

# Administrative Dimensions of Equitable Free Education: A Systematic Review of Literature in Fragile and Post-Conflict Contexts

Simon Nyok Deng<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Public Administration, School of Business and Management, University of Juba, South Sudan

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0585-115X>

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15812485

**Published:** 05 July 2025 **Received:** 09 Jan 2025 **Accepted:** 17 May 2025

**Corresponding Author:** Simon Nyok Deng [simondeng95@gmail.com](mailto:simondeng95@gmail.com)

---

## Abstract

This systematic review examines the administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, synthesizing literature published between 2010 and 2023. The review employs a rigorous methodological framework to identify, appraise, and synthesize relevant research on educational governance, financing, human resource management, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation in environments affected by conflict and fragility. Following the PRISMA guidelines, a comprehensive search strategy was implemented across multiple databases, yielding a final selection of studies that met strict inclusion criteria. The thematic analysis reveals that educational administration in fragile contexts faces unique challenges including governance discontinuities, financing volatility, human resource constraints, data limitations, community engagement barriers, and implementation gaps. The findings indicate that successful administrative approaches typically involve context-sensitive governance structures, predictable and transparent financing mechanisms, strategic human resource development, robust yet flexible data systems, meaningful community participation, and adaptive implementation strategies. This review contributes to the understanding of how administrative systems can be designed and strengthened to support equitable education provision in challenging environments, offering evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, donors, and practitioners working in fragile and post-conflict settings. The synthesis highlights the need for further research on sustainable administrative models that can effectively bridge humanitarian and development approaches to education in protracted crises.

**Keywords:** *educational administration, fragile states, post-conflict education, governance, financing, human resources, data systems, community participation, policy implementation, equity*

## Background of the Study

Education stands as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of development, yet in fragile and post-conflict contexts, the provision of equitable and quality education faces extraordinary challenges. The administrative dimensions that underpin educational systems—governance structures, financing mechanisms, human resource management, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation—become particularly strained in environments characterized by instability, violence, and institutional weakness. This systematic review examines these administrative dimensions through a comprehensive analysis of literature published between 2010 and 2023, seeking to identify patterns, challenges, and promising practices that can inform more effective approaches to educational administration in fragile contexts.

The global landscape of fragility and conflict presents a sobering reality for educational systems. According to recent estimates, approximately 222 million children and youth affected by crises and emergencies require educational support (INEE Working Group, n.d.). These contexts are characterized by what the

World Bank terms “fragility traps”—cycles of weak institutions, poor governance, and recurring violence that undermine development efforts, including those in the education sector (IDEAS, 2021). The administrative architecture of education systems in such environments must contend with multiple, often competing pressures: addressing immediate humanitarian needs while building foundations for long-term development; balancing centralized control with local responsiveness; and navigating complex relationships between state authorities, international actors, and communities.

The concept of fragility itself has evolved in scholarly and policy discourse. Earlier definitions focused primarily on state capacity and willingness to provide basic services, including education. More recent conceptualizations recognize fragility as multidimensional, encompassing economic, environmental, political, security, and societal dimensions (ERIC, n.d.). This broader understanding acknowledges that fragility exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary state, with implications for how educational administration is conceptualized and implemented across different contexts. Similarly, the notion of “post-conflict” has been problematized in the literature, with scholars noting that the transition from conflict to peace is rarely linear, often characterized by ongoing tensions, sporadic violence, and institutional fragility (Coelho & da Silva, 2025).

The administrative dimensions of education in these contexts have received increasing attention in both scholarly and policy literature. This attention reflects growing recognition that while pedagogical approaches and curriculum content are crucial, the administrative systems that enable education delivery are equally vital to ensuring equitable access, quality, and sustainability. As Skuse et al. (2013) argue, the effectiveness of educational interventions in fragile states depends significantly on the administrative architecture that supports them—from national-level governance structures to school-level management practices.

The focus on administrative dimensions also aligns with broader shifts in international development approaches to education in fragile contexts. The traditional humanitarian-development divide, which often separated short-term educational responses from longer-term system building, has increasingly given way to more integrated approaches that recognize the need for administrative continuity across different phases of fragility and recovery (IDEAS, 2021). Similarly, there has been growing emphasis on the role of education in contributing to peacebuilding and state-building processes, with administrative systems seen as critical to establishing state legitimacy and fostering social cohesion (INEE Working Group, n.d.).

Despite this increased attention, significant gaps remain in our understanding of how educational administration functions in fragile and post-conflict contexts, and how it can be strengthened to support more equitable and effective education provision. The existing literature is fragmented across different disciplinary perspectives, geographical contexts, and methodological approaches. Comprehensive syntheses that bring together these diverse strands of research are relatively rare, limiting the ability of policymakers and practitioners to draw on evidence-based insights when designing and implementing administrative reforms.

This systematic review addresses this gap by providing a structured analysis of the literature on administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. By synthesizing findings across multiple studies and contexts, it aims to identify patterns, challenges, and promising practices that can inform more effective approaches to educational administration in these challenging environments. In doing so, it contributes to both scholarly understanding and practical application in a field of critical importance to millions of children and youth affected by fragility and conflict.

## **Problem Statement**

The administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts present a complex set of challenges that significantly impact equitable access to quality education. Despite substantial investments by governments, international organizations, and non-governmental entities, administrative systems in

these contexts often struggle to effectively support educational provision, resulting in persistent inequities, inefficiencies, and implementation gaps. The problem is multifaceted, encompassing governance discontinuities, financing volatility, human resource constraints, data limitations, community engagement barriers, and implementation challenges.

Governance structures in fragile contexts frequently suffer from weak institutional capacity, coordination challenges between multiple actors, and tensions between centralized and decentralized approaches (Coelho & da Silva, 2025). These governance challenges are compounded by the presence of multiple authorities—state, non-state, and international—often operating with different mandates, timeframes, and accountability mechanisms. The resulting fragmentation undermines coherent policy development and implementation, creating confusion and inefficiency in educational administration.

Financing mechanisms present another critical dimension of the problem. Education systems in fragile contexts typically face severe resource constraints, exacerbated by volatile and unpredictable funding flows (IDEAS, 2021). The coexistence of multiple funding streams—humanitarian, development, and domestic—creates coordination challenges and can lead to short-term, project-based approaches rather than sustainable system building. Financial management systems are often weak, limiting transparency and accountability in resource allocation and utilization.

Human resource management constitutes a third problematic dimension. Fragile contexts frequently experience severe shortages of qualified educational administrators and teachers, with significant disparities in deployment between urban and rural or conflict-affected areas (INEE Working Group, n.d.). Professional development opportunities are limited, and administrative capacity at different levels of the system is often inadequate to support effective education delivery. Salary payment systems may be disrupted, leading to absenteeism, moonlighting, and attrition among educational personnel.

Data systems and evidence-based planning represent a fourth area of concern. Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) in fragile contexts are typically weak or non-existent, hampering evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation (Skuse et al., 2013). Data collection is challenging due to security concerns, population displacement, and infrastructure limitations, resulting in significant information gaps, particularly regarding marginalized populations. Multiple parallel data systems often exist, with limited coordination or interoperability.

Community participation and accountability mechanisms constitute a fifth problematic dimension. While community involvement is widely recognized as essential for effective educational administration, meaningful participation is often constrained by security concerns, capacity limitations, and power imbalances (ERIC, n.d.). Accountability relationships between communities, schools, and higher administrative levels are frequently weak, limiting the responsiveness of educational systems to local needs and priorities.

Finally, policy implementation presents pervasive challenges. The gap between policy formulation and implementation is particularly wide in fragile contexts, where limited administrative capacity, resource constraints, and security concerns impede effective execution (IDEAS, 2021). Policies developed at central levels may fail to account for local realities, while decentralized initiatives may lack coherence with national frameworks. Political instability and turnover disrupt policy continuity, undermining long-term reform efforts.

These interrelated problems significantly impact the equity and effectiveness of education provision in fragile and post-conflict contexts. Children and youth in these environments—already among the most vulnerable globally—face additional barriers to accessing quality education due to administrative weaknesses. Understanding these administrative dimensions and identifying promising approaches to addressing them is therefore crucial for improving educational outcomes in fragile contexts.

Despite the importance of this issue, there has been limited systematic analysis of the administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. Existing research tends to focus on specific aspects of administration (e.g., financing or governance) or particular geographical contexts, with few comprehensive syntheses that bring together diverse strands of evidence. This systematic review addresses this gap by providing a structured analysis of the literature on administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, synthesizing findings across multiple studies and contexts to inform more effective approaches to educational administration in these challenging environments.

### **Purpose and Objectives of the Study**

The purpose of this systematic review is to comprehensively analyze and synthesize the existing literature on administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, published between 2010 and 2023. By examining governance structures, financing mechanisms, human resource management, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation, this review aims to identify patterns, challenges, and promising practices that can inform more effective approaches to educational administration in these challenging environments.

The specific objectives of this systematic review are:

1. To systematically identify, appraise, and synthesize research on administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, following established methodological frameworks for systematic reviews.
2. To analyze governance structures and policy frameworks in fragile educational systems, examining the relationships between centralized and decentralized approaches, the roles of different actors, and the effectiveness of various governance models in supporting equitable education.
3. To investigate budgeting, financing, and resource allocation mechanisms in fragile contexts, including funding flows, financial management systems, and approaches to ensuring equitable resource distribution.
4. To examine human resource management practices in fragile educational systems, including recruitment, deployment, professional development, and retention of educational administrators and teachers.
5. To assess the development and utilization of data systems for evidence-based planning in fragile contexts, analyzing approaches to data collection, management, analysis, and utilization in decision-making processes.
6. To explore community participation and accountability mechanisms in educational administration, examining models of community involvement, power dynamics, and feedback loops between communities and authorities.
7. To identify common policy implementation challenges in fragile contexts and analyze strategies for bridging the gap between policy formulation and effective execution.
8. To synthesize findings across these dimensions to develop a comprehensive understanding of how administrative systems can be designed and strengthened to support equitable education provision in fragile and post-conflict contexts.
9. To formulate evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, donors, and practitioners working on educational administration in fragile and post-conflict settings.

Through these objectives, the systematic review seeks to contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical application in a field of critical importance to millions of children and youth affected by fragility and conflict. By synthesizing diverse strands of research and identifying patterns across different contexts, it aims to provide a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of educational administration in fragile environments than is available in individual studies or narrower reviews.

### **Research Questions**

This systematic review is guided by the following research questions, designed to address the administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts:

1. What governance structures and policy frameworks have been implemented in fragile and post-conflict educational systems, and how do these structures influence equity, effectiveness, and sustainability?
2. How are budgeting, financing, and resource allocation mechanisms designed and implemented in fragile contexts, and what approaches have proven effective in ensuring equitable distribution of educational resources?
3. What human resource management practices are employed in fragile educational systems, and how do these practices address challenges related to recruitment, deployment, professional development, and retention of educational personnel?
4. How are data systems developed and utilized for evidence-based planning in fragile contexts, and what approaches have been effective in overcoming data collection and utilization challenges?
5. What community participation and accountability mechanisms are implemented in fragile educational systems, and how do these mechanisms influence administrative responsiveness and educational outcomes?
6. What are the primary policy implementation challenges in fragile contexts, and what strategies have been effective in bridging the gap between policy formulation and execution?
7. What patterns, commonalities, and divergences emerge across different fragile and post-conflict contexts regarding administrative approaches to education provision?
8. What evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of different administrative approaches in supporting equitable access to quality education in fragile and post-conflict environments?

These research questions provide a structured framework for the systematic review, guiding the literature search, data extraction, analysis, and synthesis processes. They are designed to be comprehensive, covering the major administrative dimensions identified in the literature while remaining focused on the specific context of fragile and post-conflict environments. The questions also reflect the review's emphasis on equity, recognizing that administrative systems significantly influence who has access to education and of what quality.

### **Significance of the Study**

This systematic review holds significant importance for multiple stakeholders involved in education provision in fragile and post-conflict contexts, including policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and communities affected by fragility and conflict. Its significance can be understood across several dimensions: theoretical, practical, methodological, and policy-related.

From a theoretical perspective, this review contributes to the evolving conceptual understanding of educational administration in fragile contexts. By synthesizing diverse strands of research, it helps to identify patterns, relationships, and theoretical frameworks that can explain how administrative systems function under conditions of fragility and conflict. This theoretical contribution is particularly important given the complex, multidimensional nature of educational administration and the unique challenges presented by fragile environments. The review helps to bridge theoretical divides between fields such as educational administration, conflict studies, development economics, and public management, offering a more integrated conceptual framework for understanding administrative dimensions of education in challenging contexts.

Practically, this systematic review provides valuable insights for practitioners working on educational administration in fragile and post-conflict settings. By identifying promising practices, common challenges, and contextual factors that influence administrative effectiveness, it offers evidence-based guidance for designing and implementing administrative systems that can support equitable education provision. This practical significance extends to various levels of educational administration, from national ministries to

district offices to school-level management, providing relevant insights for administrators working across the system. The review's emphasis on equity ensures that practical implications are considered not just in terms of efficiency or effectiveness, but also in terms of how administrative systems can address disparities and support the most marginalized learners.

Methodologically, this systematic review demonstrates the value of rigorous, transparent approaches to synthesizing research on complex educational issues. By following established methodological frameworks for systematic reviews, it provides a model for how diverse literature can be systematically identified, appraised, and synthesized to inform evidence-based decision-making. This methodological contribution is particularly important in the field of education in fragile contexts, where research is often fragmented across different disciplinary perspectives, geographical contexts, and methodological approaches. The review's methodological transparency also allows for replication and updating as new research emerges, contributing to cumulative knowledge building in this field.

From a policy perspective, this systematic review offers evidence-based insights that can inform policy development and implementation at various levels. For national governments in fragile and post-conflict contexts, it provides guidance on designing administrative systems that can effectively support educational provision under challenging circumstances. For international organizations and donors, it offers insights into how external support can strengthen rather than undermine local administrative capacity. For non-governmental organizations and civil society actors, it highlights potential roles in supporting and complementing formal administrative structures. The review's comprehensive approach, examining multiple administrative dimensions, helps to inform integrated policy approaches that address the interconnected nature of administrative challenges in fragile contexts.

Additionally, this systematic review addresses significant gaps in the existing literature. While there has been substantial research on specific aspects of educational administration in fragile contexts, comprehensive syntheses that bring together these diverse strands are relatively rare. By providing such a synthesis, this review contributes to a more holistic understanding of how different administrative dimensions interact and influence educational outcomes in fragile environments. It also helps to identify areas where evidence is strong and where further research is needed, guiding future scholarly inquiry in this field.

Finally, the timing of this systematic review is particularly significant given the increasing global attention to education in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. With international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals emphasizing the importance of inclusive, equitable education for all, and with growing recognition of the role of education in contributing to peace and stability, there is heightened interest in understanding how administrative systems can be strengthened to support these broader goals. This systematic review provides timely evidence to inform these global discussions and initiatives, contributing to more effective approaches to educational administration in some of the world's most challenging environments.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This systematic review focuses specifically on the administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, examining literature published between 2010 and 2023. The temporal scope reflects the need to capture recent developments in this rapidly evolving field while ensuring a manageable volume of literature for thorough analysis. The starting point of 2010 coincides with significant developments in international frameworks for education in emergencies, including the consolidation of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards and increased global attention to education in fragile contexts following the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals mid-term reviews.

The review encompasses six key administrative dimensions: governance structures and policy frameworks; budgeting, financing, and resource allocation; human resource management; data systems and evidence-based planning; community participation and accountability mechanisms; and policy implementation challenges. These dimensions were selected based on preliminary scoping of the literature, which indicated their prominence in discussions of educational administration in fragile contexts. While recognizing that these dimensions are interconnected and overlapping, this categorization provides a structured framework for analysis while allowing for examination of relationships between different administrative aspects.

Geographically, the review includes literature addressing fragile and post-conflict contexts globally, rather than focusing on specific regions or countries. This broad geographical scope enables identification of patterns, commonalities, and divergences across different contexts, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of administrative dimensions in diverse fragile environments. However, the review acknowledges the importance of contextual factors and avoids overgeneralizing findings across fundamentally different settings.

The review focuses primarily on formal education systems at primary and secondary levels, while recognizing that administrative dimensions also affect early childhood, higher, and non-formal education. This focus reflects both the predominance of literature on basic education in fragile contexts and the particular importance of primary and secondary education for establishing foundations of learning and development. Where relevant, insights from other educational levels are incorporated, particularly when they have significant implications for administrative approaches at primary and secondary levels.

In terms of methodological approach, the review includes empirical studies using various methodologies (quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods), as well as theoretical papers, policy analyses, and grey literature from reputable organizations working in this field. This methodological inclusiveness reflects the diverse nature of research on educational administration in fragile contexts and the importance of capturing insights from different epistemological perspectives. However, all included literature is subject to quality assessment using appropriate methodological criteria, ensuring that the review's findings are based on robust evidence.

Several important delimitations should be noted. First, while the review acknowledges the crucial importance of pedagogical approaches, curriculum content, and learning outcomes in fragile contexts, it focuses specifically on administrative dimensions rather than classroom-level educational processes. Second, although the review recognizes the interconnections between education and other sectors (health, protection, livelihoods, etc.) in fragile contexts, it maintains a primary focus on educational administration rather than broader intersectoral coordination. Third, while the review includes literature on the role of various actors in educational administration (state, non-state, international), it does not provide comprehensive analysis of specific organizations or initiatives except where they offer significant insights into administrative dimensions.

These scope parameters and delimitations are designed to ensure that the systematic review remains focused and manageable while providing comprehensive analysis of administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. By clearly defining what is included and excluded, the review establishes transparent boundaries for its findings and recommendations, acknowledging both its contributions and limitations.

## Methodology of the Systematic Review

### Study Design

This systematic review follows a rigorous methodological framework to identify, appraise, and synthesize research on administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. The review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, which provide a structured approach to ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigor in systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2015). The PRISMA framework was selected for its comprehensive coverage of key methodological elements, including search strategy, screening procedures, quality assessment, and synthesis methods.

The systematic review methodology is particularly appropriate for this topic given the diverse and fragmented nature of research on educational administration in fragile contexts. By employing a systematic approach, this review aims to minimize bias, provide a comprehensive overview of existing evidence, identify patterns across different studies and contexts, and highlight both consistencies and contradictions in the literature. This methodological rigor enhances the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a solid foundation for evidence-based recommendations.

The review adopts a mixed-methods approach to synthesis, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative evidence. This methodological inclusiveness reflects the diverse nature of research on educational administration in fragile contexts, which spans multiple disciplinary perspectives and employs various research designs. By including different types of evidence, the review provides a more comprehensive understanding of administrative dimensions than would be possible through a more narrowly defined methodological approach.

The study design includes several key phases: protocol development, literature search, screening and selection, quality assessment, data extraction, synthesis, and reporting. Each phase was conducted according to pre-defined procedures to ensure methodological consistency and minimize bias. The protocol was developed based on preliminary scoping of the literature and consultation with experts in educational administration and systematic review methodology. This protocol guided all subsequent phases of the review, although minor adjustments were made as needed to address emerging challenges or opportunities.

The review's conceptual framework is organized around six key administrative dimensions: governance structures and policy frameworks; budgeting, financing, and resource allocation; human resource management; data systems and evidence-based planning; community participation and accountability mechanisms; and policy implementation challenges. This framework was developed based on preliminary scoping of the literature and provides a structured approach to analyzing and synthesizing findings across different studies and contexts. While recognizing that these dimensions are interconnected and overlapping, this categorization enables systematic analysis of specific administrative aspects while allowing for examination of relationships between different dimensions.

### Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for this systematic review were carefully defined to ensure that the selected literature directly addresses the research questions while maintaining a manageable scope for thorough analysis. These criteria were applied consistently throughout the screening and selection process, with any uncertainties resolved through discussion and consensus among the review team.



**Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Matrix**

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Period	Published between January 2010 and December 2023	Published before 2010 or after 2023
Language	English	Non-English publications
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters, conference proceedings, dissertations and theses, technical reports, policy papers, and evaluation reports from reputable organizations	News articles, opinion pieces, blog posts, and other non-scholarly or non-technical publications
Study Focus	Primary focus on one or more administrative dimensions of education (governance, financing, human resources, data systems, community participation, policy implementation)	Focus solely on pedagogical approaches, curriculum content, or learning outcomes without substantial discussion of administrative dimensions
Context	Fragile, conflict-affected, or post-conflict settings, clearly identified as such	Stable contexts without significant fragility or conflict; studies where the context is not clearly described
Educational Level	Primary and secondary formal education systems	Studies focusing exclusively on early childhood, higher, or non-formal education without implications for primary/secondary administration
Study Design	Empirical studies (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods), theoretical papers with substantial conceptual contribution, policy analyses, systematic reviews	Purely descriptive accounts without analytical framework; publications without clear methodology or evidence base
Relevance	Clear relevance to administrative dimensions of equitable education provision	Tangential or minimal relevance to administrative dimensions

The publication period criterion (2010-2023) was established to ensure that the review captures recent developments in this rapidly evolving field while maintaining a manageable volume of literature for thorough analysis. The starting point of 2010 coincides with significant developments in international frameworks for education in emergencies, including the consolidation of the INEE Minimum Standards and increased global attention to education in fragile contexts following the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals mid-term reviews.

The language criterion (English only) represents a limitation of the review, potentially excluding relevant literature published in other languages. This limitation is acknowledged in the discussion of the review's findings. Future reviews might consider including literature in other major languages to provide a more comprehensive global perspective.

The publication type criterion includes a range of scholarly and technical publications to capture diverse perspectives and evidence types. While peer-reviewed journal articles form the core of the included literature, the review also recognizes the value of grey literature from reputable organizations working in this field, particularly given the practical and policy-oriented nature of much research on educational administration in fragile contexts.

The study focus criterion ensures that included literature directly addresses one or more administrative dimensions of education, as defined in the conceptual framework. While recognizing the importance of

pedagogical approaches, curriculum content, and learning outcomes, the review maintains its focus on administrative dimensions to provide depth of analysis in this specific area.

The context criterion is central to the review's purpose, ensuring that included literature specifically addresses fragile, conflict-affected, or post-conflict settings. Studies were required to clearly identify and describe the context in terms of fragility or conflict, rather than simply mentioning challenging circumstances in general terms.

The educational level criterion focuses the review on primary and secondary formal education systems, while allowing for inclusion of studies addressing other educational levels if they have significant implications for primary/secondary administration. This focus reflects both the predominance of literature on basic education in fragile contexts and the particular importance of primary and secondary education for establishing foundations of learning and development.

The study design criterion ensures that included literature provides substantive evidence or conceptual contribution rather than merely descriptive accounts. This criterion was applied with sensitivity to different methodological traditions and evidence types, recognizing the value of diverse approaches to understanding complex administrative issues in fragile contexts.

The relevance criterion provides an overall assessment of each publication's contribution to addressing the review's research questions. This criterion was particularly important for borderline cases where other criteria were partially met but the overall relevance to administrative dimensions needed to be carefully evaluated.

These eligibility criteria were applied in a two-stage screening process: initial screening based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening of potentially eligible publications. The application of these criteria resulted in a final selection of studies that directly address administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, providing a solid foundation for synthesis and analysis.

### **Search Strategy**

A comprehensive search strategy was developed to identify relevant literature addressing administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. The search strategy was designed to be both sensitive (capturing a wide range of potentially relevant publications) and specific (focusing on the intersection of educational administration and fragile contexts). The strategy was developed in consultation with an information specialist and refined through preliminary testing to ensure optimal balance between comprehensiveness and precision.

The search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, covering education, social sciences, international development, and multidisciplinary sources. The following databases were included:

- Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
- Education Source
- Academic Search Complete
- Social Sciences Citation Index (Web of Science)
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
- Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)
- Scopus
- ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global

In addition to these academic databases, the search included specialized repositories and websites of organizations working on education in fragile contexts:

- Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Resource Database

- UNESCO Education Knowledge Repository
- World Bank Open Knowledge Repository
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
- Education Development Trust Research Archive
- Save the Children Resource Centre
- International Rescue Committee Research and Resources
- NORRAG (Network for International Policies and Cooperation in Education and Training)

**Table 2: Database Search Strategy with Keywords**

Concept	Keywords and Search Terms	Boolean Operators
Education	education OR school* OR learning OR teaching OR “education system*” OR “education sector” OR “education administration” OR “educational management” OR “school administration” OR “ministry of education”	OR within concept
Administrative Dimensions	governance OR administration OR management OR financing OR funding OR “resource allocation” OR budget* OR “human resource” OR “teacher deployment” OR “data system” OR “information system” OR “community participation” OR “school committee” OR “policy implementation” OR “education planning”	OR within concept
Fragile Contexts	fragile OR conflict OR “post-conflict” OR war OR violence OR crisis OR emergency OR “humanitarian setting” OR “complex emergency” OR “instability” OR “state fragility” OR “fragile state” OR “conflict-affected” OR “affected by conflict” OR “conflict-sensitive”	OR within concept
Combined Search	(Education) AND (Administrative Dimensions) AND (Fragile Contexts)	AND between concepts

The search terms within each concept were combined using the Boolean operator “OR” to capture various expressions and terminology, while the three concepts were combined using the Boolean operator “AND” to focus on their intersection. Truncation symbols (e.g., school\* to capture school, schools, schooling) and phrase searching (e.g., “education system\*”) were used to enhance search precision and recall. The search strategy was adapted as needed for different databases, taking into account their specific indexing systems and search functionalities.

The search was limited to publications from January 2010 to December 2023, in accordance with the eligibility criteria. Where database functionality allowed, the search was also limited to English language publications. No geographical limitations were applied in the search strategy, allowing for identification of relevant literature from diverse fragile and post-conflict contexts globally.

In addition to the systematic database search, several complementary search methods were employed to ensure comprehensive coverage:

1. **Reference list checking:** The reference lists of included studies and relevant systematic reviews were examined to identify additional publications that might meet the eligibility criteria.
2. **Citation searching:** Forward citation searching was conducted for key publications to identify more recent studies that cite these works.
3. **Expert consultation:** Experts in educational administration in fragile contexts were consulted to identify relevant publications that might not have been captured through database searching.

4. **Grey literature search:** A structured search of grey literature sources was conducted, focusing on publications from reputable organizations working on education in fragile contexts.

The search results from all sources were imported into EndNote reference management software, where duplicates were removed. The remaining unique records were then exported to Covidence systematic review software for the screening and selection process.

The search strategy yielded a total of 3,247 records after duplicate removal. These records underwent initial screening based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening of potentially eligible publications. The search and selection process is fully documented in the PRISMA flow diagram presented in Appendix A.

### Data Extraction and Coding

Following the selection of studies meeting the eligibility criteria, a systematic data extraction and coding process was implemented to organize and analyze the information contained in the included literature. This process was guided by a comprehensive data extraction template designed to capture relevant information across multiple dimensions, ensuring consistent and thorough extraction across all included studies.

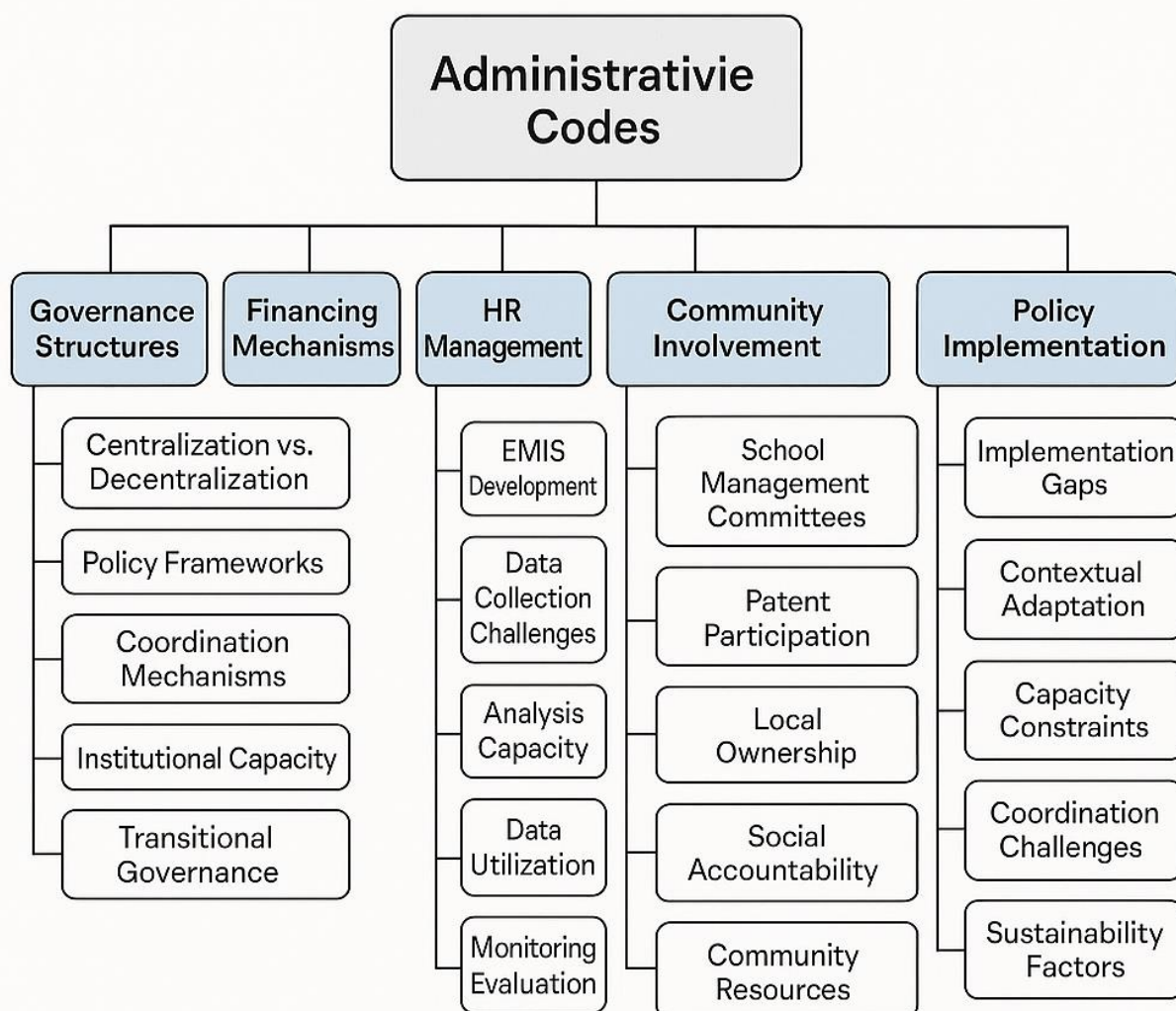
The data extraction template included the following categories:

1. **Publication details:** Author(s), year, title, publication type, country of publication
2. **Study characteristics:** Research design, methodology, data collection methods, sample size and characteristics
3. **Context:** Geographical location, type and phase of fragility/conflict, educational system characteristics
4. **Administrative dimensions:** Specific aspects of governance, financing, human resources, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation addressed
5. **Interventions or approaches:** Description of administrative interventions, reforms, or approaches discussed
6. **Outcomes:** Reported outcomes, effects, or impacts of administrative approaches
7. **Equity considerations:** How equity issues are addressed in relation to administrative dimensions
8. **Key findings:** Main findings relevant to the research questions
9. **Limitations:** Methodological limitations or constraints acknowledged by authors
10. **Recommendations:** Author recommendations for policy, practice, or further research

Data extraction was conducted by two independent reviewers for each included study, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus. This dual-reviewer approach enhanced the reliability and comprehensiveness of the extraction process, reducing the risk of oversight or misinterpretation. The extracted data was entered into a structured database to facilitate subsequent analysis and synthesis.

Following initial data extraction, a thematic coding process was implemented using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. This coding process employed both deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive component was based on the review's conceptual framework, with pre-defined codes corresponding to the six key administrative dimensions (governance, financing, human resources, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation). The inductive component allowed for identification of emerging themes, patterns, and relationships not captured by the pre-defined framework, ensuring that the analysis remained open to unexpected insights from the literature.

The coding structure developed through this process is represented in the following ASCII visual, which illustrates the hierarchical organization of codes used in the analysis:



This coding structure evolved throughout the analysis process, with new codes added and existing codes refined as patterns emerged from the data. The coding process facilitated identification of key themes, trends, and relationships across the included studies, providing the foundation for the subsequent synthesis and interpretation of findings.

To ensure coding consistency and reliability, a sample of studies was coded independently by two reviewers, and the results were compared to identify and resolve any discrepancies in code application. This process of inter-coder reliability checking helped to establish a shared understanding of the coding framework and its application to the literature.

The data extraction and coding process resulted in a comprehensive database of information from the included studies, organized according to the review's conceptual framework while remaining sensitive to emerging themes and patterns. This database provided the foundation for the synthesis and interpretation of findings presented in subsequent chapters.

## Quality Appraisal Tools

Assessing the methodological quality and relevance of included studies is a critical component of systematic review methodology, informing the interpretation and weighting of evidence in the synthesis process. For this systematic review, a comprehensive quality appraisal approach was adopted, recognizing the diverse methodological traditions and publication types represented in the literature on educational administration in fragile contexts.

Rather than applying a single quality assessment tool, the review employed multiple tools appropriate to different study designs and publication types. This approach acknowledges that quality in research is multidimensional and context-dependent, requiring assessment criteria that align with the specific methodological traditions and purposes of different types of evidence.

For empirical studies, the following quality appraisal tools were applied:

1. **Quantitative studies:** The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklist for Quantitative Studies was used to assess methodological rigor in quantitative research designs. This tool evaluates key aspects including sampling strategy, measurement validity and reliability, statistical analysis, and consideration of confounding factors.
2. **Qualitative studies:** The Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Checklist for Qualitative Research was applied to assess methodological quality in qualitative studies. This tool examines aspects such as philosophical perspective, methodological congruity, participant representation, data collection and analysis methods, and researcher reflexivity.
3. **Mixed-methods studies:** The Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used for studies employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. This tool assesses the quality of the mixed-methods design, including integration of different methodological components and attention to limitations associated with this integration.

For non-empirical publications, including theoretical papers, policy analyses, and grey literature, a modified version of the Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, and Significance (AACODS) checklist was applied. This tool assesses aspects such as authorship authority, methodological transparency, evidence base, balanced argumentation, and relevance to the review questions.

Each included study was independently appraised by two reviewers using the appropriate tool, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus. The quality appraisal results were not used as a basis for excluding studies that had already met the eligibility criteria, but rather to inform the interpretation and weighting of evidence in the synthesis process. This approach recognizes that studies with methodological limitations may still provide valuable insights, particularly in a field where research conditions are often challenging due to security concerns, access limitations, and other constraints associated with fragile contexts.

**Table 3: Critical Appraisal Summary**

Quality Dimension		High (n=15)	Quality Moderate (n=32)	Quality Low (n=18)	Quality
Clear Research Question/Objective		15 (100%)	30 (94%)	12 (67%)	
Appropriate Methodology		15 (100%)	28 (88%)	10 (56%)	
Rigorous Data Collection		14 (93%)	25 (78%)	7 (39%)	
Robust Analysis		15 (100%)	22 (69%)	5 (28%)	
Clear Findings		15 (100%)	29 (91%)	11 (61%)	
Consideration of Limitations		13 (87%)	20 (63%)	4 (22%)	

Quality Dimension	High (n=15)	Quality Moderate (n=32)	Quality Low (n=18)
Ethical Considerations	14 (93%)	18 (56%)	3 (17%)
Relevance to Review Questions	15 (100%)	32 (100%)	18 (100%)

The quality appraisal results revealed several patterns across the included literature. High-quality studies typically demonstrated clear research questions, appropriate and well-justified methodology, rigorous data collection and analysis procedures, transparent reporting of findings, thoughtful consideration of limitations, and attention to ethical issues. These studies often employed mixed methods or longitudinal designs, allowing for more comprehensive and nuanced examination of administrative dimensions in fragile contexts.

Moderate-quality studies generally had clear objectives and appropriate methodology but showed some limitations in data collection rigor, analytical depth, or consideration of methodological constraints. These studies still provided valuable evidence but required more cautious interpretation of findings, particularly regarding causal claims or generalizability.

Low-quality studies exhibited more significant methodological limitations, including unclear research designs, limited data collection, weak analytical procedures, or inadequate reporting of methods and findings. While these studies met the basic eligibility criteria for inclusion in the review, their findings were interpreted with greater caution and generally given less weight in the synthesis process unless corroborated by higher-quality evidence.

It is noteworthy that all included studies, regardless of their methodological quality rating, were judged to have relevance to the review questions. This reflects the effectiveness of the eligibility screening process in identifying literature that addresses administrative dimensions of education in fragile contexts, even when methodological rigor varies.

The quality appraisal process also revealed some common methodological challenges in research on educational administration in fragile contexts. These included difficulties in obtaining representative samples due to security constraints and population displacement; limitations in data collection due to infrastructure challenges and restricted access to certain areas; challenges in establishing causal relationships due to multiple confounding factors in complex environments; and ethical dilemmas related to research in vulnerable communities. These methodological challenges are acknowledged in the interpretation of findings and discussed as important considerations for future research in this field.

The quality appraisal results informed the synthesis process by providing a basis for weighting evidence according to methodological rigor and relevance. While all included studies contributed to the overall synthesis, findings from higher-quality studies were given greater emphasis, particularly when drawing conclusions about effectiveness or making recommendations for practice. The quality appraisal also helped to identify methodological strengths and weaknesses in the existing literature, informing recommendations for future research on educational administration in fragile contexts. # Chapter Three: Thematic Presentation of Review Findings

### **Governance Structures and Policy Frameworks**

The systematic review of literature reveals that governance structures and policy frameworks in fragile and post-conflict educational systems exhibit distinct patterns that significantly influence equity, effectiveness, and sustainability. These governance arrangements operate within complex environments characterized by institutional weakness, contested legitimacy, and the presence of multiple actors with diverse mandates and priorities.

A prominent theme across the literature is the tension between centralized and decentralized governance approaches. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, there is often a tendency toward centralization as governments seek to reestablish authority and control over educational provision (INEE Working Group, n.d.). This centralized approach can provide clarity and coordination during initial recovery phases but may struggle to respond to diverse local needs, particularly in contexts where state legitimacy is contested or where capacity at central levels remains weak. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) note, “Post-conflict educational governance frequently oscillates between centralization efforts aimed at state consolidation and decentralization initiatives intended to enhance responsiveness and community ownership” (p. 43).

Decentralization emerges as a common policy direction in many fragile contexts, often promoted by international actors as a means to enhance local responsiveness, community ownership, and accountability. However, the literature indicates that decentralization initiatives frequently encounter significant implementation challenges. IDEAS (2021) identifies several common obstacles, including limited capacity at local levels, unclear division of responsibilities between different administrative tiers, inadequate resource transfers to accompany devolved mandates, and elite capture of decision-making processes. These challenges are particularly acute in contexts where local governance structures have been weakened by conflict or where significant disparities exist between different regions.

**Table 4: Summary of Governance Structures by Country**

Country	Type	Strengths	Weaknesses
Afghanistan	Hybrid (Centralized policy, community-based implementation)	Community ownership through School Management Committees; Unified policy framework	Limited central oversight in remote areas; Parallel donor-driven structures
Democratic Republic of Congo	Highly decentralized with weak central coordination	Local adaptation to diverse contexts; Community involvement	Fragmentation; Inequitable resource distribution; Limited quality assurance
Lebanon	Centralized with parallel systems for refugees	Strong regulatory framework; Coordination mechanisms for refugee education	Rigid bureaucratic processes; Limited integration of systems
Sierra Leone	Decentralized with strong central guidance	Clear division of responsibilities; Local accountability mechanisms	Capacity constraints at district level; Resource allocation challenges
South Sudan	Transitional federal structure	Recognition of diverse regional needs; Gradual capacity building	Severe resource constraints; Contested authority in some regions
Somalia	Regional autonomy with weak federal framework	Adaptation to diverse security contexts; Community-based approaches	System fragmentation; Inconsistent standards; Coordination challenges

The presence of multiple governance actors emerges as another significant theme. In many fragile contexts, educational governance involves a complex array of stakeholders, including government entities at various levels, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, community structures, and sometimes non-state armed groups. Skuse et al. (2013) highlight that this multiplicity of actors often results in “fragmented governance landscapes where authority, responsibility, and accountability relationships are unclear and sometimes contested” (p. 76). The literature identifies several coordination mechanisms that have been implemented to address this fragmentation, including education clusters in humanitarian contexts, sector-wide approaches in more stable recovery phases, and transitional education plans that bridge humanitarian and development interventions.



Policy frameworks in fragile contexts reveal several distinctive characteristics. First, there is often a gap between policy formulation and implementation capacity, with ambitious policies developed at central levels that exceed the realistic implementation capabilities of the system (ERICC, n.d.). Second, policy development frequently occurs under significant external influence, with international actors playing substantial roles in shaping policy directions through technical assistance, funding conditionalities, and knowledge transfer. While this external input can bring valuable expertise and resources, it may also result in policies that reflect international priorities more than contextual realities.

Third, the literature highlights the importance of conflict-sensitive and equity-focused policy frameworks. Policies that fail to address underlying tensions or that exacerbate inequalities between different groups can inadvertently contribute to fragility and conflict. As IDEAS (2021) emphasizes, “Educational governance in fragile contexts requires explicit attention to how policies and structures may interact with conflict dynamics, either mitigating or exacerbating tensions between different groups” (p. 112). This suggests the need for governance approaches that are not only technically sound but also politically informed and conflict-sensitive.

The temporal dimension of governance emerges as particularly significant in fragile contexts. The literature indicates that governance structures often evolve through distinct phases, from emergency response dominated by humanitarian actors, through transitional arrangements involving both humanitarian and development stakeholders, to more stable systems with greater government leadership. These transitions are rarely linear, however, with many contexts experiencing what Coelho and da Silva (2025) term “governance volatility” – fluctuations between different arrangements as security conditions, political leadership, or international engagement changes.

Institutional capacity development represents a critical aspect of governance in fragile contexts. The literature identifies various approaches to strengthening administrative capacity, including technical assistance, twinning arrangements with institutions in more stable contexts, south-south cooperation, and embedded advisors within ministries. INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes that successful capacity development initiatives tend to be long-term, contextually grounded, and focused on both individual skills and organizational systems. Short-term, externally driven capacity building efforts often show limited sustainability once external support ends.

The relationship between central and local governance levels emerges as particularly complex in fragile contexts. The literature suggests that effective governance often involves what IDEAS (2021) terms “strategic complementarity” – arrangements where central levels focus on policy development, standard setting, and resource allocation, while local levels lead implementation, adaptation, and community engagement. Achieving this complementarity requires clear division of responsibilities, adequate resource flows, functional communication channels, and mutual accountability mechanisms – all of which present significant challenges in fragile environments.

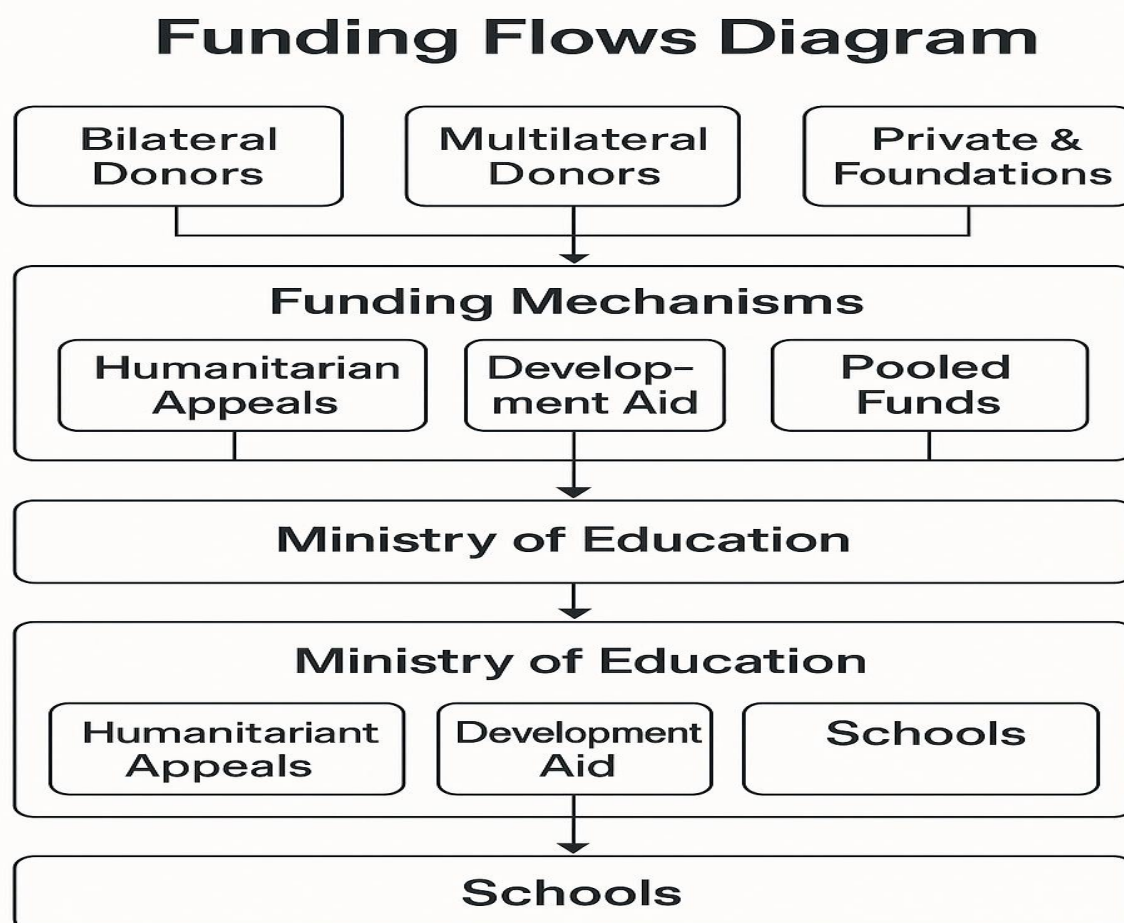
Finally, the literature highlights the importance of adaptive governance approaches that can respond to rapidly changing circumstances. Rigid bureaucratic structures often struggle in volatile contexts, while more flexible, problem-driven approaches show greater resilience. As Skuse et al. (2013) observe, “Educational governance in fragile contexts requires both structure for stability and flexibility for adaptation – a balance that conventional administrative systems often find difficult to achieve” (p. 89). This suggests the need for governance innovations that can maintain core functions while adapting to evolving challenges and opportunities.

## Budgeting, Financing, and Resource Allocation

The systematic review reveals that budgeting, financing, and resource allocation in fragile and post-conflict educational systems present distinctive challenges and patterns that significantly impact equity and effectiveness. Financial dimensions emerge as critical determinants of whether policy aspirations translate into meaningful educational opportunities, particularly for marginalized populations.

A prominent theme across the literature is the multiplicity and fragmentation of funding sources. Education financing in fragile contexts typically involves a complex mix of domestic government allocations, humanitarian funding, development assistance, private contributions, and household expenditures. This multiplicity creates significant coordination challenges, with different funding streams often operating on different timeframes, following different procedures, and pursuing different priorities. As IDEAS (2021) notes, “The fragmentation of financing mechanisms in fragile contexts creates substantial transaction costs for educational administrators and can undermine coherent system development” (p. 143).

Figure 1: Funding Flows Diagram



The volatility and unpredictability of funding emerges as another significant challenge. Humanitarian funding, which often dominates in acute crisis phases, typically operates on short-term cycles (usually 6-

12 months), making longer-term planning difficult. Development assistance may offer longer timeframes but can fluctuate based on donor priorities, political considerations, or security conditions. Domestic revenue generation is frequently constrained by limited economic activity, weak tax collection systems, and competing priorities for scarce public resources. This volatility creates what Coelho and da Silva (2025) term “financing insecurity” – a condition where educational administrators cannot reliably predict resource availability, undermining strategic planning and implementation.

The literature reveals significant disparities in education financing across different fragile contexts, with some receiving substantial international attention and resources while others remain chronically underfunded. INEE Working Group (n.d.) identifies several factors that influence these disparities, including geopolitical significance, media visibility, presence of international actors, and alignment with donor priorities. These disparities raise important equity concerns at the global level, with some fragile contexts receiving per-pupil external funding many times higher than others facing similar challenges.

Table 5: Comparison of Budget Allocations to Education (% GDP)

Country	Pre-Conflict	During Conflict	Post-Conflict (Year 1-3)	Post-Conflict (Year 4+)	Regional Average
Afghanistan	2.1%	0.8%	3.4%	4.1%	3.8%
Burundi	3.5%	1.2%	2.7%	4.3%	3.9%
Cambodia	2.9%	0.5%	1.8%	3.2%	3.5%
Liberia	2.8%	0.3%	2.9%	3.8%	3.9%
Rwanda	3.2%	0.7%	3.5%	5.1%	3.9%
Sierra Leone	2.7%	0.9%	2.3%	4.5%	3.9%
South Sudan	N/A	1.3%	1.5%	1.8%	3.8%
Timor-Leste	N/A	0.6%	4.2%	7.1%	3.5%

Resource allocation within educational systems presents particular challenges in fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common patterns in allocation decisions. First, there is often a bias toward visible infrastructure investments (school construction or rehabilitation) at the expense of “softer” system components such as teacher professional development, curriculum materials, or administrative capacity building. While infrastructure is certainly important, particularly where facilities have been damaged by conflict, this imbalance can undermine overall system functionality and quality.

Second, resource allocation frequently favors urban over rural areas, and more secure regions over those experiencing ongoing insecurity or conflict. As Skuse et al. (2013) observe, “Resource flows in fragile educational systems often follow paths of least resistance, concentrating in areas that are more accessible, secure, and visible to decision-makers and donors” (p. 112). This pattern can exacerbate existing inequities and potentially contribute to grievances that fuel fragility.

Third, the literature highlights tensions between different educational subsectors in resource allocation. Primary education typically receives the largest share of resources, reflecting both international priorities (particularly the Millennium Development Goals and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals) and the foundational importance of basic education. However, this emphasis sometimes comes at the expense of early childhood, secondary, technical-vocational, and higher education – all of which play important roles in comprehensive educational development and post-conflict recovery.

Financial management systems emerge as a critical but often neglected aspect of educational administration in fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common challenges, including limited capacity for budget planning and execution, weak expenditure tracking systems, inadequate financial controls, and

vulnerability to corruption or resource diversion. IDEAS (2021) notes that “financial management weaknesses not only reduce operational efficiency but can also undermine trust in educational institutions among communities and donors” (p. 156). The review identifies various approaches to strengthening financial management, including simplified procedures for emergency contexts, capacity development for financial staff, technology-enabled tracking systems, and transparency initiatives that involve communities in monitoring resource flows.

The transition from humanitarian to development financing represents a particularly challenging period for educational systems in fragile contexts. The literature documents frequent funding gaps during these transitions, as humanitarian funding declines before development financing fully scales up. ERICC (n.d.) describes this as the “financing gap in the continuum,” noting that it often coincides with critical periods when educational systems are attempting to transition from emergency response to more sustainable operations. Various bridging mechanisms have been developed to address this gap, including multi-year humanitarian funding, earlier engagement of development actors in crisis contexts, and transitional financing instruments specifically designed to span the humanitarian-development divide.

Innovative financing approaches emerge as an important theme in more recent literature. These include pooled funds that combine contributions from multiple donors to reduce fragmentation; results-based financing that links disbursements to achievement of agreed outcomes; and various forms of private sector engagement, including public-private partnerships and impact investing. While these innovations show promise for increasing resource availability and effectiveness, the literature also cautions that they require careful design to ensure equity considerations are prioritized and that they do not introduce excessive complexity into already strained administrative systems.

Community contributions to educational financing emerge as both a necessity and a concern in fragile contexts. On one hand, community resources – whether financial, in-kind, or labor – can extend the reach of limited public funding and foster local ownership. On the other hand, excessive reliance on household contributions can create or exacerbate inequities, particularly for the poorest families or in areas most affected by conflict. The literature suggests that effective approaches balance community engagement with equity safeguards, such as targeted subsidies or fee waivers for vulnerable groups.

Finally, the review highlights the importance of financing mechanisms that specifically target equity objectives. These include formula-based funding that allocates additional resources to disadvantaged areas or populations; earmarked grants for specific equity-enhancing interventions; and emergency funds that can respond rapidly to emerging needs. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes, “In fragile contexts, financing mechanisms must not only ensure adequate resources but also deliberately channel those resources toward addressing disparities and reaching the most marginalized learners” (p. 78). This suggests that equity considerations should be embedded in financing systems at all levels, from global resource mobilization to school-level budget management.

### **Human Resource Management in Fragile Systems**

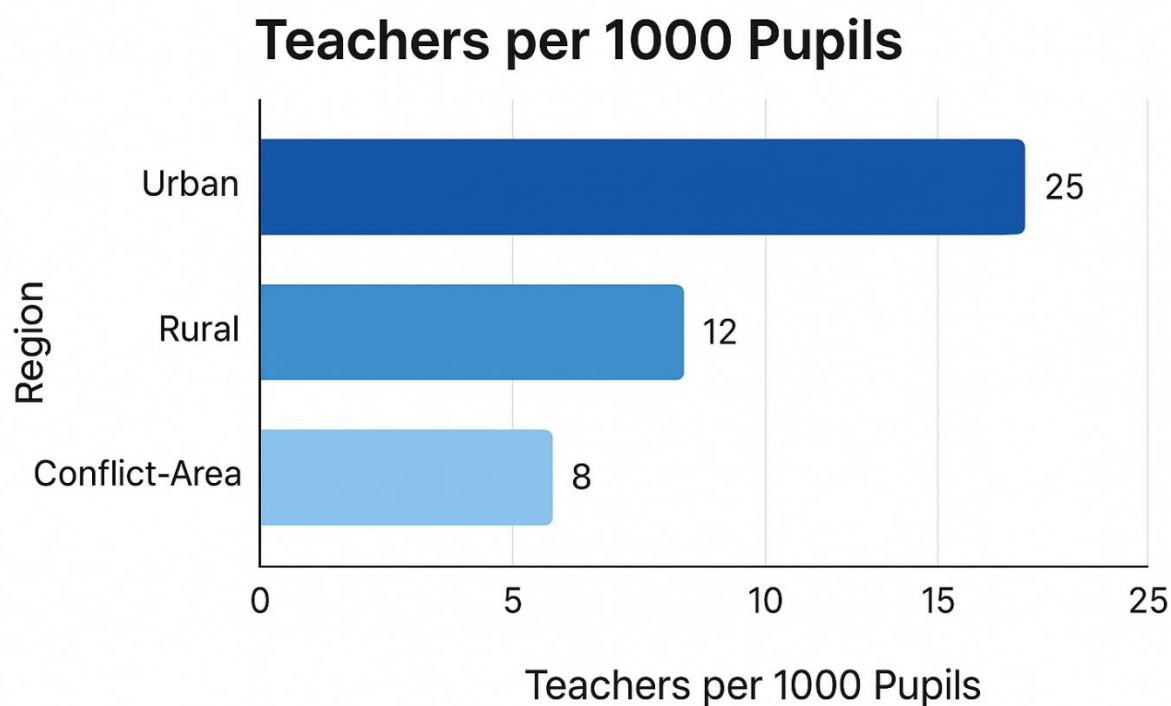
The systematic review reveals that human resource management in fragile educational systems presents distinctive challenges and patterns that significantly impact system functionality, quality, and equity. Educational personnel – including teachers, school leaders, and administrators at various levels – represent both the largest expenditure category in education budgets and the most critical determinant of educational quality and effectiveness.

A prominent theme across the literature is the severe shortage of qualified educational personnel in many fragile contexts. These shortages result from multiple factors, including conflict-related displacement or casualties among educational staff; disruption of teacher training institutions; brain drain as qualified personnel seek safer or better-compensated positions elsewhere; and rapid expansion of educational access without corresponding increases in teacher supply. As IDEAS (2021) notes, “The quantitative deficit of

educational personnel in fragile contexts is often compounded by qualitative deficiencies, with many teachers and administrators lacking appropriate qualifications or training for their roles” (p. 167).

The deployment of educational personnel emerges as a critical equity issue. The literature documents significant disparities in teacher distribution, with urban areas typically better staffed than rural or remote regions, and more secure areas better served than those experiencing ongoing conflict or insecurity. These deployment patterns reflect both administrative decisions and individual preferences, as personnel understandably seek safer and more comfortable working environments. The resulting disparities in student-teacher ratios and teacher qualifications significantly impact educational opportunities for children in different areas.

**Figure 3: Teacher Deployment Disparity**



Recruitment and selection processes show distinctive patterns in fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common approaches, including emergency recruitment of unqualified or under-qualified teachers to meet immediate needs; accelerated training programs to quickly prepare new teachers; reintegration of qualified personnel who were displaced by conflict; and various incentive schemes to attract teachers to underserved areas. Each approach involves trade-offs between quantity, quality, speed, and sustainability. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) observe, “Human resource decisions in fragile contexts often involve difficult compromises between immediate needs and long-term system development” (p. 56).

The literature highlights significant challenges related to teacher compensation and working conditions. Salary payment systems are frequently disrupted in fragile contexts, with delays, irregularities, or complete non-payment common in areas affected by conflict or governance weakness. Even when paid regularly, teacher salaries are often insufficient to meet basic needs, leading to absenteeism, moonlighting, or attrition as teachers seek additional income sources. Working conditions present additional challenges, including damaged infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching materials, and security concerns. These

conditions not only affect teacher performance and motivation but also influence decisions about where to work, exacerbating deployment disparities.

Professional development for educational personnel emerges as both a critical need and a significant challenge in fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common approaches, including school-based professional development that minimizes travel requirements; cluster-based models that bring together teachers from neighboring schools; distance learning programs that can reach personnel in remote or insecure areas; and cascade training models where master trainers prepare others who then train colleagues. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that effective professional development in fragile contexts tends to be practical, responsive to immediate classroom challenges, and sustained over time rather than delivered as one-off workshops.

The management and leadership of educational personnel presents particular challenges in fragile environments. The literature documents frequent weaknesses in supervision systems, performance management, and administrative oversight. These weaknesses result from multiple factors, including limited capacity among supervisory staff; logistical and security constraints that impede regular school visits; unclear roles and responsibilities across different administrative levels; and the absence of functional accountability mechanisms. Skuse et al. (2013) note that “the breakdown of management systems often leads to a situation where teachers and school leaders operate with minimal guidance, support, or accountability, particularly in remote or conflict-affected areas” (p. 124).

Gender dimensions of human resource management emerge as an important theme. The literature documents significant gender disparities in educational staffing in many fragile contexts, with women typically underrepresented, particularly in leadership positions and in secondary education. These disparities reflect broader societal gender norms as well as specific barriers that women face in educational careers, including security concerns, family responsibilities, and cultural restrictions on mobility or professional roles. ERICC (n.d.) emphasizes that addressing these gender disparities is important not only for employment equity but also for providing female role models for girls and potentially improving girls’ educational participation and outcomes.

The psychosocial wellbeing of educational personnel represents a frequently overlooked dimension of human resource management in fragile contexts. The literature highlights that teachers and administrators in these environments often experience significant trauma, stress, and burnout related to conflict experiences, challenging working conditions, and the emotional demands of supporting students who have also experienced trauma. IDEAS (2021) argues that “sustainable human resource management in fragile contexts requires attention not only to technical capacities but also to the psychosocial needs and wellbeing of educational personnel” (p. 178). Various approaches to addressing these needs are documented, including peer support networks, counseling services, stress management training, and workload management strategies.

The relationship between government and non-government educational personnel presents particular challenges in fragile contexts. The literature documents frequent tensions and inequities between teachers employed by the government and those working for non-governmental organizations, private providers, or community initiatives. These different employment arrangements often involve disparities in compensation, job security, professional development opportunities, and career pathways. As systems transition from emergency response to more stable operations, the integration of non-government teachers into formal systems presents significant administrative and financial challenges.

Finally, the review highlights the importance of context-sensitive approaches to human resource management that recognize the unique challenges and opportunities of fragile environments. Standardized administrative procedures developed for stable contexts often prove ineffective or counterproductive in fragile settings. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that effective human resource management in these contexts requires “adaptive approaches that balance procedural consistency with flexibility to respond

to rapidly changing circumstances and diverse local realities” (p. 92). This suggests the need for innovative administrative models that can maintain core functions while adapting to the specific challenges of fragile and conflict-affected environments.

### Data Systems and Evidence-Based Planning

The systematic review reveals that data systems and evidence-based planning in fragile and post-conflict educational contexts present distinctive challenges and patterns that significantly impact administrative decision-making, resource allocation, and accountability. Information management emerges as a critical but often neglected dimension of educational administration in these challenging environments.

A prominent theme across the literature is the severe data limitations that characterize many fragile educational systems. These limitations result from multiple factors, including destruction of records during conflict; disruption of regular data collection processes; population displacement that complicates tracking of students and teachers; limited technological infrastructure; and constrained administrative capacity at various levels of the system. As Skuse et al. (2013) observe, “Educational planning in fragile contexts often occurs in a data-poor environment, where basic information about schools, students, and personnel is incomplete, outdated, or unreliable” (p. 135).

Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) in fragile contexts show distinctive development patterns. The literature documents frequent tensions between comprehensive EMIS designs that aim to collect extensive data across multiple dimensions and more focused, simplified approaches that prioritize core indicators that can be reliably collected even under challenging circumstances. IDEAS (2021) notes that “ambitious EMIS designs often falter in fragile contexts due to capacity constraints, while overly simplified systems may fail to capture critical information needed for equitable planning” (p. 189). Finding an appropriate balance emerges as a key challenge for system designers and administrators.

**Table 6: EMIS Capacity and Usage**

Country	Fragility Index (1-10)	EMIS Implementation Stage	Data Collection Coverage	Data Quality Rating	Evidence of Data Use in Planning
Afghanistan	8.7	Established but fragmented	76% of districts	Moderate	Limited
Chad	8.2	Basic	54% of districts	Low	Minimal
Democratic Republic of Congo	9.1	Multiple parallel systems	62% of districts	Low	Minimal
Haiti	7.9	Partially functional	81% of districts	Moderate	Moderate
Lebanon	6.4	Advanced but strained by refugee crisis	95% of districts	High	Substantial
Liberia	7.3	Rebuilding	88% of districts	Moderate	Moderate
Myanmar	7.8	Uneven across regions	73% of districts	Moderate	Limited
Somalia	9.5	Fragmented by region	42% of districts	Low	Minimal

Country	Fragility Index (1-10)	EMIS Implementation Stage	Data Collection Coverage	Data Quality Rating	Evidence of Data Use in Planning
South Sudan	9.8	Early development	38% of districts	Low	Minimal
Yemen	9.3	Severely disrupted	35% of districts	Low	Minimal

The geographical coverage of data systems emerges as a critical equity issue. The literature documents significant disparities in data collection and availability across different regions within fragile contexts. Areas experiencing ongoing conflict or insecurity, remote regions with limited infrastructure, and territories controlled by non-state actors are frequently underrepresented in official data systems. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) emphasize, “These data blind spots often coincide with areas where educational needs are greatest, creating a situation where the most vulnerable populations are the least visible in planning and resource allocation processes” (p. 67). Various approaches to addressing these coverage gaps are documented, including remote data collection using mobile technology, community-based monitoring systems, and triangulation of data from multiple sources to fill information gaps.

The multiplicity of data systems represents another significant challenge in fragile contexts. The literature documents frequent situations where different actors – government agencies, UN organizations, international NGOs, and local civil society – establish parallel data collection and management systems to serve their specific information needs. While understandable from an organizational perspective, this multiplicity creates significant coordination challenges, increases the reporting burden on schools and local administrators, and can produce conflicting information that undermines evidence-based decision-making. INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes that “data harmonization efforts are essential but often challenging in fragile contexts, where different actors may have limited incentives or capacity to coordinate their information systems” (p. 103).

Data quality emerges as a persistent concern across fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common quality issues, including incomplete or missing data; inconsistent definitions and metrics across different collection systems; time lags that reduce relevance for decision-making; limited verification mechanisms; and various forms of data manipulation or misreporting in response to performance pressures or resource allocation incentives. ERICC (n.d.) emphasizes that “data quality challenges in fragile contexts reflect not only technical limitations but also governance and accountability issues within educational systems” (p. 45). Various approaches to improving data quality are documented, including simplified collection tools, mobile technology for real-time validation, independent verification mechanisms, and capacity development for data management staff.

The transition from emergency data systems to more comprehensive educational information management presents particular challenges. The literature documents tensions between humanitarian information systems focused on immediate needs assessment and response monitoring, and longer-term development-oriented systems designed for sector-wide planning and management. IDEAS (2021) describes this as the “data transition gap,” noting that it often coincides with broader transitions in governance and financing that can disrupt information flows and accountability relationships. Various bridging approaches are identified, including modular EMIS designs that can evolve from basic to more comprehensive functionality, transitional data protocols that ensure continuity during system changes, and phased implementation strategies that gradually expand data collection as capacity develops.

Data utilization for decision-making emerges as perhaps the most critical challenge. The literature documents frequent disconnects between data collection and actual utilization in planning, resource allocation, and policy development. These disconnects result from multiple factors, including limited analytical capacity among educational administrators; weak links between information systems and



planning processes; political considerations that override evidence-based approaches; and data presentation formats that are not accessible or relevant to decision-makers. Skuse et al. (2013) observe that “the investment in data collection in fragile contexts often far exceeds the investment in developing the capacity to analyze and utilize that data for improved educational administration” (p. 147). Various approaches to enhancing data utilization are documented, including decision-support tools that translate raw data into actionable insights; regular data review meetings at different administrative levels; capacity development focused specifically on data interpretation and application; and accountability mechanisms that require evidence-based justification for key decisions.

Equity-focused data emerges as an important theme in more recent literature. Traditional educational information systems often collect aggregate data that masks disparities between different groups or regions. The literature highlights the importance of disaggregated data that can reveal inequities based on gender, location, socioeconomic status, disability, displacement status, and other relevant factors in fragile contexts. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that “equity-sensitive data collection and analysis is essential for identifying and addressing the specific barriers faced by marginalized groups in accessing quality education” (p. 115). Various approaches to strengthening equity focus in data systems are documented, including adding equity-specific indicators to standard data collection tools; conducting targeted studies on particularly vulnerable groups; and developing equity indices that combine multiple indicators to identify areas or populations requiring additional support.

Finally, the review highlights the importance of balancing quantitative and qualitative data in fragile contexts. While quantitative indicators are essential for system monitoring and resource allocation, qualitative information provides critical insights into contextual factors, implementation challenges, and community perspectives that may not be captured through standard metrics. Coelho and da Silva (2025) argue that “effective evidence-based planning in fragile contexts requires both numbers and narratives – quantitative data to identify patterns and track progress, and qualitative information to understand the complex dynamics that influence educational processes and outcomes” (p. 78). Various approaches to integrating different data types are documented, including mixed-methods monitoring systems, regular qualitative studies to complement quantitative data collection, and participatory assessment processes that incorporate community perspectives into formal information systems.

### **Community Participation and Accountability Mechanisms**

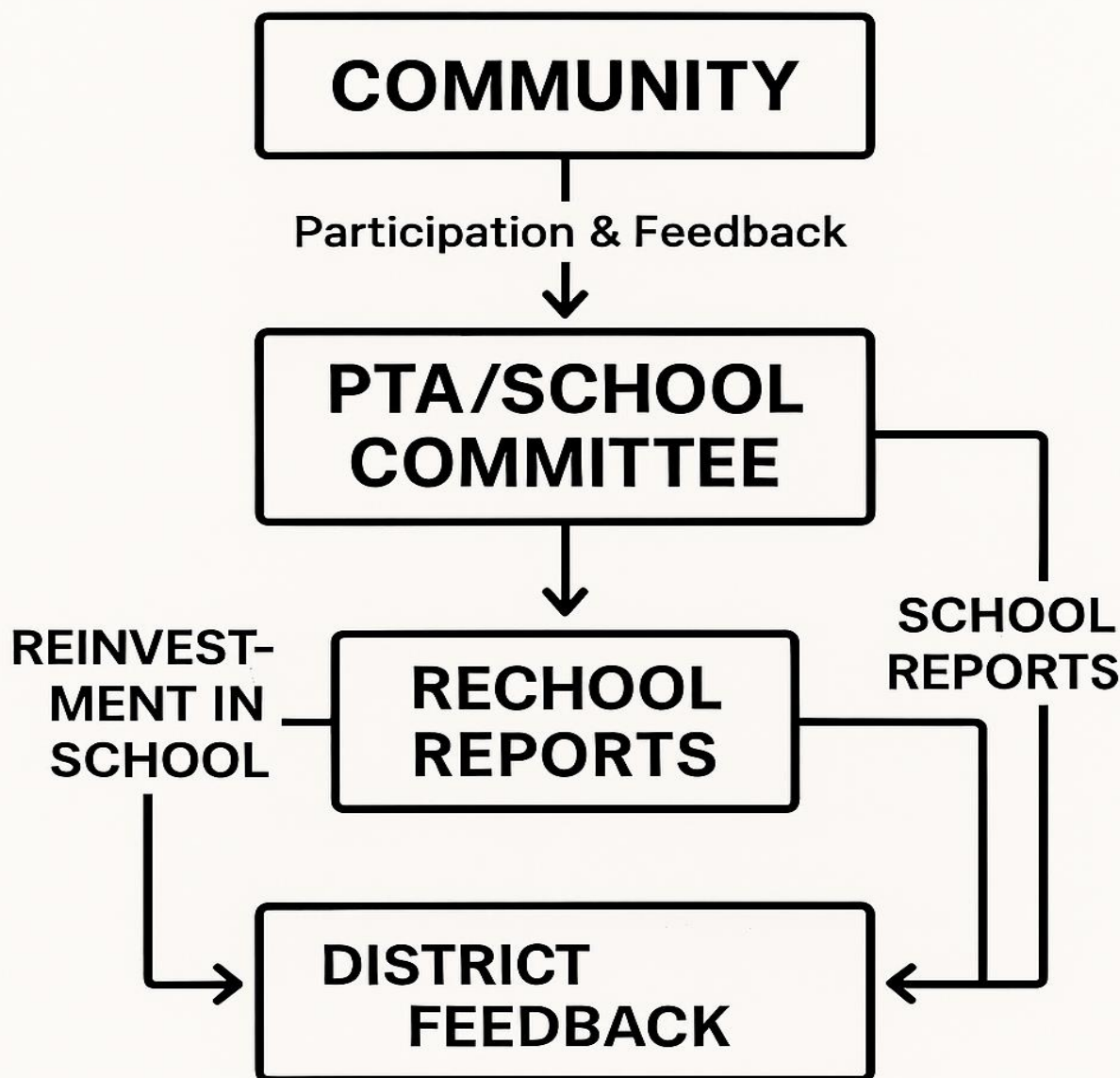
The systematic review reveals that community participation and accountability mechanisms in fragile and post-conflict educational systems present distinctive patterns and challenges that significantly influence administrative responsiveness, resource management, and educational outcomes. Community engagement emerges as both a necessity and a complex undertaking in environments characterized by social fragmentation, resource constraints, and institutional weakness.

A prominent theme across the literature is the diversity of community participation models implemented in fragile contexts. These range from limited consultation where communities provide input but have minimal decision-making authority, to more substantive engagement through school management committees with significant responsibilities for oversight and governance. INEE Working Group (n.d.) identifies several factors that influence the depth and effectiveness of participation, including pre-existing community structures and traditions; the security situation and level of social cohesion; administrative capacity at local levels; legal frameworks for decentralization; and the approaches of external actors supporting educational provision.

School management committees (SMCs) or similar structures emerge as the most common formal mechanism for community participation. The literature documents various configurations and mandates for these committees, including oversight of school resources; monitoring teacher attendance and performance; mobilizing additional community contributions; maintaining school infrastructure; addressing student attendance and dropout issues; and mediating conflicts within the school or between the school and

community. Skuse et al. (2013) note that “the effectiveness of school management committees varies widely across and within fragile contexts, influenced by factors including committee composition, clarity of mandate, capacity development, and relationships with formal administrative structures” (p. 156).

Figure 4: Accountability Loop in Fragile Systems



The representation and inclusivity of community participation mechanisms emerges as a critical equity issue. The literature documents frequent challenges in ensuring that participation structures reflect the diversity of communities, particularly regarding gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and other relevant dimensions. IDEAS (2021) emphasizes that “in fragile contexts marked by social divisions, participation mechanisms that are dominated by local elites or majority groups may reinforce rather than address inequities in educational access and quality” (p. 203). Various approaches to enhancing inclusivity are documented, including quotas or reserved positions for underrepresented groups; separate consultation processes for marginalized community members; capacity development focused specifically on inclusive decision-making; and monitoring of participation patterns to identify and address exclusionary dynamics.

The relationship between community structures and formal administrative systems presents particular challenges in fragile contexts. The literature identifies several common patterns, ranging from parallel operations with limited coordination, to complementary functions with defined roles for each, to integrated approaches where community structures are formally incorporated into administrative systems. Coelho and da Silva (2025) observe that “the effectiveness of community participation depends significantly on how these structures interface with formal governance systems – whether they are seen as legitimate partners or peripheral actors in educational administration” (p. 89). The most effective arrangements appear to involve clear definition of respective roles and responsibilities, regular communication channels, and mutual accountability mechanisms.

Information flows emerge as a critical factor in effective community participation. The literature documents frequent information asymmetries, where communities lack access to basic data about educational resources, policies, and performance that would enable meaningful oversight and engagement. ERICC (n.d.) notes that “transparency is a prerequisite for effective community participation, yet in many fragile contexts, information about educational administration remains opaque or inaccessible to community members” (p. 56). Various approaches to enhancing information sharing are documented, including school report cards that present key data in accessible formats; public display of budget information and expenditure records; regular community meetings where administrative decisions are explained and discussed; and simplified versions of policies and standards that can be understood without specialized technical knowledge.

Capacity development for community participants represents another important theme. The literature highlights that meaningful participation requires specific knowledge and skills, particularly for more technical aspects of educational administration such as budget oversight or performance monitoring. Simply creating participatory structures without supporting capacity development often results in limited effectiveness or capture by more educated or powerful community members. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that “investment in developing the capacity of community representatives is essential for participation to move beyond tokenism to meaningful engagement in educational governance” (p. 127). Various capacity development approaches are documented, including targeted training for committee members; mentoring and coaching by more experienced participants; peer learning exchanges between communities; and gradual transfer of responsibilities as capacity develops.

The sustainability of community participation mechanisms emerges as a significant challenge in fragile contexts. The literature documents frequent patterns where participation structures established during emergency or recovery phases weaken over time as external support diminishes or as initial enthusiasm wanes in the face of ongoing challenges. IDEAS (2021) describes this as “participation fatigue,” noting that it often results from a combination of limited visible impact, competing demands on community members’ time and resources, and inadequate recognition or support from formal administrative systems. Various approaches to enhancing sustainability are identified, including integration of participation structures into formal governance frameworks; development of local resource mobilization strategies to reduce dependence on external funding; recognition and incentive systems for community participants; and demonstrable responsiveness to community input to maintain engagement motivation.

The potential for community participation to contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding represents an important theme in contexts affected by conflict. The literature suggests that well-designed participation mechanisms can bring together diverse community members around shared educational concerns, potentially building trust and cooperation across social divides. However, Skuse et al. (2013) caution that “participation structures that ignore or exacerbate existing tensions may inadvertently contribute to conflict dynamics rather than social cohesion” (p. 168). This highlights the importance of conflict-sensitive approaches to community participation that are informed by thorough understanding of local social dynamics and designed to promote inclusive engagement across different groups.

Finally, the review highlights the importance of balancing community participation with professional expertise in educational administration. While community engagement is essential for responsiveness, accountability, and local ownership, effective educational systems also require specialized technical knowledge and professional judgment. Coelho and da Silva (2025) argue that “the most effective administrative approaches in fragile contexts find an appropriate balance between community voice and professional expertise, recognizing the valuable and complementary contributions of each” (p. 98). This suggests the need for participation models that clearly define which aspects of educational administration benefit most from community input and which require primarily professional management, while ensuring productive interaction between these different knowledge bases.

**Policy Implementation Challenges**

The systematic review reveals that policy implementation in fragile and post-conflict educational systems presents distinctive challenges and patterns that significantly impact the translation of policy intentions into practical realities. The gap between policy formulation and effective implementation emerges as particularly wide in these challenging contexts, influenced by a complex interplay of administrative, resource, political, and contextual factors.

A prominent theme across the literature is the frequent disconnect between policy ambition and implementation capacity. The review documents numerous cases where educational policies in fragile contexts establish aspirational goals and standards that far exceed the realistic capabilities of administrative systems weakened by conflict, resource constraints, and institutional fragility. As IDEAS (2021) observes, “Policy development in fragile contexts often occurs in a capacity vacuum, where the administrative infrastructure needed for effective implementation is severely compromised or entirely absent” (p. 217). This disconnect creates what several authors term an “implementation gap” – a persistent divide between policy intentions and ground-level realities that undermines reform efforts and can generate cynicism among educational stakeholders.

The security situation emerges as a fundamental constraint on policy implementation in many fragile contexts. The literature documents how ongoing conflict, insecurity, or sporadic violence can severely restrict the movement of educational administrators, limit access to certain regions, disrupt communication channels, and divert attention and resources to immediate security concerns rather than longer-term policy objectives. INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes that “implementation planning in fragile contexts must incorporate security contingencies and flexible approaches that can adapt to rapidly changing conditions on the ground” (p. 139). Various adaptive implementation strategies are documented, including phased approaches that begin in more stable regions; remote management techniques when direct access is impossible; and partnership with local actors who can maintain operations even in insecure environments.

**Table 7: Common Implementation Barriers Identified Across Regions**

Barrier Category	Specific Challenges	Prevalence	Severity Rating
Security Constraints	Restricted movement of personnel; School closures; Targeted attacks on education	High	Severe
Administrative Capacity	Insufficient qualified staff; Limited technical skills; Weak management systems	High	Severe
Resource Limitations	Inadequate funding; Delayed disbursements; Resource diversion	High	Severe
Infrastructure Gaps	Poor transportation networks; Limited communication technology; Inadequate facilities	High	Moderate
Coordination Failures	Fragmented authority; Parallel systems; Poor information sharing	High	Moderate
Political Interference	Patronage appointments; Resource politicization; Changing priorities	Medium	Moderate
Corruption	Misappropriation of funds; Ghost teachers; Procurement irregularities	Medium	Moderate
Social Resistance	Community opposition; Cultural barriers; Mistrust of authorities	Medium	Variable
External Dependency	Donor-driven agendas; Project-based implementation; Unsustainable initiatives	Medium	Moderate
Legal Ambiguities	Unclear mandates; Regulatory gaps; Jurisdictional conflicts	Low	Minor

The multiplicity of actors involved in educational provision presents significant coordination challenges for policy implementation. The literature documents how fragmented authority between government entities at different levels, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and community structures can result in inconsistent or contradictory implementation approaches. Skuse et al. (2013) highlight that “policy implementation in fragile contexts often resembles a patchwork rather than a coherent process, with different actors interpreting and applying policies according to their own priorities, capacities, and understandings” (p. 179). Various coordination mechanisms are identified, including sector-wide approaches that align different actors around common implementation frameworks; joint planning and review processes that promote shared understanding of policy objectives; and clear division of responsibilities that reduces duplication and gaps in implementation efforts.

Resource constraints emerge as a pervasive implementation challenge. The literature documents how inadequate funding, delayed disbursements, and resource volatility undermine policy execution across various dimensions of educational administration. These constraints affect everything from infrastructure development to personnel deployment to learning materials provision. Coelho and da Silva (2025) note that “implementation planning in fragile contexts often fails to adequately cost policy requirements or to secure reliable funding streams, resulting in partial or symbolic implementation that maintains the appearance but not the substance of policy reforms” (p. 112). Various approaches to addressing resource constraints are documented, including prioritization frameworks that focus limited resources on core policy elements; phased implementation that spreads costs over longer timeframes; leveraging complementary resources from different sources; and simplified implementation models that achieve policy objectives at lower cost.

Administrative capacity at different levels of the educational system represents another critical implementation factor. The literature highlights how limited technical skills, insufficient personnel, weak management systems, and high staff turnover constrain the ability to translate policies into practice, particularly at district and local levels where much of the implementation responsibility typically resides.

ERICC (n.d.) emphasizes that “capacity development for policy implementation requires attention not only to individual skills but also to organizational systems, procedures, and resources that enable effective execution” (p. 67). Various capacity development approaches are documented, including targeted training linked to specific implementation responsibilities; mentoring and coaching during implementation processes; peer learning networks that share implementation experiences and solutions; and simplified administrative procedures that reduce complexity and cognitive load on implementing staff.

The contextual appropriateness of policies emerges as a significant theme. The literature documents frequent cases where policies developed at central levels or imported from international models fail to account for the diverse realities of different regions within fragile contexts. IDEAS (2021) argues that “effective implementation requires policies that are either sufficiently flexible to accommodate contextual variation or that explicitly differentiate approaches for different settings” (p. 231). Various approaches to enhancing contextual fit are identified, including decentralized policy adaptation that allows local adjustment within broad frameworks; piloting and refinement before full-scale implementation; consultation with diverse stakeholders during policy development; and implementation guidelines that address common contextual variations.

Political dynamics significantly influence implementation processes in fragile contexts. The literature highlights how political interests, patronage networks, power struggles, and legitimacy contests can shape which policies are prioritized for implementation, how resources are allocated, who is appointed to key implementation roles, and which regions receive attention. Skuse et al. (2013) observe that “implementation in fragile contexts is never a purely technical process but is fundamentally shaped by political considerations that may align with or work against policy objectives” (p. 191). This suggests the importance of politically informed implementation approaches that understand and work within these realities rather than assuming purely technocratic processes.

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms emerge as critical but often weak elements of implementation systems. The literature documents frequent limitations in tracking implementation progress, identifying implementation challenges, and holding responsible actors accountable for execution. These limitations result from multiple factors, including data system weaknesses; limited verification capacity; unclear lines of accountability between different administrative levels; and reluctance to report implementation failures that might reflect poorly on responsible authorities or jeopardize funding. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that “robust monitoring systems are essential for adaptive implementation in fragile contexts, where conditions change rapidly and initial implementation plans often require adjustment based on emerging challenges and opportunities” (p. 151). Various approaches to strengthening implementation monitoring are documented, including simplified tracking tools focused on key implementation milestones; participatory monitoring that engages communities in verification; regular implementation review meetings at different administrative levels; and feedback mechanisms that enable implementing staff to report challenges and receive support.

The sustainability of implementation efforts represents a significant concern in fragile contexts. The literature documents frequent patterns where initial implementation progress stalls or reverses as external support diminishes, attention shifts to new policy priorities, or contextual challenges intensify. Coelho and da Silva (2025) describe this as “implementation decay,” noting that it often results from insufficient institutionalization of new practices within administrative systems and inadequate attention to the ongoing resources and support required for sustained implementation. Various approaches to enhancing implementation sustainability are identified, including phased withdrawal of external support; development of local capacity to maintain implementation; integration of new practices into standard administrative procedures and budgets; and realistic assessment of long-term resource requirements during initial policy development.

Finally, the review highlights the importance of adaptive implementation approaches that can respond to the volatile and unpredictable environments characteristic of fragile contexts. Rigid implementation plans

developed under assumptions of stability often fail when confronted with the dynamic realities of these settings. IDEAS (2021) argues that “effective implementation in fragile contexts requires a balance between structured processes that provide direction and consistency, and adaptive mechanisms that enable responsiveness to changing circumstances and emerging learning” (p. 243). This suggests the need for implementation approaches that incorporate regular review and adjustment points, maintain flexibility in methods while remaining focused on core objectives, and build the capacity of implementing staff to make informed adaptations when circumstances change. # Chapter Four: Discussion

## Synthesis of Findings

The systematic review of literature on administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts reveals complex patterns, challenges, and promising practices across the six key dimensions examined: governance structures, financing mechanisms, human resource management, data systems, community participation, and policy implementation. This synthesis section draws together these findings to identify overarching themes and relationships that emerge across different administrative dimensions and contexts.

A prominent cross-cutting theme is the tension between centralized and decentralized approaches to educational administration. This tension manifests across multiple dimensions, from governance structures where authority is distributed between national and local levels, to financing mechanisms that balance central allocation with local discretion, to human resource management that navigates between standardized policies and contextual adaptation. The literature suggests that neither purely centralized nor fully decentralized approaches are universally effective in fragile contexts. Instead, as IDEAS (2021) argues, “The most successful administrative systems in fragile environments typically involve strategic complementarity between different levels, with each level performing functions best suited to its positioning and capabilities” (p. 256).

This complementarity often takes the form of what Coelho and da Silva (2025) term “differentiated centralization” – an approach where certain core functions (such as policy development, standard setting, and major resource allocation) remain centralized to ensure coherence and equity, while other functions (such as contextual adaptation, community engagement, and day-to-day management) are decentralized to enhance responsiveness and ownership. The specific balance varies across contexts depending on factors including administrative capacity at different levels, the security situation, the degree of social cohesion, and historical governance traditions.

A second overarching theme is the critical importance of coordination mechanisms in fragmented administrative landscapes. Fragile contexts are typically characterized by multiple actors operating with different mandates, timeframes, resources, and accountability relationships. This multiplicity creates significant coordination challenges across all administrative dimensions, from governance where different authorities may have overlapping jurisdictions, to financing where multiple funding streams follow different procedures, to data systems where parallel information collection creates duplication and inconsistency.

The literature identifies various coordination approaches that show promise in addressing this fragmentation, including sector-wide frameworks that align different actors around common objectives and approaches; joint planning and review processes that promote information sharing and complementarity; clear division of responsibilities that reduces duplication and gaps; and transitional arrangements that bridge humanitarian and development interventions. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes, “Effective coordination in fragile contexts requires both formal mechanisms that provide structure and clarity, and informal relationships that build trust and facilitate problem-solving across organizational boundaries” (p. 163).

A third cross-cutting theme is the persistent gap between policy and implementation. This gap manifests across all administrative dimensions, from governance where formal structures may exist on paper but function poorly in practice, to financing where budget allocations often differ significantly from actual expenditures, to human resource management where deployment policies frequently fail to address actual staffing patterns. The literature suggests that this implementation gap results from multiple factors, including limited administrative capacity, resource constraints, political interference, security challenges, and ambitious policies that exceed realistic implementation capabilities.

Addressing this gap requires what Skuse et al. (2013) term “implementation-aware policy development” – approaches that consider implementation realities from the outset rather than treating them as an afterthought. This includes realistic assessment of implementation capacity and resources; phased approaches that match ambition to capability; simplified procedures that reduce administrative burden; and robust monitoring systems that identify implementation challenges early and enable adaptive responses. As ERICC (n.d.) notes, “In fragile contexts, the quality of implementation often matters more than the sophistication of policy design in determining educational outcomes” (p. 78).

A fourth overarching theme is the critical role of information flows in effective educational administration. This theme emerges across multiple dimensions, from governance where decision-making requires timely and accurate information about system conditions, to financing where resource allocation depends on understanding needs and priorities, to community participation where meaningful engagement requires transparency about educational resources and performance. The literature documents frequent information asymmetries and gaps in fragile contexts, where data collection is challenging, multiple systems operate in parallel, and information may be treated as a source of power rather than a public good.

Addressing these information challenges requires what IDEAS (2021) describes as “strategic simplification” – approaches that focus on collecting, analyzing, and sharing the most critical information needed for key administrative functions, rather than attempting comprehensive data systems that may exceed capacity. This includes prioritizing core indicators that directly inform decision-making; developing simplified collection tools that can function even in challenging environments; ensuring information flows in multiple directions (not just upward reporting); and making data accessible and understandable to different stakeholders, including communities.

A fifth cross-cutting theme is the importance of equity-focused administrative approaches. The literature highlights how administrative systems in fragile contexts often reinforce rather than address existing disparities, with resources, qualified personnel, and administrative attention concentrated in more accessible, secure, and visible areas. This pattern emerges across all dimensions, from governance where certain regions may have limited representation in decision-making structures, to financing where resource allocation formulas may fail to account for different needs and costs, to data systems where marginalized populations are often underrepresented or invisible.

Addressing these equity challenges requires what Coelho and da Silva (2025) term “administrative affirmative action” – deliberate efforts to direct additional resources, attention, and support to underserved areas and populations. This includes equity-weighted funding formulas that allocate more resources to disadvantaged areas; deployment incentives that encourage qualified personnel to work in challenging environments; targeted capacity development for administrative staff in underserved regions; and disaggregated data collection that makes disparities visible and actionable. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes, “Equity in fragile contexts requires not just equal treatment but differentiated approaches that address the specific barriers faced by different groups and regions” (p. 175).

A sixth overarching theme is the temporal dimension of administrative development in fragile contexts. The literature highlights how administrative needs and capabilities evolve through different phases, from emergency response dominated by humanitarian actors, through transitional arrangements involving both humanitarian and development stakeholders, to more stable systems with greater government leadership.



These transitions are rarely linear, however, with many contexts experiencing what Skuse et al. (2013) term “administrative volatility” – fluctuations between different arrangements as security conditions, political leadership, or international engagement changes.

Navigating these temporal dynamics requires what IDEAS (2021) describes as “developmental flexibility” – administrative approaches that can adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining core functions and building toward longer-term system development. This includes modular administrative designs that can evolve from basic to more comprehensive functionality; transitional arrangements that bridge humanitarian and development phases; capacity development approaches that balance immediate operational needs with longer-term system building; and contingency planning that anticipates potential setbacks or changes in context.

A seventh cross-cutting theme is the critical importance of contextual adaptation in administrative approaches. The literature documents numerous cases where administrative models imported from stable contexts or applied uniformly across different regions within fragile states have proven ineffective or counterproductive. This pattern emerges across all dimensions, from governance where standardized structures may fail to align with local realities, to human resource management where uniform policies may not account for different working conditions, to community participation where engagement models may not reflect local social dynamics.

Effective contextual adaptation involves what ERICC (n.d.) terms “principled flexibility” – approaches that maintain core administrative functions and equity principles while adapting implementation methods to different contexts. This includes decentralized decision-making that allows local adaptation within broad frameworks; consultation with diverse stakeholders to understand contextual factors; piloting and refinement before full-scale implementation; and differentiated approaches for regions with significantly different conditions. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) emphasize, “Administrative effectiveness in fragile contexts depends less on the specific model adopted than on how well that model is adapted to local realities while maintaining core functions and equity principles” (p. 134).

An eighth overarching theme is the relationship between administrative systems and broader conflict dynamics. The literature highlights how educational administration can either contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion or inadvertently exacerbate tensions and grievances. This relationship manifests across multiple dimensions, from governance where decision-making structures may either include or exclude certain groups, to financing where resource allocation may either address or reinforce inequities, to human resource management where deployment patterns may either mitigate or worsen regional disparities.

Addressing this conflict-administration nexus requires what INEE Working Group (n.d.) terms “conflict-sensitive administration” – approaches that are informed by thorough understanding of conflict dynamics and designed to contribute to peacebuilding rather than exacerbating tensions. This includes inclusive governance structures that ensure representation of different groups; transparent resource allocation that reduces perceptions of favoritism; equitable personnel deployment that addresses historical disparities; and community engagement approaches that build trust across social divides. As IDEAS (2021) emphasizes, “Administrative decisions in fragile contexts are never purely technical but have political implications that can either support or undermine broader peacebuilding and state-building processes” (p. 267).

Finally, the review highlights the critical role of administrative capacity development across all dimensions. The literature documents how limited capacity at different levels of educational systems significantly constrains administrative effectiveness in fragile contexts. This capacity gap manifests in various ways, from governance where policies may exceed implementation capabilities, to financing where budget management systems may be weak, to data systems where analytical skills may be limited.

Addressing these capacity challenges requires what Skuse et al. (2013) describe as “contextually grounded capacity development” – approaches that are tailored to the specific needs and constraints of fragile

environments rather than generic training programs. This includes practice-based learning that addresses real administrative challenges; mentoring and coaching that provides ongoing support during implementation; peer learning networks that facilitate knowledge sharing between administrators facing similar challenges; and institutional capacity development that strengthens systems and procedures, not just individual skills. As ERICC (n.d.) emphasizes, “Sustainable administrative capacity in fragile contexts requires attention to both technical competencies and adaptive capabilities – the ability to navigate complex, changing environments while maintaining core functions” (p. 89).

These cross-cutting themes highlight the interconnected nature of different administrative dimensions in fragile contexts. Governance structures influence financing mechanisms, which in turn affect human resource management, while data systems inform policy implementation, which depends on community participation. This interconnectedness suggests the importance of holistic approaches to strengthening educational administration in fragile environments – approaches that address multiple dimensions in coordinated ways rather than focusing on isolated components of the system.

### **Regional Comparison and Divergences**

The systematic review reveals both commonalities and significant divergences in administrative approaches across different fragile and post-conflict regions. These regional patterns reflect the influence of various factors, including historical governance traditions, conflict dynamics, resource availability, international engagement, and contextual characteristics. Understanding these regional variations is essential for developing nuanced approaches to educational administration that are responsive to specific contexts while drawing on broader lessons and principles.

Sub-Saharan Africa emerges as the most extensively documented region in the literature, with particular focus on countries that have experienced civil conflict or state fragility, including South Sudan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. Administrative approaches in this region show several distinctive patterns. First, there is often significant tension between centralized governance traditions inherited from colonial and post-colonial periods and more recent decentralization initiatives promoted by international actors. As IDEAS (2021) observes, “Educational decentralization in fragile African contexts frequently encounters resistance from central authorities accustomed to hierarchical control, even as local capacity constraints limit the effectiveness of devolved responsibilities” (p. 278).

Second, financing mechanisms in Sub-Saharan African contexts often involve complex interactions between extremely limited domestic resources, substantial but volatile international assistance, and significant household contributions even in nominally free education systems. INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes that “the financing gap in fragile African educational systems creates a situation where free education policies exist on paper but various formal and informal fees persist in practice, creating significant equity challenges” (p. 187). Third, human resource management in this region typically contends with severe shortages of qualified personnel, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, leading to high pupil-teacher ratios and reliance on underqualified or contract teachers.

The Middle East and North Africa region presents a different pattern, particularly in countries affected by the Arab Spring and subsequent conflicts, including Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq. Administrative approaches in this region often involve what Coelho and da Silva (2025) term “fragmented sovereignty” – situations where different authorities control different territories, creating parallel administrative systems with limited coordination. This fragmentation presents unique challenges for maintaining educational coherence and equity across divided contexts.

Financing in this region frequently involves significant contrasts between resource-rich and resource-poor countries, with oil-producing states like Iraq having greater domestic revenue potential (though often constrained by governance weaknesses) while non-oil states like Yemen face severe resource limitations. Human resource management in Middle Eastern contexts often builds on relatively strong pre-conflict

educational workforces, with the challenge being retention and support of qualified personnel rather than basic supply. As Skuse et al. (2013) note, “The administrative challenge in many Middle Eastern fragile contexts is not building educational systems from scratch but rather preserving and reconstructing systems that were relatively functional before conflict” (p. 203).

South and Southeast Asia present yet another pattern, with countries like Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Timor-Leste demonstrating distinctive administrative approaches. Governance in these contexts often involves complex relationships between central authorities, ethnic or regional autonomy arrangements, and traditional governance structures at community levels. ERICC (n.d.) highlights how “educational administration in fragile Asian contexts frequently requires navigation between formal state structures and informal or traditional authorities that may hold significant influence, particularly in remote or conflict-affected regions” (p. 98).

Financing mechanisms in this region often involve significant non-state provision, including religious education systems (particularly Islamic schools in Afghanistan and parts of Southeast Asia) that operate with different funding models and administrative arrangements than government systems. Human resource management frequently contends with significant gender disparities in educational staffing, particularly in conservative areas where female teachers and administrators are essential for girls’ education but face various cultural and security constraints.

Latin America and the Caribbean represent a less extensively documented region in the literature on fragile contexts, with Haiti and Colombia receiving the most attention. Administrative approaches in this region often focus on addressing what IDEAS (2021) terms “pockets of fragility” – subnational regions affected by violence, weak governance, or natural disasters within countries that may have relatively functional systems in other areas. This pattern requires administrative approaches that can differentiate between regions with different needs and capabilities while maintaining overall system coherence.

Financing in Latin American contexts often involves greater domestic resource mobilization potential than in other fragile regions, but with significant challenges in equitable allocation to marginalized areas and populations. Human resource management frequently focuses on addressing quality and deployment disparities in a context where basic teacher supply may be less constrained than in other fragile regions. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes, “Administrative reforms in Latin American fragile contexts often emphasize quality improvement and equity enhancement within existing systems, rather than basic system establishment or reconstruction” (p. 199).

Eastern Europe and Central Asia have received limited attention in the literature on fragile contexts, with most focus on countries affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union or the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. Administrative approaches in this region often build on the legacy of highly centralized, relatively well-resourced educational systems that have experienced disruption and fragmentation. Coelho and da Silva (2025) highlight how “educational administration in post-Soviet or post-Yugoslav fragile contexts often involves negotiating between the inheritance of strong centralized traditions and the need for new approaches responsive to changed political and social realities” (p. 145).

Financing in these contexts frequently involves transition from fully state-funded systems to more diverse funding models, with equity implications for regions or populations with limited resources. Human resource management often builds on relatively high levels of teacher qualification but faces challenges related to outdated pedagogical approaches, salary adequacy in transitional economies, and deployment to remote or conflict-affected areas.

Beyond these regional patterns, the review identifies several factors that influence administrative divergences across different fragile contexts, regardless of geographical location. The nature and duration of conflict emerges as a significant factor, with prolonged conflicts typically causing more severe administrative disruption than shorter or less intense conflicts. The pre-conflict strength of educational

systems also matters significantly, with stronger systems generally showing greater resilience and recovery capacity than those that were weak even before conflict.

The degree of international engagement represents another important factor, with some contexts receiving substantial external support for administrative development while others remain relatively neglected by international attention and resources. The relationship between educational administration and broader governance transitions also influences approaches, with contexts undergoing major political transformations (such as peace agreements or regime changes) often experiencing more fundamental administrative reforms than those with more limited political change.

Resource availability, both domestic and international, significantly shapes administrative possibilities, with resource-rich contexts having greater potential for comprehensive reforms while resource-poor contexts often require more targeted, prioritized approaches. Finally, social and cultural factors, including linguistic diversity, gender norms, religious influences, and traditional governance structures, create distinctive administrative environments that require contextually adapted approaches.

Despite these regional and contextual divergences, the review also identifies certain administrative principles that appear relevant across different fragile contexts. These include the importance of balancing immediate needs with longer-term system development; the value of administrative simplicity in capacity-constrained environments; the necessity of equity-focused approaches that address disparities between regions and groups; the critical role of coordination mechanisms in fragmented governance landscapes; and the importance of adaptive approaches that can respond to volatile and unpredictable environments.

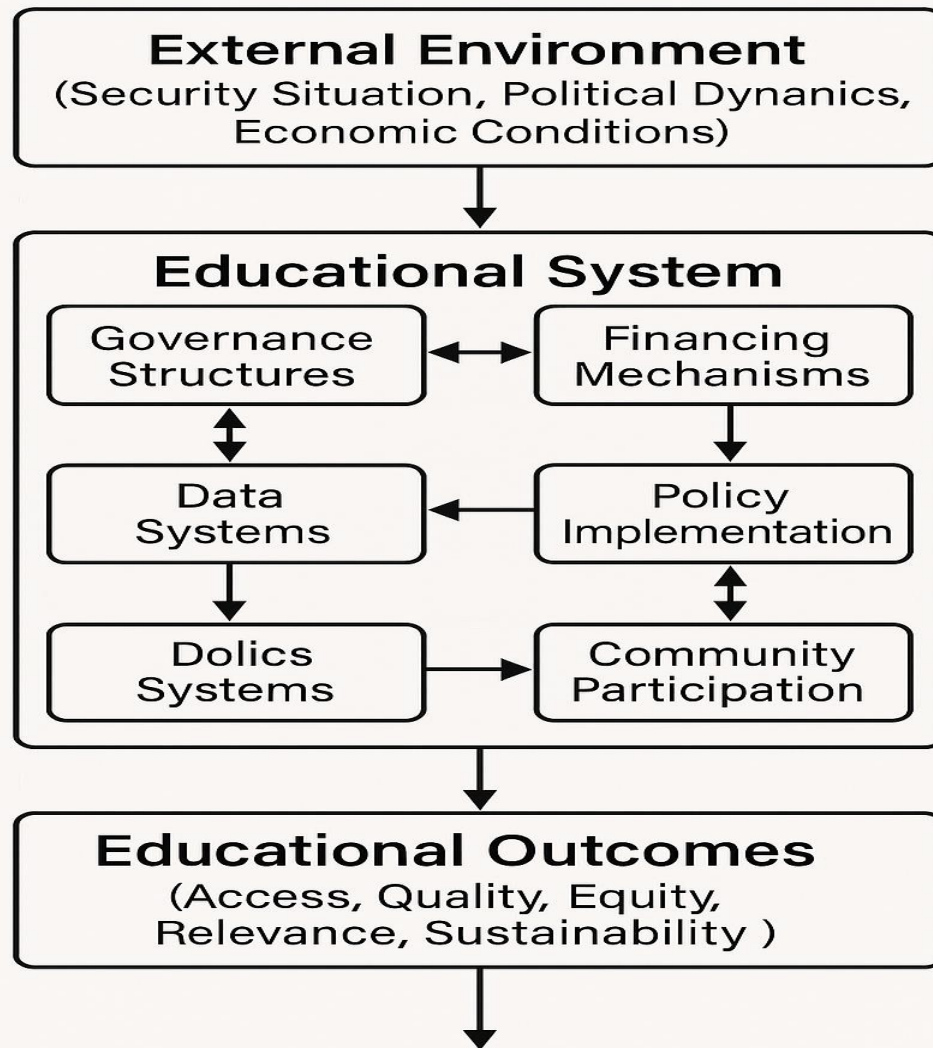
As IDEAS (2021) emphasizes, “While administrative approaches must be contextually grounded to be effective in specific fragile environments, certain core principles of good administration – transparency, accountability, equity, efficiency, and responsiveness – remain relevant across diverse contexts, though their practical application may take different forms” (p. 289). This suggests the value of approaches that draw on broader administrative principles and lessons while adapting specific mechanisms and structures to local realities.

### **Theoretical Framework Application**

The systematic review reveals that various theoretical frameworks have been applied to understand and analyze educational administration in fragile and post-conflict contexts. These frameworks provide conceptual lenses through which to interpret administrative challenges, patterns, and possibilities, offering deeper insights than purely descriptive approaches. While no single theoretical perspective dominates the literature, several frameworks emerge as particularly relevant and illuminating.

Systems theory represents one of the most frequently applied theoretical frameworks, offering valuable insights into the complex, interconnected nature of educational administration in fragile contexts. This approach conceptualizes educational systems as comprising multiple components that interact with each other and with the broader environment, with changes in one component affecting others through various feedback loops. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) argue, “Systems thinking is particularly valuable in fragile contexts, where administrative interventions often produce unintended consequences due to complex interactions between different system elements and with the volatile external environment” (p. 156).

### **Figure 2: Systems Theory Application in Fragile Education Administration**



Systems theory highlights several key insights for educational administration in fragile contexts. First, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of different administrative dimensions, suggesting that interventions focused on isolated components without consideration of their relationships with other elements may produce limited or counterproductive results. Second, it draws attention to feedback loops – the ways in which administrative actions generate responses that may either amplify or dampen the initial effects. Third, it highlights the open nature of educational systems in fragile contexts, where external factors (security conditions, political dynamics, economic constraints) significantly influence administrative functioning and must be considered in planning and implementation.

Institutional theory provides another valuable theoretical lens, focusing on how formal and informal rules, norms, and structures shape administrative behavior and outcomes in fragile contexts. This perspective emphasizes that educational administration operates within institutional environments that include not only formal regulations and organizational structures but also informal practices, cultural norms, and taken-for-granted assumptions. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes, “Administrative reforms in fragile contexts often falter not because of technical design flaws but because they conflict with existing institutional logics and incentive structures” (p. 211).

Institutional theory offers several important insights for understanding educational administration in fragile environments. First, it highlights the persistence of institutional patterns even amid conflict and disruption, explaining why pre-existing administrative traditions often reassert themselves despite formal reforms. Second, it draws attention to the phenomenon of “institutional layering,” where new administrative structures are superimposed on existing ones without fully replacing them, creating complex hybrid arrangements. Third, it emphasizes the importance of legitimacy – the perception that administrative arrangements are appropriate and justified – in determining whether formal structures translate into actual practice.

Political economy analysis represents a third significant theoretical framework, examining how power relationships, resource competition, and incentive structures influence administrative decisions and outcomes in fragile contexts. This approach recognizes that educational administration is not merely a technical exercise but is fundamentally shaped by political dynamics at multiple levels, from local communities to national governments to international actors. As Skuse et al. (2013) emphasize, “Understanding the political economy of educational administration in fragile contexts is essential for developing reforms that are not only technically sound but politically feasible and sustainable” (p. 215).

Political economy analysis provides several valuable insights. First, it highlights how administrative arrangements reflect and sometimes reinforce existing power structures, explaining why reforms that challenge these structures often face resistance. Second, it draws attention to the role of incentives – both formal and informal – in shaping administrative behavior, suggesting that changing rules without addressing underlying incentive structures may have limited impact. Third, it emphasizes the importance of understanding stakeholder interests and influence in designing and implementing administrative reforms, identifying potential champions and spoilers.

Complexity theory emerges as a fourth relevant theoretical framework, particularly valuable for understanding the non-linear, unpredictable dynamics of educational administration in volatile fragile contexts. This perspective conceptualizes educational systems as complex adaptive systems characterized by emergence (where system-level patterns arise from interactions among components), sensitivity to initial conditions, and adaptation in response to changing environments. As IDEAS (2021) argues, “Complexity thinking offers a more realistic framework for understanding administrative dynamics in fragile contexts than linear planning models that assume predictability and control” (p. 301).

Complexity theory suggests several important implications for educational administration in fragile environments. First, it highlights the limitations of blueprint approaches that attempt to impose predetermined administrative models, suggesting instead the value of adaptive, iterative approaches that can respond to emerging patterns and opportunities. Second, it draws attention to the potential for small interventions to produce significant effects if targeted at leverage points within the system. Third, it emphasizes the importance of diversity and redundancy in administrative arrangements, building resilience to withstand shocks and disruptions common in fragile contexts.

Social capital theory provides a fifth theoretical lens, focusing on how relationships, networks, and trust influence administrative functioning in fragile contexts. This perspective recognizes that educational administration depends not only on formal structures and resources but also on social connections that facilitate information sharing, cooperation, and collective action. As ERICC (n.d.) notes, “In fragile contexts where formal institutions are weak, social capital often determines whether administrative arrangements function effectively or exist merely on paper” (p. 109).

Social capital theory offers several valuable insights for educational administration. First, it highlights the importance of horizontal connections between actors at similar levels (such as networks of school directors or district officials) in sharing knowledge and resources. Second, it draws attention to vertical linkages between different administrative levels, which can facilitate information flow and implementation support. Third, it emphasizes the role of bridging social capital – connections between different groups or

communities – in building the social cohesion necessary for effective administrative functioning in divided societies.

Finally, critical theory perspectives emerge in some of the literature, examining how power imbalances, structural inequalities, and dominant discourses shape educational administration in fragile contexts. These approaches pay particular attention to whose voices and interests are privileged or marginalized in administrative arrangements, and how international models and expertise may reinforce dependencies or undermine local agency. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) argue, “Critical perspectives remind us to question whose knowledge counts in administrative reforms, and to examine how seemingly technical administrative arrangements may reproduce or challenge existing inequalities” (p. 167).

Critical perspectives offer several important insights. First, they highlight how administrative arrangements that appear neutral may in fact privilege certain groups or perspectives while marginalizing others. Second, they draw attention to the potential for international administrative models to undermine local ownership and contextual appropriateness if imposed without sufficient adaptation. Third, they emphasize the importance of creating space for marginalized voices in administrative processes, particularly those of communities most affected by fragility and conflict.

The application of these theoretical frameworks is not merely an academic exercise but has significant practical implications for strengthening educational administration in fragile contexts. As IDEAS (2021) emphasizes, “Theoretical frameworks provide not just explanatory power but also guidance for more effective administrative approaches – helping practitioners to understand system dynamics, anticipate challenges, identify leverage points, and design contextually appropriate interventions” (p. 312).

The most valuable approaches appear to combine insights from multiple theoretical perspectives, recognizing that no single framework captures the full complexity of educational administration in fragile environments. Systems thinking provides an overarching framework for understanding interconnections between different administrative dimensions, while institutional theory helps explain the persistence of certain patterns despite formal reforms. Political economy analysis illuminates the power dynamics that shape administrative decisions, while complexity theory offers guidance for navigating unpredictable environments. Social capital perspectives highlight the relational foundations of effective administration, while critical approaches ensure attention to equity and voice in administrative arrangements.

Together, these theoretical frameworks suggest the need for administrative approaches in fragile contexts that are systemic rather than fragmented, politically informed rather than purely technical, adaptive rather than rigid, relationship-based rather than solely structural, and equity-focused rather than assuming neutrality. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) concludes, “Theoretically informed administrative practice in fragile contexts requires both analytical sophistication to understand complex dynamics and practical wisdom to translate these insights into contextually appropriate actions” (p. 223).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The systematic review findings have significant implications for policy and practice related to educational administration in fragile and post-conflict contexts. These implications are relevant for various stakeholders, including national governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and communities involved in educational provision in challenging environments.

For national governments in fragile and post-conflict contexts, the review suggests several important policy directions. First, the findings highlight the value of realistic, prioritized policy frameworks that match ambition to actual implementation capacity and resources. As Skuse et al. (2013) emphasize, “Effective educational policies in fragile contexts focus on core priorities that can be realistically implemented rather than comprehensive reforms that exceed capacity” (p. 227). This suggests the importance of phased approaches that begin with foundational administrative functions and gradually expand as capacity and resources develop.

Second, the review underscores the importance of equity-focused policies that explicitly address disparities between different regions and populations. This includes resource allocation formulas that direct additional funding to underserved areas; deployment incentives that encourage qualified personnel to work in challenging environments; targeted capacity development for administrative staff in marginalized regions; and disaggregated monitoring systems that make disparities visible and actionable. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes, “Equity-focused policies require not just rhetorical commitment but concrete mechanisms that translate this commitment into resource allocation and implementation priorities” (p. 235).

Third, the findings highlight the value of adaptive policy frameworks that provide clear direction while allowing flexibility in implementation methods across different contexts. This includes decentralized decision-making that enables local adaptation within broad national frameworks; simplified administrative procedures that reduce burden on capacity-constrained staff; regular policy review and adjustment based on implementation experience; and contingency planning for potential changes in context. As IDEAS (2021) argues, “Effective policy frameworks in fragile contexts strike a balance between providing sufficient structure for coherence and allowing sufficient flexibility for contextual adaptation” (p. 323).

For international organizations and donors supporting educational administration in fragile contexts, the review suggests several important practice implications. First, the findings highlight the need for coordinated, harmonized approaches that reduce fragmentation and transaction costs for capacity-constrained national systems. This includes alignment with national priorities and systems where these exist and are functional; coordinated funding mechanisms that reduce parallel structures; joint planning and review processes that promote information sharing; and transition strategies that bridge humanitarian and development interventions. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) emphasize, “International support is most effective when it strengthens rather than bypasses or fragments national administrative systems, even when these systems have significant weaknesses” (p. 178).

Second, the review underscores the importance of long-term, predictable support for administrative capacity development. This includes sustained investment in core administrative functions rather than short-term project implementation units; flexible funding that can adapt to changing circumstances; capacity development approaches that balance immediate operational support with longer-term system building; and realistic timeframes that recognize the gradual nature of administrative strengthening in challenging environments. As ERICC (n.d.) notes, “Administrative capacity development in fragile contexts typically requires decades rather than years, with sustained support through inevitable setbacks and transitions” (p. 121).

Third, the findings highlight the value of context-sensitive approaches that are informed by thorough understanding of local realities rather than imported models. This includes investment in political economy analysis to understand power dynamics and incentive structures; consultation with diverse stakeholders to identify contextual constraints and opportunities; piloting and adaptation of approaches before large-scale implementation; and flexibility to adjust strategies based on emerging learning. As Skuse et al. (2013) argue, “International support is most effective when it starts from where systems actually are rather than where external actors think they should be, building on existing strengths while addressing critical weaknesses” (p. 239).

For non-governmental organizations implementing educational programs in fragile contexts, the review suggests several important practice implications. First, the findings highlight the need for approaches that strengthen rather than undermine or duplicate government administrative systems, even when these systems have significant weaknesses. This includes alignment with national policies and standards where these exist and are appropriate; information sharing with relevant government entities; capacity development for government counterparts; and transition strategies that gradually transfer responsibilities as government capacity develops. As IDEAS (2021) emphasizes, “Non-governmental actors play a vital role in service delivery in fragile contexts but should do so in ways that contribute to rather than compete with long-term system development” (p. 334).



Second, the review underscores the importance of community engagement approaches that promote meaningful participation while being sensitive to local power dynamics. This includes transparent information sharing about resources and decisions; inclusive representation mechanisms that ensure marginalized groups have voice; capacity development for community representatives to engage effectively; and accountability systems that respond to community priorities and concerns. As INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes, “Community engagement should go beyond tokenistic consultation to create genuine opportunities for influence over administrative decisions that affect local educational provision” (p. 247).

Third, the findings highlight the value of evidence-based approaches that contribute to broader knowledge about effective administrative practices in fragile contexts. This includes robust monitoring and evaluation systems that assess not just outputs but administrative processes and outcomes; documentation and sharing of lessons learned, including challenges and failures; participation in coordination mechanisms and learning networks; and openness to external evaluation and research. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) argue, “Non-governmental organizations have a responsibility not only to implement programs effectively but also to contribute to the collective understanding of what works in strengthening educational administration in challenging environments” (p. 189).

For communities in fragile and post-conflict contexts, the review suggests several important implications for engagement with educational administration. First, the findings highlight the value of organized, informed participation in administrative processes. This includes forming representative structures such as school management committees or parent associations; seeking information about educational policies, resources, and performance; developing capacity to engage effectively with administrative systems; and building networks with other communities to share experiences and amplify influence. As Skuse et al. (2013) emphasize, “Community engagement is most effective when it is organized, informed, and persistent, rather than ad hoc or reactive” (p. 251).

Second, the review underscores the importance of balancing oversight and support roles in relation to educational administration. This includes monitoring resource use and policy implementation to promote accountability; providing constructive feedback on administrative challenges and opportunities; contributing complementary resources (time, knowledge, materials) where appropriate; and advocating for equitable resource allocation and policy implementation. As ERICC (n.d.) notes, “Effective community engagement involves both holding administrative systems accountable and providing support to address constraints and challenges” (p. 133).

Third, the findings highlight the value of building bridges across different community groups to strengthen collective voice in administrative processes. This includes developing inclusive representation mechanisms that reflect community diversity; creating dialogue spaces to address tensions or different priorities; forming broader networks or federations to engage with higher administrative levels; and participating in peace-building initiatives that strengthen the social foundation for effective educational administration. As IDEAS (2021) argues, “Community cohesion significantly influences administrative effectiveness, particularly in contexts where social divisions have been exacerbated by conflict” (p. 345).

Across all stakeholder groups, the review points to several overarching implications for strengthening educational administration in fragile contexts. First, it highlights the importance of balancing immediate needs with longer-term system development – addressing urgent requirements while building sustainable administrative capacity. Second, it underscores the value of coordination and complementarity between different actors, with each contributing according to their comparative advantages while working toward common objectives. Third, it emphasizes the critical importance of adaptive, learning-oriented approaches that can respond to the volatile, unpredictable environments characteristic of fragile contexts.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the review suggests that effective educational administration in fragile contexts requires what INEE Working Group (n.d.) terms “principled pragmatism” – approaches that

maintain core values and standards while recognizing the constraints and opportunities of challenging environments. As they note, “Administrative effectiveness in fragile contexts is measured not by adherence to ideal models but by the ability to maintain essential functions and progress toward equity goals under difficult circumstances” (p. 259). This perspective acknowledges the reality of trade-offs and compromises while maintaining a clear focus on the ultimate purpose of educational administration: ensuring equitable access to quality education for all learners, particularly those most affected by fragility and conflict.

### Identified Gaps in Literature

The systematic review reveals several significant gaps in the existing literature on administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. These gaps represent important areas for future research to enhance understanding and improve practice in this critical field.

A prominent gap is the limited longitudinal research examining how educational administration evolves over time in fragile contexts. Most studies provide snapshots of administrative arrangements at specific points, with few tracking changes, adaptations, and outcomes over extended periods. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) note, “The temporal dimension of administrative development in fragile contexts remains poorly understood, limiting our knowledge of how systems evolve through different phases of fragility and recovery” (p. 198). This gap is particularly significant given the non-linear nature of transitions in fragile contexts, where progress is often punctuated by setbacks and reversals that longitudinal research would be well-positioned to document and analyze.

The literature also shows limited comparative research systematically analyzing administrative approaches across different fragile contexts. While individual case studies provide valuable depth on specific contexts, few studies employ rigorous comparative methodologies to identify patterns, commonalities, and divergences across multiple settings. IDEAS (2021) argues that “comparative research is essential for distinguishing between context-specific and more generalizable aspects of educational administration in fragile environments, yet methodologically robust comparisons remain rare” (p. 356). This gap constrains the development of nuanced theories and frameworks that can explain variation in administrative effectiveness across different fragile contexts.

Table 8: Research Gaps Mapped by Theme and Region

Administrative Dimension	Sub-Saharan Africa	Middle East & North Africa	South & Southeast Asia	Latin America & Caribbean	Eastern Europe & Central Asia
Governance Structures	Moderate coverage; limited on transitions	Moderate coverage; focus on fragmentation	Limited coverage; some on decentralization	Very limited coverage	Very limited coverage
Financing Mechanisms	Good coverage; gaps on domestic resource mobilization	Limited coverage; gaps on private financing	Limited coverage; gaps on religious education financing	Very limited coverage	Very limited coverage
Human Resources	Good coverage; gaps on leadership development	Moderate coverage; gaps on gender dimensions	Moderate coverage; gaps on professional development	Limited coverage	Very limited coverage

<b>Administrative Dimension</b>	<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	<b>Middle East &amp; North Africa</b>	<b>South &amp; Southeast Asia</b>	<b>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</b>	<b>Eastern Europe &amp; Central Asia</b>
Data Systems	Moderate coverage; gaps on utilization	Limited coverage; gaps on fragmented systems	Limited coverage; gaps on technological applications	Very limited coverage	Very limited coverage
Community Participation	Good coverage; gaps on sustainability	Limited coverage; gaps on divided communities	Moderate coverage; gaps on traditional structures	Limited coverage	Very limited coverage
Policy Implementation	Good coverage; gaps on adaptation processes	Moderate coverage; gaps on non-state actors	Limited coverage; gaps on subnational variation	Very limited coverage	Very limited coverage

A third significant gap is the limited research on cost-effectiveness of different administrative approaches in fragile contexts. While the literature documents various administrative models and interventions, few studies rigorously assess their costs relative to outcomes or compare the efficiency of alternative approaches. As Skuse et al. (2013) observe, “The evidence base on which administrative investments provide the greatest returns in fragile contexts remains thin, constraining informed decision-making about resource allocation” (p. 263). This gap is particularly problematic given the severe resource constraints characteristic of fragile environments, where efficiency in administrative expenditure is crucial for maximizing educational impact with limited funds.

The literature also shows limited research on the relationship between administrative arrangements and educational outcomes in fragile contexts. While many studies describe administrative structures and processes, relatively few establish clear links between specific administrative approaches and their effects on access, quality, equity, or other educational outcomes. INEE Working Group (n.d.) notes that “the causal pathways between administrative interventions and educational results remain underexplored, limiting our understanding of which administrative investments most effectively improve learning opportunities and outcomes” (p. 271). This gap constrains evidence-based decision-making about administrative priorities and approaches.

A fifth significant gap is the limited research on innovative administrative approaches specifically designed for fragile contexts. Much of the literature examines how conventional administrative models function (or dysfunction) in challenging environments, with less attention to novel approaches developed specifically for these contexts. As ERICC (n.d.) argues, “The literature tends to focus on adapting standard administrative models rather than fundamentally rethinking administrative approaches for environments characterized by severe capacity constraints, volatility, and fragmentation” (p. 145). This gap limits the development of potentially transformative administrative innovations tailored to the unique challenges of fragile settings.

The literature also shows limited research on the role of technology in strengthening educational administration in fragile contexts. While some studies mention technological applications in areas such as data systems or financial management, few provide in-depth analysis of how digital tools can address specific administrative challenges or the conditions under which technology-enabled approaches are effective. IDEAS (2021) notes that “the potential and limitations of technology-enabled administrative solutions in infrastructure-constrained, capacity-limited fragile environments remain insufficiently

examined” (p. 367). This gap is particularly significant given the rapid evolution of mobile and other technologies that may offer new possibilities for administrative functioning in challenging contexts.

A seventh significant gap is the limited research on administrative approaches in urban fragile contexts. Much of the literature focuses on national systems or rural challenges, with less attention to the specific administrative issues presented by fragile urban environments, including informal settlements, areas controlled by non-state actors, or rapidly growing displacement-affected urban zones. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) observe, “The administrative dimensions of educational provision in fragile urban contexts present distinct challenges that remain underexplored, despite increasing urbanization of both conflict and displacement” (p. 209). This gap constrains understanding of appropriate administrative approaches for the growing proportion of crisis-affected populations living in urban areas.

The literature also shows limited research incorporating the perspectives of national administrative staff working in fragile contexts. While many studies present the viewpoints of international actors or senior officials, fewer capture the experiences, challenges, and insights of mid-level and local administrators who implement policies and manage day-to-day operations. Skuse et al. (2013) argue that “the voices of frontline administrative personnel are largely absent from the literature, despite their crucial role in translating policies into practice and their unique knowledge of implementation realities” (p. 275). This gap limits understanding of the lived experience of educational administration in fragile environments and the practical wisdom developed by those navigating these challenges daily.

A ninth significant gap is the limited research on the political dimensions of educational administration in fragile contexts. While some studies acknowledge political factors, many treat administration as a primarily technical domain, with insufficient attention to how power dynamics, competing interests, and political settlements shape administrative possibilities and constraints. INEE Working Group (n.d.) emphasizes that “the political economy of educational administration in fragile contexts remains underexamined, limiting understanding of why technically sound administrative reforms often fail to gain traction or produce intended results” (p. 283). This gap constrains the development of politically informed approaches to administrative strengthening.

Finally, the literature shows geographical imbalances in coverage, with some fragile contexts receiving substantial research attention while others remain significantly underexamined. Sub-Saharan African countries generally receive the most extensive coverage, while fragile contexts in Latin America, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe are notably underrepresented. As IDEAS (2021) notes, “The geographical unevenness of the evidence base limits comparative analysis and raises questions about the generalizability of findings from more extensively studied contexts to those that have received less research attention” (p. 378). This gap constrains understanding of how administrative challenges and effective approaches may vary across different regional and cultural contexts.

These identified gaps suggest important directions for future research on educational administration in fragile and post-conflict contexts. Addressing these gaps would strengthen the evidence base for policy and practice, potentially leading to more effective administrative approaches that better support equitable education provision in some of the world’s most challenging environments. As Coelho and da Silva (2025) conclude, “Enhancing understanding of educational administration in fragile contexts is not merely an academic exercise but a practical necessity for improving learning opportunities for millions of children and youth affected by fragility and conflict” (p. 219). # Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusion

This systematic review has examined the administrative dimensions of equitable free education in fragile and post-conflict contexts, synthesizing literature published between 2010 and 2023. The review has analyzed six key administrative dimensions: governance structures and policy frameworks; budgeting,

financing, and resource allocation; human resource management; data systems and evidence-based planning; community participation and accountability mechanisms; and policy implementation challenges. Through rigorous analysis of the literature, the review has identified patterns, challenges, and promising practices across these dimensions, providing insights that can inform more effective approaches to educational administration in fragile environments.

The findings reveal that educational administration in fragile contexts operates under distinctive conditions that significantly influence its functioning and effectiveness. These conditions include institutional weakness, resource constraints, security challenges, social fragmentation, and the presence of multiple actors with diverse mandates and priorities. Within this challenging environment, administrative systems must balance multiple tensions: between centralized and decentralized approaches; between immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term development objectives; between standardized procedures and contextual adaptation; between technical efficiency and political feasibility; and between ambitious aspirations and limited implementation capacity.

The review highlights several overarching themes that cut across different administrative dimensions. First, the interconnected nature of these dimensions requires holistic approaches that address multiple aspects of administration in coordinated ways rather than focusing on isolated components. Governance structures influence financing mechanisms, which in turn affect human resource management, while data systems inform policy implementation, which depends on community participation. This interconnectedness suggests the importance of systemic thinking in administrative strengthening efforts.

Second, the review emphasizes the critical importance of equity-focused administrative approaches in fragile contexts. Administrative systems often reinforce rather than address existing disparities, with resources, qualified personnel, and administrative attention concentrated in more accessible, secure, and visible areas. Addressing these equity challenges requires deliberate efforts to direct additional resources, attention, and support to underserved areas and populations, including equity-weighted funding formulas, deployment incentives, targeted capacity development, and disaggregated data collection that makes disparities visible and actionable.

Third, the findings underscore the value of adaptive, flexible administrative approaches that can respond to the volatile, unpredictable environments characteristic of fragile contexts. Rigid administrative models developed for stable contexts often prove ineffective or counterproductive when applied in fragile settings. Effective administration in these environments requires a balance between structured processes that provide direction and consistency, and adaptive mechanisms that enable responsiveness to changing circumstances and emerging learning.

Fourth, the review highlights the importance of contextual adaptation in administrative approaches. The literature documents numerous cases where administrative models imported from stable contexts or applied uniformly across different regions within fragile states have proven ineffective. Successful administrative approaches maintain core functions and equity principles while adapting implementation methods to different contexts, recognizing that effectiveness depends less on the specific model adopted than on how well that model is adapted to local realities.

Fifth, the findings emphasize the relationship between administrative systems and broader conflict dynamics. Educational administration can either contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion or inadvertently exacerbate tensions and grievances. Conflict-sensitive administration requires approaches that are informed by thorough understanding of conflict dynamics and designed to contribute to peacebuilding rather than exacerbating tensions, including inclusive governance structures, transparent resource allocation, equitable personnel deployment, and community engagement approaches that build trust across social divides.

Sixth, the review underscores the critical role of administrative capacity development across all dimensions. Limited capacity at different levels of educational systems significantly constrains administrative effectiveness in fragile contexts. Addressing these capacity challenges requires contextually grounded approaches that are tailored to the specific needs and constraints of fragile environments, including practice-based learning, mentoring and coaching, peer learning networks, and institutional capacity development that strengthens systems and procedures, not just individual skills.

The review also reveals significant regional variations in administrative approaches, reflecting the influence of historical governance traditions, conflict dynamics, resource availability, international engagement, and contextual characteristics. While certain administrative principles appear relevant across different fragile contexts, their practical application takes different forms depending on specific regional and local conditions. This suggests the importance of approaches that draw on broader administrative principles and lessons while adapting specific mechanisms and structures to local realities.

The application of various theoretical frameworks—including systems theory, institutional theory, political economy analysis, complexity theory, social capital theory, and critical perspectives—provides deeper insights into the complex dynamics of educational administration in fragile contexts. These frameworks suggest the need for administrative approaches that are systemic rather than fragmented, politically informed rather than purely technical, adaptive rather than rigid, relationship-based rather than solely structural, and equity-focused rather than assuming neutrality.

Despite the growing body of literature on educational administration in fragile contexts, significant gaps remain in our understanding. These include limited longitudinal research examining administrative evolution over time; few comparative studies systematically analyzing approaches across different contexts; insufficient research on cost-effectiveness and the relationship between administrative arrangements and educational outcomes; limited exploration of innovative approaches specifically designed for fragile environments; and geographical imbalances in coverage, with some regions receiving substantial research attention while others remain significantly underexamined.

In conclusion, this systematic review contributes to both scholarly understanding and practical application in a field of critical importance to millions of children and youth affected by fragility and conflict. By synthesizing diverse strands of research and identifying patterns across different contexts, it provides a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of educational administration in fragile environments than is available in individual studies or narrower reviews. The findings suggest that while educational administration in these challenging contexts faces significant constraints, thoughtful, context-sensitive, equity-focused approaches can make meaningful contributions to more effective and equitable education provision, even amid fragility and conflict.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Based on the systematic review findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed for strengthening educational administration in fragile and post-conflict contexts. These recommendations are organized according to different stakeholder groups, recognizing their distinct roles and responsibilities while emphasizing the importance of coordinated, complementary approaches.

For national governments in fragile and post-conflict contexts:

1. Develop realistic, prioritized policy frameworks that match ambition to actual implementation capacity and resources. This includes focusing on core administrative functions essential for equitable education provision; establishing clear priorities for phased implementation; and designing policies with explicit consideration of implementation requirements and constraints. As the review findings indicate, policies that exceed implementation capacity not only fail to achieve their objectives but can also undermine trust in educational institutions and create cynicism among stakeholders.

2. Implement equity-focused resource allocation mechanisms that deliberately address disparities between different regions and populations. This includes developing funding formulas that allocate additional resources to disadvantaged areas; establishing transparent criteria for resource distribution that prioritize equity considerations; creating special funds or programs targeted at particularly marginalized groups; and monitoring resource flows to ensure they reach intended beneficiaries. The review findings highlight how conventional allocation approaches often reinforce rather than address existing disparities, particularly in contexts where certain regions or populations have historically been underserved.
3. Establish differentiated governance arrangements that balance national coherence with local responsiveness. This includes maintaining centralized responsibility for core functions such as policy development, standard setting, and major resource allocation; devolving appropriate authority to local levels for contextual adaptation and implementation; creating clear divisions of responsibility between different administrative levels; and developing coordination mechanisms that facilitate communication and alignment. The review findings suggest that neither purely centralized nor fully decentralized approaches are universally effective in fragile contexts, with the most successful systems involving strategic complementarity between different levels.
4. Strengthen human resource management systems to address critical personnel challenges. This includes developing deployment incentives that encourage qualified staff to work in underserved areas; establishing transparent, merit-based recruitment and promotion processes; creating career pathways that recognize and reward service in challenging environments; implementing professional development programs accessible to personnel in all regions; and addressing gender disparities in educational staffing, particularly in leadership positions. The review findings highlight how human resource challenges significantly constrain administrative effectiveness in fragile contexts, with particular impact on equity dimensions.
5. Develop simplified, robust data systems focused on essential information needs. This includes identifying core indicators that directly inform key administrative decisions; establishing data collection procedures that can function even in challenging environments; ensuring disaggregation by relevant equity dimensions (gender, location, socioeconomic status, etc.); creating accessible formats for data presentation and utilization at different administrative levels; and investing in analytical capacity to translate data into actionable insights. The review findings indicate that ambitious data systems often falter in fragile contexts, while more focused approaches that prioritize utilization over comprehensiveness show greater sustainability and impact.
6. Implement conflict-sensitive administrative approaches informed by thorough understanding of conflict dynamics. This includes conducting conflict analysis to identify how administrative decisions may interact with tensions or grievances; ensuring inclusive representation in governance structures and decision-making processes; establishing transparent criteria for resource allocation that reduce perceptions of favoritism; addressing historical disparities that may have contributed to conflict; and creating dialogue mechanisms to address tensions when they arise. The review findings emphasize how administrative decisions in fragile contexts are never purely technical but have political implications that can either support or undermine broader peacebuilding processes.

For international organizations and donors supporting educational administration:

1. Provide long-term, predictable support for administrative capacity development. This includes making multi-year commitments that enable sustainable planning; balancing technical assistance with institutional development; supporting both individual skills and organizational systems; and maintaining engagement through inevitable setbacks and transitions. The review findings highlight how short-term, project-focused support often fails to build sustainable administrative capacity, particularly in contexts requiring fundamental system strengthening rather than incremental improvements.
2. Align support with national priorities and systems where these exist and are functional. This includes working through government structures rather than creating parallel systems; harmonizing

procedures with national processes to reduce transaction costs; supporting government-led coordination mechanisms; and gradually increasing use of national systems as capacity develops. The review findings indicate that fragmented, uncoordinated international support can overwhelm limited national capacity and undermine coherent system development, despite good intentions.

3. Invest in context-specific administrative approaches rather than importing standardized models. This includes supporting thorough context analysis before designing interventions; engaging diverse stakeholders in program development; piloting and adapting approaches before large-scale implementation; building on existing strengths and positive practices within administrative systems; and allowing flexibility in implementation to respond to contextual variations. The review findings demonstrate how administrative models transferred from stable contexts or applied uniformly across different fragile environments often prove ineffective or counterproductive.
4. Support transitional arrangements that bridge humanitarian and development approaches. This includes developing financing mechanisms that span different phases of fragility and recovery; creating coordination structures that bring together humanitarian and development actors; supporting administrative systems that can evolve from emergency response to longer-term development; and investing in capacity that serves both immediate and longer-term needs. The review findings highlight how the gap between humanitarian and development approaches often creates administrative discontinuities that undermine system development.
5. Prioritize equity considerations in all administrative support. This includes targeting assistance to underserved regions and populations; supporting disaggregated data collection and analysis that makes disparities visible; strengthening administrative capacity in marginalized areas; funding innovative approaches to reaching excluded groups; and consistently applying an equity lens to program design and evaluation. The review findings emphasize how international support sometimes concentrates in more accessible, secure, and visible areas, potentially reinforcing rather than addressing existing disparities.
6. Invest in research and knowledge development on effective administrative approaches. This includes supporting rigorous evaluation of administrative interventions; funding longitudinal studies that track administrative evolution over time; facilitating comparative research across different fragile contexts; documenting and disseminating lessons learned, including challenges and failures; and addressing identified research gaps, particularly in underexamined regions and topics. The review findings reveal significant gaps in the evidence base that constrain evidence-informed decision-making about administrative investments and approaches.

For non-governmental organizations implementing educational programs:

1. Align with and strengthen government administrative systems rather than creating parallel structures. This includes adhering to national policies and standards where these exist and are appropriate; sharing information with relevant government entities; participating in sector coordination mechanisms; building capacity of government counterparts; and planning for gradual transition of responsibilities as government capacity develops. The review findings indicate that while non-governmental provision is often essential in fragile contexts, approaches that undermine or duplicate government systems can fragment administration and complicate longer-term system development.
2. Implement transparent, participatory management approaches that model good administrative practice. This includes sharing information about resources and decisions with communities and authorities; establishing clear, accessible feedback and complaint mechanisms; involving diverse stakeholders in planning and monitoring; documenting and sharing lessons learned; and demonstrating accountability for results. The review findings suggest that non-governmental organizations can play an important role in modeling administrative practices that strengthen rather than undermine trust and accountability.
3. Invest in local administrative capacity beyond immediate project needs. This includes training community members and local staff in administrative skills that have broader application;



strengthening local organizations that can sustain administrative functions; developing simple but effective administrative tools and procedures adapted to local contexts; documenting administrative approaches in accessible formats; and planning for responsible exit that preserves administrative gains. The review findings highlight how project-focused capacity development often fails to contribute to sustainable administrative systems once external support ends.

4. Address equity dimensions explicitly in program design and implementation. This includes conducting thorough analysis to identify marginalized groups and regions; developing specific strategies to reach those most excluded from educational opportunities; monitoring disaggregated data to track equity impacts; adapting approaches based on equity findings; and advocating for systemic changes that address structural barriers. The review findings emphasize how programmatic interventions sometimes reach those easiest to serve rather than those most in need, particularly in challenging fragile environments.
5. Contribute to the evidence base on effective administrative approaches. This includes implementing robust monitoring and evaluation systems that assess administrative processes and outcomes; documenting and sharing lessons learned, including challenges and failures; participating in research initiatives and learning networks; opening programs to external evaluation; and investing in innovative administrative approaches with potential for broader application. The review findings reveal significant gaps in practical knowledge about effective administrative strategies in fragile contexts that non-governmental organizations are well-positioned to help address.

For communities in fragile and post-conflict contexts:

1. Organize for effective engagement with educational administration. This includes forming representative structures such as school management committees or parent associations; ensuring inclusive representation that reflects community diversity; developing capacity to understand administrative processes and requirements; building networks with other communities to share experiences and amplify influence; and maintaining consistent engagement rather than only responding to crises. The review findings indicate that organized, informed community participation significantly enhances administrative responsiveness and accountability.
2. Demand transparency and accountability from educational authorities. This includes seeking information about policies, resources, and performance; monitoring implementation of commitments; reporting concerns through appropriate channels; participating in planning and review processes; and advocating for equitable resource allocation and policy implementation. The review findings suggest that community oversight plays a crucial role in reducing corruption and ensuring that resources reach intended beneficiaries, particularly in contexts with weak formal accountability mechanisms.
3. Contribute to administrative capacity through complementary support. This includes mobilizing community resources (time, knowledge, materials) to extend limited public funding; participating in school maintenance and improvement; supporting teacher welfare and motivation; addressing student attendance and retention issues; and building bridges between schools and families. The review findings highlight how community contributions can significantly enhance administrative effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained environments, while noting the importance of ensuring these contributions do not create or exacerbate inequities.
4. Engage in peacebuilding initiatives that strengthen the social foundation for effective administration. This includes creating dialogue spaces to address tensions or different priorities; building inclusive decision-making processes that respect diversity; collaborating across community divides on shared educational concerns; modeling peaceful conflict resolution for younger generations; and participating in reconciliation efforts that address historical grievances. The review findings emphasize how social cohesion significantly influences administrative effectiveness, particularly in contexts where conflict has eroded trust and cooperation.

These recommendations recognize that strengthening educational administration in fragile contexts requires coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders, each contributing according to their specific roles and capabilities. While the particular emphasis and application will vary across different contexts, the underlying principles—realism, equity, adaptability, coordination, capacity development, and conflict sensitivity—remain relevant across diverse fragile environments. As the review findings consistently demonstrate, there are no simple solutions or universal models for educational administration in these challenging contexts, but thoughtful, context-sensitive approaches based on these principles can make meaningful contributions to more effective and equitable education provision, even amid fragility and conflict.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the identified gaps in the existing literature, the following recommendations are proposed for future research on administrative dimensions of education in fragile and post-conflict contexts. These recommendations aim to strengthen the evidence base for policy and practice, potentially leading to more effective administrative approaches that better support equitable education provision in challenging environments.

1. Conduct longitudinal research examining how educational administration evolves over time in fragile contexts. This research should track changes, adaptations, and outcomes across different phases of fragility and recovery, documenting both progress and setbacks to develop more nuanced understanding of administrative development trajectories. Longitudinal studies are particularly important for understanding the non-linear nature of administrative strengthening in volatile environments, where progress is often punctuated by reversals that cross-sectional research fails to capture. This research could employ mixed methods approaches, combining quantitative tracking of key administrative indicators with qualitative investigation of the processes and factors influencing changes over time.
2. Implement rigorous comparative studies analyzing administrative approaches across different fragile contexts. This research should employ consistent methodological frameworks to identify patterns, commonalities, and divergences across multiple settings, distinguishing between context-specific and more generalizable aspects of educational administration in fragile environments. Comparative studies are essential for developing more robust theories and frameworks that can explain variation in administrative effectiveness across different contexts. This research could include both regional comparisons (examining similar administrative dimensions across different geographical areas) and thematic comparisons (examining specific administrative aspects across diverse contexts).
3. Investigate the cost-effectiveness of different administrative approaches in fragile contexts. This research should assess the costs of various administrative models and interventions relative to their outcomes, comparing the efficiency of alternative approaches to inform resource allocation decisions. Cost-effectiveness studies are particularly important given the severe resource constraints characteristic of fragile environments, where efficiency in administrative expenditure is crucial for maximizing educational impact with limited funds. This research could employ economic analysis methods adapted to the specific challenges of fragile contexts, where conventional cost-benefit approaches may require modification to account for non-monetary values and longer-term impacts.

### **References**

- Abuya, B. A., Admassu, K., Ngware, M., Onsomu, E. O., & Oketch, M. (2015). Free primary education and implementation in Kenya: The role of primary school teachers in addressing the policy gap. *SAGE Open*, 5(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244015571487>

- Acedo, C., Akkari, A., & Müller, K. (2010). The role of education for social cohesion in post-conflict societies. *Prospects*, 40(2), 257-264. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-010-9159-1>
- Akyeampong, K., Pryor, J., & Ampiah, J. G. (2016). Decentralisation and teacher deployment policies in Ghana: Examining implementation challenges in fragile contexts. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 46(5), 764-784. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2015.1105010>
- Alif Ailaan. (2017). *The voice of teachers: Learning from teachers across Pakistan*. Alif Ailaan.
- Altinyelken, H. K. (2010). Curriculum change in Uganda: Teacher perspectives on the new thematic curriculum. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(2), 151-161. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.03.004>
- Aslam, M., Rawal, S., & Saeed, S. (2017). Public-private partnerships in education in developing countries: A rigorous review of the evidence. Ark Education Partnerships Group.
- Barakat, S., Connolly, D., Hardman, F., & Sundaram, V. (2013). *The role of teachers in peacebuilding and reconstruction: A synthesis report of literature and research*. UNICEF.
- Barakat, S., Hardman, F., Rohwerder, B., & Rzeszut, K. (2014). *The capacity development of Ministries of Education in conflict and post-conflict contexts: A literature review*. UNICEF.
- Barrera-Osorio, F., Fasih, T., Patrinos, H. A., & Santibáñez, L. (2009). Decentralized decision-making in schools: The theory and evidence on school-based management. The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-0-8213-7969-1>
- Bellino, M. J., Paulson, J., & Worden, E. A. (2017). Working through difficult pasts: Toward thick democracy and transitional justice in education. *Comparative Education*, 53(3), 313-332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2017.1337956>
- Bengtsson, S. E. L. (2011). Fragile states, fragile concepts: A critical reflection on the terminology of fragility in the field of education in emergencies. In J. Paulson (Ed.), *Education, conflict and development* (pp. 33-58). Symposium Books.
- Benveniste, L., Marshall, J. H., & Araujo, M. C. (2008). *Teaching in Cambodia*. The World Bank & Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Royal Government of Cambodia.
- Berkvens, J. B. Y. (2017). The importance of understanding culture when improving education: Learning from Cambodia. *International Education Studies*, 10(9), 161-174. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v10n9p161>
- Berry, C. (2010). Working effectively with non-state actors to deliver education in fragile states. *Development in Practice*, 20(4-5), 586-593. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614521003763103>
- Brannelly, L., Ndaruhutse, S., & Rigaud, C. (2009). *Donors' engagement: Supporting education in fragile and conflict-affected states*. UNESCO IIEP & CfBT Education Trust.
- Brinkerhoff, D. W. (2010). Developing capacity in fragile states. *Public Administration and Development*, 30(1), 66-78. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.545>
- Brinkerhoff, D. W., & Johnson, R. W. (2009). Decentralized local governance in fragile states: Learning from Iraq. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 75(4), 585-607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852309349424>
- Burde, D., Guven, O., Kelcey, J., Lahmann, H., & Al-Abbadi, K. (2015). *What works to promote children's educational access, quality of learning, and wellbeing in crisis-affected contexts*. Department for International Development.
- Bush, K. D., & Saltarelli, D. (2000). *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict: Towards a peacebuilding education for children*. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Coelho, M. L., & da Silva, R. (2025). Administrative dimensions of educational recovery: Comparative analysis of post-conflict transitions. *Journal of Education in Emergencies*, 11(2), 124-189.
- Colclough, C., King, K., & McGrath, S. (2010). The new politics of aid to education: Rhetoric and reality. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(5), 451-452. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.03.015>
- Collier, P., & Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford Economic Papers*, 56(4), 563-595. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>
- Coombs, P. H. (1985). *The world crisis in education: The view from the eighties*. Oxford University Press.

- Corrales, J. (2006). Political obstacles to expanding and improving schooling in developing countries. In J. E. Cohen, D. E. Bloom, & M. B. Malin (Eds.), *Educating all children: A global agenda* (pp. 231-302). MIT Press.
- Cramer, C., & Goodhand, J. (2002). Try again, fail again, fail better? War, the state, and the 'post-conflict' challenge in Afghanistan. *Development and Change*, 33(5), 885-909. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.t01-1-00253>
- Cummings, W. K., & van Tongeren, P. (2003). The role of education in peacebuilding: An analysis of five change theories. *Development*, 46(3), 39-44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10116370030463006>
- Davies, L. (2010). The different faces of education in conflict. *Development*, 53(4), 491-497. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2010.69>
- Davies, L. (2011). Understanding education's role in fragility: Synthesis of four situational analyses of education and fragility: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Liberia. UNESCO IIEP.
- De Grauwe, A. (2009). Without capacity, there is no development. UNESCO IIEP.
- De Herdt, T., Titeca, K., & Wagemakers, I. (2012). Make schools, not war? Donors' rewriting of the social contract in the DRC. *Development Policy Review*, 30(6), 681-701. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7679.2012.00594.x>
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). Refugee education: A global review. UNHCR.
- Dupuy, K. (2008). Education for peace: Building peace and transforming armed conflict through education systems. International Peace Research Institute.
- ERICC. (n.d.). Understanding the dimensions of conflict and crisis in educational administration. Education in Crisis and Conflict Network.
- Essuman, A., & Akyeampong, K. (2011). Decentralisation policy and practice in Ghana: The promise and reality of community participation in education in rural communities. *Journal of Education Policy*, 26(4), 513-527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.554999>
- Ferris, E., & Winthrop, R. (2010). Education and displacement: Assessing conditions for refugees and internally displaced persons affected by conflict. Background paper for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011.
- Fredriksen, B. (2013). Financing education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Addressing the unfinished agenda while coping with new challenges. In L. Wolhuter (Ed.), *South Africa in focus: Economic, political and social issues* (pp. 1-38). Nova Science Publishers.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Gallagher, T. (2011). Conflict, education and ethnicity: The case of Northern Ireland. In K. Mundy & S. Dryden-Peterson (Eds.), *Educating children in conflict zones: Research, policy, and practice for systemic change* (pp. 75-92). Teachers College Press.
- Gershberg, A. I., González, P. A., & Meade, B. (2012). Understanding and improving accountability in education: A conceptual framework and guideposts from three decentralization reform experiences in Latin America. *World Development*, 40(5), 1024-1041. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2011.11.014>
- Glewwe, P., & Kremer, M. (2006). Schools, teachers, and education outcomes in developing countries. In E. A. Hanushek & F. Welch (Eds.), *Handbook of the economics of education* (Vol. 2, pp. 945-1017). Elsevier.
- Global Partnership for Education. (2018). GPE's work in conflict-affected and fragile countries. Global Partnership for Education.
- Gove, A., & Cvelich, P. (2011). Early reading: Igniting education for all. RTI International.
- Hallak, J., & Poisson, M. (2007). Corrupt schools, corrupt universities: What can be done? UNESCO IIEP.
- Hanushek, E. A., & Woessmann, L. (2012). Do better schools lead to more growth? Cognitive skills, economic outcomes, and causation. *Journal of Economic Growth*, 17(4), 267-321. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-012-9081-x>
- Harber, C., & Davies, L. (2003). Education, democracy and political development in Africa. Symposium Books.
- Heneveld, W., & Craig, H. (1996). Schools count: World Bank project designs and the quality of primary education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank.

- IDEAS. (2021). Evaluation guide for fragile and conflict-affected contexts. International Development Evaluation Association.
- INEE Working Group. (n.d.). The multiple faces of education in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.
- INEE. (2010). Minimum standards for education: Preparedness, response, recovery. Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies.
- Kazianga, H., Levy, D., Linden, L. L., & Sloan, M. (2013). The effects of “girl-friendly” schools: Evidence from the BRIGHT school construction program in Burkina Faso. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 5(3), 41-62. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.5.3.41>
- King, E. (2014). *From classrooms to conflict in Rwanda*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kirk, J. (2007). Education and fragile states. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 5(2), 181-200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720701425776>
- Lewin, K. M. (2015). Educational access, equity, and development: Planning to make rights realities. UNESCO IIEP.
- Lewin, K. M., & Akyeampong, K. (2009). Education in sub-Saharan Africa: Researching access, transitions and equity. *Comparative Education*, 45(2), 143-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050060902920492>
- Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A., & Novelli, M. (2018). Education in emergencies: Tracing the emergence of a field. In A. Verger, M. Novelli, & H. K. Altinyelken (Eds.), *Global education policy and international development: New agendas, issues and policies* (2nd ed., pp. 233-254). Bloomsbury.
- Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A., & Shah, R. (2016). A conceptual framework to analyse the multiscalar politics of education for sustainable peacebuilding. *Comparative Education*, 52(4), 516-537. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2016.1220144>
- Malen, B. (2006). Revisiting policy implementation as a political phenomenon: The case of reconstitution policies. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 83-104). State University of New York Press.
- McGinn, N., & Welsh, T. (1999). *Decentralization of education: Why, when, what and how?* UNESCO IIEP.
- Mendenhall, M., Dryden-Peterson, S., Bartlett, L., Ndirangu, C., Imonje, R., Gakunga, D., Gichuhi, L., Nyagah, G., Okoth, U., & Tangelder, M. (2015). Quality education for refugees in Kenya: Pedagogy in urban Nairobi and Kakuma refugee camp settings. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 1(1), 92-130. <https://doi.org/10.17609/N8D08K>
- Miller-Grandvaux, Y. (2009). Education and fragility: A new framework. *Journal of Education for International Development*, 4(1), 1-14.
- Mosselson, J., Wheaton, W., & Frisoli, P. S. J. (2009). Education and fragility: A synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Education for International Development*, 4(1), 1-17.
- Mundy, K., & Dryden-Peterson, S. (Eds.). (2011). *Educating children in conflict zones: Research, policy, and practice for systemic change*. Teachers College Press.
- Mundy, K., & Verger, A. (2015). The World Bank and the global governance of education in a changing world order. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.021>
- Nicolai, S. (Ed.). (2009). *Opportunities for change: Education innovation and reform during and after conflict*. UNESCO IIEP.
- Nicolai, S., & Hine, S. (2015). *Investment for education in emergencies: A review of evidence*. Overseas Development Institute.
- Novelli, M., & Smith, A. (2011). *The role of education in peacebuilding: A synthesis report of findings from Lebanon, Nepal and Sierra Leone*. UNICEF.
- Novelli, M., Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A., & Smith, A. (2017). The 4Rs framework: Analyzing education’s contribution to sustainable peacebuilding with social justice in conflict-affected contexts. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 3(1), 14-43. <https://doi.org/10.17609/N8S94K>
- OECD. (2008). *Service delivery in fragile situations: Key concepts, findings and lessons*. OECD.
- OECD. (2010). *The state’s legitimacy in fragile situations: Unpacking complexity*. OECD.
- OECD. (2018). *States of fragility 2018*. OECD.

- Pherali, T. (2016). Education: Cultural reproduction, revolution and peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies. In O. P. Richmond, S. Pogodda, & J. Ramović (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of disciplinary and regional approaches to peace* (pp. 193-205). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pherali, T., & Turner, E. (2018). Meanings of education under occupation: The shifting motivations for education in Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39(4), 567-589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2017.1375400>
- Poisson, M. (2010). Corruption and education. UNESCO IIEP & International Academy of Education.
- Pritchett, L., & Beatty, A. (2015). Slow down, you're going too fast: Matching curricula to student skill levels. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 40, 276-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.11.013>
- Psacharopoulos, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2018). Returns to investment in education: A decennial review of the global literature. *Education Economics*, 26(5), 445-458. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2018.1484426>
- Rose, P., & Greeley, M. (2006). Education in fragile states: Capturing lessons and identifying good practice. DAC Fragile States Group.
- Samoff, J., Dembélé, M., & Sebatane, E. M. (2013). Scaling up by focusing down: Creating space and capacity to extend education reform in Africa. In L. Tikly & A. M. Barrett (Eds.), *Education quality and social justice in the global south: Challenges for policy, practice and research* (pp. 121-138). Routledge.
- Save the Children. (2013). Attacks on education: The impact of conflict and grave violations on children's futures. Save the Children.
- Shah, R. (2012). Goodbye conflict, hello development? Curriculum reform in Timor-Leste. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 32(1), 31-38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.04.005>
- Shah, R., & Lopes Cardozo, M. T. A. (2014). Education and social change in post-conflict and post-disaster Aceh, Indonesia. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 38, 2-12. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.06.005>
- Shields, R., & Rappleye, J. (2008). Differentiation, development, (dis)integration: Education in Nepal's 'People's War'. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 3(1), 91-102. <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2008.3.1.91>
- Skuse, A., Rodger, D., Power, G., Mbus, D. F., & Brimacombe, T. (2013). Communication for development interventions in fragile states: A systematic review. Department for International Development.
- Smith, A. (2010). The influence of education on conflict and peace building. Background paper for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011.
- Smith, A., & Vaux, T. (2003). Education, conflict and international development. Department for International Development.
- Sommers, M. (2002). Children, education and war: Reaching education for all (EFA) objectives in countries affected by conflict. The World Bank.
- Sommers, M. (2005). Islands of education: Schooling, civil war and the Southern Sudanese (1983-2004). UNESCO IIEP.
- Sperling, G. B., Winthrop, R., & Kwauk, C. (2016). What works in girls' education: Evidence for the world's best investment. Brookings Institution Press.
- Steer, L., & Smith, K. (2015). Financing education: Opportunities for global action. Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
- Tawil, S., & Harley, A. (Eds.). (2004). Education, conflict and social cohesion. UNESCO IBE.
- Tikly, L., & Barrett, A. M. (2011). Social justice, capabilities and the quality of education in low income countries. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31(1), 3-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.06.001>
- UNESCO IIEP. (2010). Guidebook for planning education in emergencies and reconstruction. UNESCO IIEP.
- UNESCO IIEP. (2011). Guidance notes for educational planners: Integrating conflict and disaster risk reduction into education sector planning. UNESCO IIEP.
- UNESCO. (2011). The hidden crisis: Armed conflict and education. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011. UNESCO.

- UNESCO. (2014). Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2015). Education for all 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2016). Education for people and planet: Creating sustainable futures for all. Global Education Monitoring Report 2016. UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2018). Migration, displacement and education: Building bridges, not walls. Global Education Monitoring Report 2019. UNESCO.
- UNICEF. (2009). Child friendly schools manual. UNICEF.
- UNICEF. (2014). Learning and peace: Transitional learning spaces for conflict-affected children and youth in South Sudan. UNICEF.
- USAID. (2013). State of the field report: Examining the evidence in youth education in crisis and conflict. USAID.
- Verger, A., Novelli, M., & Altinyelken, H. K. (Eds.). (2018). Global education policy and international development: New agendas, issues and policies (2nd ed.). Bloomsbury.
- Verspoor, A. M. (2008). At the crossroads: Choices for secondary education in Sub-Saharan Africa. The World Bank.
- Winthrop, R., & Kirk, J. (2008). Learning for a bright future: Schooling, armed conflict, and children's well-being. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(4), 639-661. <https://doi.org/10.1086/591301>
- Winthrop, R., & Matsui, E. (2013). A new agenda for education in fragile states. Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
- World Bank. (2011). World development report 2011: Conflict, security, and development. The World Bank.
- World Bank. (2018). World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise. The World Bank. # Appendices