Research Article

Educational Policy in Post-Crisis Yemen: Between Regulatory Ideals and Implementation Constraints

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Abstract: Yemen's protracted crisis has severely disrupted the educational sector, rendering the implementation of national education policies inconsistent and largely ineffective. This article explores the major challenges faced in executing educational policies in post-crisis Yemen, focusing on the gap between well-formulated regulatory frameworks and the realities of field implementation. Drawing upon a qualitative literature review and document analysis, the study identifies several critical barriers, including political instability, inadequate infrastructure, funding shortages, and regional disparities. The analysis also highlights the resilience of local actors and communities who often act as de facto education providers in the absence of centralized governance. Findings suggest that the success of post-crisis education policy in Yemen depends not only on formal regulation but also on adaptive, community-driven implementation mechanisms. The study concludes with strategic recommendations to bridge the policy-practice gap through decentralized governance, international partnerships, and targeted investment in teacher development and school reconstruction. These insights contribute to a broader understanding of educational recovery in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Keywords: educational policy; Yemen; post-crisis governance; policy implementation; conflict-affected education; regulatory framework; educational equity; resilience

1. Introduction

Education in conflict-affected settings plays a crucial role in social recovery, national reconciliation, and long-term development. In the case of Yemen, more than eight years of protracted conflict have devastated the education system, resulting in the closure of schools, displacement of teachers and students, and the deterioration of institutional governance. According to UNICEF [1], over 2 million children in Yemen are currently out of school, and those who remain enrolled often face poor learning conditions and disrupted instructional continuity. While various national education policies and frameworks have been introduced in the post-crisis period to restore the sector, their implementation remains highly uneven and fraught with logistical, political, and socioeconomic challenges. This study focuses on the implementation gap between these formal regulatory frameworks and the actual conditions of educational service delivery in post-crisis Yemen [2], [3].

Previous studies on educational policy in Yemen have largely adopted a top-down analytical approach, focusing on national strategies, donor frameworks, and formal legislative reforms. Research conducted by the World Bank [4] and the Global Education Cluster [5], for instance, emphasized the importance of reconstructing institutional capacity and developing standardized policy blueprints. While such approaches are valuable in mapping macro-level interventions, they often neglect the micro-level realities of fragmented governance, localized insecurity, and social distrust that impede actual policy execution [6], [7]. Moreover, many of these studies assume a level of political stability and institutional coherence that does not align with Yemen's fragmented political landscape, which is divided among competing authorities and heavily reliant on international aid [4]. Consequently, the

lack of contextual sensitivity in prior analyses has contributed to a policy-reality gap, where ambitious reforms fail to take root on the ground.

This research addresses a central question: why do educational policies in post-crisis Yemen remain largely ineffective despite the existence of regulatory frameworks that appear comprehensive on paper? The study aims to uncover the structural and contextual factors that hinder the implementation of these policies, particularly in conflict-affected and marginalized regions. By critically examining the divergence between policy design and actual practice, this study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the systemic barriers— including administrative fragmentation, political interference, limited financial resources, and the erosion of teacher workforce—that prevent meaningful educational reform [1], [8]. The purpose is not only to highlight these impediments but also to identify adaptive strategies employed by local actors, such as community schools and informal networks, that help maintain access to education amidst institutional collapse [9].

To address these issues, this study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in literature review and policy document analysis. It synthesizes findings from academic journals, NGO reports, and governmental policy frameworks to examine the dissonance between regulation and implementation [10], [11]. Unlike purely normative or technocratic analyses, this article situates Yemen's educational crisis within a broader context of fragile governance and post-conflict reconstruction, emphasizing the importance of bottom-up resilience and local agency [12], [13]. By doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on education in emergency and recovery contexts, offering practical insights for policymakers, international donors, and educational practitioners. It highlights the need to move beyond regulatory idealism and towards adaptive, context-responsive strategies that engage communities as active partners in rebuilding the education system [1].

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 presents a review of the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks on policy implementation in post-conflict and fragile states. Section 3 outlines the methodological approach used in this study, including sources of data and analytical techniques. Section 4 provides an in-depth discussion of the key findings, focusing on the barriers to educational policy implementation in Yemen and the role of local adaptive mechanisms. Section 5 concludes the article by summarizing the main arguments, discussing implications for policy and practice, and offering recommendations for future research and intervention in similar post-crisis contexts.

2. Literature Review

Educational policy in post-crisis contexts requires a careful balance between formal planning and responsive implementation [14]. This literature review explores relevant theoretical and empirical works that help explain why well-intentioned education reforms often fail to deliver tangible outcomes in fragile states [15]. The review is divided into two main strands. The first addresses how educational policies are formulated and adapted in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), where political instability and resource limitations frequently undermine systemic coherence [16]. The second analyzes the theory– practice divide through the lens of policy implementation models, particularly in contexts where state institutions are weak or fragmented [17]. Together, these perspectives offer a conceptual foundation for analyzing Yemen's post-crisis education policy within its socio-political and administrative realities.

2.1. Educational Policy in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States

In fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), educational policy is often shaped by competing demands for stabilization, development, and humanitarian relief [18]. Unlike policies in stable environments, educational frameworks in FCAS must navigate political volatility, resource scarcity, and fragmented governance structures [16]. According to Davies [19], education in such contexts serves both as a potential catalyst for peacebuilding and, paradoxically, as a mechanism for reinforcing structural inequalities when poorly implemented. In countries like South Sudan, Syria, and Afghanistan, education policy is frequently developed under the influence of international donors, resulting in ambitious blueprints that often lack local ownership or practical feasibility [7], [20].

In Yemen, these dynamics are further compounded by ongoing political division, economic collapse, and widespread displacement [21]. Policy directives issued by central

authorities frequently fail to reach local districts due to security concerns, broken communication channels, and the absence of institutional continuity [1]. As a result, there exists a sharp divide between de jure educational mandates and de facto schooling conditions on the ground. Studies by the Global Partnership for Education [22] emphasize that, without inclusive policy design and community engagement, educational interventions in FCAS risk remaining superficial or even exacerbating existing tensions.

This subsection highlights the importance of contextualized policy formulation and calls for a more flexible, adaptive model that aligns with the lived realities of communities affected by conflict. It sets the stage for examining how Yemen's post-crisis education policy both reflects and diverges from the broader FCAS patterns.

2.2 The Policy–Implementation Gap: Theoretical Perspectives

The gap between policy formulation and its actual implementation is a persistent issue in public administration, particularly acute in post-crisis and low-capacity settings [23]. Classic models of policy implementation—such as the top-down approach proposed by Pressman and Wildavsky [24]—emphasize the linear transmission of policy directives from central authorities to local implementers. However, in fragile contexts like Yemen, this model proves inadequate due to weak institutional capacity, conflicting political interests, and limited communication infrastructure [25], [26]. As a result, policies rarely follow a direct path from law to practice.

In response, bottom-up models have been developed to account for the agency of local actors and the variability of policy outcomes across different regions [27], [28]. Lipsky's [29] theory of street-level bureaucracy posits that implementers—teachers, school leaders, district officers—exercise discretion and modify policies based on contextual realities. These actors often become the de facto policy designers when formal systems are dysfunctional. In Yemen, local educators and community leaders frequently adapt national directives to suit available resources and security conditions, creating a patchwork of informal but functional practices [30].

Recent scholarship also advances hybrid implementation models, which recognize the interplay between structural constraints and local agency (Elayah et al., 2024). Sabatier and Mazmanian [31] argue that successful policy outcomes in complex environments depend not only on clarity of objectives and resource allocation but also on stakeholder engagement, feedback mechanisms, and inter-organizational coordination. These models are particularly relevant to Yemen, where fragmented governance necessitates cooperation between state actors, NGOs, and community networks [32], [33].

Understanding the policy–implementation gap through these theoretical lenses allows for a more realistic assessment of Yemen's education reform efforts. It underscores the need to view implementation not as a technical phase of policy delivery, but as a dynamic process shaped by power relations, institutional weakness, and grassroots innovation.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach to explore the challenges surrounding the implementation of educational policy in post-crisis Yemen. The research design is rooted in the analysis of secondary data, particularly policy documents, academic literature, and institutional reports relevant to the Yemeni education sector in fragile contexts. Rather than conducting primary fieldwork, this study relies on a systematic review of policy texts issued by the Yemeni Ministry of Education between 2014 and 2023, alongside international reports from organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Global Education Cluster.

The analytical process follows a thematic content analysis framework, enabling the identification of key themes and patterns related to policy-practice discrepancies, governance fragmentation, regional disparities, and the role of local actors in educational adaptation. The data sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and coverage of both national and subnational dynamics. Special attention was given to capturing the tension between the regulatory ideals embedded in policy documents and the on-the-ground challenges faced by schools, educators, and administrators.

To strengthen the validity of the analysis, multiple forms of literature were cross-compared, including peer-reviewed articles, policy briefs, and humanitarian assessments. The

findings were then contextualized within Yemen's complex political and socio-economic landscape, taking into account the ongoing conflict, institutional fragility, and humanitarian crisis. Through this methodology, the study aims to present a grounded and interpretive account of how educational policy is negotiated, contested, and adapted in a post-crisis environment marked by uncertainty and resilience.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of educational policy in post-crisis Yemen reveals a profound and persistent disconnect between regulatory frameworks and the realities of field-level implementation [8], [34]. While the national education strategies formulated after 2015 articulate ambitious goals—such as restoring access, improving quality, and ensuring equity—these goals remain largely aspirational in the face of systemic constraints [35]. The findings of this study are organized around three key thematic concerns: structural barriers to policy implementation, the role of local actors and informal systems, and the implications for long-term educational recovery.

One of the most significant findings is the limited operational capacity of government institutions in delivering on education mandates. The political fragmentation of Yemen into competing authorities—primarily between the internationally recognized government in the south and the de facto authorities in the north—has resulted in a dual or even parallel system of educational governance [36]. Each faction issues its own policies, curricula, and administrative guidelines, often with minimal coordination or coherence. This has led to confusion, duplication of efforts, and, in some cases, conflicting directives at the school level. Moreover, recurrent insecurity, infrastructure destruction, and delayed salary payments to teachers exacerbate the fragility of the system and undermine the morale of educational personnel [1].

In this context of institutional breakdown, local actors—including community-based organizations, parent-teacher associations, and informal teacher networks—have emerged as critical agents of continuity. Their role is especially prominent in rural and conflict-affected regions, where state presence is minimal or absent. These actors often adapt national policy goals to local realities, creating informal schooling arrangements or maintaining teaching activities without official support [32]. While these grassroots responses are pragmatic and often necessary, they also risk entrenching inequality by relying on unevenly distributed community resources. This reflects a broader phenomenon documented in FCAS literature, where local resilience compensates for state failure, but does not replace the need for systemic reform [37].

Furthermore, the findings underscore how international aid, although essential for sustaining the sector, can inadvertently reinforce the implementation gap [13], [38]. Donor-driven projects frequently bypass national planning processes or focus on short-term service delivery without building local capacity. This creates dependencies and undermines the sustainability of reforms. A more integrated approach that strengthens state institutions while empowering local implementers is therefore vital. As Pherali and Sahar [15] argue, effective educational recovery in conflict-affected settings requires "bridging the humanitarian–development divide" through policies that are both context-sensitive and institutionally embedded.

In light of these challenges, adaptive mechanisms at the local level have played a pivotal role in maintaining basic educational functions [30], [32]. In areas where formal institutions are absent or dysfunctional, informal schools—often held in mosques, private homes, or temporary shelters—have emerged to serve displaced populations. Teachers, frequently unpaid or minimally compensated, continue to provide instruction out of a sense of civic duty or religious obligation [34]. These community-driven responses demonstrate the flexibility and resilience of local actors, but they also highlight the urgent need for policy frameworks that formally recognize and support such grassroots initiatives.

What distinguishes Yemen's case from other conflict-affected settings is the degree of political fragmentation and the absence of a unified national education authority [39]. In contrast, countries like Rwanda and Liberia, though similarly affected by crisis, were able to re-establish centralized education ministries that led national recovery efforts with international support. In Yemen, the multiplicity of power centers and the ongoing conflict have made such consolidation extremely difficult. This fragmentation has led to the

coexistence of divergent curricula, politicized content, and varying standards of teacher training—further complicating efforts to establish equitable and consistent educational provision across the country [40].

The analysis also reveals that while policy documents often contain language promoting inclusive and equitable education, these commitments are not matched by implementation mechanisms [41], [42]. There is a lack of clear pathways for monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. Donor funding, though substantial, is typically tied to emergency relief efforts rather than systemic policy support [38], [43]. As a result, interventions are often reactive, short-term, and disconnected from broader institutional reform agendas. Without a coherent implementation strategy that bridges top-level policy with local delivery systems, even well-designed policies remain aspirational [44].

Ultimately, the discussion points to the necessity of rethinking the model of policy implementation in fragile states. Rather than relying on a traditional centralized delivery model, Yemen's case illustrates the potential for a hybrid framework—one that leverages both state and non-state actors in a coordinated manner. This would involve decentralizing decision-making to regional education offices, investing in community-based teacher training, and creating flexible funding mechanisms that allow local adaptation while maintaining national standards. It also requires political will and sustained international engagement that goes beyond emergency assistance to long-term institution-building.

5. Comparison with State-of-the-Art

When compared with contemporary scholarship and practice in the field of education policy in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), the case of Yemen reflects both shared patterns and unique structural challenges. Recent literature emphasizes the importance of integrating emergency response with long-term system strengthening—what is now referred to as the "nexus approach" between humanitarian aid and development planning [35]. In countries such as South Sudan and the Central African Republic, hybrid implementation frameworks that blend international support with localized delivery systems have shown moderate success in maintaining educational continuity while rebuilding national capacity.

Yemen, however, diverges from many of these models due to its extreme political fragmentation and the absence of a neutral, functioning central authority. Unlike Rwanda, which experienced rapid educational recovery through centralized planning and reconciliation initiatives post-genocide, Yemen's dual governments have created parallel policy regimes with limited coordination. This has led to policy incoherence, duplication of curricula, and politicization of educational content—outcomes not typically observed in other FCAS with unified governance structures.

Moreover, while other countries have successfully piloted community-based school models with embedded monitoring systems (as seen in Nepal and Afghanistan), Yemen's community responses remain largely informal, unrecognized, and unsupported by national or international frameworks. This lack of integration between grassroots resilience and national policy weakens the potential for sustainable educational reform.

In contrast to state-of-the-art practices that prioritize inclusive governance, participatory policy design, and evidence-based monitoring, Yemen's policy implementation remains largely ad hoc and reactive. International actors working in FCAS increasingly advocate for adaptive programming that adjusts interventions based on real-time feedback and localized needs [37]. However, in Yemen, such adaptive mechanisms are not institutionally embedded, and feedback loops between implementers and policymakers are virtually absent.

This comparison underscores the urgent need for Yemen to transition from emergency relief mode to structured educational governance that is flexible, inclusive, and data-informed. Drawing on global best practices while tailoring them to Yemen's unique sociopolitical landscape could provide a feasible path forward for rebuilding its fractured education system..

6. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex challenges facing the implementation of educational policy in post-crisis Yemen, revealing a persistent disconnect between regulatory ambition and field-level realities. Although the national education frameworks introduced over the past decade reflect a genuine effort to restore the education sector, their implementation has been severely hampered by political fragmentation, institutional fragility,

and ongoing conflict. The lack of coherence between parallel authorities, combined with inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and weakened administrative systems, has prevented the transformation of policy into practice.

A central conclusion of this analysis is that effective educational reform in Yemen requires more than regulatory planning. It demands a shift towards an adaptive, decentralized, and community-driven implementation model—one that recognizes the agency of local actors and integrates them into national strategies. Informal schooling initiatives, teacher-led adaptations, and community-based solutions should not be viewed as temporary substitutes but rather as essential pillars of a resilient educational architecture.

The synthesis of findings also demonstrates that international aid, while vital, must be aligned with long-term capacity building and governance reform. Donor programs should move beyond project-based interventions and instead support systemic transformation that includes inclusive policy design, robust monitoring frameworks, and coordination mechanisms across political divides.

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