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Research Article

Rapid Learning for Lasting Change: Accelerated Basic Education in Post-Conflict, Somalia

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Abstract

This paper extensively examines the comparative learning outcomes and impact of Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in conflict-affected regions, focusing the Bar ama Baro (BAB) initiative in Somalia. With assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), this initiative successfully enrolled over 100,000 children who were not attending school, while emphasizing the necessity of equal educational opportunities regardless of gender. The primary aim of the study is to contrast the theoretical understanding of Alternative Basic Education with the practical realities observed during the implementation of the USAID-Bar ama Baro program in Somalia. The paper analyzes the collaborative efforts of the Bar ama Baro initiative alongside USAID and Somali education authorities, stressing the importance of providing quality education opportunity that is appropriate, inclusive, adequate, and accessible to all genders. It draws on interview data from 200 participants involved with Bar ama Baro to show how this significant initiative was experienced and what was learned. The study encompasses an in-depth research and literature review demonstrating the significance of Alternative Basic Education during emergencies, facilitating a smooth transition to formal education. The paper also analyzes the significance and effective strategies for addressing the educational needs of developing countries. Furthermore, it assesses the level of basic education in Somalia in comparison to other countries within the Horn of Africa and the African continent. The paper offers educational stakeholders, researchers, and policymakers with a framework to initiate and deliver educational services during emergencies. The paper also recommends collaboration among governments, educational support organizations, researchers, and other education stakeholders to successfully implement and assess main advantages of Alternative Basic Education.

Keywords

Post-Conflict, Educational Challenges, Alternative Basic Education, Somalia, Lifelong Learning, Education in Emergencies, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), Supplementary Reading Materials

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview of Post-Conflict Educational Challenges in Somalia

Somalia faces significant educational challenges post-conflict, with millions of children out of school due to factors like internal displacement, poverty, safety concerns, and inadequate facilities caused by prolonged civil unrest, climate shocks and more.

In Somalia, over three million children face barriers to

education due to poverty, safety concerns, distance to schools, gender biases, lack of facilities, and teacher shortages. Even if enrolled, inadequate resources and displacement hinder learning, particularly for vulnerable groups like girls and children with disabilities[1]. Somalia's enrolment rates in basic education stand in stark contrast to those of its peer countries in Africa. its low enrollment rates differ from those of other East African countries. While African nations have made significant strides in expanding access to basic education, four East African countries had a combined primary school GER of 106% in 2020, whereas Somalia's was only 14%[2]. The analysis by Abdullahi Mohamoud Mohamed and John Momanyi Ongubo unveils significant variation in gross enrollment rates across Africa. Madagascar has the highest rate at 160%, while Somalia has the lowest at 33%. Other countries in the region have the following rates: Eritrea at 48%, Djibouti at 54%, Sudan (including South Sudan) at 74%, Ethiopia at 102%, Kenya at 113%, and Uganda at 122% [1]. As per RTI International report, since 2005 Somalia has conducted three early grade reading assessments, all in 2013 after the establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia. The first two assessments, part of the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) program and administered as Uwezo assessments, showed Somali pupils scoring mid-range compared to other countries in the GEC program. The third assessment, conducted by Concern Worldwide in November 2013, was the first Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in Somalia, evaluating 400 pupils in grades 2, 3, and 4. Results indicated that grade 2 pupils could read 16 correct words per minute (cwpm), grade 3 pupils 32 cwpm, and grade 4 pupils 51 cwpm. However, 47% of grade 2 pupils scored zero on the Oral Reading Fluency passage [33].

Reports indicate out of Somalia's total population of 12.3 million, approximately 4.9 million are of school age, yet 3 million are not enrolled in school [40]. Many problems limit children's access to education in crisis affected areas. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Somalia grappled with an educational crisis, with over 3 million children, were out of school. The primary causes were persistent instability, conflict, and emergencies disproportionately affecting internally displaced people (IDPs) and children from pastoralist communities, who faced heightened barriers to accessing education together with increased risk of discontinuing their schooling. Among these challenges, girls encountering obstacles such as gender-based violence, societal norms, and early marriage and pregnancy, which hindered their ability to attend and complete their education [35, 36].

Nevertheless, despite widespread recognition of the importance of education in post-conflict recovery, a significant gap exists in understanding how to effectively provide education to children and youth who missed out on schooling.

In the aftermath of conflict, countries like Somalia confront a multitude of obstacles in reconstructing their education systems. The centralized government of Somalia collapsed in 1991, transitioning to a federal system in 2012. It is now divided into regions such as Somaliland, Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubbaland, Banadir, and Southwest States, each overseeing its own education, under Federal Government supervision. Very few children gain access to literacy and numeracy skills at the appropriate stage of schooling, with alternative educational opportunities being scarce in all states. According to the Education Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2020 by the Somalia Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, 39% of all Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) learners nationwide were enrolled in Level 1. In Central South and Puntland, there were roughly equal proportions, while Somaliland has a lower enrolment at 31%. For Level 2, 28% of all ABE learners are enrolled, with Somaliland having the highest proportion at 30%, and Puntland the lowest at 23%. Across Levels 1-3, there has been a consistent decrease in enrolment, except in Somaliland where proportions remained relatively equal. However, there's a significant drop-off in enrolment at ABE Level 4. In Central South, while there were initial high drop-off rates from Levels 1 and 2, enrolment at later levels was more evenly distributed. Overall, the data indicates that many ABE learners drop out after the first two years, with smaller proportions advancing to higher levels [14].

Significant strides have been made to rectify this issue. With support from the Somali government and organizations like USAID, the Accelerated Basic Education (ABE) program now operates in various regions in Somalia, aiming to enhance primary-level education and bridge education disparities. In 2022, ABE data collection was integrated into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) for the first time, allowing analysis and monitoring of progress. Most ABE students are enrolled at the lowest level, indicating recognition of the need for basic education and literacy skills, yet some students are also progressing to higher levels. The Ministry of Education, in partnership with USAID's Bar Ama Baro Program, invests in data collection and analysis to improve the program's quality and address diverse learners' needs [13].

This research article on the USAID Bar ama Baro Alternative Basic Education program examines the causes of Somalia's education service shortages, assesses various methodologies, and identifies factors contributing to success. The paper aims to investigate the distinctive benefits of ABE for out-of-school children in emergencies, evaluating the suitability of ABE packages in ensuring equitable access and quality education in post-conflict areas. The paper will highlight the differences and similarities between Formal Education and Non-Formal Education, specifically focusing on Alternative Basic Education and Accelerated Basic Education approaches. Drawing on my fieldwork experience as a program manager for FENPS, I offer detailed understanding

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1 https://www.unicef.org/somalia/education

2 Somalia Education Sector Analysis, Assessing opportunities for rebuilding the country through education;

Federal Government of Somalia, IIEP-UNESCO Dakar, 2022

based on practice, making it easier for education practitioners to tackle similar learning challenges if they face them. Formal Education Network for Private Schools (FENPS) is one of implementing partners for the Bar ama Baro program funded by USAID in Somalia [6].

1.2. Importance of Alternative/Accelerated Basic Education (ABE)

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) is crucial for bridging educational gaps in post-conflict Somalia, offering flexible, learner-centered education to out-of-school children. The substantial need of quality education in Somalia's post-conflict recovery and long-term stability, especially in teaching out of school youth and children and addressing education disparities underlines the imperative of the Alternative Basic Education needed for a brighter future. Historically, formal education has been the predominant method of imparting knowledge to children, characterized by rigid structures and methodologies that leave little room for participation of students in active learning processes. However, this inflexibility has failed to address the varied learning needs of individuals, especially in cases where traditional methods are inadequate or may not suffice. There's a need to investigate more advanced teaching approaches. Madeleine C. Will (1986) emphasized that providing educational services tailored to individual needs requires that both administrators and teachers be permitted to collaboratively apply their skills and resources to implement suitable educational strategies; the practices of collaborative systems and improved pedagogies are important to post-conflict education.

During emergency crises, education faces numerous challenges such as widespread out school children, educational disparities, qualified teacher shortages, and infrastructure damage, posing significant barriers to rapid resolution. Education matters to individuals and thus to society: "Being out-of-school means one has a very low chance of accessing relevant basic knowledge and skills, and the certificates to signal them. It also erects barriers to dignified and fulfilling employment, well-being, poverty reduction and economic growth, at the household, community, and national levels" [16]. In such circumstances, there is an urgent call to innovate strategies for rebuilding education systems and facilitating recovery efforts in disaster-affected regions.

This article underscores the critical role of Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in overcoming education obstacles and fostering equitable access to quality learning in post-conflict zones. Alternative Basic Education programs offer an effective solution to educational requirements and can improve learning outcomes for underserved societies by providing them condensed and concentrated instructions adapted to individual needs in post conflict settings. UNICEF (2022) identifies out-of-school adolescents as a diverse group impacted by factors like poverty, discrimination, and violence, and proposes a taxonomy based on age, educational attain-

ment, and time out of school to address learners' varied needs through Alternative Basic Education programs [39].

According to the LASER PULSE external evaluation on the USAID Bar ama Baro ABE Program, there has been notable literacy and numeracy gains. Specifically, learners in the Bar ama Baro Program scored greater improvement in literacy skills compared to the achievement typically seen in formal primary education classes over a span of two years [19], as highlighted in the selected findings from a longitudinal study presented at the Somalia Education Sector Coordination meeting on March 28, 2024. Over five years, the USAID Bar ama Baro program has provided quality, affordable, and accessible education to over 100,000 children who previously lacked educational opportunities for various reasons.

Ensuring that every child worldwide has access to quality education stands as an indispensable responsibility for fostering global growth and prosperity; the fundamental value and determination of this effort demand further research efforts, guiding policymakers and practitioners who want to develop and implement efficient educational strategies at crisis situations like Somalia. This article contributes to this drive to understand effective pedagogy for post-conflict recuperation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition and Principles of ABE

Teaching and learning methods have different approaches, and finding the most suitable one that results in quality education within a specific context requires considerable effort and a sure sense of direction. Different research papers (Sletten 2002, EDC 2017 and McColl 2020) emphasize that Alternative Basic Education is a flexible and effective approach that provides learning opportunities for out-of-school children in emergency settings, where traditional schooling options are unavailable due to missed opportunities for education at the appropriate time [6, 8, 11]. Formal traditional education has not met the requirements for inclusive education, necessitating the implementation of alternative models to educate all children and youth. Ngware et al. reason that after extensive experimentation with various models of alternative education and training for out-of-school children and youth, it is time to systematically integrate these models into a comprehensive education and training system [27]. Those papers highlight the crucial role of Alternative Basic Education in addressing educational challenges in post-conflict contexts of disrupted education.

Alternative Basic Education faces uncertainty from certain individuals, so understanding its definition is essential in addressing concerns and differentiating it from formal education. Indira Gandhi describes alternative education as distinct from the formal system because it prioritizes students' needs and interests over set curriculum and uses varied teaching methods to meet these needs and satisfy interest. It

offers flexibility in curriculum, admission, and pace, covering diverse activities outside formal education. This system provides options at all educational levels for those dissatisfied with formal schooling. However, the lack of a unified definition remains a major challenge [18]. Various sources define ABE as a flexible, effective approach that complements formal education, particularly in emergency settings where traditional schooling is disrupted.

The most widely accepted definitions come from the alternative education working group (AEWG)'s descriptions of the Accelerated Education Principles: Alternative Approaches to Basic Education. They describe a system of learning which is characterized by flexibility, capacity to recognize diversity and respond creatively, and transparency in terms of the degree of openness – open access, open learning, and limitless opportunities to release the creative potential of the learners. Alternative approaches are applicable to both formal and non-formal learning situations and in time could be the means to harmonize the two in an integrated system of education with parity of esteem, and with due regard to diversity in a life-long learning framework [12].

Alternative Basic Education mostly focuses on a certain age group of out-of-school children. "Alternative Basic Education is the component of non-formal education program that serves as an alternative approach to complement the formal education program in the effort to increase access to basic primary educational opportunity to those out of school children in the age range of 7-14" [21]. It is a short course that serves as a bridge for learners to transition to or adapt to the formal education curriculum. "A short-term transitional education program for children and youth who had been actively attending school prior to an educational disruption, which provides students with the opportunity to learn content missed because of the disruption and supports their re-entry to the formal system" [4, 29].

The term "flexible" suggests that Alternative Basic Education provides more options than formal education, particularly in addressing the diverse needs of communities, such as when many children are unable to physically attend school due to various circumstances beyond their control. In formal education, learners typically must adhere to set conditions like age restrictions, grade levels, uniforms, and fixed schedules, whereas Alternative Basic Education allows students to choose when and how they study, free from such constraints. This flexibility is a strength in post-conflict restoration: it seems to focus on out of school children. Most of the ABE programs appear to complement formal school programs rather than continuing in parallel with formal education system. They seem to fill gaps which formal schools could not address in times of chaos [24].

Alternative education apparently responds to specific needs of particular communities at particular times of fluctuation and transition. Alternative education includes non-formal education programs where the certification and validation of the learning is not automatically assured; ad hoc education or awareness programs that respond to a specific perceived need; and short-term emergency education programs that are considered bridging programs [26].

The Alternative Basic Education approach not only facilitates flexible access and enrolment for children but also employs a learner-centered methodology, encouraging active participation in learning and teaching activities. In contrast, traditional formal education mostly relies on a teacher-centered approach, resulting in minimal student engagement in activities. Stepping away from formality gives benefits beyond enabling transition: The world needs individuals who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, decision makers, creative and digitally literate (soft skills) and all these skills are properly developed in schools with learner centered methods as students are exposed to individual practical learning [25].

At a quick glance, accelerated basic education and Alternative Basic Education are types of non-formal education (NFE). They are sometimes used interchangeably but address different educational gaps. Accelerated education targets learners aged 18 and older, emphasizing catch-up programs to help them reach the same educational level as their peers. Alternative education, designed for individuals aged 10 to 18, serves as a bridge to formal education. For children under 10, formal education remains the standard approach. "Learners aged 10-18 can join alternative education, those over 18 explore adult education programs, and those under 10 should look into primary school options" [3]. The USAID-Bar ama Baro project aimed to provide Alternative Basic Education for 10- to 17-year-olds, serving as a bridge to formal education.

The above definitions and compiled elaborations show that Alternative Basic Education does not eliminate formal education but instead complements it by providing adequate and affordable access opportunities for out-of-school children and youth, while also easing the strict conditions imposed on learners by the formal education system.

2.2. Theoretical Perspectives

Cognitive and constructivist learning theories support ABE's learner-centered approach, emphasizing the importance of adaptable, lifelong learning. The paper analyses the available literature on alternative basic education, investigating various debates and interpretations within the discipline. The paper specifically examines cognitive and constructivist learning theories, the concept of lifelong learning, and the relationship of Alternative Basic Education to these areas. Dr. Masaud Ansari (2020) summarized three significant cognitive theories: 1. Piaget's developmental theory (1936), 2. Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural cognitive theory (1934), and 3. Atkinson and Shiffrin's information processing theory [10]. Cognitive psychology emphasizes modifying and enhancing the interactions between teachers and students, which subsequently leads to improved comprehension, thinking, and knowledge acquisition. According to Tollefson, cognitive theories of motivation furnish essential frameworks for un-

derstanding and, in certain instances, modifying the interaction patterns between teachers and students [28]. George E. Hein suggests that constructivist principles, now influential in school classrooms and curricula, can also apply to museum learning. While these principles align with modern views on learning and knowledge, they conflict with traditional museum practices, necessitating learner and teacher reflection to implement them effectively.

Alpaydın and Demirli argue that since the 1970s, the rise of the information society, technological advances, globalization, and postmodernity have fostered the constructivist paradigm in education. This paradigm emphasizes individual learning, the subjective nature of knowledge, so favors student-centered approaches, and reduced teacher authority. Culture, values, character, and social-emotional development have gained importance. Technological advancements have significantly transformed educational structures and objectives in the 21st century [41].

In their 2015 work on cognitive theory, Zhou and Brown contend that individuals can directly impact their personal environments, particularly in terms of relationships, behaviors, and goals. The motivation to influence our surroundings stems from the belief that we benefit by effecting change in our desired direction [30]. Alternative Basic Education supports lifelong learning, sharing the belief that individuals should have the access and flexibility to learn whenever and however they choose, in contrast to the constraints imposed by formal education. Huseyin Uzunboylu and Gulenaz Selcuk concur with Gulec, Celik, and Demirhan, asserting that lifelong learning holds a prominent position in global educational research. They emphasize that this concept can be implemented anywhere, removing limitations related to place, time, age, and education level [16].

Referencing the Preamble for the Incheon Declaration and SDG4 – Education 2030 Framework for Action, there is a commitment to promoting quality lifelong learning for all, at all education levels. This includes increasing equitable access to quality technical, vocational, and higher education with attention to quality assurance. Flexible learning pathways and the recognition of skills from non-formal education are essential. The commitment extends to ensuring youth and adults, particularly girls and women, achieve literacy, numeracy, and life skills, and have access to adult learning and training opportunities [30].

When a country's education system has been long destroyed and is not functioning well, it is essential to conduct research on how to reform its education system. Somalia's Bar ama Baro program makes a good case study of a post-crisis country reforming education. The Bar ama Baro program, supported by USAID, aims to support basic education for Somali children affected by prolonged crises and conflicts, enhancing the quality and availability of inclusive education.

2.3. Background on Somalia's Bar Ama Baro Program

The Bar ama Baro program, supported by USAID, aimed to support basic education for Somali children affected by prolonged crises and conflicts, enhancing the quality and availability of inclusive education.

The reform of education in Somalia has required comprehensive research to determine the most effective strategies for overcoming the prolonged setback in children's education, ensuring the future well-being of subsequent generations. For over three decades, the governmental structure in Somalia has exhibited fragility, resulting in a significant obstacle to education and children have suffered significant deterrent to school attendance: Since the downfall of Siad Barre's regime in 1991, Somalia has faced ongoing instability and division within its political landscape. This led to a state of lawlessness and absence of a central authority, paving the way for the rise of clan and militia factions and eventually plunging the nation into civil conflict[3].

Before the collapse of the government in 1991, basic education in Somalia was based on the formal education system which was 4 years' lower primary education, 4 years' upper primary education and 4 years' secondary education. Somalia education system consists of five stages: primary education covering grades one to four, middle education spanning grades five to eight, secondary education for grades nine to 12, technical education for ages 15 to 18, and tertiary education for higher education [38].

In the period from 1991 to 2013, with the Ministry of Education absent, proactive educators established private schools, introducing a schooling structure consisting of six years for lower primary, three years for upper primary, and three years for secondary education in Somalia. But only a small percentage of Somali children had access to quality education, leading to one of the world's lowest enrolment rates, with significant marginalized group disparities persisting in the educational opportunities. According to the humanitarian online data portal Reliefweb (2020), the educational crisis in Somalia is severe. The education system was already under strain, with one of the lowest primary school enrollment ratios globally. About 70% of school-age children (3 million out of 4.4 million) are not attending school. Furthermore, only 17% of children in rural areas or IDP settlements are enrolled in primary schools [31].

Currently education in Somalia is undergoing restructuring. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, with the help of donors like UASAID and national and international organizations, is making efforts to provide quality, accessible and equal education to all Somali children.

The education system structure was improved through the adoption of the General Education Act on February 2021, which harmonizes the two previous parallel streams: the legacy 6+3+3 (with six years of lower primary, three years of upper primary, and three years of secondary school) and the new 4+4+4 system (four years of lower primary, four years of upper primary, and four years of secondary school). The new Education Act also streamlines the structure of other

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3 Education Sector Analysis-Federal Government of Somalia, 2022, P. 31

sub-sectors, including religious education, technical and vocational education (TVET), and components of the general education sub-sector, such as Alternative Basic Education and Adult Basic Education" [34]. With the adoption of a new national curriculum and Education Sector Strategic Plan, Somalia is addressing the pressing issues confronting out-of-school children and youth.

The USAID's five-year Bar ama Baro initiative was a comprehensive primary education program crafted to bolster the Somali government's endeavors in establishing secure learning environments conducive to enhancing literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills among students. Bar ama Baro's initiatives complement Somalia's new national curriculum, Education Sector Strategic Plan, and National Development Plan-9. Operating at both national and local levels. Bar ama Baro systematically and strategically aided government and community stakeholders in designing and delivering comprehensive, non-formal Alternative education for marginalized children nationwide.

The program actively supported the government in shaping policies and program frameworks while implementing interventions in about 30 districts, with the aim of reaching approximately 100,000 school children. Through tailored programming and advocacy for systemic policy reforms, Bar ama Baro, alongside its diverse consortium of partners – including Save the Children International, ORB International, SIL LEAD, Formal Education Network for Private Schools, Hano Academy, Himilo Relief and Development Association (HIRDA), and Somalia's Ministry of Education (MoECHE) – extended curriculum offerings, expanded service coverage, and reinforced learning support systems, ensuring that all children, especially those on the margins, could access equitable, safe, and conflict-sensitive education [7, 22].

In 2022, the Bar ama Baro (Teach or Learn) initiative successfully enrolled 102,440 out-of-school children and youth across 31 districts. Supported by USAID, the program's goal was to deliver Alternative Basic Education, compressing an eight-year primary cycle into four years to address the substantial number of unenrolled children who had fallen behind the formal structure.

Emphasizing the significance of literacy, the program highlighted collaboration between the American people, the Federal Government of Somalia, and Federal Member States. Bar ama Baro trained approximately 2,700 teachers and head teachers in 460 schools and distributed 772,000 copies of teaching and learning materials for students and educators [17].

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Objective

In this study, I employed comprehensive qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, incorporating several key approaches to gather and analyze data. In my research methodology, I utilized various techniques including Likert scale items, rating scales, and other methods to gather comprehensive data using a questionnaire. As per John Kling (2021), rating scale questions are easy for participants to comprehend and use. They offer researchers a comparative analysis of quantitative data within the target sample, which helps in making well-informed decisions [20]. Laura South et al. (2022) explains that Likert scales permit researchers to collect quantitative measurements of subjective traits, producing numerical data that can be summarized and visualized in the same way as other quantitative data acquired during evaluations [23].

I carried out in-depth interviews with beneficiaries of the Bar ama Baro program to gain first-hand insights into their experiences and the program's impact on their educational journey. The study involved a detailed analysis of program data and reports, providing quantitative support to underpin the qualitative findings and to ensure a well-rounded understanding of the challenges and successes associated with ABE in Somalia. The paper examines the data from success stories and external assessment reports on the Bar ama Baro, and involves interviewing 200 individuals (99 females and 101 males) who have directly benefited from the initiative to discover its impact. Interviews were conducted according to participant convenience in schools, community centers and through teleconferences as well.

On average, interviews took between 45 and 60 minutes. Interview questions dug deeper into the questions asked in the questionnaire to gather richer data and understanding. The respondents included a diverse group: 40 teachers, 30 head teachers, 60 learners, 4 district education officers, 50 community education committee (CEC) members, and 16 parents.

The primary aim of the study is to contrast the theoretical understanding of Alternative Basic Education with the practical realities observed during the implementation of the USAID-Bar ama Baro program in Somalia. The secondary goal is to highlight gaps and recommend further research, providing guidance for policymakers and practitioners aiming to develop and implement effective educational strategies in crisis situations such as in Somalia.

My data collection work emphasized the critical importance of maintaining research ethics throughout the study. As stated by Dooly, Moore, and Vallejo (2017), researchers must prioritize doing no harm, and they should consider potential negative impacts on participants and be prepared to address unforeseen ethical issues by stopping or adjusting the study if necessary [9]. I have diligently obtained full informed consent from all direct respondents, whom I thoroughly informed about the nature and purpose of the research. I assured them that their data would remain confidential and be used solely for the research objectives. To uphold these ethical standards, I implemented stringent measures to safeguard the confidentiality of the data.

I conducted a thorough literature review to understand the existing body of knowledge on Alternative Basic Education (ABE) and its implementation in post-conflict settings. Ac-

cording to Hannah Snyder, literature reviews are fundamental to all research types. They contribute to knowledge development, guide policy and practice, provide evidence of effects, and, if conducted well, inspire new ideas and directions within a field. Consequently, they form the basis for future research and theoretical advancements [15].

Additionally, I have carefully reviewed literature to verify the reliability of all cited sources, ensuring that the information referenced was accurate and credible. This rigorous approach underscores my commitment to ethical research practices. Fitt emphasizes that conducting a thorough literature review before starting new research is essential to avoid duplicating past work or selecting inappropriate methods. It is reasonable to assume that substantial research exists on teaching these skills to future scholars [14]—the literature review in this paper is essential to its integrity.

3.2. Ethical Considerations

This paper underscores the importance of adhering to research ethics by ensuring that full informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were clearly informed that their data would remain confidential and would be used exclusively for the purposes of this research. The study also ensured strict confidentiality in data handling, whereby the citation of sources is checked well to ensure that the cited information is reliable.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1. Case Study: Bar Ama Baro Program

The Bar ama Baro program has significantly improved literacy and numeracy skills among target beneficiaries, demonstrating the effectiveness of ABE. The story of Farah, a 12-year-old girl, is both captivating and deeply moving. In a narrative penned by Ali nor Osman, USAID Bar ama Baro staff member, Farah and her older brothers, living in dire poverty, had never imagined attending school. However, the Bar ama Baro project presented them with a chance to join thousands of other children facing similar challenges in pursuing education. Ali nor Osman described the pleasure when Farah, displaying a natural gift for education and an energy for the work of learning, planned to become a teacher one day for the purpose of educating underprivileged children in her country [2]. This experiential story suggests that success within a funded scheme has the potential to carry forward.

The education personnel interviews established that the project reached remote areas, providing many out-of-school children with superior education through better literacy, reading skills, materials, social-emotional learning, and teacher training, surpassing formal traditional education. Abdirahman Mohamed Hashi, a dedicated teacher at schools supported by USAID Bar ama Baro project in Barawe district, Somalia, emphasized the significance of continuous profes-

sional development for teachers through class coaching and enhanced in-service training conducted monthly during weekends and school holidays. Again, the benefits reach forward to ongoing improved teaching.

Hassan Ali Dalha, another teacher in the same point in Wanlaweyn district said that the positive outcome was evident in the improved interactions with Alternative Basic Education (ABE) students, as students actively participated in extra-curricular activities, including Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and their access to supplementary reading materials further enriched their educational experience.

Ms. Naima Mohamud Mohamed at Al-nureyni School in Barawe district firmly supported Alternative Basic Education as the most suitable approach for educating children and youth who may have missed timely educational opportunities or lacked appropriate grade and age alignments. These learners had the opportunity to catch up; showing that the program's contribution to restoring social equity, her endorsement reflects the program's effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of learners who require tailored educational pathways.

Interviewed education authorities also confirmed that the Bar ama Baro project had played a vital role in providing opportunities for out-of-school children in their respective districts or regions. Nur Abukar Nur, the District Education Officer (DEO) of Barawe, emphasized the importance of implementing Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in conflict areas. He highlighted how the Bar ama Baro program had enhanced the capabilities of local education officers, allowing them to eliminate obstacles and enroll many out-of-school children. He said that for the first time, the government has integrated ABE learners into education management information system (EMIS), ensuring better tracking and planning. These efforts have provided essential educational opportunities in Barawe and other districts, fostering a sustainable framework for long-term development. The DEO of Barawe district remarked that it was noteworthy that the Bar ama Baro program was included in the crisis modifier package during the 2022 drought to address the heightened educational needs resulting from displacement and the drought crisis.

4.2. Comparative Analysis

Drawing from the literature review and practical analysis, this section highlights the comparison between accelerated/Alternative Basic Education (ABE) and traditional formal education: ABE provides greater flexibility and adaptability, which are essential in post-conflict settings where traditional methods are often inadequate or have fallen apart. Cadis et al. (2023) note that the traditional education system has been criticized for its rigidity, lack of individualized instruction, and tendency to suppress creativity and critical thinking. Conversely, alternative education systems have emerged as innovative approaches, providing student-centered, experiential, and personalized learning. Proponents of alternative education highlight its capacity to enhance creativity, critical

thinking, and student motivation [5]. Considering technological advancements and evolving global conditions, an alternative education system is clearly beneficial. Patrick Werquin noted that recognizing non-formal and informal learning outcomes could benefit everyone, but many countries are particularly exploring this approach to help vulnerable groups who lack recognized skills and competencies, addressing their risk of social or professional exclusion [37].

5. Findings

5.1. Summary of Findings

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) plays a crucial role on closing educational gaps in post-conflict countries, providing flexible, learner-focused education for out-of-school children. In my research on the USAID Bar ama Baro Alternative Basic Education program, interviews were conducted with 200 education stakeholders, unveiling several significant findings. Firstly, a strong emphasis was placed on inclusive learning, ensuring that every child received quality education regardless of their background or circumstances. Secondly, the interviews identified various barriers faced by traditional schools, such as uniform requirements and monthly tuition fees, which the Bar ama Baro (BaB) program managed to eliminate to create a more accessible educational environment.

Alternative Basic Education programs (ABE) offer an effective solution to educational requirements and to improving learning outcomes for underserved societies by providing them with condensed, and concentrated instructions adapted to individual needs in post conflict settings. The USAID Bar ama Baro initiative was an effective solution for addressing educational challenges in post-conflict Somalia, with significant positive impacts observed in this program. In a short period of time, the Bar ama Baro program has provided ABE learning activities to over 100,000 boys and girls, enabling them access to quality education and compete with their peers in formal schools.

Community awareness also emerged as a key outcome, with targeted outreach efforts leading to increased local involvement in the educational process. Alongside community involvement and approval, flexibility in scheduling, age-appropriate curriculum development, and a focus on social-emotional learning activities were highlighted as key benefits of the program. The Bar ama Baro program made a significant advancement by integrating ABE learners in Somalia into the information management education system (EMIS) for the first time, thereby facilitating the continuation of their educational journey. Findings show that ABE is likely to be an ideal approach for other regions establishing education after crisis or conflict. Notably, external evaluation on students participating in the Bar ama Baro initiative's Alternative Basic Education (ABE) program demonstrated superior performance in literacy and numeracy compared to their peers in formal primary education over a span of two years.

5.2. Insights from Survey Responses of Education Personnel

A poll conducted with 30 head teachers and 40 teachers demonstrated overwhelming support for Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in emergency settings. This selective poll with five questions was distributed among 70 education personnel involved in the Bar ama Baro program. The questions used a Likert scale (1. totally agree, 2. agree, 3. totally disagree, 4. disagree, and 5. neither agree nor disagree). The Likert items analysis indicates strong consensus on the effectiveness of Alternative Basic Education (ABE).
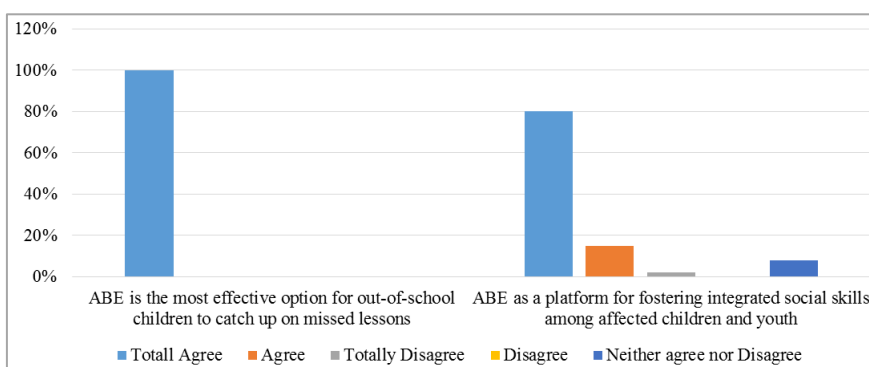

Figure 1. Shows respondents Perception on ABE effectiveness.

All respondents (100%) strongly agreed that ABE is the most effective option for out-of-school children to catch up on missed lessons, serves as a valuable tool for trauma healing among affected children, and acts as a means for inclusiveness, removing barriers to formal education. Additionally, a significant majority of 80% recognized ABE as a platform for fostering integrated social skills among affected children and youth, and as a simplified guide for skills development and job opportunities for crisis-affected youth.
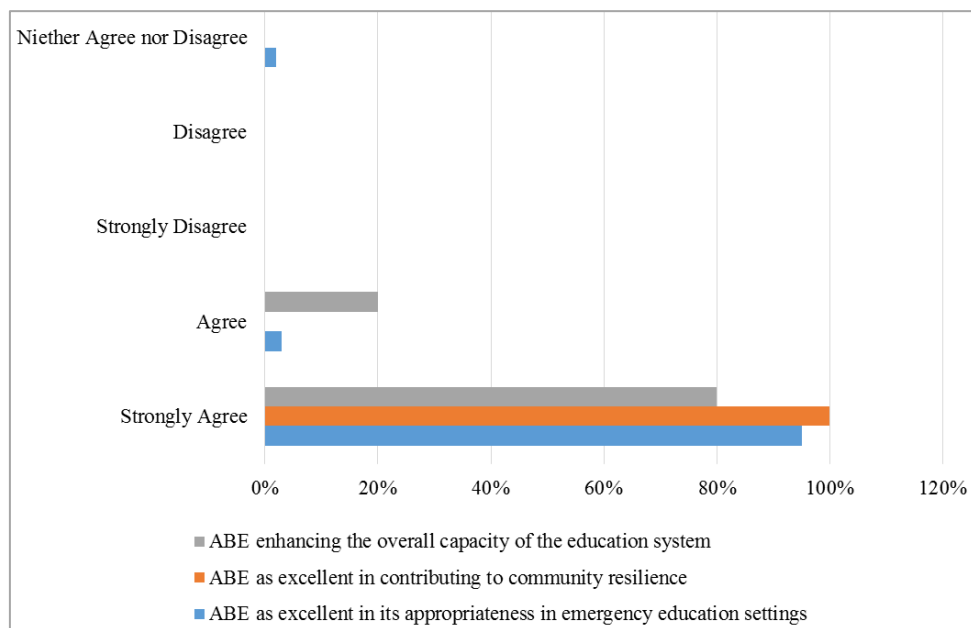
Figure 2. Illustrates rating results for questions to education personnel about benefits of Bar ama Baro.

The analysis of the 1-5 rating scale responses from 70 school-level respondents reveals a high level of endorsement for Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in emergency settings.

Notably, 95% of respondents rated ABE as excellent in its appropriateness for schooling out-of-school children, indicating a strong consensus on its effectiveness in addressing educational needs during emergencies. Furthermore, all respondents (100%) rated ABE as excellent in contributing to community resilience and risk mitigation, showcasing widespread recognition of its importance beyond education, particularly in fostering community resilience during crises.

Regarding strengthening the education system capacity, a significant majority (80%) rated ABE as excellent in this aspect, highlighting its role in enhancing the overall capacity of the education system to respond to emergencies and cater to the needs of marginalized populations.

However, it's worth noting that 20% of respondents rated ABE as fair in terms of strengthening education system capacity, suggesting some reservations or areas for improvement in this regard.

These findings underscore the multifaceted role of Alternative Basic Education (ABE) in addressing educational gaps, promoting social integration, and empowering youth for future economic resilience. The high achievement scores across various objectives of the Bar Ama Baro program highlight the comprehensive impact of ABE initiatives on vulnerable populations.

ABE programs are instrumental in bridging educational gaps, particularly for out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY). By providing flexible and accessible learning opportunities, ABE ensures that those who have missed out on formal education due to conflict, displacement, or socio-economic barriers can still receive a quality education.

The success of the Bar Ama Baro program in increasing enrollment and retention rates, as indicated by the high achievement scores, demonstrates ABE's effectiveness in reaching marginalized groups and addressing their unique educational needs.

5.3. Positive Achievements in USAID Bar Ama Baro Program: District-Level Survey Response

The analysis of feedback from 200 interviewees (99 females and 101 males) involved in the USAID Bar ama Baro program in Wanlaweyn and Barawe highlights significant positive achievements across all seven program objectives. The respondents included a diverse group: 40 teachers, 30 head teachers, 60 learners, 4 district education officers, 50 community education committee (CEC) members, and 16 parents.
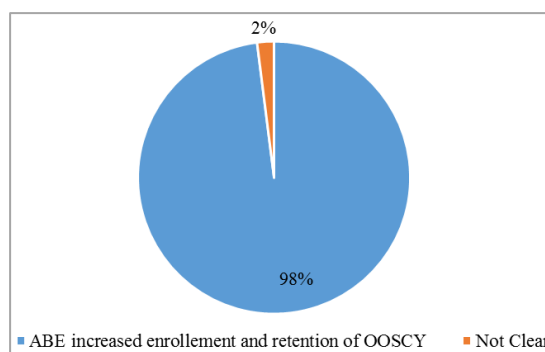

Figure 3. Depicts scoring of respondents about Bar ama Baro program increased enrollment and retention of OOSCY.

The first objective, aimed at increasing enrollment and retention of out-of-school children and youth (OOSCY) in Alternative education centers, received an impressive 98% achievement score.

Participants emphasized that the Bar Ama Baro program has achieved near-complete success in addressing the dual challenges of low enrollment and high dropout rates among the vulnerable population in the initiative's targeted areas.

The program's comprehensive approach, including community engagement, tailored educational strategies, and support mechanisms, has been instrumental in overcoming these challenges.

The second objective, focusing on improving learning outcomes through quality Alternative learning programs, achieved an 83% score.
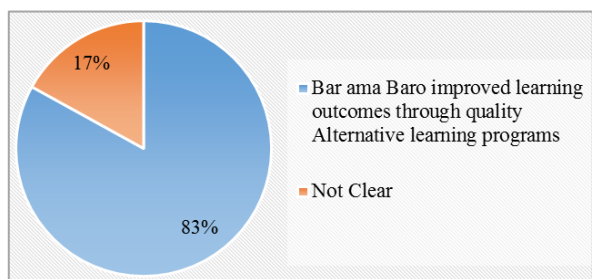
Figure 4*. Shows the extent that Bar ama Baro improved learning outcomes through quality Alternative learning programs.*

While slightly lower than Objective 1, this still signifies substantial progress in equipping out of school children and youth OOSCY with essential skills and knowledge. An 83% achievement score indicates that the majority of participants in these alternative learning programs have experienced significant improvements in their educational outcomes. The

programs have likely introduced effective teaching methodologies, relevant curricula, and supportive learning environments that have contributed to better learning experiences for OOSCY.

Objective 3, which aimed to raise awareness, acceptance, and demand for Alternative education among OOSCY and communities, received a commendable 91% achievement score.
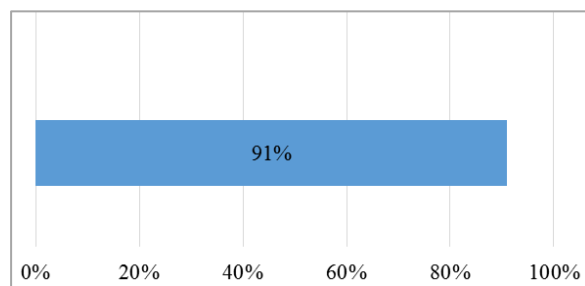

Figure 5*. Illustrates that Bar ama Baro raised awareness, acceptance, and demand for alternative education among out of school children and youth and communities.*

Through various outreach and advocacy initiatives, the program likely utilized strategies such as community meetings, informational campaigns, and partnerships with local leaders and organizations. These efforts helped to shift perceptions and increase the acceptance of Alternative Education as a viable and beneficial option for OOSCY. The high score suggests that a significant portion of the targeted communities now recognize the importance of education and are more supportive of sending their children to Alternative Education Centers.

The fourth objective, targeting the promotion of inclusive, safe, and gender-responsive learning environments within Alternative education centers, garnered an 85% score.
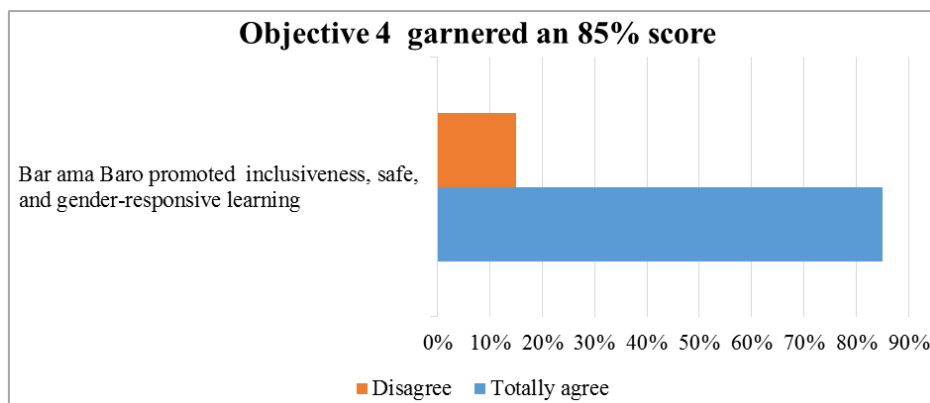

Figure 6*. Illustrates that Bar ama Baro promoted inclusiveness, safety, and gender-responsive learning environments within Alternative education centers of the program.*

The 85% score signifies that while there is room for improvement, the Bar Ama Baro program has made considera-

ble strides in transforming Alternative Education Centers into environments where every child feels safe, included, and

respected. These efforts are vital for creating a supportive educational atmosphere that encourages learning and development. This progress is crucial for ensuring that all students, particularly those from vulnerable and marginalized communities, have the opportunity to receive a quality education in a supportive and empowering setting.

Objective 5, which aimed to strengthen the capacity of district education offices and communities to manage Alternative education programs, achieved a high score of 90%. Facilitating collaboration and networking among different district education offices and communities would have been a key strategy.
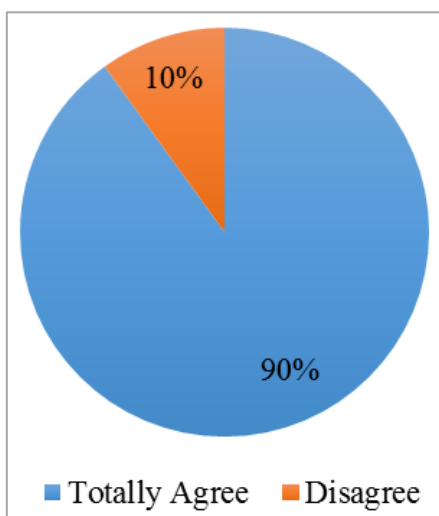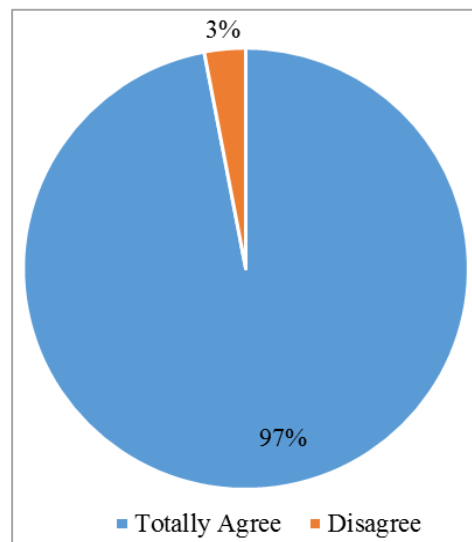

Figure 7. Shows that Bar ama Baro program strengthened the capacity of district education offices and communities to manage Alternative education programs.

By sharing best practices, challenges, and solutions, districts and communities can learn from each other and enhance their collective capacity to manage and sustain Alternative Education programs.

The achievement of a 90% score for Objective 5 reflects the Bar Ama Baro program's success in building the capacity of district education officers and communities to effectively manage and sustain Alternative Education programs. This progress is essential for creating a robust and resilient educational infrastructure that can adapt to the needs of out-of-school children and youth, ensuring that these programs continue to thrive and make a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable populations.

The sixth objective, focused on mobilizing out-of-school youth to participate in Alternative learning programs, received an impressive 97% score. The respondents indicated that through targeted outreach, community engagement, supportive services, and youth-centric approaches, the program has made significant strides in providing educational opportunities to a previously underserved population, paving the way for their future success and development.

Figure 8. Indicates that Bar ama Baro played vital role on mobilizing out-of-school youth to participate in Alternative learning programs.

The impressive 97% score for this objective indicates that the Bar Ama Baro program was highly successful in its efforts to mobilize out-of-school youth. This success is crucial for ensuring that these young people have access to education and the opportunities it provides, helping to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization.

Finally, Objective 7, which aimed to enhance the capacities of learning facilitators through training and support, received a perfect score of 100%.
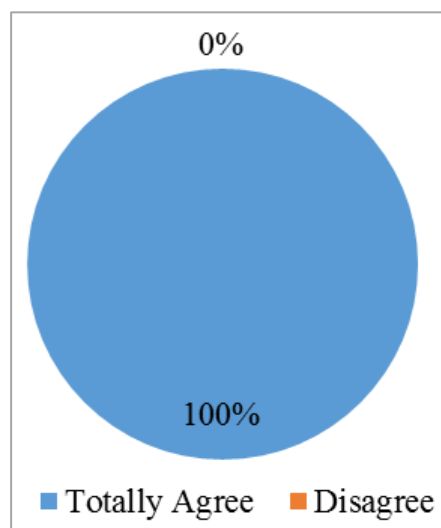
Figure 9. Shows that Bar ama Baro enhanced the capacities of learning facilitators through training and support.

The questionnaire respondents for the study reflect the Bar Ama Baro program's outstanding success in providing comprehensive training and support to learning facilitators.

They indicate that through well-designed training programs, continuous professional development, personalized mentorship, resource provision, and strong support networks, the program has ensured that facilitators are fully equipped to deliver effective, inclusive, and responsive education. This, in turn, contributes significantly to the program's overall mission of improving educational access and quality for out-of-school children and youth.

Overall, the feedback from the 200 respondents highlights the USAID Bar ama Baro program's considerable success in achieving its objectives, with particularly high scores in enrollment and retention, community engagement, and facilitator training. These results underscore the program's effectiveness in addressing educational challenges in post-conflict settings.

6. Conclusion and Contributions

6.1. Conclusion

The research behind this article is set in Somalia, an excellent case study for those who are also working in zones where children's education has been disrupted by political strife, climate disaster and poverty. Somalia's prolonged conflict crisis, acerbated by climate change issues, have prevented many displaced and impoverished children from receiving basic education at the appropriate age. That leaves them likely to be trapped in poverty in the future. A high lack of literacy leaves the country facing a gloomy future too. The situation in Somalia necessitated finding strategies to educate these children to improve their lives and prevent further deterioration. What we learned from our solutions is likely to be helpful elsewhere.

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) is an educational approach designed to teach out-of-school children and youth to recover from learning gaps and acquire essential learning skills they missed due to a lack of proper schooling. This article integrates a literature review with the study's research findings from 200 participants' firsthand accounts reporting how they directly benefited from Alternative Basic Education in specific contexts. This approach of reaching direct beneficiaries provides a unique perspective that showcases the practical impact and effectiveness of Alternative Basic Education in reforming educational practices during challenging circumstances. My review of literature and interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders of the USAID Bar ama Baro program highlight ABE's significant impact on community resilience and youth life skills development in emergency situations. ABE removes barriers to education, so that children in emergency situations have fair access to learning. When educationalists must find ways to repair broken systems and disrupted lives, ABE is a strong option.

I have observed that Alternative Basic Education ensures the continuity of education during emergencies, preventing extended disruptions and helping children retain a sense of normalcy. According to interviewees, ABE eliminates educational barriers, providing all children, regardless of their circumstances, with the opportunity to learn and grow.

Importantly, educationalists bringing in ABE need to ensure buy-in from their communities. My research respondents emphasized that the USAID Bar ama Baro program enhanced resilience by involving communities in educational activities and reinforcing local networks and support systems. They specifically noted the incorporation of the crisis modifier package during the program's implementation. According to Reliefweb (2020), crisis modifiers can speed up response efforts, ensure adequate coverage of smaller shocks, and safeguard development gains [32].

To successfully implement and assess main advantages of ABE, it necessitates collaboration among governments, educational support organizations, researchers, and other stakeholders. Within this community collaboration, children are likely to do more than resume work on literacy. Prominent papers reviewed for this study explain that ABE programs frequently include components that teach children and youth essential life skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional resilience.

At the level of the personal learner, Alternative Basic Education (ABE) accommodates those whose educational level surpasses what formal education can offer. It provides an accelerated curriculum to help children catch up on missed education due to crises, bridging educational gaps caused by interruptions. Enabling strong learners to progress even during crisis situations makes a good way to provide intellectual leadership in the country's future.

These strategic findings demonstrate that ABE not only addresses immediate educational needs but also supports the long-term recovery and stability of crisis-affected communities. This makes ABE particularly relevant in crisis regions with educational gaps, such as Somalia.

6.2. Contributions

6.2.1. Contributions to the Field

While this paper outlines a significant impact, displays success stories, and discusses implications provided by alternative basic education, there is still research gap that needs further exploration into the challenges encountered during the implementation of this teaching approach. The paper offers valuable insights into the practical implementation of Alternative Basic Education (ABE), enriching the broader understanding of education in emergency contexts. It also emphasizes how children and young people can utilize flexible learning methods to bridge the educational gaps caused by crises.

6.2.2. Future Research Directions

Further research is recommended to assess the long-term impact of Alternative Basic Education on educational im-

provement in countries recovering from crisis and conflict, particularly in Somalia. This research is essential to identify the most effective strategies for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of quality education in post-conflict contexts.

Abbreviations

ABE	Accelerated Basic Education
BAB	Bar Ama Baro
CWPM	Correct Words Per Minute
ECCN	Education in Crisis and Conflict Network
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
FENPS	Formal Education Network for Private Schools
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
IIEP	International Institute for Educational
UNESCO	Planning of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UWEZO	Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans

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Disclaimer

The perspectives and interpretations presented in this paper are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of the affiliated organization or any other individual. The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to this paper.

Author Contributions

Abdikadir Issa Farah is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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