



Evaluating Concerns of Stakeholders on Secondary School Leaving Examination in Somalia



Somali Researchers Association (SRA) & Qalam College
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Abstract

Last two years the national exam has experienced problems including the 2019 exam cancellation which led student protesters to walk out around the city. The following year 2020 nearly eight thousand students from the capital city Mogadishu failed the exam which resulted in complain from schools in the Banadir region to the ministry of education.

This study comes amid heightened attention to the national exam following the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school year exam problems.

Objective: To assess how far do teachers & school administrators have concerns and fear, the following secondary school leaving Examination. To avoid the third wave of exam confusion 2020/2021 in Somalia.

Sample: nearly all, teachers, principals, and other stakeholders have a chance of selection. Total 416 respondents including 294 secondary school teachers, 87 principals and 35 stakeholders from regional states and the

Banadir region participated in the study. The assessment conducted on 7th Feb –15 Mar. 2021.

Method: The study applied a descriptive survey. Data were collected both online and face to face using a self-reporting questionnaire.

Results: Large majority of the participants have shown great concern and fear about the school-leaving examination and stated the need for major changes to avoid similar confusion that happened last two years' secondary schools leaving examination.

Key Words

Secondary School, Examination, Concern.

Introduction

The secondary school-leaving examination is one of the most important exams in the country. Before 2015 School umbrellas such as FPENS and SAFE were managing secondary leaving exams. But, after 2018 the government fully took over and the ministry

of education centralized the exam. However, for the last two years, the national exam has experienced frustration including exam cancellation and a failure rate of 25% of the students.

Thus, lessons learned for the last two years rendered teachers, administrators, students, and other stakeholders worry about the status of secondary school leaving examination. The concern has also increased when exam time and election time matched.

In this article, we'll be looking at some of the common concerns/fears from teachers, principals, and other stakeholders towards secondary school leaving examination.

Gender

During in the data collection men and women were given equal chances however, male teachers and principals are more than females, thus 90% of the respondents were male while only 10% were female respondents.

Employment Status

Looking at the employment status, responded teachers were 294, (71%) school principals 87 (21%) and other stakeholders 35 (8%) including school umbrellas, NGO's involved education and ministry of education staffs.

Years of Experience

When it to comes respondents' years of experience, roughly one-third (37%) of the respondents had one to five years' experience, 43% of the respondents with six to ten years' experience only 20% were having more than 15 years of experience.

Examination Leakage

The secondary leaving exam is a centralized examination, if one paper leaks it affects the whole exam. 2018/2019 exam papers were seen in the market before the exam started. The ministry of education had decided to cancel all the exams. The consequences of cancellation resulted in students protesting streets in Mogadishu and other regions in the country.

We asked respondents, how far do you afraid of examination leakage this year similar to the 2018/2019 school calendar?

Nearly half of the respondents (51%) said they have the fear of exam leakage while slightly lesser than half (49%) expressed that they don't afraid of exam papers to be seen in the market before the exam.

A school principal states that "lessons learned previous exam leakage will result to tighten the security of the exams".

Exam Invigilators' Fairness

Invigilators are contracted teachers employed by the ministry of education. A minimum of two invigilators are present in each examination room and in each class, there are 20 students.

Exam invigilation needs to be fair to all students, however, 2019/2020 has raised concerns about invigilators' unfairness. The government has been facing a growing backlash from schools in the Banadir region.

We asked respondents how far do you fear invigilators' unfairness?

Respondents have expressed concern about the unfairness of the invigilators. About six-in-ten of the respondents (61%) stated that they are afraid of the unfairness of invigilators. While 39% mention that they don't fear invigilators' unfairness.

A school principal told that "invigilators don't go through the formal recruitment process and are not given enough training".

A school teacher said, "Invigilators are expected to behave equally to all students but some of them facilitate students to cheat". Another teacher mentioned that "Last year secondary school leaving exam invigilators were unfair to the students in some regions".

Curriculum-based Examination

Over two decades, the country did not have a national standard curriculum; education providers were teaching different curriculum however, the academic year 2020/21 is different, there's a national standard curriculum in the country, although Puntland and Somaliland are not using it yet. To have a centralized exam it is necessary to consider factors such as the curriculum.

We asked respondents how far do you fear adding examination chapters, not inline with the curriculum?

A large majority of the respondents (68%) have shown that they don't fear to include the exam paper anything out of the curriculum. However, 32% argued that they scare exam to include questions, not in line with the curriculum.

A school principal said, "There's no inspection system to control curriculum arrangements at schools from the ministry of education".

A teacher said that "Among schools, some may have completed the curriculum earlier while others are far behind to complete on time and the ministry will not be aware until the last minute".

Exam Duration

The secondary school leaving exam runs five working days (Saturday to Wednesday). Each day students sit for two subjects. Exam questions consist of different sections such as multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank spaces, and direct questions. The number of questions is different depends on the subject but most of the exam questions between 50-80. To answer these questions, students are given two hours and there's no extra time.

We asked respondents how far do you concern/afraid of students can't finish the exam at given times?

About five-in-ten (53%) of the respondents have stated that they are afraid of students can't finish the exam at given times. While other 47% have expressed that they don't have the fear of the given times.

A teacher said, "I have been invigilating exams for the last three two years, students always complain about the time".

A school principal said, "My experience two hours is not enough to complete in five pages' exam".

Recruiting Exam Marking Teachers

According to the trend of secondary school leaving students, the number was rising over the past years and it is projected to continue.

Thus, there will be a demand for recruiting exam marking teachers qualified to the subject they are marking and have teaching experience.

We asked respondents how far do you afraid of recruiting unqualified teachers for marking exams?

About six-in-ten (61%) of the respondents indicate that they are afraid of recruiting unqualified teachers for marking exams however, 39% of the respondents have not expressed fear of recruiting unqualified marking teachers for the exam papers.

A teacher said "Some of those hired marking exam papers are not qualified teachers; unqualified staff will have a negative impact on student's performance".

A school principal highlights "I recommend the ministry of education to prioritize recruitment and training for those marking exam papers".

Exam Postponement

The school-leaving exam normally held in May school calendar, but the 2019/2020 exam cycle has changed and postponed for two-month period due to COVID-19.

This year Secondary school examination dates were not announced yet, and there's uncertainty due to COVID-19 and election

which may have an impact. Somali Researchers Association (SRA) and Qalam college asked respondents How far do you concern/scare of exam postponement?

67% among respondents said they fear exam postponement, another 33% argued that they don't fear postponement rather they expect the exam data to remain unchanged.

The school-teacher said, "if exams are postponed students will have a tough time feeling frustrated and stressful".

The school principal said "Postponement of the school-leaving exam has an effect student to entry university and we have already experienced last year"

On the other hand, last year 2020 exam result was supposed to release before September but because of COVID-19, there was a delay and the ministry has not been able to release the result until October 2020.

We asked respondents, how far do you have the fear the exam comes first before the due date.

The majority of the respondents 80% have shown that they don't afraid of exams coming first before the due date, while 20% have shown that they fear exam comes first before its schedule.

A teacher said, "Curriculum is based on hours if the exam comes first before the chapters are completed it will create problems for the students".

"If COVID-19 increases let the ministry choose the exam comes first because it is the best alternative mechanism," Said the school principal.

Marking Exam Fairness

Exam questions are the same across the country. If exams are marked injustice can negatively affect pupils' emotions as well as teachers and the school admin. Every exam paper needs the correct mark, error-free so that every student gets the correct grade. 2019/2020 reported incorrect grades were given to some students when they received their results.

We asked respondents how far do you afraid of the unfairness of marking exams?

The majority of the respondents have shown pessimistic concern about exam marking. More than half of respondents (56%) stated that they are afraid of the unfairness of exam marking. However, 44% of the respondents have indicated that they don't scare unfairly marking papers.

The school principal said, “teachers cannot recognize whose paper they are marking, so chances of fairness are higher.”

A teacher argued “If a student wants to complain that the mark or grade is incorrect, they cannot request a review of marking or moderation and that is a problem.

A school principal said, “students with lower grades do not receive secondary school leaving certificate, therefore, exam paper needs the correct mark, error-free so that every student gets the correct grade”.

Marking Exam Papers on Time

Waiting for exam results creates anxiety for the students. According to the ministry of education marking exam should take one month. Thus, exam markers are required commitments on completing work to the deadline.

Last year the ministry of education faced pressure on exam marking time. Different stakeholders doubt the time allocated to mark the exams and dissatisfied with the result.

We asked respondents how far do you afraid of marking papers on time?

50% of the respondents have expressed fear of marking exam papers on time. another

50% have shown that the result will come on time.

A teacher said, “I doubt whether the ministry of education could easily know if markers were on track to meet marking deadlines until sometimes quite late”.

A school principal said, “Ministry of education continually monitor marking progress and have the opportunity to intervene early to address issues of speed or quality”.

Once marking papers are completed result is presented to the ministry website and students can view the result on their accounts using the given user and password on the ministry website and only the student has access to see his/her result. But the concern is not the resulting platform, it is about the delay for the result which will have a major impact on students willing to join overseas universities as well as local universities.

A New Charges for the Exam

After the central government collapsed in 1991 privately owned schools were opened. School fees become a major challenge for the parents to send children to the schools.

During secondary school leaving examination, students are demanded to pay extra service charges. For the last two years

different fees have been asked students to pay. The amount ranges from \$ 50- 100 per student. Somali Researchers Association and Qalam College asked respondents how far do you fear legalizing new fees at the time of the exam?

About six-in-ten (62%) of the respondents said, we highly afraid of demanding new fees when exam time comes closer. 38% have shown that they don't fear the new fees.

A school teacher mentioned, "If last-minute students and parents are asked new fees, they have no choice to reject".

A school principal said, "This year is different, students will not pay to the school umbrella fees, but they will only pay fees to the ministry of education".

Election and the Examination

Over the past years, three different ministries were appointed to the ministry of education including the current one who was appointed few months before the presidential election. Transition time is a difficult time for the education sector. Director-general is also newly appointed recently. The presidential election was postponed, this creates anxiety and uncertainty in ministry offices.

Respondents were asked how far do you fear election to have an impact on the final year exam?

73% of the respondents said we have the fear that the election will have an impact on the final exam. No more than about a quarter 27% said the election will not have an impact.

One of the respondents said, "If political instability did not impact on us this year exam will be better and manage well than 2019/2020".

First Aid Availability

The second wave of COVID-19 is being reported in the country, emergency cases may happen such as developing breathing difficulties to the student which may result in health issues, thus, students need to get first aid services.

We asked respondents how far do you fear the lack of first aid during the exam?

There is a concern that the ministry of education may not prepare first aid services in case of emergency. Roughly eight-in-ten (86%) stated that they are afraid of the ministry of education not providing first aid to schools during the final exam while just 14% argued that the ministry will provide first aid.

School admin said that “In the case of health emergency during the examination, it is the ministry responsibility to provide first aid assistance and there should be an emergency number to contact if students experiencing an illness”.

A teacher said, “in case of a health emergency there should be a consideration plan for the second set of leaving exams for the student.

Conclusion

Somali Researchers Association (SRA) and the Qalam College aim to know the concern of teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders on secondary school-leaving examination 2020/2021.

Respondents have expressed concerns and anxiety about the exam leakage, the unfairness of invigilators, examination postponement, marking exams, and the impact of examination on the election.

The study found that there’s a need to take significant decisions about the concerns of the stakeholders and to conduct an early implementation process. Handling properly the concern of the stakeholders will boost the public support of the ministry as well as the government.

Recommendations

Ministries of education need to address several key questions before determining announcement of secondary school leaving exam these include: -

- 1- Control exam leakage and not to happen incidents similar to 2018.
- 2- Not to cancel or postpone beyond the scheduled date for the exam.
- 3- To consider and give proper attention concerns from the teachers and school administrators and education officials
- 4- During the exam there is a need to prepare the first aid team in case of emergency
- 5- In case of a health emergency, there should be a consideration plan for the second set of leaving exams for the student.
- 6- The ministry of education should consult with school umbrellas, Banadir School Union, and other stakeholders to avoid similar mistakes that happened for the last two years.
- 7- We recommend not to ask for extra fees for all students who are due to sit exams
- 8- To present error-free marking exams, so that students, parents, teachers, and

head-teachers can be confident in results.

- 9- The election should not have an impact on the exam

About SRA

Somali Researchers Association (SRA) is an association that brings together Somali researchers and provides a platform to exchange knowledge, experience, and ideas. SRA founded in 2017, it's a professional association whose mission is to promote excellent research in Somalia.

Our research creates awareness about the public problems in people's life provides actionable intelligence to civic leaders and policy-makers, reorients the focus towards the solutions, and paves the way for real change in a way that builds momentum for a better tomorrow for all and delivers its information free of charge.

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