



LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION COUNTRY PROFILE

Somalia

PREPARED FOR

Bureau for Africa

Office of Sustainable Development, Education and Youth Division

United States Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20523

PREPARED BY

Dexis Consulting Group

1412 Eye Street NW, Washington, DC 20005

JUNE 2021

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Linguistic Context	4
Official Language of Instruction Policy	6
Class Time	7
Pre-Service Teacher Training Curriculum for Literacy	8
Teacher Language Proficiency/Language Specific Training	8
Teacher In-Service	9
USAID Reading Program Approach and Ongoing Programs	9
Community Engagement within USAID Projects	10
Other Donor Funded Reading Programs	10
References	12

Funding was provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from the American people under Contract No. AID-OAA-I-15-00019, Task Order No. AID-OAA-TO-16-00024. The contents are the responsibility of the USAID Research for Effective Education Programming (REEP-Africa) Project and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government. USAID will not be held responsible for any or the whole of the contents of this publication.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	Alternative Basic Education
AET	Africa Educational Trust
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EGIDS	Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale
EGR	Early Grade Reading
ESSP	Education Sector Strategic Plan
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
L1	First Language
L2	Second (or additional) Language
LOI	Language of Instruction
MOECHE	Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education
REEP-A	Research for Effective Education Programming–Africa
SNU	Somali National University
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing reading skills in the early grades is a key education priority for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Despite some improvements in access and learning in sub-Saharan Africa, literacy levels in the early grades remain low, and progress has been slow. Efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the early grades have led to an increased focus on the role of the language of instruction (LOI). Recent research has demonstrated that mismatches between the LOI and the language that students and teachers speak and understand best, can hamper effective teaching and learning (University Research Co., 2019). Thus, it is critical to understand the LOI policy and linguistic context of a country when trying to design programs to improve literacy and learning outcomes.

Currently, USAID supports **Early Grade Reading (EGR) initiatives in 19 countries across sub-Saharan Africa**. Many policies in these countries have recently shifted toward adopting the mother tongue as the language for initial literacy acquisition, and then transitioning to a second or additional language, such as a regional, national, or international language, as the subsequent LOI.

Government policies and strategies related to teachers and LOI reflect country priorities, approaches, and objectives for early grade literacy. During the design-phase of donor-funded reading programs, decisions are made regarding the manner and extent to which national policies are incorporated into project design, and when alternative approaches or additional elements need to be considered. However, government policies on LOI, and other information relevant for informing design, are often difficult to find and are not easily accessible.

The LOI country profiles aim to address this need. The profiles will allow the USAID Africa Bureau, USAID Missions, and partner organizations to quickly understand the country's linguistic and policy context in order to design an approach that most effectively helps improve EGR outcomes. These profiles, designed for 18 of the countries with current or upcoming USAID EGR initiatives, aim to clearly and succinctly describe and illustrate the country's linguistic landscape and official LOI policy. This country profile in particular provides information on language policy and practice in Somalia.



LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

According to SIL International's *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, there are 13 living languages in Somalia, 10 of which are indigenous and three which are nonindigenous. Of these, three are institutional languages, three are developing, and one is vigorous while five are in trouble and one is dying (Eberhard et al., 2020). For more information on how languages are categorized on the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), please see Table 1.

Article 7 of the 2004 Transnational Federal Charter declared Arabic and Somali as the national languages of Somalia.¹ Of an approximate total population of 15.2 million, there are 2.05 million Standard Arabic speakers and 7.82 million Somali speakers (Eberhard et al., 2020). Other widely spoken languages include English, which is often used in educational settings, Maay with 1.75 million speakers, and Swahili with 183,000 speakers (Eberhard et al., 2020). For more information on the geographic dispersion of indigenous languages, please see Figure 2.

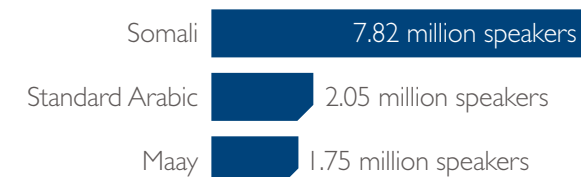
Table 1. Assessing Language Vitality: EGIDS Scale

Institutional	The language is used by institutions beyond the home and community
Developing	The language is in vigorous use and with literature in a standardized form
Vigorous	The language is not standardized but it is used among all generations
In Trouble	Intergenerational transmission is breaking down
Dying	Only fluent users, if any, are middle-aged or older
Extinct	The language is not used

Source: SIL International, n.d. For more information, please see: www.ethnologue.com/about/language-info

¹ The official languages of Somaliland, an autonomous region, are Somali, Arabic, and English, and the official languages of Puntland are Somali and Arabic.

Most widely-spoken languages in Somalia

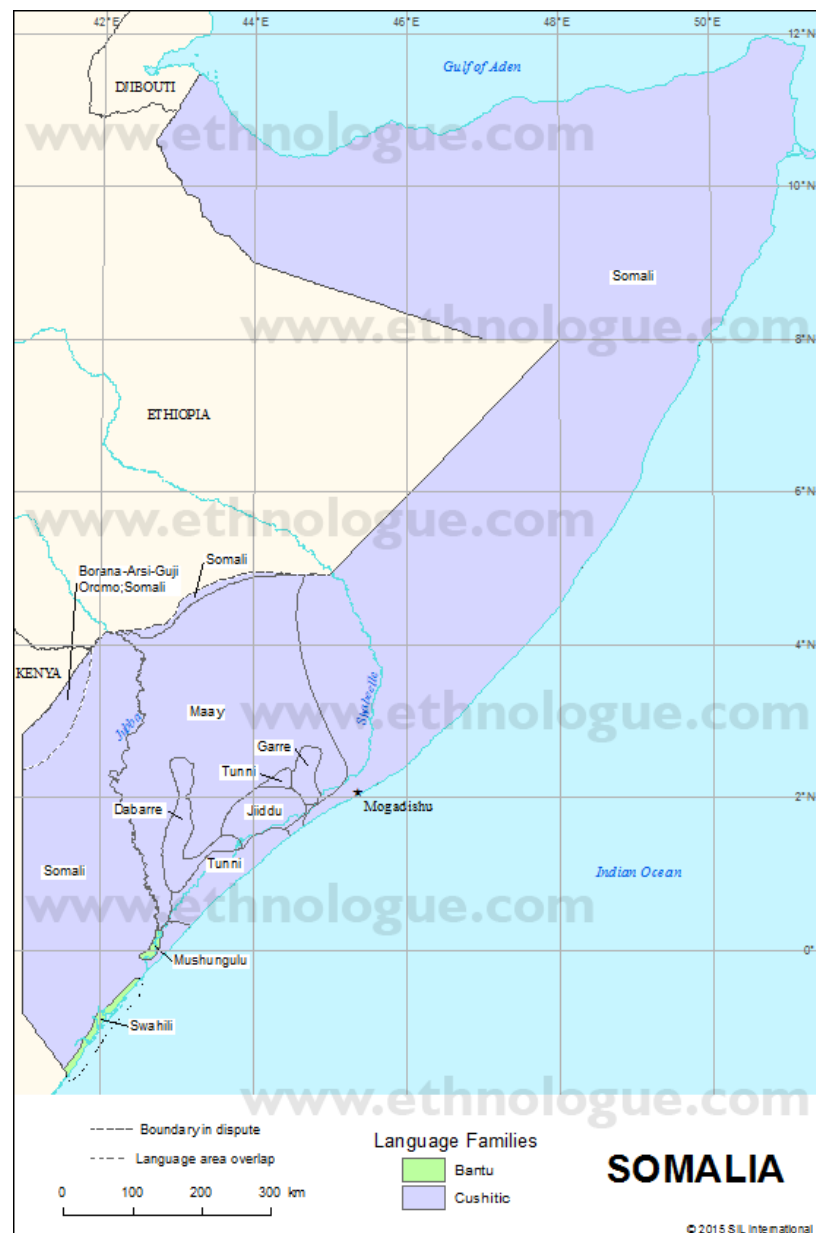


Source: Eberhard et al., 2020

Figure 1. Map of Somalia



Figure 2. Mapping of Indigenous Languages in Somalia



Source: Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION POLICY²

Somalia experienced a decades-long civil war starting in 1991, which created significant challenges for establishing an LOI policy. During the war, there were major shortages of teaching and learning materials, forcing teachers to use whatever materials they were able to source themselves, often from neighboring countries in Africa and the Middle East. As such, many materials were written in English or Arabic, and these languages were commonly used as the LOI (African Union Mission in Somalia & United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, 2018).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education (MOECHE), with support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), recognized the need for a unified, national curriculum and developed a National Education Curriculum Framework. The framework, which was validated in 2017, outlined a policy for the use of languages in education, stating that "Somali, the first language of virtually every child in Somalia, should be the foundation upon which other languages are learnt and through which education proceeds" (as cited in MOECHE, 2017b, p. 130). As such, Somali is used as the LOI in primary schools, with Arabic and English taught as subjects. A report by the MOECHE noted that Somali is used as the LOI in alternative basic education facilities across the country as well (MOECHE, 2017a). In the upper primary grades, the LOI sometimes shifts to Arabic for subjects such as Islamic studies, history, and geography, and to English for science subjects. However, this is not the case across all schools. English or Arabic becomes the primary LOI during secondary school (MOECHE, 2017b).

The extent to which the language policy is implemented is unclear: As noted in the MOECHE's 2018-2020 Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), there is a notable lack of teaching and learning materials in Somali, which has made it difficult for teachers to use Somali as the LOI (2017b). Furthermore, a large majority of primary students in Somalia attend private schools, with 87.5% of primary students attending non-government schools in 2016 (as cited in MOECHE, 2018). The presence of private education providers is often attributed to the destruction of much of the public education sector's infrastructure and materials

2 Please note that information in the following sections refers to language and education policy of the Federal Republic of Somalia (also referred to as South Central Somalia) and its Ministry of Education, Culture, and Higher Education (MOECHE), unless otherwise stated. Somaliland and Puntland are autonomous regions, and thus administer their own education systems. However, Puntland has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Federal Government of Somalia to align strategic objectives for the education sector (Altai Consulting, 2018).

during Somalia's civil war (Altai Consulting, 2018). Many of these private schools are Quranic schools, and may use Arabic as the LOI (MOECHE, 2017a). As such, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the LOI policy is being implemented and how it impacts students in private primary schools, which tend to be less regulated than government-run schools (Altai Consulting, 2018).

The MOECHE does not have a policy regarding special needs education or the LOI for learners with special needs. However, the ministry did acknowledge this gap in the 2018-2020 ESSP and noted that future strategy documents must address the specific needs of learners with disabilities (MOECHE, 2017b).

CLASS TIME

The public education system employs an 8-4 structure, in which primary school lasts for eight years (divided into four years for lower primary and four years for upper primary) and secondary school lasts for four years. However, many Somali children attend private schools, which often utilize a 9-3 system in which primary school lasts nine years and secondary school lasts three years (MOECHE, 2017b).

The MOECHE validated the new national curriculum for primary and secondary school students in 2017, with roll-out of the curriculum beginning in 2018 (Inside Education, 2019). This is the first curriculum developed by the federal government since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991. Prior to this, many schools used their own curricula, often adopted from neighboring countries in Africa and the Middle East (MOECHE, 2018). The new primary curriculum reportedly covers the following subjects: English, Arabic, Somali, math, Islamic studies, science, physical education, technology, and social studies (Inside Education, 2019). The MOECHE's 2018-2020 ESSP noted that teaching and learning materials had not yet been developed for the new curriculum (MOECHE, 2017b). As such, it is unclear the extent to which the new curriculum is being implemented across the country.

As mentioned previously, a large majority of Somali primary students attend non-government schools. A study of 170 government-run, mixed management, and private schools in 2018 revealed that many primary schools incorporated elements from different curricula, including the Kenyan curriculum, pre-war Somali curriculum, Egyptian curriculum, and the new national curriculum (Altai Consulting, 2018). Therefore, instructional time and curricular requirements outlined by the MOECHE may not apply to the vast majority of Somali primary students. However, 80% of primary schools included in the study did offer the same set of core subjects, including Arabic, English, Somali, Islamic studies, math, and science (Altai Consulting, 2018).

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING CURRICULUM FOR LITERACY

Somalia has no national teacher licensing system, and many teachers have not received formal teacher training. Across all of Somalia, only 37.9% of teachers have a teaching qualification, while only 21% of teachers in South Central Somalia hold a teaching qualification (MOECHE, 2018). Furthermore, the MOECHE has not developed a standard pre-service teacher training curriculum, so the syllabus used for pre-service training varies based on the institution that the teacher trainee attends.

Somali National University (SNU), a government-supported university in Mogadishu, offers pre-service teacher training. However, the teacher training department at SNU lacks funding and adequate staffing. Only in 2017 did SNU begin to develop a curriculum for an undergraduate degree focused on early childhood and primary school education. Furthermore, upon launching in 2018, the degree program has seen high dropout rates, with only 12 of the original 60 primary education degree students remaining in the program (Altai Consulting, 2018).

As of 2018, there were no government-run teacher training institutes in the other four member states of Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, and the Southwest (MOECHE, 2018). However, in the 2018-2020 ESSP, the MOECHE outlined its intention to establish five teacher training institutes by 2020 to improve the accessibility and quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training in Somalia. It is unclear the extent to which this goal has been accomplished. Other private universities across Somalia offer teacher training, including Mogadishu University, Benadir University, and the University of Somalia (Altai Consulting, 2018). Government-run teacher training institutes also exist in Garowe, the capital of Puntland, and Hargesia, the capital of Somaliland (Altai Consulting, 2018).

TEACHER LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY/LANGUAGE SPECIFIC TRAINING

As noted above, the curriculum for teacher training varies across institutions, so there is no standardized language training for teachers. The MOECHE noted that pre-service teacher training offered at SNU covers the following subjects: mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, Islamic religion, Arabic language, English language, and Somali language (MOECHE, 2017a). However, it is unclear if teachers receive any training to improve their own language proficiencies.

TEACHER IN-SERVICE

The MOECHE does not have a policy related to in-service teacher training, and the *Education Sector Analysis 2012–2016* reported that the government had not organized any in-service teacher trainings since 1990 (MOECHE, 2017a). Furthermore, in 2016, UNICEF conducted a rapid baseline survey, in which only 18% of surveyed teachers reported having received any type of pre-service or in-service teacher training (MOECHE, 2017a).

The MOECHE outlined its intention to develop a comprehensive in-service teacher training framework in the 2018-2020 ESSP (2017b), but it is unclear the degree to which this has been accomplished. Furthermore, the MOECHE's Department of Quality Assurance has developed a plan to offer continuous professional development and counseling to teachers. However, due to resource constraints, this plan has not yet been rolled out (MOECHE, 2017b).

As such, teachers are heavily reliant on donors and nongovernmental organizations to provide training opportunities. The Elmidoon (Seeking Knowledge, in English) Program, supported by the European Union, offered in-service teacher training at SNU, Mogadishu University, and Benadir University until 2017. The program covered the fees for all participants and enrolled 230 trainees at SNU and 85 at Benadir University (MOECHE, 2017a). Other organizations such as Save the Children, UNICEF, and the U.K. Department for International Development have also supported in-service training programs across Somalia.

USAID READING PROGRAM APPROACH AND ONGOING PROGRAMS

In alignment with the U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education, USAID's programming in Somalia aims to support the needs and priorities of the partner country to ensure that gains from the programming are sustained.

The 2018-2020 ESSP estimates that nearly 50% of Somalis are pastoralists, meaning that they frequently move their families and livestock in search of water and pasture

(MOECHE, 2017b). Such communities face significant impediments to education, as children and youth are unable to enroll in traditional, static schools due to their migratory lifestyles. In fact, the MOECHE estimates that only about 16% of children aged six years and above in pastoralist communities are enrolled in formal education (2017b). As such, USAID launched the five-year (2015-2020), \$10 million **Alternative Basic Education (ABE)** activity to expand the provision of education services and improve development and stability in the Jubaland State of Somalia. Implemented by UNICEF and local partners, ABE sought to improve access to equitable, quality education for pastoralists and other marginalized children who have been out of school for significant periods of time or have never been to school (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2021).

In particular, the activity aimed to support 21,000 learners in completing one cycle of the alternative education program. To do this, ABE rehabilitated and constructed temporary learning spaces, outfitted the learning spaces with teaching and learning materials, and developed educational programming that condensed the eight grades of formal primary school into four levels of alternative basic education. ABE also worked to strengthen teachers' ability to deliver the accelerated curriculum by providing training on the curriculum and professional development opportunities to teachers, administrators, and education officials. Last, the activity supported the development of a non-formal education strategy by hiring a technical advisor to assist with drafting a policy framework and standards for non-formal education (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2021).

USAID also launched the five-year (2019-2024), \$49 million **Bar ama Baro** (Teach or Learn) activity to expand access to quality education for over-aged, out-of-school youth ages 8 to 15 in Somalia. Implemented by Creative Associates with other partner organizations, the activity aims to increase enrollment in accelerated education programs, improve student safety, and monitor and improve student learning outcomes. The activity focuses on cultivating literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills, as well as promoting positive gender norms among children and youth. At the federal level, Bar ama Baro also aims to improve the government's ability to standardize and regulate accelerated education programs across Somalia (USAID/Somalia, 2020).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITHIN USAID PROJECTS

Community engagement played a critical role in ensuring the success of the ABE activity. The project had two objectives centered on community engagement, namely:

- Increased awareness of parents, community elders, and religious leaders to value and support their children's education, especially for girls.
- Enhanced capacity of community organizations to design and implement sustainable, relevant, and progressive basic education programs (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2021, p. 13).

To accomplish these aims, ABE conducted public awareness and mobilization campaigns to enhance community ownership of the project's activities and also established mobile libraries to make reading materials more accessible to migratory communities. Last, ABE established a community education committee at each alternative education space, with the goal that such committees would provide oversight and day-to-day management of the spaces once the project had concluded (NORC at the University of Chicago, 2021).

No information on community engagement within the USAID Bar ama Baro activity was available at the time of publication.

OTHER DONOR FUNDED READING PROGRAMS

Alongside USAID, several other organizations are involved in implementing projects to address literacy and language issues across Somalia, which are described below.

Educate A Child and Mercy Corps' Educate Somali Children Project³

The Educate Somali Children (or Wax Bar Caruurta Somaaliyeed) project is a three-year (2018-2021), \$20 million joint initiative of Educate A Child and Mercy Corps that aims to enroll 109,373 out-of-school children in primary education programs in South Central Somalia, Somaliland, and Puntland. To increase enrollment, the project

will address barriers to education such as a lack of school facilities, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, and teaching and learning materials. Likewise, the project aims to improve the quality of education and management in the schools it supports by conducting teacher and school management training as well as encouraging community ownership and participation in school programming (Shaheen et al., 2018).

Educate A Child and UNICEF's Formal Education for Out of School Children in Somalia Project⁴

The Formal Education for Out of School Children in Somalia project aims to improve access to primary education for 64,000 out-of-school children in marginalized communities across Somalia. This will be achieved through the construction and rehabilitation of 800 primary classrooms, the provision of teaching and learning materials to the 208 schools that the project supports, as well as teacher training and school management training to strengthen the capacity of community education committees. Furthermore, the project aims to advance gender sensitivity in its programming by training teachers on gender-responsive teaching methods as well as incorporating gender themes into its teaching and learning materials. The project will also ensure that the sanitation facilities it constructs through its school improvement component are private and safe for girls to use.

European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation's (ECHO) Education in Emergencies Project

The European Union's ECHO, in collaboration with Finn Church Aid, launched a two-year (2020-2021), €750,000 education activity targeting 4,000 children in the Bakool region of Southwest State, Somalia. Bakool has been impacted by natural disasters such as droughts and floods as well as armed conflict, creating significant barriers to accessing education for many children in the region. Further, the area is home to many internally displaced persons, who often struggle to access educational services. As such, the intervention will focus on providing quality education opportunities for

³ For more information, see: <https://educateachild.org/our-partners-projects/projects/wax-bar-caruurta-somaaliyeed-educate-somali-children-0>

⁴ For more information, see: <https://educateachild.org/our-partners-projects/projects/formal-education-out-school-children-somalia>

internally displaced and out-of-school children, particularly through an accelerated basic education program. ECHO will also work to rehabilitate schools in the area to ensure the availability of safe learning spaces and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities, as well as provide teaching and learning materials (Finn Church Aid, 2020).

GPE's COVID-19 Response⁵

In 2020, GPE provided the Federal Government of Somalia with a \$5.4 million grant to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to the education sector. Working in collaboration with Save the Children as the grant agent, the Federal Government will develop and implement distance learning programming, including printed materials, radio and TV broadcasts, and online educational materials. The grant will also support a safe return to schools by providing health and sanitation supplies to schools to mitigate the spread of the virus. Last, the grant will provide temporary financial relief to teachers who are out of work to ensure that they are able to return to the profession when the pandemic ends, with priority given to female teachers and teachers in emergency and remote settings (GPE, n.d.).

UNICEF's Learning Passport Project⁶

In 2020, UNICEF launched a digital remote learning platform, called the Learning Passport, in collaboration with the Government of Puntland, Microsoft, and the University of Cambridge. The learning platform is accessible both online and offline

⁵ For more information, see: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/somalia>

⁶ For more information, see: <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/press-releases/puntland-ministry-education-and-unicef-launch-line-learning-platform>

through computers or mobile phones, allowing students to access educational content from home. As of 2020, over 11,000 children had access to the platform, which included 600 recorded lessons for 12 different subjects at the Grade 8 level. More content is under development for the platform, covering the learning needs of both primary and secondary students (UNICEF, 2020).

World Food Programme's (WFP) School Feeding Initiatives⁷

WFP provides school meals across Somalia to encourage primary school attendance and improve students' nutrition. WFP also works to tackle gender inequities in school enrollment in areas of the country where girls are less likely to attend school by providing them with take-home rations (WFP, n.d.). School closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic made implementation of these school feeding programs extremely difficult. However, WFP has piloted an innovative approach, with the support of the Latter-day Saint Charities, to overcome the obstacles presented by school closures. Using WFP's e-Shop mobile phone application, schoolchildren and their parents can submit online orders for food staples and have their orders delivered to their homes (Gordon, 2020). This program hopes to prevent malnutrition during the pandemic so that students can take full advantage of distance learning programs while schools are closed.

⁷ For more information, see: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/somalia>

REFERENCES

- African Union Mission in Somalia & United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia. (2018). *A new way to educate in Somali schools starts in August*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/new-way-educate-somali-schools-starts-august-enso>
- Altai Consulting. (2018). *Study on Understanding the Role of Non-state Education Providers in Somalia*. World Bank. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/abs/10.1596/31610>
- Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G.F. & Fennig, C.D. (eds.). (2020). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-third edition. SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- Educate A Child. (n.d.). *Wax Bar Caruurta Somaaliyeed (Educate Somali Children)*. <https://educateachild.org/our-partners-projects/projects/wax-bar-caruurta-somaaliyeed-educate-somali-children-0>
- Finn Church Aid. (2020, July 16). *New project launched to ensure access to quality education for thousands of children in Somalia*. ReliefWeb. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/new-project-launched-ensure-access-quality-education-thousands-children-somalia#:~:text=The%2013%2Dmonth%20education%20project,crisis%2Daffected%20areas%20of%20Somalia>
- Global Partnership for Education (GPE). (n.d.). *Somalia*. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/somalia>
- Gordon, E. (2020). *Giving Hope to the Rising Generation in Somalia*. Latter-day Saint Charities. <https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/blog/giving-hope-to-the-rising-generation-in-somalia?lang=eng>
- Inside Education. (2019, October 6). *New Dawn for Somalia's Schools as Government Rolls out Synchronised Curricula*. <https://insideeducation.co.za/2019/10/06/new-dawn-for-somalias-schools-as-government-rolls-out-synchronised-curricula/>
- Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education (MOECHE). (2017a). *Education Sector Analysis, 2012–2016*. Federal Government of Somalia. <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/media/1201/file/Somalia-Education-sector-analysis-2012-16.pdf>
- MOECHE. (2017b). *Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018–2020*. Federal Government of Somalia. https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/federal_government_of_somalia_essp.pdf
- MOECHE. (2018). *Education Sector Program Improvement Grant 2018–2020 Program Document*. Federal Government of Somalia, the Global Partnership for Education, and Care. https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/fgs-program_document.pdf
- NORC at the University of Chicago. (2021). *Alternative Basic Education in Somalia External Performance Endline Evaluation*. USAID. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00X9T5.pdf
- Shaheen, R., Woolfenden, J., Maughan, C., & Sardiwal, D. (2018). *Educate a Child Program Somalia Baseline Study*. Action Against Hunger UK's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Services. https://knowledgeagainsthunger.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/EAC-Baseline-Report_Final.pdf
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2020). *Puntland Ministry of Education and UNICEF launch on-line learning platform*. <https://www.unicef.org/somalia/press-releases/puntland-ministry-education-and-unicef-launch-line-learning-platform>
- University Research Co., LLC. (2019). *Handbook on Language of Instruction Issues in Reading Programs*. USAID. <https://www.urc-chs.com/sites/default/files/urc-grn-instruction-issues.pdf>
- USAID/Somalia. (2020). *Bar ama Baro ("Teach or Learn")*. USAID Education Factsheet. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Fact_Sheet_-_Somalia_BAB_February_2020.pdf
- World Food Programme (WFP). (n.d.). *Somalia*. <https://www.wfp.org/countries/somalia>