary education, girls constitute only 30.5%. The quality of education is primarily affected by factors such as a shortage of qualified teachers and the absence of a standardized curriculum. Therefore, this study addresses the critical challenges in providing quality public education, with a particular focus on the role of international education partners in enhancing public schools' leadership practices.

All these strategies and national policies were intended to transform the education sector to higher standards. According to F. Obsiye and H. Tadesse (2023), despite the involvement of Western partners, significant shortcomings remain in Somaliland's education system, particularly in terms of quality. This gap is one of the factors that forces Somaliland families to enroll in private schools or become less favorable to public schools. The lack of coordinated policies aimed at enhancing school leadership styles, practices, and routines contributes to low student enrollment and high dropout rates, particularly among girls and marginalized communities. Since education partners are networks of national, regional, and provincial associations that facilitate and create opportunities for better-quality education (IEL, 2024).

The study aimed to address the following research question: What are the policy gaps in Somaliland's education partners and school leadership practice improvement policies? The primary objective of this study is to examine the policy gap in Somaliland's education partners and school leadership practice improvement policies. According to Somaliland Standard (2022), Hargeisa local government, through the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), plays an active role in supporting public primary schools.

2 Review of Related Literatures

2.1 Conceptualizing School Leadership

Conceptualizing school leadership involves understanding the multifaceted nature of a school leader's role. It encompasses creating a vision, fostering collaboration, driving positive change within the school community, and ensuring optimal learning environments. It is about navigating the complexities of the school's context and addressing the needs of the wider community. The Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2022-2026 outlines the priorities for the education sector. It builds on previous plans and improves those previous policies with new thinking. Key policies include expanding access to quality education for all children, enhancing the relevance of education, and ensuring an efficient and effective education system. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for implementing these policies and is working to improve teacher training, curriculum development, and the overall quality of learning.

2.2 School Leadership across the World

School leader tasks have become increasingly complex due to globalization, knowledge-based economies, and greater student diversity. As Pont, B. (2014) stated, increased governmental focus on educational policy reforms has shifted the role of school principals and administrative leadership, with more autonomy and accountability. This article focuses on how partners' policies can ensure that school leaders contribute to school improvement. It builds on an international study that analyzed practices across 22 education systems and supports the professionalization of school leadership (OECD, 2008). Key strategies that many countries have adopted include: clarifying the role of school leaders based on the tasks that have the most significant

impact on school outcomes, ensuring specialized training and development programs that work with the conditions, and attracting qualified professionals to public primary schools is crucial (OECD, 2024b).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring Report in 2024–2025 examines the requirements of good leadership in education and how they vary between countries and over time (GEM, 2025). There is a growing belief that educational leadership is the second most important factor, after teachers, in explaining learning outcomes. This will make teaching and school leadership a sustainable profession that is well-supported by governments, partners, and stakeholders. These stories highlight how, in the hands of committed and creative leaders, schools can overcome cultural barriers and improve educational quality. Beyond the statistics, this demonstrates that educational leadership has the power to transform not just schools but also the communities around them.

2.3 Somaliland School Leadership Styles and Practices

The realities of school leadership in Somalia-Somaliland are complex. There are neither post-secondary educational headship programs nor school-based apprenticeship programs. Due to the absence of clear governmental and partner policies and programs, there are no institutions that prepare and develop principals or school leadership in general. There is no formal training and leadership development for public and private primary head teachers in Somaliland (Sood, K. & Tarah, A., 2024). In contrast, there is a growing global recognition of the importance of school headship preparation through professional development and training. Comparatively, the procedures used in Africa are inadequate, and their inductions and in-service trainings are inappropriate in developing countries (UNICEF, 2025). 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 head teachers to improve school performance (ESSP, 2017). To achieve this, comprehensive and consolidated train-

ing programs will be developed. Somaliland has its own ESSP, which includes extensive references to increasing the number of female head teachers. However, there is no mention of any direct government policy for preparing, developing, and training head teachers.

This makes it more difficult for school leaders to learn how to enact any type of leadership other than daily unavoidable managerial tasks (Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E., 2014, p. 236). Furthermore, it leaves head teachers untrained, with no professional development programs available to them, and the leadership that is tyrannical and abusive is on the rise in many schools. Abusive leadership is a destructive form of leadership that has a lasting negative influence on subordinates. Mullen, Fiset, and Rhéaume (2018) argue that empirical evidence suggests that scholars on this topic are concerned about the damaging effect of destructive forms of leadership. Teachers become demotivated when they are abused rather than appreciated. It is very difficult to operate in an environment that is abusive. Different forms of abuse from school principals include hurling insults, talking down to someone in the presence of others, and ridicule. From professional development to meeting the equity needs of children, shifting their pedagogical practice, and much more, educators felt empowered to solve the issues that students were facing in their schools.

2.4 Somaliland Education Partners

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set benchmarks for inclusive and equitable education as an international agenda, of which Somaliland is a part (Vargas-Baron, E., Diehl, K., & Small, J., 2022). However, implementing these ideals remains challenging due to the lack of standardized frameworks and policies. Additionally, lack of funding and effectiveness has sabotaged educational policies and affected Early Childhood Education (ECE) expansions (Bwalya, T., 2023). In Somaliland, ECE policy development is influenced by international standards and local socio-political realities. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) outlined a strategic plan in 2017, emphasizing child rights, inclusiveness, accountability, and relevance. However, the 2021 MoES Education

Sector Analysis (ESA) report highlights issues such as inadequate resources, limited trained personnel, and inconsistent program implementation, which hinder children's learning readiness (Melesse & Obsiye, 2022).

2.5 United Nation Organizations & Somaliland education projects

An extensive relationship exists between the United Nations and Somaliland. This bond was highlighted during a recent visit of senior UN officials to the capital of Somaliland, Hargeisa. The UN headquarters envoys visited Hargeisa with other officials from other UN agencies operating in Somaliland, including the Country Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Cesar Arroyo; the Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Johann Soffione; and the Country Program Manager for UN Women, Sadiq Syed (UN Somalia, 2021). For example, in collaboration with the Somaliland Government, UNICEF introduced the project "Education Cannot Wait," a $6.7 million project.

However, the prominent UN units involved in Somaliland education initiatives are, among many others, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and UN Women. Somaliland and UN organizations launched multimillion-dollar programs, designed to take several years, to increase the access, quality, and inclusiveness of education. Addressing the education needs of children affected by emergencies is one of UNICEF's priorities (UNICEF, 2024). Working with partners, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the United States Agency for International Development provided clean, safe drinking water, learning materials, and teachers' monthly incentives in Somaliland.

2.6 International Organizations involved in Somaliland education

Many international organizations have been involved in education in Somaliland. In addition to fighting against poverty, some international organizations and communities help Somaliland manage the long distances to school, safety concerns, and social norms favoring boys to maintain schooling. They also support Somaliland education in

terms of solving the lack of teachers, particularly female teachers, and the low availability of sanitation facilities. These are some factors that some organizations and researchers acknowledged as preventing parents from enrolling children in public schools, particularly girls (UN in Somalia, 2024). As part of Somaliland's development, the European Union is working with educational authorities to support and positively change Somaliland's efforts in education. For instance, the European Union and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have provided funds for educational projects in Somaliland, including the "Horumarinta Cilmiga" (Somaliland Standard, 2019).

Several NGOs, such as Save the Children International, Care International, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), work with the Somaliland government. Windle Trust International has also supported Somaliland to improve English language instruction for teachers. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Finland, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of the Netherlands, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Islamic Relief, Mercy Corps, CARITAS, Africa Education Trust (AET), and Education Development Trust (EDT).

These international organizations are involved in Somaliland's education infrastructure. They also support the capacity development of education authorities at all levels, as well as school communities and children, to support crisis-affected children. In a nutshell, the international community plays a crucial role in supporting Somaliland's education system. This support focuses on improving access, retention, and the quality of education, especially for vulnerable groups like girls and those in rural areas. However, the gap in improving school leadership practices, which is the backbone of schools' and education quality improvements, remains.

2.7 International Education Partners' Policy Gap

Somaliland's primary education is facing significant challenges, yet the government and its partners show an unwavering determination to improve it.

As foreign partners continue to collaborate with local partners, communities, and the government in shaping the future of education in Somaliland (n.a., 2024). The potential elements for better outcomes are developing transformative policies and programs, which immensely focus on schools' leadership practices with continued efforts and strategic interventions, and it becomes increasingly integral. According to the journey of improving education in Somaliland, the ESS Plan (2022-2026) is ongoing and filled with promises and opportunities. It is a journey that international partners are proud to be a part of, working alongside the people and the government of Somaliland to turn Vision 2030 into a tangible reality.

However, according to Atasoy, R. (2020), the much-documented policies and manuals are not effectively implemented, particularly in school leadership elements. The challenges are impactful when they arise from primary school leadership practices. The government, UN, and international education partners need to seriously consider school leadership-related items in their policies and program development. The first part of this challenge lies in the disconnection between policy formulation and practical execution, particularly in the components of school leadership. Foreign partners have the potential to transform principals' daily practices, taking a new course towards a future where every child in Somaliland has access to the quality education they deserve, enabling them to thrive in a global community.

Based on Brooks, J. S., & Brooks, M. C. (2024), policies are crafted with the intention of guiding actions and fostering a specific environment. Yet, when these ideals remain confined to paper, the intended impact on the ground is compromised. One significant consequence of policies merely existing on paper is the lack of tangible outcomes. This gap can leave children vulnerable to inadequate schools, as the policy aims are not translated into actionable practices (Save the Children, 2021). Addressing the gap between policy documentation and implementation requires a multifaceted approach. This involves not only revisiting and strengthening policy frameworks but also fostering a culture of accountability.

Stakeholder involvement in policy implementation, along with regular monitoring and evaluation of the practical application of these policies, will be highly significant. For instance, Troy, V., Mumford, M. A., Campion, M. A., & Morgeson, F. P. (2007) Skills Model, or "skills-based leadership model," can be applied to evaluate public schools' leadership attributes. According to Mumford *et al.* (2000), the Skills Model identifies the key skills for effective leadership. These attributes involve engaging stakeholders to address the gaps to promote school leadership practices, providing a series of instructional leadership topics, ongoing coaching programs, and, finally, following an overall program evaluation. Additionally, supporting effective school leader cohorts and experience-sharing activities to build principal skills and design their leadership capacities.

To bridge this gap, implementing school-level leadership support programs, policies, and frameworks would be extremely beneficial in easing the burden of delivering quality education as a public service. In support of this argument, during the National Education Conference (2023), different teams conducted national education policy reviews and public discussions. The concept of policy work refers to the processes of interpreting and translating policies into practice. The goals for school principals included gaining a deeper understanding of educational policy, school leadership, legal issues, and organizational structures, as well as being able to read and interpret documents and comprehend the structures and cultures of organizations.

2.8 Theoretical Framework of School Leadership Practice

A theoretical framework for school leadership practice provides a structure for understanding how leaders influence and guide schools. It encompasses various leadership styles, theories, and models that inform how leaders operate and interact with their school communities. These frameworks help analyze leadership effectiveness, guide decision-making, and ultimately improve educational outcomes. The analytical framework used in this study is grounded in the theory of policy work. From the perspectives of Scanlon, D., MacPhail, A., & Calderón, A. (2023), the challenge of practices is

that they are not stable; rather, they are sophisticated, contingent, complex, and unstable. Thus, evaluating principals' leadership practices requires a complicated process of interpretation and translation. Therefore, in this study, governmental and partners' policies, programs, and frameworks are converted into practicums and program intentions. The concept of policy decoding is both retrospective and prospective (Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012, p. 43). It is a process of meaning-making from smaller to larger scales through recoding, considering the culture and history of the institution and the policy biographies.

The importance of a theoretical framework provides a lens for understanding leadership practices. By understanding and applying relevant theories, leaders can improve their ability to influence and guide their schools. It promotes continuous improvement, providing a framework for evaluating leadership practices and making adjustments for better outcomes. In essence, a theoretical framework for school leadership provides a foundation for understanding, practicing, and improving leadership in educational settings. It helps leaders navigate the complexities of their roles and work towards creating positive and successful learning environments for all. Here's a breakdown of key aspects of a theoretical framework for school leadership:

2.8.1 Transformational and instructional Leadership:

Focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision, often involving change and innovation. Emphasizes the leader's role in shaping teaching and learning, focusing on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.

2.8.2 Distributed and transactional Leadership:

Shares leadership responsibilities among various stakeholders, promoting collaboration and collec-

tive responsibility. Relies on a system of rewards and punishments to motivate performance.

2.8.3 Situational Leadership:

Situational school leadership is an approach where school leaders adapt their leadership style based on the specific needs of their followers and the context of the situation. This means that instead of relying on a single leadership style, leaders adjust their approach to best support and guide teachers, staff, and students. Leaders assess the situation and the readiness of their followers (teachers, staff, or students) to determine the most effective leadership style.

2.9   Conceptual Framework of School Leadership Practice

A conceptual framework for school leadership practice provides a structured approach to understanding and guiding leadership behaviors within an educational setting. It outlines key dimensions, principles, and skills that effective school leaders should possess and utilize to foster a positive and productive learning environment. Somaliland is fully committed to realizing the international policy of equal access to quality education. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) provides the resources it requires with the help of various international partners. Thus, this study observed the gaps and limitations of these policies and frameworks, how these policies increase school leadership and practices, and it examined how these programs would enhance principals' leadership practices and daily activities. This would provide insights for policymakers and international partnerships to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of school leadership activities. Therefore, the following conceptual frameworks would help provide equitable educational opportunities and prepare children for primary education (Figure 1).
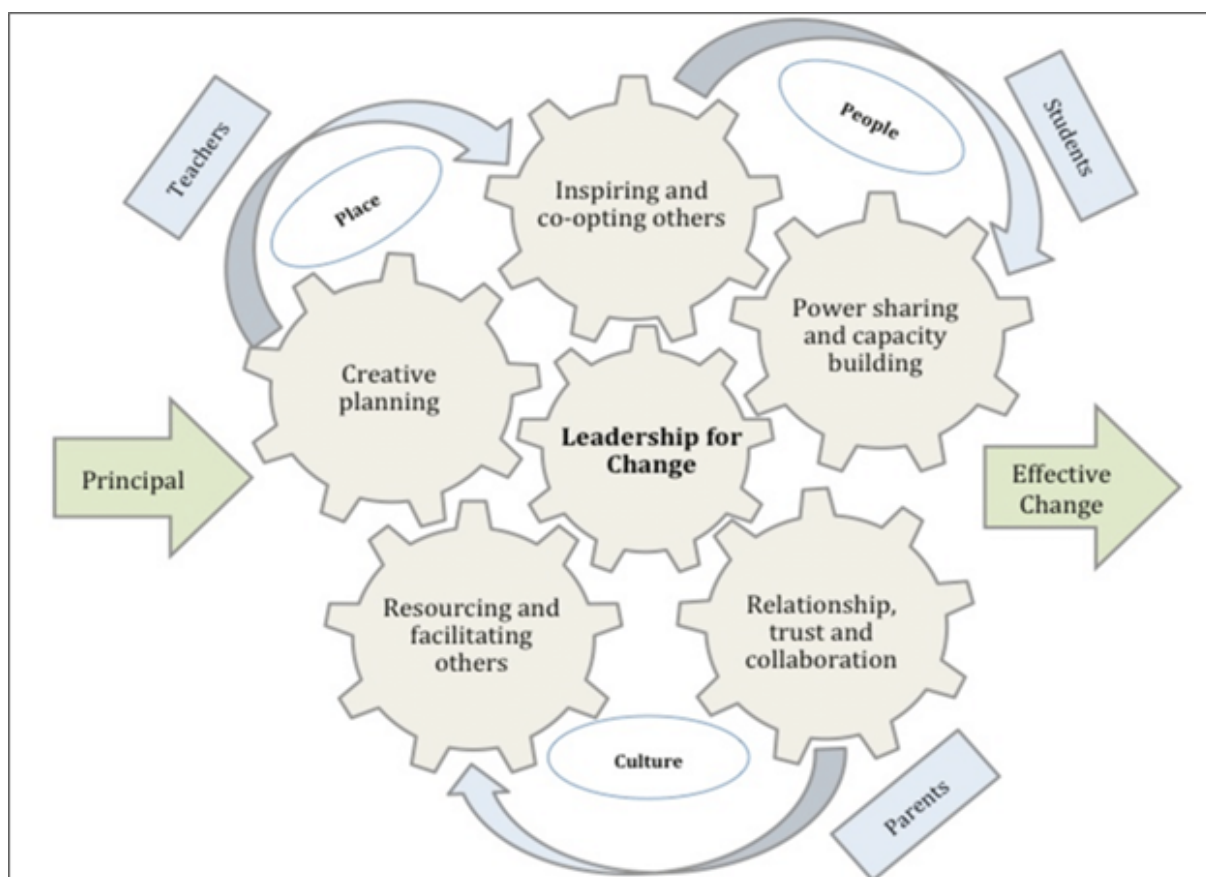
Figure 1: Conceptualization of education leadership & school principal leadership practice; (Source: Abu Salahudin, 2016)

3 Research Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research Methodology

This study presented policy work as a phenomenon. It draws on the theory of policy work and its actual implications. It examined various cases from different perspectives and objectives, especially in education spheres. It builds on previous research by Jensen (2019) and Jensen and Ottesen (2022), which explored how the education of school leaders is situated, experienced, and legitimized. Therefore, this study consists of six cases based on principals' observations of daily practices, as well as policy texts and tools provided by international partners relevant to school leadership improvement programs. This diffuse phenomenon makes case study research a necessary tool. When research seeks to explore a complex issue, understand unique situations, or gather rich qualitative data through detailed analysis, the case study approach is highly effective.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research is a methodology used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that possibly govern such behaviors. It focuses on exploring and interpreting phenomena in their natural settings. It aims to uncover the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. According to Tanis, E. (2024), this research method explores an in-depth understanding of perspectives and behaviors through non-numerical data. Common examples of this research method include case studies, ethnographies, content analysis, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology. These approaches are used to collect primary data through interviews, focus groups, observations, and record management. This research design is often used to investigate complex social issues or develop new theories. However, a case study is an in-depth examination of a specific individual, group, organization, event, or phenomenon (Priya, A., 2021). The aim is to understand the complexities within

a particular context. The strengths of case studies lie in their ability to provide rich, detailed, and contextualized understanding, allowing researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth. However, the limitations include the difficulty of generalizing findings to broader populations and the potential for researcher bias.

3.3   Research Populations

Somaliland has 989 public primary schools. According to the Somaliland Central Statistics Department (2024), this number is part of a total of 1,145 primary schools. The remaining 156 are privately owned schools. Both parts produce a broader education system as public and private schools at primary and intermediate levels. These primary schools are spread across 23 districts in Somaliland territory. However, this case study focuses on public and urban primary schools located in nine different sub-districts within the Hargeisa District. The study explored the similarities and differences among public school principals, as well as the scope and origins of their leadership improve-

ment programs supported by international partners.

3.4   Research Samples and Sample Size

In qualitative research, sample size is not predetermined. Instead, it is determined by the principle of data saturation. This principle means continuing data collection until no new information or insights emerge on that particular issue. However, typical sample sizes range from a few participants, e.g., 5–30 for in-depth interviews, or 6–10 for focus groups (Table 1). These figures are estimated and depend on the research question and methodology. According to Ahmed, M. (2024), this method helps to identify the most informative cases, guaranteeing information-rich responses from a knowledgeable audience. Thus, the researchers use their judgment, such as knowledge, experience, availability, and willingness, to select the participants who are most likely to provide relevant information.

However, in this research, the researchers decided to reach 6 different schools (Table 2).

Table 1: Sampling & Samples Size

S.No.	Categories	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Rationale
1	School Principals & Deputies	12	Purposive	
2	CECs' Chairpersons	6	Purposive	
3	School Supervisors	6	Purposive	
4	DEOs' Officers	1	Purposive	
5	Parent-teacher Ass	6	Purposive	
6	Sub-district Ed. Heads	6	Purposive	
		37		

Table 2: Case-studied school profile

S.No.	School Name	Sub-District	Number of Students	Remarks
1	Janan Da'ud	Ahmed Dhagah	1200	Army Bracks
2	Riis	Ga'an Libah	1800	Pure Urban
3	Qu'dhaDheer	Mohamed Moge	2500	Pure Urban
4	Digaale	Mohomoud Haybe	1100	IDP
5	Biyo-dhacay	26 June	2000	Pure Urban
6	FadimoBihi	31 May	1600	New Locality

These schools are primary, public, and urban schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the policy gap in Somaliland Education Partners and School Leadership Practice Improvement Programs as Case Studies in Hargeisa District urban public primary schools to observe how international education policies, programs, and interventions improve schools' leadership practices. Six public primary schools were taken as case studies to find out the key policies and programs from their respective foreign partners to promote those schools' principal leadership practices through continuous professional development (CPD), context-fit capacity-building seminars, upgrading courses, different schools' leadership experience-sharing arrangements, and school autonomy and decentralization policies.

3.5 Research Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was applied in this case study research. According to Priya, A. (2021), case study research is a qualitative research approach. It focuses on an in-depth analysis of a specific subject within normal situations. Thus, this method is used to understand complex issues by exploring a single unit of the population to know it in more detail. Specifically, case studies are particularly useful when a researcher wants to understand the "how" and "why" of a phenomenon (Glette, M. K., 2022). As a sampling method, purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique, was the appropriate technique because it is

the method by which the researcher deliberately selects the participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research question (Stratton, S. J., 2024). With this technique, the goal is not to generalize findings to a larger population but to gain in-depth insights into a particular phenomenon. This approach allows for a targeted exploration of specific themes and the acquisition of in-depth insights. However, as a limitation, purposive sampling can be prone to bias, and the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population. To gain insight into principals' activities, extended observations were used as a convenient method for primary data collection.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The study used selected public primary schools as case studies to illustrate its findings. Observation notes, one-to-one interviews, and five-to-seven-person focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were conducted to collect the primary data. The primary data of the study were collected between June 17, 2023, and July 31, 2024. Field observation notes, recorded focus group discussion sessions, and documented semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used as data collection instruments. From 45 to 60 minutes was the time allotted for each session of these interviews and focus group discussions. Transcripts were recorded using an iPhone mobile device. Interviews were conducted in Somali, recorded recorded with participants' consent, and

Table 3: Some Somaliland Policies

S.No.	Policy	Time-Frame	Status
1	Somaliland Education Act	2018-	Active
2	National Education Policy	2015 – 2030	Active
3	Somaliland Multiyear Resilience Program	2019 – 2021	Passive
4	National Education Drought Response Plan	2021 – 2022	Passive
5	ESA	2021	Passive
6	GPE Guidelines	2023	Passive
7	Guidelines for Enabling Factor Analysis	2024	Passive
8	Independent Technical Advisory Panel	2023	Passive
9	Education Sector Strategic Policy	2022 – 2026	Active

transcribed verbatim before being translated into English. Written and formal consent letters were pre-arranged and shared with the respective targeted members of the research samples. After their approval, meetings were planned at a mutually convenient time, location, and manner.

During the field notes, non-verbal cues and contextual cases were considered and noted. The secondary data were scanned and studied from their sources, such as online platforms, institutional archives, school records, and government-released policies. Document analysis offered a comparative basis for assessing how observed practices aligned with policy frameworks and standards outlined in official documents, such as the ESS Plan 2022–2024 (Table 3).

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

3.7.1 Primary data analysis

The first step in the interview analysis involved a holistic and selective reading of the transcripts several times, while the second step focused on identifying how interpreted and translated policy texts were reflected in designs and practices. Secondly, focus group transcripts were analyzed alongside the documents and textual materials, which had previously been investigated through content analysis. The third step involved analyzing the engagements of policy actors, declarations, and implementations on one hand and principal leadership practices on the other hand, using a discourse analytical perspective. According to Fairclough (2013), the analysis was guided by the typology of policy work and policy actors developed by Paulsson, & Macheridis (2022), which was used to illustrate the various types of policy actor engagement in the leadership practices of the programs.

3.7.2 Secondary data analysis

Qualitative secondary data analysis involves using existing qualitative data, collected for a different purpose, to answer researchers' specific objectives. This approach allows researchers to explore topics from new perspectives. Using different theoretical lenses, researchers need to carefully consider issues like data adequacy, contextual knowledge, and researcher positionality. It is a cost-effective and efficient way to leverage existing data, involving the analysis of various techniques like thematic, iterative, coding, and categorization of interview transcripts, field notes, and policy documents. Initial open coding was used to identify key concepts and recurring themes, which were then refined into categories through axial coding. The codes were subsequently organized into broader themes, including the learning environment, instructional delivery, management, supervision, and challenges in policy implementation.

3.7.3 Research Trustworthiness

In policy gap research, trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence stakeholders, particularly policymakers, can have in the research findings. According to Johnson, J. L. (2020), ensuring that the evidence presented in the research is accurate, reliable, unbiased, and relevant increases the likelihood that the research will be used to inform policy decisions. Key aspects of trustworthiness in policy gap research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.7.4 Research credibility and transferability

In qualitative research, credibility is analogous to internal validity in quantitative research, focusing on the truth value of the findings. It determines whether the data collected and the subsequent interpretations are accurate and representative of the participants' reality. A credible study provides confidence that the findings are not simply the researcher's interpretations but are grounded in the participants' experiences. Researchers employ various methods to enhance credibility, including:

- Prolonged engagement and persistent observation: Spending sufficient time with participants and observing the phenomenon in depth.
- Triangulation: Using multiple data sources, methods, or perspectives to confirm findings.
- Member checking: Seeking feedback from participants on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and summaries.
- Peer debriefing: Discussing the research process and findings with colleagues to identify potential biases or areas for improvement.

- Negative case analysis: Exploring and analyzing instances that contradict initial findings to refine the understanding of the phenomenon.
- Detailed description: Providing thorough accounts of the research context, methods, and findings to allow readers to assess the credibility of the study.

In research, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts, situations, or populations. It is a crucial aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, similar to generalizability in quantitative studies, but with a focus on applicability to similar, rather than broad, contexts. Essentially, it asks: "To what extent can these findings be useful or relevant in other situations?" Key aspects of transferability include:

- Providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and specific circumstances allows others to assess the relevance of the findings to their own situations.

- Clear explanations of how participants were selected and the characteristics of the sample are important for understanding the potential applicability of the results.

- Describing the research methods used, including data collection and analysis techniques, helps readers evaluate the rigor and potential transferability of the study.

3.7.5 Research dependability and conformability

Dependability assesses the consistency and stability of the research process, and confirmability examines the objectivity of the findings, ensuring they are grounded in the data rather than researcher bias. Dependability focuses on the stability and replicability of the research process. It ensures that if the study were repeated with similar participants and in similar contexts, the findings would be consistent. To establish dependability, researchers should provide a detailed description of the research methods, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. An audit trail, documenting all decisions and changes made during the research process, can also enhance dependability. This allows other

researchers to assess the rigor and consistency of the study and potentially replicate it.

However, confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research findings, ensuring they are based on the data collected rather than researcher bias or preconceptions. Researchers should strive to minimize their influence on the data and findings. Strategies to enhance confirmability include peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Peer debriefing involves discussing the research findings with colleagues or experts to identify potential biases or alternative interpretations. Member checking allows participants to review and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations. Reflexive journaling involves reflecting on the researcher's own biases and perspectives throughout the research process. By implementing these strategies, researchers can demonstrate that their findings are grounded in the data and not simply a reflection of their own biases.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

According to Kadam, A. R. (2017), ethical considerations are essential to ensure informed consent, protect participants' privacy, and maintain sensitivity toward those involved in the case studies. Before the data were collected, the participants were informed and agreed to participate in the study. It was also confirmed that no information would be disclosed without the consent of the study participants and would be kept confidential.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

According to the Education Act (XEER LR.77/2018), the National Education Policy (NEP, 2015–2030), and different sets of education subsector policies, plans, and guidelines, such as the Somaliland Multi-Year Resilience Program (MYRP, 2019/21) and the Somaliland National Education Drought Response Plan (NEDRP, 2021/22), all of which inform planning processes and provide a broad framework for the nation's promotion of education, Somaliland and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) hold overall responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and

overseeing education sector policies and programs, including those outlined in this research.

To enhance the quality of education, the Ministry of Education and Science collaborated with state and non-state educational partners. For this reason, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partner, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), along with several international organizations, contributed to Somaliland's education infrastructure. They are crucial for ensuring education for refugees and displaced individuals during emergencies and protracted crises, donating $2.6 million. For instance, the Education Sector Analysis report (ESA, 2021) highlights both the financial and technical capacity challenges that become barriers to the government's effective implementation of its national educational policies.

Still, education sector stakeholders have a substantial number of requirements to implement the priority reforms to achieve the intended policy outcomes. Therefore, the study focuses on the policy gaps in school leadership practices and Somaliland Education Partners, particularly promoting and implementing programs to enhance school leadership practices. Thus, the initiative addressed the barriers that hinder effective school leadership practices. Many partners have hugely contributed to Somaliland's public primary education; however, their policies are not sufficiently focused on promoting schools' leadership practices.

The Global Partnership for Education ITAP report (GPE ITAP, 2024) identifies key challenges, such as limited human capacity and equipment, poor data quality, reliability, and timeliness, inconsistencies across data sources, and gaps in the use of data for planning and decision-making.

The Education Sector Coordination Committees (ESCC, 2024) agreed with these findings and have prioritized strengthening the Education Management Information Systems policy framework, expanding national research and knowledge management capacity with a particular focus on Most Vulnerable Children (MVCs).

4.2 Discussions

Due to the numerous competing national developmental priorities, it will not be optimal to rely on external resources to mobilize the government's budget and allocate additional resources to key reforms in public education priorities, especially school leadership promotions. The Government of Somaliland (GoSL) needs to establish a forum that aligns donor financing with the ongoing coordination between donor resources and strategies to set priorities and fosters mutual accountability among key stakeholders in education.

The Government of Somaliland and its partners have assessed the country's progress in addressing the four enabling factors for education system transformation. For example, Somaliland has developed preparedness plans to ensure the continued provision of core educational services during droughts and natural disasters. The Somaliland Multi-Year Resilience Program and the Somaliland National Education Drought Response Plan significantly challenge the mainstreaming considerations within program planning and monitoring.

Consequently, the country analysis and supporting documentation were submitted to the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP, 2023). There is a pressing need to improve data security and completeness beyond access indicators and to increase the utilization of complementary data sources. Because the Education Management Information System (EMIS, 2023) does not incorporate knowledge generated from surveys and studies conducted by partners and institutions of higher learning, promoting the widespread use of data is essential to fostering evidence-informed decision-making, planning, and policymaking. Additionally, according to the Guidelines for Enabling Factor Analysis (GEFA, 2024), the final findings and recommendations account for designing interventions to address bottlenecks.

Somaliland education faces issues like policy gaps, inadequate funding, and a shortage of qualified teachers. On top of that, the lack of standardized curricula, poor policy implementation from foreign partners, and donor dependency are part of the challenge.

Prioritizing education funding to improve infrastructure, teacher salaries, and learning materials is crucial. Consequently, student learning outcomes, particularly in public primary schools, are affected.

Finally, the national education policy gap in Somaliland is the lack of a comprehensive framework to address school leadership practices and how they could be improved. This hinders the ability to effectively improve principal leadership skills, attitudes, and styles.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study suggests practical implications for improving public primary school leadership routines, such as establishing a well-designed education policy framework. Most policies, strategies, guidelines, or manuals on educational improvements and school leadership place less emphasis on promoting principals' daily activities. Education policy priorities are not clearly linked to promoting school leadership practices, which contributes to expanding quality learning in public primary schools. In Somaliland, where over 50 percent of school-age children are out of school, unequal access to education remains a major issue in vulnerable communities. Children from rural, nomadic, and pastoralist communities face severe barriers in accessing basic education, with only 12 percent enrolled in primary schools.

5.2 Recommendations

Somaliland educational partners, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), should design and implement tailored and specialized programs targeting public primary school leadership teams. By focusing on critical school leadership components, these initiatives will substantially improve education performance. These strategies, which are currently missing from Somaliland's national primary education policies, should be standardized and support the national primary education system by improving both the quantity and quality of educational leaders, which is crucial for enhancing the overall education sector in Somaliland.

Limitations and Implications for Further Studies

The main purpose of this study was to assess the current policies and programs concerning the challenges of public primary principal practices in government public primary schools as case studies in Hargeisa City administration. The research utilized a qualitative method design approach to deeply understand the existing policy gaps. However, the biggest implication that the researchers encountered was the lack of credible literature reviews fairly assessing Somaliland education development policies or programs, particularly in leadership domains. On the other hand, the research was limited to six public primary schools in Hargeisa, which makes it difficult to generalize its outcomes. However, this research was delimited to school leadership practices in public primary schools and the gap that exists in educational partners' policies, programs, and protocols.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The corresponding authors declare that there is no potential competing interest in relation to this study.

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