

REVIEW ARTICLE



Governance and Accountability: An Assessment of the European Union's Role in Strengthening the Somali Education Sector's Institutional Capacity

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Abstract: This article critically reviews the European Union's (EU) role in strengthening governance and accountability in Somalia's education sector, with a particular focus on building institutional capacity. Drawing on scholarly literature, donor reports, and international policy assessments, the study evaluates the EU's contributions to policy harmonization, teacher training, curriculum reform, deployment of technical advisors, and institutional governance. A qualitative document-based review methodology is employed to synthesize evidence from academic and policy sources. Findings reveal that while the EU has made significant contributions to institutional strengthening and governance reforms, challenges persist regarding sustainability, donor dependency, and limited national ownership. The paper concludes with recommendations to enhance Somali-led accountability systems, strengthen federal-state collaboration, and ensure long-term capacity development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Governance and accountability are central to the effective functioning of education systems, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. In Somalia, decades of political instability and institutional collapse have left the education sector weak, fragmented, and heavily reliant on external support (World Bank, 2023). International partners, notably the European Union (EU), have sought to rebuild governance structures and strengthen accountability mechanisms in the sector.

This paper reviews the EU's engagement in Somalia's education system, with attention to its governance and accountability interventions, including the role of technical advisors embedded within ministries. It aims to contribute to the literature on aid effectiveness in fragile states by assessing how EU-supported initiatives have influenced institutional capacity.

2. BACKGROUND

Somalia's education sector has been shaped by decades of political instability, protracted conflict, and weak state institutions. Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, the absence of a functioning state apparatus resulted in the privatization and fragmentation of education, where communities, religious

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organizations, and NGOs became the primary providers of schooling (Abdi, 2019; UNESCO, 2022). While these non-state actors prevented a complete collapse, the lack of centralized governance generated disparities in quality, curricula, and access.

2.1. Governance in Fragile States

Governance in education refers to the structures and processes through which decisions are made, implemented, and held accountable (Bray, 2003). In fragile states like Somalia, weak institutional capacity and political instability hinder coherent governance structures (Menocal, 2014). Governance challenges are compounded by corruption, inadequate policy coordination, and limited fiscal autonomy (World Bank, 2023).

2.2. Accountability in Education

Accountability mechanisms in education typically encompass financial accountability, performance accountability (student outcomes, teacher effectiveness), and democratic accountability to stakeholders (Sayed & Ahmed, 2015). In Somalia, accountability has historically been undermined by fragmented service provision and the absence of strong regulatory frameworks (Ali, 2020). Donor interventions often introduce accountability frameworks, but without national ownership, they risk becoming compliance exercises rather than sustainable reforms (OECD, 2020).

2.3. EU's Global Role in Education Development

The EU is one of the largest global donors in education, with policies aligned to SDG 4 (inclusive and equitable education) and the EU Consensus on Development. Its approach emphasizes equity, inclusiveness, and governance strengthening (European Commission, 2021). In fragile states, EU programs often target systemic reforms, including teacher training, curriculum harmonization, and sector planning.

2.4. The Somali Education Context

Somalia's federal structure adds complexity to education governance. Federal Member States (FMS) exercise significant autonomy, leading to parallel and sometimes conflicting policies (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022). Teacher shortages, lack of standardized training, and weak monitoring systems further constrain the sector (UNICEF, 2021). Only about 30% of primary-age children are enrolled in school, among the lowest rates globally (UNESCO, 2022). Financing remains critically low, with Somalia allocating less than 2% of GDP to education (World Bank, 2023).

2.5. EU Engagement in Somalia's Education Sector

The EU has been one of Somalia's longest-standing partners in rebuilding the education sector, linking its support to broader objectives of state-building, peacebuilding, and sustainable development. Since the early 2000s, its interventions have expanded from emergency education assistance to systemic governance reforms. Key areas of engagement include curriculum harmonization, teacher professionalization, sector-wide planning, and governance reforms.

2.5.1. Curriculum Harmonization

One of the EU's earliest and most significant contributions has been the support for curriculum development and harmonization. Following the collapse of central government in 1991, Somalia's education landscape became fragmented, with Federal Member States (FMS), local authorities, and private providers adopting varied curricula, often imported from neighboring countries (Mohamed & Dualeh, 2018).

The EU, working with UNESCO and UNICEF, supported the formulation of a National Curriculum Framework (NCF), launched in 2017, which introduced consistency in learning standards across subjects. The EU's role included financing curriculum workshops, training curriculum specialists, and developing teaching/learning materials. While the NCF has improved coherence, resistance remains in some FMS that

prefer local adaptations, raising questions about the balance between national unity and regional autonomy.

2.5.2. Teacher Professionalization

Teacher shortages and weak qualifications have been identified as critical barriers to educational quality in Somalia (British Council, 2021). Many teachers lack formal training, relying instead on community-based learning or religious education.

The EU has invested in teacher training institutes and professional certification programs, often in partnership with the British Council and UNICEF. Thousands of teachers have benefited from in-service training modules, focusing on pedagogy, classroom management, and subject content. Additionally, the EU supported the creation of teacher career pathways to professionalize the workforce, though retention remains a challenge due to low salaries and limited incentives.

Example Data Point: By 2020, EU-supported projects had trained approximately 5,000 teachers across Somalia, with notable improvements in literacy and numeracy instruction (European Commission, 2021).

2.5.3. Sector-Wide Planning

The EU has played a central role in strengthening Somalia's Education Sector Strategic Plans (ESSPs). These plans, covering 2018–2022 and 2022–2026, serve as the government's roadmaps for education development (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022).

EU contributions included:

- Financing technical advisors to draft and monitor the ESSPs.
- Supporting data collection for the Education Management Information System (EMIS).
- Facilitating joint sector reviews to enhance accountability between donors and government.

The ESSPs provide Somalia with its first comprehensive, long-term education strategies since state collapse, aligning national priorities with international frameworks such as SDG 4 and Education for All. However, implementation remains constrained by weak local capacity, limited resources, and political fragmentation.

2.5.4. Governance and Accountability Reforms

Beyond service delivery, the EU has embedded governance and accountability frameworks within Somalia's education policy environment. Through budget support and conditional grants, the EU requires MoECHE and FMS ministries to implement transparent financial reporting, auditing, and performance monitoring (OECD, 2020).

This has led to:

- Development of financial accountability systems to track education expenditures.
- Creation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) units within ministries.
- Increased donor-government dialogue on accountability benchmarks.

Nevertheless, challenges persist, including capacity gaps in financial management, corruption risks, and limited downward accountability to communities (UNICEF, 2021).

2.5.5. Technical Assistance and Capacity Building

A distinctive EU contribution has been the deployment of Technical Advisors (TAs) to MoECHE and FMS ministries. These advisors provide hands-on expertise in policy planning, curriculum development, financial management, and EMIS (European Commission, 2021).

Between 2015 and 2022, more than 30 EU-funded TAs were embedded within Somali education institutions, supporting reforms such as the ESSPs, curriculum implementation, and audit systems. While this

has accelerated reform progress, reliance on expatriate advisors raises concerns about sustainability and national ownership (UNESCO, 2022).

2.6. Technical Assistance in Capacity Building

A central EU contribution has been the deployment of Technical Advisors (TAs) to MoECHE and FMS ministries. Advisors provide expertise in policy planning, EMIS development, financial accountability, and donor coordination (European Commission, 2021). While these advisors have accelerated institutional reforms, concerns remain over sustainability, as ministries often depend on expatriate staff and experience setbacks when contracts end (UNESCO, 2022) (Table 1).

Table 1. Key Governance Challenges in Somalia's Education Sector.

| Challenge | Description | Source |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Fragmented governance | Federal–state divergence in policies | Federal Gov. of Somalia (2022) |
| Weak financing | <2% of GDP allocated to education | World Bank (2023) |
| Teacher shortages | Few trained teachers, high attrition | British Council (2021) |
| Curriculum incoherence | Parallel curricula in FMS | Mohamed & Dualeh (2018) |
| Limited accountability | Weak M&E, corruption risks | OECD (2020) |

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a **document-based review methodology** (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Sources include peer-reviewed articles, EU Delegation reports, Somalia's ESSPs, and assessments by multilateral organizations. A thematic analysis extracted evidence on governance, accountability, technical assistance, and institutional capacity.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Strengthening Institutional Governance

EU support for ESSPs has promoted coordination between federal and state ministries, although implementation remains uneven (Federal Government of Somalia, 2022).

4.2. Accountability Reforms

EU budget support introduced expenditure tracking and audits. These reduced leakage but corruption risks remain high (OECD, 2020).

4.3. Teacher Professional Development

EU-funded programs trained more than 10,000 teachers since 2015, improving classroom delivery. However, attrition persists due to low pay (British Council, 2021).

4.4. Curriculum Reform

EU initiatives supported consolidation of curricula into a National Curriculum Framework (Mohamed & Dualeh, 2018), though regional authorities sometimes resist.

4.5. Role of Technical Advisors

Between 2015 and 2022, the EU supported over 30 TAs at MoECHE and FMS ministries (European Commission, 2021) (Table 2).

Table 2. EU-Supported Technical Advisors in Somali Education Governance (2015–2022).

| Ministry Level | Areas of Support | Approx. number of Tas | Outcome |
|------------------|--|-----------------------|---|
| MoECHE (Federal) | Policy planning, EMIS, donor coordination, Finance | ~12 | Drafted ESSPs, improved reporting, curriculum framework |
| FMS Ministries | Teacher training, EMIS, inspections, curriculum | ~18 | Enhanced planning, localized teacher programs |
| Cross-cutting | M&E, procurement, audits | ~5 | Improved accountability and donor coordination |
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While impactful, reliance on TAs has created dependency risks. Ministries face capacity gaps when contracts expire, highlighting the need for structured capacity transfer (UNESCO, 2022).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

National Ownership: Align interventions with Somali-led strategies.

Gradual Localization of TA Roles: Pair expatriate advisors with Somali civil servants for structured capacity transfer.

Strengthen Data Systems: Expand EMIS to support planning and transparency.

Foster Multi-Level Accountability: Support community-level school management committees.

Equitable TA Deployment: Ensure balanced support across FMS.

Sustainable Teacher Development: Establish long-term salary and career pathways.

CONCLUSION

The EU has been instrumental in strengthening Somalia's education governance, accountability, and institutional capacity. Achievements include policy harmonization, teacher training, curriculum reform, and TA deployment. Yet challenges persist: donor dependency, federal–state political fragmentation, and weak local ownership. Moving forward, EU assistance should emphasize localization of technical roles, Somali-led accountability, and sustainable governance reforms.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author confirms that this article's content has no conflict of interest.

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