

**Primary School Principals' Perceptions of their Role and Experiences
within the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia**

Mohamed Hassan

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to principals working in Mogadishu, Somalia, to those who are working steadily towards a better future for their students, and to those who are working to sustain education despite the extraordinary challenges created by the ongoing conflict since 1991. I have been inspired by your commitment, determination, courage, and self-sacrifice.

ABSTRACT

While the role of the school principal has received much attention in stable environments, little research exists on principals working in conflict-affected countries. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to uncover perceptions of Somali principals in Mogadishu regarding their roles and lived experiences, as well as the challenges they face as they lead their schools amid ongoing conflict. In order to understand the different dimensions of the principal's role and how this role is experienced in such a context, a descriptive phenomenology has been employed. A purposeful sample of eight primary school principals in Mogadishu, which has been the epicentre of the ongoing conflict, was identified and the principals were interviewed. Through the six-step approach to phenomenological data analysis, as suggested by Creswell (2013), 11 themes were identified.

Findings revealed that principals perceived their role as supporting teachers personally and professionally, supervising instruction, facilitating teacher professional development when the security situation permits, having good relationships with governing bodies, and building community collaboration. Findings also showed that, besides security concerns, student mobility, poor facilities, shortage of trained teachers and student discipline were the major challenges to principals. Findings further indicated that principals acted as boundary spanners using a variety of buffering and bridging strategies in an attempt to minimize uncertainty and security risks, as well as to adapt the school to the volatile environment. Furthermore, commitment to keep schools open, despite the huge challenges, a sense of responsibility for student safety, and calm and courageous actions in the face of danger were perceived as critical factors in sustaining principals in their positions.

Four conclusions were drawn from the study, including principals' lack of unity in the perception of their roles, principals' lack of pre-service training, the possibility and

essentiality of providing education during armed conflicts, and the importance of creating strong bonds through principals' supportive roles. Recommendations were offered for primary principals, local educational umbrellas, NGOs, and UN agencies, as well as for further research possibilities.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The year 1991 marked a turning point for the people of Somalia as the country plunged into a devastating civil war and conflict that has had and will have huge impact not only on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Somali people but also on the functioning of public institutions for decades to come. This civil war and protracted conflict resulted in total collapse of the central government and political institutions, as well as the destruction of Somalia's social and economic infrastructure, including educational institutions.

Since almost all educational systems and infrastructure prior to 1991 were destroyed or seriously damaged by the civil war and protracted conflict, in the absence of a functioning central government, new forms of education provision have been taking shape with the participation of the community and remaining educators. Some of the key players in this new emerging system are school leaders who have taken the initiative to reopen schools and to work as links between school and community, as well as between school and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These school leaders are called upon to contribute to the provision of education in the absence of a government that is supportive of their efforts.

However, little is known about these leaders, who they are, what their roles are, how they themselves view their own roles, what experiences and challenges they are facing, and how they navigate the ongoing conflict. These and other questions motivated me to undertake this study. My interest in investigating the principal's role, therefore, arises from the recognition of the principal as the primary agent of school leadership.

As an educator who worked as a teacher for several years in developing countries, I have a strong belief that education is the cornerstone of any society that wants to stand on its own feet, and school leaders, especially school principals, can be instrumental in making

schools a better place for both teachers and children, regardless of any challenging circumstances they face. It has been substantiated by the volume of evidence in effective school literature in developing and developed countries that the principal and the vision that he/she holds for the school play a major role in the success of the school. As Barth (1980) pointed out, “It is not the critics or the central-office people or the university people who really make schools what they are. It is whoever occupies the principal’s office” (p. 216).

My belief is further enhanced by the leadership studies I have pursued at the University of Ottawa, and the vast amount of literature describing the leadership experiences and the studies by researchers in schools in more industrialized nations have intrigued me to wonder what school principalship looks like in war-torn environments.

There is another compelling reason to undertake this study. It is an attempt to draw attention to and underscore the important role that school leaders play in war-torn environments and the need to make their voices heard. As Milligan (2010) noted, voices of teachers, children, and parents in war-torn environments are powerful, while the voices of school leaders are less present in the literature on education and conflict. The absence of such studies that explore the work of school leaders in conflict-affected societies is striking, and particularly so against the background of social upheaval in many parts of the world. Since armed conflicts and social unrest have become the norm rather than the exception in many parts of the world, there is good reason to conduct studies that provide insights into what school leaders who struggle under such conditions do, and how they engage a collapsed or collapsing socio-political order within schools and communities. School leaders’ engagement often becomes embedded in new institutional and social forms that span organizational lines (Mazawi, 2008). Such processes remain the least studied and understood, however, despite their critical importance for the ways in which school leaders

negotiate meanings regarding their work in the absence of the government support. So, this study comes as a major contribution to school leadership in conflict and education.

Making principals' voices heard is particularly important in the context of Somalia because their own narratives of struggle have remained untold amid widespread media coverage of the conflict. The images on the news, on websites, and in reports often talk about fighting and drought, chaos and violence, and terrorism and piracy, while rarely featuring the struggles of school leaders. Principals' voices need to be heard so that one may appreciate the great efforts they have made in the face of difficult circumstances. Hence, this study is motivated by a desire to give voice to school principals on issues of schooling because of their intimate and expert knowledge of the context within which they work.

Finally, research on the principalship in Somalia, before and after the civil war, is severely limited. The lack of research about such a group of people who are essentially vital for maintaining schools is of great concern. It is hoped that this study will mark the beginning of research studies, which may help educational practitioners in their efforts to improve the role of the principal during this difficult time in Somali history and when peace is restored. To this end, this study chooses not to focus on the politics of the conflict. Instead, it attempts to understand the lived experiences of primary principals in Mogadishu and the challenges they face in enacting their roles in a situation of protracted conflict.

Only primary school principals were selected for this study for the following reasons. First, the issue of accessibility was considered, as anecdotal information received from school supervisors in Mogadishu, suggests that there is greater accessibility to primary school principals than to their counterparts in secondary schools. Secondly, apart from the ongoing conflict, primary school principals face great challenges, as many untrained young teachers are frequently recruited into primary schools. Finally, Makki (2009), who studied

the role of secondary school principals in building positive relationships with local communities, recommended the importance of conducting a similar study for primary school principals. It is my hope that this study may yield information that will be of use to Somali educators, as well as to those charged with preparing them for success in the most challenging circumstances.

This chapter presents background information about Somalia, including a historical perspective of the development of education in Somalia from pre-colonial times to the present. It also presents the statement of the problem followed by the purpose of the study and research questions, as well as the significance of the study. Possible limitations of the study and definition of key terms have also been provided. An outline of the organization of the remaining six chapters concludes this introductory chapter.

Background Information

The Country in Brief

Somalia is situated in the Horn of Africa with an area of 637,657 km². It shares territorial frontiers with the Republic of Djibouti and the Gulf of Aden to the north, Ethiopia to the west, Kenya to the south, and the Indian Ocean to the east. Its population in 2009 was estimated by the United Nations to be around 9 million.

The Somali people might be described as one of the largest homogeneous ethnic groups in Africa, though there are some minorities. They share a single language, Somali, with two distinctive dialects, and are bonded by a common Islamic religion and culture. The majority of the Somali people are nomadic pastoralists, agriculturalists, and agro-pastoralists. Somali society is based on clan groupings, and clan membership plays an important role in Somali culture and politics. Clans are grouped into sub-clans, resulting in extended families.

As with many African nations, the colonial powers divided Somalia into five territories. Two of these colonial territories, British Somaliland and Italian Somalia gained independence in 1960 and united to form the Somali Republic. The first ten years of independence were marked by a vibrant but corrupt and eventually dysfunctional multiparty democracy (Juma, 2010). Electoral politics became increasingly chaotic, and state programs delivered little public benefit as each group sought to maximize the spoils that it could loot from the system. This resulted in a military coup led by Mohamed Siad Barre in 1969.

The military regime received enthusiastic support from the general public in the early stages of its administration. However, this support diminished and Major-General Barre's governance became increasingly ineffective after Somalia lost the 1977-1978 Ogaden war to Ethiopia. This marked the beginning of internal strife in Somalia, which began as a struggle for control of the government but quickly degenerated into factional violence and the destruction of public institutions when the central government finally collapsed in 1991.

Although the nature of the armed conflict has changed significantly since 1995, Somalia remains without a functional central government. Despite the creation of an internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004, which later became the Federal Republic of Somalia in August, 2012, regional and local governing bodies continue to exist and control various regions of the country. Against this historical and socio-political background, education in contemporary Somalia barely exists.

A Historical Perspective of Educational Development in Somalia

An education system can best be understood through the environment within which it operates, as educational goals are generally shaped by social, economic, political, and cultural factors. Accordingly, the development of education in Somalia can be understood through three distinct historical stages. The stages are: Education in the Pre-Independence

Period, Education in the Post-Independence Period, and Education in the Post-Civil War Period. The following section briefly explains each of these stages.

Education in the Pre-Independence Period. Long before Italian and British colonialism and the influence of Christian missionaries, Somali people came into contact with Islam, which has played a major role in the shaping of their culture and education. Islam introduced a type of religious education that promoted literacy in the Koran, the Muslim Holy Book. According to Morah (2000), Koranic schools were introduced into Somalia 700 years ago and have served as the oldest educational system in Somalia. The purpose of Koranic schools is to teach children from five to fifteen years old how to read and write the Arabic script of the Koran besides its memorization. Both boys and girls are exposed to Koranic education. Unlike formal schools, these schools tend to have flexible schedules suited to the schedules of young children. The Koranic school still forms an important component of community education in Somalia, although it has been overshadowed by the introduction of modern education in colonial times (Bekalo et al., 2003).

The Western or formal education system was introduced during the colonial period. The British colonial administration introduced an English education system in northwest Somalia known as the British Protectorate of Somaliland while the Italians introduced an Italian system elsewhere. However, the school systems, established in these colonies, were limited both in scope and reach (Abdi, 1998; Bennaars et al., 1996). The common concern of colonial schools was, as elsewhere in Africa, the provision of education that prepares students to fit into colonial expectations (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007).

Although some schools were opened during this period, educational provision was largely limited to the primary level. According to Abdi (1998), Somali students were, by design, not allowed to go beyond grade 7, which was considered to be sufficient for

administrative and low-technical duties assigned to Somalis. Abdi argued that this policy represented an embodiment of the character of colonial education that ultimately fulfilled the real objectives of the colonial powers, which was educating a small number of Somalis capable of doing low level jobs because it was easier for governing colonial bodies to govern Somalis from afar while still benefiting from their dominance, somewhat like an absentee landlord. Bennaars et al. (1996) concurred, stating that the number of schools established by the colonial powers was largely limited and beyond the reach of the majority of people.

Education in the Post-Independence Period. After independence in the early 1960s, the future of education looked promising. Education grew in importance, with the majority of the society maintaining a very positive perception of education. As a result, the newly independent state came under popular pressure for more educational opportunities. According to Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007), the most pressing problems at the time were how to (a) unify the British and the Italian systems of education into a single national system, (b) provide the schools with qualified Somali teachers, and (c) make education more accessible to the majority of people.

The civilian governments who ruled the country between 1960-1969 made some efforts to integrate the two systems inherited from the colonial period by turning all elementary schools into four years followed by four years of intermediate, and four years of secondary education (Bennaars et al., 1996; Dawson, 1964). Arabic was chosen as the medium of instruction in the elementary years, while English was used at the intermediate and secondary levels.

The civilian governments were less successful in addressing the shortage of qualified Somali teachers as well as in making any meaningful expansion of education in the first nine years of independence. As Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007) pointed out, extending schooling

to the masses was clearly hindered not only by the difficulties of multiple languages of instruction but also by limitations of infrastructure and personnel. These researchers maintained that the first civilian governments lacked the bold initiatives necessary to remedy these problems. These problems remained unsolved until the military took over in 1969.

The military regime, which created a highly centralized educational system, made some significant reforms to education in Somalia. Among the most significant reforms in the early years of the regime were the writing of the Somali script in 1972, and the launching of massive literacy campaigns (Abdi, 1998; Bennaars et al., 1996; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). The writing of the Somali script, based on the Roman alphabet, was viewed by many as a major step toward making education more accessible to the majority of the Somali people, though there was strong opposition from a large segment of the society who preferred the Arabic language. Consequently, school enrolment dramatically increased.

The Somali language was introduced as a medium of instruction into elementary, intermediate and secondary education in 1972, 1973, and 1975 consecutively. The indigenization of the entire school curricula, with strong emphasis on the national culture and tradition, was a major objective (Warsame, 2001). In addition, education was made free and compulsory for all children between six and fourteen years of age.

As many observers acknowledged, these educational reforms did not last long, as the Somali education system began to decline in the 1980s, due to many factors, including the Ogaden war with Ethiopia (1977-1978) and the economic crisis that hit the continent in the 1980s. These combined factors and others led to a downturn in quality and participation rates in schools (Bekalo et al, 2003; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007). Consequently, payment of salaries to teachers and administrators was affected. School buildings began to fall into

disrepair. As a result, there was a decline in all educational levels, which was accelerated by the collapse of the military regime in 1991.

Education in the Post-Civil War Period. The civil war that broke out in 1991 has had a devastating impact on the public institutions. The impact of the conflict has been particularly profound in the area of education because of the widespread destruction of the educational infrastructure. The majority of school buildings, technical training centres, and university facilities that existed prior to the outbreak of civil conflict were destroyed or seriously damaged. Educational equipment and materials were looted; some school buildings and technical training centres that were spared from the destruction have been used as shelters by internally displaced people or taken over by armed militia. Many students, teachers and school administrators were also displaced or forced to flee the country and seek refuge in neighbouring countries; and this has ultimately led to the collapse of the educational system and its management (Abdi, 1998; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007).

As a result of heightened insecurity, schools were closed throughout 1991 and 1992 and hundreds of thousands of children missed out on education completely during this period, as educators were preoccupied with the quest to survive and satisfy their own basic needs (Abdi, 1998; Abdinoor, 2007). Ironically, as Bennaars et al. (1996) noted,

By the early 1990s, when Education for All (EFA) was advocated worldwide, the formal education sector in Somalia was in complete chaos. At this point in time, Somalia presented the worst possible situation, the very antithesis of Education for All, namely, Education for None. (p.12)

As conditions improved slightly in 1993 with the arrival of United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), local communities and former educational administrators and teachers who remained in the country began to reopen some schools. The efforts of local communities were supported by UN agencies, donor organizations, and international non-

governmental organizations. These efforts resulted in the reestablishment of schools, which varied in their quality of facilities, materials and human resources, depending on the financial capacity of sponsoring organizations (Bennaars et al., 1996; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007).

However, the withdrawal of the United Nations forces and a number of international organizations in 1995 resulted in a setback for the reconstruction of the education system, as many schools were re-closed. Local communities and educators realized that the only way to sustain the educational system was to rely on their own limited resources. In spite of many difficulties, community schools run by Somali NGOs and Islamic charities, as well as private schools, began to emerge and the education sector has made some progress since 1996 (Abdinoor, 2007, 2008 ; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Saggiomo , 2011).

The Current State of Education in Somalia. The central feature of formal education to be noted is that governance, funding, and ownership of schools are highly fragmented. This is largely due to the disintegration of the country into many independent mini-administrative zones. Although there are many administrative zones, the three prominent zones are (a) the South-Central Zone (SCZ), which is nominally under the administration of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG); (b) the Northeast Zone (NEZ), being administered by the Puntland State of Somalia; and (c) the Northwest Zone (NWZ), which is administered by the self-declared Republic of Somaliland (Pfaffe et al., 2009; UNDP, 2007).

Although the three regional zones are all, to varying degrees, characterized by fragility and vulnerability to conflict, they are distinguished by markedly different levels of institutional development (Pfaffe et al., 2009). Since both Puntland and Somaliland have functioning ministries of education and enjoy relative peace and stability, this study was delimited to South Central Somalia, specifically Mogadishu, which served as the site for this study.

Given the absence of a functioning ministry of education in South Central Somalia, there are a number of privately owned educational umbrellas/networks. These umbrellas/networks address educational matters that would normally fall under the aegis of the ministry of education, such as issuing student certificates, supervising examinations, organizing teacher training, coordinating among member schools, and seeking validation of student certificates issued by their member schools (Abdinoor, 2007; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Saggiomo, 2011).

The two most prominent organizations are the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS), created by a group of former public school inspectors and other educators in 1998, and the Somali Association for Formal Education (SAFE), which was also established in 1998. The former umbrella organization coordinates schools that mainly use Arabic as a medium of instruction and oversees a large number of primary and secondary schools, while the latter coordinates schools that mainly use a modified version of the curriculum used before the civil war.

The majority of schools are owned by communities while private individuals also represent a substantial percentage of school owners (Cummings et al., 2003). According to UNICEF (2005), 90 percent of schools across the country have community education committees (CECs), which own and manage about a half of all schools in the country. They are typically composed of volunteers, in consultation with the principal, selected by aid agencies or NGOs that support schools.

Community education committees work closely with the school administrator to ensure that the school is properly managed (Pfaffe et al., 2009). School administrators as well as teachers are recruited on the basis of their educational credentials and clan affiliation to the local community (Makki, 2009; Pfaffe et al., 2009). These researchers indicated that,

although this criterion for recruitment is crucial for ensuring the protection of schools, it may compromise the quality of work and leadership.

For school funding, parents play a major role in supporting schools financially and school fees make up teacher salaries and often represent as much as 100% of a school's administrative costs (Pfaffe et al., 2009). However, the fees vary among schools depending on the education level. Primary schools charge tuition fees ranging from 2 to 10 US dollars per month, while secondary schools charge tuition fees ranging from 10 to 15 US dollars per month (Oxfam Novib, 2004). The school fees may seem to be very small or insignificant to an outsider, but it represents a major cost for parents who struggle to make ends meet, given the harsh economic conditions prevalent in the country at the time.

Like funding, there is no coherent educational system in South Central Somalia. Most of the formal schools tend to follow two main models. The first model is based on a system of 9 years of primary education and 3 years of secondary education, and is mainly followed by schools affiliated with the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS) (Abinoor, 2007; Makki, 2009). The second model consists of 8 years of primary education and 4 years of secondary education. Both systems lead to twelve years of schooling, which is consistent with international schooling systems (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007).

Lack of coherence among education policies also applies to the type of curriculum and the language of instruction. Schools use different types of curricula with no common standards. Some use curricula imported from East African countries like Kenya and Uganda and others use curricula from several Arab countries like Sudan and the United Arab Emirates, while a few schools follow a modified version of the old Somali national curriculum. According to Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007), the choice of the type of

curriculum is mainly dictated by availability of teaching resources and textbooks, as well as personal familiarity with a particular curriculum by those in charge of the school.

Regarding the language of instruction, there are three languages currently used in schools. These languages are Arabic, English, and Somali. Arabic is the dominant language of instruction in secondary schools, though English and Somali are also used in a number of schools (Pfaffe et al., 2009). At the primary level, most schools use Somali as the language of instruction in lower primary grades, while special consideration is given to Arabic and English, which are taught as language subjects. Arabic is also used as the language of instruction in the upper primary grades (Mohamud, 2011).

Although the use of a certain language as a medium of instruction is often dictated by the availability of educational resources, many parents prefer Arabic-medium schools (Oxfam Novib, 2004). As noted above, the Somali language was used as a medium of instruction in both primary and secondary schools before the collapse of the state. However, this prominent role of the Somali language in education has now lost ground in favour of Arabic and English. Regardless of the reason for choosing the language of instruction, learning opportunities for the majority of Somali children remain very limited.

As of 2007, UNICEF reported that the gross enrolment rate in South Central Somalia was merely 22%, and access to primary education was extremely limited. The report indicated that South Central Somalia has one of the lowest school enrolment rates in Somalia as compared to the other two zones, as only a small segment of the society can afford to pay for education. The same source further indicated that, due to the civil war, an estimated one and a half million youth missed out on educational opportunities.

There is also a major concern about the high dropout rate among students who have access to primary education. According to the UNDP report (2007), 74% of the total number

of pupils in primary education are enrolled in lower primary (grades 1-4) and only 26% are enrolled in upper primary (grades 5-8). The report shows that only 54% of all the pupils who enter Grade 1 reach Grade 5. The trend shows that the dropout rate increases as pupils move into the upper grades. The report concluded that it is unlikely for Somalia in general, and South Central parts of the country in particular to achieve the global target for universal primary education by 2015. However, a closer target of 71% is possible. Yet, some observers maintain that it will be difficult to expand education and achieve this target as long as the conflict continues (UNDP, 2010; Moyi, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

Riven by more than two decades of conflict, Somalia is a country without stable governance systems, particularly in the south and central parts of the country, where the current study was conducted. The school conditions created by the absence of central educational authority at all levels district, regional and national, have had profound consequences for school management and leadership (Makki, 2009).

As a result, principals have non-traditional roles with multiple tasks under extremely challenging circumstances where persistent insecurity has become part of their daily lives. In the absence of central education authorities responsible for providing education, these principals must step in and assume this responsibility with the help of the community and non-governmental organizations. These principals were able to keep schools running despite extraordinary challenges. Since little has been documented about the roles of these leaders, their experiences and the way they navigate the conflict, as well as the challenges they face in leading their schools, I found this phenomenon a subject worth of study, especially since there is a global lack of studies of principals' roles in war-torn environments. The issues facing school leaders in such context offer insights into school leaders' work under

conditions of prolonged civil war within a fragmented society. Therefore, this study attempts to fill that gap and give an accurate description of the lived experiences of these leaders.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative phenomenological study has three primary objectives which are (a) to describe the role of the school principal as perceived by a select group of primary school principals in Mogadishu, (b) to describe the principals' experiences of and responses to the ongoing conflict, and (c) to identify the challenges facing these principals in leading their schools in Mogadishu. To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. How do primary school principals perceive the nature of their role in schools in Mogadishu, Somalia?
2. What are the challenges that primary school principals face in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu?
3. What are the experiences of primary school principals in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu?

The questions raised above aim to identify school leaders' work under conditions of armed conflict as important areas worthy of exploration. These questions open up new areas to explore how school leaders enact their roles and responsibilities within the context of unstable circumstances. With regard to South Central Somalia, addressing such questions would offer a better understanding of the current state of school leadership in Mogadishu.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in a number of ways. First, to the best of my knowledge, very little research has been done on school leadership in South Central Somalia. This study therefore pioneers school leadership in South Central Somalia. Second, for aid agencies and

NGOs involved in education, this study will provide them with an accurate description of the environment in which school principals operate and thereby allow a much more strategic intervention or collaboration with the education stakeholders. Third, the major contribution of this study, however, lies in the fact that it significantly contributes to the limited and sparse literature on school leadership in conflict-affected societies where education provision is characterized by instability. Finally, the findings of this study may also be helpful for principals caught in other conflicts of similar nature. Despite these anticipated contributions, this study is not without limitations.

Limitations of the Study

This study has certain limitations that must be taken into account. First, only eight primary school principals in Mogadishu participated in this study and, because of this small size, the sample makes any generalizations provisional. Although it is difficult to say that the roles and experiences described by these principals translate across all regions of the country, as levels of institutional development vary among different regions, some of the ideas that principals discussed, and some of the implications arising from these discussions, may very likely resonate with other principals working in other regions, particularly in the south central parts of the country where lack of security seems to be a common factor.

Secondly, the lack of data from teachers, students, and other stakeholders may be of concern, since the principals' roles are part of a larger organization context that involves far more people than school principals. Reliance on a single source offers only one of many possible perspectives, which may bias the results reported. Future research may address these limitations and may help to expand our understanding of the roles and experiences of principals in South Central Somalia.

Thirdly, the absence of female principals from the sample of this study is another limitation, because the inclusion of female principals would have provided an interesting additional perspective on school leadership in Mogadishu, Somalia. However, the exclusion of female principals from this study was not done by design, but by default, given the non-availability of female principals who are currently working in Mogadishu. This absence of women from school leadership reflects a general phenomenon in many developing countries, as there are factors at work limiting their access to leadership positions.

Finally, the study has methodological limitations. Due to travel restriction imposed on Somalia as a result of the ongoing conflict, the researcher was unable to conduct fieldwork. Therefore, interviews, which were the primary source of data collection, were conducted by telephone. This deprived the researcher of conducting in-depth face-to-face interviews. Despite such limitations, the findings of this study can be used as a particular and revealing window into prevailing school management and leadership in South Central Somalia. Through this window, it is hoped that insight may be gained into the nature of school management and leadership emerging in this part of the country.

Definition of Key Terms

Researchers define terms so that readers can understand specific meaning (Creswell, 2003). As a result, the following key terms are operationally defined for this study.

Banadir Region: The specific setting for this study and one of the 18 administrative regions into which Somalia was divided prior to the collapse of the central government in 1991. It includes Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. However, most current studies and reports by the United Nations conveniently divide the country into three administrative zones: (1) the South-Central Zone (SCZ), which nominally comes under the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) where the Banadir region is

located; (2) The Northeast Zone (NEZ) under the Puntland State, which has established a functioning administration and recognizes itself as part of Somalia; and (3) the Northwest Zone (NWZ) under Somaliland, which claimed independence from the rest of the country in 1991, but has remained without international recognition.

Community Schools: This term may have different meanings in different country contexts.

For this study, in the context of the failed state, it refers to schools which are built, financed and managed by the communities themselves with or without NGO support.

Developing Countries: Countries that have not achieved a significant level of development and, thus, have social, economic, and educational conditions that place them behind in development when compared with more industrially developed countries.

Education for All (EFA): A movement launched at the World Conference on Education in 1990 that aims to provide basic education for children, youth, and adults by 2015.

Education in Conflict and Emergencies: Refers to a context in which people are affected by protracted conflicts.

Formal Education: The school system brought to the country by European colonial powers and Christian missionaries.

Koranic School: As with many Muslim countries, Koranic schools offer religious education where children are taught how to read, write and memorize Koranic verses. In Somalia, these schools are known as “Dugsi.”

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Refers to non-profit international and local organizations performing a variety of services and humanitarian functions.

Primary School: The formal education that children receive for 8 or 9 years, depending on the education systems currently used in the country. It is designed to prepare children who are bound for secondary school or vocational training institutes.

Principal: An individual who occupies the highest official position in a school organization and is charged with the responsibility to direct, operate, supervise, and administer the activities of the school. This term may be used interchangeably with the term “headteacher” which is commonly used in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Private Education: In the context of the failed state, all schools are private; some are owned by private entrepreneurs, while others are owned and financed by faith-based organizations or communities; consequently they are diversely resourced.

Protracted Conflict: The term “post-conflict” is sometimes used by many researchers and international organizations when referring to the conflict in Somalia. However, this use is problematic, especially when referring to the conflict in South Central Somalia where this region continues to experience significant levels of violence since 1991. Therefore, the term “protracted conflict” or “ongoing conflict” will be used throughout this study when referring to the extended conflict in Somalia.

Untrained Teachers: Teachers recruited to teach in primary and secondary schools who have not been professionally prepared through pre-service programs.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 has already been described.

In Chapter 2, I present a literature review dealing with education in conflict and emergencies, school leadership, and open systems theory with particular reference to buffering strategies. A conceptual framework for the study has also been provided.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodology of this study, including the research approach taken, the researcher’s background and assumptions, research design, details of the site and sample to be selected, data collection and a plan for data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the research and the ethical issues.

In Chapter 4, I report on research findings including the profiles of participants as well as textural description of each participant. This will help the reader gain a better understanding of the participants who informed this study.

In Chapter 5, I present an analysis of the themes emerging from the study, including a comparative analysis of the themes.

In Chapter 6, I provide a discussion of major research findings supported by the relevant literature reviewed for this study.

In Chapter 7, I finally provide a summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the past decades, a great deal of research has been conducted on school leadership and the multiple roles and responsibilities that principals play in leading their schools toward success (Leithwood & Duke., 1999; Oplatka, 2004; Sergiovanni, 1995). Yet, school leaders working in conflict-affected countries have, so far, received little attention from researchers despite the great challenges that such leaders are facing on an almost daily basis (Maxcy et al., 2010; Milligan, 2010). As Mazawi (2008) argued, this might be due to the special attention given to “best practices” in educational leadership, professional standards for teachers as well as to the comparative studies of student learning across countries in stable environments. He further indicated that the heavy emphasis on such areas leaves little space for studies that explore the roles and responsibilities of educators in conflict-affected societies. Such roles and responsibilities might be “perceived as structurally transitory circumstances, devoid of specific and long term value for our standing of educators’ work” (Mazawi, 2008, p. 72).

However, this perception might not be justifiable, as protracted conflicts and social unrest have become the norm rather than the exception in many parts of the world, as is the case in Somalia. Through this phenomenological study, I attempt to describe and understand the roles and lived experiences of Somali primary school principals in Mogadishu, as well as the challenges they face as they navigate through an external volatile environment. It is important here to note that Somalia represents an extreme case of state failure and taking a principal’s position in that context is extremely challenging.

To situate the current research within the literature and provide a context, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first section aims to provide a contextualizing review of the literature relating to education in conflict and emergency situations, because understanding such context is central to conceptualizing the roles undertaken by principals. It will briefly discuss the impact of armed conflict on education systems; and the provision of education under conditions of armed conflict. The second section reviews research studies dealing with school leadership with particular reference to the roles of the principal in developing countries, given the paucity of studies dealing with such roles in armed conflict situations. This section will briefly discuss the concepts of leadership and management and will then elaborate on perspectives relating to the roles of the principal in school leadership in developing countries. The third section briefly discusses the role of the principal as a boundary spanner in both stable and unstable environments with particular reference to the concepts of buffering and bridging. The fourth section presents the conceptual framework for this study, which concludes this chapter.

Education in Conflict and Emergency Situations

There is a growing body of literature on education during and after conflicts and emergencies. Provision of education in such situations is no longer seen as less important than shelter, food, health care, and other vital services but rather as an essential element of responses to conflict situations and emergencies that is considered to be critical to the maintenance of communities, the psychological welfare of children, and recovery in such situations (Davies & Talbot, 2008; Sinclair, 2002; Smith & Vaux, 2003; Sommers, 2002).

As Sinclair (2002) noted, the term ‘education in conflict and emergencies’ can be misleading, because it evokes images of tent schools, copybook distributions and other interim measures that keep schooling going during crises. However, the term can be used in a

wide variety of situations that exceed individuals' and communities' coping capacities, including natural disasters, civil war, protracted conflicts, and a reconstruction phase.

Definitions of what represents an emergency in the Education in Emergencies field, as noted above, are not only diverse but are also evolving. However, most researchers in this field have been focusing and continue to focus heavily on contexts of war, conflict, and social upheaval, which are often characterized by limited or absence of a functioning government, weak civil society, disrupted community structures, and international humanitarian assistance from international community (Bush & Saltarelli , 2000; Colletta & Collen, 2000; Pigozzi, 1999; Sinclair, 2002; Smith & Vaux, 2003).

In this study, the term 'Education in Conflict and Emergency Situations' will be used to refer to a context in which people are affected by protracted conflicts. Since much of this emerging body of literature comes from reports and studies carried out by United Nations agencies, as well as by international development agencies working in humanitarian crises, the reviewed studies are mainly drawn from such literature. Given the paucity of studies published in peer-reviewed journals available for this new and emerging area, the UN reports were prioritized. These reports were selected based on the level of evidence available.

In late 2011, armed conflicts affected twenty-one countries within their territory, and all of these conflicts are characterized by societal warfare, with most of them being in Africa and Asia (Marshall & Cole, 2011). These authors underscored the intra-state dimension of current conflicts, with most of those having started since the 1990s. Intra-state conflicts are characterized by high mortality rates, social, political and economic breakdown, displacement of population, the emergence of the civilian as the primary target, rape and the involvement of children as soldiers. The terms "complex humanitarian emergency" and "complex political emergency" have become associated with these conflicts in an attempt to

describe something of their character. A complex emergency, as defined by the United Nations, is “... a major humanitarian crisis of multi-causal nature” (Adams & Bradbury, 1995, p. 9). While the original causes of armed conflicts may not be the same, their impact on education systems is devastating. The following section discusses available evidence on the impact of armed conflict on education.

Impact of Armed Conflicts on Education

Situations of armed conflict are often seen as one of the most important factors in the deterioration of education (UNESCO, 2011). A series of United Nations’ reports indicated a variety of ways that armed conflict negatively affects education opportunities, actors and institutions. These include, among other things, destruction of educational infrastructures, targeting of teachers and students, displacement of students and their families, and recruitment of child soldiers (O’Malley, 2007, 2010). In a recent study, *Education under Attack*, commissioned by UNESCO, O’Malley (2010) reported a dramatic increase in attacks on education systems in the last three years, including the burning of school buildings, occupation of school buildings by security forces, and the killing of teachers and students. The author highlighted that the targeting of schools and school community members has become an effective tactic in conflict, as schools are more visible institutions in civil society.

Several reports suggested that some of these attacks are motivated by ideological opposition to education generally, or specifically to education enterprises undertaken by foreign forces (Coursen-Neff & Sheppard, 2011; Glad, 2009; O’Malley, 2007). In Nepal, for example, the rebel Maoists destroyed 79 schools, 13 district education offices and one university during the period from 2002 to 2006 (O’Malley, 2007). Maoist insurgents targeted education institutions and private schools as part of their campaign against the Nepali state.

Several international NGOs working in Afghanistan noted that the involvement of foreign forces in the construction of schools could provoke retaliation by Taliban forces against these schools. These international NGOs reported that schools built by foreign forces are more likely to be targeted by Taliban forces than schools built by NGOs (Glad, 2009). Likewise, in the southern regions of Thailand, schools have been targeted because they are viewed as imposing an alien language of instruction, religion and history as part of a policy to assimilate Muslims in a previously autonomous area (Maxcy et al., 2010).

Whatever the motivation behind these attacks on schools, teachers, and students, research studies are clear about their serious consequences in terms of school attendance, enrolment and educational attainment. In a paper commissioned by UNESCO for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011, Justino (2010) described how attacks on schools may spread fear among parents, which plays an important role in explaining the removal of children from schools. As a result, the enrolment of children declines dramatically and the loss of even a fragmentary education means that all that awaits children is a life of violence (Justino, 2010).

Apart from safety reasons, research has attributed the lower enrolment in the conflict-affected countries to an increasing inability of many families to meet the cost of schooling (Addison, 2003). Armed conflicts reduce resources available to many families, which, in turn, induce households to withdraw their children from school. Addison explained that investment by families in education drops as its expected long-term return declines because of labour market contractions.

Not only are children in conflict-affected countries less likely to enrol in primary school, they also are more likely to drop out. For example, Akresh and de Walque (2008) demonstrated the strong negative impact of Rwanda's genocide on children's schooling. The genocide was extremely violent and disrupted the school year throughout the entire country.

The authors found that school age children exposed to the genocide experienced a drop in educational achievement of almost half a year of completed schooling, and are 15% less likely to complete 3rd or 4th grade. Similar findings were found in Somalia by Moyi (2012). The literature reviewed above shows a clear negative impact of conflict on education in terms of reduction in enrolment and attainment.

Provision of Education in Conflict Situations

Communities experiencing armed conflicts, like any other community, value education both for its intrinsic human worth and for possibilities for societal improvement, which may contribute towards an end to the conflict. Martone (2007) suggested that the provision of education often becomes a priority and a focus of community engagement. This is ironic, since schools are often targets of violence. The author indicated that communities affected by armed conflict all over the world find ways to maintain schooling in some form when neither government nor the international community are able or willing to assist them. This can be seen in countries and territories as diverse as Somalia and Southern Sudan in Africa, Afghanistan in Asia, and Kosovo in Europe. Communities organize themselves, hire teachers and administrators, select curriculum and do the business of educating their children even during the height of insecurity and government oppression or collapse (Abdinoor, 2007; Smith & Vaux, 2003).

This is particularly true in situations of protracted conflicts, where the decision to delay educational provision until a return to some semblance of normality often means dismissing the educational opportunities of an entire generation of young people (Milligan, 2010). On the other hand, the community's interest in maintaining some kind of schooling during armed conflicts is vital because if education is disrupted for prolonged periods of time, it becomes likely that children will themselves perpetuate the cycle of violence (Abdi,

1998; McKee, 2000). Drawing on an example from Somalia, Abdi (1998) pointed out that many young people who missed out on education are likely to join armed militia and use their weapons as a means to earn a living. Since these young people were not prepared in schools for responsible future roles, they are more hostile to any peace and reconciliation efforts, and prefer to see the current political situation maintained because, as the author stated, “this is what these children know, anything different may seem alien and dangerously unpredictable” (Abdi, 1998, p. 337).

The benefits of education during armed conflict were well documented in the literature on education in conflict and emergencies. Several authors argued that schools can be a refuge and offer a degree of normalcy in an otherwise chaotic world; they can help protect children from harm, exploitation and violence, and from abuses related to forced displacement (Buckland, 2005; Machel, 1996; Sinclair, 2002; Smith & Vaux, 2003). These researchers pointed out that schools can restore a sense of organization and can transmit survival messages and life skills, which can contribute to the social and economic development of the displaced community.

However, maintaining even the most basic forms of schooling in contexts characterized by the limited or the absence of a functioning government requires great sacrifices on the part of local communities, as well as external support from UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As Obura (2008) emphasized, NGOs working in such contexts can make significant contributions to education by working with local communities and building bottom-up change as a part of the community’s development.

Although NGOs’ support is essential, the nature of their involvement may have an enabling effect or unintended consequence. For instance, it might contribute to a sustainable community provision of education, or it may perpetuate dependence on NGO capacity and

resources (Brannelly & Sullivan-Owomoyela, 2009). In fact, the latter is what happened after the withdrawal of the United Nations agencies and international NGOs from Somalia in 1995. Many schools that re-opened in 1993 with the support of international NGOs were closed again after these organizations had left the country, because the survival of these schools was totally dependent on these organizations.

The literature on education in conflict and emergencies has recently recognized the importance of developing the capacity of stakeholders by encouraging community participation in the sustainability of education services as a way to improve their sense of ownership (Brannelly & Sullivan-Owomoyela, 2009; Ulleberg, 2009). In a recent study commissioned by UNESCO, Brannelly & Sullivan-Owomoyela (2009) examined the forms that community participation can take in conflict-affected areas. The authors described various channels through which communities may be involved in the learning environment. They cited four ways that the community can make contributions: (a) school governance in the form of community education committees, (b) school contributions in the form of financial or of in-kind support, (c) raising awareness in local communities about the importance of education, and (d) community involvement in school protection .

Recent research has emphasized the importance of community involvement in school protection, as educational projects that are created remain vulnerable to further conflict and attacks by opposing conflicting forces (Coursen-Neff & Sheppard, 2011; Glad, 2009; O'Malley, 2010). In a study conducted by CARE on behalf of the World Bank and the Afghan Ministry of Education, local communities were asked, among other things, about the prevention and protection mechanisms currently in place in order to better protect their schools (Glad, 2009). Respondents identified three factors that could mitigate attacks on

schools: (a) the existence of education councils or security shuras, (b) hiring of security guards, and (c) employing staff from the local community to teach and run the school.

Although the study stated that no association could be presently confirmed or denied between the rate of prevention and the existence of these factors, almost all respondents attributed the absence of attacks on their schools to the presence of these factors. The study also raised an important issue related to school guards, which is the use of arms. Respondents had mixed opinions about the engagement of weapons. Some expressed the need for arming local communities and their security guards to effectively protect their schools. However, some critics feared that any decision to arm communities and their security guards may have serious consequences, as it might increase insecurity and social divisions within the communities and sow the seeds for future conflict. While the study cautioned against the engagement of weapons, it emphasized the importance of collaboration between community elders and school leaders.

School Leadership

Leadership defined

Any discussion of the roles of school principals needs first to be framed within the context of the much larger concept of school leadership. The term leadership is understood and defined differently by scholars coming from different backgrounds, contexts, cultures and experiences (Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Mullins, 2005). As a result, there are multitudes of definitions of the term including individual traits, behaviours, influence over people, interaction patterns, role relationships, occupation of administrative positions, and perceptions by others regarding the legitimacy of influence. Northouse (2013) suggested that several different elements can be identified as central to the phenomenon of leadership in all contexts and cultures: (a) leadership is a process, (b) it involves influence, (c) it occurs

within a group context, and (d) it involves goal attainment. Summarizing his review of several dozen definitions, Northouse (2013) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p.5).

From an organizational perspective, Yukl (2010) provided a comprehensive analysis of the concept of leadership by focusing on attributes of leadership, the sources of a leader’s power, and on the tasks of the leader. He groups all concepts of leadership into five approaches: (a) the trait approach, (b) the behaviour approach, (c) the power-influence approach, (d) the situational approach, and (e) the integrative approach (Yukl, 2010, p. 13). The author proposed an integrated approach to leadership, which brings together theories of power and influence, a range of leader behaviours and traits, and which is clearly influenced by the situation. The author acknowledged in this discussion, however, that relating to this final point, particular types of leadership appear to be most appropriate for organizations at different times and in different contexts.

Within the field of education, Leithwood and Duke (1999) also brought together different models of school leadership. In their review of the articles on educational leadership since the 1980s, they identified current educational philosophies, theories and contemporary thinking and concluded that there are six distinct concepts or models of school leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, managerial leadership, contingent leadership, participative leadership, and moral leadership. The authors pointed out that each of these concepts of school leadership reflects a different emphasis that should be viewed in terms of the connection among leaders, schools, and the community.

The Wallace Foundation’s (2013) report offered one of the most recent conceptualizations of the leadership roles that school principals assume and attempted to integrate the various lenses that have been historically discussed separately within the

literature. These roles, which are aligned with the many perspectives through which school leadership has been studied, include shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction to enable teachers teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation Report, 2013, p. 6).

Shaping a vision of academic success is discussed in the literature that views the principal as an instructional supervisor, while creating a climate hospitable to education is discussed in the literature that views the principal as a manager. Cultivating leadership in others is also aligned with the principal as a transformational leader and human capital manager whereas improving instruction corresponds with the principal as an instructional supervisor. Furthermore, managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement is discussed in the literature that views the principal as a human resource manager. What all these approaches have in common is their aim to identify key factors involved in leadership and to see how these factors relate to one another in providing effective leadership. The premise is that, if we can understand leadership better, we can provide better leadership.

Management and Leadership

While such description and distinction of different concepts and models of school leadership is clearly important in studying the role of school leadership, it is equally important to distinguish conceptually between leadership and management, as much recent literature reflects the important distinction between these two terms. Leadership and management are two closely related systems concepts (Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1990; Yukl, 2010). On the one hand, leadership tends to emphasize doing the right things and relates to

vision, mission, innovation, and aspiration. On the other hand, management emphasizes doing things right and involves systematically maintaining order and stability through processes, structures and examples, which include carrying out plans and organizing.

Leithwood and Levin (2005) reinforced this by suggesting that the difference between management and leadership lies in the effect produced by different behaviours. They stated that, “If behaviour produces order and consistency then it must be management; if it produces change in a valued direction it must be leadership” (Leithwood & Levin, 2005, p. 6). The authors added that productive change through leadership must have two essential functions: direction setting and influence. The former is concerned with helping members of the organization establish an agreed upon direction or set of purposes that are considered valuable for the organization; while the latter emphasizes encouraging organizational members to act in ways that seem helpful in moving toward the agreed upon direction.

Although each management and leadership situation has its own functions, characteristics and activities, some scholars saw these two terms as complementary and emphasized that they cannot be practiced separately (Fullan, 2001; Kotter, 1990; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Yukl, 2010). For example, Yukl (2010) argued that organizations could not make progress without leadership because management relates to consistency and stability and, without management, leadership alone could not provide the system with the structure needed to carry out the vision. Thus, these two concepts are essential for school leadership.

The above-mentioned literature on school management and leadership originated in educational institutions in Western nations. However, the organizational structure of educational systems varies considerably across countries, particularly between developed and developing countries (Dimmock & Walker, 1998; Oplatka, 2004). Since these two

contexts are different from each other, it cannot be assumed that models of school leadership that apply in developed nations necessarily apply in developing countries.

While much of the existing body of knowledge on the role of principal leadership comes primarily from education systems and school environments in Western countries, little research exists on school leadership in developing countries (DeJaeghere et al., 2009; Dimmock & Walker, 2000; Oduro & MacBeath, 2003; Oduro et al., 2007; Oplatka, 2004; Simkin et al., 2003). Due to the paucity of literature on principal leadership in conflict and emergency situations as acknowledged by Milligan (2010), which may inform and guide the current study, the review of the literature mainly relies on research studies undertaken in the context of developing countries with particular reference to Sub-Saharan Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa was chosen for its geographical and cultural affinity to Somalia.

The Role of the Principal in Developing Countries

A number of approaches can be used to study the role of the school principal in developing countries. One of these approaches is to categorize the main areas of the principal's work (Simkins et al., 1998). In a study carried out in four African countries (Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia), Bregman (2008) suggested that the responsibilities of secondary school principals cover three aspects of the school system: academic management, financial management, and school administration. Academic management comprises managing the teaching and learning process. Financial management covers all types of funds coming from different sources. Administration covers the task of reporting to different authorities and stakeholders.

Another study identified five major task areas: management of staff, external relations, managing boarding, pupil control and discipline, and any other responsibilities, which may include curriculum matters (Harber & Dadey, 1993). It is worth noting that such

categorizations take into consideration the context being studied. Harber and Dadey's categories, for example, reflect the fact that many African secondary schools are boarding schools, and management of pupil discipline is often a difficult task because of the age of the pupils and the political pressures placed on schools (Simkins et al., 1998).

Chapman and Burchfield (1994) further organized the work of the principal in developing countries into four primary domains; management, instructional supervision, school community relationships, and school-ministry communications. Although the relative emphasis given to these functions may vary from country to country and from school to school, research studies have supported the importance of the principal's role, relative to efficient teaching and student learning in each of these areas. Each of these core responsibilities, of course, is comprised of numerous tasks that fill in the details of the principal's role.

Since little research exists on the way primary school principals operate in developing countries, this study adopted Chapman and Burchfield's (1994) approach, which is seen as a general approach applicable to both primary and secondary school principals in developing countries. This approach has been frequently mentioned in the literature, without being limited to secondary school principals, though it was originally developed to explore how junior secondary school headteachers perceive their roles. On the other hand, it is important to note here that no phenomenological studies were found in the literature examining principals' roles in such countries. As such, most studies reviewed for this study were quantitative. While few were qualitative, they were more likely to be case studies as opposed to be phenomenological in their approach. Since phenomenological research has not yet been used to explore principals' roles in developing countries, this study will make another contribution to research in such countries. The following section addresses

principals' roles in developing countries while trying to identify possible tasks or functions most relevant to school principals within the Somali setting.

The Principal as Manager. A review of the literature has shown that, in most developing countries, the principal's role is central to school management (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; Oduro & MacBeath, 2003; Simkins et al., 2003). Management, here, refers to the day-to-day administration and organization of teaching and learning at the school. The principal's workday often involves activities related to organizational maintenance. As the organizational manager of the school, the principal is responsible for implementing educational policies, determining staffing needs, ordering instructional materials and textbooks, managing school finances, maintaining school records and attending to discipline issues (Chapman, 2008; DeJaeghere et al., 2009). While each of these factors is considered essential for creating an environment conducive to learning, the extent to which school principals influence these areas reflects the relative success of the school.

School principals are expected to be skilled in managing these innumerable tasks and responsibilities in order to accomplish the school's goals (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; Fullan, 2001). As the organizational manager of the school, the principal needs to develop the ability to manage recurring functions of the school through management systems that provide for the effective and efficient running of the school. However, principals in many developing countries are appointed on the basis of seniority and teaching experience, along with the implicit assumption "that a successful classroom teacher necessarily makes an effective school administrator" (Bush & Oduro, 2006, p. 362). Although principals more or less depend on on-the-job experience, enhanced by infrequent in-service programs and seminars, they often lack a sound understanding of management concepts. For example, in

managing fiscal resources, the principal needs to ensure that the school accounts and records are properly kept and make best use of funds for the benefit of students.

However, research findings have also shown that the environment in which school principals have to carry out their duties and the availability of support and facilities contribute to the success or failure of their management responsibilities. In developing countries, particularly in Africa, schools operate in difficult resource contexts. This exerts a significant impact on the way principals manage their schools (Otunga et al., 2008). For example, Kitavi and van der Westhuizen (1997) examined the problems facing new principals in developing countries and found that the education systems' failure to provide adequate physical facilities, combined with poverty among parents, created managerial problems for both new and veteran principals. The researchers reported that school principals were faced with problems such as shortages of classrooms, inadequate water supply, lack of telephones, and pupils who cannot afford to pay fees on time or buy books. The conditions described in Kitavi and van der Westhuizen's (1997) study are likely to get worse in conflict situations where many countries have been adversely affected by civil wars and schools are struggling to survive (Otunga et al., 2008).

Several researchers (e.g. Bregman, 2008; Chapman, 2002; De Grauwe, 2005) suggested that the level of managerial responsibility principals have to assume is compounded in many developing countries as a result of the movement toward decentralization in school systems. Although principals are being given some fiscal responsibility and decision-making power, there is little support provided to school principals. These researchers have noted that, although the degree to which the principal manages school funds may vary from country to country and from school to school, these

reforms have, in several cases, increased the administrative and managerial workload shouldered by principals.

Concerning decision-making power, Tekleselassie (2002), writing in the context of Ethiopia, argued that the type of tasks delegated to principals tends to overload principals instead of empowering them. Principals are encouraged to exercise management functions because of the priority that district offices give to routine administrative functions. As such, principals are tied to a centralized arrangement in a supposedly decentralized system.

The principal's managerial role in developing countries is further compounded by the difficulty of maintaining a safe school environment because of violence and conflict. According to Sedel (2005), many African countries are now in crisis and emergency situations. From 1990 to 2001, 57 major armed conflicts in 45 different locations were counted worldwide. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most severely affected. Somalia is a good example of one of those countries that has been plagued by civil war and protracted conflicts. Consequently, maintaining the safety and security of students and staff has become of great concern to school principals (Makki, 2009; Otunga et al., 2008). There is no doubt that increased administrative and managerial tasks without principals having additional support negatively affects principals' time for instructional improvement.

The Principal as Instructional Supervisor. Instructional supervision is another major area of principals' responsibilities (Blase & Blase, 1999; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Southworth, 2002). Principals in successful schools are described as leaders who establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement, and who concentrate their available resources on attaining such goals. These principals are described as individuals who devote a great deal of time to supervising and evaluating teachers in order to improve teacher quality and student achievement.

Scholars have defined instructional supervision in different ways. For example, Glanz (2006) defined instructional supervision as a “process that engages teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving teaching and learning and promoting student achievement” (p. 55). Sergiovanni and Starratt (2002) similarly viewed instructional supervision as “helping increase the opportunity and capacity of teachers and schools to contribute more effectively towards students’ academic success” (p. 6). One element that remains constant in various definitions of instructional supervision is the idea that it is an “enabling activity.” The supervisor’s intention is to enable teachers to do a better job in helping students learn.

Many scholars have viewed evaluation as a part of the supervisory process. Glanz and Neville (1997) asserted that it is virtually impossible to separate the concept of evaluation from supervision. Drake and Roe (1999) concurred, insisting it is impossible to separate supervision from evaluation if the supervisor’s role is to achieve school goals through teaching, providing support and resources, and fostering cooperative problem solving. Such literature review reveals that not only should the principal supervise teachers but he/she must also evaluate them regularly. Through regular evaluation, the principal is able to know the strengths and weaknesses of his teachers. For example, Glanz and Neville (1997) argued that any attempt to improve instruction must also invite evaluation as a process of assessing where improvements need to be made.

In many developing countries, however, instructional supervision has traditionally been the duty of the inspectors, a branch of the ministry of education (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; De Grauwe, 2005, 2007). School principals were not expected to supervise their teachers to improve their teaching methods. Thus, they may lack the mandate or the skills that would support their operation in this role (DeJaeghere et al., 2009; Moswela ,

2010). This can clearly be seen in studies conducted in a number of developing countries. For example, in a qualitative study of teachers and principals on their views about the importance of instructional supervision and how it can be improved in secondary schools in Botswana, Moswela (2010) found that instructional supervision did not appear to be considered as one of the major priorities of principals. The author attributed this to the fact that principals were not mandated to conduct instructional supervision, though they were responsible for overseeing curriculum implementation. In another study by DeJaeghere et al. (2009), examining training needs of principals in Uganda, principals were less confident in their knowledge about reviewing teachers' work, assessing overall teacher performance, and identifying teacher training needs.

However, considering the numerous benefits that several studies have attributed to the principal's role in teacher supervision and taking into account the poor transportation in many developing countries coupled with limited budgets for inspectors, it would seem plausible to empower and train principals to perform this duty (Bregman, 2008; Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; De Grauwe et al., 2005). In fact, specific studies within developing countries are beginning to shed light on this role. In Kenya, for example, Musungu and Nasongo (2008) reported that principals take on the role of instructional supervision, and this role includes regular checking of teachers' professional records and regular class visitation. They observed that the principal's frequency of teacher supervision contributed towards better performance of their schools.

Similarly, in a synthesis report (Heneveld, 2007; Heneveld et al., 2006) summarizing the findings and conclusions of four sub-national studies on the quality of primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tanzania, Uganda, Mozambique, and Madagascar), primary schools were reported to have obtained better results when the principal acts as a role model and

supervises the teaching and learning processes (Heneveld et al., 2006). The report underscored that schools with better student results tend to have principals who pay more attention to teachers' preparation for teaching than principals in schools with lower results.

Research has indicated that effective principals are not only concerned with instructional supervision but also demonstrate their commitment to teachers' welfare (Blase & Blase, 1999; Harris, 2002; Kamper, 2008; Southworth, 2002). For example, effective principals demonstrate a high concern for teachers by supporting staff development and discussing work with teachers as well as increasing their morale by encouraging and acknowledging their good work. Blase and Blase (1999) asserted that a major responsibility of the principal is to make available to teachers opportunities for personal and professional growth, either by organizing in-service staff development activities or by allowing teachers to attend such programs. It is the duty of the principal to ensure that adequate resources are available for teachers to deliver instruction in the most effective manner possible. The success of a school depends largely on the principal's performance in this area.

Research has shown that successful principals promote collegial and collaborative forms of supervision based on the principles of equality and growth but not hierarchy and compliance (Blase & Blase, 2003). For example, Glickman et al. (2007) described good supervision as a collaborative effort performed in a supportive environment that results in a school wide action plan. Although these researchers used words like "collaborative" and "collegial" to describe the nature of the relationship between principal and teacher in the supervision practice, they acknowledged that a directive and control-oriented supervisory approach may become necessary if teachers are functioning at low levels of personal and professional development (Glickman, 2002). This is especially true in developing countries where many untrained young people are employed as teachers in schools (Kunje & Stuart,

1999; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). This group can benefit from a formal, explicit support structure controlled by the principal.

Although principals have responsibility for instructional matters, this is only one of their many tasks. They are aware that the success of their school depends on everyone in the community. Thus, seeking support from all stakeholders is vital. We now turn to one of the important roles school principals' play in developing countries.

The Principal as Builder of School-Community Relationships. The importance of school, family, and community relations to student success has been recognized in both western and non-western societies (Epstein, 2001; Swift-Morgan, 2006; Watt, 2001). Involving the community in the life of the school can be an effective tool in building effective learning. Early studies (e.g., Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990) asserted that creating a successful school requires a positive school and community relationship, including parents who support the school and are involved in their children's education. However, these scholars acknowledged that establishing such a relationship is a complex task, but success in accomplishing this task is critical to the success of the school. The principal's role is then to ensure that collaborative relationships are established between the school community and the community in which the school finds itself.

The literature review has indicated that the principal's philosophy and communication are important factors in building successful collaboration with the community. School principals who have a community-oriented philosophy are more likely to have positive school-community relations (Charlton, 1983). A community-oriented philosophy relates to being visible and accessible to all community groups who have an interest in the success of the school. Parents, as essential members of the school community, are the target audience for a principal who holds a community-oriented philosophy. With

respect to communication, Sanders and Harvey (2002) identified the principal's willingness to engage in a two-way communication with community partners about their level of involvement as one of the important factors for successful school community collaboration.

In many developing countries, the most common types of interest groups or communities that are associated with schools include community education committees (CECs), parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and faith-based organizations, as well as other NGOs that have an interest in education. Communication with these stakeholders can be enhanced through many channels, including telephone communications, formal and informal visits and parent conferences (Swift-Morgan, 2006; Watt, 2001).

Parent conferences particularly serve an important function in developing positive home and school relations (Hughes & Ubben, 1989). Not only can parents be informed of the programs and their children's progress in their education, but they can also have a voice in planning directions in order to meet their children's educational needs. Unfortunately, in poorer communities which make up the majority of population in many developing countries, parents' average educational level is low; consequently they may be reluctant to enter the school, and may lack the confidence or knowledge to take an active part in their children's education. It is the principal's role to encourage these parents and correct their misconceptions regarding the parents' role in their children's education (Watt, 2001).

Studies have shown that bringing the school and the home closer together can generate many benefits. It has been reported that positive home and school relations lead to increased access and educational quality (Academy for Educational Development, 2002; Watt, 2001). For example, Swift-Morgan (2006) examined the form and scope of community involvement in schooling in southern Ethiopia. She investigated what constitutes community participation in schooling, and the impact of various types of participation on educational

quality and access. She suggested that community participation contributed to access and quality of education despite the economic hardships faced by parents. Another study by Sheldon (2003) demonstrated that school and community collaboration leads to improved student achievement. Other studies also indicate that improved school discipline and higher attendance rates are some of the positive outcomes of school and community collaboration (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Collaboration between the school and the community also has benefits that go beyond academics. Some researchers have described school-community collaboration as a way to enhance school resources (Bray, 2003; Pryor, 2005; Swift-Morgan, 2006). Benefits can accrue in the form of material or human resources such as monetary or labour contributions. This is particularly important in Sub-Saharan Africa where the ability of most governments to secure human and technical resources has diminished in the last three decades, as schools have striven to make ends meet (De Grauwe et al., 2005; Sifuna, 2007).

In many Sub-Saharan countries, teachers' salaries are usually a month or two late and, even when salaries arrive on time, they are quite low (Swift-Morgan, 2006). In such cases, communities may assist in supplementing teachers' salaries through cash or food contributions. As a result, school principals have a big role to play in generating revenues through new and creative sources. They can be proactive in communicating the needs of the school to the larger community as part of ongoing efforts to gain community involvement and support. As Ziegler (2001) asserted, principals should assume leadership roles in the business community and become involved in the efforts of local community organizations to make contacts, discover opportunities for resources, and cultivate individuals for potential partnerships. To this end, fundraising or resource mobilizing has become an important component of the principal's role in many developing countries (Oplatka, 2004).

Several studies have found principals taking an active role in mobilizing local communities in rehabilitating a fallen school or helping improve a rising school by expanding its facilities or other improvement (Levin & Lockheed, 1993). For example, Tsang and Wheeler's (1993) study in Thailand reported that primary school principals achieved many school improvements by stimulating community financing of education through the collection of contributions. Similarly, Makki (2009) found that secondary school principals in Somalia play a critical role in encouraging parents and other community members, during social gatherings held in the school, to make contributions for the improvement of the school buildings and facilities. Overall, school principals can enlist school community support to help in a wide variety of school projects and activities. In addition to establishing collaborative relations with their communities to meet schools' financial needs, principals also need to collaborate with local communities to help protect their schools against environmental turbulence caused by civil wars and conflicts.

The Principal as Boundary Spanner

While the above-mentioned approach for studying principals' roles in developing countries applies to principals working in relatively stable environments, the presence of an extremely unstable environment in conflict-affected countries, as is the case in Somalia, requires efforts that go beyond managing a normal environment. As a result, principals need to develop adaptive strategies for coping with the environment. To this end, school principals take on the role of "boundary spanners." Hence, the following section discusses that role.

In order to understand the principal's role as a boundary spanner, it is appropriate to look briefly at the importance of boundary spanning to organizations. The concept is derived from the open systems model of organization, which posits that organizations are inextricably linked to environmental elements and depend on them for acquiring resources

(Aldrich & Hecker, 1977; Miller, 2008; Scott, 2003). This perspective maintains that, in order to flourish, effective organizations often need to adjust to their environments and consequently develop their capacity to negotiate with external actors in the environment who are typically outside of the sphere of influence of organizational members (Aldrich & Hecker, 1977). To this end, organizations must scan the relevant environment for opportunities and threats, and develop strategic responses by adjusting organizational structure. As Scott (2003) pointed out, organizations strive to manage their environments by responding to those elements most critical for their survival.

The literature on organizational boundaries has revealed that organizations create certain mechanisms to facilitate this critical relationship between the organization and its environment (Scott, 2003). These mechanisms include boundary spanning, which refers to the process of linking an organization with its environment and coordinating that boundary. The individual who holds the boundary spanning position is responsible for linking his organization to the organizational environment through interaction between members of his organization and external actors. Marrone et al. (2007) concurred that this interaction between the organization and its external actors aims to establish a relationship that would facilitate the achievement of overall organizational goals. Miller (2008) further explained the boundary spanner's role by not only highlighting the spanner's role in facilitating the information exchange between organizations but also in representing organizations in the external environment.

Scott (2003) identified two general approaches that boundary spanners adopt in managing relationships between organizations and their dynamic external environment: buffering and bridging. Buffering refers to activities that "buffer" the organization from the environmental influences while bridging refers to activities that "bridge" the organization

with that environment. In buffering the organization from the environmental influences, the boundary spanner tries to isolate the technical cores of his organization from external influences so as to reduce external uncertainty and achieve relative stability for the internal functioning of the organization (Scott, 1998). In bridging the organization with the environment, the boundary spanner promotes external connections that include cooperation (Scott, 2003).

In school organizations, the principal typically holds the boundary-spanning role as a chief executive officer of the school (Goldring, 1993). In this capacity, the principal deals continuously with parents and other community members because of the interconnections that usually exist between schools and their environments and also because of the permeability of the school's boundaries (Goldring & Sullivan, 1996). Research has also described principals as "boundary spanners," who can engage people from different organizations to solve school problems. Principals are expected to work with other community stakeholders to communicate, negotiate, and coordinate strategies to address school needs (Bradshaw, 1999).

The literature review has shown that the principal's boundary spanning tasks, when interacting with parents and other community members, are very complex. As Goldring & Sullivan (1996) pointed out, school principals need to balance the traditional approach of buffering the school from negative external forces with bridging strategies aiming at creating more open boundaries between the school and its environment. To achieve this goal, principals need to take into consideration the demands and pressures parents can put on the school, as well as the internal functioning of the school. By accomplishing this, the principals may be more successful in building bridges with stakeholders while buffering the school's instructional activities from disruption.

Much has been written about bridging strategies that school principals employ to increase the interdependence of the school with elements in its environment. These include involving parents in the organization of workshops, providing tutoring, assisting teachers in classrooms or with after school activities, as well as forging alliances and garnering the resources and support of other groups who have goals congruent with the school's mission and goals (Bradshaw, 1999; Epstein, 2001; DiPaola & Tschannen-Morgan, 2005). However, little research exists on the use of buffering strategies in schools. Nevertheless, researchers have observed that buffering strategies are most appropriate when external environment tends to disrupt the function of the school and poses a great deal of uncertainty.

As Scott (2003) pointed out, uncertainty can undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of any organizations' core responsibilities. In the school context, environmental uncertainty and unpredictability can result from several conditions, including parental interference, heterogeneity, and instability (Ogawa, 1996). Ogawa, in his review of the literature, indicated that uncertainty can be created by parents who judge teachers' professional competency as well as their professional discretion. The author cited studies that suggest parents, especially well educated, middleclass ones, tend to question certain aspects of the school's practices and programs. This behaviour on the part of parents may sometimes be interpreted by teachers and principals as interference with their professional domains.

With regard to uncertainty as a result of heterogeneity, Ogawa drew attention to the linguistic diversity of families served by many schools, which may present schools with issues of uncertainty. The author eventually cited other studies that document the high mobility rates of families served by many schools. Faced with increasing uncertainty, principals are expected to buffer the central tasks of teaching and learning from disruptions.

Researchers have further observed some common strategies used by principals in order to protect the teaching and learning process from environmental influences (DiPaola & Tschannen-Morgan, 2005; Ogawa, 1996). For example, DiPaola and Tschannen-Morgan (2005) argued that formal procedures created by school principal to respond to outside requests might be seen as an effort to buffer the school. To protect their teachers from unwarranted demands, principals often ask parents and community members to make their initial contact with them rather than with teachers. They might introduce specific measures such as locking school doors, instituting sign-in procedures, and mediating conflicts between teachers and parents. Similarly, Jacobson et al. (2007) stressed the importance of the boundary spanning and buffering aspects of the principal's external role in the urban context. They noted that effective principals ensure the safety of everyone in the school environment.

While the literature reviewed so far deals with the boundary-spanning role of school principals in stable environments, some evidence has also emerged from conflict regions. In a study conducted in Southern Thailand, where school principals face extraordinary challenges as a result of ongoing conflict between government forces and insurgents, Maxcy et al. (2010) examined the buffering and bridging strategies used by school principals to maintain the functioning of their schools, as well as to ensure the safety of their school members. They found principals using a number of bridging and buffering strategies as improvisational efforts to re-organize schools in their respective communities.

As the school communities are divided ethnically and religiously, these school principals were found to have employed a multi-cultural approach to education as a bridging strategy. This bridging strategy can be construed as “an effort by the principals to buffer the school through a combination of acquiescence and compromise with external groups” (Maxcy et al., 2010, p. 174). Maxcy and his colleagues found that principals who were more

successful in adapting their operations through effective use of bridging and buffering strategies increased the probability of their schools being chosen for student recruitment within an increasingly harsh operating environment characterized by severe competition among schools, due to the flight of many families from the region. The researchers also suggested that principals enhanced the position of the school in the community as they capitalized on the anxiety stemming from this schism.

A related study in Thailand (Sungton, 2007) using observational and interview techniques supported the above findings. Apart from other leadership challenges, Sungton found that, in several of the most affected areas, principals faced extraordinary challenges in maintaining the safety and security of their schools. In buffering their schools against potential harms, principals were found using a number of buffering strategies. These strategies included (a) avoiding politics due to the erosion of trust as a result of conflict, (b) increasing levels of security alertness, (c) closing school doors and checking identification cards, (d) applying closed circuit video cameras, (e) posting soldiers as safeguards, (f) changing school schedules and dismissing schools earlier, (g) limiting and cancelling extra-curricular activities, (h) suspending schools, and (i) carrying arms for personal protection. According to Sungton, these buffering strategies were influenced by the principals' perceptions of the external environment. When the environment was perceived to be highly volatile, these buffering strategies were employed in an attempt to minimize uncertainty and to adapt the school to the volatile environment.

In bridging between the school and their community members, principals as boundary spanners also attempted to increase their cooperation with external elements in the environment. Principals of public schools in Sungton's (2007) study invited their competitors in private schools to share their school facilities for extracurricular activities.

These principals believed that bringing community members together could promote and foster strong relationships and reduce tensions among different segments of the society that, in turn, could make schools safe places for learning. Like their counterparts in Maxcy et al.'s (2010) study, principals also promoted multi-cultural education in recognition of the school's cultural and religious diversity. While these studies were conducted within a particular context- schools within the southern provinces of Thailand- the results may suggest the utility of buffering and bridging strategies in similar situations of ongoing conflict.

Summary

The literature review covered four major themes, education and conflict, school leadership, principals' roles in developing countries, and principals' role as boundary spanners. As we have seen, education has a particularly complicated relationship with conflict. One aspect of this relationship is the destructive impact of conflict upon education systems. Education is greatly influenced by the politics and social fabrics of a country; consequently schools and school members often become targets of warring sides. As noted above, education quality may be deteriorated due to lack of safety. Factors that prevent children from going to school during conflict include extreme poverty, recruitment as child soldier and fear for safety. From this discussion, it is also apparent that maintaining schooling during armed conflicts goes beyond the financial capacity of local communities and requires partnership with NGOs. While these organizations are critical in the provision of educational services, they may unintentionally hamper the social capital development of local communities by creating some sort of dependency, as happened in Somalia. Therefore, it is critical for such organizations to strike a balance between providing the assistance needed and helping local communities develop their social capital. An issue, which was addressed in this discussion, is the importance of community involvement in school

protection by creating security councils along with collaboration between local communities and school leaders.

The literature review also discussed school leadership in both developed and developing countries. The literature on school leadership in developed countries offers a variety of conceptual models which include among others, the principal as instructional leadership, transformational leadership, managerial leadership, contingent leadership, participative leadership, and moral leadership. What is interesting about the construction of the principal in much of the literature in developed countries is the fact that the position is not wholly conceived as directorial. Instead, it is described as having both management and leadership duties, usually emphasizing the work principals are responsible for, not the power or authority perhaps typically associated with the role. However, little exists on such models explaining the ways in which school leaders operate in developing countries. Yet, three possible approaches for examining principals' roles were located in the literature. This study has chosen Chapman and Burchfield's (1994) approach which portrays the principal in a managerial role, though at times, he is expected to help teachers professionally and foster a positive relationship with parents and the local community.

Since this approach falls short of addressing experiences and challenges faced by school principals leading their schools amid ongoing conflict, the principal as a boundary spanner was further discussed to broaden the principal's role in unstable environments, as well as to help the reader understand the experiences that principals may have had. It was noted that school principals can serve as boundary spanners in both stable and unstable environments. In stable environments, principals use both bridging and buffering strategies. While buffering strategies are used mainly to shield teachers from undue parental influence, bridging strategies are employed to foster parental support, as well as the support of other

stakeholders. In unstable environments, however, principals have more challenges in responding to unpredictable environments, as they have to buffer their schools and school members from potential and real dangers while building bridges between school and community.

Having reviewed the literature, which covered the above-mentioned themes, it became clear that little has been written about school leadership in war-torn environments. There appears to be a need for researching school leadership in such environments. Therefore, this phenomenological study makes an original and significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding of principals' roles and experiences as well as the challenges they face, as they maintain the functioning of their schools amid ongoing conflict.

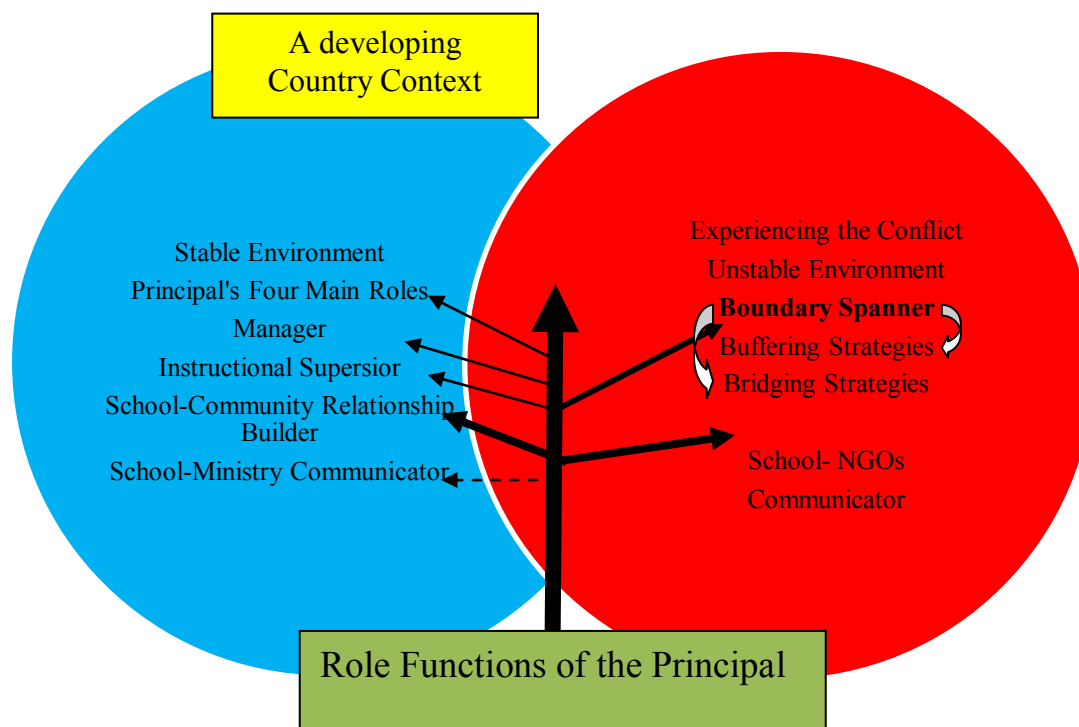
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is informed by the literature cited above and is mainly based on a general framework adapted from the works of Chapman and Burchfield (1994) on the roles of school principals in stable developing countries. It also relies on the concept of buffering and bridging from open systems theory (Ogawa, 1996; Scott, 2003), where the principal acts as a boundary spanner. This concept is used as a complementary lens through which the experiences of school principals in conflict regions are addressed.

As previously noted, Chapman and Burchfield (1994) posited that school principals in developing country contexts have four major roles: school management, instructional supervision, school-community relation, and school-ministry communications. This study will not address the principal's role in school-ministry communications, as it is not pertinent to the present situation in Somalia, given the absence of a functioning ministry of education. Instead, it will address the principal's role in communicating with NGOs/external aid agencies. Accordingly, this study will use (a) principal as a manager, (b) principal as an

instructional supervisor, (c) principal as a builder of community-school relationships, (d) principal as a boundary spanner, and (e) principal as a communicator between school and NGOs/external aid agencies in order to conceptualize the roles of primary school principals in the protracted conflict regions of Somalia.

Figure 1: Visual Representation of the Role Functions of Primary School Principals in Mogadishu, Somalia



This diagram illustrates a way to visualize the role functions of the principal in Somalia after the civil war. As shown in the diagram, the circle on the left represents the situation that existed in schools before the civil war. The circle on the right reflects the new situation created by the ongoing conflict while the intersection represents the role of the principal in relation to the sets of functions depicted by the two circles. The area inside the circle on the left shows the four core areas of principals' responsibilities in developing countries, as developed by Chapman and Burchfield (1994). However, the dotted arrow indicates an absence or weakness in the principal's role as a communicator between school

and the ministry of education because of the absence of a functioning government. The area inside the circle on the right represents the additional roles that principals are expected to shoulder as a result of the extraordinary circumstances in which they work. The increased size of the arrows shows an increase in the role of the principal as a boundary spanner, as well as his role in communicating with the community and NGOs since the collapse of the state. Therefore, principals find themselves in a situation where they have to perform what principals in relatively stable situations are normally expected to do while facing challenging circumstances due to the ongoing conflict.

While acknowledging the multi-dimensionality of the principal's role, the role of the principal in this study is conceived through five perspectives. It is also important to note that these perspectives may intersect and overlap at times. For example, the principal's role as a builder of school-community relationship overlaps with the principal as a boundary spanner using bridging strategies, as both roles aim to garner the resource and support of parents and community members. Bearing this in mind, the first perspective conceptualizes the role of the principal within a managerial perspective (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994). This role involves day-to-day administrative and operational task management, such as determining staffing needs, scheduling classes, ordering textbooks and instructional materials, and maintaining records. It also involves providing a safe and secure learning environment for both student and staff. Managing student behaviour is also inherent in this role. The main focus of this role is on organizational maintenance.

The second perspective used in this study identifies an instructional role (Chapman, 2002; Chapman & Burchfield, 1994). The emphasis in this role is on instructional supervision and in-service training as many unqualified/untrained teachers, especially in primary schools need regular supervision and training (De Grauwe, 2007). This role involves

performing regular observation of teachers and organization of workshops to foster communication between teachers on professional matters (Komba & Nkumbi, 2008).

The third perspective conceptualizes the role of school principals within a home/community and school collaborative perspective (Makki, 2009). The focus in this role is on the development of a collaborative school-community environment. This role specifically emphasizes the development of strong connections with parents and school community. It involves building a bridge between school and community members by increasing parent and community involvement in school.

The fourth perspective conceptualizes the role of the principal as a boundary spanner. While the above-mentioned perspectives apply to principals working in relatively stable environments, the presence of an extremely unstable environment in Mogadishu, Somalia, requires efforts that go beyond managing a normal environment. As such, the principal in his capacity as the chief executive officer of the school may take on the role of the boundary spanner and develop buffering and bridging strategies for coping with the volatile environment (Maxcy et al., 2010; Sungtong, 2007).

The fifth and final perspective conceptualizes the principal's role as a communicator or link between school and NGOs. Since Somalia represents an extreme case of state failure, and there is no functioning ministry of education in south central parts of the country, NGOs play an important role in supporting and providing such services. In these circumstances, the principal is expected to act as a link between the school and these organizations. These five perspectives, of course, provide a general framework for preparing the interview guide for this study, which is perceived within a phenomenological study seeking to describe the perceptions and lived experiences of participants, as well as the challenges they face as they lead their schools amid ongoing conflict.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research methodology used for this study. Within this chapter is a description of the research approach, the researcher's background and assumptions, research design, the site and participant selection, data collection procedure and tools, and the data analysis path. Finally, this chapter discusses the trustworthiness of the research and provides a summary of the chapter.

Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was chosen to gain insight into the perceptions and lived experiences of primary school principals regarding their role in schools as well as the challenges they face in a context of ongoing conflict. Selection of a research approach is an important decision made by the researcher. The objective of this decision is to select the approach that offers the “best fit” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 17) for the study being conducted. So, I have chosen a qualitative research approach because I believe that this approach would produce the most informative data to describe and understand what perceptions and experiences principals have about their school management and leadership.

Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process based on “assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). He indicated that researchers conduct qualitative research to obtain detailed understanding of an issue from the point of view of the participant involved in that issue. Polkinghorne (2005) further characterized qualitative research as an inquiry process aimed at describing the lived experience of the people being researched. A qualitative

research approach was necessary in order to account for and provide deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants.

In choosing a qualitative research approach, the researcher is guided by a set of assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology), which specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined in specific ways (methodology) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 30-32). For example, Crotty (1998), as cited in Creswell (2003), listed several assumptions that qualitative researchers bring to the field of research. These include the notions that (a) meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting, (b) humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives, and (c) the process of qualitative research is largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field (p.9).

Apart from the underlying assumptions of qualitative research, Janesick (2000) offered three guidelines researchers should consider when carrying out qualitative research. The researcher should “look for meaning, the perspectives of the participants in the study, find relationships in the structures and occurrences, and recognize points of tensions or conflict, things that do not fit” (Janesick, 2000, pp. 387-388). By following these guidelines, the researcher comes to understand the complexity of views expressed by participants.

Descriptive Phenomenology

As there are a variety of perspectives within qualitative inquiry, this study was further approached as a descriptive phenomenological study for the following reasons. Firstly, according to Creswell (2013, p. 76), “A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon.” This study also aims to describe the lived experiences of several primary school principals leading their schools amid ongoing conflict. Secondly, a descriptive phenomenology

“focuses less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). As such, the focus of this study is to describe the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by several primary school principals leading their schools amid ongoing conflict. Third, in a descriptive phenomenology, “investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). The researcher in this study also makes every effort to listen closely and carefully to what his participants have to say and to represent the full range of their views.

Before discussing phenomenology as a research approach, we must come to some understanding of its philosophical assumptions, as recommended by Creswell (2013). Phenomenology appears as philosophy and a research method. As philosophy, it draws on the writings of such notable philosophers as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others during the early years of the 20th century (Creswell, 2013; Smith, 2005). Husserl is credited with founding contemporary phenomenology, while the others are given credit for the expansion and in some cases rejection of some of Husserl’s original ideas (Prim, 2006).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician and philosopher, introduced phenomenology in an effort to establish a science of the essence of consciousness rather than empirical facts. His primary emphasis was the study of phenomena as they appeared through consciousness (Lavery, 2003). For Husserl, the fundamental concept of phenomenology is the intentionality of consciousness; the idea that consciousness is always directed toward objects of study. Conscious awareness was the starting point in building one’s knowledge of reality. As Lavery (2003) pointed out, Husserl’s phenomenology centers more on “the epistemological question of the relationship between the knower and the object of study” (pp. 13-14). It poses the question, how do we go about constructing our ideas of what reality

is? Husserl (1970) stressed the importance of returning to reflective intuition to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in consciousness.

Another central concept in phenomenology is the notion of lived experience or the life world (Husserl, 1970). Lived experience refers to an “experience as we live through it, in our actions, relations and situations” (Van Manen, 2007, p. 16). The assumption here is that lived experiences are seen as a way of reaching true meaning; hence, phenomenology focuses on descriptions of such experiences. Husserl (1970) noted that there were universal essences to experiences. Essence is the “... invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience” (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Van Manen (1990) stated that essence is “ the very nature of a phenomenon, which makes something what it is, and without which it could not be what it is” (p.10).

Drawing on Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (1962/1999), Van Manen (1990) explained that the essence or the central underlying meaning of a phenomenon can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon. In other words, an essence may only be intuited or captured through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience (p.10). He noted that seeing the meaning or essence of something is both easy and difficult. It is easy because everyone sees meaning and essence in everyday life. It is more difficult to reflect and explicate or articulate what the phenomenon is.

Husserl (1970) also developed the concept of phenomenological reduction or bracketing. He recognized the subjectivity of the researcher and advocated a process of *epoche* or, as Creswell (2013) described, a suspension of all judgements about what is real by adopting a neutral attitude until they are founded on a more certain basis. Phenomenological reduction is a process of bracketing through which the researcher describes, then sets aside

his or her own experience with the phenomenon and approaches the phenomenon without preconceptions (Husserl, 1970; Finlay, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2007). By bracketing one's preconceptions as much as possible researchers could avoid simply looking for justification in the data that support their suppositions about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl (1970) characterized phenomenology as the study of how people describe things and experience them through their senses and perceptions. People do not objectively observe things or actions and understand them through a process of induction or generalization, but rather they grasp the phenomenon through an on-going dialogue between themselves and the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962), another phenomenological philosopher from France, further emphasized the primacy of perception as means of access to reality. He indicated that through perception individuals can gain access to knowledge. The lived world is the concrete inter-subjective reality of one's immediate existence as it is perceptually experienced in a sensory-motor manner.

Husserl's ideas have been developed further by others, notably Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) who followed an alternative course. While Husserl focused his studies on the cognitive processes of the intentional act, Heidegger dedicated his work to the existential aspects of human beings. Heidegger's philosophy is often called existential phenomenology, since it combines the knowledge theory of philosophy with ideas from existential movements (Prim, 2006). In existential phenomenology, the concept of intentionality was expanded in order to include the relation between the person and the world. This relationship is investigated through the lived experience and revealed by way of meaning (Prim, 2006).

Husserl and Heidegger's ideas have been interpreted in many different ways which, in turn, resulted in the emergence of different phenomenological research approaches.

According to Creswell (2013), there are two major approaches to phenomenology: hermeneutic/interpretive and transcendental/descriptive. While both approaches seek to understand human experience as it is lived, they differ in terms of methodological procedures (Creswell, 2013; Lavery, 2003). For hermeneutic phenomenology, Van Manen (1997) acknowledged that “hermeneutic phenomenological method is not a procedural system but rather its method requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, and sensitive to language and constantly open to experience” (p. xi). On the other hand, descriptive phenomenology has “systematic steps in the data analysis procedures and guidelines for assembling the textural and structural descriptions” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Furthermore, Creswell (2013) offered seven guidelines that researchers should consider when conducting a descriptive phenomenological study. The researcher needs to (1) determine whether the phenomenological approach can address the research problem, (2) have interest in the phenomenon, (3) discuss the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology, (4) collect data from participants who have experienced the phenomenon, (5) ask participants broad and general questions, (6) develop significant statements and cluster them into themes during data analysis, and (7) provide a description that presents the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell , 2013, pp. 81-82).

Although both approaches share a common interest in looking at the lived human experience, I feel that descriptive phenomenology works well for this study because it offers a logical and systematic approach with clear procedures for data analysis. As such, I follow the above-mentioned guidelines as I conducted my research and collected my data. In addition, it was necessary for me to become cognizant of my personal biases and assumptions at the beginning of the research process.

Researcher's Background and Assumptions

In the qualitative research process, the researcher serves as the primary instrument from which decisions are made such as who would be in the study and what questions are asked. In addition, data collection and analysis may be coloured by the researcher's experience and background. As a result, the researcher cannot claim to be completely "objective," as that is just not possible. As Creswell (2013) pointed out, the researcher needs to be aware of the personal presuppositions that might have a potential influence on the research process before initiating the study. This process involves a description of the researcher's experience with the phenomenon under study. It is known as "bracketing" or "epoche", which is a Greek word meaning to stay away from or to abstain (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). The purpose of epoche for the researcher is to identify biases and preconceived ideas about the specific experience. Van Manen (1997) suggested that it allows the researcher to clear his mind of personal biases and to see the world from participants' perspectives.

This is especially important as the research questions are so intertwined with the researcher's epistemological assumptions or views of what is valuable and important to know about the world. In theory, the ideal phenomenologist is required to completely fulfil the epoche experience. However, in practice, as Creswell (2013) noted, this is a difficult task and experience. Nevertheless, it is important for the researcher to be aware of the subjective experience in order to see how it might influence the research. Thus, the following is a description of my preconceived notions about the principals' roles in school leadership and their potential influence on the interviews as well as on the data analysis.

At the beginning of the research process, I considered various personal perspectives on school leadership and identified two that might have potential influences on the research process; my personal experiences as a teacher in a number of developing countries, and my

assumptions about what the role of the school principal should be. These personal assumptions and experiences were reflected upon prior to the interviews and data analysis and were suspended as much as possible in order to gain the perspectives of the interview participants as well as to preserve the credibility of the study.

Although I have no experience as a school principal, my perceptions on school leadership have developed from my personal experience as a teacher in some developing countries, where I worked closely with school principals. During my work in these countries, I had the opportunity to observe how school principals deal with and solve problems of practice as well as to observe their relationships with teachers, students and parents. As I recall, these principals, like their counterparts in many developing countries, worked under highly centralized school systems. This created a narrow scope of the role played by the principal, as many of the important decisions were made by higher authorities and, consequently, the principals' professional autonomy was very limited.

While, to some extent, these principals worked under similar education systems, the way they managed and led their schools was quite different. One of these principals was very proactive and supportive of teachers, while the other used to spend most of his time in his office doing paperwork. As a result of this experience, I have come to realize that, even though there are some common aspects found across the work of principals in developing countries, the meaning each principal constructs for his role and the perception each holds toward such roles are different.

Another potential source of bias may come from my perspective on what the role of the principal should be in developing countries, based on North American standards. During my graduate studies in Canada, I have learned more about school leadership and developed new ways of viewing school leadership, particularly the principal's leadership role.

Numerous readings on school leadership have given me a new perspective on the principal's work in a Western context. This theoretical perspective was reinforced by first hand information where I had the opportunity to visit schools and, on one occasion, conduct an interview with a school principal. This practical experience gave me a glimpse into the life of a Canadian school principal, including the opportunities and the challenges. As a result of this experience, I have come to realize the multiple tasks that school principals are expected to fulfill in order to lead their schools effectively.

Finally, my assumptions regarding the role of effective principals in schools facing challenging circumstances in Western nations may have some influence on how I look at the role of principals in situations of armed conflict. Although the nature of challenges and problems that effective principals in schools facing challenging circumstances in Western nations are vastly different from those faced by principals in situations of armed conflict, the characteristics of the former, such as integrity and honesty as well as dedication to the welfare of their students and teachers, might be a great source of inspiration for their counterparts in difficult situations. I may, therefore, unconsciously assume that principals in conflict regions are expected to act like their counterparts in schools facing challenging circumstances in Western nations.

Therefore, I was fully aware not to let any of these preconceptions and understandings influence the interviews and data analysis processes as much as possible. For example, I was careful not to ask questions implying some sort of a comparison between the work of Somali principals in Mogadishu and their counterparts in a Western context. Throughout the course of the interviews and data analysis, I reminded myself to listen closely and carefully to what my participants have to say, to represent the full range of their views, and to re-examine how my assumptions may be influencing my analysis of the data.

However, I am cognizant of how my own preconceptions may affect what I chose to note or emphasize. Once I had bracketed my preconceived notions as much as possible, I started the process of data collection and such conscious reflection continued throughout the research process. I concur with Creswell (2013) that this is a difficult experience.

Research Design

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection. To help the reader understand the context in which the participants live and work, the site of the study will be described. Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, was chosen as the site for this study. Mogadishu is located in the coastal Banadir Region on the Indian Ocean (See Map of Somalia in Appendix A). It is the largest city in the country and consists of 16 districts. Given the absence of recent censuses, the population of Mogadishu is locally estimated around two and half million people (SAACID, 2007). Of this number, 300,000 are internally displaced people living in camps around the city. There are also at least 100,000 families hosted by their relatives within the city. These figures can change within a short period due to people movements in response to famine and conflict.

Mogadishu was chosen as a geographical location for this study for two reasons. First, the types of schools found in the city are a microcosm of schools in Somalia after the collapse of the state in 1991. Some are individually-owned schools, while others are owned by communities and sometimes get financial support from local or international non-profit organizations. Some schools offer only primary education, while others combine both primary and secondary levels and share the same building using a double shift system (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Mohamud, 2011; Saggiomo, 2011). Second, unlike many other cities, Mogadishu has been the epicenter of armed conflict since the collapse of the state. Furthermore, it has the largest number of primary schools in the country as well as the

highest number of both teachers and learners (UNICEF, 2007), which comprised a positive site for the recruitment of the sample population of primary school principals.

Participant Selection

Purposeful Sampling. In a phenomenological study, an important criterion of the purposeful selection of participants is that the potential research participants should be carefully selected to make sure that all have experienced the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). For the purpose of this study, potential research participants need to meet the criterion of leading primary schools in Mogadishu as principals for more than five years besides being willing to share their experiences. Creswell (2013, p. 78) suggested that a heterogeneous group ranging from “3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” may be sufficient to uncover the essences from experience by collecting adequate data in a phenomenological study. For this study, 8 participants were determined to be sufficient to uncover a range of perceptions and experiences associated with the phenomenon of leading schools in a war-torn environment. These participants represented a group of principals with diverse backgrounds, and varied educational levels, years of teaching and administrative experience as well as organizational affiliations. A more detailed profile of participants is provided in Chapter 4 along with the findings of the study.

Recruitment Procedure. Due to travel restrictions imposed on Somalia as a result of the ongoing conflict, I was unable to conduct fieldwork. So I hired two research assistants: One to recruit participants, and the other to help participants with the setup of Skype software for conducting the interviews, which was originally planned but later abandoned because of technical problems. As a result, telephone interviews were recommended. Once I received ethical approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, I contacted

the recruiter who was personally recommended by some of my friends who vouched for his good reputation as trustworthy, as well as his social network among school principals.

I instructed the recruiter to invite potential participants to participate in the study while bearing in mind the above-mentioned criteria. Primary school principals in Mogadishu were targeted for the study with the intention of securing between eight and ten participants. The invitation letter shown in (Appendix B) was used to recruit potential participants. It explained the purpose of the study, the time commitment and procedures for the interview. It also disclosed the researcher's affiliation to the University of Ottawa, and ensured the promise of confidentiality. The recruiter was then instructed to make follow up calls for non-respondents within one week of the original invitation. Since the recruiter was a school supervisor, a number of steps were taken to ensure that participants felt no coercion to participate in the study. These were discussed in the ethical considerations section.

Field Testing. An interview was conducted prior to the actual interviews with two former principals in order to refine the interview questions and the procedures for collecting data (Creswell, 2013, Drever, 2003). The principals had not received invitations to participate in this study because, as Drever (2003) recommended, participants in a pilot interview must not be included in the actual study. As a result, I chose not to include data from the pilot interview in this study.

The field testing proved to be relevant and informative. Both participants in the pilot interviews made some important suggestions for improving the interview guide. Some modifications were made with respect to the clarity of interview questions seven and eight which deal with instructional support available to teachers. Participants' comment on the final question was also very important, because it drew my attention to the diversity of schools and their affiliations, which will certainly impact the roles of the principal and his

authority and autonomy. Accordingly, a follow up question was included for participants to reveal their affiliation and whether or not their school receives external support.

Finally, two interview questions relating to principals' views on the concept of school leadership were dropped, because it became clear to me that they might not elicit sufficient and relevant information. Both participants in the pilot study found these questions difficult to answer. The difficulty may not be due to the way I asked the questions themselves, because I asked them in different ways, but I think it was due to difficulty in answering the questions and this was clear in their false starts and pauses. Although both participants perceived the concept of leadership as someone who is in a position of authority like traditional chiefs, they found it difficult to view it in terms of the education system.

Data Collection Procedure and Tools

Although there are a number of means by which researchers might collect phenomenological data, such as poems, observations, and documents, the consensus of opinion is that the primary and preferred means of data collection is in-depth multiple interviews with participants (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). However, for this study, such in-depth face to face interviews might not be possible, as the study relied on long distance telephone interviews. Nevertheless, valuable information can be collected through telephone interviews when participants cannot be reached directly (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), as is the case in this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

While interviews are widely used as data collection methods in phenomenological research, researchers have different views on whether to use unstructured interviews or semi-structured interviews (King & Horrocks, 2009). Unstructured interviews allow participants to set the direction of the interview while the researcher listens to and responds in a

conversational manner (Lodico et al., 2010). The researcher in unstructured interviews comes to the interview with no predefined questions and generates questions in response to the participant's narration. In contrast, semi-structured interviews start with open-ended questions and allow the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby the researcher is able to probe interesting areas which arise (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

A major advantage of the semi-structured approach is that it offers sufficient flexibility to incorporate different probe questions as the interviews progress in order to gain a fuller description of the phenomenon (Irby & Lunenburg, 2008). However, there occasionally arises an issue of power with regard to the semi-structured interview, with charges that the researcher can be guilty of "leading" the interview. This can easily be refuted by noting that the thesis is not "critical" in the sense that it attempts to change the power dynamics of or between school leaders and that the researcher is in charge and is directing the interview in order to obtain data relating to the research questions. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was chosen for this study to allow participants to have greater flexibility in describing their perceptions and experiences regarding their roles in school management and leadership.

Conducting the Interviews

First Round of Interviews. I collected my data by telephone using semi-structured interviews. Despite the physical distance between me and my participants, I got to know them well through multiple interactions on the phone. I conducted the interviews at different times. The time and place of the interviews were chosen by participants and arranged by the research assistants. Seven of the eight interviews took place at the homes of the participants, and one interview took place in the principal's office. The interviews lasted between 45 and

60 minutes. Although it was sometimes difficult in getting through due to the frequent line disconnection, overall the interviews went smoothly.

Interview questions were emailed to all participants through the research assistant one week prior to the interview date in order to give participants enough time to think through their responses. Participants were told that the purpose of the open-ended questions was to capture their perceptions and experiences pertaining to school management and leadership. They were also encouraged to consider this interviewing as a conversation with a purpose, as most of the participants were not familiar with this kind of interviewing.

All interviews began by reminding participants that their involvement in this study was voluntary and they could withdraw from participation at anytime. Participants were requested to sign two copies of the consent form shown in (Appendix C). They were given one copy for their own records, while the second copy was returned to the researcher. They were also asked permission to have the interviews audio-recorded, to which all participants agreed. Such recording permits easy access to the contents of the interview (Glesne, 1999).

Interviews were conducted with each participant using the revised interview guide (Appendix, D). The use of semi-structured interviews ensured that each participant was asked similar questions, which provided some consistency and common starting points across all interviews. However, different probes or follow up questions were used, given the great diversity of schools in Mogadishu.

Second Round of Interviews. The second set of interviews took place after the first interviews had been transcribed and initially analyzed for themes. As participants entered the study with the understanding that a second interview might be necessary, they all agreed to participate. I also felt that this interview was needed to allow me to find out more about the themes that emerged from the first interview. Despite the fact that all the participants agreed

to a second interview, it was a challenge for them to provide further information, due to their assumption that they had given sufficient information in the first interview. This was evident in the repeated expression ‘As I said before’ during the second interview. The second interview guide is shown in Appendix E. and followed the same processes as the first interview. The audiotapes were transcribed and the transcripts were sent back to participants for revision.

Researcher’s Reflective Journal.

A reflective journal was maintained throughout the research process. It was used to help me reflect on the choices and decisions made during the research process, as recommended by Ortlipp (2008). I often used this journal following each interview, writing down my reflective notes on the interview and the topics in the participants’ responses as well as the problems I encountered. Writing personal thoughts and reflective notes following interviews is described by Ortlip (2008) as an important strategy for researchers because it enables them to articulate their thoughts and justify their decisions.

Maintaining this journal was also useful, because it helped me to become more aware of my preconceived notions and biases while trying to stay as true to the participants’ meaning as much as possible. In this journal, I created entries entitled “researcher bias” where I was able to track some of the recurrent thoughts that might have influence on principals’ responses to my interview questions. For example, during the interview, I found myself resisting the temptation to say, “Principals in Canada or developing countries do so and so, what about principals in Mogadishu, Somalia?” So, this journal helped me to avoid asking such comparative questions and to keep my preconceptions at bay. It is important to note here that the information in this journal was not processed as a source of data collection.

Data Analysis Path

Data analysis in qualitative research involves the preparation and organization of the data (Creswell, 2013; Lodico et al, 2010). For organizing the data, I sorted all the collected data to make them more manageable. Audio-tapes of interviews were labelled according to each participant's name and the date of the interview. Returned consent forms were accurately copied and saved in a secure place. Computer folders and files were used to safeguard the data. Specifically, the following steps were used:

The interviews were recorded using a portable cassette tape-recorder and a Panasonic RR-US551 digital voice recorder to provide a backup recording in case of the malfunctioning of one of the recorders. The digital voice recordings were then transferred to a secure laptop in MP3 format. The audio recordings were carefully transcribed as Word document files in a rich text format and the document title reflected each participant, using a pseudonym. The transcripts were checked for accuracy against the original audio recordings and with the participants. Once confirmed, the transcripts were carefully translated into English. A separate file was also created in Microsoft Word document for each participant profile. All Word document files were saved and maintained on external flash memory data storage devices (USBs) as a precautionary measure. Having the transcribed interviews available in Word document files as a rich text format, the actual data analysis was performed.

The objective of phenomenological data analysis is to reconstruct the lived experience of the participants as it relates to the phenomenon under study. Creswell (1998) stated that, "Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for possible meanings" (p. 52). Phenomenological data analysis is also a writing intensive process that generates a description of the phenomenon under study as well as a thematic interpretation or narrative

through which the meaning of the phenomenon can be understood (Van Manen, 1997). Moustakas (1994) further stated that the researcher analyzes specific statements, generates meaning units, and develops a description that captures the essence of the phenomenon.

While there are several ways to analyze data in a phenomenological study, this study uses Creswell's (2013) six-step approach. This approach is largely based on Moustakas (1994) method of data analysis. Creswell offered a six-step process of analysis, which can be used by novice researchers to get at the essence of the lived experience of their subjects. Data were analyzed using the following steps:

Description of Researcher's Personal Experience with the Phenomenon. Before collecting or analyzing the data, researchers have to set aside their personal experience, "so that the focus can be directed to the participants in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). Thus, this step has already been discussed under *Researcher's Background and Assumptions*.

Reading Interview Transcripts for Significant Statements. The next step involved listening to the audio-recorded interviews to develop a better understanding of the participants' words and expressions regarding their experience and roles in school management and leadership. Once I had listened to the recordings, I started reading the interview transcripts to get a sense of the phenomenon as it relates to the participants. This process has been largely facilitated by the fact that I am the person who conducted the interviews, transcribed the audio recordings, and translated the Somali version into English.

Although I have done my best to translate responses of my research participants as accurately as possible, I can't claim that I was able to convey the subtle nuances of meaning of each word or rule out that I translated certain words or phrases through the lens of my own previous assumptions and value position. However, what is certain that some meanings are always lost in translation while new ones are gained. Furthermore, my multiple interactions

with the interview transcripts helped me to become immersed in the data and to get a sense of the content of the interviews. Marshal and Rossman (2006) suggested that multiple readings of the interview transcripts are essential for data analysis.

After I had familiarized myself with the data by listening to each recorded interview and then reading the corresponding interview transcript, I had to “develop a list of significant statements” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193) having potential significance for describing the participants’ roles and experiences in school leadership. This included looking over each paragraph or sentence to identify those statements relevant to the experience.

The significant statements could consist of a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph; nonetheless, they are all discrete units of meaning. Groenewald (2004) emphasized that this process requires “a substantial amount of judgement calls” (p. 19). Therefore, I was conscious of my preconceived notions about the phenomenon while making these decisions.

This step also involved another important sub-step, elimination of overlapping or repetitive statements (Creswell, 2013) or what Moustakas (1994) calls “horizontalization.” Horizontalization consists of taking the list of significant statements and treating them as statements of equal value. With horizontalization “non-repetitive and non-overlapping” statements were formed (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). To this end, a table was created and all significant statements were transferred to the table. Then I went through the statements recorded in the table, searching for overlapping or repetitive statements. All repetitive or overlapping statements were highlighted with a different colour and subsequently eliminated from the table, leaving only the horizons “the textural meaning and invariant constituents of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994). At this point, I made no attempt to cluster the remaining statements or order them in any way (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Clustering Significant Statements into Themes. In the third step of the data analysis, significant statements were grouped into “larger units of information called meaning units or themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). Themes are the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand (Van Manen, 1990). Having read the list of non-repetitive statements several times, an initial list of themes was developed by placing significant statements that had similar meanings together. For example, a single label was assigned to each cluster of statements such as *high student mobility*. If a statement was significant to more than one category it was included in both categories. I went back through each transcript to ensure accuracy of the clustered significant statements. At the end of this step, I had a table with significant statements clustered under the meaning unit assigned, along with the theme that emerged from that data. This table provided an organized progression of data analysis and furthered the rigour of the study.

This procedure also required a substantial number of judgement calls because different participants may express similar themes but state ideas in diverse ways (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Once the theme identification was complete, these themes were used to develop textural descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of each participant regarding his role in school management and leadership.

Writing Textural Description. The fourth step of Creswell’s phenomenological analysis and representation is known as “a “textural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). It consists of reporting what the participants experienced regarding the phenomenon. This includes a full description of the individual’s conscious experience as relayed to the researcher, and it includes the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and situations that composed the experience. This step was carried out by the identification of themes common to most or all of the participants’ transcripts.

However, unique voices were also considered worthy of being reported because, as Groenewald (2004) stated, “there are important counterpoints to bring out regarding the phenomenon researched” (p. 21). Therefore, outlier voices are included because they still have a legitimate perspective. Once common themes were identified, significant statements were used to write a description of what the participants experienced. This description included verbatim examples from the participants to provide “specific concrete evidence, in the informants’ words to support a theme” (Creswell, 1998, p. 171) or to help recreate the horizon from which the phenomenon emerged (Moustakas, 1994).

Writing Structural Description. The fifth step involved writing the structural description (Creswell, 2013), which entails describing how the participants experienced the phenomenon. The structural description provided contextual information regarding the phenomenon to help describe the experience of the phenomenon more fully. Contextual information was noted when relevant to describing the themes. This step required the researcher to identify the “bones of the experience for the whole group of people studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 486) to determine “how all the participants experience what they experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 142).

Writing Composite Description. The final step of Creswell’s phenomenological analysis and representation involved writing a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. As Creswell (2013, p. 194) stated, “This passage is the essence of the experience and represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study.” It usually consists of a long paragraph or two giving the reader a better grasp of the common experiences of the participants. This is presented at the end of Chapter five, following a comparative analysis of the common themes that emerged from the data. Hopefully, this will also serve to further the rigour of the study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Phenomenological research provides great opportunities to gain insight and understanding of the lived experiences of participants. A key reason to conduct a phenomenological research is to let the reader have a better understanding of what is like for someone to experience the phenomenon under investigation. This sharing requires that the reader has confidence and trust in the rigour of the study undertaken by the researcher.

Qualitative scholars suggest many strategies that the researcher can use to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of his findings. For the purpose of this study, trustworthiness was enhanced by employing four out of the eight verification procedures suggested by Creswell (2013): acknowledging researcher bias, implementing member checks, writing thick descriptions, and peer review or debriefing. First, I acknowledged having preconceived beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon under study. This was offered at the outset so that readers understand how my own experience has shaped the interpretation of the data. This was completed by the bracketing process described in the section, “Researcher’s Background and Assumptions.” I also used a reflective journal as an aid to this process.

Secondly, I used member checking to validate the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2003). This verification procedure was considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as one of the most critical techniques for establishing credibility. A portable cassette tape-recorder and a Panasonic RR-US551 digital voice recorder were used for interviews which were then transcribed into computer files. Recording these interviews on such devices allowed for no details to be lost in translation. Following the interviews, the transcripts were sent by email to some of the participants while others received a hard copy via the research assistant for verification and comment. As a result, the participants in the study were able to check the accuracy of the transcribed data and provided their verbal approval by telephone.

Thirdly, I employed thick descriptions of the participants' lived experiences in such a manner that will allow readers to make their own decisions about the transferability of the data to other settings. Transferability in qualitative research may be seen as generalizability in quantitative research and refers to the other contexts and situations where the researcher believes that his findings are most likely to be relevant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although this strategy was compromised, due to a lack of face-to-face interviews, an adequate level of detail required to help with transferability was provided. This was reflected in both the participants' profiles as well as the individual textural descriptions provided in Chapter 4.

Finally, I validated the emergent themes of this study through the process of peer review. A colleague of mine, who is familiar with my research and who has recently successfully defended his dissertation, was requested to review the transcripts and verify the themes identified. He was given a list of codes that represented sub-themes. He was also given a copy of the excerpts extracted from the participants' transcripts and asked to code them. The peer review confirmed that the themes and sub-themes identified could be located in the transcripts he reviewed. All these techniques will contribute to the establishment of the trustworthiness of this study.

Ethical Issues

Qualitative research requires the consideration of ethical issues in the anticipation of data collection (Creswell, 2013). There were multiple ethical issues that were considered at all stages of this study. First, since two research assistants were in charge of participant recruitment and interview arrangements, protecting the identity and confidentiality of all participants was taken seriously. As a result, a confidentiality statement (see Appendices F & G) was provided and signed by the two research assistants before the start of the study.

Secondly, to ensure that participant felt no coercion to participate in the study, the recruiter, who is also a school supervisor, was encouraged to contact principals affiliated with various organizations as well as independent principals. Only two of the eight participants are affiliated with the recruiter's organization. This may explain the recruiter's responsiveness to my instructions. Thirdly, an informed consent was also provided, explained, and signed by all participants before the start of an interview. The signing of the consent form by the participants confirmed their willingness to participate in the research. Kvale (1996) stated that obtaining informed consent allows participants to participate in the study, secures confidentiality, and outlines for participants the potential dangers or consequences of involvement in the study. Patton (2002) noted that such information is usually provided in advance and then just prior to an interview, as was the case in this study. In addition, the use of pseudonyms obscured the real names of participants, their schools and the organizations with which they are affiliated. This was considered by Dahl and Boss (2005) as important because phenomenological inquiry elicits deep and personal questions. So, confidentiality needs to be protected by providing interviewees with pseudonyms and occasionally changing their demographic descriptions to protect their identities.

The interview materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the thesis supervisor, and no one will have access to the raw interview data (transcripts and audio-recordings) except the researcher and his supervisor, Dr. Stephanie Chitpin. Research assistants who were responsible for participant recruitment and interview arrangements will have no access to such data. The use of a high-quality digital audio recording also helped to store data. Data are maintained solely by me, the researcher, and securely stored in a computer database protected by a password. Backup files are stored on a disk. All of the information relevant to this study will remain protected and maintained according to the

Research Ethics Board of the University of Ottawa guidelines. This means that the data will be conserved in the office of the thesis supervisor for five years after the completion of the study and then destroyed. The use of the above steps is expected to minimize any risks and to protect participants of the study.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological elements of this phenomenological study. Primary school principals leading their schools amid ongoing conflict in Mogadishu were invited to participate in the study. Eight participants were interviewed on two occasions. The data sources were the first and second interviews supplemented by the researcher's journal. Trustworthiness of the study was established through clarifying researcher's bias, member checks, thick description and peer review. The importance of ethical considerations was highlighted. The next chapter provides a detailed account of principals' perspectives and experiences as well as the challenges they face as they lead their schools amid ongoing conflict by addressing the following research questions: (1) How do primary school principals perceive the nature of their role in schools in Mogadishu, Somalia? (2) What are the challenges that primary school principals face in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu? (3) What are the experiences of primary school principals in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu?

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter introduced the demographic information of the principals and their schools, followed by their individual textual descriptions, which include a detailed account of each principal's unique perspectives and lived experiences, as well as the challenges he faces amid ongoing conflict. Each principal had the opportunity to share intimate accounts of being a primary school principal in a situation of armed conflict and how he managed to maintain his school in such an extraordinary environment. Several themes emerged from the transcribed data for each participant, which allows the reader to get to know each principal and to situate the findings within the context of each principal's life. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants and their schools, as well as the organizations with which they are affiliated. Below is a description of the participants' profiles followed by their individual textual descriptions.

Participant Profiles

A total of eight principals from various primary schools in Mogadishu participated in the study. The participants were asked to reveal their personal and school profiles. Several variables were considered with regard to such demographic information. These variables included age, academic qualifications, years of experience in teaching and their number of years as principals. This demographic information also included the size of the school in terms of the number of students and teachers, the type of the school (whether supported by NGO or not) as well as the school's membership in local educational networks. These demographical and personal data are summarized in the following table:

Table 1: Profiles of Participants and their Schools

Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Education Level	Years of Teaching Experience	Years as Principal	No. of Teachers	Student body	Type of School	School Membership
Ali	47	Male	College	20	7	25	900	NGO-Support	FPENS
Bashir	55	Male	College	35	15	21	700	Independent	SEDA
Daahir	58	Male	College	22	16	12	500	Independent	SAFE
Faisal	52	Male	College	13	8	14	600	NGO-Support	FPENS
Jamal	36	Male	College	11	5	7	250	Nominal NGO-support	FPENS
Khalid	48	Male	High School	20	7	10	400	NGO-Support	FPENS
Mubarak	51	Male	High School	0	13	8	450	Independent	FENPS
Salem	65	Male	College	21	19	22	500	Independent	SAFE

As we can see from the table above, the typical profile of a primary school principal working in Mogadishu is that of a male in his 50s. He is typically a holder of a bachelor's degree in education from Lafaole College of Education which, until the outbreak of the civil war in 1991, was the main teacher training institution in the country. The length of teaching experience of the participants varied considerably. The participant with the least experience spent 11 years in the classroom before becoming a principal. Four principals taught for more than 20 years before becoming principals, and one for as long as 35 years. A wide range of time serving as principal also existed among the participants. Participant longevity at the current school ranged from 5 to 19 years. All of the principals have worked in a range of schools of different sizes and organizational affiliations. The largest school was reported to have 900 students, while the smallest had only 250. Some of these principals were affiliated with various local NGOs while others are independent.

Individual Textural Descriptions

Here I provide a full description of the individual's perspectives and lived experiences as relayed to me. These descriptions are composed of and include excerpts from the interview transcripts. They revealed elements unique to each participant's perspectives

and experiences. As mentioned earlier, pseudonyms were used rather than the unique identifiers in order to ensure anonymity of the participants.

Participant 1: Ali

Ali, 47 years old, is currently the principal of Mogadishu Primary School, which belongs to a local organization and was created by a group of former public school teachers. Ali holds a bachelor's degree in education with a major in Arabic and Islamic Studies and has a total of 20 years experience as a teacher, five years as an assistant principal and seven years as principal. His appointment as principal was offered in recognition of his good performance, as well as his service to the organization that supports his school and, as such, this represented a natural path towards the principalship. Ali attended a number of training sessions organized by the supporting organization to enhance certain administrative aspects of his job. Ali is assisted by a vice-principal and is not required to teach but, when a teacher is absent, he acts as a substitute. Ali leads Mogadishu Primary School, which is a relatively large school serving about 900 students in grades one through grade nine. The school has a 37-person staff of 25 teachers and 12 support staff, including janitors and security guards. Six of the school's 25 teachers are female and all teachers are college graduates; some from local universities and others from the Sudan. The school is a member of the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS), one of the largest educational umbrella organizations in the country and oversees many schools that follow the system 9-3 representing 9 years of primary education and 3 years of secondary education.

Ali believed his role is to follow the educational policy of the organization that supports the school. Describing his role, Ali stated,

I am responsible for the daily management of the school. To do my job, I am required to enforce the educational policy of the organization and do everything I can to make

the school function. Actually, this requires good working relationships with the organization, which is based on cooperation and mutual respect.

Ali rules out the existence of any conflict between him and the officers in the organization, because as he observes, “people’s relations are often based on disrespect and distrust due to the erosion of confidence among people.” He emphasized that

Maintaining schools in this context largely depends on good will, mutual trust and commitment. You know, Mogadishu is a war zone where many people die in the frequent fighting between the two sides of the conflict, and other waves of violence. So, resting on those values keep us going.

An important part of his responsibilities is to communicate with the organization. Ali talked about reporting directly to an education committee, which is comprised of five members. He described this communication as “a two-way communication,” where

We actually receive orders and instructions from the committee on security and financial matters and we send reports to the committee on matters related to the school. Let me tell you our main source of income is the fees paid by students which are collected and managed directly by the Financial Department of the organization. My role is to present the needs of the school to the organization.

Ali acknowledged that the final decisions for financial matters, as well as for teacher recruitment, are made by the education committee. Although the organization has the authority to recruit teachers, Ali stated, “I am responsible for making decisions on assigning teachers to their classes within subject areas as specified by the education committee.”

With the exception of financial and recruitment issues, Ali said that he does not need to refer each and every issue to the education committee because “It is not part of the day-to-day management of the school.” He indicated that he makes his own decisions.

Actually, I prefer to make my own decisions, because I am ultimately responsible for everything that goes wrong in the school. This does not mean that I don’t consult others. Sometimes I consult my vice-principal, and then we tell the staff what they have to do.

When asked what he does to ensure that teachers get the support they need to perform their duties, Ali pointed to the many problems that teachers face and his moral responsibility to help them. He stated,

When something bad happens to one of my teachers, like wounding or killing one of his family members or relatives, we do what we can to help him. When a teacher is in that type of situation, it is emotionally difficult for him to perform his teaching obligation. I have to cover his classes or make changes to his schedule, because we don't have a substitute who is always available.

With respect to instructional support and what he does, Ali stated that part of his duty is to supervise teachers and occasionally visit classrooms and observe teachers while they are teaching. He stated,

Actually, I can only make one formal visit per term to each teacher because of the conflict. During my visit, I look for the weak points in the teacher's performance. After the class, we hold a meeting in which we address any problems that the teacher might be encountering. I let the teacher reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of the lesson. On my part, I praise the teacher for his good performance and make suggestions for the areas that need to be improved. I am always prepared to offer guidance to my teachers.

However, when it becomes evident that his support may not be enough, he writes to the education committee on the possibility of arranging in-service training for the teacher.

The teacher may be given a training session twice or three times during the school year, and this is important particularly for newly hired teachers and the teachers who received unsatisfactory ratings on their last evaluation.

Improving student learning not only requires helping teachers to improve their performance, but also involves parents and the community in the education of children. So, Ali brought up this aspect of his role and stated,

Our school has a parents' committee, which is active. I work closely with this committee and seek its support when I am faced with a problem that is beyond my

control. You know, we live in a time of war and you really need parents' support and protection, especially if something bad happens to the school, though we are rarely targeted because we serve children from different clans.

Nevertheless, Ali emphasized the protective role of this committee in communicating their security concern to the larger community.

Ali then talked about his experience of working in a volatile external environment and the lessons he learned from leading in such an environment. He stated,

We have learned a lot from working in this challenging environment, which we could not have learned from any other sources. We have adapted to the ongoing conflict because it has become part of our lives.

But he acknowledged that leading in this environment is a daily struggle and requires a lot of courage, commitment, and self-sacrifice or, as he put it,

Accepting the position of principal in such a turbulent environment in itself demonstrates the principal's courage because, if you want to become a principal in this situation, you must definitely know that you will face a lot of difficult situations that may pose risks to your personal safety as well as to the safety and security of your school. Without courage, it would be easy for you to convince yourself that a difficult situation is too hard to face and you may finally lose your nerve.

Ali described how working in a situation of armed conflict has had profound impact on his thinking and actions. Some of the many things that Ali learned include being self-controlled and calm, especially during difficult times. He recounted what happened on one of the most difficult days he experienced:

It was a Monday morning in late March. There was a clash between the two sides of the conflict in an area not far from the school. A group of insurgents retreating in the face of government forces passed near the school. Then the government forces stormed into the school and began searching for suspects who might be hiding in the school. Actually, I did not angrily respond to this provocation and I tried to remain calm to avoid confrontations and save myself a lot of unnecessary trouble.

Eventually, when they did not find them, I calmly told them to leave the premises and not to terrify the children.

Ali also recounted another experience where remaining calm is important. This is when fighting erupts while students are still in school and anxious parents begin to call the school inquiring about the safety of their children. In this case, Ali stated, “You must answer these phone calls calmly and try to assure parents that their children are safe; otherwise you create panic among parents as well as a chaotic situation in school.”

Another lesson that Ali learned from working in a situation of armed conflict is his preparedness for action once warning signs of imminent fighting loom large. He described the situation as follows:

Once I receive reliable information about an imminent fighting from the officers in the education committee, I immediately contact school bus drivers and instruct them to transport students and to take the safest routes to their homes. Sometimes, student evacuation becomes difficult due to the intensity of fighting. In such situations, we keep students separately in safe rooms that can protect them from stray bullets.

Another other major challenge facing Ali is student mobility and its impact on the school operation. He described the dramatic effect of such mobility on the school functioning

You may have a school full of students and suddenly you find yourself in a situation where half or one-third of these students have left in one day as a result of family displacement. Parents may take their children from school while the school year is still in the middle of the academic year or a few months are remaining until its end. So, we feel uncertainty about whether the school will remain in its place or if the school year will end normally. To tell you the truth, this is one of the greatest sources of frustration among school principals because they can do nothing about it.

Ali also raised another problem that is the result of the ongoing conflict. He particularly complained about student discipline problems, which he relates to absence of the rule of law in the country. Commenting on this, he stated:

It is regrettable to say that pupils no longer view teachers as parents because they do not have respect for them and often defy their authority. Pupils also challenge our authority in making appropriate decisions regarding student discipline. We must be careful in enforcing such decisions. I am sorry to say that the problem of tribalism has affected our power and authority in resolving students' behavioural and discipline problems. You may be forced to resort to tribal means that you would never accept if you were in a country where the rule of law is observed.

Since all these problems have been created by the ongoing conflict, Ali believed that most of those who have been involved in the civil war and are still perpetuating the conflict are people with no or little education. He argued that, "If nothing is done about the education of the young people, ignorance will prevail and the senseless killing will continue." Therefore, Ali is committed to keep schools open despite the abovementioned challenges. Although there seems uncertainty over the country's political direction and future, Ali expressed optimism about the future of education, and he envisages that the education system of the future will be better than the system used before the civil war and that it will be beneficial to public and private schools.

At the end of the interview, Ali was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Ali replied:

I believe it is important but it is not necessary as long as you have teaching experience and served as a vice-principal. In our situation, however, it might be helpful to have training in conflict and problem solving skills, given the environment in which we work.

Participant 2: Bashir

Bashir, 55 years old, is the principal of Kismayo Primary School, an independent school which relies heavily on fees paid by parents. He earned his bachelor's degree in geography from the former Lafoole College of Education. Bashir worked as a teacher for

more than 35 years and has served as a principal for a total of 15 years. He was appointed three years ago to his current position at Kismayo Primary School on the basis of seniority and experience. Prior to that, he was a principal of a combined primary and secondary school. Bashir participated in a number of short seminars offered by UN and other aid agencies. He is helped by a vice-principal and has no teaching responsibilities. Bashir leads Kismayo Primary School with 700 students in grades one through grade eight. The school employs 21 teaching staff. Only seven of them have bachelor's degrees while the rest are secondary school graduates with limited pre-service training. The school also employs two security guards, one in the morning and the other at night, and two janitors. The school operates in the afternoon as the school facilities are shared by secondary school students in the morning. The school is a member of a local educational umbrella called Education Development Association (SEDA).

Bashir described himself as having the final responsibility for everything and everybody in his school. He stated, "I am in charge of students, teachers, and other staff. I have an overall control of all the activities taking place in the school." Bashir noted that the owner of the school gave him broader authority to organize the school as he sees appropriate. As a veteran principal who worked before the collapse of the state, Bashir felt that the broader authority conferred to him carries with it immense responsibilities and he often consults his vice-principal as well as the advisory committee of his school when making critical decisions. He acknowledged that, "If you have a good vice-principal, who is ready to help you, then you are going to have a functioning school." However, Bashir did not see the importance of involving the other staff, including teachers, in the decision making process in the school and provided justification by saying, "Most teachers are young people who lack experience. And they know I have that experience."

Bashir also portrayed himself as a father figure towards his teachers rather than as a school manager.

It is important that teachers see you as a parent, rather than just a school manager. If they see you in that way, they become more open to you in terms of things that may happen in their personal lives. I'm very keen to help them.

Bashir also reported that he tries to alleviate some of his teachers' financial difficulties.

Although I operate my school on a very tight budget because of our reliance on school fees, I do my best to help my teachers financially. I asked every teacher to make a small monthly contribution in order to help those who are in dire need of financial assistance.

Apart from taking interest in his teachers' personal problems, Bashir saw great value in teacher supervision and describes his supervisory practices as follows:

I have a pre-teaching meeting in the morning to find out if teachers are prepared to deliver the assigned lessons. I also conduct classroom observations mainly to help teachers who have little formal training. During such observation, I sit in the back seat and observe the teacher while he is teaching. If the lesson is delivered well, I praise the teacher for his performance. Otherwise, I will take up the lesson and do it again.

Bashir emphasized the importance of passing along his experience to his teachers or, as he put it, "It is my duty to pass my experience on to younger teachers, particularly those who have little or no formal training." Bashir perceived his responsibilities in teacher supervision to include checking students' exercise books because, as he put it, "It helps me to see if the teacher is giving appropriate homework and taking time to go through the students' exercise books."

Bashir reported that he makes himself visible in the school in order to intervene in a supportive and corrective manner whenever a teacher has a problem with a disruptive student. He emphasized the importance of encouraging teachers to seek help early on when

the problems are easier to solve. “In doing so,” he believed, “they help themselves as well as the school administration in reducing the tension between them and students.”

On the other hand, Bashir urged the school committee to organize in-service training sessions for teachers whenever available resources, as well as the security conditions, permit. In this regard he said,

I sometimes urge the school committee to find ways for improving teachers’ performance. To be honest with you, it is really difficult to organize training sessions during the school year for many reasons, but we were able to organize such sessions when the school is closed. And our teachers occasionally attend seminars organized and funded by UN or external aid agencies, which are helpful.

He considered the training sessions organized by such agencies useful to teachers with limited pre-service training because, “Besides improving teachers’ pedagogical skills, certificates of participation from UN agencies increase their chances of getting better jobs.”

Bashir then brought up another aspect of his role, which is collaboration with parents. His efforts were mainly concentrated in the area of financial support. He described the support of the parents’ committee as helpful in reaching out to local businesses for financial support. He stated,

As you know, in our culture, you can achieve many things through personal connections. So, we communicate our financial needs through members of our parents’ committee, who have personal connections with local business people or charity organizations. This often takes place when the school is in dire need of financial support.

For instance, Bashir offered an example where the parents’ committee play an important role in helping him with financial problems that he faces.

Apart from the ongoing conflict, the country has been going through economic hardships and droughts. We often face price increase and teachers find themselves in a very difficult situation where their salary is not enough to meet their basic needs

and we do not have external support. In these circumstances, we invite the parents' committee for a meeting and consult them about a possible increase in the school fees. In most cases, they are very supportive.

Providing financial support to a school administrator in times of difficulty, particularly in a war-torn environment can be extremely revitalizing. Raising the issue of working in a war-torn environment, Bashir shared his experiences and expressed a great deal of frustration with the ongoing conflict and its disruptive effects on student learning, especially when heavy fighting erupts and continues for several days. Bashir explained how he had dealt with such incidents.

Although the situation is fraught with great safety risks, my vice-principal and I try to get to school in order to update teachers and students on the security situation in the area surrounding the school. If we feel that there are safety risks, we advise students and teachers to stay home and not risk their lives to come to school. We communicate this message through local radio stations.

Bashir commented on this action as risk-taking and self-denial, which he likened to walking through minefields. He also recounted another experience where government forces broke into his school while chasing their retreating enemy and suspected him of hiding the insurgents. He described his reaction to this provocation.

I calmly asked the soldiers to leave the school premises and to not terrify the children. I told them this is not a battleground; it is a school for small children. To be honest with you, it was a difficult situation but I tried not to show any sign of panic and fear in front of my students and teachers.

Bashir also expressed grave concern about the negative impact on student learning due to frequent closures of the school. He stated, "The school is often closed and this closure impacts students' learning as well. Students can't learn much due to the frequent fighting." Bashir noted that some schools moved to the outskirts of the city to avoid school closures, but he decided to remain in the city because of logistical problems.

Moving the school means facing an enormous amount of difficulties. You need to find a building that has adequate water and sanitation facilities. Such facilities in the displaced people's camps are appalling. We cannot afford to build such facilities

because our financial resources are extremely limited. Not only this, if some of your teachers and students decide to stay in the city, you have to provide them with a bus. As we are not supported by an organization, we cannot afford to provide such transportation.

Apart from the effects of the conflict and subsequent harsh economic conditions, lack of adequately trained teachers is of major concern to Bashir. He described his teachers as young people who are motivated but struggle with classroom management because they do not know how or what to do to maintain control of the class. You can't blame them for this deficiency because they did not receive adequate training before they took their jobs. This is a reality I have to deal with.

Despite these challenges, Bashir expressed his strong commitment to keep schools open for the sake of the Somali children's futures. He described this commitment as follows:

Although the conflict is still going on, we never give up on providing education to our children. We have a great responsibility on our shoulders, and we are determined to keep schools open and provide education for the Somali children, regardless of the conflict and the difficult situation in which we work.

Bashir believed that such commitment requires a lot of sacrifice and states,

It is not our goal to make more money for the sake of personal gain, as some people claimed; instead, we are concerned about the future of our children. I was one of few educators who reopened schools in the early 1990s. We used to get a monthly salary of 80 thousand Somali Shillings, which was roughly 14 US dollars. If we are not committed to helping Somali children, we would have left this profession during that period.

This strong commitment is reinforced by a sense of optimism about the future of education in the country. Bashir stated,

I am optimistic for one reason. We have learned to rely on ourselves. We also feel that parents have now more interest in education than in the past. And the creation of many private schools and higher institutes during the past twenty years of the conflict is a good sign for a better future.

At the end of the interview, Bashir was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what kind of training would he suggest? Bashir replied:

I don't think it is necessary. Teaching experience is the most important criterion for selecting a principal. In addition, the principal needs to have good people skills. He has to be able to interact positively with different people, and you know being able to do so within a tribal society in the midst of ongoing conflict is difficult. So, it is probably something that we have to be aware of when we train new principals.

Participant 3: Daahir

Daahir, 58 years old, is currently the principal of Baidoa Primary School, which is a privately-owned school. He is a graduate of Lafoole College of Education with a major in English. Daahir has extensive teaching and administrative experience, totalling more than 32 years. Before becoming principal, he was a teacher at his current school for more than 10 years. Daahir was appointed as principal based on seniority and experience. As a veteran principal, he attended training seminars before the collapse of the central government. He is assisted by a vice-principal and an advisory committee and is not required to teach. Daahir leads Baidoa Primary School, which has around 500 students in grades one through grade eight. Daahir has 12 teachers, of whom two are female, distributed as follows: seven for lower primary grades and five for upper primary grades. Out of the 12 teachers, five are university graduates and seven are holders of secondary school diploma. The school also employs two janitors and two security guards. It is a member of a local educational umbrella called the Somali Association for Formal Education (SAFE), which oversees schools that follow the system 8-4 representing 8 years of primary and 4 years of secondary education.

Daahir saw himself as an executive officer who “is in charge of the school, while taking into account directives of the owner and the school committee.” Daahir talked about a school committee that helps him to perform this task.

We have a school committee consisting of seven members. It acts as an advisory body, and helps me in making major decisions such as selecting a curriculum, hiring staff, managing school fees, and resolving conflicts.

Daahir pointed out that these are the major decisions that affect the daily working of the school and he has to consult with the vice-principal or the school's advisory body. He admitted that, "When making one of these decisions, I have to consult the school's advisory body or at least my vice-principal." He offered an example of some of these decisions by saying, "If I need to hire a new teacher, I have to consult the advisory body. I cannot do that on my own. If I need to raise fees, I can't do that on my own." Daahir saw this committee as an essential source of support indicating that getting the support of this committee is vital in maintaining the school.

Daahir then enumerated the multifaceted roles he plays as a principal. These roles include helping teachers, supervising them and checking their ability to perform their duties satisfactorily, building a good relationship with parents, and maintaining order and discipline within the school walls.

Daahir talked about the helpful attitude that he and his teachers demonstrate when a tragic incident strikes one of his teachers. Commenting on this, he stated:

I am always available when a teacher needs help. I am always supportive when a tragic event strikes one of my teachers. You see there are a lot of problems in this country. We do our best to rally around those involved in the tragedy and we are also ready to help them cope with the tragedy.

Daahir described his teachers as "people who are ready to protect you and keep you safe." He believed that the stronger the relationship with teachers, the easier it is for him to communicate and gain support in times of difficulty or, in his words, "helping each other during difficult times has become part of us and we all do what we can to help others."

Daahir conceded that since teachers' salaries are not sufficient to cover their basic needs, he has to find another way to supplement the meagre salaries of his teachers.

I created part-time job opportunities for teachers. We offer remedial classes for students with learning difficulties or those who want to improve their academic performance. We charge a nominal fee for such classes, which is much cheaper than what private tutors at home charge. If teachers' needs are not addressed, all other efforts will be in vain.

Another important role Daahir plays is teacher supervision, which includes reviewing teachers' lesson preparation books. He explained this practice as follows:

When a teacher comes to school in the morning, he has to report to my office. I check if he has prepared the lesson well. I check if the stated objectives of the lesson are clear. I check if the lesson has the necessary questions as well as the homework questions. Then the teacher can deliver the lesson.

In addition, Daahir visits classrooms to find out if "teachers are really doing what they have stated in their preparation books." He believed that such monitoring is necessary for the implementation of the prescribed curriculum in good time and to avoid any unpredictable events that may disrupt the school calendar. He stated,

Schools in Mogadishu are frequently disrupted by the frequent fighting. This makes school days short and creates uncertainty about the completion of the curriculum. So, I have to ensure that teachers cover the curriculum as much as they can by sticking to what they have stated in the preparation book.

Daahir further indicated that this procedure is necessary with regard to teachers who lack experience as well as pre-service training. Daahir also used classroom visits as a means for helping teachers. He mentioned that, "I often walk into classrooms without prior notice. The aim is to send a message to teachers and students alike that I am available whenever help is needed."

Regarding his relationships with parents and the local community, Daahir's efforts were mainly concentrated in monitoring student attendance. He described a situation where contact between school and home regarding school attendance becomes necessary.

As a result of the ongoing conflict and poverty, many children who lost their parents or whose parents are very poor cannot go to school. These children often roam the streets. When school children see their peers playing in the streets, they feel tempted to skip classes and play with such children without the knowledge of their parents. Unless there is communication between the school and the parent, it will be difficult for the school administration to monitor student attendance.

Although Daahir has a collaborative relationship with parents on student school attendance, he reported that parents' financial contribution to school is very limited. He cited poverty as the main reason. He stated, "We cannot ask parents to make donations or contributions to school, because they can barely afford to pay school fees." Daahir also conceded that his school neither receives financial assistance from external organizations nor engages in any kind of fundraising activities aiming to support the school financially.

When asked about his experience of working in a war-torn environment, Daahir said the first thing is student safety, because "Nowadays you could never feel safe walking on the road because of roadside bombs or landmines." He expressed great concern about the increasing numbers of people who are wounded or killed as a result of such roadside bombs and landmines, including children on their way to school.

I always feel great responsibility for student safety, whether they are within the walls of the school building or beyond the boundaries of the school. So, my first step was to hire security guards who help us to protect and provide safety for the school.

Daahir also expressed concern about severe disruptions to student attendance and learning, particularly when fighting erupts before students make their way to school. During such fighting, travel to school for both teachers and students becomes dangerous. He

explained that “It happens that students and teachers could not get to school along their usual route or could not come at all because of the fighting or the presence of many roadblocks and checkpoints.”

Daahir further described the safety measures that are in place in his school, especially when fighting takes place in an area near the school:

When fighting breaks out in our neighborhood, we disperse students into small groups and hide them in separate areas. ... We place students in concrete shelters found in the neighboring area. ..., the area where the school is located may come under artillery fire or shells, and there are also stray bullets that kill many people who are not involved in the fighting. When fighting stops, we bring students back from their hiding places. Then we resume our classes.

Daahir conceded that making the appropriate decision in such emergency cases is one of the most difficult tasks facing the principal because, “You have to act immediately in response to the fighting but, at the same time, you do not have enough information on which you base your decision, as you do not know how long the fight will take.”

Daahir mentioned that his school was located in what was formerly known as the green line dividing the city into north and south, where some of the main confrontations between the two sides of the conflict frequently take place. Because of school closures, he decided to move his school to the outskirts of the city where many people and schools have moved. Daahir compared the positive and negative effects of moving the school.

Now my school is relatively safer and less vulnerable to the frequent disruptions that we had experienced before moving from the original location, but now we are working in makeshift schools where water and sanitation facilities are very poor. Some of our students have to sit on the bare ground with books on their laps, due to lack of chairs.

He expressed his concern about the inconvenience and health risks that such situations may cause for students because, as he states, “You can’t sit this way for a long time.” Daahir

admitted that relocating the school is a last resort to avoid frequent school closures due to insecurity and to cope with the displacement of students and their families.

Apart from the poor facilities, Daahir expressed great concern about the discipline problem in his school:

As things are quite different now, I think that the violent environment in which children are growing up has a negative impact on their behaviours. What we see in student behaviour is a reflection of the violence in the larger society. I have been in education for over 40 years, but what I am seeing now is that students are becoming more rebellious.

Daahir particularly complained about disruptive behaviours caused by older children who missed out on early years of their education because of the civil war and who have then come back to school. He stated that discipline problems in the classroom arise when these young people lure younger teachers into confrontation by challenging their authority. Daahir cited incidents in which teachers were threatened by these students, who may bring a gun or pistol to school with the intention of harming a teacher. Although, according to school policy, bringing weapons to school is prohibited, Daahir admitted that, given the absence of a law enforcement authority in the country, he had to deal with this kind of situation calmly with the help of security guards, the parents' committee and community elders.

To solve student discipline problems, Daahir tried to be proactive because he believed that "Any simple quarrel among students or between students and teachers in such a turbulent environment could spark a conflict that could escalate beyond the school." In order to enforce school discipline, he specifically relied on his vice-principal, some experienced senior teachers and members of the parents' committee, as well as classroom prefects.

Despite the aforesaid challenges, Daahir believed that the current educational system has made significant progress, arguing that students had little chance of going to university

before the collapse of the state but, now, “Many students have the chance to get into local universities or go abroad for study.” He believed that this indicates a better future.

At the end of the interview, Daahir was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Daahir replied:

I would say it is not necessary. It can be supplementary, because most of the time you deal with students. So you must have teaching experience. My own promotion was made on the basis of my teaching experience, and this was before the civil war. But now the situation is quite different. So I would suggest that principals may need to have good skills in dealing with conflicts and disputes.

Participant 4: Faisal

Faisal, 52 years old, has been the principal of Beledweyn Primary School for the past eight years. He holds a bachelor’s degree in technical education from a vocational institute in Mogadishu and a diploma in technical teaching from an overseas university. Faisal taught at Mogadishu Polytechnic Institute for seven years before the collapse of the state in 1991. He was appointed to his current position on the basis of merit after having served as an outstanding teacher for more than six years at his School. Faisal participated in one training session organized by the supporting organization to improve his administrative skills. Faisal is assisted by a vice-principal and has no teaching responsibilities. The school that Faisal leads has around 600 students in grades one through grade nine and 14 teaching staff, nearly ten of whom are graduates of teacher training colleges, while the rest have degrees in a field other than teaching or education. The school employs a secretary, as well as two security guards, two janitors and a man who runs errands for the school. It is supported by a local organization and is a member of the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS).

Faisal described his own perceptions of what he does in school on a day-to-day basis. He saw himself as a manager of the school who undertakes many tasks. Faisal talked about a

range of different tasks that he addresses from teacher supervision to overseeing the curriculum and its implementation, to having good relationships with the supporting organization. Faisal then emphasized his relationship with the education committee representing the organization supporting his school. He described how he communicates with this committee.

The education committee is comprised of a chairman, his deputy and principals of the schools affiliated with the organization. It holds regular meetings where we as principals submit reports every three months describing the general atmosphere of the school, the point reached in the syllabus, the problems faced by teachers in teaching the syllabus, and the tasks assigned to teachers.

Faisal indicated that all these matters are communicated to the education committee which, in turn, provides him with “continuous updates on the security situation and instructions on financial matters.” Faisal described himself as having a very limited role in financial matters.

We are relieved from the burden of financial matters by the Financial Department of the organization, which directly manages the school fees. I am only required to check on students who have not paid their fees and write a report to the department. In fact, financial matters are beyond the scope of school principals’ responsibility.

Although the education committee is in charge of financial matters, Faisal asserted that, “It does not interfere in the internal affairs of the school administration because our relationship is based on mutual respect and trust.” Faisal raised another aspect of his relationship with the education committee. He emphasized the importance of keeping in touch with the officers in the Education Committee. He mentioned two important reasons for such ongoing communications. First, the turbulent environment in which he works requires “making quick and decisive decisions that might have serious consequences for the school management.” So, Faisal said, “I follow a policy of ongoing consultations with the

department. This will allow me to ensure the safety of my school.” Second, all decisions on financial matters are made at the committee level; therefore “I have to regularly communicate the financial needs of the school to the committee.”

While Faisal emphasised the consultative nature of some of the major decisions he makes, he admitted that there are decisions he has to make himself.

It’s not always that I consult other people. It depends on the decision that I have to make. Some people may construe your frequent consultation as a weakness or your inability to take decisive actions. So, I am keen to demonstrate that I am the person who takes ultimate responsibility for all decisions made at school.

Faisal then talked about his role in teacher supervision by saying,

Supervision is a major part of my duties. I feel I am in a better position to assist teachers pedagogically because, before I came to this position, I was rated twice as the best teacher in my school. My role as a supervisor includes checking teachers’ lesson preparation every morning. I feel this is important, because many teachers engage in other activities such as offering tutoring lessons at home or other works to make ends meet. We, as principals, are under moral and professional obligation to give priority to our students. So such monitoring is necessary to make sure that the teacher comes to school prepared to perform his duty.

Faisal also spoke of making classroom visits and observing teachers while they are teaching.

The purpose of classroom visitation is, as Faisal explained, to observe “the way teachers present lessons, how they involve students in the lesson, how they control the class and how students interact with the teacher.” After classroom visits, Faisal stressed the importance of providing teachers with feedback on weak points of their performance while encouraging and praising them for positive aspects of their teaching.

Faisal pointed to the importance of providing in-service training to teachers. He explained that, when a teacher faces difficulty in certain aspects of teaching or classroom

management, he feels obliged to provide support for that teacher or arrange a training session for him in order to improve his performance. Faisal mentioned that such training focuses on

... areas of weakness in teacher performance that have been observed during the school year. These areas include upgrading the teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, developing the skills needed for dealing with students' behavioural problems, classroom control and marking pupils' exercises. Of these topics, classroom management strategies are at the top of the agenda whenever training sessions are organized in school.

Faisal further talked about an important issue relevant to teacher supervision, monitoring the syllabus. He pointed to a constant disruption of learning process caused by unexpected school closures, due to frequent fighting. He remarked that such disruptions cause a great deal of confusion relating to the coverage of the syllabus. Commenting on this, he said,

Unless the principal closely monitors the implementation of the syllabus, some teachers may skip certain lessons that need to be covered, and this might affect pupils' learning as well as their preparation for the examinations, especially for students in grade 9 who sit for the primary school-leaving examination.

Besides in-service training and curriculum coverage, Faisal pointed to Thursday morning meetings, where newly appointed teachers are helped by the more experienced teachers with regard to lesson planning. This includes demonstration and practice lessons. He stated that the experienced teachers "observe their colleagues and provide them with guidance and advice." Faisal considered all these ongoing follow-up, monitoring, and in-service training as part of instructional support for his teachers.

Faisal turned to the subject of his relationship with parents, which he described as negative. He complained about parents' lack of collaboration, which he mainly ascribed to their attitude towards education. He stated,

Most parents believe that their role is to bring their children to school, and the rest is the responsibility of the school. That is why we are having difficulty in reaching them. Our communications with parents have recently been very weak. Although we have a parents' committee, it exists in name only. In reality, it does not function.

Although the security situation has greatly affected contacts between the school and parents, Faisal asserted that, "parents' beliefs about their role in the education of their children are to be partially responsible for such lack of collaboration."

On his experiences of working in a war-torn environment, Faisal highlighted some important lessons that he learned from this experience. One of these lessons is the importance of commitment and persistence as a source of strength for school leaders working in war-torn environments. Faisal has come to believe that "If you have a will and determination, you will find a way to achieve your goal, regardless of any obstacles that come your way." He cited the example of those who have restarted schools from scratch after the fall of the central government and who have shown how strong determination and commitment can overcome great challenges. Faisal acknowledged that those educators have set a good example for others and he is determined to follow in their footsteps. On this issue, he stated,

I couldn't imagine what the education in the country would be like without the determination and commitment of those educators who restarted schools from scratch at a time nobody thought that was possible. Thanks to their efforts and commitment to education, many students who went to school when these dedicated people opened schools are now university graduates and some of them are even in graduate studies. We followed in their footsteps and have maintained schools despite frequent fighting in recent years that killed hundreds and displaced thousands of families from the city.

Another lesson that Faisal raised is the importance of calmness for making the appropriate decisions during difficult times. He learned from experience that "Calmness

helps the principal to avoid making hasty and poorly thought out decisions, which may have serious consequences for the school.” Faisal offered an example, where principals are prone to making such decisions.

Although the principal is responsible for the safety of his students, our long experience of working in this environment has taught us not to rush into making decisions when there are rumours of an imminent outbreak of fighting in the city or see some kind of skirmish between the two sides of the conflict, which may not last for more than half an hour or so.

This does not imply a lack of a sense of responsibility, but the opposite is true. Faisal communicated a high level of great responsibility for student safety. He felt moral obligation towards student safety within the walls of the school building and beyond. He offered an example of sharing with his students the risk of traveling to school.

While I was commuting with 50 of my students to our school located on the outskirts of the city, we were caught in crossfire between the two sides of the conflict. No one was injured in this incident. But the difficulty in such incidents is that you may not find a wall or shelter to duck behind from the falling shells and stray bullets.

Faisal indicated that being responsible for overseeing these students while traveling to school in such a volatile environment involves a lot of risk-taking, but he asserted that a sense of responsibility drives him to do so.

Faisal explained one of the most difficult aspects about being a school leader in a war-torn environment. He expressed a major concern about student mobility. He indicated that parents are often displaced and this leads “to a situation where a large number of students leave with their parents.” He noted that this mobility affects not only students and parents, but also the school itself. Faisal recalled that his school moved to different locations three times in a single year. He described schooling in Mogadishu as unique, because “it is the only place that a school can move to different locations within a short period of time.”

Despite these huge difficulties that school principals face, Faisal was optimistic about the future of education in the country. However, he acknowledged that, “Much depends on changes in the current security situation and how people view education.” He strongly believed that without education, children will lose hope and confidence, first in themselves, and also in the community they live. This leaves them with a bleak future. As an individual who was educated for free before the collapse of the state, Faisal felt that he is accountable to the Somali children and is obliged to provide educational opportunities for them as much as he can.

At the end of the interview, Faisal was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Faisal replied:

It is difficult to say it is necessary or not necessary. To be honest with you, I didn't feel comfortable when I became a principal because of lack of prior preparation; I had to ask for many opinions on how to do things. On the other hand, I was quite comfortable in supervising teachers, because of my teaching background. As you see, it is a very difficult question to answer. However, what we need now is capacity building, particularly in the area of curriculum development. We need to have a good solid foundation of how to develop curriculum. So, we request UN agencies to help us in developing our capacity in this area.

Participant 5: Jamal

Jamal, 36 years old, has been the principal of Garowe Primary School for the last five years. He is the youngest and least experienced of all the principals, and has a bachelor's degree in business management (economics). So, Jamal did not train as a teacher. After teaching for 11 years, he was promoted to principal on the basis of personal connections with the owner of the school, a former local organization that no longer exists as an active organization, but still represents the school at the Educational Network responsible for examinations and school certificates. Jamal still retains some teaching responsibilities and

did not have a vice-principal but he has a senior teacher who acts as a vice-principal on a non-permanent basis. Jamal participated in two short workshops focusing on school administration. The school that Jamal leads is nominally associated with a local organization and has around 250 students in grades seven through grade nine. No classes are held for lower primary grades. Jamal has seven teachers and all of them are university graduates. The school employs two janitors, as well as two security guards whose functions are to control the opening and closing of the main entrance of the school and to allow visitors to enter the school. It is a member of the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS).

Jamal believed that his role and responsibilities were not clearly defined because, “There is no official job description to tell me what I should do as a principal. But my common sense tells me that the principal is in charge of everything in the school.” However, he described “coordinating the work of teachers, making sure that they do their job responsibly, monitoring the implementation of the syllabus and an overall supervision of the school activities and discipline,” as his main tasks.

When asked about his relationship with the sponsoring organization, Jamal talked about a limited relationship and gave the reason.

My school was previously supported by a local charity organization. But this organization is no longer able to support the school financially because of losing its financial support from abroad. We now totally rely on school fees collected from students. Yet the organization still represents us at the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia, which is responsible for examinations and school certificates. So, our working relationship with the organization is very limited.

Jamal described school fees as the only source of income for the school. Such fees are used to pay teachers’ salaries and to cover the costs of running the school. Because of lack of

external support, Jamal expressed a lot of frustration about the working conditions of his teachers.

Our teachers work under difficult conditions and their salaries are too low. What also makes their financial situation more difficult is that we do not have any other source of external support. In such circumstances, all I can do is to provide verbal encouragement to boost their morale, because I am not in a position to help them financially.

Jamal also spoke of having a limited role in teacher supervision. He acknowledged that he neither “makes any class visits nor signs the teacher’s preparation book for inspection.” He gave the reason by stating that it would create tension between him and his teachers because “some teachers may feel that you want to find faults with them.”

However, Jamal closely monitored the implementation of the syllabus because the examination dates are set in advance by the educational network that oversees the member schools, rather than by individual schools. Because the educational network sets the examination schedule he must cover the entire curriculum within the allotted time frame. He noted,

The educational network with which I am affiliated has a specific schedule for the administration of the final examinations, especially for Grade 9 examinations. The examination dates cannot be changed or postponed to a later date, regardless of any circumstances that are beyond the control of the school management. Therefore, it is my responsibility to closely monitor the coverage of the syllabus so that students will be ready for the examination before the end of the school calendar.

Although Jamal monitored the syllabus coverage, he admitted that he “accepts the report submitted by each teacher without further inquiry, because of the trust existing among ourselves.”

Jamal also spoke of having a very limited relationship with parents. He described the communication between parents and the school as non-existent. He regrettably stated that “a very few parents care about what their children do at school.” He cited parents’ low levels of education as the main reason for lack of collaboration on the part of most parents. He noted,

When we invite parents to visit the school, only a few of them show up for meetings, even during school functions. You may even find a parent or a guardian whose child is in your school and who had never stepped into school.

Apart from parents’ lack of involvement in school, Jamal acknowledged that parents make no financial contributions to his school. He illustrated parents’ attitudes towards public contributions by saying:

Unfortunately, our society in general, and school parents in particular, are not oriented towards making contributions to school. If you ask parents to contribute some money towards the erection of classrooms, you notice a lack of commitment and faith in the value of such contributions.

Since Jamal received no external support from charity organizations or parents, he followed a strategy whereby whatever income generated is distributed equally among teachers or, in his words, “Teachers’ salaries are not fixed but increase or decrease in proportion to the amount of school fees generated.” He added that this arrangement was unanimously approved by all teachers. Jamal associated this with a norm followed in his school with respect to decision making.

Our school is very small and there is no management hierarchy compared to big schools. So, I work closely with my teachers. I like to consult them before taking important decisions. We hold regular meetings on Thursdays to make such important decisions. Once a decision is reached, everyone has to abide by the decision. So far, this strategy has helped us to survive during hard times.

Referring to his experience of working in a situation of armed conflict, Jamal stated “We have been in this conflict for more than two decades; it is not something new to us.” He described how the reality of ongoing fighting disrupts the normal functioning of the school:

In the middle of the school day, fighting suddenly erupts. You have to stop classes and look for shelter or any other secure area. This causes a lot of panic and fear among students and teachers. Once the fighting is over, you have to resume classes. Unfortunately, we have no control over such events taking place beyond our school boundaries.

As Jamal described, learning disruption while students are at school often occurs when fighting takes place in the vicinity of the school or the area around the school. The fighting between the two sides of the conflict is characterized as “hit and run,” which causes frequent disruptions to student learning. As a result, it is normal that, after every battle, people walk out, open their schools and shops, and life returns to normal for a few days until a new battle erupts again. Therefore, as Jamal put it, “There is no need to cancel the remaining class periods in such circumstances. But, when fighting continues for days or weeks, a different decision is needed.”

Another experience that is of particular concern to Jamal is the phenomenon of moving the school whenever the local community is displaced. Jamal admitted that the decision to move the school was the most difficult decision that he has ever made. He described the difficulties involved in making such a decision:

Sometimes heavy fighting erupts and continues for days or weeks. This causes displacement of families. Before making any decision to move the school, we have to balance the interest of parents who decide to remain in the city and those who move to the outskirts of the city. If the number of students who move to the outskirts of the city outnumbers those who remain in the city, we have to decide to move the school. Then we have to locate the area to which most of the parents had moved. Finally, we

have to make a radio announcement informing students about the new location of the school.

Jamal noted that he “always sets aside a small amount of money for emergency cases, like this one, in order to rent a private house and convert it into a school.”

Jamal expressed great concern about the use of rented private houses, “because they have not separate toilets for girls and this forces them to share toilets with boys.” Because these girls want to have their own privacy, do not use toilets during breaks. They are forced to come out while classes are in session and this causes them a lot of embarrassment. Jamal expressed a lot of frustration because, as a principal, while it is his responsibility to spare girls’ embarrassment, he acknowledged that he can do nothing due to lack of financial resources.

The ongoing conflict not only affects the stability of schools, but also the authority and power of the principal in resolving students’ behavioural and discipline problems. Jamal expressed concern about student discipline and finds difficulty in making the right decision or taking appropriate discipline measures against some students. He stated that, “If you take the right decision against some students, it may have serious consequences for your personal safety as well as the school safety.” In dealing with such difficult students, Jamal admitted that,

Considering the overall environment in which we work and the availability of arms in every house, even to children, I have to soften the tough disciplinary decisions I intend to make and I have to make more lenient decisions that partially solve the problem at hand. In doing so, I feel that this approach has a negative effect on other students and the school as a whole, but I do not have any better choice.

When asked what motivates him to keep working in this challenging environment, Jamal did not hesitate to state that, “It is difficult to get a better job here.” I admit that I was

somewhat taken aback because this is the first time I heard a principal speak so frankly that he is ready to quit his job if he finds a better job. Jamal admitted that, “Managing a school in a war-torn environment is very dangerous.” He expressed his wish to find a job less stressful and risky.

At the end of the interview, Jamal was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Jamal replied:

I feel that teaching experience is not sufficient, because managing a classroom is not like managing a school. Although having teaching experience is still an advantage, management skills are indispensable for any manager of a school. Since you asked me to make a suggestion, I would say many principals may need training in conflict and problem solving skills, because most of the time we are dealing with endless problems, whether from students or parents or even from the community members.

Participant 6: Khalid

Khalid, 48 years old, has been the principal of Hargeisa Primary School since 2005. He holds a secondary school diploma and has more than 20 years of teaching experience. After teaching for five years at Hargeisa Primary School, he was promoted to his current position on a recommendation from his predecessor, which was approved by the senior management of the organization that supports the school. Khalid attended a one-month in-service training on school management organized by the supporting organization, as well as two short seminars by UN agencies focusing on life skills and psychosocial care and support in emergency education. Khalid is assisted by a vice-principal and has no teaching responsibilities. The school that Khalid leads has around 400 students in grades one through grade nine and 10 teaching staff, of whom two are female. Four of his teachers have secondary school diplomas while others have degrees in fields other than teaching or education. The school, which belongs to a local organization is a member of the Formal

Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS), and follows a modified version of the curriculum currently used in the United Arab Emirates.

Khalid viewed his role as helping teachers and fostering a connection between school and the community.” He emphasized that this is the most difficult part of his job, especially where human and material resources are very limited. Khalid articulated a desire to help teachers do their job and explains why supporting teachers is important:

Without support, teachers would find themselves facing huge challenges in performing their duties, because the conditions in which they work are extremely difficult as a result of the ongoing conflict. Offering whatever means and forms of assistance that we can afford is of paramount importance.

Khalid noted that, in a war-torn environment, what would seem a normal day can easily turn into an emotionally tense day due to tragic events. He said, “In such events, I am not only a manager, but I am also a parent who takes care of his students and teachers. I let them feel I care about them, provide them whatever I can.” He emphasized the importance of solidarity by showing emotional and moral support to those who are affected by such events. Khalid said, “By showing moral support to others, they will do the same to you during difficult times.”

When asked what kind of assistance he gives to his teachers, Khalid said, “I give them lunch and tea at break time, because some of them, particularly those with a large family may come to school on empty stomachs.”

With regards to instruction, Khalid considered teacher supervision an important aspect of his responsibilities. He stated, “I believe that supervision is very important. If there is no teacher supervision, we would not have known whether a teacher has done his job satisfactorily or not.” So, Khalid conducted visits and evaluated teachers’ performance. During classroom visits,

If there is deficiency in the teacher’s performance, which can be improved, I arrange for him training sessions, as most teachers are not graduates of colleges of education

and there are also shortages of university graduates. I invite people with teaching expertise and knowledge, especially former public school supervisors, to provide such training.

Khalid also talked about arranging collaboration among teachers.

I arrange some kind of collaboration between more experienced teachers and less qualified ones on Thursdays where the school holds staff briefings. This kind of collaboration is helpful; because more experienced teachers have no time for helping others during working days. I encourage teachers to work together and to exchange their experiences. Of course, this depends on the general security situation.

Stressing the importance of helping teachers improve their performance, Khalid often writes "... a request letter to the supporting organization to provide teachers with training opportunities, especially during vacations."

Referring to his relationship with the supporting organization, Khalid talked about having a good working relationship with the organization. He reported that the organization has an

... education committee responsible for making educational policies and for coordinating activities of all member schools. I report directly to the chairman of the education committee in all matters related to the school. The chairman acts as a link between the school and the organization. The director never interferes with the internal management of the school, as he is responsible for external relationships. In fact, because of our trustworthy relationships, the supporting organization has given me a high degree of latitude in decision making.

Khalid indicated that he is fully authorized to take any action necessary to ensure student safety and to protect the school. For example, he mentioned that, during emergency situations, he could "keep the school closed for a maximum period of seven days until the area in which the school is located becomes safe." He noted that, "You know, such authority is rarely given to a school principal affiliated to a local organization."

Khalid also talked about similar relationships with parents and the local community, pointing out the importance of such collaborative relationships in the current security situation.

Before the collapse of the central government, when you face a problem that may pose potential risks to the safety and security of the school, the principal used to call the police for intervention. But now there is no police, there is no law and there is no order. Therefore, collaboration with parents and the local community has become essential for solving such problems.

Khalid further described how he had sensitized parents towards their crucial role:

When I became a principal, I called on all parents to attend a general meeting and told them that one person cannot solve the problems of their school, and it is the responsibility of the parents to help the school because the school is the property of the community, and the community members have to defend the interest of their school.

Khalid acknowledged that, “Without parents and the local community collaboration, the principal is likely to face many security problems.”

Khalid elaborated on his experience of working in a war-torn environment. He emphasized the importance of maintaining a high level of vigilance and taking appropriate steps to ensure student safety. In this regard, he said,

I always follow local radio news to know the security developments. These radio stations closely monitor the general security situation in the country and warn people who are likely to be affected by the imminent fighting and in case fighting breaks out, the routes that can be used safely.

Providing safety for his students and teachers was always on the mind of Khalid. He expressed great concern about the very real risks of roadside bombs or landmines, and recounts incidents where children have lost limbs. He indicated that he feels a moral

responsibility for his students' safety, though such incidents often take him beyond the walls of the school.

Khalid indicated that, if there is an imminent outbreak of fighting before students leave home, school cancellations will be aired on local radio stations. However, he emphasized the importance of acting on information obtained from reliable sources while remaining alert and vigilant because, "Sometimes you hear a lot of rumours about an imminent outbreak of fighting, which may become true or false." Khalid noted that, if the situation involves real and perceived security risks, students are informed to stay home and not to risk their lives to come to school.

When heavy fighting breaks out, we suspend the school because we do not want to put students' lives at risk by letting them come to school under such circumstances. We reopen the school only if we feel that the risks to students' lives have passed.

Khalid also expressed great concern about student mobility as a result of frequent fighting. He described how student mobility has affected the functioning of his school. He noted that, "Students move out of school so frequently that a large number of them may have not the opportunity to have educational continuity for the whole school year." Khalid recounted that,

There was a mass exodus from the area in which the school was located. A large number of students moved with their families while the school was still in the middle of the school year. As the number of students declined significantly, the school became unable to cover the running costs, including the salaries of teachers and other staff. We could not have survived without the financial support of the organization.

Another concern that is the consequence of the ongoing conflict expressed by Khalid was student discipline. Khalid complained that

It is very difficult to control children who have only seen violence and war throughout their lives. I think the violent environment has greatly affected their

individual mindsets and has made them more prone to violence. But it is fair to say that most discipline problems are actually caused by overage students who defy the authority of the teacher but not small children. These students may attempt to intimidate teachers by bringing in arms, which is now a rare phenomenon.

Despite the safety risks involved in dealing with student discipline in such a volatile environment, Khalid reported that he refuses to compromise his school policy and rules on the grounds that, “If we do not apply the rules fairly, the school would become chaotic and people would lose faith, trust and confidence in your leadership.” So, he believed that, “We have to be strict so that people feel that there is justice in your school, something that is lost in our society.”

A third concern expressed by Khalid relates to lack of adequately qualified teachers. He mentioned that he was forced to recruit individuals outside of the teaching field. Khalid pointed out that some of his teachers are secondary school graduates while others have degrees in fields other than teaching or education. As Khalid described, these individuals had not been formally trained as teachers, so they are struggling to maintain control of the class. He felt that, without the proper training, “They cannot adequately respond to the learning needs of their students and effectively manage their classrooms.”

When asked what motivates him to keep working in this challenging environment, Khalid talked about a moral obligation and desire to help Somali children. He stated that,

If we give up providing education on the grounds that the current security situation does not permit us to open schools, large numbers of Somali children would remain out of school for unpredictable periods of time. Although what we can contribute is very limited, in the absence of a functioning government, we should not give up the struggle. I believe that education can bring a change and contribute to building a peaceful nation.

At the end of the interview, Khalid was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Khalid replied:

No, I don't believe it is necessary for one reason. You can see many successful schools led by principals without prior preparation. But I wouldn't say that there is no value to prior preparation. In fact, such a preparation helps principals quickly understand what is important in school management. For training that might be helpful for principals, let me mention one thing that I consider important in our situation; principals need conflict resolution and psychosocial care and support skills, because we have to deal with many children and adults who are traumatized by the ongoing conflict.

Participant 7: Mubarak

Mubarak, 51 years old, is both owner and principal of Borama Primary School, established in 1999 as a private computer school, which later became a primary school. Mubarak holds a secondary school diploma and is currently pursuing his undergraduate degree in one of the Mogadishu universities. He is one of only two participants who have no teaching background. Mubarak worked in the Somali National Library for three years before moving to the Ministry of Education, where he spent two years. For academic affairs, he is assisted by a vice-principal and an education advisor who holds a bachelor's degree from Lafoole College of Education. Mubarak participated in three training seminars offered and organized by UNICEF and other UN agencies, mainly focusing on life skills and psychosocial care and support in emergency education. Mubarak's school has around 450 students in grades one through grade eight, and eight teaching staff, five of whom are secondary school graduates while the rest have bachelor's degrees. The school is a member of the Formal Education Network for Private Schools (FENPS), which oversees 30 member schools; seven secondary and 23 primary schools.

As owner and principal, Mubarak perceived his role as a manager who undertakes a number of administrative tasks including “monitoring the cleanliness of the school, supervising the arrangement of the classrooms, providing textbooks and preparing teaching materials.”

Another administrative function Mubarak emphasized was the importance of involving teachers in the decision-making process. Mubarak indicated that he tries, whenever possible, to let his teachers become involved in some decisions that may affect their lives or their work. He shared an example where teachers are involved in making decisions on selecting who would be sent to external training seminars offered by UN agencies. Commenting on this, he said,

Occasionally I receive an offer from UNICEF or other external aid agencies asking me to select a number of teachers for training. When I receive such an offer, I call a meeting and ask teachers to decide among themselves who would participate in such training seminars. I do this because organizing agencies usually provide financial incentives to participants, which is important in the harsh economic context of Somalia.

Mubarak expressed his gratitude to these agencies by saying, “We are appreciative of the assistance provided by United Nations agencies regarding instructional materials as well as training seminars, which are very important, as they boost teachers’ morale.”

Mubarak further mentioned that he is supportive of teachers who may experience tragic events, such as losing one of their family members or other extended family members. He noted,

As a result of ongoing conflict, people lose members of their family or other extended family members. It is a moral obligation to show presence at the funeral and condolence gatherings. It is also important for me to give any grieving teacher three days off in order to help him cope with the emotional experience.

With regards to instructional support, Mubarak indicated that he has an external supervisor who is in charge of teacher supervision and evaluation. He said, “We have a supervisor designated to advise and report on teachers’ instructional practices. I do not need to replicate the duty of the supervisor, because I have a lot of other duties.”

When asked whether he organizes training session at school, Mubarak acknowledged that such activities require financial resources, which he cannot afford to provide, as:

Our school operates on a very tight budget as we rely heavily on fees paid by parents. Organizing training sessions requires financial resources because, when you invite former public school supervisors, who are the only available experts, you have to pay them.

On the other hand, Mubarak reported that he checks students’ exercise books to show parents that his teachers are doing a good job. He explained this as follows:

Now we are working in a competitive environment...As you know, before the civil war, teachers received their salaries from the Ministry of Education even if they did not perform their duty properly. But now the situation is quite different. We have to prove we are working hard. Marking students’ exercise books regularly is one such proof.

Regarding his relationship with parents and the community, Mubarak stressed the importance of using the parents’ committee as a means for the “protection of the school building and the teachers against any attack or harm.” He noted,

As you know, since the collapse of the state, there has been no police or any other law enforcement authority. So we draw on our traditional way of resolving disputes. The parents’ committee and community elders play an important role in mediation efforts.

Mubarak was appreciative of the work of his parents’ committee in helping orphan students and children from very poor families with respect to payment of school fees. However, Mubarak was less satisfied with parents’ collaboration with other aspects of

schooling. He offered an example of how parents' beliefs in their role in school are reflected in their behaviour:

When a parent asks for admission of his child to our school, we ask him to complete an application form. The form contains information explaining what will happen if his child causes harm to others or harm is caused to him. When the parent is asked such questions, he says, "Please do not ask me too many questions. I am ready to pay the school fees and you are responsible for the rest."

When asked about his experience of working in a war-torn environment, Mubarak described the ongoing conflict as a normalized emergency because, as he puts it, "People go about their business once the fighting subsides." Despite this, Mubarak acknowledged the unpredictable nature of such fighting and his preparedness for action when emergency situations arise.

Fighting between the AMISOM-backed TFG forces and insurgent groups often erupts suddenly. It is hard to anticipate or get prepared in advance. Despite this, you need to monitor the security situation. You have to follow the press conferences held by the opposing sides of the conflict. As we have lived through this conflict for more than two decades, we instinctively know when there are signs of imminent fighting. Mubarak explained that, if the fight breaks out in the vicinity of the school, the immediate concern is the safety of students. The doors of the school are locked, and classes are stopped immediately. Teachers are instructed to calm students by telling stories. An emergency meeting is held by the school committee, while the situation is monitored closely. Mubarak stated that the situation becomes very tense during such incidents. He recalled receiving a barrage of phone calls from anxious parents inquiring about the safety of their children. In such cases,

We try to answer phone calls calmly and ensure parents that their children are safe. The difficulty in answering these calls lies in the phone lines available to the school.

Unfortunately, we have only two phone lines, which cannot accommodate all these contacts simultaneously.

Mubarak also spoke of having difficulty in organizing any form of coherent delivery of instruction when fighting starts before students leave their homes and causes disruption to student attendance.

During this kind of disruption, it is very difficult to anticipate how many students and teachers could get to school. Sometimes you are forced to combine two grades or more in one class. Organizing classes and matching between those teachers and students who make it becomes very difficult.

Mubarak further described the immense challenges that he faced in maintaining his school when a large number of students were displaced by heavy fighting. He admitted that keeping the school open becomes a nightmare, as school fees fall off sharply. In this regard, Mubarak said,

People are always on the move due to frequent fighting. You do not know who would be in school tomorrow, as some parents may be displaced and take their children with them. Keeping the school open becomes difficult as the school fees fall off sharply.

Mubarak noted that, when a large number of students are displaced, principals are often forced to relocate their schools. “It is not surprising,” he stated, “to repeatedly hear an announcement from the radio that a school so and so has moved to the displaced people’s camps on the outskirts of the city.” Mubarak acknowledged how difficult it was for him to cover expenses needed to keep the school open during such difficult times.

If people flee from the area of the school, nobody will look back to school. The landlord, the electricity company, and the water supplier all ask you to pay them and they do not care about what happened. As the proprietor and manager of the school, you are responsible for all such payments. It is really a desperate situation, because there is no organization from which you can seek help. The school committee can do nothing about it in such emergency cases.

Mubarak also cited the recurrent absence of electricity as one of the major problems, especially when renewed fighting breaks out in the vicinity of the school. He noted that, “Power outages often occur and can last for days.” He expressed a lot of frustration when such power outages occur because, as he stated, “We do not have a generator, as some businesses do, and we can’t afford to buy one due to our limited resources.”

Another major challenge cited by Mubarak was the lack of proper school buildings. Mubarak provided a general picture of how the shortage of proper school buildings creates innumerable problems for the school administration:

Because of the lack of proper school buildings, we have to convert rented private houses into schools. You know, these houses do not have the necessary facilities to be schools. We do not have enough space for students and teachers, we do not have enough toilets that can handle the number of students we have, and we do not have hallways that students can use during school breaks.

Mubarak believed that such poor school facilities contribute to student behavioural problems and discipline. He particularly expressed great concern about the disruptive behaviours caused by children who missed out on early years of their education because of the civil war and who have then come back to school. Mubarak noted that discipline problems in the classroom often arise when “Upper grade students who are over age for their level of education defy teachers’ authority, especially when the teacher uses non-verbal behaviours to control the class.” He also cited incidents in which teachers have been threatened or intimidated by these students. To keep the safety of his students and teachers, Mubarak hired security guards whose functions were to “prevent strangers from entering the school as well as to monitor students who may bring weapons to school.”

Mubarak partially attributed the disruptive behaviours of some students to the fact that untrained teachers sometimes use verbal and non-verbal behaviours to control the class.

This sometimes creates violent reactions on the part of misbehaving students. He pointed out that some of his teachers had completed only secondary education and had not received adequate training. “Since there is no other alternative,” Mubarak stated, “these teachers are often assigned to teach in the lower primary grades. This is not exclusive to our school, but it is common.” He considered this arrangement as a partial solution to the discipline problems where more experienced teachers are assigned to upper grades in which older children are placed.

When asked what drives him to stay in the field of education despite the huge challenges he faces on a daily basis, Mubarak responded:

In the absence of a government responsible for providing educational services, we cannot stand by, so we have to do something to help Somali children. It is also my belief that education can be a weapon to fight ignorance and violence, because if we close schools, the number of ignorant people will increase which, in turn, will breed more violence.

At the end of the interview, Mubarak was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Mubarak replied:

Certainly, it is important. But, in my case, I had neither teaching experience nor prior educational training. Yet, I was able to maintain my school throughout the ebb and flow of the conflict. So, I can't say about how important prior preparation or teaching experience is. For the second part of the question, I specifically suggest training seminars that promote collaboration among school principals. As I said before, we work in a competitive environment, so we need seminars that assist principals to develop strategies for such cooperation.

Participant 8: Salem

Salem, 65 years old, is co-founder and principal of Cairo Primary School, established in 1993. He is a graduate of Lafoole College of Education and has more than 40 years of

extensive teaching and administrative experience. Salem is assisted by a vice-principal and has no teaching responsibilities. Salem received training in school administration before the collapse of the state. Salem's school is quite different from other schools in Mogadishu, as it caters to children from rural and remote regions where schools virtually ceased to function. It also caters to children from Somali families living abroad who wanted to send their children back home. The school has about 500 students in grades one through grade eight and 22 teaching staff, nearly nine of whom are graduates of Lafoole College of Education, while the rest have bachelor's degrees from overseas universities. The school follows an upgraded version of the old Somali national curriculum used before the civil war and is a member of the Somali Association for Formal Education (SAFE).

Salem believed that "The role of the principal is a lot more than what many people think. It is probably the most difficult job because it requires competency in managing human and material resources effectively." When asked what his major tasks are as a principal, Salem enumerated the different tasks and functions that make up his role, including helping teachers personally and professionally, building strong relationships with parents and the community, dealing with student discipline problems, buffering students from the negative influences of the ongoing conflict.

With regards to helping teachers, Salem considered his teachers an invaluable asset and resource and tries to address their personal and professional needs. He reported that he makes himself available when they have problems. In this connection, he said,

I make myself accessible so that they come to me with their personal as well as their professional problems. I try to make them feel like a family where I am the person who is responsible for the welfare of its members. Actually, this is my role as a school leader.

He drew attention to the tragic events caused by the ongoing conflict and the importance of showing sympathy for affected teachers.

You may come to school and find one of your teachers terribly sad because one of his family members or relatives was killed or hospitalized as a result of wounds. Nowadays incidents like these are common because of the fighting. In such incidents, you have to show sympathy for your teachers.

Salem offered an example of emotional support by giving the grieving teacher three days off and remarked that, “This is in line with the traditional mourning period in Islam, which lasts for three days.” He further indicated that, “Even when the teacher comes back after three days, he feels sensitive to the teacher’s emotional state as the teacher attempts to do his professional duties.”

Salem also reported that he addresses the financial needs of his teachers by encouraging community members to “... occasionally make contributions in cash or in kind to supplement salaries of his teachers, especially those who are found to be in dire need of assistance.”

Referring to his role in teacher supervision, Salem claimed that formal classroom observation requires a lot of time, and the ongoing conflict does not permit him to perform such observation justifying his position as follows:

Now you cannot spend 30 or 45 minutes observing one teacher. Now, you need to be highly visible in the school, given the abnormal conditions in which we work. So I spend most of my time walking in and out of classrooms frequently to make myself available for help or assistance if an emergency situation arises.

Although performing formal classroom observation becomes difficult, Salem articulated a desire to improve the performance of his teachers by inviting “former public school supervisors to come to school in order to lecture about effective

teaching methods and give demonstration lessons.” He described this form of teacher in-service training as the only form available to his teachers, due to the conflict.

Salem then talked about having good relationships with parents and the local community. He pointed out that parents play a significant role in protecting school property or resolving disputes within the community or between the school and the community. Salem stated that he invites “the parents’ committee and community elders as well as influential religious leaders to intervene if there is a dispute in the school which is beyond his control.” As a respected individual, he is often invited to participate in mediation efforts. Salem spoke of his experience of being asked to play such a role.

When there is a problem or dispute within the community, we are often invited to take part in mediation efforts. As we enjoy the respect and trust of the community members because we are people of integrity who take care of their children, our reconciliation and mediation efforts are often acceptable by both parties involved in the dispute.

Salem, a principal of a boarding school which sponsors a significant number of orphan students, also talked about the role of his parents’ committee in soliciting financial support from local companies. He stated that, thanks to the efforts of the parents’ committee, he “...received dozens of scholarships from local companies to financially support poor students who could not afford to pay for the costs of their housing, food and tuition.”

However, Salem acknowledged that parents’ financial contributions to school are very limited. He cited poverty as the main reason for parents’ lack of contribution. He stated,

The vast majority of people in this country are very poor and they largely depend for their livelihood on money sent by their relatives living abroad. Therefore, it is difficult for them to make any meaningful financial contributions to the school.

When asked about his experience in a war-torn environment, Salem reported that schools are rarely targeted by either sides of the conflict, but they might be damaged as a

result of broader fighting taking place in the area where the school is located, as has happened to his school. He noted that his school was previously located in the area under the control of the TFG and recently moved to the outskirts of the city. On the reason for this move, Salem stated:

The anti-government forces have been launching a hit and run attack since the Ethiopian invasion in 2006. The school was partly damaged during an exchange of fire between the two sides. It was difficult to continue working in that environment. So, I decided to bring the school to its current location, which is on the outskirts of the city.

Although schools are rarely targeted, the persistent insecurity led Salem to hire security guards to help him provide safety for the school. Salem indicated that security guards are typically hired from among individuals who have a good reputation in the local community. Having such a reputation would allow them to resolve disputes peacefully, as Salem explained.

We need someone who uses his mind, not the barrel of the gun. You know, the ongoing conflict has affected people's mentality and they can easily be provoked to use their guns. If you begin using your gun, you will be the loser. So, we are keen not to provoke people by stationing armed security guards at the school entrance. Instead, we use someone who is respectful and peaceful.

Apart from lack of security, Salem highlighted three major challenges and problems that make his work more difficult. As a principal of a boarding school located on the outskirts of the city, he expressed great concern about poor school facilities. He specifically complained about the lack of chairs in the dining hall, which forces students to sit on mats when they have their meals. He believed this causes a lot of hygiene problems. Another major concern to Salem was a shortage of trained teachers. He complained that many trained

teachers have been leaving the teaching profession and seeking employment in NGOs.

Complaining about this, Salem stated,

Let me tell you one thing about such NGOs, which I don't like. They indirectly encourage qualified teachers to leave schools by offering higher salaries. As our financial resources are very limited, we can't retain these teachers, because the salary offered by NGOs is much higher than what we can afford.

Salem felt that this has created many problems including student discipline problems. He said when you are left with untrained teachers who lack classroom management skills, you find yourself handling endless discipline problems. Apart from this, Salem attributed student discipline problems to the general environment in which he works where the civil war has been fought along clan lines. Salem stated,

The clan-based fighting began to surface among students, particularly girls, soon after the collapse of the state. This was a big discipline problem during the warlord era in Mogadishu. Thanks to God, fighting along clan lines among students is no longer a big problem after the defeat of the warlords by the Islamic Courts Union.

Salem indicated that such conflicts were often referred to the parents' committee for mediation and he preferred not to take part in resolving such conflicts due to the sensitive nature of clan-related problems and to avoid "... any sense of a perceived bias on the part of those who are involved in the conflict," which may undermine their trust and confidence in his integrity and honesty. However, Salem asserted that all other discipline problems are dealt within the school under the supervision of a discipline committee. Salem talked about following a strict policy when it comes to bringing weapons to school. He stated, "Without this policy schools can become a dangerous place for students because of the availability of arms in every house."

Salem also talked about his efforts to improve student discipline by saying,

We invite religious leaders and civil society activists to participate in our daily morning assembly to promote ethics and morals for the students. We also warn older students against joining armed groups because that would destroy their future.

When asked what motivates him to stay in his position, in spite of the daily struggles, Salem was quick to say,

I opened this school in 1993. At the time, nobody thought about establishing schools because of the heavy fighting among different factions in Mogadishu. My belief has always been that we need to have educated young people if we want to have any kind of peace. Once our young people become educated, they will be less prone to joining fighting groups.

At the end of the interview, Salem was asked if he considers educational training for school principals necessary. If so, what type of training would he suggest? Salem replied:

There is no simple answer to this question because, in our situation, it is difficult to find qualified teachers, let alone principals with prior preparation. In normal situations, however, such preparation may be necessary for this complex job. After 40 years in education, and more than 20 years as a principal in a conflict situation, I really know what I mean when I say this is a complex job. For the kinds of training that I would like to see are training seminars on problem solving and conflict resolution skills. I think that young administrators would really benefit from those kinds of management training in this kind of environment we have.

Having presented the perceptions and lived experiences of each of the eight principals, it becomes necessary to determine the recurrent themes and sub-themes common to some or most of the participants. Through the use of phenomenological data analysis as explained in Chapter 3, eleven themes were identified. The table below (Table 2) shows an overview of the variety of themes and sub- themes that emerged from each individual participant. It is meant to assist the reader in gaining a global picture of the similarities and differences among the participants at a glance.

Table 2. Themes and Sub-themes for the Entire Group of Principals

Major themes	Sub-themes	Ali	Bashir	Daahir	Faisal	Jamal	Khalid	Mubarak	Salem
Supporting Teachers	Emotional Support	+	+	+	--	--	+	+	+
	Financial/Material Support	--	+	+	--	--	+	--	+
	Assisting Teachers with Classroom Discipline	--	+	+	--	--	--	--	+
Supervising Instruction	Monitoring the Syllabus Coverage	--	--	+	+	+	--	--	--
	Reviewing Lesson Preparation and Student Workbooks	--	+	+	+	--	--	+	--
	Visiting and Observing in Classroom	+	+	+	+	--	+	--	+
Facilitating Teacher PD	Organizing Training Sessions at School	+	+	--	+	--	+	--	+
	Sending Teachers to External Seminars	--	+	--	--	--	--	+	--
	Pairing Untrained Teachers with More Experienced Teachers	--	--	--	+	--	+	--	--
Relationship with Governing Bodies	Good Relationship	+	+	+	+	--	+	N/A	N/A
	Principals' Autonomy	--	+	+	--	+	+	N/A	N/A
	Limited Consultation	--	--	--	--	+	--	+	--
Building Community Collaboration	Resolving Disputes	+	--	--	--	--	+	+	+
	Seeking Financial Assistance	--	+	--	--	--	--	+	+
	Monitoring Student Attendance	--	--	+	--	--	--	--	--
Student mobility		+	--	--	+	+	--	+	--
Poor Facilities		--	+	+	--	+	--	+	+
Shortage of Trained Teachers		--	+	+	--	--	+	+	--
Student Discipline		+	+	+	--	+	+	+	+
Boundary Spanning-Buffering strategies in Response to the Conflict	Hiring Security Guards	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Constant Vigilance	+	--	--	--	--	+	+	--
	Cancelling Classes Temporarily	--	--	--	--	+	+	--	--
	Suspending Schools	--	+	--	--	+	+	+	--
	Relocating Schools	+	--	+	+	+	--	--	+
Principals' Strengths	Having a Firm Commitment to Keep Schools Open	+	+	+	+	--	+	+	+
	Remaining Calm and Courageous in the Face of Danger	+	+	--	+	--	--	+	--
	Possessing a Sense of Responsibility for Student Safety	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	A Sense of Optimism about the Future of Education	+	+	+	+	--	--	+	--

The symbol (+) indicates that a participant has discussed the theme or sub-theme

while the symbol (--) means the absence of such a discussion or the participant discussed the theme negatively. It is clear from the table that not every participant discussed every theme or sub-theme. The next chapter will bring all eight individual textual descriptions together through the 11 themes listed in this table.

CHAPTER 5

Analysis of Themes

This chapter presents a composite textural and structural description of the principals' perceptions of their roles, lived experiences relating to the ongoing conflict and the challenges they have faced, using the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The chapter also presents the essence of managing and leading schools in a war-torn environment phenomenon.

Interviewing eight primary school principals, twice, provided a plethora of data. Through the six-step approach to phenomenological data analysis, as suggested by Creswell (2013), 11 themes emerged and included *supporting teachers, supervising instruction, facilitating teacher professional development, good relationships with governing bodies, building community collaboration, student mobility, poor facilities, shortage of trained teachers, student discipline, boundary spanning, and principals' strengths*. These themes were identified as they appeared to be recurrent throughout the participants' responses.

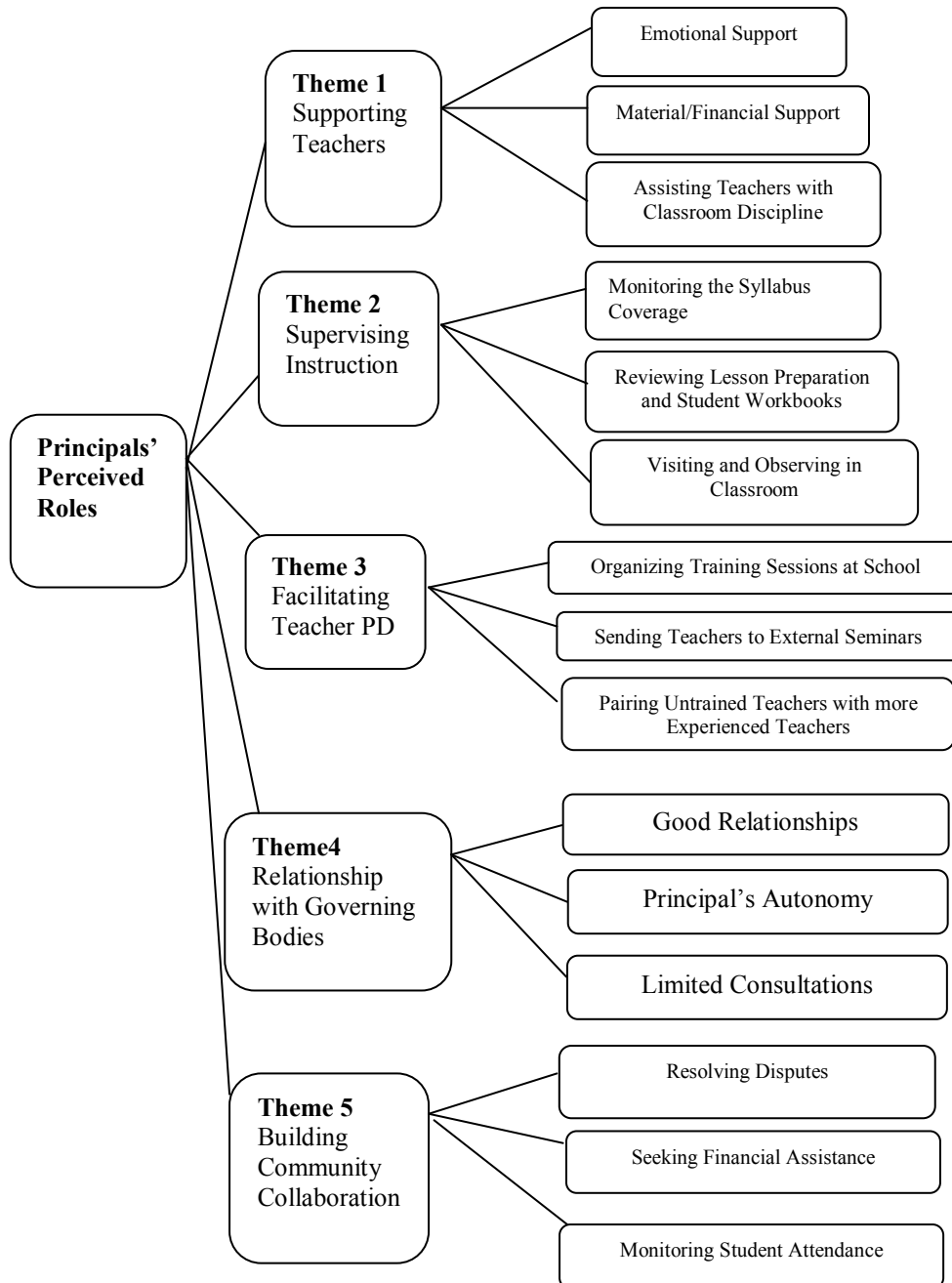
In order to create order, the themes were grouped into three categories, which provide an overall fit with the three research questions. These categories are (1) Principals' Perceived Roles, (2) Major Challenges Facing Principals, and (3) Experiencing the Ongoing Conflict. Each category is displayed in a figure with the constituent themes and subthemes comprising that theme. This is followed by a description of the theme and a cross-cutting analysis of that theme. It is important to note that not every participant discussed every theme or sub-theme. However, these themes are presented so as to allow as many different participants' voices to be represented in the study as possible, except those who negatively responded. Furthermore, every time four or more principals comment on a theme or a sub-theme, the term "the majority of participants" may be used.

Principals' Perceived Roles

Principals were asked during the interviews how they perceived their roles. Their responses have revealed a list of different task domains that they must address during the daily operation of their schools. While there are no particular patterns noted among the participants' responses, it appears that all of the participants are aware of their responsibilities for the smooth running of the organizations for which they are in charge.

As principals are likely to spend their energy and time on the things or tasks they perceive to be critically important to their jobs, they were asked to describe the important aspects of their roles. As a result, five themes have emerged as illustrated in figure 2, which are *supporting teachers, supervising instruction, facilitating teacher PD, building community collaboration, and good relationships with governing bodies*. These themes, to some degree, represent what principals are expected to do wherever these themes are encountered or, in other words, common principal experiences, whether they are in stable or unstable environments. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, relevancy to the ongoing conflict will be provided.

Figure 2. Themes and Sub-themes Related to Principals' Perceived Roles



Theme 1: Supporting Teachers

Supporting teachers emerged as an overarching aspect of principals' roles that infuses all other elements of the principals' responsibilities. "Support" was perceived as providing whatever means and forms of assistance to teachers that circumstances call for. This support was seen as critical for teachers as they struggle to survive in very difficult circumstances. Principals frequently used words such as 'helping teachers,' 'supporting teachers,' and 'assisting teachers,' to describe their relationships with teaching staff. The perception that the role of principal is to help and support teachers was expressed by the majority of participants.

Three of the principals further considered themselves as parents who are responsible for the welfare of their teachers. Salem, Khalid and Bashir emphasized the importance of the principal's role as a parent in helping teachers realize a sense of solidarity during difficult times. They talked about creating a family-like atmosphere, where teachers are given an opportunity to vent their personal and professional concerns and problems. Creating such an environment becomes an essential component of the principal's role.

According to the data analysis, principals' support of teachers fell into three sub-themes: emotional support, financial support, and assistance with classroom discipline. It is noteworthy that emotional support and assistance with classroom discipline were emphasized, while financial support was mentioned less often, as schools operate on very tight budgets.

Emotional Support. There was evidence of emotional support, which has been described by six of the participants, with the exception of Faisal and Jamal, as important in their relationship with teaching staff. The importance of emotional support becomes more apparent, due to the fact that these principals have witnessed many tragic events involving

injury or death of a colleague, of a family member or relative, or damage to property. These tragic events have the potential to affect, one way or another, teachers' personal and professional lives. As a result, giving emotional support has become an important part of the principal-teacher relationship.

Three of the participants noted specific examples of how they, as principals, offer emotional support to their teachers. For example, both Mubarak and Salem talked about showing sympathy for grieving teachers through their presence at funeral and condolence gatherings, as well as giving teachers three days off in order to help them cope with the emotional experience. They remarked that this is in line with the traditional mourning period in Islam, which lasts for three days. On the other hand, Ali spoke of covering the classes of the grieving teacher or making changes to his schedule, while providing whatever assistance the teacher needs.

Two of the principals further remarked that giving emotional support to teachers has an added benefit besides maintaining teachers' morale. This support was mirrored back to the principal. This was a reciprocity that takes place when teachers try to support their principals in difficult times. This was clearly evident in statements made by both Daahir and Khalid. While Daahir was appreciative of the readiness of his teachers to keep him safe, Khalid commended his teachers for their collaboration with the vice-principal in maintaining the school during his absence, as well as their sympathy for him during difficult times. These principals believed that the stronger the relationship with teachers, the easier it is for the principal to communicate and gain support in times of difficulty. In fact, by supporting their teachers, the principals were building a base of support for themselves. This became an invaluable asset and resource that could be called upon during difficult times. In addition to

emotional support, tangible support was also provided, depending on the financial capacity of the school.

Material/Financial Support. The data analysis revealed that principals' support of their teachers was also provided through tangible means, which included financial assistance and material goods. Although principals represented a variety of schools and organizations varying in material resources, they all acknowledged directly and indirectly that their schools operate on a tight budget, as they relied heavily on fees paid by parents. Despite these financial constraints, four of the principals talked about their efforts in addressing and alleviating some of the financial difficulties faced by teachers working in their schools. For example, Bashir spoke of his attempts to improve the quality of life of teachers in his school by establishing a common fund for helping teachers who are in dire need of financial support. Similarly, Daahir talked about organizing remedial classes in the afternoon, which offers part-time job opportunities for his teachers. Such efforts on his part were much appreciated by both teachers and parents.

Furthermore, Salem spoke of encouraging community members to supplement insufficient salaries of his teachers by making contributions, whether in cash or in kind. This gave every member of the community an opportunity to participate. Finally, Khalid talked about one of the ways that he helped his teachers was to provide them with tea at break, as well as lunch, because he knows that some of them come to school hungry, particularly those who have large families. Apart from this more personal approach, principals also had a professional obligation to support teachers instructionally.

Assisting Teachers with Classroom Discipline. The participants considered this support as important because the majority of their teachers were untrained and inexperienced; consequently, they found themselves providing significant assistance with

classroom discipline. Discipline problems occurring in schools and the ways they are handled will be presented in more detail later in the section, “Major Challenges facing Principals.” However, here, we were concerned with the assistance available to teachers in dealing with disruptive behaviours in classrooms.

Three of the principals, in addition to the financial support, pointed to assisting teachers with classroom discipline. They indicated that such assistance was provided through maintaining high visibility in the school. For example, Bashir emphasized being highly visible in the school in order to prevent and deter those who might cause disruption to the learning process in the classroom and to provide assistance whenever a teacher needs help. He encouraged teachers to be proactive in dealing with student problems by informing the administration in a timely manner.

This view was also echoed by both Daahir and Salem. Daahir was keenly interested in making himself accessible through walking into classes without prior notice. He indicated that this strategy was geared towards monitoring what was going on in the school, as well as to show the teachers that he is available when help is needed. Similarly, Salem reported that he is seldom in one classroom for a formal observation; instead he moved around the school in order to monitor what happens in the school and to respond to emergency situations in a timely manner.

Overall, the data emphasized how the principals felt about this notion of wanting to help their teachers. Principals were aware that teachers are the school’s most important resources, especially within the context of ongoing conflict where other instructional resources are very limited. In such an environment, where people lose their children and relatives, creating a supportive environment in which teachers feel they are helped personally and professionally became an important role of the principal. Principals also emphasized the

human element of their relationship with teachers, which in their view, has maintained education so far. While emphasizing the importance of helping teachers to overcome their problems, both instructional and sometimes personal, most principals were willing to do what it takes to make teachers become more responsive towards their duties.

Theme 2: Supervising Instruction

The data analysis revealed that principals played a central role in instructional supervision. Although this theme was addressed in several ways that sometimes sounded different from one principal to another, all but two of the principals viewed instructional supervision as an important aspect of their role. This was evidenced in statements such as, “Supervision is a major part of my duties.” “If there is no teacher supervision, we would not have known whether a teacher performs his job properly or not. Therefore, I believe that supervision is very important.” Other principals also made similar comments.

While stressing the importance of instructional supervision, principals acknowledged that conducting regular instructional supervision under the existing security circumstances was fraught with difficulties. Nevertheless, they identify certain activities from their supervisory practices, including monitoring the coverage of the syllabus, reviewing teachers’ lesson preparation and student workbooks, and visiting and observing in classrooms. The principals employed these ways to supervise instructional activities, as security conditions permit.

Monitoring the Syllabus Coverage. A supervisory practice cited by three participants was the principal’s role in ensuring that teachers cover the syllabus in good time. These participants attached great importance to this role, because of the uncertainty about the completion of the school calendar because of the conflict within the nation. For example, Faisal pointed to a constant disruption of the learning process caused by unexpected school

closures due to frequent fighting. He remarked that such disruptions cause a great deal of confusion relating to the coverage of the syllabus. So, he closely monitors whether teachers cover the prescribed curriculum to ensure that students, particularly those in grade 9 are prepared for primary school leaving examination.

Similarly, Jamal concurred with Faisal and added that the importance of closely monitoring the coverage of the curriculum lies in the fact that the examination dates are set in advance by the educational network that oversees the member schools and not by individual schools. He claimed that the network does not take into consideration the disruptive effects of the ongoing conflict; consequently he was obliged to closely monitor the coverage of the syllabus to ensure students' readiness for the examination before the end of the school calendar. He further indicated that the umbrella organizations decide what the schools are expected to teach. Therefore, he was keenly interested in ensuring that teachers teach according to the syllabus stipulated by the network. This practice was further confirmed by Daahir who considered such monitoring as necessary to avoid any unpredictable events that may disrupt the school calendar and to ensure that teachers stick to what they have stated in their lesson preparations.

Reviewing Lesson Preparation and Student Workbooks. Another supervisory practice identified by almost all principals was to check teachers' lesson preparation book. Principals considered this monitoring of a teacher's preparation book as essential. The reasons for this, however, differ. While lack of training and experience was given as one reason by some principals, a lack of time as a result of teachers' engagement in other activities was given as the reason by one principal. Bashir who represented the majority of the principals, shared his perspective on this supervisory practice. He reported having a pre-teaching meeting in the morning to check if teachers are prepared to deliver the assigned

lessons. He stressed that it is the responsibility of the principal to check whether the teacher has prepared his/her lesson before the start of the daily morning assembly. He believed this monitoring of a teacher's preparation book was important because most of his teachers are untrained and inexperienced, and need ongoing monitoring and guidance.

On the other hand, Faisal gave another reason for such monitoring. He indicated that, besides teaching at school, many teachers engage in other activities such as offering tutoring lessons at home or other works to make ends meet. He felt that he was under moral and professional obligation to give priority to his students; consequently he made sure that teachers come to school prepared to perform their duties. Two of the principals, in addition to monitoring teachers' preparation books, agreed that monitoring was not sufficient to ascertain if teachers are effective in delivering their lessons. So, they emphasized the importance of checking students' exercise books. While Bashir considered checking students' exercise books as a means for ascertaining whether teachers give appropriate homework and take time to go through the students' exercise books, Mubarak viewed this as an accountability tool for showing parents the good work that his teachers do. Such supervisory practices reflected principals' conscientious efforts to improve student learning by holding teachers accountable for their professional duties.

Visiting and Observing in Classroom. A final supervisory practice that the majority of participants considered to be important was classroom observation. Six of the principals reported conducting classroom visits and observing certain aspects of a teacher's performance. For example, Ali talked about visiting each teacher at least once per term in order to evaluate their performance and he acknowledged that his visits were constrained by the ongoing conflict. Based on his evaluation report, teachers who are not performing well may be given a training session once or twice during the school year to improve their

performance. Similarly, Faisal provided further details about his classroom observations. He was interested in observing many aspects of the teacher's performance including lesson presentation, interaction between the teacher and students and the teacher's ability to control the class.

On the other hand, Bashir reported a classroom observation that is somewhat different from those mentioned above. He saw classroom observations as a form of modeling, indicating that he visits classrooms mainly to support teachers who have little formal training. Bashir emphasized the importance of praising the teacher when he performs well and showing the right way of teaching when they perform unsatisfactorily. In contrast, Daahir viewed classroom observations as a form of inspection and control. He pointed out that his visits aim to encourage teachers not to deviate from the prescribed lesson, which, in his view, would contribute to the implementation of the prescribed curriculum in good time.

While classroom observation is identified by the majority of principals as an important supervisory practice, they acknowledged the difficulty in performing regular classroom observations under the existing circumstances because of the ongoing conflict. For example, Salem claimed that regular classroom observation requires a lot of time, and the ongoing conflict does not permit him to perform such observation; instead he has to conduct informal classroom observations by walking into classes to make himself available for assistance. As Salem suggested, this was what made this informal observation effective and relative.

Two of the principals further emphasized the importance of holding meetings with teachers after classroom visits in order to provide feedback. For example, Faisal mentioned that, after every visitation, he provided feedback and let the teacher reflect on the weaknesses and strengths of the lesson. He indicated that he gives compliments on work well done and

indicated the areas that needed to be improved. This practice was also confirmed by Ali who described feedback after classroom visits as an opportunity to help teachers improve their performance. In conjunction with instructional supervision, principals also have put in place a system that allows for the personal and professional development of teachers.

Theme 3: Facilitating Teacher Professional Development

The majority of the principals viewed teachers' professional development as a means for improving the teacher's competence, especially for those with limited pre-service training. This purpose was clearly reflected in comments made by Bashir, Salem, Khalid, Ali, and Faisal, which focused on helping teachers who are facing difficulties in certain aspects of teaching the curriculum or classroom management.

Although most principals cited a number of strategies they employed to facilitate the professional development of their teachers, they were quick to emphasize the difficulty in providing regular professional development activities, given the persistent insecurity in the country, as well as a lack of funds. Nevertheless, the strategies cited included organizing training sessions at school, sending teachers to seminars and workshops offered by external organizations during summer holidays, and pairing untrained teachers with experienced ones.

Organizing Training Sessions at School. The strategy most often cited involved training sessions organized at school. Two of the principals mentioned that they occasionally invite former public school supervisors who had worked for the Ministry of Education before the civil war to organize workshops or training sessions for teachers who are in need of training. For example, Salem, who himself is a veteran principal, talked about inviting people with teaching expertise and knowledge to provide such workshops. He remarked that these workshops often take the form of lecturing on effective teaching methods as well as providing examples of demonstration lessons. Similarly, Khalid

communicated the training needs of his teachers to the supporting organization and urged it to invite former public school supervisors to organize training sessions in school. Khalid noted that, since the school day and school year are so short due to unexpected closures as a result of ongoing conflict, he found difficulty in organizing such training sessions during the school year. In addition, teachers often hold more than one job to support themselves and, consequently, the only time available for them to participate in teacher professional development activities is during summer holidays.

However, two of the principals claimed that organizing training sessions could take place during the school year and it depends on the training needs of their teachers. Ali mentioned that a teacher may be given a training session twice or three times during the school year. This claim was also confirmed by Faisal who stated that training sessions were organized as and when necessary. These principals noted that their supporting organization has a general supervisor who visits each school once per week. Therefore, the availability of this supervisor may make it easier for them to organize such training sessions.

Apart from the ongoing conflict, two of the principals further acknowledged that organizing such training sessions was not regular because of the costs involved. They mentioned that organizing such training depended on financial resources available to the school as well as on the financial capacity of supporting organizations. This was clearly evidenced by Mubarak, who stated that organizing training sessions requires financial resources, and in the face of so many dire needs, teacher training became less of a priority. Therefore, principals often looked for external assistance from UN agencies and local educational umbrellas.

Sending Teachers to External Seminars. Another strategy for facilitating teachers' professional development was sending teachers to training seminars offered by the local

educational umbrellas, United Nations, and external aid agencies. Two of the principals noted that participation in such seminars is associated with both educational and financial benefits, as the organizing agency often gives certificates of participation and financial incentives to participating teachers. These principals emphasized the importance of such certificates and financial incentives within the context of ongoing conflict in Somalia. For example, Mubarak was highly appreciative of the assistance provided by United Nations agencies regarding training seminars, which he considered very important, as they boost teachers' morale. Bashir added that receiving a certificate of participation from a UN agency is an advantage for teachers with limited pre-service training, as the newly established formal teacher training institutes have not the capacity to train the number of new secondary school graduates hoping to pursue a teaching career. Thus, teachers who receive such certificates have a better chance for employment in schools or in NGOs working in the country than those who have never attended such seminars.

Although the school principal is ultimately responsible for ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in the school, he needs the support of other staff to achieve that goal, as evidenced by Khalid's comments in Chapter 4. As a result, principals sought to enlist experienced teachers in order to help improve the performance of less experienced teachers.

Pairing Untrained Teachers with More Experienced Teachers. A final strategy that was less mentioned by principals was using the weekly meetings, held on Thursdays, as a means for encouraging teachers to work together and to exchange their experiences. Three of the principals mentioned that Thursday meetings are mainly held to discuss general issues of particular interest to schooling. For example, Jamal talked about holding regular meetings on Thursdays for making important decisions relating to the school. However, two of the participants added another dimension to this meeting as a place where teachers exchange

experiences and get new ideas from their experienced colleagues. For example, Khalid mentioned that he arranges some kind of collaboration between more experienced teachers and less qualified ones. He described the meetings as helpful; because more experienced teachers have no time for helping other teachers during working days.

While Khalid saw the meetings as the only avenue left open to his teachers to exchange ideas, given the lack of time as well as the existing security conditions, he provided no specific arrangement for such exchange. However, Faisal talked about a meeting on Thursday mornings where newly appointed teachers with limited pre-service training are helped by the experienced teachers with regard to lesson planning. This includes demonstration lessons. The experienced teachers observe their colleagues and provide them with guidance and advice.

Overall, in a war-torn environment where financial resources are extremely scarce, teacher training may become less of a priority. However, principals in this study clearly felt that professional development was something that could be helpful to their teachers, and they spared no efforts to communicate their needs to the supporting organizations, local educational networks, as well as to UN and external aid agencies.

Theme 4: Relationships with Governing Bodies

Governing bodies refer here to education committees representing supporting organizations or school advisory committees representing the owner of the school. The principal's relationship with such governing bodies was perceived quite diversely among participants. This is quite understandable, as most schools are affiliated with different organizations. Half of the eight participants stated that they are affiliated with an organization, while others mentioned that they are independent.

Good Relationships. The first group of participants spoke of having good relations with their respective organizations. For example, Ali described his relationship with his organization as “good,” which is based on “cooperation and mutual respect.” Similarly, both Khalid and Faisal expressed similar sentiments, stressing the importance of their relationship with the supporting organization, while Jamal made no comment on such relationships, given the nominal relationship existing between the school and the organization as indicated in Chapter 4.

As these principals noted, good relationships based on cooperation and mutual respect are vital in war-torn societies, because people’s relations are often based on disrespect and distrust due to the erosion of confidence among people. Therefore, such mutual respect and cooperation are important for maintaining the support of such organizations.

For principals of individually owned schools, like Daahir and Bashir, they also talked about having good relationships with the owner of the school, as well as with the school committee which functions as an advisory body. These two veteran principals who began their career before the collapse of the central government noted that the current situation is quite different from the previous one in terms of communication between the school and its governing body. In the current situation, they described the line of communication between the school and the advisory committee as short, and decisions are communicated quickly.

This fast communication between the school and its supporting organization becomes crucial during difficult times, as reported by Faisal. Keeping in touch with the Education Committee helps him to make quick decisions that might have serious consequences for school management during difficult times. Similarly, Ali cited a two-way communication

between himself and the Education Committee, where ongoing updates on the security situation and financial matters are the main subjects of such communications.

When it comes to principals who are owners or co-founders of their schools, like Mubarak and Salem, it is self-evident that they are the final authorities in their schools. Nevertheless, Mubarak reported that he involves teachers in matters that may directly or indirectly affect their work. But for other principals, it is interesting to discover the degree of autonomy they enjoy in making decisions.

Principals' Autonomy. The issue of autonomy was significant for principals who are employed by school owners or supporting organizations. When asked about their role in decision-making, three of the NGO-supported principals talked about two levels of decision-making; at the school level and at the education committee level. At the education committee level, Faisal acknowledged that final decisions relating to hiring or firing teachers or other staff rest with the education committee. This committee also has the authority to make decisions on financial matters in consultation with the organization's financial department. Similarly, Ali, who is affiliated with the same organization, concurred with Faisal and pointed out that matters related to staff hiring, as well as financial issues, are outside of his mandate. His role is limited to communicate the school's financial and staffing needs to the committee.

In contrast, Khalid, who is also a principal of an NGO-supported school, claimed that he has much authority in terms of making decisions relating to staff hiring and financial matters. He talked about reporting directly to the Director of the Education Department in all matters related to the school. But he described the role of the Director as a link between the school and the organization, adding that the director never interferes in the internal

management of the school because he is responsible for external relations. Khalid remarked that he is fortunate to have a supporting organization that has a lot of confidence in him.

These principals acted as a link between their schools and the supporting organizations, which seemed to serve as a local education authority. Furthermore, the fact that they seemed to serve in this capacity was a direct result of the circumstances of the ongoing conflict and the absence of a Ministry of Education responsible for providing educational services.

Limited Consultations. Again, the principals' decision-making was perceived quite diversely among participants. Four of the principals indicated that they sometimes make the important decisions themselves and at other times in consultation with their vice-principals. For example, Bashir acknowledged that he often makes important decisions in consultation with his vice-principal, whom he described as someone who is effective and helpful.

Daahir expressed similar views about consultation with the vice-principal or the school advisory body, pointing out the importance of consultation when making critical decisions. Such decisions have an impact on the daily working of the school and, consequently require consultations with the vice-principal or the school's advisory body. He provided an example of some of these decisions, including hiring a new teacher, changing the student uniform or raising school fees.

While these principals emphasised the consultative nature of some of the major decisions they make, they admitted that there are decisions they have to make themselves. For example, Faisal admitted that his consultation depends on the nature of the decision he wants to make and he does not necessarily always consult others, as this may be perceived as a weakness or an inability to make his own decision. He provided an example of decisions that he has to make himself without consultation, like making the final decisions in the

appointment of teachers to posts of responsibility in order to avoid any conflict among teachers. Unlike other principals, Jamal and Mubarak indicated that they try, whenever possible, to let their teachers become involved in some decisions that may affect their lives or their work. For example, Mubarak shared an example where teachers are involved in making decisions regarding who would be sent to external seminars offered by UN agencies and local educational umbrellas for teacher training.

For Jamal, it was important to hold regular meetings on Thursdays with his teaching staff in order to solicit their views on important matters at the school. He provided a picture that is somewhat different from that of other principals in terms of the decision-making process in his school. Jamal described his school as being very small, which does not necessitate the presence of hierarchical structures. So, he preferred to consult his teachers before taking important decisions.

Overall, principals offered a description of their relationship with their superiors. Such a relationship is based on mutual respect and trust, which are a vital link in the daily running of a school in a war-torn environment. They tended to have a less centralized organizational structure with a shorter line of communication between the principal and their superiors. These principals were in close contact with their superiors. Consequently, decision-making was fast and the superiors served as a resource to the schools. Principals enjoyed various degrees of autonomy in decision-making depending on the type of the school and its affiliation. They must first get permission from either the education committee or school advisory body to make certain decisions. However, at the school level, decisions are often made in consultation with the vice-principal, while teachers are just told to implement such decisions. Lack of experience was given by some principals as a reason for

excluding teachers from decision-making processes. Only two principals perceived teachers' involvement in shared decision-making as being important.

Theme 5: Building Community Collaboration

The majority of the principals viewed their role as that of building a collaborative relationship between the school and parents, which also extended to the local community. Their efforts in building bridges with parents and other community members and maintaining such relationships were focused on three areas: (a) resolving disputes, (b) seeking financial assistance, and (c) monitoring student attendance.

Resolving Disputes. Four of the principals pointed out that collaboration with parents and the local community on resolving disputes has become important and, without such collaboration, principals are likely to face many security problems. This was mainly due to the absence of a law enforcement authority in the country. These principals stressed the importance of using parents committees and community elders as a means for school protection. For example, Khalid, Salem and Mubarak mentioned that, if a dispute arises between the school and its local community, members of the parents committees are invited to act as mediators. Ali echoed these sentiments and asserted that parents are indispensable for resolving conflicts and disputes, given the absence of the rule of law in the country.

Although schools are often targeted in times of war, schools in this sector of the country are rarely targeted by any of the fighting groups, as confirmed by Ali and Salem. For example, Ali believed that schools are rarely targeted because they serve children from different clans. Salem added that since the civil war has been fought along clan lines, it makes little sense to attack schools for clan considerations because schools transcend clan affiliations. Yet, parents' support was still viewed as fundamental to conflict resolution.

Salem further pointed to the reciprocal relationship between school principals and the local community. As social problems and conflicts have increased, due to the absence of a law enforcing authority, people often seek advice from principals, especially experienced ones. These principals are invited to participate in mediation efforts. He mentioned that he is often invited to take part in mediation efforts and this is mainly due to the respect and trust he enjoys within the community. On his part, Salem indicated that he invites the parents' committee and community elders, as well as influential religious leaders, to intervene if there is a dispute in the school which is beyond his control. As participants indicated, maintaining close collaboration with parents and the local community was not only important in resolving disputes but also in seeking financial support.

Seeking Financial Support. Since principals are affiliated with different organizations, and some are independent, there were variations across schools in how financial resources are mobilized. Some principals emphasized the role played by parents committees in communicating their financial needs to parents and to the larger community. Bashir reported that the parents committee of his school is consulted when his administration intends to increase school fees. He indicated that this often takes place when the school administration finds it difficult to cover the salaries of its teachers, as a result of price increases. Bashir further described the support of the parents committee as helpful in reaching out to local businesses for financial support. The message is often communicated through the parents' committee, which has personal connections with local business people or charity organizations.

Salem, a principal of a boarding school, which sponsors a significant number of orphan students, also talked about the role of his parents committee in soliciting financial support from local companies. He was appreciative of the efforts of the parents committee in

encouraging local companies to provide scholarships and grants to orphans and poor students who cannot afford to pay for the costs of their housing, food, and tuition. Similar sentiments were expressed by Mubarak whose parents committee is active in helping orphaned students and children from very poor families with respect to payment of school fees.

While stressing the importance of parents committees in reaching out to local business people for financial support, these principals acknowledged that parents' financial contributions to schools are very limited. They cited poverty as the main reason for parents' lack of contribution. For example, Daahir mentioned that parents can barely afford to pay school fees as most of them largely depend for their livelihood on money sent by their relatives living abroad.

However, three principals (Khalid, Ali, and Faisal) acknowledged that seeking financial support either from parents or from an external agency is an issue beyond their mandate. Such mobilization is addressed by the organization with which the school is directly affiliated. They described their relationship with parents regarding financial matters as being very limited. Khalid indicated that, when his school faces financial constraints, particularly during a large displacement of students and their families, he usually relied on the supporting organization for its survival.

For Jamal, although there were no constraints on his role in seeking financial support from the parents or the community, he acknowledged that he rarely sought such support, because of the negative attitude of the society, as well as parents, towards making contributions to school. To avoid financial pressures that other principals feel when school fees drop, Jamal reported that he does not pay fixed salaries to his teachers; instead, the salaries are tied to the income generated from the school fees. This meant that whatever income generated was distributed equally among teachers. While participants varied in how

they mobilize financial resources, their experiences of collaboration with parents on student attendance also varied.

Monitoring Student Attendance. Principals expressed different views about parents' collaboration on student attendance. Some principals complained about parents' lack of collaboration in this regard. While acknowledging the adverse impact of the existing security situation on the contacts between the school and parents, these principals asserted that parents' beliefs about their role in school are partially responsible for such lack of collaboration. Both Faisal and Mubarak mentioned that most parents believe that school is separate from home; school principals and teachers are fully responsible for the education of their children while their responsibility ends once they bring their children to school. Mubarak observed that parents' beliefs in their role in school are often reflected in their behaviour, where they are only interested in paying the school fees, but reluctant to provide the support their children need to succeed in school. Besides parents' beliefs, Jamal cited parents' lower levels of education as the main reason for lack of collaboration. He explained that the only thing that these parents care about is just to pay the school fees and they never ask their children what they do at school.

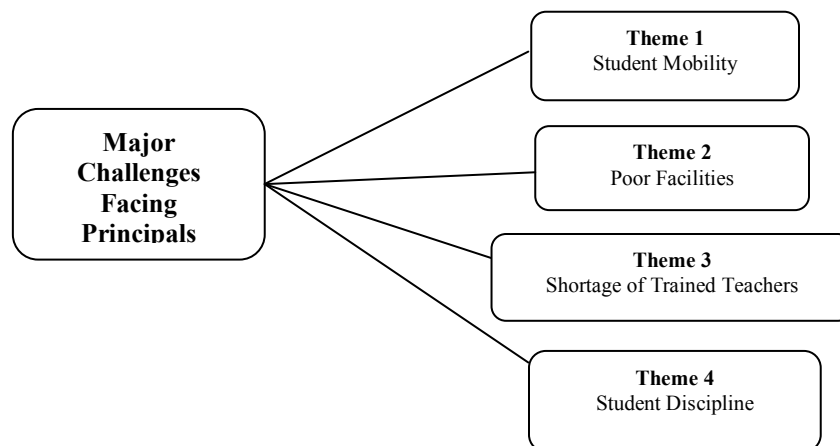
However, this view was not shared by Daahir, who argued that communication with parents regarding student attendance is considered vital in the current security situation in the country for two reasons. First, principals have to make sure that students get to school or home safely. Secondly, there are a large number of children who are out of school because their parents either died or cannot afford to send them to school. These children often spend most of their time playing in the streets and cause a lot of distraction to those who are on their way to school. If there is no communication, it would be difficult to ascertain if children are actually at school.

Overall, most principals were appreciative of the role of the parents' committees in resolving disputes and communicating their financial needs to the larger community. Parents' involvement in other aspects of schooling was seen as low. The reasons for this, however, differed. While poverty, lack of security and cultural beliefs were given as reasons by some, parents' low level of education was given as the major reason by others. While acknowledging the difficulty in monitoring student attendance because of the school disruptions caused by the ongoing conflict, which have become part of students' lives, another principal felt that it is his responsibility to maintain good collaboration with parents, which helps him to follow up on their children's attendance. Achieving this goal in a context of ongoing conflict is one of the many challenges that school principals face.

Major Challenges Facing Principals

Many of us, who live in peaceful environments, may only read about what plagues schools in war-torn countries like Somalia and may never experience these schools first hand but, for principals working in such schools, it is just part of their daily struggle. Principals are responsible for providing education to children while responding to an increased external volatile environment, coupled with limited resources. As I listened to my participants, I heard them describe the great challenges they face as principals in their schools. They have given vivid accounts of what it is like to work in an environment of ongoing conflict. Although these principals represented a variety of schools and organizations varying in human and material resources, they, at times, have all faced similar concerns and challenges. Apart from the security concerns that permeate the work of the principals, these challenges are represented in Figure 3, and include *student mobility*, *poor facilities*, *shortage of trained teachers*, and *student discipline*. They are presented in order according to their gravity.

Figure 3. Themes Related to Major Challenges Facing Principals



Theme 1: Student Mobility

A theme that emerged from the data analysis, expressed by most principals, was the high mobility rates among students. Student mobility constituted a major challenge for principals working amid ongoing conflict. Not only did it cause a great disruption of learning opportunities, it also had a great effect on the operation of the school.

Almost all participants talked directly or indirectly about the impact of the ongoing conflict on school stability. They indicated that frequent fighting causes a great deal of family displacement, which also results in high incidences of student mobility. For example, Faisal reported that parents are forced to leave their homes and seek shelter in another area. This leads to a situation where large numbers of students leave with their parents. Khalid made a similar observation about the frequent displacement of students which may disrupt students' educational continuity for the whole school year. Ali also cited the dramatic effect of student displacement on school functioning when half of the students are displaced in a single day. He noted that this creates uncertainty about whether the school will remain in its place or the school year will end normally. He further indicated that this is one of the greatest sources of frustration among school principals because such displacement is beyond their control and this inability acts as another source of frustration and powerlessness.

Student mobility also constituted a great challenge to school principals because it has a profound effect on school finance. As schools rely heavily on student fees, a loss of even a small number of students may cause severe financial problems. Some principals indicated that the high mobility rates have actually caused their schools to be unstable financially and on the brink of closure. Khalid, one of these principals, described how student mobility has affected the functioning of his school. He recounted that, at one point, there was a mass exodus from the area in which the school was located. A large number of students moved while the school was still in the middle of the school year. As the number of students declined significantly, the school became unable to cover expenses, including the salaries of teachers and other staff. He admitted that, without the financial support of the organization, he could not have survived.

However, principals whose schools have no external support face a graver situation than principals who have external support. Mubarak, a proprietor and principal of a private school with no external support, admitted that keeping the school open becomes a nightmare when a large number of students move with their families and the school fees fall sharply accordingly. He acknowledged how difficult it was for him to cover expenses needed to keep the school open, especially during the displacement of many people. He further conceded that, in such circumstances, the parents committee virtually becomes dysfunctional.

Some principals also expressed frustration by frequently having to move the school from one place to another. They indicated that they have to follow the population whenever they are displaced. Faisal described schooling in Mogadishu as unique, because it is the only place that a school can move to different locations within a short period. He recalled that his school moved three times in a single year. This phenomenon was also confirmed by Mubarak, who considered the phenomenon of frequent relocation of the school as a normal

thing in Mogadishu. These principals indicated that moving the school to a new place not only involves many logistical problems but also results in a lack of physical facilities.

Theme 2: Poor Facilities

The majority of school facilities, as reported by principals, do not provide the minimum physical conditions necessary for teaching and learning. While school facilities may vary among different schools, based on the level of support they receive from the community and NGOs, most principals conceded that they are working in poor facilities that were not specifically designed for educational purposes. This was clearly evidenced by comments made by the majority of principals, including Mubarak, Jamal, Salem and Daahir. These principals expressed great concern about the lack of school facilities. For example, Mubarak complained that many school buildings were totally or partially destroyed or occupied by displaced people or used by the African forces (AMISOM) as military bases. This lack of proper school buildings has forced him to convert private houses into schools, which creates innumerable problems, including lack of adequate sanitation facilities and space for both students and teachers. Jamal concurred with Mubarak and added that lack of adequate sanitation facilities creates special problems for girls where they have to share toilets with boys. Jamal expressed a lot of frustration for being unable to resolve this problem due to lack of financial resources.

The lack of basic facilities was not only a problem faced by principals using converted houses, but also those who moved their schools to the outskirts of the city. Daahir, one of these principals, complained about sanitation problems, as well as lack of enough chairs. He indicated that some of the students have to sit on the bare ground with books on their laps. He expressed his concern about the inconvenience and health risks that such situations may cause for students. Salem also expressed similar concerns about lack of chairs

in the dining hall, which forces students to sit on mats when they have their meals. He believed this causes a lot of hygiene problems. All these problems reflect the magnitude of the administrative challenges in providing education in a war-torn environment.

Theme 3: A Shortage of Trained Teachers

Findings from the study revealed that the lack of adequately trained teachers is one of the major problems facing schools in Mogadishu. Principals in the study spoke of having difficulty in hiring trained teachers, because many teachers who received training before the collapse of the state, have left the country, retired or sought employment with NGOs, while graduates from the newly established institutes lack experience. As a result, there are too few trained people to staff schools.

Lack of trained teachers was identified as a major challenge by the majority of the principals including Bashir, Daahir, Khalid, Mubarak and Salem. These principals complained about having an insufficient number of trained teachers, which is a serious impediment to providing a reasonable quality of education to children. For example, Bashir attributed the shortage of trained teachers to the ongoing conflict which has forced many trained teachers to flee the country, and to the lack of experience for graduates of recently established institutes. Both Bashir and Mubarak further complained about having teachers who have a limited command of teaching methods due to their low qualifications. They indicated that many of their teachers have completed only secondary education and did not receive adequate training. Mubarak noted that these teachers are often assigned to teach in the lower grades and he claims that this is not exclusive to his school, but is a common occurrence.

On the other hand, Khalid mentioned that he was forced to recruit individuals outside of the teaching field. He pointed out that these teachers are university graduates who had not

been formally trained as teachers, so they are struggling to adequately respond to the learning needs of their students and to effectively manage their classes. Salem also pointed to another factor underlying the shortage of trained teachers. He complained that many trained teachers have been leaving the teaching profession and seeking employment opportunities in non-governmental organizations, which pay much higher salaries than what schools can afford. He felt that this poses a significant challenge to school principals.

In summary, the above-mentioned principals considered the shortage of trained teachers as a major problem. The causes of such shortage, however, differed. While the ongoing conflict was given as the main cause by some principals, others attributed it to the low qualifications of their teachers. Furthermore, offering higher pay by NGOs was also cited as one of the causes of this problem. Further, principals in this study acknowledged that schools not only suffer from a shortage of trained teachers but also from discipline problems.

Theme 4: Student Discipline

The data analysis revealed that the majority of principals identified discipline problems as a major challenge in schools. While some of the principals attributed such problems to the ongoing violence that has become part of daily life, others believed they are partially caused by a lack of behaviour management skills on the part of untrained teachers. For example, Khalid mentioned the difficulty in controlling children who have only seen violence and war throughout their lives. He believed that living in this violent environment has greatly affected their individual mindsets and has made them more prone to violence. Daahir expressed similar sentiments and saw student violence and aggression as partly a reflection of the violence in the larger society, pointing out that students have become more rebellious. Ali echoed this view and complained that pupils no longer view their teachers as parents because of lack of respect and defiance of their authority.

However, two of the principals were very clear in making a distinction between younger children and those who have missed out on primary education and then have come back to school. Both Daahir and Mubarak mentioned that the major discipline problems come from older children who might threaten teachers or bring arms into school. They cited incidents where students came to school carrying a gun or pistol with the intention of harming a teacher. It appeared that these incidents might be specific to these two principals because other principals did not mention such incidents. Salem added another dimension to student discipline problems. Contrary to what one might expect, he complained about fighting among girls based along clan lines. He indicated that such a phenomenon had begun to surface among students, particularly girls, soon after the collapse of the state but now is no longer a big problem.

Two of the principals also noted that lack of behaviour management skills on the part of untrained teachers partially contributes to students' discipline problems. As the increasing numbers of untrained teachers enter classrooms without pre-service training in primary schools, they face many challenges in classroom management. These principals indicated that untrained teachers sometimes resort to punitive measures in order to deter misconduct. This sometimes creates violent reactions on the part of misbehaving students, as noted by Mubarak and Daahir.

Ali and Jamal also acknowledged that students with discipline and behavioural problems are not only a direct challenge to teachers' authority but also to the authority of school principals. These principals felt that their authority to solve students' discipline problems was quite constrained by the overall environment within which they work. They found themselves forced to choose between adopting lenient decisions or adhering to school rules, which may cause them a lot of personal problems. These principals chose to adopt a

lenient decision as a way of coping with contextual realities prevalent in Mogadishu. They expressed a sense of frustration because they were forced to give priority to their personal safety over school authority, which may limit the potential for having a significant impact on the general environment of the school.

However, Khalid and Salem reported that they refuse to compromise their school policy and rules on the grounds that, if they do not apply the rules, the school would become chaotic and people would lose faith, trust and confidence in their leadership. For example, Khalid believed that adopting a strict policy with respect to student discipline would make people feel justice, which he described as something that is lost in Somali society. Similarly, Salem claimed that he enforces a very strict policy against bringing arms to school, arguing that without this policy schools can become a dangerous place for students due to the availability of arms in every house.

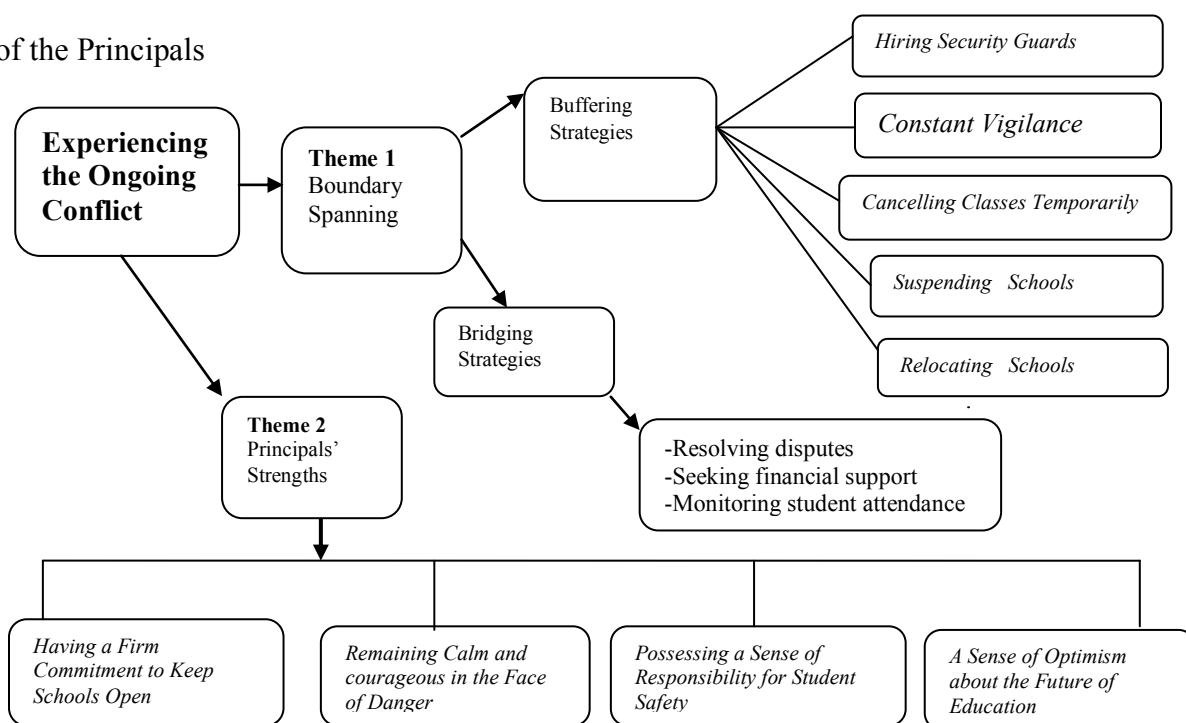
In summary, the majority of principals viewed student discipline as a major concern. Included in the suggested causes of discipline problems among students were the ongoing violence and its effects on students, presence of over-age students in primary schools, and the lack of experience of many untrained teachers in dealing with children's behavioural problems, especially with older students who have missed out on their early education and then come back to school.

Experiencing the Ongoing Conflict

Interviews with the school principals revealed mixed feelings in the way they have experienced the ongoing conflict. They have given a wide range of responses, including general statements such as, "We have been in this conflict for more than two decades; it is not something new to us" (Jamal); "We have adapted to the fighting" (Ali); "People go about their business once the fighting subsides" (Mubarak); and "We have gradually become

familiar with the fighting; even students have adapted to the situation” (Salem). Although their responses were quite varied, a number of themes emerged which embodied the lived experience of these principals with respect to managing and leading their schools in the midst of ongoing conflict. The themes, which are illustrated in Figure 4, include *boundary spanning*, and *principals’ strengths*. These two themes and their sub-themes represented the ‘hard’ things relating directly to principals’ conduct in a war-torn environment or the extraordinary challenges affecting principals in such settings.

Figure 4. Themes and Sub-themes Related to Boundary Spanning & Personal Characteristics of the Principals



Theme 1: Boundary Spanning

The data analysis revealed that principals operate in a highly volatile and challenging environment. The ongoing conflict has had a profound effect on school administration and student learning. Navigating through this turbulent environment required principals to engage in boundary spanning activities aimed at managing risks arising from the external

environment while continuing to address other demands of their roles. Therefore, principals, in order to survive in this challenging circumstance, developed creative ways to navigate through the ongoing conflict. Among these ways are a number of buffering and bridging strategies. The bridging strategies that school principals use to foster cooperation between school and parents include a focus on efforts to involve parents and community elders in resolving disputes due to the absence of a law enforcement authority. Other strategies include a focus on seeking financial assistance from parent and local community, given the non-availability of government support, as well as monitoring student attendance regularly. I have already addressed these bridging strategies in “Theme 5: Building Community Collaboration,” so, I need not repeat them here. Consequently, the discussion focuses on buffering strategies.

Buffering Strategies

The data analysis revealed that participants in this study developed a number of responses that might be appropriate or necessary for managing and maintaining the safety of their schools. These responses involved *hiring security guards, constant vigilance, cancelling classes temporarily, suspending schools, and relocating schools.*

Hiring Security Guards When asked about non-teaching staff in their schools, all of the principals mentioned that they have security guards for school safety and protection. They indicated that this has become a common practice among schools since the collapse of the central government in January 1991, due to the persistent insecurity in the country. For example, Daahir stated that the security guards help him to provide safety for the school.

Contrary to what one might expect, principals reported that security guards hired by schools are currently unarmed, particularly during the school day. Salem indicated that these guards are hired from among individuals who have a good reputation in the local community.

Having such a reputation would allow them to resolve disputes peacefully. Salem noted that the ongoing conflict has affected psyches of people where they can easily be provoked to use their guns. So, he believed that, by using disarmed security guards, he would be able to avoid confrontation and manage his school in a peaceful manner.

Two of the principals further mentioned security guards' normal duties such as closely monitoring the movement of outsiders who visit their schools. Mubarak, for instance, described the security guard's duty as helping the school administration to prevent strangers from entering the school and to monitor students who may bring weapons to school. Jamal added that, besides maintaining order at the beginning and end of the school day, the security guard controls the opening and closing of the main entrance of the school and allows visitors to enter the school.

Although these principals viewed using security guards as a means for ensuring the safety of their school members, they admitted that nobody can guarantee the general security, as none of the two sides of the conflict has full control of the city.

Constant Vigilance Some principals described the environment in which they work as turbulent and it requires that they have always to be vigilant to potential outbreaks of violence. These principals acknowledged that there is no way to anticipate and to be prepared because violence can break out at any time. However, they emphasized the importance of being vigilant about what is happening in their neighbourhoods.

The data analysis revealed that principals whose schools are located in the city are likely to be more concerned about the potential harm of the ongoing conflict than those whose schools had moved to the outskirts of the city. Mubarak, one of the principals working in the city, where fighting is the order of the day, acknowledged the difficulty in getting prepared in advance because fighting often erupts suddenly. Nevertheless, he was keen to

follow the media, particularly the press conferences held by the two sides of the conflict. Similarly, Khalid, another principal whose school is in the city, shared the same strategy and emphasized the importance of following local radio stations which closely monitor the security situation in the country. These stations warn people who are likely to be affected by the imminent fighting and, in case fighting breaks out, the routes that can be used safely.

Two of the principals, Ali and Faisal, mentioned that it is the responsibility of the officers in the education committee to monitor security developments. These officers keep in touch with reliable sources on both sides of the conflict. They stated that they are constantly informed of the security situation. These principals described constant vigilance as vital for ensuring the safety of their school members, as well as for avoiding any sort of panic caused by rumours.

Cancelled Classes Temporarily The data analysis revealed that schools have continued to suffer from a great deal of disruption. Feelings of frustration were echoed throughout the interviews. Each participant has expressed a sense of frustration and powerlessness towards the frequent disruptions to the learning process, as a result of the frequent fighting. Temporary cancellation of classes was cited by principals as a response to sudden outbreaks of fighting. For example, apart from the panic and fear caused by the fighting, Jamal mentioned that he has been forced from time to time to stop classes temporarily in the middle of the school day whenever fighting starts in his surroundings and resuming classes when fighting stops.

While Jamal provided no specific safety procedures, Mubarak gave details and stated that once the fight breaks out in the vicinity of the school, the immediate concern is the safety of students. The doors of the school are locked, and classes are stopped immediately. Teachers are instructed to calm students by telling stories. An emergency meeting is held by

the school committee, while the situation is monitored closely. Daahir also shared his experience and further described the safety measures that are in place in his school. Students are divided into small groups and placed in concrete shelters to minimize casualties and to avoid stray bullets. Then when fighting stops, classes are resumed.

Daahir acknowledged that making the appropriate decision in such emergency cases is one of the most difficult tasks facing the principal due to lack of enough and accurate information about the intensity of the fighting and its duration. Ali confirmed this difficulty and emphasised the importance of making sure that the fight has ended before the resumption of classes. In fact, these principals reported that they have learned from experience that the fighting between the two sides of the conflict often takes the form of “a hit and run” and for this reason they considered temporary cancellation of classes as the appropriate response to this kind of fighting. In addition, they admitted that this is not something unique to schools, but it is also a common practice among business people. They indicated that after every battle, people would walk out, open their shops, and life would return to normal for a few days until a new battle erupts again. Therefore, as Jamal noted, cancelling the remaining class periods in such circumstances becomes unnecessary. However, when fighting continues for days or weeks, a different decision must be made. This illustrates the reality of working in an environment of ongoing conflict and its disruptive effects on school life.

Suspending Schools Suspending schools was another strategy reported by three principals in response to the real risks of the frequent fighting. While taking into consideration the safety of their students, these principals mentioned that they have been forced to suspend their schools many times, especially when heavy fighting erupts and continues for days. In such cases, as Bashir explained, principals and vice-principals are

obliged to come to school and to update teachers and students on the security situation. If the situation involves real security risks, students are instructed to stay home and not to risk their lives to come to school. This strategy was also confirmed by Khalid, who considered opening schools in such circumstances as a security risk. He emphasized the importance of suspending the school and keeping it closed until the risks to students' lives pass.

As reflected in the comments of some principals, suspending schools is of particular concern to principals whose schools remain in some areas of the city where clashes between the sides of the conflict are frequent. Bashir, one of these principals, explained that, when fighting erupts before students make their way to school, travel to school for both teachers and students becomes risky. Mubarak confirmed this negative impact and indicated the difficulty in organizing any form of coherent delivery of instruction under such circumstances, due to disruption to student attendance. First, he had to deal with uncertainty regarding the available time for teaching, as some students and teachers may arrive late and want to leave early due to safety reasons and, secondly, he had to match those teachers and students who were able to come to school. Overall, principals suspended their schools temporarily when they are not sure about the safety of their school members. They were also deeply concerned about the impact of such frequent closures of schools on student learning.

Relocating Schools Relocating the school was a response to the frequent closure of schools due to the persistent insecurity and displacement of people from their homes, as some principals indicated. These principals mentioned that they have been forced to abandon their schools because they were in a war zone. For example, Salem explained the reason for moving his school, which was located in downtown where clashes between the two sides of the conflict were the order of the day. It became difficult for him to continue working in that environment and he decided to move the school to the outskirts of the city. Daahir, another

principal who also moved from the city, gave similar accounts and mentioned that his school was located in what was formerly known as a green line, where some of the main confrontations often take place.

However, Jamal acknowledged that the decision to move the school from its original place was dictated not only by the insecurity but also by the displacement of the community that the school served. He admitted that the decision to move the school was the most difficult decision that he had ever made because of the complication of the displacement where some families prefer to remain in the city while others move to the outskirts of the city; consequently causing dispersal of students. He indicated that, before making his decision, he had to locate the area to which most of the parents had moved.

Principals who moved their schools expressed a kind of relief from the stressful environment in which they previously worked. Schools are relatively safer and less vulnerable to the frequent disruptions that principals had experienced before moving from their original locations. In addition, with the exception of students who have remained in the city, other students now live closer together in one place and they don't require transportation. However, they described their current working conditions as very harsh because, as Daahir indicated, they are working in makeshift schools where water and sanitation facilities are very poor.

Lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities in the displaced people's camps was one of the major reasons why some principals decided to stay in the city despite the insecure situation. Bashir, who decided not to move his school, explained the problems involved in such a move. Apart from the logistical problems, he acknowledged the difficulty in finding a building that has adequate water and sanitation facilities and, even if such a building is found, he has to provide transportation to those who remain in the city. Overall, the above

comments reflect the delicate situations that school principals are faced with in deciding whether they have to stay in the city or move their school to a safer place. They had to take many factors into consideration before making their final decision. These comments further demonstrate the principals' perseverance and resilience in coping with the ongoing conflict.

Theme3: Principals' Strengths

The data presented in this study portrayed principals as individuals characterized by certain personal qualities. These qualities appeared to have helped them to lead their schools in the face of difficult circumstances. Although each has his own personality, they shared some similarities. These include *having a firm commitment to keep schools open, remaining calm and courageous in the face of danger, possessing a sense of responsibility for student safety, and a sense of optimism about the future of education*. Below is an analysis of each of these characteristics.

Having a Firm Commitment to Keep Schools Open. The majority of the principals described having a firm commitment to keep schools open as essential for working in the midst of ongoing conflict. These principals indicated that at no time did they consider giving up on the provision of education despite the many challenges they have faced and are still facing. For example, Faisal communicated a belief that having a strong commitment to keep schools open has been the driving force for many educators who have restarted schools from scratch after the fall of the central government. Faisal acknowledged that those educators have set a good example for others and he is determined to follow in their footsteps. Bashir also reflected on his experience and emphasized the need for keeping schools open for the sake of Somali children's future. He felt a great responsibility as an educator and expressed his determination to stay in the field despite the many challenges he faces.

These principals were aware that education could make an important contribution to the country's future peaceful development. They acknowledged that, as educators, they are accountable to Somali children and are obliged to provide educational opportunities for them, as much as they can. For example, Mubarak felt that his commitment to providing education has grown stronger than ever because he viewed the conflict surrounding him as evidence of the need to use schools as a means to fight ignorance and violence. He believed that closing schools would lead to an increase in violence committed by ignorant people. Ali agreed that most of those who have been involved in the civil war and are still perpetuating the conflict are people with little or no education. Like Mubarak, he believed that the senseless killing will continue unless young people are educated in order to appreciate the value of human life. This view was further reinforced by Salem who made great efforts in protecting and keeping young people from joining armed groups. His belief has been that peace can be restored only when children are provided the opportunity to have education.

Khalid further explained why keeping schools open is important despite the security situation. He believed that the persistent insecurity cannot be justification for giving up providing education because no one knows for sure when the conflict will end. Closing schools means, in his view, that many children would remain deprived of educational opportunities. For these principals, there is no signal to predict the end of this conflict. So, an action to save many children from a bleak future is needed.

Two of the principals also noted that such commitment requires a lot of sacrifice on the part of the principals. Principals have to move beyond their own self-interest. For example, Bashir emphasized that his commitment to keep the school open is driven by a desire to help Somali children rather than by material gains. He provided evidence by reflecting on his experience in the early 1990s when many educators left the profession for

economic reasons besides the deterioration of the security situation in the country. He felt that he is morally obliged to make whatever contribution he can to his community. Similar accounts were provided by Salem who indicated that he opened his school at the height of the civil war when nobody thought about schooling in Mogadishu. These principals hoped that, by helping to provide education, they were helping to build futures for their children. The commitment of these principals is inspiring, to say the least. While professional commitment was perceived to be an important quality of school leadership, it may not be enough in itself, particularly in the face of difficult circumstances.

Remaining Calm and Courageous in the Face of Danger. Four of the principals commented on the fact that being a principal in a war-torn environment requires a lot of courage and calmness. They spoke of the importance of having courage during difficult times. Ali clearly mentioned that personal and moral courage is required to be a principal in a war-torn environment. He indicated that such an environment is fraught with huge challenges and difficult situations that may expose the principal to many risks including their personal safety, as well as the safety of their schools. Ali believed that the determination of the principal can fade quickly when faced with difficult situations unless they are armed with a lot of courage.

Two of the principals shared their experiences of facing difficult situations where a lot of courage and calm are necessary. For example, Bashir mentioned a difficult situation that sometimes arises when government forces storm into the school and demand the principal to bring out the insurgents hiding in his school. In such a situation, Bashir emphasized the importance of remaining courageous and calm in the face of the soldiers' provocations. Ali shared a similar experience and stressed the importance of avoiding

confrontation with soldiers for the sake of student safety. Bashir and Ali acknowledged that it was a difficult situation to go through.

This requirement for calmness was also reflected in comments made by both Ali and Mubarak who shared another experience where calmness is very important. This situation arises when fighting erupts suddenly in the vicinity of the school and the principal receives a barrage of phone calls from anxious parents inquiring about the safety of their children. In such cases, Mubarak stated that parents experience difficulty getting through on the telephone lines and become angry, so the important thing to remember is to stay calm in the face of angry parents and to try calmly to diffuse their anger.

The requirement for calmness was further reflected in Faisal's comments regarding the importance of making appropriate decisions during difficult times. He believed that being calm helps the principal to avoid making impulsive decisions, which could have serious consequences for the school. Faisal mentioned that making such decisions often occur when there are rumours of an imminent outbreak of fighting. In such circumstances, it might be more prudent for the principal to wait and see before releasing students from school. Finally, principals agreed that remaining calm and courageous in the face of danger does not mean recklessness, but needs to be accompanied by a sense of responsibility for student safety.

Possessing a Sense of Responsibility for Student Safety. This sub-theme was evident in the responses of almost all principals. They recognized the tremendous responsibility to do everything possible to maintain student safety. Mubarak noted that being a school principal in a war-torn environment is a huge responsibility. It requires the principal to be constantly vigilant and to closely monitor everyone who enters or leaves the school to make sure that nobody is harmed while the person is in school. Mubarak added that a school principal in a war-torn environment is morally responsible for making sure that all of his students arrive to

school or home safely. This great sense of responsibility was further captured by Khalid through a vivid description of what can happen to students in a war-torn environment. Khalid created a vivid scenario involving around 500 pupils gathering in one place amid ongoing violence. He imagined what might happen if a shell lands in the school. Khalid always bore this scenario in mind, which reflects the reality of working in a war-torn environment.

Three of the principals expressed their concern not only about the safety of their students within the walls of the school building but also about their safety while they are on their way to or from school. They pointed to the danger of roadside bombs or landmines laid by insurgents against the government forces. These principals mentioned that roadside bombs are a recent phenomenon and they originally were meant to target convoys carrying government and AMISOM forces, but they often kill civilians using these roads, including students.

Daahir expressed his concern about such incidents, noting that there are an increasing number of people who are wounded or killed as a result of roadside bombs and landmines. He acknowledged that these roadside bombs or landmines are a real threat to everybody including students who are on their way to or from school. Khalid also expressed the same concern and indicated that he feels a moral responsibility for the safety of children, though such incidents often take him beyond the walls of the school.

Principals also mentioned the risk of children being caught in crossfire as they commute to school. Faisal who, along with 50 of his students, commutes to his school, located on the outskirts of the city, talked about the risks of being caught in crossfire. He indicated that, when such incidents take place, people are exposed to stray bullets due to lack of cover. While acknowledging that these incidents are less frequent, however, when they take place many people lose their lives, including children on their way to or from school.

As a result, school principals felt great concern when they hear that many people were killed in incidents like these for fear that some of their students or teachers were included. Despite all these challenges, some principals felt positive about the future of education in Somalia.

A Sense of Optimism about the Future of Education. The study participants were asked how they see the future of education in the country, against the backdrop of current realities. Most principals envisaged that the future system would be much better than the system used before the civil war and it will be beneficial to both public and private schools. For example, Bashir expressed an optimistic view on the grounds that many private educational institutes and schools have been established during the past twenty years of the conflict. He noted that people's awareness of the importance of education has increased, which is a good sign for the future of education in the country. Bashir felt optimistic because people have learned to rely on themselves and many parents now have more interest in education than in the past. Daahir expressed a similar view and believed that the current system has made significant progress, arguing that students had little chance of going to university before the collapse of the state, but now, despite the persistent violence many students have the chance to get into local universities or go abroad for study. He believed that this will be beneficial to the future of education. Similar views were further expressed by Ali, Faisal and Mubarak.

However, the optimism expressed by the foregoing principals was not shared by Khalid, Jamal and Salem. For example, Khalid described the education they are now providing as "a struggle for survival." He believed that a large number of Somali children would remain deprived of educational opportunities unless a government that supports and oversees the public education is restored as quickly as possible. Jamal and Salem shared

Khalid's view and Salem further emphasized the need for a unified curriculum that fosters national unity and social cohesion.

Overall, most principals were positive about the future arguing that some progress has been made without government support and this progress will be much greater when peace is restored. Once peace is restored, an effective central government that fosters national unity and social cohesion through a unified curriculum is needed, as some principals argued.

Finally, principals were asked if they consider educational training for principals necessary. If so, what type of training do they suggest? The majority of principals believed that such prior preparation is not necessary, and they agreed that teaching experience is the most important criterion for selecting principals. They further indicated that, in the context of Somalia, it is difficult to find qualified teachers, let alone principals with any formal training. Regarding the type of training they would like to suggest, the majority of principals believed that conflict resolution and problem solving seminars would be helpful to principals working in war-torn environments. They mentioned that they often deal with endless problems due to the ongoing conflict. Khalid further suggested the need for training in psychosocial care and support to help principals deal with traumatized children and adults effectively.

However, Faisal and Mubarak suggested two different types of training, which would be helpful for principals. For example, Faisal felt a great need in the area of curriculum development while Mubarak was concerned with the absence of collaboration among school principals. For Faisal, lack of capacity in the area of curriculum development has led many schools to adopt foreign curricula, which make little sense in the Somali context. So, he pleaded to UN agencies for assistance in this area. On the other hand, Mubarak acknowledged that they work in a competitive environment that creates isolation and he

wishes to see professional development opportunities to assist principals in getting together with other principals. He believed this will provide an opportunity to exchange views and share experiences on matters related to schooling.

As shown in the preceding comparative analysis, the principals shared a variety of perspectives, lived experiences, and challenges on how they manage and lead their schools in an extremely difficult environment. Their perspectives and lived experiences tended to cluster around several repeating themes. Reflecting on these themes, I have integrated the composite textural and structural descriptions into a long paragraph that meaningfully captured the essences of managing and leading schools in a situation of armed conflict, which reflected the lived experience of the participants. In other words, participants' perspectives, lived experiences and challenges were blended into a common story that provided the "essence" of the principals' experiences.

The Essence of the Experience

According to Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994), the last step in a phenomenological study is to describe the essence of the phenomenon by incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. As Creswell (2013) stated, this usually takes the form of a "... long paragraph that tells the reader "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon and "how" they experienced it" (p. 194). In the case of this study, it is the essential understanding of the roles of primary school principals in managing and leading their schools in a situation of armed conflict. My intention was to help the reader better understand what it might be like to work as a primary school principal in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, which has been the epicenter of armed conflict since the fall of the military rule in 1991. Being a principal in such a context is extremely challenging. In addition to all of the other demands of their roles, which principals are expected to do

wherever they are found, such as supervising instruction and teachers, principals in this study were struggling with a host of conflict-related problems and challenges that complicated their jobs and seemingly overwhelmed them in terms of safety and security. Protecting their students and teachers from the effects of the violence that is taking place beyond the walls of their schools has become their major concern. These principals took care of their teachers' and students' safety even when fighting takes place in the vicinity of their schools or when their schools were caught in crossfire between fighting groups and people's lives were at stake. In such a life or death situation, these principals gathered their students and teachers together in order to buffer them from the threats of the violent conflict. Providing safety and security for their students and teachers were always on the minds of these principals. These principals were not only challenged to overcome the security problems created by the ongoing conflict but they were also challenged to maintain the functioning of their schools, with an extreme scarcity of both human and material resources in a physical environment that could be described as deplorable. Lack of proper school buildings has forced some principals to convert private houses into schools due to the abandonment of their school buildings as a result of student displacement, while others have to use makeshift schools where water and sanitation facilities are very poor. Learning in such conditions can cause a lot of inconvenience and health risks for students, as some of the students have to sit on the bare ground with books on their laps for a long time. On the other hand, recognizing that teachers are the school's most important resources, especially within such an environment where other instructional resources are very limited, creating a supportive environment in which teachers feel they are helped became critical. Being supportive of teachers, in terms of helping them cope with difficult working conditions, providing whatever resources are available and giving emotional support permeated the principals' personal and professional

relationships with teachers. This became an invaluable asset and resource that could be relied upon during difficult times.

As a result of constant wrestling with these extraordinary problems, most of these principals gained strength and perseverance in doing their jobs. A sense of personal value reminded these school principals that their work is necessary and important for the future of Somali children. Commitment and persistence gave these principals a purpose to move beyond their daily challenges and struggles, as well as to move beyond the discouragement and frustration of the ongoing conflict that was out of their control. They articulated a strong belief in the power of commitment, calm, and courage, and a sense of responsibility for the safety of school members in coping with the various challenges of being a principal in conflict situations. In fact, these principals did not regard themselves as heroic individuals who solely shaped the course of their organizations. Instead, they recognized the ongoing collaboration between the schools and the communities in which they have been painstakingly shouldering the burden of maintaining their schools in the face of daunting adversity. Such collaboration with parents and local communities with respect to security and financial matters, though principals varied in their actual practices of such collaboration, went well beyond the traditional role of parents and members of the community in stable environments. This collaboration has become a top priority for principals in order to protect their schools or seek financial support, given the absence of a functioning government. Extraordinarily, through such collaboration and their commitment, these principals have eventually succeeded in maintaining their schools throughout the ebb and flow of the conflict.

In the following chapter, I discuss the meaning and significance of the major research findings. These findings will be discussed through the literature on education in conflict, school management and leadership as well as through the open systems theory.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

The findings of this study offer a general image of the principalship in Mogadishu, Somalia that is based on the principals' perceptions about their roles, lived experiences, and challenges in a situation of armed conflict. These findings are discussed in relation to the broader literature about the principalship, particularly in developing countries. However, the difficulty here lies in the fact that much of the literature is based on the perspective of the roles of the principal in stable environments rather than that of the roles of the principal in war-torn settings. Therefore, the discussion of these findings takes into account the dearth of literature that is specific to the roles and experiences of the principal in a war-torn setting. In doing so, six major findings emerging from the study are singled out for discussion:

- *Prominence of the Instructional Dimension of the Role*
- *Paternalistic Relationship with Teachers*
- *Fostering Parent and Community Collaboration*
- *A Severe Lack of Resources*
- *Utility of Buffering Strategies in Unstable Environments*
- *Key Personal Characteristics of the Principals*

Prominence of the Instructional Dimension of the Role

The principals' description of what they do shows that the instructional dimension of the principal's role is prominent in the principal's work in Mogadishu. Analysis of the perceived roles revealed some elements of instructional leadership rather than managerial leadership. This finding, however, is at odds with an important body of literature on principals' roles in developing countries. In most developing countries, the managerial role

of the principal is dominant (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; Oplatka, 2004; Tekleselassie, 2002). Principals tend to spend a considerable amount of their time on administrative and managerial functions such as writing reports, going over routine paperwork, managing the finances, and implementing the decisions and directives issued by higher authorities. However, principals in this study rarely mentioned that they spend much of their time on such administrative tasks. Instead, they talked about supervising teachers, monitoring the syllabus coverage and facilitating teachers' professional development when funds and security situation permit.

The difference between the two findings may be a function of the difference between relatively stable developing countries and war-torn environments. In many developing countries, education systems are highly centralized and much emphasis is placed on administrative and managerial functions (Oplatka, 2004). As a result, principals have to do a lot of managing to ensure that the school is following the rules and regulations, as well as expectations, which come from the state, the district school board, or the local community. Even in countries where principals are given some fiscal responsibility and decision-making powers, as a result of the movement toward decentralization in school systems, they still find themselves tied to a centralized arrangement in a supposedly decentralized system because of the priority that district offices give to routine administrative functions (De Grauwe, 2005; Tekleselassie, 2002).

In contrast, school systems in conflict-affected countries are greatly weakened (Buckland, 2005) or completely destroyed, as is the case in Somalia, which represents an extreme case of state failure (Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Saggiomo, 2011). In such an environment, it is understandable that principals in Mogadishu work under a less centralized organizational structure with a shorter chain of command between the principals and their

governing bodies if they are supported by a non-governmental organization. In fact, this is a benefit to these principals and is one way in which school leadership in a war-torn country can be more expedient than in a stable developing country where there is a stronger hierarchy of power. Consequently, the administrative and managerial workload shouldered by principals in this study is far less than that of their counterparts in a relatively stable environment. Almost all of the principals in this study overlooked this aspect of their managerial role except for student discipline.

Managing Student Discipline. As stated in the literature review, managing students' discipline problems is an area of the school operation that principals consider as part of their managerial responsibilities. Although principals have always been responsible for providing a safe and secure school environment, in a period of civil war where many students are exhibiting anti-social behaviours, managing the school discipline becomes a challenging task (Makki, 2009; Shafa, 2011). Research shows a link between exposure to community violence and the potential development of antisocial attitudes and aggressive behaviours among young people (Boothby, 1996; Garbarino, 1999, 2001). These studies suggest, for instance, that American urban children, who have witnessed armed robberies, shootings, and killings, tend to demonstrate more general aggression than children not exposed to such violence. These studies also indicate that children living in conditions of armed conflict might be more at risk for developing aggressive behaviour as they learn violent behaviour by imitating and modeling others.

Based on the responses of the principals in this study, two general comments can be made about the issue of discipline problems in primary schools in Mogadishu. The first is that not all of the principals expressed the same degree of concern about these problems. Some principals reported types of disruptive behaviours that can be viewed as less serious

misconduct. Some principals, however, had to cope with much more serious misconduct like showing a lack of respect for teachers, actual physical fighting, especially among girls based along clan lines, and threatening teachers with weapons. Such serious misconducts are particularly linked to the presence of many over-age students in class. Although some forms of misconduct like threatening teachers with weapons are clearly more serious and can even be regarded as criminal offences, all these forms do have a serious negative influence on the climate of teaching and learning.

The second comment is that there are a number of ways in which principals attempt to cope with these problems. Some of the measures that have been suggested by some principals to improve discipline in schools include (a) referring clan-related problems to parents committees for mediation, (b) inviting religious scholars and civil society activists to lecture on nurturing and promoting ethics and morals for the students, and (c) following a strict policy about bringing arms to school. These principals argued that, since students, parents, and the community look at the school as a relatively safe place amid a volatile external environment, they refuse to compromise their school policy and rules on the grounds that, if they do not apply the rules, the school would become chaotic and people would lose faith, trust and confidence in their leadership.

An important question that arises in this context is the degree of effectiveness of such rules and policies in a country which has lacked rules and regulations for more than two decades. Some principals reported that students do not follow school rules as they should because they see and live violence, so it is difficult to implement discipline rules as required. This requires adapting school rules to suit perceived local needs and operational circumstances. Similar practices were reported by Zakharia (2004), who studied how schools coped with student discipline during the Lebanese civil war. Zakharia indicated that school

administrators turned a blind eye to students who challenged their authority in order to maintain their personal safety as well as the safety of their school members.

One possible interpretation of different views among principals in the current study may be the social and clan status held by the principal in the local community, as well as his age. Principals who opt for a lenient decision tend to be younger and may not have the same level of respect as that given to older principals. In addition, principals adhering to strict policy on discipline may be backed by a strong local clan so they need not compromise their school policies. Regardless of the principals' views, it is no doubt that school principals face a huge challenge in providing an environment conducive to teaching and learning amid a violent external environment.

Instructional Supervision. As indicated in the literature review, principals in many developing countries, particularly in Africa, do not view instructional supervision as part of their duties because of either being committed to administrative functions or ignoring it or regarding it as a less important aspect of their supervisory role (de Grauwe et al., 2005; DeJaeghere et al., 2009; Moswela, 2010; Mulkeen et al., 2007). However, the way principals in the current study manage academics shows an element of instructional supervision as they talked repeatedly about their role in supervising teachers and offering professional development opportunities whenever the security situation and the available funds permit. This is evident in the emphasis on improvement of classroom practice and feedback given after the class visitations, monitoring of lesson presentations and evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the teacher, as well as monitoring the syllabus coverage, and students' workbooks.

This finding echoes that of Heneveld et al (2006), whose study of the quality of primary education in four Sub-Saharan African countries, shows the importance of the

principal's role in supervising teachers. Heneveld et al (2006) suggested that schools with better student results tend to have principals who pay more attention to teachers' preparation for teaching than principals in schools with lower results, particularly when the principal supervises the teaching and learning processes. This finding also echoes that of Abdinoor (2007), who explored views of various actors engaged in the education sector about the emerging educational system following the collapse of the Somali public institutions. Five primary and secondary school principals, who were part of a sample of 27 individuals, talked about what they perceived as a high quality of education being offered in private schools compared to the low quality of public education before the collapse of the state. They attributed this, in part, to the better supervision of teachers by principals in private schools.

While this claim is debatable, improving the quality of learning through teacher supervision is compromised in situations of extreme insecurity, as is the case in Mogadishu, because of safety concerns and school closures which often result in the reduction of instructional time available to students. Therefore, the extent to which such teacher supervision is effective is questionable. However, it is fair to state that any mention of instructional quality in Mogadishu should be viewed within the context of the state failure. Since school principals in Mogadishu face an extraordinary array of educational problems, ensuring the functioning of their schools would, in itself, be a major accomplishment. Therefore, one would appreciate that having any kind of education under such conditions can be seen as a great achievement.

Another issue related to supervision raised in this study is the principal's role in monitoring the syllabus coverage by ensuring that teachers follow the prescribed lesson plan. This practice may raise concern among educational researchers, because it deprives the teacher of bringing creative and lively thinking into the lesson (Datnow & Castellano, 2000;

Grossman & Thompson, 2004). These scholars further suggest that effective teachers must attend to the individual learning needs of their students by going beyond limited prescribed curriculum practices. However, one suspects that there may be many of these teachable moments in a war-torn environment as is the case in Mogadishu, Somalia.

While using such a supervisory practice may be considered a retrograde method in North America, it may be necessary in a war-torn environment, especially with inexperienced and ill-trained teachers, as revealed by the principals in this study. These principals were keen to ensure that teachers cover the syllabus in the allocated timeframe, given the nature of the learning environment where there are a lot of disruptions due to unexpected school closures. These disruptions cause a great deal of confusion relating to the coverage of the syllabus. As a result, principals in this study are more concerned about covering the curriculum in good time because of the uncertainty about the completion of the school calendar due to the conflict in the nation, rather than involving their staff in curriculum enrichment activities. This is one way that principals in a war-torn environment go about their supervisory practices, which differs from the practices of principals in stable environments.

A Paternalistic Relationship with Teachers

As noted in the theme “Supporting Teachers” in Chapter Five, a major component of managing teachers is to back up teachers in their work. Principals in this study emphasized the importance of the human element in their relationship with teachers. They talked about supporting and taking care of teachers personally and professionally through emotional and material support. This kind of caring and support is congruent with the notion of the principal as a paternalistic leader. Farh and Cheng (2000, cited in Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008, p. 567) described paternalistic leadership as “a style that combines strong discipline

and authority with fatherly benevolence.” Benevolence refers to taking an interest in the personal welfare of individuals. In a review of the literature on paternalistic leadership, Pellegrini and Scandura (2008) pointed out that the benevolent aspect in paternalism has been underappreciated in the Western leadership literature because of being associated with authoritarianism. However, in many non-Western cultures, it has increasingly been perceived as an effective leadership style in dealing with subordinates. In such paternalistic cultures, they argued, people in authority consider it an obligation to provide support and protection to those under their care and, in exchange, expect loyalty and deference. Thus, paternalistic leaders guide both the professional, as well as the personal lives of their subordinates in a manner resembling a parent.

The Somali principals in this study appear to assume a paternal or fatherly role in their relationships with teachers, as mentioned by some principals. A “Parent” in Somali culture is perceived as a person who is caring and respectable, as well as being attentive to the problems of those who are under his care, and seeking to resolve such issues. As most of the principals are over the age of 50, it appears that, for these principals, showing care and support for their teachers might not be perceived as an extra responsibility, but may be perceived as part of their role in the school community as elders. According to Reagan (2000), age is an important element in the life of African culture. It entails social status and respect and, consequently, “the elder is assumed to be a man of wisdom and expected to demonstrate in speech and in action if he is to keep among those who look up to him for leadership” (Reagan, 2000, p. 38). Consequently, the principals in this study appear to bring to their workplace the roles they play in their community.

The principals’ descriptions of their role as the person ultimately “responsible for all others” in the school reinforce this notion of paternalistic leadership. In the Somali culture,

being like a father, in addition to the “caring” connotation, suggests that the person is the sole decision-maker in a group of people perceived to know less than he does. All but two principals do not view teachers’ participation as part of the decision-making process in their schools because, in their view, making decisions is the prerogative of the principal, with the help of vice-principals in some cases.

Since the principal is held solely accountable for the functions of the school, it is understandable that principals prefer the top-down approach regarding making critical decisions (Makki, 2009). In addition, the atmosphere of a constant sense of urgency in which principals in Mogadishu operate may not allow them to consult everyone, especially during difficult times. Furthermore, as Oplatka (2011) points out, due to the culture of obedience prevalent in many developing countries, school leaders by virtue of their official authority rarely consult their subordinates when making significant decisions. Whatever the reason for the principals’ lack of improving decision making through teacher participation, they are interested in building good relationships with the local community.

Fostering Parent and Community Collaboration

As indicated in the literature review, schools whether in developed or developing countries, need the continuous support and involvement of parents and communities. Therefore, the provision of education should be a process of collaboration between schools and communities (Chapman & Burchfield, 1994; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) and in order to make this collaboration meaningful, school leaders should make efforts to build external social capital, the schools connection with community.

In developing countries, Chapman and Burchfield (1994) identify three important reasons for fostering parent and community collaboration: (1) eliciting parents’ encouragement of their children’s learning experience, (2) monitoring children’s regular

attendance and helping them do their homework, and (3) soliciting financial support. The data obtained from the principals in Mogadishu partly support the conclusion reached by Chapman and Burchfield (1994) regarding the importance of the principal's role in achieving these goals.

However, a major distinction to note is that principals in this study also emphasized the collaborative relationship with parents and members of the local community for the protection of schools, given the absence of a functioning government responsible for providing security for schools. This distinction is clearly a function of the difference between stable and war-torn environments. As indicated in the literature review, previous research suggests that local communities in war-torn environments play a major role in protecting schools (Abdinoor, 2007; Glad, 2009; O'Malley, 2010). Although schools are often targeted in times of war, as seen in many conflict-affected countries, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, Thailand, to name but a few, schools in Mogadishu are rarely targeted by any of the fighting groups, as indicated by the principals in this study. As Elmi (2009) suggests, education was not one of the major grievances that resulted in the Somali civil war or driven by certain, contested ideology among warring factions, as is the case, for example, in Afghanistan and Thailand. Another possible explanation may be that Mogadishu is a metropolitan city containing schools serving children from different clans. Since conflict in Somalia is driven by clan politics, it would be difficult for any of the fighting factions to target schools for clan considerations. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that it is important to distinguish between types of conflict and their impact on education.

Nevertheless, the principals in this study highlighted the need to engage parents' committees and traditional and religious leaders in handling disputes between the school and community members, or among school members and students. They described such

collaboration with members of the community to be one of the key elements in maintaining their schools, despite the many security challenges. This finding also supports the views held by the principals in Abdinoor's (2007) study, that the community can enforce rules and resolve disputes among students and families, given the absence of law enforcing authority. Previous research on communities in war-torn environments further suggests that, although the chaos of war often destroys or discredits traditional social structure and authorities, cultural and religious leaders are often viewed by members of the society as a means for establishing order when a functioning government is absent (Brannelly & Sullivan-Owomoyela, 2009).

With the protracted conflict in South Central Somalia, members of the community, particularly parents committees have been instrumental not only in resolving disputes but also in assisting school principals in obtaining the resources they need from the community. Although the principal's role in soliciting financial support was found to be significant in this study, the extent to which the principal has to be engaged in such efforts varied from system to system and from principal to principal. The findings of this study suggest that the principal's role in schools without NGO support seems more active in seeking financial support than in NGO-supported schools. While principals in both schools rely heavily on fees paid by parents, the role of the NGO-supported principal is less likely to engage in financial resource generation, which is provided when necessary by the education committee of the supporting organization; consequently the principal is only responsible for fee collection in this regards.

The principals in this study repeated most of the barriers mentioned in the literature on parental involvement in education: poverty, lower levels of education, and cultural beliefs. Principals reported that community financial support for schooling is generally low,

mainly due to high levels of poverty. This extreme poverty has been caused by ongoing conflict, recurrent famines and droughts, and decline in economic growth, which have seriously affected the financial position of many parents. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2007), “In 2002, the total share of population living in extreme poverty in Somalia below one US\$ per day was estimated at 43.2% or 2.94 million people” (p. 14). In many cases parents are so deprived that they cannot afford to pay two US dollars per month to maintain a child in a school (Oxfam Novib, 2004). However, while at least in the context of stable environments, the impact of poverty on parents’ capacity to make contributions does appear to be surmountable when societies align their core values and chart a collective and focused course toward a common goal (Swift-Morgan (2006), the findings of this study seem to suggest that, in the case of ongoing conflict in Mogadishu, where financial resources are extremely scarce, what community members can manage in order to support schools financially is very limited.

Another reason for the low level of community participation in education could be due to a long-standing tradition of total reliance on government for social services. Research on community participation in education in conflict settings shows that the nature of state and community relationships prior to the conflict in terms of movement away from a decentralized education system is a key factor in the role that the community assumes when a state becomes weak or absent in a conflict setting (Brannelly & Sullivan-Owomoyela, 2009). These authors argue that societies influenced by a long-term, dominant central state may well be less capable of independent community initiatives.

This phenomenon was observed in Somalia where community participation in educational projects was limited because Somalia was one of the most centralized states in Africa before the collapse of the central government and almost all public service institutions

and economic production facilities were owned by the state (Nicolai, 2003). This observation was further supported by Abdinoor (2007), who suggests that the Somali society is more familiar with the concept of clan mobilization for the purpose of war than for public interest. He adds that making contributions to schools was not part of their culture in the past.

Regarding the need to build collaborative relations with parents on monitoring student attendance, the responses given by the principals in the current study revealed mixed experiences. Some of the principals reported that they found it hard to involve parents in the education of their children. These principals argued that parents' beliefs in their role to be the main reason. Many Somali parents believe that it is the responsibility of school administration and teachers to take care of everything relating to the education of their children while they are in school. This finding is consistent with the general literature that parental involvement is more a function of parental beliefs and culture than family demographics. Parents' perceptions of the roles they should play in their children's education and their beliefs that their involvement can affect their children's education have been shown to predict actual engagement in schools or at home (Sheldon, 2003). Therefore, parents' cultural beliefs about their children's education can influence the parent-school relationships.

While little research has been done about Somali parents' involvement in their children's education, a number of studies carried out in Western nations, particularly in Canada and the USA, where a large number of the Somali diaspora live, found that parents' cultural beliefs back home play a major role in their attitude towards schooling (Ighodaro, 1997; Nderu, 2005). These studies reached similar conclusions that many of the Somali parents grew up with the notion that the school and the home are separate entities. So, it was a surprise for them when they came to these countries to find that schools expected them to be actively involved in their children's education. As a result, school administrators and

teachers often misread this behaviour as expressing a lack of interest in the education of their children. While realizing the challenges facing parents in terms of poverty and lack of security, some of the principals in this study believe that the fundamental aspect of parents' belief toward school involvement has not changed in Mogadishu, despite the absence of a functioning government responsible for providing education.

However, generalizations about parents' lack of involvement may be misleading, as some principals in this study argued. These principals repeated that, under circumstances of ongoing conflict and because of safety risks, communication with parents regarding student attendance is considered vital. It is important for school administration to know whether a student who has not shown up for class is legitimately absent or not. Consequently, the administration must ensure that parents of students who skip classes are immediately informed. These principals further indicated that there are many parents who are also ambitious for their children and who not only encourage school attendance but also ask for extra tuition for their children. They noted more positive attitudes toward school involvement among parents in Mogadishu since the state collapse.

A Severe Lack of Resources

The evidence presented in this study shows that school principals in Mogadishu face an extreme scarcity of both human and material resources. These principals repeated most of the problems facing schools in war-torn environments. There was, however, a clear emphasis on some particular problems facing these school principals that resulted from characteristics unique to the Somali conflict.

Poor School Facilities. As noted in Chapter One, the education system was suffering seriously from lack of material resources even before the collapse of the central government as a result of diverting resources to military expenditures (Bekalo et al., 2003). With the

collapse of the state, the situation has continuously deteriorated. Poor conditions of school facilities and limited supplies of learning materials in countries affected by ongoing conflicts have been well documented (Glad, 2009; Holmes, 2010; O'Malley, 2010; UNESCO, 2011). According to these researchers, schools in many conflict-affected countries are faced with enormous problems that include physical destruction of school infrastructure or occupation of school buildings by displaced people or armed groups. Accordingly, school facilities and educational resources become less available. Communities are often forced to improvise facilities that lack such things as adequate furniture and equipment, toilets, as well as staffrooms.

Nearly every problem identified by these researchers is present in an aggravated form in the primary schools in Mogadishu, as mentioned in Chapter Five on Major Challenges Facing Principals. Most of the schools are housed in makeshift premises and they lack many of the facilities that are taken for granted in schools in non-conflict situations, such as separate toilets. Principals in the study remarked that the poor quality of school facilities and lack of instructional materials are among many other problems that they face in the absence of government or aid agency support.

Shortage of Trained Teachers. Findings from this study also suggest that the lack of adequately trained teachers is another major problem facing primary schools in Mogadishu. As Buckland (2005) noted, conflict usually has a profound and negative impact on a country's teacher corps. Qualified teachers become less available as teacher training institutions collapse, and inadequately prepared individuals join the teaching profession. Principals in this study spoke of having difficulty in hiring trained teachers, because many teachers, who received training before the collapse of the state, had left the country, retired or sought employment with non-governmental organizations. As a result, there are too few

trained people to staff the schools. This finding supports those of other studies on shortages of trained teachers in Somalia in general (Bekalo et al., 2003; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Pfaffe et al., 2009). These researchers noted that schools are forced to hire people without teacher training to fill the gap. These people are either graduates of secondary school or colleges other than teacher training colleges. According to Pfaffe et al (2009), the total number of teachers in the formal primary schools in 2006 was 14,040, of which 52% were secondary school graduates, and 84% were untrained. This reflects the magnitude of the problem of teacher shortage in the country in general.

To overcome the shortage of trained teachers, or at least to minimize its negative impact, principals in this study use different ways to facilitate teachers' professional development. As stated in Chapter Five, these include organizing in-service training in school, pairing untrained teachers with experienced ones, sending teachers to seminars offered by various organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and local educational umbrellas. While some forms of professional development like organizing in-service training in school are described as effective, because they have relevance to the daily activities of teachers and learners, others, like sending teachers to external seminars, are criticized for representing passive learning, ad-hoc, fragmented, and far removed from classroom situations (Ayeni, 2011; Lieberman & Miller, 2001; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

However, in a war-torn environment where offering PD opportunities is constrained by a set of security and financial considerations, it is important to emphasize that every form of professional development is good at serving a particular purpose, while not necessarily serving all others. In addition, sending teachers to external workshops may be the only professional development available to teachers in some schools and, as such, represents

valuable teaching and pedagogic information, albeit not necessarily in ways that the critics would prefer.

The main areas of focus for these training sessions, as reported by the principals in this study, include lesson planning, student discipline problems and classroom management. It is important to note here that principals appeared to pay special attention to pedagogical improvement and to be less concerned with providing teachers with skills and knowledge to deal with the psychosocial effects of the conflict such as trauma, fear, aggressive behaviour so on. They rarely mentioned the importance of training teachers on psychosocial care and support for learners, which has recently received much attention as an important area in teacher training in conflict and emergency education (UNICEF, 2011).

Research indicates that teachers in conflict-affected societies need to be trained to become sensitive to emotional and psychological, as well as instructional needs of learners. Despite the importance of such topics, principals in this study may feel that they are held particularly accountable for student performance on examinations. Accordingly, they dedicated much of their efforts to actions associated with improving teacher performance. As stated earlier, the importance of test scores was emphasized by monitoring the coverage of the syllabus. It appears that principals in the study are interested in pursuing any strategy that might help their teachers do their jobs more effectively and to cope with the daily challenges of working in such a volatile environment.

Utility of Buffering Strategies in Unstable Environments

This section discusses the buffering strategies used by school principals in this study. It focuses on how principals in Mogadishu perceive and apply such strategies in their roles as boundary spanners. It expands our understanding of boundary spanning, accounting for ways

that school leaders manage their external school environments in a situation of armed conflict.

The findings of this study revealed that principals in Mogadishu work in a highly volatile environment due to the ongoing conflict. Since schools are open systems that are affected by their surroundings, it is safe to say that doing things as usual is insufficient to maintain schools under these challenging circumstances; neither is it adequate to merely respond to the safety needs of school community members. This is so because doing things as usual is based on predictable plans which cannot easily be maintained under unstable conditions. This is why buffering strategies are critical to maintaining schools in conflict situations. Therefore, three themes are evident from the data and are singled out for discussion: Preparing for Emergency Situations, Environmental Scanning, and Communication.

Preparing for Emergency Situations. Preparedness for emergency generally refers to designing flexible plans which can be readjusted. Such planning should take into consideration and demonstrate an adequate understanding of unique contextual constraints (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2010). However, a big problem in conflict contexts is uncertainty. No one can predict what will happen next; even when things appear calm and life returns to normal, sudden events might occur and disrupt the normal life again.

Considering that uncertainty is a major characteristic of the environment in which principals in this study work, they always expect the worst to happen. Therefore, the need to act quickly at any moment during the outbreaks of fighting between the two sides of the conflict is of paramount importance. The evidence emerging from the study suggests that principals adopt buffering strategies that match the specific context of the school. This means that the principals' responses to events in the environment represent an event-by-event

strategy. This fact tells us that disruptions from the external environment could not be handled in a routine and systematic manner.

The perceptions of Somali principals in Mogadishu about the environment are likely central to the external adjustment of their actions and about how they enact responses to such events or incidents. For example, when the external environment is perceived to be highly volatile or threatening, schools might be temporarily suspended or closed. This finding is somewhat similar to those of other studies that have been reported in conflict-affected countries. For example, Sungtong (2007), writing in the context of Southern Thailand, where a wave of conflict has been raging since 2004, observed that buffering strategies employed by Thai principals were influenced by the principals' perceptions of the external environment. When the external environment was perceived to be highly volatile, buffering strategies were employed in an attempt to adapt the school to the volatile environment.

Environmental Scanning. My analysis of the data highlighted one way in which school principals in Mogadishu tried to reduce the external uncertainty in the environment by gathering information about the situation, or what Scott (2003) refers to as “environmental scanning” for the purpose of determining appropriate organizational responses. Scanning for information is an important role for boundary spanners who are trying to deal with uncertainty in the external environment when decisions are made (Goldring & Rallis, 2000).

Some of the environmental scanning tactics employed by principals in Mogadishu to reduce environmental uncertainty include following local radio news, press conferences, and relying on or using their personal connections with insiders of the conflict to provide an early warning. This type of information has helped the principals to develop a range of responses that might be appropriate or necessary for managing and maintaining the safety of their schools. For example, knowing the imminent outbreak of fighting could help the principals

to arrange the school in the most effective manner to respond to the emergency situation. Principals remarked that frequent fighting causes a lot of learning disruption and creates roadblocks that make the trip to school risky and dangerous; consequently, some teachers may not be able to get to school. In such circumstances, the school schedule has to be changed and, consequently, teachers' classes are reorganized. For example, teachers who make it fill in for those who cannot make it by combining their classes. Although such arrangements temporarily solve the problem at hand, principals in this study acknowledged the difficulty in organizing any form of coherent delivery of instruction under such circumstances. Pepper et al. (2009) noted that, "Thinking quickly and flexibility in evolving conditions is essential during such abnormal circumstances" (p. 26).

Another issue related to environmental scanning is the role of the principal in filtering the information. Research shows that school principals, as boundary spanners of their schools, have to specify incoming information and its sources (Goldring & Rallis, 2000). Since not all information in the environment is of importance, principals have to select the information that they consider to be important and relevant in order to make timely, accurate decisions. By filtering information, especially when environments are rapidly changing and unstable, school leaders protect the school from stress and other impacts on the public image of the school (Goldring & Rallis, 2000).

Filtering information in war-torn societies is extremely important and difficult due to conflicts of interest between the warring factions. Somali principals in this study highlighted the importance of acting on information obtained from reliable sources to avoid any sort of panic caused by rumours. As one of the principals stated, "Sometimes you hear a lot of rumours about an imminent outbreak of fighting, which may become true or false." In such circumstances, some principals are prone to make quick decisions, which may have

consequences for student learning. For example, in the absence of accurate information and the uncertainty surrounding the situation, coupled with rumours about the imminent outbreak of violence, some principals may decide to dismiss schools earlier, preferring to err on the side of school safety. However, other principals, while acknowledging the importance of giving priority to student safety, suggested that dismissing schools whenever there are rumours will result in the loss of learning time, which may affect the quality of education.

A possible explanation for such different views might lie in the fact that some of these principals, as became apparent from their responses, have been given more discretion and freedom to do what they can, as allowed by the situation. Having authority to act on their own might have helped them gain capacity and confidence. As a result, they are in a better position to claim ownership and be accountable for any course of action they take, while others may tend to rely more on their superiors rather than be willing to take risks. Regardless of the reason for adopting one approach or another, this clearly indicates that school leaders in Mogadishu are faced with the challenge of balancing student safety with student learning.

Communication. Another critically important issue raised in this study is the principal's role in communicating with stakeholders during the emergencies caused by the frequent outbreaks of fighting. While communication is a vital component of any organization, it becomes more critically important during crisis management. Research shows that communication during crisis is considered to be a key element of effective school leadership (Pepper et al., 2009). School leaders are fully aware that successful management of crisis situations requires providing constant and clear communication in order to keep all stakeholders informed. They often use all means of communication including traditional press, briefings, meetings, newsletters, and non-traditional vehicles like websites, blogs, and

telephone trees (Pepper et al., 2009). These researchers further indicate that communication should be aimed at addressing both those immediately impacted and those who have an indirect relationship with the school or crisis.

For Somali principals in this study, communication with parents, as well as with education committees, was viewed as crucial during emergency situations. They talked about ongoing communication with these stakeholders to update them on the security developments and the quick decisions they are planning to make in order to respond to the existing situation. While various means of communication available to these principals are very limited due to the destruction of the infrastructure of the country, they rely primarily on cell phones and local radio stations to deliver their message. Given the changing dynamics of the fighting from moment to moment, principals have to keep in touch with those in education committees or parents' committees who would be able to help the school. For example, when heavy fighting breaks out, principals may quickly arrange buses to transport students. Local radios are used to inform the public, including drivers carrying students on routes that can be used safely.

Local radios are also used to communicate with students about the movements of their schools. In a context where emergency situations have become a normal way of life due to the frequent fighting in the city, school leaders are forced to come up with innovative solutions in order to cope with such unstable conditions. One such solution is moving the school whenever a significant number of students are displaced. Such an adjustment has become a common practice in Mogadishu. This practice is consistent with a long-standing tradition of the Somali culture in managing Koranic schools. These schools are characterized by a high level of mobility, whereby a Koranic teacher travels with each community and provides religious instruction at hours convenient to the children (Abdinoor, 2007; Bekalo et

al., 2003; Cassanelli & Abdikadir, 2007; Morah, 2000). However, unlike Koranic teachers who voluntarily travel with their communities, principals in this study are forced to abandon their schools and follow the displaced people wherever they go. This demonstrates that principals find themselves struggling to make things work in the best possible manner.

Based on the above discussion, one can conclude that the buffering strategies articulated by principals in Mogadishu in response to the volatile external environment may expand our understanding of the role of the principal as a boundary spanner in conflict-affected environments. While the international literature on the role of the principal as a boundary spanner helps us to make sense of the efforts of these principals, it falls short of accounting fully for the nature and scope of such a role in a war-torn environment. The buffering strategies that principals employ in stable environments are mainly limited to protection of teachers from unwarranted demands as well as mediating conflicts between teachers and parents (DiPaola & Tschannen-Morgan, 2005; Ogawa, 1996). However, in a war-torn environment, a principal may engage in a wide range of buffering strategies, like dismissing the school earlier for safety reasons, cancelling classes, or closing the school temporarily or its relocation. Principals engage in such activities to protect their schools in the face of substantial uncertainty and real danger. This demonstrates the principals' perseverance and commitment to do whatever they can to maintain the teaching and learning process.

Key Personal Characteristics of the Principals

Sometimes the obvious needs to be mentioned, as it can be easily missed. The principals are the designated leaders within the school. To be a leader implies certain traits of character. Although trait theories of leadership are currently not popular, research has been very definitive in recognising certain qualities or traits that make principals effective in

leading schools facing challenging circumstances (Harris, 2002; Kamper 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008). While the nature and context of challenges faced by principals in schools facing difficult circumstances in stable environments are somewhat different from those in war-torn societies, principals in both contexts share certain leadership characteristics. While principals may have quite different personalities and leadership styles, these common characteristics include, commitment, passion, empathy and concern for the welfare of students and staff, a sense of responsibility to stakeholders, a sense of personal integrity, courage and ability to remain calm in difficult situations (Botha, 2004; Harris, 2002; Kamper 2008).

However, in this study, the characteristics that figured prominently in the principals' responses are having a firm commitment to keep schools open, remaining calm and courageous in the face of danger, possessing a great sense of responsibility for student safety, and optimism about the future of education in Somalia. It appears that these qualities are major contributory factors or cornerstones in sustaining schools in Mogadishu.

Commitment: Being committed to keep schools open was perceived as a form of moral obligation and of giving something back to community. These principals felt a debt, as they had received their education for free in Somalia before the collapse of the state. They recognized their responsibility for the future of Somali children. Evidence shows that commitment to student learning is a very important characteristic of a school principal (Harris, 2002; Kamper 2008). For example, Kamper (2008) identifies commitment as an important quality needed for principals working in high poverty schools in Africa. Commitment is considered important because it gives the school leader a purpose to move beyond his daily challenges and struggles.

While my study makes no judgement regarding the effectiveness of the principals in this study, it is clear from their responses that they are united in their commitment and

persistence to help Somali children and equip them with the necessary knowledge to find their way through life. Although principals' remarks may reflect their honest views, it is prudent to be cautious when interpreting the data, given that there are some possible reasons to suspect the presence of social desirability in the context of this study. Since school principals in Somalia are normally from local communities, as claimed by other studies (Makki, 2009; Pfaffe et al., 2009), but not evidenced by this study, they are likely to portray a glorified view of their actions as principals in protecting the interests and images of their schools. Therefore, these principals may be giving socially desirable answers rather than a spontaneous description of their authentic experience. Nevertheless, the fact that they highlighted this theme is still remarkable and noteworthy.

Courage. The other aspect to being committed occurs when principals find themselves in difficulty. Commitment is necessary but not sufficient to keep going when things get harder. An extra amount of sheer courage and commitment is needed to lead schools in the context of war-torn Mogadishu. This finding is also consistent with those of other studies on principals leading schools during crisis. For example, Pepper et al. (2009) described the great courage shown by some principals in managing and leading their schools following the 9/11 attacks. Principals in Pepper et al.'s study strongly believed that having courage is important to the role of being a school leader, particularly in times of crisis. They stated that a good principal must have courage in defending members of the school community.

The school leaders in the current study reported that great personal and professional courage in defending members of their school community is vital. They viewed having courage as important for the principal to face difficulties no matter how much pressure may be exerted on them. In war-torn Mogadishu, the principal sometimes faces a difficult

situation where one of the conflict sides breaks into the school and asks the principal to bring out those hiding in his school. In such cases, they emphasized that the principal must be a role model for his teachers and students in terms of courage and calmness.

However, standing firm against such pressure is not an easy thing to do, particularly in such environment, where people's lives are at stake. As Botha (2004) points out, effective principals in challenging circumstances value commitment and courage. He states that these two values are closely intertwined or in his words "go hand-in-hand" (Botha, 2004, p. 241). Their importance for principals lies in the willingness and resolve to "stand up" for the things that are truly important in education. While courage in the face of opposition or commitment to what matters in education may bring school leaders in stable environments into direct conflict with higher authorities, or even may cause them to lose their jobs, their counterparts in Mogadishu may face much greater risks. Such risks are real in situations of armed conflict where fighting erupts in the vicinity of school while students are still in class. Principals' firm stands in such situations provide evidence of their courage in the face of danger.

An important aspect of being courageous is remaining calm in the face of danger. This character is also linked to effective leadership during crisis. After reviewing the common approaches to leadership as they relate to crisis, Seeger et al. (2003) suggest that crisis calls for leaders with traits such as ability to remain calm, a sense of personal control, and ability to act quickly during uncertainty. These authors indicate that such kinds of personal qualities can minimize the unpredictability of emergency situations.

Somali principals in Mogadishu reported two emergency situations where a sense of personal control and calm are extremely critical. The first situation arises when the school telephone lines are overwhelmed by the calls of anxious parents inquiring as to the safety of their children during sudden outbreaks of fighting between the two sides of the conflict. In

such circumstances, the principal must demonstrate a great deal of calm and respond to the anxious parents by ensuring the safety of their children. Since schools have insufficient telephone lines, principals feel a lot of frustration, and consequently they may lose the sense of their self-control. The second situation arises when principals are provoked by government forces during fighting. Principals reported that it is important for the principal to be calm and never be easily provoked, and avoid any kind of confrontation with such forces.

Somali principals in Mogadishu reported that possessing the ability to stay calm amid turmoil also helps them to avoid making hasty or poorly thought decisions. However, to make an informed and sound decision, they rarely talked about involving staff in decision-making processes. Although principals' responses to emergency situations may vary, depending on the circumstance, their decision-making appears to remain consistently one of limited consultations. The notion of shared responsibilities and shared decision-making is quite alien to most of these principals. Through the interviews, my sense is that principals are the sole-decision makers. This may be due to the atmosphere of constant urgency in which these principals operate, which may not allow them to consult everyone, especially during difficult times. As some scholars argue directive or authoritarian leadership is best suited to crisis situations in order to deal with an environment in which time does not allow for consensus building (Seeger et al., 2003). However, this does not negate the importance of shared decision-making, which comes with a sense of commitment and responsibility.

A Great Sense of Responsibility for Student Safety: This characteristic is consistently prioritised by almost all participants. This is quite understandable because principals are responsible for the lives of their students in a situation that is far from being safe. Research shows that principals in challenging circumstances attempt to create a safe environment for their school members (Jacobson et al., 2005; Jacobson et al., 2007). In a

qualitative study of three elementary principals in urban schools in the United States, Jacobson et al. (2007) found that these principals made great efforts in creating safe environments for their school members. The authors noted that this required them to maintain a highly visible presence at different times of the school day, to lock school doors, to screen visitors, and to ask parents to patrol the playgrounds and the area around the school building at regular times to ensure that children are safe. A similar study conducted in the United States supports the above findings (Jacobson et al., 2005).

While the context of principals in the United States is vastly different from that in Mogadishu, there are some similarities that are noticeable between the two contexts. Principals in this study also make great efforts in translating their powerful sense of responsibility for student safety into actions by adopting the following procedures. First, they hire security guards who are responsible for screening visitors and locking the school doors. Secondly, they form discipline committees that are responsible for any misconduct within the school. Thirdly, they maintain high visibility during breaks to send a strong message to students that they are under protection. Fourthly, they utilize parental support in dealing with sensitive issues like clan-related problems among students. Finally, they keep in touch with school bus drivers when transporting students to and from school, particularly when there are security risks on the road. These efforts and concerns the principals demonstrate are reflective of the personal and professional level of responsibility for student safety. They also reveal that principals work diligently in order to create a safe environment for their students.

However, this should not obscure the fact that the ongoing war and instability has a tremendously negative effect on school safety in Mogadishu, and principals have little control over aspects of the events taking place beyond the walls of their schools. Despite the said challenges, principals in Mogadishu are remarkably positive about the future.

A Sense of Optimism about the Future of Education. Somali principals in this study remain optimistic about the future of education in the country. Optimism has been viewed as a quality that enables leaders to arrive at their goal even if faced with huge challenges (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Research shows that effective principals in schools facing challenging circumstances demonstrate a sense of hope and optimism in the face of daunting conditions “by pushing forward when there is little reason to expect progress” (Leithwood et al. 2008, p. 36). These principals do not allow themselves to become disheartened or a victim of despair in the face of obstacles.

Interviews with Somali principals in Mogadishu revealed that, despite many challenges, hopes for the future and the desire to stay in the field and make whatever contribution they can to their community have not been extinguished. This finding is consistent with research on dispositional affect and leadership effectiveness. According to Chemers et al. (2000), feelings of optimism are related to high levels of motivation, which could affect levels of perseverance in the face of difficulty, causing the leader to work harder and longer to achieve goals. These researchers further indicated that optimism may be a more important aspect of leadership where there is a greater need to sustain motivation through positive expectancies over the long term.

Principals in this study sustain an optimistic outlook which they consider important, because it allows them to find ways to cope with their challenging situations. Their sense of agency and optimism is rooted in their sense of a moral imperative that called them in the first place to take the educational initiatives. Although degrees of optimism varied between principals, there are a couple of reasons why these principals are optimistic about the future. First, a shift in people’s positive attitudes towards education is cited as a good sign for the future of education in the country. There is a growing community participation in education,

though it is still far less than what a dynamic conflict situation needs. Second, in the absence of the state support, people's social capital might have been strengthened. In the past, people relied heavily on the government for providing social services, including education. But now, they have no choice but to rely on themselves. Principals provided examples of what people can do when they rely on themselves. These examples included establishment of many private schools, institutes and universities. Some principals argued that if such progress has been made while the country is still in a state of ongoing conflict, greater progress can be achieved in the future, when peace is restored.

In summary, these personal qualities and characteristics that emerged from the data appeared instrumental to principals' resilience. These included commitment, courage and calm in the face of danger, responsibility for student safety, and optimism and hope for a better future of education in the country. In concluding this chapter with the discussion of personal qualities of the principals, I turn now to Chapter 7, which is the final chapter, by providing a summary of the research findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a brief summary of the study, presents some conclusions drawn from the study, and makes recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the role of a select group of primary school principals in Mogadishu, to describe the principals' experiences of and responses to the ongoing conflict, and to identify the challenges facing these principals in leading their schools amid ongoing conflict. To accomplish this purpose, the study focused on describing the lived experiences of Somali primary school principals in Mogadishu and the challenges they face in enacting their roles amid ongoing conflict.

The study was mainly based on a general framework developed by Chapman and Burchfield (1994) for school principals' roles in relatively stable developing countries, which identifies four domains: school management, instructional supervision, school community relationships, and school-ministry communications. Since Chapman and Burchfield's (1994) framework is concerned with principals working in a relatively stable environment and falls short of addressing experiences and challenges faced by school principals working in protracted conflict settings, the study also drew on education in conflict and emergencies literature, as well as the concepts of buffering and bridging from open systems theory as a complementary lens where the principal acts as a boundary spanner. Together these three bodies of literature provided a broader conceptual framework for this study.

The study was also guided by the following three research questions:

- 1) How do primary school principals perceive the nature of their role in school in Mogadishu, Somalia?

- 2) What are the challenges that primary school principals face in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu?
- 3) What are the experiences of primary school principals in managing and leading their schools in Mogadishu?

To address these questions, the study employed a phenomenological approach because it was best suited to describing and understanding perceptions, lived experiences, and challenges faced by school principals in managing and leading their schools amid ongoing conflict. The main goal of a phenomenological study is to describe the phenomenon from the perspective of the people experiencing it, and provide more understanding about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 1990).

This research approach gave me an opportunity to capture the perceptions, lived experiences and challenges faced by a select group of primary school principals in Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia. Mogadishu was chosen as a site for this study because it has been the epicenter of armed conflict since the fall of the military rule in 1991 and contains the largest number of primary schools in the country. The participant sample consisted of eight primary school principals, all of whom were men. The participants were purposefully selected, based on their experiences managing and leading their schools amid ongoing conflict. Their ages ranged approximately from 36 to 65 while their levels of experience as primary school principals ranged from 5 to 19 years. The overwhelming majority obtained their bachelor's degree from Lafoole College of Education. They also represented various local non-profit organizations and local educational umbrellas.

The data collected from these participants through semi-structured interviews was analyzed based on steps advanced by Moustakas (1994) and prescribed by Creswell (2013). Eleven themes along with their sub-themes constituted the significant findings of the study. The common themes were organized around the research questions as follows: The first

research question addressed the roles that principals perceived as the most important, and included *supporting teachers, supervising instruction, facilitating teacher professional development, good relationships with governing bodies, and building community collaboration*. These roles represented common principal experiences whether in stable or unstable environments. Nevertheless, some of the roles were perceived to be vital for maintaining the functioning of their schools in the face of difficult circumstances.

The second research question looked at what primary principals considered the major challenges they faced in leading their schools and included *student mobility, poor facilities, a shortage of trained teachers, and student discipline*. Responses to this question demonstrated that principals were not only challenged to overcome the obstacles created by the ongoing conflict, they were also challenged to provide education to children in the absence of government support and an unimaginable scarcity of both human and material resources in a physical environment that they described as deplorable.

The third research question considered the ways that primary school principals described and spoke of the ongoing conflict and its impact on student learning and school administration, and included two major themes *boundary spanning* and *principals' strengths*. These two themes and their sub-themes represented the 'hard' things relating directly to principals' conduct in a war-torn environment.

Despite these challenges, principals in the study appeared to remain confident that the provision of education could be sustained. Their confidence was mainly reinforced by what they considered as a change in people's attitudes towards education. According to the principals in the study, since the collapse of the state, there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of education among people, which is a good sign for the future of education in the country.

Overall, the above-mentioned themes provided a description of the roles, lived experiences and challenges faced by primary school principals in Mogadishu, Somalia. These themes also formed the basis of the following major findings.

The study has yielded a number of major findings. Some are quite in line with findings from previous studies that have investigated the roles of school principals in stable environments, while others are quite unique to situations of violent conflict. The following is a summary of these major findings.

Based on the demographic information of the participants, primary school principals in Mogadishu are normally appointed on the basis of their teaching experience. The majority of participants mentioned that teaching experiences have helped them to become principals. For principals in this study, there is no indication that they were selected or appointed on the basis of their administrative training. The majority believed that prior formal preparation is not necessary as long as the principal has prior teaching experiences. Yet, principals in the study acknowledged that they more or less depended on on-the-job experience, enhanced by short seminars offered by local educational umbrellas or UN agencies.

The findings also revealed that principals enjoyed a certain degree of authority and autonomy in decision-making, but varied in their level of autonomy. Principals, as portrayed in this study, could be characterized on a continuum from being a principal with a high degree of autonomy at one end to being one with restricted autonomy at the other end. Generally speaking, they appeared to have a less centralized organizational structure with a shorter chain of command between the principals and their governing bodies. For principals of non-supported schools, whether owners or co-founders of the school, they enjoyed more decision-making powers than did their counterparts in NGO-supported schools. For example, principals of non-supported schools are in charge of recruiting and appointing new teachers

and have more authority in matters related to evaluating teachers, compared to their counterparts in NGO-supported schools. While it would be difficult to make a clear distinction between and among these groups of principals in terms of their power and autonomy, there is no doubt that principals who are owners or co-founders of the school have a lot of managerial power over a variety of decisions. With varying degrees of autonomy, principals saw themselves as responsible for many aspects of school life.

Findings from the study further indicated that instructional supervision is central to the principals' roles. The data analysis of the perceived roles portrayed an image of the principal as an instructional supervisor; although what that actually meant in practice varied from principal to principal. The principals' descriptions of what they do as instructional supervisors included activities such as assisting teachers with classroom discipline through modelling, supervising teachers, reviewing lesson plans, checking student exercise books, ensuring syllabus coverage, coaching teachers to improve their performance, and monitoring student attendance, as well as being visible in school for safety and assistance reasons.

This instructional role was reinforced by the fact that the majority of principals viewed themselves as individuals who have come to their positions with a modicum of teaching experience. Consequently, they felt that they can help teachers improve their teaching skills. This role was further reinforced by the principals' increased sense of accountability towards parents, as reflected in their responses. As present day schools are privately managed and financed through school fees, due to the absence of a functioning government, principals are held accountable for the performance of their students. They have to satisfy the community, especially parents, and prove that their teachers are working hard to improve student learning, despite the poor working conditions.

The findings also indicated that the principals' concern for the wellbeing of their teachers emerged prominently in the principals' roles as school leaders. The majority of principals expressed concern about the personal difficulties of their teachers. Although the NGO supporting the school or the individual owner of the school is ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of the teachers in their schools, principals in the study considered themselves as parents who take care of their teachers' personal problems. They offered whatever assistance they can, whether it is emotional, financial or material support. In situations of ongoing conflict where instructional materials are extremely scarce or non-existent, teachers become the only source of knowledge. As such, principals were aware that, if teachers' concerns are not addressed in some way, all other efforts may be in vain.

The findings revealed that the role of principals is instrumental in facilitating teachers' professional development. The majority of their teachers were described as individuals with limited pre-service training. In efforts to help teachers acquire new teaching methods and to improve their teaching skills, principals reportedly organized training sessions at their schools, sent teachers to seminars and workshops offered and funded by external organizations, or arranged some kind of collaboration between untrained and experienced teachers.

Findings from the study suggested that some principals assume an active role in communicating the school's needs to the larger community as part of their ongoing efforts to gain community and parental support. This support mainly took the form of dispute resolution, financial support, and monitoring of student attendance. In the absence of a functioning government responsible for maintaining law and order, parent committees, community elders and religious leaders have become to play increasingly important roles in helping principals resolve disputes arising within the school or between the school and the

local community. With regard to principals' efforts in seeking financial support, members of parent committees, who are well aware of the school's financial needs, play an important role in communicating such needs to local business people or charity organizations.

The study suggested that, while many parents are involved in parent committees, lack of parental involvement in school is still an obstacle facing most principals. Principals noted that, even though many parents are interested in sending their children to school, they lack a commitment to provide the support their children need to succeed in school. Lack of security, poverty, parents' beliefs and lower parental educational levels were cited as major factors impeding parental involvement in school.

The findings indicated that primary school principals in Mogadishu face a number of extraordinary challenges in maintaining their schools. First, they work in physical environments characterized by poor facilities lacking adequate sanitation and furniture. Second, students are often displaced as a result of frequent fighting in the city, which poses the greatest challenge to school principals because of its financial consequences. Third, schools face an acute shortage of trained teachers as many trained teachers have left the country or have sought employment with NGOs. Finally, student discipline was also considered as one of the major challenges facing schools.

The findings revealed that, despite these extraordinary challenges, principals made every effort to maintain their schools to the extent possible by adapting them to better suit the volatile environment. They also made their activities more conflict sensitive through a number of buffering strategies. Some of the most common strategies used in response to the conflict involved hiring security guards, constant vigilance, temporary suspension of classes or schools, as well as the relocation of schools by following the displaced people wherever they go. According to the principals, these responses are determined by the level of

perceived violence they encounter, and the decisions regarding such responses are sometimes made at the school level at the discretion of the principal, where an urgent situation requires quick action.

Finally, the study revealed that principals in this study shared some personal characteristics that have helped them to maintain their schools in the face of extremely difficult circumstances, which is nothing short of inspiring, let alone heroic. These qualities included commitment, courage and calmness, as well as a sense of responsibility for student safety and optimism about the future of education in the country.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, there is an indication that school principals lack unity in the perception of their roles as school leaders. Each of them expresses a different opinion of his roles. As an example, almost all the principals perceive instructional supervision as a major part of their roles. However, what that actually means in practice varied from principal to principal. Some perceive instructional supervision as some sort of inspection while others view this as a means for helping teachers improve their teaching skills. The variation in the perceptions of the principal's role may be a result of their specific context, as well as their affiliation to different organizations with different educational policies. This may have implications for educational leaders and NGOs interested in supporting school principals.

Second, primary school principals in Mogadishu manage and lead their schools in very challenging circumstances without pre-service training. The challenge is enormous. These principals are not only challenged to overcome the obstacles of poor facilities, shortage of qualified teachers, and high rates of student mobility coupled with a great deal of disruption to the teaching and learning process as a result of the ongoing conflict. They are

also called upon to undertake great responsibility with little formal training. As mentioned earlier, principals in the study have come to their positions without pre-service training. At most, these principals may have attended one or two infrequent and short seminars or workshops on school management and leadership organized by UN agencies or local educational networks. As reflected in their responses, principals appear to professionally develop themselves based on instinct and survival. As one principal shared, “We have learned a lot from working in this challenging environment, which we could not have learned from any other sources.” However, the question remains whether learning on the job is sufficient for a job that is increasingly complex and dangerous.

Third, providing education in the face of armed conflict is both possible and essential for offering children a degree of normalcy in an otherwise chaotic world. According to the principals in the study, this is the most significant lesson that they have ever learned in their lives as school leaders. Although they were sceptical of the possibility of keeping schools open while the conflict continues, they eventually realized that it is necessary for the future of Somali children and Somalia itself. Thanks to these educators’ efforts, many schools have been kept functioning throughout the conflict, which has given many young children the opportunity to have some sort of education, instead of ending up on the street or joining armed gangsters. As Machel (1996, p. 26) put it, “When everything around is chaos, schools can be a haven of security that is vital to the well-being of war-affected children and their communities.”

The fourth conclusion of this study is that principals’ caring and supportive attitude towards teachers during difficult times strengthens the bond between the principal and his staff. As humans turn to one another for support during difficult times, it is evident in what principals have said and how they have expressed themselves that support is invaluable to

teachers as they perform their duties. Being supportive of teachers, in terms of helping them cope with difficult working conditions, providing whatever resources are available and giving emotional support, seemed to permeate the principals' personal and professional relationships with teachers. In fact, by supporting their teachers, the principals are building a base of support for themselves. This becomes an invaluable asset and resource that can be relied upon during difficult times, as reflected by these principals' responses.

The fifth and final conclusion that can be drawn from the study is that buffering and bridging strategies used by principals in Mogadishu, as boundary spanners, are of great utility to school principals working in a situation of armed conflict. On the one hand, buffering strategies enabled principals to protect their schools from the influences of external environmental elements or threats that may disrupt the functioning of the school. While, in stable environments, threatening elements can be controlled as much as possible by creating formal rules and regulations, such elements in volatile environments are often beyond the control of the principal. As such, all the principal can do is to mitigate their negative impact on the learning and teaching process by employing certain tactics. These tactics may include scanning the environment for potential threats and introducing safety procedures such as locking school doors, instituting sign-in procedures, and hiring security guards. However, when the level of perceived security risks is greater, extraordinary measures may be taken, such as suspending the school or its relocation. On the other hand, bridging strategies also enabled principals to foster a positive relationship with parents and the local community on resolving problems and obtaining resources and support. Maintaining such a positive relationship with these stakeholders becomes critical in the absence of both a law enforcement authority and government support. In sum, using these two strategies, principals

in Mogadishu were able to maintain the functioning of their schools in one of the most challenging circumstances in the world.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered for principals, current stakeholders in education, including local educational networks, NGOs, and UN agencies, to consider in their efforts to address the issues affecting primary school principals in South Central Somalia, particularly, principals working in the Mogadishu area. Suggestions for future research are also offered.

Recommendations for Principals

- One of the most revealing findings of this study is that the majority of principals complained, in varying degrees, about the lack of adequate resources. Because of a total reliance on school fees paid by parents as their primary source of income, schools frequently do not have sufficient resources. School fees are used to pay the teachers' salaries and buy teaching and learning materials for the school. In short, there are insufficient funds to attend to all of these needs. As many parents' livelihood depends on money sent by relatives living abroad, in many cases this may impact parents' ability to pay school fees on time which, in turn, makes it very difficult for school principals to pay their teachers' salaries on time. To avoid this dilemma, school principals need to seek alternative means of funding for their schools, rather than to rely solely on school fees. An alternative source of income generation for the school may include creation of small business projects, such as purchasing a vegetable plot in the fertile land near the capital through an interest-free loan from a charitable organization. For example, poor parents can be employed to take care of the farm and sell the vegetable at a profit for their own keeping and a

portion of the proceeds can be returned to the school. Income generated from such a project can be used to support the school financially.

- The study revealed that principals in the study often talk about working in a competitive environment rather than a collaborative one, on the grounds that schools are now privately run and financed through school fees. However, since these principals complain about a shortage of trained teachers, school facilities, and instructional materials, it would be beneficial for them to collaborate or network for resource sharing or acquisition. They can network with other principals to seek ideas and assistance, and can pool their meagre resources to assist needy schools. Networking among school principals, even private schools, could be an alternative way for generating and sharing knowledge, ideas and resources.
- The study suggested that there are a large number of children who are out of school because their parents cannot afford to pay school fees, due to the economic hardship in the country. From their position in school, principals can make some contribution to increasing educational access to such children by devising a system that will enable poor parents to use their labour and technical skills, like carpentry and masonry in exchange for their children's fees and textbook costs. In doing so, the principal may contribute to partially solving the problem of access to schooling.
- Findings from the study indicated that parental involvement in school is still in a transitional stage. The notion that education is solely the responsibility of the school principals and teachers continues to be dominant among parents. Thus, school principals are well positioned as leaders to educate families about the importance of parental involvement, and ways in which parents can be meaningfully involved in

their children's education. For example, an effective way that might be utilized in situations of ongoing conflict, where the general security situation in the city does not permit parents to visit school regularly, is to communicate to parents about their children's regular school attendance. School attendance can be monitored through a two-way communication between the school and home using cell phones, which are now cheap and affordable to the majority of people in Mogadishu, as other studies have shown. This would likely be done as an exception rather than as a rule, so that parents will be alerted if their children are not in school.

Recommendations for Local Educational Networks, NGOs and UN Agencies

- As reported by the principals, a large proportion of teachers in schools do not have proper academic qualifications and training to be teachers. This means that the principals have to devote much of their time to improving the competencies of teaching staff. From the perspectives of principals in the study, lack of financial resources was the major constraint they have faced in arranging for in-service training for teachers in schools. NGOs and UN agencies are recommended to take into account the importance of adapting their educational and financial support to the needs of schools. For example, this could be done by providing flexible grants to each school, while paying due consideration to their financial needs, as well as to the difficult environment in which they work.
- According to principals in the study, UN agencies and local educational networks occasionally organize seminars and workshops for teachers. These agencies, therefore, are recommended to involve school principals in the identification of the training needs of their teachers and jointly structure and determine its content. This

not only improves the quality of the training program, but also ensures the relevant skills and knowledge that are required. According to the principals, the important skills and knowledge needed by the majority of teachers are those associated with organizing and maintaining classrooms and dealing with students' disruptive behaviours. A strong component of the training program should be aimed at equipping teachers with such skills and strategies.

- The study revealed that almost all of the principals started their jobs without pre-service training, and rarely received any in-service training. This fact turned these principals into proclaimed heroes who had to struggle to learn “on-the-job.” While half of the participants were in their late 50s, approaching retirement, and seemed quite satisfied with their performance as school leaders, the other half talked about their need to have professional training to improve their performance. Thus, the study recommends that organizations work in close collaboration with principals, especially young ones, to provide training seminars. An important component of such training seminars should be conflict resolution skills, as suggested by principals in this study, because these principals deal with endless problems and disputes as a result of the ongoing conflict.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research on the principalship in Mogadishu, Somalia is severely limited. This study has served as an exploration of the terrain and has reflected, above all, the complex and dangerous nature of the position and the need for further research to inform educational leaders in their attempts for improvement. Although building a knowledge base pertinent to the role of the principal and of the school organization is an important goal, doing research in

Mogadishu currently involves security risks which may convince other researchers to avoid undertaking such projects.

However, as of the writing of this thesis, there are positive signs that the security situation is slowly improving in South Central Somalia, especially Mogadishu, which may make prospects for future educational research promising. Although this study has shed light on the important work undertaken by primary school principals in Mogadishu amid ongoing conflict, it is limited in scope and size. As a result, the following suggestions for future research are made in order to further the findings of this study.

1. More studies are needed to broaden this work by including other stakeholders who interact with principals in their daily work. These may include school supervisors, teachers, students, parents, or management committees. Since principals' roles are performed within a context of interaction, which creates a wide range of perspectives, such inclusion is considered important in order to reflect the complexity of the worlds within which principals work. Special attention should be given to female principals whose perspectives are absent from this study.
2. Further studies are also needed to compare principals of NGO-supported and non NGO-supported schools. Such studies may investigate many aspects of the principals' roles and responsibilities, especially principals' autonomy and supervisory practices and, consequently, the academic performance of their students. Such comparative studies may improve the quality of education, as schools now operate in isolation from each other.
3. A comparative study of the nature of school principals' experiences in conflict regions is also recommended. This study may look into greater detail of the ways ongoing conflicts affect schools, and how principals navigate its pervasive

unpredictability. Since ongoing conflicts have become prevalent in many parts of the world, such a comparative study will enrich the literature on education and conflict where voices of school leaders are less frequently heard.

4. Expansion of research into the secondary school level is also recommended for further investigation into principals' roles and responsibilities. Although a pioneering study was conducted by Makki (2009) about the roles of secondary school principals in building positive relationships with local communities, further study is needed to explore other aspects of the principal's roles and responsibilities, especially how they navigate through ongoing conflict.
5. Many of the study's findings still warrant further investigation. For example, this study identified the different dimensions of the principal's role and experience, without examining the relative emphasis the principals placed on each and every dimension. Investigating how often the principals become involved in each type of responsibility, and why they do so, can provide a potentially useful insight into the principalship in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Finally, the researcher is interested in taking this study further by disseminating its findings through presentation and publication. He also feels that Somali principals can be assisted by connecting them with their Canadian counterparts through the Global Education Initiative of the Faculty of Education. They can also be assisted through the Canadian Principal Learning Network developed by my supervisor, Dr. Chitpin. Hopefully, such networking will provide Somali principals with opportunities to develop the knowledge and skills they need to lead their schools effectively.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Map of Somalia showing its geographical location in Africa. It also shows the three major administrative zones, as well as Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, which is the site of this study.



Source: <http://www.google.ca/imgres?>

Source: <http://www.mabryonline.org/blogs/baylor/archives/assessments/index.html>

Appendix B
Letter of Recruitment

Dear prospective participant,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research study entitled, “The Role of Primary School Principals in the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia: Principals’ Perspectives”. The purpose of this study is to explore the role and experiences of primary school principals in the protracted conflict regions of Somalia. I wish to explore how principals perceive this role and the challenges they face in the absence of a functioning central authority. Please note that this is not an evaluation of your performance, or your school as a whole; instead, it is an attempt to understand your perceptions and experience about you lead and manage your school.

My name is Mohamed Hassan. I am a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, Canada. I am currently conducting a research study, as partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the Doctor of Philosophy in Education. The theme of the study is: “The Role of Primary School Principals in the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia: Principals’ Perspectives” under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Chitpin.

You are kindly invited to become one of the research participants in this study. If you decide to accept, the research assistant will provide you with further information. Please let me briefly inform you what will happen if you decide to take part in this study:

- You will be participating in two rounds of interviews lasting approximately between 45-60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted via Skype Video Calling, which will be set up for you by a research assistant for technical support.
- Interviews will be conducted in Somali.
- With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped so that I can accurately portray your ideas and opinions.
- Interviews will be conducted at a time convenient to you in the office of research assistant for technical support.

The results of this study may help further our understanding of the roles that school principals assume in managing their schools as well as the challenges they face in the absence of the central authority. This understanding may also help educators and policy makers to improve principals’ work context and provide them with relevant in-service training resources.

Therefore, you are invited to participate in this study voluntarily. Your time and effort are much appreciated. Should you agree to participate in this study, please call the research assistant at _____.

Thank you in advance.

Date:-----

Appendix C
Participant Consent Form

Title of the study: Primary School Principals' Perceptions of their Role and Experiences within the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia

Invitation to Participate and Purpose of the Study: I am invited to participate in the abovementioned research study being conducted by Mohamed Hassan of the Faculty of Education at University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Chitpin. Mr. Hassan can be reached at _____ or _____, and his supervisor at _____ or _____. The purpose of the study is to understand the role and experiences of primary school principals as well as the challenges they face in leading and managing their schools in the protracted conflict regions of Somalia.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of being interviewed. I will attend two sessions of interviews via Skype Video Calling during which I will be asked to talk about my role as primary school principal. Each interview will last approximately between 45-60 minutes and will be conducted at a time convenient to me in the office of research assistant for technical support. During the interviews, I will be asked to give permission for the interview session to be audio taped. I understand that I may request the researcher to stop the tape recording at any time during the interview.

Risks and Potential Benefits: I have received assurance from the researcher via the research assistant for participant recruitment that my participation in this study entails no risks other than the inconvenience of the time to participate in the interviews. However, the study will benefit me in two ways. First, it will help me to consciously reflect on my leadership practices as principal. Second, I will receive a copy of the summary of the thesis results upon the completion of the study. Furthermore, the study will help educators and policy makers to improve principals' work conditions and provide them with relevant in-service training resources. This, in turn, will help principals lead their schools in an effective manner so as to maximize student success and learning.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher via the research assistant for participant recruitment that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for educational purposes and that my confidentiality will be protected. This will be achieved by storing all data in a password-protected computer and on external flash memory data storage devices (USBs) that will be accessible only to the researcher and his supervisor. I have also received assurance that pseudonyms will be used to protect my identity as well as that of my school and the organization with which I am affiliated. This means that my name will not appear in the research or any publications or presentations resulting from the study. In case I am quoted, all information revealing my identity will be removed.

Conservation of data: The data collected from the research will be conserved in a locked filing cabinet in the thesis supervisor's office at the university. The researcher will also keep a copy of such data on encrypted USB. After five years from the completion of the thesis, all

audio recordings will be destroyed while computer files saved on USB are deleted. In addition, papers containing transcripts as well as consent forms will be shredded.

Monetary Compensation: As the interviews will take place in the office of research assistant for technical support, which may be far from my school, the researcher via his research assistant for participant recruitment will pay for any travel costs that I may incur. Accordingly, I will receive compensation at the beginning of each interview in order to cover such expenses.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mohamed Hassan of the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, which research is under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Chitpin.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the research assistant for participant recruitment at his phone _____

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5 Tel.: (613) 562-5841 Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Participants' preference for recording:

Yes, I agree to being recorded in interviews. ()

No, I don't agree. ()

Please check here if you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research ().

Appendix D

First Interview Guiding Questions

Through this study, I am trying to develop an understanding of your role as a school principal as it is experienced in primary schools in the Banadir region.

Introductory Questions

- 1) Please tell me how you became a principal in this school. In other words, how have you been selected as principal in this school?
- 2) Why did you choose to become a principal?
- 3) Have you ever been a vice-principal?
- 4) Is your school affiliated with an organization? If so, could you tell me the nature of your relationship with such an organization?

The role of the principal as perceived by participants

- 5) How do you perceive your role as principal?
- 6) What aspects of your role do you consider most important?
- 7) Can you describe your role in supporting teachers?
- 8) What kind of instructional support is available to your teachers?
- 9) Can you describe your relationship with parents and the local community?

Principals' Experience with the ongoing conflict

- 10) Tell me about your experience of working in a situation of armed conflict?
 - a) What have you learned from this experience?
 - b) How have you responded to the ongoing conflict?

Major Challenges

- 11) Given the ongoing armed conflict, what are the major problems and challenges you face?
 - a) How do you navigate through these challenges?
 - b) What keeps you working in this challenging environment?

Additional Information

- 12) How do you see the future of Somali education system?
- 13) Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand your role as school leader?

Appendix E

Second Interview Guiding Questions

In this interview, I am going to ask you some follow up questions based on your responses to the first interview questions.

- 1) Can you please give a brief description of your school in terms of
 - a) The number of teachers and their educational qualifications,
 - b) The number of students and grades,
 - c) The number of other staff.

- 2) Can you please tell me how decisions are made in your school?

Probes:

- a) What kind of educational decisions can you make without consulting your superiors?
- b) If you were to describe how you make decisions, do you make them after consulting your superiors or do you make them yourself and then communicate them later?
- c) How would you describe the level of trust between you and the supporting organization?

- 3) What is your understanding of your role in teacher supervision?

Probes:

- a) Provide details on type of supervision and the objective?
- b) What type of feedback do you offer when you review a lesson plan?
- c) Or observe a teacher?
- d) Given the disruptive nature of the ongoing conflict, do you monitor syllabus coverage?

- 4) What role do you play in contributing to the professional development of your teachers?

Probes:

- a) What teacher training activities are carried out in the school?
- b) Who offers and funds these in-service trainings?
- c) What are the areas of assistance needed by your teachers?
- d) How useful is the training to the performance of your teachers?

- 5) Given what you have said about shortages of resources, how do you go about mobilizing the resources your school needs? Specifically, in what ways has the community been involved in the school?

Probes:

- a) Provided Cash?
- b) Provided in-kind contributions?
- c) Provided time?

- 6) Given the absence of the rule of law, how do you protect your school?

Probes:

- a) How helpful are parents' committees?
- b) How helpful are community elders and religious leaders?
- c) How effective are security guards in protecting the school?

- 7) Please tell me more about school discipline.

Probes:

- a) What problems does your school have?
- b) How do you deal with student discipline?
- c) What are some of the ways you use to enforce school discipline polices?

- 8) How do you navigate the armed conflict?

- a) From an administrative perspective, how difficult is it for you to organize instruction during the armed conflict?
- b) What strategies do you have in place to address safety challenges?
- c) What support do you get during such difficult times?

- 9) Since you have talked in your first interviews about the importance of being supportive of teachers during such difficult times, tell me

- a) What tragic events you have experienced as a principal.
- b) What kinds of support you have offered your teachers.

- 10) Please tell me what personal or leadership qualities you consider important for a principal working in a situation of armed conflict.

- 11) Since you have come to the principalship on the basis of teaching experience, in your opinion, would you consider educational training for school principals necessary? If so, what kind of training do you suggest?

- 12) Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?

Thank you for your time

Appendix F

Recruiter Confidentiality Statement

I, _____, the participant recruiter in the research study entitled, “Primary School Principals’ Perceptions of their Role and Experiences within the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia” being conducted by Mohamed Hassan of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Chitpin, hereby agree to exercise strict confidentiality with regard to information about study participants which comes to me as a result of facilitating the necessary communications between the researcher and the participants. All participant information shared with the researcher remains confidential.

The Recruiter’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

The Recruiter’s Printed Name: _____

Title: _____

Appendix G

Facilitator Confidentiality Statement

I, _____, the research assistant for technical support in the research study entitled, “The Role of Primary School Principals in the Protracted Conflict Regions of Somalia: Principals’ Perspectives” being conducted by Mohamed Hassan of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Dr. Stephanie Chitpin, hereby agree to exercise strict confidentiality with regard to information about participants which comes to me as a result of providing technical support to participants using Skype video calling. All participant information shared with the researcher remains confidential.

The Recruiter’s Signature: _____ Date: _____

The Facilitator’s Printed Name:

Title: _____