



## SOMALIA'S CURRENT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM, CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD: A SCOPING REVIEW

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Received: 27.04.2023

Revised version received: 08.07.2023

Accepted: 11.07.2023

### Abstract

The education sector of Somalia faces many challenges to increasing the quality of higher education and this negatively impacts the development of skilled human resources and the internationalization of higher education. The scoping review's aim is to analyze the current gap in standard education policy and strategy framework and suggest the way forward to overcome the current challenges. In the study, publications related to the current higher education system, challenges, and the way forward were searched from eight resourceful databases. The search involved articles published between January 2013 to February 2023 published in the English language. Heterogeneity among the studies were checked via Cochran's Q  $\chi^2$  and the I2 test statistics. Data were collected using an Excel data collection sheet and summarized data in the sheet following the study protocol. The data were obtained only from reliable online sources following the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Published peer-reviewed articles and grew literature were included in the study. The Excel data sheet was the primary tool for synthesis and enhancing the understanding of analyzing the data via thematic analysis. The RevMan V.5.4 was utilized in order to synthesize the data and search for the outcomes that are relevant to our study goals. The results revealed that majority of the articles describe the higher education challenges and mentioned the gap in higher education policies and regulations. Synthesis original articles focused on the lack of uniform policy, research facilities, lack of effective curricula guidelines, and lack of effort of internationalization of higher education while narrative documents reviews paper lack of qualified staff and quality of education, Poor infrastructure, standard education policy, universal education curriculum, and lack of accountability of education sector

**Keywords:** Curriculum, Somalia, education system, policy framework, higher education

## **1. Introduction**

Higher education creates access to innovative knowledge and develops human resources and evidence reveals that the gap between the curriculum of higher studies and the skills of students has a negative impact on the job market [1]. The gap between academia and industry can be minimized by addressing the pedagogical methods used for teaching, learning, and assessment in higher education institutions [2]. Education Ministry and higher education management authority is playing the enabling role to improve the quality of education and effective delivery of education to students [3]. In African countries like Somalia, the education sector has failed to promote reforms in higher education, and it's creating a weak education system and less qualified graduates in Somalia [4]. Many African and Asian countries face challenges including limited access to higher education, weak mechanisms to enhance higher education quality, problems with the commercialization of higher education, limited professional development in HEIs, promote reform of higher education, and lack of a standard curriculum [5]. The federal government of Somalia, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education has adopted the first-ever education sector strategy (2018-2020) and five-year agenda (2018-2022 aiming at increasing access to quality education [6]. The above strategy and plan have improved the learning outcomes based on a unified curriculum and implementation of a standard exam system. The education sector of Somalia still, faces challenges of qualified faculty in higher education, poor management at the university administration, inadequate research facilities, and internationalization of higher education [7]. The federal government needs urgent steps to reform the education sector and address the shortage of state government like universal curriculum, faculty quality improvement programs, infrastructure development, and control of unregulated private education [8]. The federal government should take responsibility to meet the current challenges about specific education policies and practices and coordination with the state government. There is much debate about education policy reform and collaborative strategy framework. Considering the above gap in education policy and framework, we decided to conduct a scoping review of the current higher education system, challenges, and way forward of Somalia. The research questions of the study were formulated as follows:

- What are common trigger factors that influence the current higher education system of Somalia?
- How does the Somalia education sector address trigger factors to attain the desired higher education quality?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

In this review, the researcher has developed a standard protocol as well as a critical appraisal tool to produce evidence to assess Somalia's current education system, challenges, and the way forward followed by PRISMA scoping review guidelines [9]. Peer-reviewed articles and grey literature on the education system, challenges of the education system, Somalia education, Somalia education & challenges, challenges, and way forward, and Somalia education & challenges & way forward using very specific keywords were searched on eight resourceful websites followed by inclusion and exclusion criteria. An ScR technique includes three steps to extract the published articles and grey reports from different websites. The three steps are: selecting the initial list of the articles and reports, techniques used to evaluate the article and the report, and data extraction and analysis. [10-11].

### 2.2. Protocol Development:

A scoping review protocol has been developed followed by the PROSPERO database and the protocol was prepared using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses Protocol (PRISMA-P) [12]. The researchers completed the PRISMA-P checklist. A summary of eligibility criteria for targeted articles was done.

### 2.3. Quality assessment:

We followed Newcastle-Ottawa Quality Assessment Scale to assess the risk of bias regarding the selection of the studies. Principal Investigator (PI) independently assessed the quality of the studies, and the co-investigator verified the evaluated studies. If researchers disagree on interpretations, a discussion session of interpreters was held to reach a decision.

#### 2.3.1. Exploring the initial list of studies.

In this scoping review, the researchers have searched the articles in the database using very specific keywords to find the desired articles and grey literature containing the words 'the education system', 'challenges of the education system', 'Somalia education', 'Somalia education & challenges', 'challenges, and way forward', and 'Somalia education & challenges & way forward'. We searched eight resourceful online databases for articles and grey literature published between January 2013 to February 2023 to gather the relevant articles and grey literature on Somalia's current education system, challenges, and the way forward. We found a total of 3629 articles and grey literature by using specific keywords and the numbers returned about 30 by searching combined keywords (Table-1).

**Table 1. Initial Search Strategy and Outcomes**

Total articles & grew literature found (January 2013 to February 2023)								
Search Databases		Search items						
Data sources	Field and access	Document Type	Education system	Challenges of the education system	Somalia Education	Somalia Education & Challenges	Challenges & way forward	Somalia Education & Challenges & Way Forward
Springer link	All	Journals	320	175	30	08	10	04
Science Direct	All	Journals	210	104	20	06	12	03
Wiley Online Library	All	Journals	280	170	36	07	06	05
PUBMED	All	Journals	445	153	22	10	11	03
PMC	All	Journals	260	145	25	08	07	04
web of Science (SCI, SSCI, HCI)	All	Journals	270	90	15	07	06	03
Hindawi	All	Journals	150	70	09	05	07	04
Google Scholar	All	Journals	330	155	20	05	10	05
<b>Total</b>			2265	1062	177	56	69	30

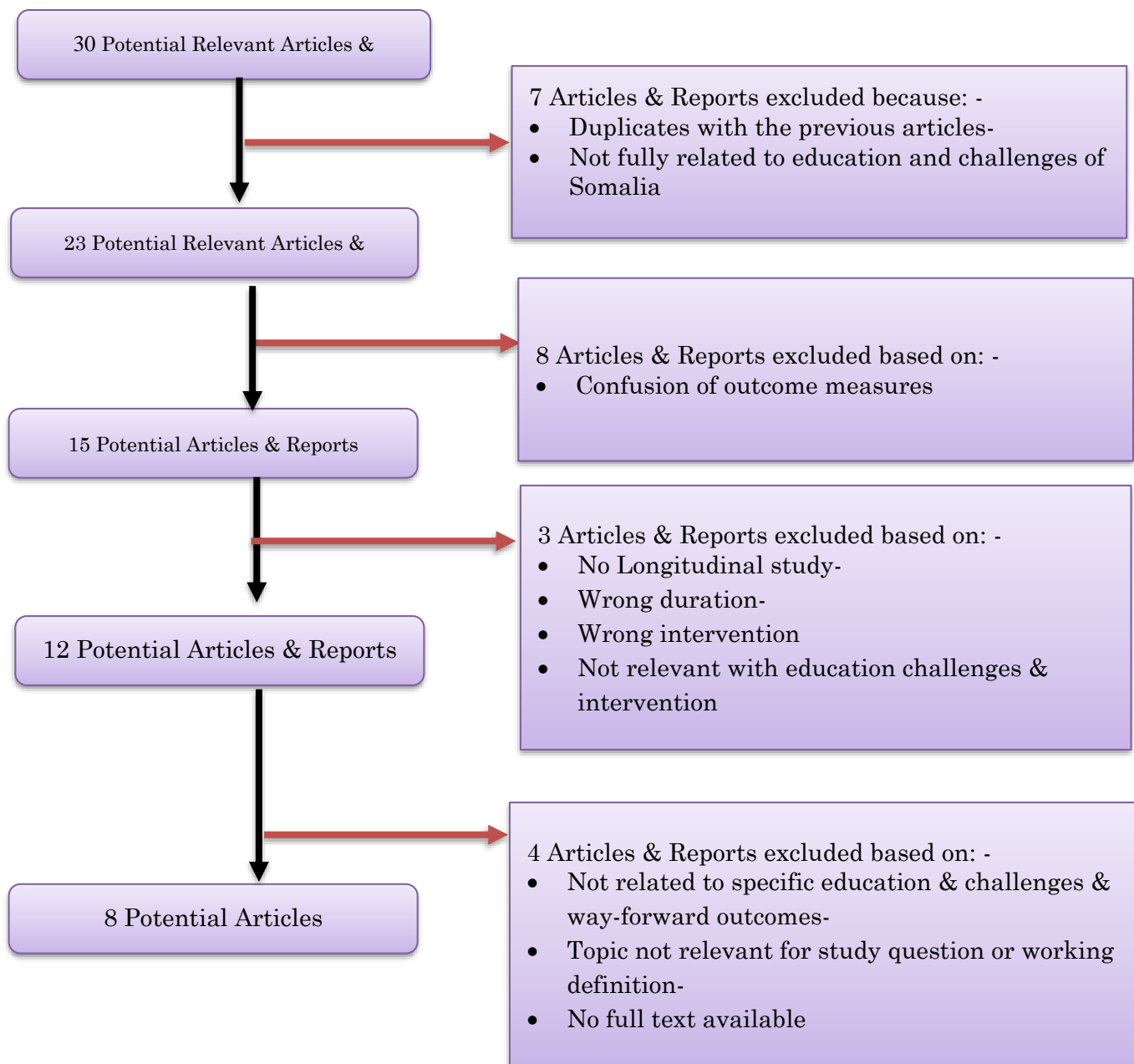
#### 2.4. Topicality of evaluation

We were alert in the steps of evaluating the standard and quality of articles and grey literature from the outcomes of the initial list of studies. The authors read all articles and grey literature titles, and abstracts, execute summaries and full text to exclude irrelevant articles and reports. Furthermore, the topicality of evaluation of collected articles and grey literature, we followed our study protocol as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria (**figure-1**).

#### 2.5. Extraction and analysis of data

In the extraction and analysis of data stage, we selected articles and the grey literature considering key details of the relevant articles and grey literature based on inclusion and exclusion criteria [13] including duration of publications, types of outcome measures, deleting similar articles, the relevance of the results and no longitudinal studies and wrong intervention. Considering the above criteria, finally, we selected 8 articles and 3 grey literature and trusted

websites to develop the background of the study. As a result, 8 articles and reports were selected for further analysis. Figure 1 below shows the results of the search and selection of studies with exclusion steps. Researchers developed a structured format form in the Excel sheet to extract information from each study. Title, author, country, journal, publication date, the main outcome, the study design (design, sample size, participants, exposure definition, covariates), the results, and limitations were included in the format. In the case of multiple studies that used the same data source, we considered the study as the most recent data. We used RevMan V.5.4 to synthesize the data and search for the outcomes that are relevant to our study goals.



## 2.6. Sampling

In our scoping review, we collected data from reliable online sources following the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Published peer-reviewed articles and grey literature were included in this study.

## 2.7. Data collection tools:

Researchers have developed an Excel data collection sheet and summarized data in the sheet following the study protocol. Excel data sheet was the primary tool for synthesis and enhancing the understanding of analyzing the data.

## 2.8. Data Analysis:

Themes and sub-theme of the synthesis data were developed and categorized according to the keywords. Excel sheet used to extract information from each study. Title, author, country, journal, publication date, the main outcome, the study design (design, sample size, participants, exposure definition, covariates), the results, and limitations were included in the format. In the case of multiple studies that used the same data source, we considered the study as the most recent data. The RevMan V.5.4 was used to synthesize the data and search for the outcomes that are relevant to the study goals.

## 2.9. Ethical issue:

In the study, there is no ethical involved.

## 3. Results

After a thorough review and assessment of the full text, a total of 72 studies were selected and finally, 12 articles were included in this scoping review (Figure 1). We included three original articles, four narrative documents review papers, and one grounded theory paper in our scoping review (Table-2). The majority of the articles describe the higher education challenges and mentioned the gap in higher education policies and regulations. In the table-2 we summarized the findings in the main themes that indicate the Somali education system's current status, challenges & way forward, and direction for further research. Synthesis original articles focused on the lack of uniform policy, research facilities, lack of effective curricula guidelines, and lack of effort of internationalization of higher education while narrative documents reviews paper lack of qualified staff and quality of education, Poor infrastructure, standard education policy, universal education curriculum, and lack of accountability of education sector. There is no information in the synthesis articles and reports about the education sector staff recruitment process, how to ensure the quality of education, and the role of civil society to increase the quality of higher education. The quality of higher education is one of the central crises of Somalia due to the conflicts, lack of uniform policy, and research facilities. The absence of

effective curricula guidelines, quality standards, and support from international bodies in higher education is responsible for poor outcomes of higher education. Our few review studies suggested that the lack of effective services delivered in the education sector results in a deficiency of qualified staff negatively impacts higher education. The majority of studies address that developing a standard formal curriculum for all states is a challenge for the central government, however, this is essential to attain quality higher education. Central and state governments must invest or allocate sufficient budget to quality learning environments and facilities, research opportunities and publications, internationalization of higher education, and faculty training. Integration of higher education and development of infrastructure, reform of education policy, and accountability of the education sector may be practical steps to strengthening higher education.

Table 2. Features of the articles

Author's	Title	Study design	Targeted populations & sample size	Current features of education	Education System & Challenges	Main features of the article	
						Way forward	Future research direction
Ga'al, H.O. (2017)	Somali Higher Education: Current State, Challenges and Opportunities as a Case Study of Somali National University	A descriptive cross-sectional study	Bachelor, Master, and Ph.D. students studying at Somali National University were included. A total of 25 respondents were interviewed.	Poor quality of teaching, insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, gender discrimination, Commercialization of Education, Incoherent content, shortage of specialized technical skills institutions, and inadequate resources.	The quality of higher education in Somalia faced difficulty due to the conflicts, lack of uniform policy, and research facilities.	Higher education is the central component of the society that contributes to peacebuilding as well as good governance in post-conflict societies in Somalia	Local government should pay attention to higher education sectors and build public-private partnerships to produce well-qualified teachers and needs research on vocational skill development programs.
Ali, M. (2023)	A Review of the curriculum change and Innovation for higher education in Somalia	Grounded theory as well as complexity theory study	Reviewed the current curriculum and education policy	Higher education institutions do not have standard formal curriculum plans and poor initiative from the central government to regulate higher education or develop standards that could be shared.	Higher education in Somalia faces challenges of lack of effective curricula guidelines, quality standards, and support from international bodies in the education sector.	Immediately needs to the establishment of the National Commission for higher education with a clear policy and independency to overview the curriculum in higher education institutions.	Meta-analysis and systematic review are important to understand the gap in the quality curriculum in higher education.
Faqih, A. (2021).	A Study Analysis on Challenges and Opportunities for the Somali education system (2016-2021)	General literature review of education sector documents	Review of education sector document (2016-2021)	High rates of school abrasion and poor learning outcomes, as well as weak capacities, and limited available resources.	Lack of effective services delivered in the education sector.	There is a growing need for regulation in all education sectors and coordination challenges in the decentralized education sector provision	Needs to review ways of decentralization of the education sector

Jama et. al., (2020)	Influence of Curriculum and Demographic Factors on Somali Students' Civic Outcomes	Cross-sectional survey	A total of 400 Somali students were interviewed	Formal curriculum impact on good civic development	Developing a standard formal curriculum for all states is a challenge for the central government.	Needs to develop a standard formal curriculum for secondary and higher education aiming to develop a good civic society.	a systematic analysis of the Somali education curriculum is conducted to properly assess the richness and depth of its content in relation to the required standards and coverage of civic education.
Muhammad.et. al. (2023)	Factors Responsible for Somali Universities Low Rankings: An Evidence-Based Review	Narrative documents review	Online available education sector documents	The educational system of Somalia is not spared and the facility is not sufficient for higher education.	Shortage of suitable learning environments and facilities, poor research opportunities and publications, lack of internationalization of higher education, and poor budget allocation to higher education.	to increase government funding to higher education by around 20%, coupled with increased community and international support.	Needs more research on higher education facilities increase and finding ways to increase the higher education budget.
Eno et.al. (2015)	The Revival of Higher Education in Somalia: Prospects and Challenges	Narrative documents review and qualitative interview	Reviewed books, journal articles, archival materials, and Qualitative with people with knowledge of the topic.	The higher education system struggles due to internal conflict and the privatizing of the education sector without proper central mechanisms.	Developing standard education policy and integration of vocational education in quality higher education	Need to Implement digital-based education professional development program.	Assessing the needs of digital education at higher studies.
Ainebyona. G. (2019)	The Fragility of Higher Education in the Post-Conflict Somaliland: A Dialogue	Narrative documents review	Analysed based on desk and document review	Somalian education sector struggles with qualified staff and the lack of a national framework that regulates higher education comes with structural challenges.	Poor infrastructure, standard education policy, universal education curriculum, and lack of, accountability.	Somalia needs a number of policy recommendations in relation to post-conflict societies that could guide the Somaliland Ministry of Education and policy on possible realities that could move this country forward	Immediate need gap analysis of education policy and validate it by education experts.
Ibrahim.M. et al. (2018)	Private Higher Education in Somalia: Challenges and Opportunities for Skills Development, Employment Creation and Entrepreneurship	Quantitative & Qualitative methods	A total of 81 participants were interviewed	Somalia's education system is not well defined and multicultural issues create a complex situation	Somalia is facing complex and multidimensional challenges in the areas of higher education policies and regulations, finance, academic infrastructures, student language barrier, and shortage of well-trained University teaching staff	The public-private partnership still is not well defined and private higher education is not accessible to low-middle-class people.	Needs gap analysis of the engagement of the public-private sector to develop a practical policy.



#### **4. Discussion**

In our scoping review, we explored the current education system of Somalia, its challenges, its way forward, and future research direction to improve the education sector. Some studies reported that the federal government has developed an education sector strategic plan (2018-2020) but there are no effective guidelines for universal education curriculum and standards of quality [14-15]. Two articles described the shortcomings of curriculum management that negatively impact the quality of education in Somalia [16-17]. These findings are supported by the study conducted by Hussein (2015) which concluded that the curriculum of Somalia's education has a statistically significant contribution to the education sector and plays a vital role in developing Somali students' sense of citizenship and national identity and improving the quality of higher education [18].

The common challenges of Somali education are poor curriculum with low-quality benchmarks, weak management in the university system, high cost in private universities, no external quality assurance agency, and absence of higher education commission [19]. Most of the articles addressed the lack of a legal framework for the education sector and poor regulatory bodies and coordination between the federal and state level. They suggested a systematic and meta-analysis review to find the gap and to develop the standard legal framework [20]. Although two papers discussed education policies reforms, and weakness of the systems and structures to support federal states coordination and such issues depends on stopping the internal conflict. Staff quality improvement programs and learning environment, internationalization of higher education, digitalization of the education sector, and quality vocational education should get priority in future education policy.

The central government is implementing the "Strategic Plan for Higher Education and immediately needed an updated and comprehensive version of the "Strategic Plan for Higher Education to engage the state government. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and National Education Policy should be in a similar line and that may help Somalia to attain the desired quality of higher education. Our such finding supports the study research questions that suggest the challenges and way forward of higher education.

#### **5. Conclusions**

The aim of the review was to understand the challenges and way forward for Somalia's education sector. Universal curriculum, legal framework, and coordination between federal and state governments were found to be effective ways to improve the current education sector of the country. From our synthesis data, we concluded that some of the challenges faced by Somalia's higher education can be dealt with at the institutional level of reform. To attain the desired quality of higher education central and state governments need to plan and innovate public-private partnership efforts. Access to higher education remains a major concern affecting

the sector's development. From the result and discussion section, it is clear that curriculum development and accreditation are also key challenges in Somalia's higher education, and digital innovation is urgently needed. Staff quality improvement programs remain the main challenges in Somalia's higher education and innovation as well.

### **Limitation of the study:**

The author likes to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The majority of studies reviewed reported limited information about the quality outcomes of tertiary education and did not incorporate the education policy and strategy framework importance and its impact on the education system of Somalia. This is a big limitation of the study and needs further SLR study in this field. The second limitation of the study is high-impact journal publications from the Somalian context.

### **Actionable Recommendations:**

A meta-analysis and systematic review study may be conducted on the gap in education policy, universal curriculum, and the strategic framework's role in the education system so that findings may materialize in future education policy and strategy framework and this study can be applied in practice.

### **Conflict of Interest:**

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

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