DILLA

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

A peer-reviewed bi-annual journal of Dilla University

Volume 3 **Issue 2** **October 2024**

DILLA UNIVERSITY JOURNALS SYSTEM
(DUJS)

DILLA JOURNAL OF EDUCATION (DJE)

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DILLA JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

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Articles

Volume 3 **Issue 2** **October 2024**

Message from Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we announce the publication of Volume 3, Issue 2 of the Dilla Journal of Education. This issue features five insightful articles categorized into three subject areas: Educational Planning and Management, Educational Psychology, and Special Needs and Inclusive Education.

In the Educational Planning and Management category, we explore the impacts of decentralized educational management in the Gedeo Zone and its implications for quality education. We also address the nature and perceptions of conflicts in Ethiopian universities, alongside an examination of Somaliland education partners' policies and school leadership practices, highlighted through case studies from Hargeisa, Somaliland.

In the Educational Psychology section, we present a narrative analysis of Ethiopian medical students' major department choice, focusing on the factors influencing their decisions, as well as their performance and challenges. Finally, in the Special Needs and Inclusive Education category, we delve into the lived experiences and barriers faced by students with physical disabilities in practical health and physical education within Ethiopian secondary schools.

We wish to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the authors for their valuable contributions, the reviewers for their critical insights, and everyone involved in the editorial team for their dedication and hard work. Your efforts have made this publication possible and enriched the academic discourse in the field of education.

Thank you for your continued support, and we hope you find this issue both informative and inspiring.

Warm regards,

Misganu Legesse Bareke (PhD, Associate Professor)
Editor-in-Chief
Dilla Journal of Education

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Conflicts in Ethiopian Universities: Its Nature and Perceptions

Mesfin Molla Demissie[1,*], **Mesfin Demissie Dukale**[1], **and Berhanu Mekonnen Yimmer**[2]

[1]Department of Educational Planning and Management, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia;
[2]Department of Curriculum and Instructional Supervision, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia.

Received: 07 May 2024 Accepted: 15 September 2024 Published: 05 October 2024

ARTICLE INFO.

Key words/phrases: Conflict, Nature of conflict, Perception of conflict, Ethiopian universities

Abstract

University conflicts are becoming more numerous, diverse, and complex. Universities are currently dealing with a variety of internal and external factors and pressures, which affect the types and numbers of disputes that arise. Therefore, the study's primary goals are to investigate the types of disputes that are happening and how stakeholders perceive student conflict at universities. Two research questions were created in order to accomplish this objective. What sorts of confrontations occur amongst university students in Ethiopia? How do stakeholders view student conflict at universities? Data were collected from 394 research participants using both quantitative and qualitative data to help address these research questions. Multistage sampling was used. The study employed an embedded mixed research design, with qualitative data complementing the quantitative findings. The results of this study demonstrated that persistent conflict has been causing problems for institutions. Conflicts between ethnic groups that are motivated by politics are particularly common and hinder students' ability to learn. A significant observation is often believed that confrontation is usually unpleasant, negative, and damaging, conflicts tend to escalate, leading to more extreme behaviors. This narrow understanding excludes the positive side of the conflict, which, when managed effectively, can be advantageous to the entire community. Universities should actively instruct and train students about the value of their important mission of working with stakeholders to produce human capital. Politics should not be allowed to influence universities negatively.

1 Introduction

This study clarifies significant aspects of the nature and stakeholder perceptions of conflicts within Ethiopian universities. Conflict is a fundamental element of human interaction, often manifesting as interpersonal hostility, anger, and misunderstanding. It is a frequent occurrence At home, school, work, or anywhere else where there are people with diverse beliefs, values, and experiences, it happens frequently. According to Swanström and Weissmann (2005), Due to competing interests, limited resources, divergent goals, and frustration, it develops (Swanström & Weissmann, 2005). Its prevalence stems from the constant interaction among individuals. Because they engage with one other frequently, different people get into conflict. It is a universal occurrence that no one can escape; specifically, it has occurred, is occurring, and will continue to occur among and amongst students, instructors, and administrators in the context of universities. Beyramijam *et al*. (2020) highlight that when handled properly, workplace or organizational conflict, such that found in universities, is unavoidable and healthy (Beyramijam *et al*.,

*Corresponding Author; Email: mesfinmollademissie@gmail.com;
Article DOI:10.20372/dje.v03i02.01

2020). Scholars extensively discuss the nature of the conflict in organizations, including its forms and intensity. Depending on an organization's complexity, the nature and root causes of conflicts may differ. Hamayun *et al* (2014) note that while colleges experience many conflicts, they are not properly addressed. They argue that institutions must take action to address this problem, as leaving it unattended could damage their reputation. Leaders spend more than 40% of their time managing conflict since it is an inherent part of academic life in the university context (Christine, Stanley, Algert, and Nancy, 2007).

University conflicts are becoming increasingly numerous, diverse, and complex. Universities are currently facing a variety of internal and external factors and pressures, which influence the types and numbers of disputes that arise. Among the contributors to conflict are various student behaviors (Egwunyenga, 2009), although conflicts predominantly arise within the university setting itself. In addition, Isabu (2017) points to issues such as overlapping authority, limited resources, and differences in perspectives as common causes of conflict in organizations.

Within this context, ethnic-based disputes have emerged as a particularly challenging type of conflict in Ethiopian universities. These conflicts are often influenced by the political and governmental factors that have historically contributed to ethnic tensions in Ethiopia under various administrations (Adamu, 2013). As students represent a dynamic segment of society, they often reflect and simulate broader ethnic, religious, and political concerns present in the wider community, leading to similar confrontations on campus. Effective management and resolution are crucial for these conflicts, ensuring that individuals involved do not experience unnecessary emotional tension during the process (Roseline & Taripanyeofori, 2020).

Beyond their negative consequences, conflicts can also hold significant potential advantages for institutions when managed constructively. Isabu (2017) suggests that a total cessation of hostilities can cause an excessive amount of comfort and sluggishness. While unmanaged conflict undoubtedly creates a negative atmosphere that hinders productivity and satisfaction, a certain level of functional conflict can stimulate creative thinking, foster healthy competition, and energize behavior. Therefore, organizational conflict, when managed well, can be considered beneficial. Rahim (2001) makes the case that while a lack of conflict might promote groupthink and stagnancy, unmanaged organizational conflict can lead to severely dysfunctional outcomes and even cause an organization to disintegrate if excessive.

The severe reality of unmanaged conflict in higher education is starkly affirmed by the numerous instances of turmoil in higher education institutions, such as those experienced in Nigeria, where confrontations have resulted in campus chaos, disruption of the academic calendar, and destruction of property (Jacob & Kehinde, 2011). Similarly, conflict at state universities in Ethiopia has been a major source of concern. Protests, violence, and disruptions, including months-long university closures due to disorder, were particularly frequent features of Ethiopian higher institutions between 2017 and 2019.

Despite the clear impact and severity of these conflicts, particularly the ethnic and political dimensions highlighted by recent events, a comprehensive understanding of their specific nature within the contemporary Ethiopian university context and, critically, how key stakeholders perceive these conflicts and their potential resolution, remains vital for developing effective strategies. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the nature of the disputes occurring in Ethiopian universities and examine how stakeholders perceive student conflict. Based on the study's aim, the following research questions were addressed:

a. What is the nature of conflicts among university students in Ethiopia?
b. How do stakeholders perceive conflict among university students in Ethiopia?

2 Methods

Research Design: An embedded mixed methods design (QUAN/qual) was employed in this study. This design was chosen because the study primarily relied on quantitative data, with a smaller compo-

nent of qualitative data included to provide deeper context and explanation. The goal of the embedded design is to gather both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or sequentially, but each type of data must complement the other. The purpose of collecting the additional data is to augment the original data, and this design enables the researcher to obtain data and conduct analysis simultaneously, concurrently, or before one another. Creswell (2012).

Research Paradigm: Consistent with the mixed methods approach, the research was guided by a pragmatic paradigm. The philosophical and theoretical foundations for conducting research are known as the research paradigm (Khatri, 2020: 1435). Pragmatism, recognized as a suitable conceptual foundation for mixed research (Creswell, 2014), emphasizes using the most appropriate methods to understand the research problem. This paradigm aligns with the study's aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of university conflict through both quantitative measurement and qualitative exploration of perceptions.

Source of Data: Primary data were collected from students, instructors, and university council members. Data were obtained using Semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires were the main tools used to obtain data.

Sample size and sampling technique: A multistage sampling strategy was used. In the initial stage, three public universities (Dilla, Wolaita, and Bulehora) were selected by lottery from the seven public universities in Southern Ethiopia, using Simple Random Sampling (SRS). In the second stage, departments within the selected universities were selected using SRS, followed by the selection of students and instructors from these departments, also using SRS. University council members were included in the sample through purposive sampling, selected based on their administrative roles and potential insights into university conflict. Based on population data from the universities' registrar offices in 2021, there was a total population of 24, 484 individuals across the three selected universities (23,680 regular students, 634 instructors, and 170 university officials). The required sample size for the quantitative survey was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for a 95% confidence level and 0.05 margin of error.

$$\text{n}=\frac{N}{(1+Ne^2)}$$

Where,
N= Population size,
e=Correct Sample size, and
e= margin of error, e=0.05

Based on the above formula, the correct sample size calculated as:

$$\text{n}=\frac{N}{(1+Ne^2)} = \frac{24084}{(1+24484(.05)^2)} = \frac{24484}{61} = 394$$

From a total of 394 sample population, 130 instructors and 264 students were involved in the survey. Based on this reality analysis was undertaken. The quantitative data were analyzed based on this sample composition. In addition to this, 30 council members' key informants were added purposively based on the researchers' belief of getting detailed information. Thus, a total of 394 participants were involved in the quantitative survey, and 30 key informants participated in the qualitative data collection (interviews/FGDs), resulting in a total sample size of 424 participants for primary data collection.

The data collection tools employed in this research included survey questionnaires, used to gather quantitative data on the nature and perceptions of conflict from participants, and semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs), which were utilized to collect qualitative data to provide deeper context and insights. The methods section explicitly states that semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires were the main tools used to obtain data, while the results section further confirms the use of qualitative data from the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs).

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used for the quantitative data analysis. To make inferences, the mean and standard deviation from the descriptive and independent t-tests were used. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent t-tests) were used. Data were computed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) Version-20 software, analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version

20 software. The alpha threshold for all meaningful tests was set at 0. 05. The average mean values cut points range was used for quantitative data analysis. Cutoff points for interpreting mean values based on a five-point Likert scale were used: 1–1.80 indicates a strong disagreement, 1.90–2.60 indicates disagreement, 2.70–3.40 indicates an undecided response, 3.50–4.20 indicates agreement, and 4.21–5.00 indicates a strong agreement. The responses gleaned from interviews were examined using the narrative analysis technique. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed using narrative analysis. Validity and Reliability: Using Cronbach's alpha statistics, the survey instruments were assessed for reliability in a pilot study at Hawassa University, and 67 participants were randomly included. They were shown to be reliable and yield an average coefficient of 0. 789 or above. The literature backs up the idea that reliability should be at least. 70 or higher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The following Table 1 and Table 2 show results generated by SPSS, indicating internal consistency. Tables 1 and 2 present the results of the reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha, assuring internal consistency of the survey items.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Nature of Conflicts

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.761	7

Table 2: Reliability Statistics for Perceptions of Conflicts

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.817	11

3 Theoretical Framework

This study's theoretical framework is built upon established theories concerning the nature of organizational conflict and how conflict is perceived. To clarify the types of conflicts that might occur in organizations, this article draws upon Jehn's (1997b) theory. Jehn (1997b) and Eruzun (2004) recognized several types of conflict that can occur in every organization. These include affective (relationship) conflict, substantive (task) conflict, conflict of interest, conflict of values, institutionalized versus non-institutionalized conflict, goal-related conflict, and realistic versus non-realistic conflict. In this study, Jehn's typology was used to investigate the types of conflict that are most common in universities.

Affective conflict is defined as "a situation in which team members experience interpersonal conflict that is accompanied by resentment, frustration, and other negative emotions". Substantive conflict, according to Jehn (1997b), refers to "differences among group members' thoughts and feelings about the task being achieved, such as disagreement regarding an institution's current strategic situation". Conflict of interest is defined as a disagreement between two or more parties about how to distribute a scarce resource or make a decision where preferences diverge. This type of conflict arises "when each group favors a different and to some extent mismatched solution to an issue, including either a distribution of limited income among them or a decision to allocate the effort of resolving it".

Conflict of Values happens when two different communal bodies vary in their values or particular ideology issues. This is similarly called political conflict. Goal conflict emerges when a favored consequence or an outcome of two societal entities is varying. In infrequent cases, "it may include differing favorites across all of the decision outcomes, establishing a loose-loose game".

Regarding Realistic versus Non-realistic conflict: Realistic conflict between or among groups that is "typically goal-oriented and reasonable" in its disagreement. Non-realistic conflict, on the other hand, is conflict that naturally arises without any pre-established organizational goals; it occasionally may be caused by egotistical desire and without any kind of rationale. Concerning institutionalized versus non-institutionalized conflict, the former is characterized by circumstances in which performers adhere to established guidelines, exhibit predictable behavior, and have a sustained affiliation, which may be under line-staff conflict or labor-administration debates. Where these circumstances do not exist, most racial conflict is non-institutionalized (Jehn, 1997b).

Empirical studies have shown that various types of conflict, such as affective, substantive, conflict of interest, conflict of values, goal conflict, and realistic/non-realistic conflict, are experienced within organizations (Pelled, Druckman, Broome, & Korper, 1988; Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Rahim, 2001). Conflict was perceived by people in a variety of ways. Therefore, to understand stakeholder perceptions, this article is also based on theories describing different views on conflict, including perspectives discussed by Robbins (2005), Tripp (1987), De Dreu & Van de Vliert (1997), Roseline, & Taripanyeofori (2020), and Thakore (2013), which illustrate how perceptions of conflict have evolved. Various observers have noted this shift in conflict perception throughout time. Key perspectives include the traditional, human relations, and interactionist views.

According to the traditional view of conflict, as described by Robbins (2005), conflicts are detrimental to any institutions because they are bothersome, aberrant, and signify a type of deviant behavior that must be avoided and eliminated if the goals of the institute are to be achieved. According to this perspective, conflict situations can have terrible consequences for the general public and a negative impact on corporate success. This view was often associated with earlier management theories focused on creating rigid institutional structures to prevent or quickly suppress conflict.

The human relations view, in contrast, considers conflict to be a natural and inevitable outcome of human interaction within organizations. While still acknowledging potential negative consequences, this perspective suggests that conflict is not necessarily pathological and can be managed to minimize its disruptive effects. Conflict can be avoided by fostering an atmosphere of trust and friendliness, despite how humans perceive conflict to be. Conflict avoidance and rapid resolution have always been the organization's main priorities.

A more recent perspective, the Interactionist view of conflict, argues that some conflict should not merely be realized as evil or good but rather that particular conflict is definitely necessary for a group to accomplish effectively (De Dreu and Van de Vliert, 1997). This view posits that a minimal level of conflict can be beneficial, stimulating critical thinking, innovation, and organizational change. For example, it is considered healthy when subordinates openly challenge their management or boss for doing anything improper, or when colleagues quarrel in front of the manager about what they believe is right, provided the conflict is managed constructively

Additionally, from this viewpoint, conflict is a necessary part of organizational life and its impact is measured by how well the organization handles it. The most recent viewpoint openly endorses instances of constructive conflict inside organizations.

4 Results

This section presents the findings from both the quantitative survey and qualitative data collection, addressing the nature of conflicts and stakeholders' perceptions. The first research question explored the nature of conflicts among university students in Ethiopia. Based on quantitative data collected via survey questionnaires, out of 394 distributed questionnaires, 335 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 85%. The majority of these participants were students (n=220, 66%), while the remainder were instructors (n=115, 34%). Table 3 summarizes descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for student and instructor perceptions on various types of conflict, along with results from independent samples t-tests comparing the mean scores between the two groups.

Based on the overall mean scores for each statement (inferred from the narrative's $\overline{x}$ values), respondents were generally "Undecided" about the presence of realistic conflict ($\overline{x}$ =2.70), goal conflict ($\overline{x}$ = 2.65), and substantive conflict ($\overline{x}$ = 2.92), with mean values falling within the 2.61-3.40 range.

In contrast, respondents indicated "Agreement" or "Strong Agreement" (mean values ranging from 3.50 to 4.08) regarding four other types of conflict: affective conflict ($\overline{x}$ = 3.53), conflict of interest ($\overline{x}$ = 3.50), conflict of values ($\overline{x}$ = 3.60), and non-institutionalized conflict ($\overline{x}$ = 4.04).

Table 3: Nature of Conflicts among University Students by Participant Group (N=335)

Variable Statement	Group	N	Mean	SD	T-test	p-value	Levene's p
1. There is affective conflict in our university	Instructors	115	3.11	1.446	2.091	.037**	0.149
	Students	220	3.75	1.446			
2. There is Substantive conflict in our University	Instructors	115	2.95	1.34	0.315	0.753	0.221
	Students	220	2.9	1.34			
3. There is conflict of interest in our University	Instructors	115	3.43	1.373	1.987	.048**	0.685
	Students	220	3.69	1.373			
4. There is conflict of values in my University occurring due to differ in values/ideologies	Instructors	115	3.46	1.318	1.572	0.117	0.211
	Students	220	3.67	1.318			
5. There is goal conflict in our University	Instructors	115	2.89	1.307	2.867	.004**	.047**
	Students	220	2.53	1.307			
6. There is realistic conflict	Instructors	115	2.79	1.443	1.62	0.106	0.755
	Students	220	2.55	1.443			
7. There is non-institutionalized conflict in my University	Instructors	115	3.96	1.077	1.2	0.231	.005**
	Students	220	4.08	1.077			

$p < 0.05$; **Levene's test significant

Note: Interpretation based on mean scores: 1.00-1.80 Strong Disagreement; 1.81-2.60 Disagreement; 2.61-3.40 Undecided; 3.41-4.20 Agreement; 4.21-5.00 Strong Agreement

Among all assessed types, non-institutionalized conflict received the highest overall mean score ($\overline{x}$ = 4.04), indicating a strong level of agreement that this type of conflict is present. As defined, this is characterized as ethnic conflict where causes are perceived as non-existent or unclear.

Independent samples t-tests comparing mean scores between instructors and students revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) for affective conflict ($p = .037$), conflict of interest ($p = .048$), and goal conflict ($p = .004$). Students reported significantly higher affective conflict and conflict of interest, while instructors reported significantly higher goal conflict. Non-institutionalized conflict had the highest mean for both groups, with no significant difference between them ($p = .231$).

Providing deeper context, the qualitative data from the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) offered valuable insights into the perceived drivers of these conflicts, particularly the high prevalence of non-institutionalized ethnic conflict.

For example, a participant from FGD Group II, identified as "B", shared that: "Conflict happening in different Ethiopian universities including our university was highly related with political interest & it was imposed externally; politicians were using students for mob conflict to attain their political interest. Of course later they achieved their goal. But, destruction and psychological negative impact is still there. "The participant further elaborated, stating that "most political parties in Ethiopia were organized on ethnic base group which is not recommendable & aggravating ethnic conflict".

Similarly, FGD Group II participant "C" corroborated this, stating that "nature of conflict happening in Ethiopian Universities was ethnic based. It doesn't mean that, existences of several ethnicities in Ethiopia are source of conflict. Instead, politician interferences are main catalyst to activating occurrences of conflict to easily achieve their goal".

These qualitative accounts resonate strongly with the quantitative finding that non-institutionalized conflict, described as ethnic conflict, is the most highly rated type. They provide critical context by suggesting this prevalent ethnic conflict is perceived by stakeholders as being fueled and exploited by external political actors operating along ethnic lines.

The second research question explored how stakeholders perceive conflict in Ethiopian universities. This was assessed using perception statements in the survey, complemented by qualitative data.

Table 4 summarizes the overall mean scores and standard deviations for each perception statement across all participants (N=335)

Table 4: Stakeholders' Perceptions about Conflict in Ethiopian Universities (N=335)

Variable Statement	N	Mean	SD	t-test	p-value	Levene's p
1. I feel that conflict is caused by failure of leaders	335	3.33	1.3	0.884	0.377	.021**
2. I feel that conflict is always bad, negative and destructive	335	3.63	1.3	3.297	.001**	11.95*
3. I feel that there are times when conflict can be desirable	335	3.25	1.2	2.652	.008**	6.84*
4. I believe that conflict can be avoided at all.	335	3.18	1.2	0.653	0.514	0.424
5. I believe that if conflict is effectively managed, results in creativity	335	3.11	1.2	1.583	0.114	2.52
6. I feel that conflict can prevent members from doing tasks at all.	335	3.18	1.3	1.546	0.123	2.43
7. I believe that conflict fosters open-mindedness	335	2.97	1.4	0.155	0.877	.024**
8. I feel that in conflicts, someone will always get hurt.	335	3.14	1.5	1.727	0.085	2.98
9. I believe that conflict can be a medium that can be aired and solutions arrived at.	335	2.81	1.3	1.221	0.223	1.491
10. I feel that conflict may facilitate change	335	2.9	1.3	0.63	0.529	0.398
11. I believe conflict in an organization like in universities is inevitable	335	2.73	1.5	2.885	.004**	8.20*

*p < 0.05; **Levene's test significant (p < 0.05), equal variances not assumed for t-test; Levene's F value presented instead of p-value in original table.

Note: Interpretation based on mean scores: 1.00-1. 80 Strong Disagreement; 1.81-2.60 Disagreement; 2.61-3.40 Undecided; 3.41-4.20 Agreement; 4.21-5.00 Strong Agreement.

Based on the overall mean scores presented in Table 4, respondents were generally "Undecided" on most statements about conflict perception. This included perceptions on conflict as a medium for airing issues and finding solutions ($\overline{x}$ = 2.81), its potential to facilitate change ($\overline{x}$ = 2.90), its inevitability ($\overline{x}$ = 2.73), fostering open-mindedness ($\overline{x}$ = 2.97), potential for creativity ($\overline{x}$ = 3.11), avoidability ($\overline{x}$ = 3.18), potential to prevent tasks ($\overline{x}$ = 3.18), belief someone always gets hurt $\overline{x}$ = 3.14), and desirability ($\overline{x}$ = 3.25).

The only statement where the overall mean score indicated "Agreement" ($\overline{x}$ > 3.40) was: "I feel that conflict is always bad, negative and destructive" ($\overline{x}$ = 3.63, SD = 1.33). This suggests a dominant perception that conflict is inherently negative. Independent samples t-tests revealed significant differences (p < 0.05) between instructors and students for statements 2, 3, and 11. Students reported significantly higher agreement that conflict is always bad, negative, and destructive (p =.001). Conversely, instructors reported significantly higher agreement that there are times when conflict can be desirable (p =. 008) and that conflict in universities is inevitable (p =. 004).

The qualitative findings from the FGDs provided deeper context for these perceptions. Echoing the dominant quantitative finding, a majority of respondents in the FGDs expressed the view that conflict is inherently bad and destructive. For instance, FGD participants C and F stated that: "conflict is not good since it has negative effects like destruction, life loose, & create disparity among individuals".

However, the FGDs also captured the nuance hinted at by the quantitative "Undecided" means and the instructors' higher agreement on conflict desirability/inevitability. Participants A, D, and J in the FGDs contrasted the prevalent negative conflict with the potential for constructive conflict, explaining that "if the dispute was occurring for work-related issues & the common good, it was constructive; however, what had been happening in our university was reverse of this".

The combined quantitative and qualitative results paint a picture of complex stakeholder perceptions. While most aspects of conflict perception elicit an "Undecided" response, the strongest agreement is on the negative view: conflict is primarily seen as bad, negative, and destructive. This dominant negative perception is strongly reinforced by qualitative accounts linking conflict to severe outcomes like destruction and loss of life. This perspective is understandable within the specific Ethiopian context, where recent experiences of university conflict have often involved violence and significant disruption. However, the qualitative data also reveals that stakeholders, or at least some groups like instructors, hold a contrasting, albeit less dominant, understanding that conflict can be constructive, particularly when related to work-related issues or the common good. The distinction drawn by participants between what has been happening (destructive,

externally imposed conflict) and the potential for constructive conflict is a critical insight.

5 Discussion

This study's primary goal was to investigate the nature of conflicts among university students in Ethiopia and how stakeholders perceive these conflicts. The findings reveal that several distinct types of conflict are prevalent in Ethiopian universities, aligning with categories described in Jehn's (1997b) typology used as the theoretical framework. Specifically, the study found evidence of affective conflicts, characterized by interpersonal friction, resentment, and negative emotions among students; conflict of values, arising from differences in students' beliefs or ideologies on particular issues; and significantly, non-institutionalized ethnic-based conflicts. Quantitative survey results, supported by insights from qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, indicate a particularly high prevalence of non-institutionalized conflict. These results resonate with and expand upon findings from previous research in the Ethiopian context. Specifically, the finding on ethnic-based conflict supports those discovered by Adamu (2013), who investigated the drivers of ethnic disputes and tensions among university students in Ethiopia. His study highlighted the role of Ethiopia's system of ethnic federalism in contributing to ethnic tensions and clashes within the nation, including in public universities. Adamu (2013) argued that the current ethnically oriented federalism was a root cause of the conflict between different ethnic groups in the university setting and identified both internal and external factors contributing to student ethnic conflict.

Building on Adamu's work, the current study's qualitative findings particularly emphasize external political interventions as the primary perceived source driving these ethnic-based non-institutionalized conflicts. As indicated by the qualitative data, conflicts occurring in various Ethiopian universities were frequently seen as motivated by external political interests and imposed from outside the university system. Participants perceived politicians as utilizing students in group conflicts to achieve their political objectives, suggesting that external pressure is viewed as a more significant cause of conflict at Ethiopian universities than purely internal or administrative factors. This perspective offers a crucial insight specific to the Ethiopian context, where universities are often seen as battlegrounds for wider political and ethnic struggles. Another significant finding relates to stakeholders' perceptions of conflict.

Quantitative survey results, supported by qualitative data from interview and focus group participants, indicate that a dominant perception among university stakeholders is that conflict is always bad, negative, and destructive. This strong negative view contrasts sharply with the interactionist school of thought on conflict perception, which posits that conflict in organizations like universities is not only inevitable but can also be necessary and even beneficial when managed constructively (Stoner & Freeman, 1989; De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997).

Murphy (1994) also suggests that leaders should recognize that conflict can have both beneficial and harmful outcomes. The study's finding of a widespread negative perception, despite the theoretical possibility of constructive conflict, likely reflects the lived experience of destructive, non-institutionalized ethnic and political conflict prevalent in Ethiopian universities, as documented in this study and highlighted by participants. While some qualitative data did acknowledge the potential for constructive conflict (e.g., when related to work issues for the common good), this view appears less dominant compared to the overwhelming perception of conflict as harmful, shaped by recent violent and disruptive events.

6 Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that Ethiopian universities face persistent challenges due to recurrent conflicts. Specifically, ethnic-based conflict, often motivated by political interests, is a dominant type that negatively impacts the university environment, leading to physical and psychological distress. This situation is exacerbated by a prevailing perception that conflict is always bad, negative, and destructive. This narrow understanding overlooks the potential positive aspects of conflict, contrary to the interactionist view which considers conflict a potential catalyst for change and, when wisely managed, capable of contributing constructively to

the community.

Therefore, universities, in collaboration with stakeholders, should implement intensive training and awareness programs for students emphasizing the importance of maintaining academic spaces free from undue political interference and focusing on the core mission of human capital development. Additionally, addressing the root causes of conflict requires federal and regional governments, along with concerned political parties, to engage in dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation efforts aimed at reducing the ethnic-based political volatility that adversely affects both universities and the country at large.

Acknowledgements

This study, "Conflict in Ethiopian Universities: Its Nature and Perceptions", was funded by Dilla University, for which we are grateful. We appreciate the support provided by the Research and Dissemination Office (RDO), the Center for Education Research (CER), and the Office of the Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer (RTTVP) at Dilla University. The authors also express their sincere gratitude to the research participants from the three sampled universities (Dilla, Bulehora, and Wolaita Universities) for providing pertinent data.

Ethical Approval

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Research and Dissemination Office of Dilla University prior to beginning data collection. The approval was assigned batch number DU/m/012/21. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Oral consent was obtained from individual participants, and appropriate consent was secured from relevant organizational representatives. Participants' desire to participate was respected, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in reporting the findings.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the conceptualization, design, and execution of this study. The research proposal was jointly prepared and defended. Following ethical approval, data collection and analysis were conducted collaboratively by all authors. Specific tasks in manuscript preparation were allocated as follows: Mesfin Molla Demissie drafted the introduction and related literature review; Berhanu Mekonnen Yimer drafted the theoretical framework and compiled the references; and Mesfin Demissie Ducalie primarily undertook the interpretation of results, discussion, and conclusion sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript before submission for publication.

Funding

This study was solely funded by Dilla University.

Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Availability of Data and Materials

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Dilla Journal of Education
https://www.du.edu.et/duj

Narrative Analysis of Ethiopian Medical Students Major Department Choice: Factors, Performance and Challenges

Belay Moges

Department of Psychology, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia.

Received: 13 May 2024 Accepted: 23 September 2024 Published: 11 October 2024

ARTICLE INFO.

Key words:
Ability, Career, Decision, Interest, Medicine, UEE

Abstract

This study investigated the factors, challenges, and school performance that influence major choice among fourth year medicine students of Hawassa University (HU) Highest score in University Entrance Examination (UEE) is required from students to join medical school as their choice of interest. The study uses qualitative research methods; interview as a major tool of data collection. It is important to understand the reasons behind students' major choice decisions, factors, and career satisfaction. This study intended to provide valuable information on the reasons for choosing a professional career among purposefully selected HU fourth year Medicine students. These selected HU medical students were interviewed and the collected information were narrated in recurrent themes. The finding evidence that social status of being a doctor, job security, employment opportunity, good salary, helping people and characters in a fiction were some of the factors for students to join medicine. Besides, personal background, early childhood experiences, and parental motives have influenced students' major career choices. The finding further demonstrated that early decision to join medicine was contributing to performing high in prior schools. However, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this study that was conducted using very few respondents from one university. This study suggested researchers conduct studies helpful to fill the gaps observed in existing major career choices literature.

1 Introduction

The history of Ethiopian higher education institutions (HEIs) showed that students' selection for entry to higher learning institutions and placement to major fields held by centrally established institutions by the Ministry of Education; HEIs have little room in these tasks (UNESCO, 1988). For instance, in the mid-1940s and 1950s students' sit for the General School Leaving Certificate Examination, the 1951 established University College at Addis Ababa has taken the mandate to process students' placement (Adane, 1996). The act of choosing a college major is one of the most profound decisions in the life of students' that requires the need of analyzing complex information (Amir & Gait, 2013). Asking early school children, a question related to careers they want to be when grown up; they mostly respond to becoming princess, King, Doctor, Lawyer and other perceived prestige careers (Schaefer, Rivera & Ophals, 2010).

However, many studies of pupils' career aspirations in early ages found a limited relationship between their college major and future career goals (Johnson, 2000). Students' choices of major fields of study in colleges have emerged as early as lower high schools and their career aspirations in middle grades (Schafer, *et al*., 2010). This research aimed to study Hawassa University (HU) Medical

Email: belaynathanem@gmail.com;
Article DOI:10.20372/dje.v03i02.02

students' major choice factors, performance, and challenges using qualitative research methods.

Early examples of research about students' interest, factors, and decisions to college major choice. The decisions appropriateness judged by knowing contextual values of respective major fields of studies emanated from students lived experience and mostly relied on intrinsic, extrinsic, social, and prestige career attributes (Semela, 2010; National Middle School Association (NMSA), 2010; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hirschi & Lage, 2005). However, findings affirmed that students' career choice decisions have been influenced by lack of knowledge, and career orientation that caused difficulties in their future life (Amir & Gati, 2010; Schafer, *et al*., 2010).

Therefore, it is imperative to conduct studies that recognize the factors of major choice and drawbacks of choice to support students to make informed major career choice decisions that align with their interest and ability. A considerable number of studies suggest career orientation programs, counselling service, teachers mentoring, and career assessment to be designed and implemented to help students to make informed and knowledgeable decisions of their college major fields of study in western context (NMSA, 2010).

However, little is known about these career interventions and the underlying factors that contribute to African students' interest to study their respective college major. Some studies conducted in Ethiopia, particularly the reason for students majoring in medicine, the prestigious value given by the public is found to be the prominent one (Tsion, Damen, Wubegzier & Miliard, 2017; Assefa, Adane & Aneme, 2008). Studies further identified reasons such as direct linkage of medical activity with life care of individuals, attention given by government, and graduates incur more payment to major medicine (Tsion *et al*., 2017).

Major fields for students of Ethiopia to pursue in respective HEIs have been decided based on their aggregate scores achieved in UEE, scoring higher is an asset to join their choice of interest as compared to other students with similar interest of choice, but with lower UEE results (Mulu, 2012; MOE, 2008; Getachew, 2008). The study of Mulu (2012) apart from other fields of studies, medicine students have highest scores as compared to other students who took UEE in the same year. The rest students' major choice of interest were maintained when the number of highest scoring students did not exceed the admission quota of specified HEIs, and major department. Such major choices of Ethiopian HEIs are believed to have considerable drawbacks.

For example, findings of studies demonstrated that most students assigned to study physics without their choice were blamed for lack of interest to learn, low achievement, lack of academic success and low academic self-concept even as compared to their counterparts assigned in other natural science departments (Semela, 2010). Similarly, study findings and reports further strengthen Ethiopian students' college major choices have known in its implementation with little or no career guidance and counselling orientations either given to students in early schooling years or at the time of their HEI career choice (AAU, 2008; Gerachew, 2008; UNESCO, 1988; Gilbert, 1967).

Despite this, the enrolment policy of HEIs has exacerbated the inequalities created by disregarding lower scoring students' choice of interest and further caused them frustration and discouragement (e. g., Semela 2010; Woodward, 1969). Students Who score high in UEE have greater probabilities of getting their top ranked college major choices. Studies evidenced that 97 percent of students who enroll to pursue medical education have joined with their first choice of interest that they believe will guarantee them future employment (Tsion *et al*., 2017; Mulu, 2012). Reviewing existing studies mostly conducted in western countries (e. g. Amir and Gati, 2013; Thompson & Dahling, 2010; Wille, De Fruyt & Feys, 2010; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hirschi & Läge, 2007; Porter & Umbach, 2006; Rosenbloom, Ash & LeAnne, 2006) and African countries (Mulu, 2012; Edoh & Alutu, 2011; Semela, 2010; Agulanna & Nwachukwu, 2004) indicated that students college major choice affected by various factors like parents, teachers, peer group, radio, television and books that they experienced in their day to day life.

Despite these apparent similarities, however, the

significance factor to place students based on their interest to HEI and major field of study accounted most on their UEE results. For instance, a study of Mulu (2012) in public HEIs found out that around 97% in medicine, 91% in law, 85% in technology, and 64% in business and economics who scored higher results in UEE have placed in these major departments based on their interest, and pleased with their placement.

On the contrary, findings showed that the majority of respondents from the College of Education and the Faculty of Sciences had joined their fields of study without their choices, rather by assignment (Semela, 2010). As a result students in the aforementioned faculties pursuing their study in college were not for love of the profession rather for the sake of getting a job and lack of options.

Faculties with more applicants such as medicine and law are in a better position to enroll students with better UEE results as compared to faculties with fewer applicants such as education. However, studies on UEE students' results and major career choice showed no significant relationship with their academic self-concept and academic performance, instead it has shown significant relationship with attitude, value orientation, admission preferences and motivation (Getachew, 2008; UNESCO, 1988; Gilbert, 1967).

The number of students enrolled in HEIs in their major field dependent on UEE results have paved a way to conduct a qualitative research on issues related to the career related major choice construct on medical students who are known in their highest UEE scores.

It is imperative to conduct a study on medical students 'major choice decision in the following reasons: most of the studies are conducted in other major department students and focus on self-efficacy and pays little attention on career choice, studies on overall evaluations of HEIs but gave little attention to career related issues (Semela, 2010). As well, little research has been conducted on the challenges of medical students.

Therefore, this study intended to contribute in addressing these gaps in career studies by answering the following research questions;

- How students lived experience, and other factors have shaped their career orientation or decision to choose medicine?
- How do students' early decision to study medicine contribute to their school performance and motivation to learn?
- What are the challenges medical students face in pursuing their medical study?

2 Career Choice in Ethiopia

People in Ethiopia have been known to engage in numerous jobs either encouraged or discouraged by the society (Harold Marcus, 1994). For example, jobs like blacksmith; Goldsmith; Clay maker; Carpenter, Weaver, and leather making not only have gone beyond cultural devaluation, but are also prone to stereotype; but also as being forbidden for people to engage (Ayalew, 2000; Teshome, 1979).

These situations somehow shifted with the beginning of Western education during the regime of emperor Minilik II in 1908 that in need of citizens to cope up with western ideas and to modernize the country (Ayalew, 2000). This initiative was further catalyzed by the motivation rooted from the Italian invasion's unexpected utilization of flying rockets as part of an advance in military science and which is new and challenging, the emperor at that time expressed his feeling in Amharic by saying:

"*Be Mach'ewimi sīmech yigebu neber*
Be'Ogadēnim sīmech yigebu neber
Besemayi layi gebu bemanawuk'ewu hāger"

This poetry demonstrated the emperor's understanding of the gaps existed between Italian and Ethiopia with regard to modernity and technology (Ayalew, 2000; Adane, 1996; Kehoe, 1962) that further ignited a candle in his mind and opted to start modern education. The initial public resistance to western education is replaced by appreciation of the teaching profession disseminated and popularized through wedding songs in Amharic:

"*Ye'inya mushirīti kurī kurī*
Wesedati āsitemarī"

This poetry is tried to send a message that dignify the status a society gave to teachers with historic rhymes; —married women feel happy and joy, "because her husband is a teacher" that evidenced how people sing to glorify teachers. This respect was also kept for other civil servants including health workers.

However, evidence in the past showed that, health workers are not only sufficient in number but also rarely available particularly in rural parts of the country in which more than 85% of the population dwells (CSA 2014). To address the community health needs, the country established the first medical education program in the 1960s (Kehoe, 1962).

The highest scoring student's interest to study medicine have evidenced that, socially prestigious, offer opportunity to explore, attract good salaries, guaranteeing job, offer people opportunities to help others, to make good money and driven by service were the major reasons of choice (Tsion, et.al, 2017 and Wakgar, 2012). The country's history evidenced that medical students are highly valued and esteemed by the people, society and government.

3 Method

In order to answer the research questions, the study employee's qualitative research design. According to Davis (2007), "Good qualitative helps to understand a complex phenomenon; it must consider the multiple 'realities' experienced by the participants themselves from 'insider' perspectives."

The description of people's lived experiences, events, or situations is often described as 'thick' (Denzin, 1989), meaning attention is given to rich detail, meaningful social and historical contexts and experiences, and the significance of emotional content in an attempt to open up the word of whoever or whatever is being studied. This study employees 'narrative analysis using the record interviews of mostly three fourth year HU Medical students using life story method, describe their life experiences via storytelling.

3.1 Participants, and Sampling

To answer the research questions of this study, HU was purposefully selected and a convenient sample of fourth year Medical students were interviewed due to proximity to the researchers. Due to unavailability of an adequate number of participants, the responses of three participants with pseudonyms using the first letters of the phrase Student Hawassa Medicine (SHM) followed by numbers, hereafter named as SHM1, SHM2, and SHM3. The interview data of these pseudo-named students were narrated and presented in this study together with a few numbers of other participants who responded to some of the questions. The sample students are given pseudo names for confidentiality and to keep privacy.

3.2 Material, and Procedures

Interview questions were raised to assess medical students' lived experience, social values, models and other factors that shape their career orientation and decision to choose medicine, challenges they face in medical school, and perceived factors to their performance and motivation to learn in HEI.

Interviews were conducted with fourth year medical students at the end of the semester. At the beginning of the interview, they were asked regarding their background including: whether they would be the first in their family to enter HEI; experiences with health related activities; aspiration towards future study; career attitude, orientation and interest; and reasons of choice and motivation prior to attending medical school and after pursuing the medical field.

The research employed deep interviews using recommended interview techniques and tried to discover possible uncovered career constructs related with pursuing medicine in HEI. Revisions have been made until the interviewer is satisfied with the responses or none generation of new ideas.

3.3 Analysis

For the attainment of the study objectives, participants interviewed data were recorded and carefully transcribed to emerge recurrent themes (read Flick, 2014). In this paper, interview data of fourth year students (aged 22-26 years) were narrated and pre-

sented under the themes; story, earlier schooling activities, mechanisms to accommodate other activities, factors for choice, reasons of choice, and challenges in medical school.

4 Results

4.1 Participants story

A 24 years old and a third child in the family; SHM1, born in one of the zonal capital towns of Ethiopia. SHM1‘s father died in his early age as he hears from his mother. His mother soon took, together with his sister to another town found near to the capital city of the country, at that time his mother was pregnant with his sister.

During the interview SHM1 is HU fourth year, semester one medical student. When asked about his lived school experience before joining medical school, SHM1 told; my Mom gives due attention to education, when I start school I am the youngest. .. My mother encouraged me ..., she has a desire from us to learn properly.

“Aha... I started to read, and to make my mama become Happy, I am strongly devoted to acquiring knowledge in education . . . God supports me and I became a clever student in early school”. The story of SHM2 and SHM3 were presented subsequently.

SHM2, who was born and grew up in a small town in Oromia region, reported to be the first child in her family, and is 22 years old. She attended her KG and primary school near her home, taking only 15 minutes on foot. She grows up with her parents and two elders. She is looking happy, her parents are both working as primary school teachers in the same school.

At present, she is fourth year medicine student at HU and shared her remarkable experience which lead her to join health science. “Ih. In my early grades my parents, particularly my father, checked my exercise books, assisting me in reading and writing skills, solving some questions. . . and carefully doing my home works. Gradually I started to do some of my activities independently and got interested in the learned subjects. Starting from the beginning of secondary school, our English teacher advised us to have a study schedule, and I discussed it with my father, and he arranged a separate reading room for me. On a program basis, sometimes I started to read and revise my subjects, and solve calculations at calm midnight, this became my reading habit”.

Uuum. . . I can‘t remember the days I became absent or late from class during my primary school. I prefer class participation and presentations so that it improves my confidence to deal with my friends. I also used to participate in competitions like question and answer programs in my school, representing my classmates as I stood among the frontier three ranks every semester. This helped me to score high points in grade 10 and makes natural science my preferred subjects.

The other interviewee, SHM3 who was born in rural areas of Arsi zone, the last and the only female to her family, and she is 23 years old attending medicine at HU. She said, though attending schools, her brothers are not successful to join higher education, self-employed in the private sector. SHM3 further tried to remember her early life experience as: “Though my brothers are not successful in their education, they advise and coach me to succeed in my education which contributed a lot in my school life. Every day, they show love to me and call me by the naked name Nurse SHM3”.

I started off thinking and wanted to study medicine because of my interest in science and my fascination with the way in which the human body functions. I think it runs deeper than that, when I was younger enough at grade 8, my mother suffered from a heart attack, sadly she didn‘t survive. I think this situation ingrained my interest to join medicine. I remember feeling so helpless when the ambulance took over my mam, an hour to get to her. My mother, father, brothers and I (I was 15) went straight over to arrive at the health post and she obtained treatment for a moment, but she failed to follow prescriptions to improve her problem, . . . this is what I remember most specifically, which I think was unconscious at that time.

I blamed myself for a long time, thinking that she might have lived if I had given her the instructions more clearly. This experience has made me want to be involved in a caring profession. I see it as an

opportunity to help and prevent families who pass through similar situations.

4.2 Other activities in early schooling

SHM1's response on other activities he was involved in his early schooling indicated as follows. "Yah. Side by side with education, I read books. When I was a grade three student, I read my first book that my elder sister borrowed from the school; I remember "*Konjowochu*" was the title of the book. I hid myself from my sister to read when I was a grade three student. Up to grade six, I read many books that my sister borrowed from the school library".

When I enter grade seven our school formally allowed students to enter the library. At that time I started entering the library and I proceeded to read fiction. I read most of the fiction when I was in grade 7 and 8. My score on the 8^{th} grade regional exam is the first and top score of the zone and the second from the region.

SHM2's response to this question; during my extra time, I used to draw pictures, maps, and diagrams. Especially I like to construct parts of the human body and wild animals through local materials and pieces. She added; "sometimes, I enjoy walking and relaxing near big trees. As I became mature, when I was in grade 8 I saw patients in our locality who suffered from different diseases like malaria, and I started to worry about the situation due to lack of health services and inadequate health professionals in the locality. This brought humanitarian thinking into my life".

SHM3's response to this question; "Woo. ...At my preschool age, I enjoyed playing different games with my neighbourhood children and, always, I take the role of nurse and act as a nurse. During my primary education, especially at the beginning of grade 3, on the way to my school, I always saw health extension workers supervising residences in small towns and giving advice about environmental sanitation".

My experience and dream, along with high achievements in my secondary school, led me to give attention to science subjects, particularly Biology, and follow some medical films. During my preparatory class, I put in more effort and really scored high marks which help for my direct placement to medicine department.

Afterwards, my decision to study medicine aligns with the knowledge and understanding I will have of the human body. Also, I imagine there is a massive amount of job satisfaction working as a doctor, as well as a lot of pressure that would be challenging, yet enjoyable to deal with, and successfully overcome.

4.3 Accommodates reading books out of the school subject

SHM1's response when he asked about the mechanisms, he accommodates reading books out of the school subject and how it contributes to becoming clever, he said: ". . . my vision. ...Aha. ..Making my mother proud of me. ..You see, succeeding in school was my plan. ..Always to be rewarded. ..You know, "Seni 30", the day to receive a card. To be rewarded is my obligation and it was the only thing I gave to my mother as a gift. In my mind, I believe in this. I became the top ranked student and was rewarded".

When, I am retrieving my childhood. I sometimes asked my mother about my father. She told me things, he drank, had come home to disturb, picked a knife, terrorized her to slaughter. She said to me repeatedly; you didn't waste any time thinking about him. She made me perceive my father as bad. In most of my school years, my concern about my father was eliminated. My mother reared me. ..Her generosity, love and empathy. She fulfils basic things for me every time, as far as her capacity is concerned.

SHM3 responded to this question; "sometimes, I join health extension workers and talk to them. They also appraise and walk with me and share love and affection to me. Always they advise me to be a strong student and have a planned study schedule for all my duties. Beside my class subjects, I prefer worship and read spiritual books with an emphasis Christian Bible".

Even though the department makes my life very

busy due to various burdens, and long study years related to other departments, I am happy with my stay for these years of study. I found the content and staffs interested me, and at the same time I like the active and practical job, creative, challenging and I like working under pressure and applying what I know and scenarios where I have to tackle the problem. The job satisfaction is the bonus, but I believe even if tomorrow, medicine became an average degree, I would still do it for my further study and nothing is more satisfactory than helping people.

I imagine—doctors can experience pressure while dealing with patients that often cause them depression and stress. For me . . . why this happens is. . . 'because, one year you could be transplanting organs and the next you could be growing them from stem cells. . . . again one year you could be watching a disease cause someone to die but another time you see people cured soon. It is a challenging career with options from clinical work to research to teaching and you get to meet new interesting people every day because as a doctor you are the frontier to protecting and improving a person's quality of life.

Following this, the study will narrate turn by turn and present the narratives under the recurrent themes; underlying reasons of choice or factors, decisions to study medicine in HEI and its contribution to prior school performance, and challenges of medical school students in the HEIs.

4.4 Factors for Choice

When asked why he/she has chosen to study medicine, SHM1 told us that he was surprisingly influenced by the character in the fiction read. "The reason that caused me to join medicine was a book I read at grade seven. The book named 'ENBUT TSIGIREDA'has influenced me to join medicine. In the book, there is a growing girl, her mother with a serious illness, she is beautiful, and I hope it is around 16 year's old girl, she went to examine. . . the physician. . . . . Their families have not any money to examine her mother, with this problem; the physician at that time requires some affair and asks about her dating relationship". I decided once he died. . . I wasn't prone to know the details, why did he die? And how he dies, I didn't have any interest. The Physician said to her, if you say no, I didn't examine your mother and he said the chance of your mother is at your hand. I remember. . . "At that time my mind decided, I should learn and become a doctor". After I become a Physician, I decide to avoid those physicians with such undesirable behaviour in the health profession. Starting from grade seven, the only goal of my future is to become a physician; no other vision is coming in my mind (SHM2).

SHM2 also asked and responded, her life experiences to patients in early childhood. I see primary education as a critical time during which I developed interest towards health activities as a result of experiences that I faced from people who suffered from different diseases like malaria as a result of lack of sufficient and qualified health professionals in my locality. This childhood experience has influenced my study habits and motivated me to give priority to science subjects. In addition to this, the personality that I possess to be sociable and loveable to patients affected my tendency to study health and made me to further support people who suffered.

SHM3 also asked and raised reason as: her interest in science subjects and fascination with human body functions that I attained in science subjects played a great contribution in my aspiration to be a doctor. Moreover, "the death of my mother due to a heart attack led me to become involved in a caring profession which could help me prevent families with similar health problems". On the other hand, the love I had for science subjects and high scores I obtained in my secondary education further deepened my interest to study medicine and made it the first decision during my entrance to HEI.

Furthermore, SHM1 told his memorization of his elder sister in place of the fiction character he read was the major factor for his decision to study medicine. At that time I felt that it just happened to my elder sister and my mind repeatedly told me, assume that she is your sister and it makes me too deeply feel my sister's pain. Still now the whole picture in my internal mind is that scenario and I only want to become a physician. There is no

reason and bringing other reasons or listing has not required for my decision to study medicine, I internal accepted it as a sufficient reason.

4.5 Reasons of Choice

Asked SHM1 to remember activities you might involve in your previous grades that might be related with medicine or not. He told in schools I was participating in different clubs like the school's Red Cross club, later I became the coordinator or chairman. The other is that the character to help people that I share from my mother and my readings. Together with these things, I have strong stand in my internal mind that helping people is how much satisfying and really developed in my mind through time become the prime reason to join medical school.

SHM2 also asked what influenced her and responded as: since I grew up in a rural community who are in shortage of infrastructures, particularly poor health services, I saw the work of few doctors and health care professionals who more or less tried to save the lives of most important people in my life, sometimes they failed to save patients life. Therefore, I couldn't think of any valuable career for me, except medicine. Besides, the support and encouragement of my father who initiated me to study hard and score high grades every semester helped me to put good effort and increasingly develop my confidence to join health science and study medicine.

The fact I used to be a clever student and some of my teachers' appreciation shaped me the way I keep and the ever increasing knowledge about how to balance the learning systems for good opportunities. With the same vein, the fact that I scored high points in grade 10 Ethiopian General Secondary Education Leaving Examination motivated me to join natural science class and put emphasis on chemistry and biology subjects which were believed to equip students with the medicine concepts.

The other reasons that interested me are, a true sense of being able to make a difference to the community, fascination about human body, how it works, why it doesn't work, how it works, the opportunity to teach and pass my skills on to others, but mostly, more than any other profession a true sense of being able to make a difference to the community.

Surprisingly, I scored high grades in my entrance exam, and made medicine my first priority. Fortunately, I got my choice and gladly started my study. During my stay in this university, I referred to a lot of medical materials and increasingly I found it compatible with my future life. Again—not only would it be satisfactory but if you love medicine, not only do you get to help people and make a difference but you get to work with the patients you enjoy in an analytical way, which I personally think is rewarding. I also think it is good because you take an active role in making a difference to someone's life.

Additionally, I am happy to be a doctor, medicine as it has many specialties that can make my life successful and as a health professional I want to participate in research activities which could help to invent new drugs. —Because as a career I think it would be constantly changing; new discoveries and treatments become interesting. Hence, the idea of being able to use your medical knowledge to save a life, lifelong learning, job security and stability are more interesting to me.

It is my great pleasure —if all medical professionals are honest and responsible for their job in reducing the gaps regarding health service coverage which is prevalent in our community. Surely, I believe I will become exemplar with this regard and apply my skill and knowledge with commitment (SHM2).

SHM3 on the other hand said: I started off thinking I wanted to go into medicine because of my interest in science and my fascination with the way in which the human body functions. I think it runs deeper than that, when I was younger enough at grade 8, my mother suffered from a heart attack, sadly she didn't survive. I think that this is ignite a candle to be interested in health fields. I remember feeling so helpless, and the ambulance took over an hour to reach my suffering mam. My mother (I was 15) arrived at the health post and obtained treatment for a moment, but she failed to follow prescriptions which might improve her health. —this is what I remember most specifically which I think was

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My experience and dream, along with high achievements in my secondary school, motivated me to give attention to science subjects, particularly Biology, and follow some medical films. During my preparatory class, I put more effort and really scored high marks that help for my direct assignment to medicine department.

Even though the department makes my life very busy due to various burdens, and long study years, I am happy with my stay in these years of my study. I found the content and staff interested me, and at the same time I like the active and practical job, creative, challenging and I like working under pressure and applying what I know and scenarios where I have to tackle the problem. The job satisfaction is the bonus, but I believe even if tomorrow, medicine became an average degree, I would still do it for my further study and nothing is more satisfactory than helping people.

I imagine—doctors can experience pressure while dealing with patients that often cause them depression and stress. For me . . . why this happens is. . . 'because, one year you could be transplanting organs and the next you could be growing them from stem cells. . . . again one year you could be watching a disease force a death sentence and the next it could be cured. It is a challenging career with options from clinical work to research to teaching, and you get to meet new interesting people every day. As a doctor you are the frontier to protecting and improving a person's quality of life believed to be the major reason.

The influence of a role model is asked; SHM1 confirmed no one in the school joins medicine beforehand that could become a model to him: When I was a grade 8 student, there was one individual who joined Black Lion Hospital Medical School. I was attracted to him when he came for summer vacation. After, I start to dream that field beforehand by the aforementioned reason and I discuss with him about medicine, he also advise me also now you just arrive 9th and 10th grade, he told me to pay attention to biology and other relevant subjects and brings materials beyond my stage to read. When I was in high school, he helped me to understand medical words.

SHM2 has no model to refer to but she said: the appreciation I obtained from my father and the encouragement provided by some of my teachers are undeniable contributors to my achievement. On the other hand, SHM3 took the initiatives that her brothers call her with her naked name'which gradually influenced her preference to health professionals, being played as a nurse. Again, the presence of health extension workers that create too close talk and enjoyment with her greatly influenced her interest towards health professions. This improved her life and really helped her to be a doctor.

Despite Reasons for Choice, other medical students' responses were presented. They reported that in our dorms we talked to each other, some hesitating "*zimibeye new shimideda yegebahut*" (I joined unconsciously to study the field of Rote memorization), and questions rose on the why of joining medicine?

At that time, most classmates reasoned that the values society gives for medical discipline is the major reason. The prestigious values in the society emanated from the service, the medical related with the name of the profession as related with the societal value.

When you are clever, you are perceived to hold the highest post, those students who perform high, allowed and selected to join medicine. In terms of income, medical doctors get a lot of money ("*hakim bizu yagegnal*") and become rich. Most of them, reason out of two reasons, money and societal prestige value.

In addition to the aforementioned SHM1's reason, the other two likely reasons for him to choose medicine are, the influence of her sister and mother and his engagement in the Red Cross club in high school beyond his reading. The narrative identi-

fies him as having motives like helping people and bringing profound change in the unethical practices observed in the health service.

Additionally, we asked SHM1 to describe his performance in schools, the way he learn and subjects he perform and relationship with teachers; he told us With relation to school activities SHM1 mentioned: Like other students, I haven‘t supported by books, and other additional materials; When a teacher teaches, I didn‘t miss it, I finish what he taught there, I understood and exit the class, I ask there for concepts that I didn‘t understood, afterward no need of reading.

My experience in subjects and participation in physics, chemistry, mathematics and related activities were believed to be very good. However, I am good in other subjects but very good in biology subject performance, we assumed related to medicine. Throughout my school biology performance is not better than physics, mathematics and chemistry, my mind sets a goal only to become a medical Doctor and I didn‘t think twice. When the choice came after I took a grade 10 exam, I was the top scorer from the school and all over the zone that allowed to select social and Natural. I did not have anything to think about, I thought only things that took me to my dream of pursuing medical study and joining the natural field of study.

I remember, my history teacher, now holding his PhD from —Sedist Kilo‖ University and currently he is in the teaching career. When I was choosing natural science, my history teacher disputed with me because he appreciated my performance in history. Soon, we joined grade 11^{th} and 12^{th}, later I sat for the leaving exam and I didn‘t dream of any field other than medicine. I selected medicine as my first choice and I got my physics teacher, he became disgusted like the history teacher of my choice. This all my stable aspiration field because of the influence of the fiction character I read during grade seven, to be a medicine student, I know what is expected from me and to score high is the only option that I have (SHM1).

4.6 Challenges in Medical School

Some of the challenges raised in medicine school are also summarized as: SHM2 and SHM3 raised similar experiences regarding their stay in studying medicine in the university. To mention a few, they raised that every discipline demands hardworking and intensive study. Health science, medicine in particular requires wider study hours and long years of study. The nature of courses is broad to cover and some to understand its theoretical and practical skills and knowledge.

Regarding challenges that block his goals in school, SHM1 stated as: I was preparing for the final exam scoring high and expected to enter medical school, unless and otherwise my dream is not realized. I am in the school, for the last four years no one scored high and joined the medical school. However, my lower first semester grade caused me to be frustrated and my mind asked me, if you can‘t compute with your classmates, how will your goal be fulfilled? It made me not study, instead I played football and one day my civic teacher asked me about the situation and later he advised me to read. Further, he looks after my activities, fulfilling materials and other moral support. Through his close inspection and support I started studying; my score became the highest not only from the school but also from the zone.

The fact that the subjects need more supplementary reading materials which incurs financial support is one of the challenges, especially for those students that have limited financial and moral support.

5 Conclusions

The right major choice for the students entering into professional education is critical, having a high impact on their professional life and future achievements. This is the turning point; it cannot be left, on intuition, preconceived notions, wild imaginations or popular concepts. A miss-perceived career choice directs all individual efforts and resources in the wrong direction, when not aligned with the expectations; would not only be frustrating rather draining individual energy and wastage of resources.

Realignment is possible, but it has serious impli-

cations in terms of time, money and motivation. The career choice of the students must need to be based on; strong knowledge, adequate career information, and vocational guidance; matching individual personality type and other intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

It was concluded that, a relatively strong sense of major choice, and greater career decidedness exist among participants that emerged from their overall story reports. Assisting students with life transitions through the provision of career orientation at schools, colleges and universities should become the role of different stakeholders, families, guardians, peers, teachers, professionals and significant others.

As well, considerable attention will be given to some students who are disqualified from their study due different reasons. The problem is getting worse since the placement is continued to be only score based, rather suggested to make the placement by taking aptitude tests, and other career tools into considerations.

Implications

The students need to be oriented on new emerging trends, future opportunities and challenges in the context of their career choice decisions. They need to know the market trends and job demands of various sectors along with their personalities. For this end, concerned bodies and educators should work to help students in identifying career objectives by encouraging them to explore careers that align with their values and interests.

The vocational guidance practices at HEIs will be consequent in line with current understandings that students should be provided with an opportunity to unearth career possibilities to discover leading edge interests, assess problems, and motivate to acquire a cognitive structure for evaluating career alternatives, clarifying expectations, and planning interventions along with their established ability and interest.

Even though it is difficult to generalize from data collected from a few sample students, findings of other study results revealed that gender has no effect on career decisions among university students. But, the interviewee result confirmed that the academic standing has an effect on career decision, and satisfaction in particular.

Based on the narratives, it can be said that students at HU should be in need of high levels of vocational guidance prior to making placement decisions in their respective fields. This helps them to have a clear and stable picture of their goals, interest, personality and talents that lead, in turn, to relatively untroubled decision making and confidence in one‘s ability to make informed decisions regarding major choices that signify future career satisfaction and alignment to career aspirations.

Limitation

This study is limited in its scope and use of few sample participants that made some of the information unable for generalization and created a room for biases.

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Dilla Journal of Education
https://www.du.edu.et/duj

Inclusive Pedagogy: Lived Experiences and Barriers of Students with Physical Disabilities in Practical Health and Physical Education in Ethiopian Secondary Schools

Ababu Teshome Ayalew [1,*] **and Birhanu Haile Agezew** [2]

[1]Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia
[2]Department of Educational Planning and Management, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia

Received: 21 May 2024 Accepted: 29 September 2024 Published: 17 October 2024

ARTICLE INFO.

Key words/Phrases: Experiences, Inclusive Pedagogy, Physical Education, Practical Class, Qualitative Research, Students with Disabilities

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to investigate the lived experience and barriers of students with disabilities focusing on health and physical education practical class from the perspective of inclusive pedagogy approach in selected 2 secondary schools in Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach and case research design is used. A purposeful sampling technique is planned to consider twenty-two students with disabilities and four secondary HPE teachers. Semi structured interviews, FGD, observation and document analysis are used to collect the data. The main findings include: SWD'S prior experience in secondary schools shows that they are excluded from health and physical education practical class. This was mainly due to the absence of inclusive curriculum in HPE subject which accommodates learners with visual, hearing and mobility impairments. Their experience in special primary schools, they were similarly accommodated and empowered like all other students without disabilities. For instance, students with visual impairment were treated equally in all academic and vocational subjects in special primary school. However, in secondary schools, students with visual hearing and physical impairment are not attending the practical class in HPE subject. The other finding is that though secondary HPE teachers have more positive attitude towards inclusion of students with disabilities, their positive attitude is not changed in to an action. Moreover, HPE teachers showed lack of commitment and readiness to adapt the practical class to meet the unique needs and interests of SWDS. To conclude, as of their physically integrated in mainstreaming secondary schools, students with disabilities had no meaningful engagement in HPE subject. Accordingly, they showed low motivation to HPE practical class in secondary schools. Therefore, it is recommended that there must be a space to revisit existing curriculum to be pedagogically responsive to children with different types of disability in particular to HPE subject in secondary schools. Legislation, educational policy, and teacher training programs also need to be progressively revisited to realize inclusive pedagogy.

1 Introduction

Inclusive pedagogy has emerged as a central pillar in transforming contemporary education by promoting equity and meaningful participation for all learners, including those with special educational needs (SEN). Grounded in principles of social justice, it aims to remove structural and attitudinal barriers that hinder full engagement in learning processes (Florian & Spratt, 2013; Loreman, 2021). Particularly in secondary education, Health and

*Corresponding Author; Email: ababuteshome2004@gmail.com;
Article DOI:10.20372/dje.v03i02.03

Physical Education (HPE) serves as a key avenue for fostering students' holistic development. However, students with physical disabilities often remain marginalized in these settings due to inadequate infrastructure, rigid curricula, and insufficiently trained teachers (Maher & Fitzgerald, 2020; Goodwin & Watkinson, 2021; Qi & Ha, 2022).

Research reveals that students with disabilities frequently experience exclusion from active participation in HPE, leading to diminished physical and social development and lower self-esteem (Black & Stevenson, 2023; Armour & Harris, 2021). Yet, when inclusive strategies such as adaptive instruction, collaborative planning, and teacher mindset shifts are employed, students with SEN show improved engagement and peer relationships (Sharma *et al*., 2021; Ben Rakaa *et al*., 2025). Supportive environments cultivated through peer tutoring, co-teaching, and targeted interventions further encourage acceptance, especially in rural settings and among female students (Delgado-Gil *et al*., 2023; Makopoulou *et al*., 2023).

In Ethiopia, several educational policy initiatives—such as the Education Sector Development Programme VI (2020–2025) and GEQIP-E—reflect the nation's commitment to inclusive education. These frameworks promote adapted curricula, inclusive training for teachers, and accessible school environments (MoE, 2020; World Bank, 2023). The Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy also recommends individual education plans (IEPs), adapted equipment, and community involvement as essential steps toward equity. These align with Ethiopia's obligations under the UN CRPD (2006), affirming every learner's right to inclusive and accessible physical education.

Nonetheless, evidence suggests that many HPE teachers lack the training and confidence to fully include students with SEN in regular classes (Baloun *et al*., 2016; Kudláček *et al*., 2018). Disabilities are often visible in PE contexts, making it crucial for teachers to adapt lessons in ways that recognize both limitations and potential. Without such adaptations, learners risk exclusion from the benefits that HPE offers, including physical wellness, social connection, and emotional growth.

2 Rationale

Every student brings distinct intellectual, physical, and emotional traits into the classroom. While most learners can thrive with general instruction, those with significant impairments—especially orthopedic, visual, or hearing—require differentiated support. Current research and policies affirm the importance of inclusive HPE in enhancing self-esteem and physical competence for these learners (World Bank, 2023; UNESCO, 2020). Inclusive models are also seen as more ethical, effective, and sustainable than segregated systems, supporting broader educational goals such as flexibility, equity, and diversity.

Yet, the implementation of inclusive pedagogy in HPE faces persistent obstacles, including limited teacher training, lack of adapted equipment, and negative attitudes (Morley *et al*., 2020). Teachers may inadvertently focus on students' disabilities rather than capabilities, perpetuating exclusion. These pedagogical and systemic issues undermine inclusive education goals and emphasize the need for evidence-based strategies that address real-world classroom challenges. Given the gap in local research on the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian secondary school HPE classes, this study seeks to address a critical need. It aims to understand students' lived experiences, identify perceived barriers, and highlight strategies to enhance inclusion. This will inform both policy and practice, contributing to a more equitable and participatory learning environment for all.

Research Questions:

1. How do students with physical disabilities describe their experiences in inclusive physical education classes?
2. What challenges do students and teachers identify as barriers to inclusion?
3. What strategies can enhance the participation of students with disabilities in HPE?

2.1 Literature Review

Physical education (PE) is widely acknowledged as a valuable platform for fostering positive attitudes among all students, including those with

disabilities, within inclusive learning environments (Hutzler & Levi, 2008; Kudláek, Ješina, & Wittmannová, 2011; Campos, Ferreira, & Block, 2013). PE classes allow students of varying abilities to engage in self-expression through movement, providing an ideal context to observe, appreciate, and evaluate each other's capabilities. These settings help students build empathy, understand individual limits, and actively contribute to the learning experience (Griggs & Medcalf, 2015; Klavina *et al*., 2014).

Despite these benefits, effective inclusion in PE requires significant adjustments based on the type and severity of a student's disability. Meaningful engagement in PE often depends on the teacher's ability and willingness to communicate clearly and adapt instruction to support inclusive participation (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010). Without such adjustments, students requiring support may face limitations in participating fully (Smith, 2004; Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Healy, Msetfi, & Gallagher, 2013). Students with physical impairments have described fulfilling PE experiences as ones where they felt accepted, competent, and where achievements were shared (Goodwin & Watkinson, 2000). Supportive social environments that promote encouragement, cooperation, and empathy were highlighted as key enablers (Seymour, Reid, & Bloom, 2009).

However, various studies indicate that implementing inclusive practices in PE can be complex and challenging. For example, Asbjørnslett, Helseth, and Engelsrud (2013) found that students with disabilities often face difficulties in accessing appropriate PE experiences in general education settings. Barriers include insufficient teacher preparation, lack of instructional materials, and unsuitable facilities. Teachers also report challenges in acquiring information about students' disabilities and in collaborating with specialists, especially when supporting students with more complex needs (Fiorini & Manzini, 2014).

Florian (2008) emphasizes that in inclusive education, responsibility for adapting instruction lies with the teacher. Teachers are expected to accommodate diversity by adjusting content and delivery, so the burden of adaptation does not rest solely on the learner. Moreover, research suggests that students with disabilities enjoy PE but often question whether the activities are appropriate for them (Coates & Vickerman, 2010). Inclusive or parallel activities, when mutually agreed upon, can increase participation (Bredahl, 2013; Haegele & Sutherland, 2015). Long-term, individualized planning is essential to ensure sustained participation and learning for students requiring additional support.

Inclusion in PE differs from other subjects because it relies heavily on physical resources, seasonal activities, and specific safety considerations (Morley *et al*., 2005). Many teachers lack adequate training to adapt these elements effectively. Coates and Vickerman (2008) argue that this lack of preparation contributes significantly to the exclusion of students with disabilities from mainstream PE classes. Therefore, teacher education programs that incorporate disability studies and inclusive pedagogy can significantly influence how well teachers respond to diverse learning needs (Florian, 2012).

3 Material and Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the lived experiences and pedagogical challenges of students with disabilities in inclusive Physical Education (PE) practical classes. A qualitative approach was selected to gain in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, emotions, and social contexts, which cannot be fully captured using quantitative methods (Patton, 2002; Seidman, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As the focus was on natural settings and contextual factors, the case study method was deemed suitable (Yazan, 2021; Yin, 2023).

The study was conducted in two purposely selected secondary schools—Sodo and Dilla secondary schools—in South Ethiopia, known for their enrollment of students with disabilities and their proximity to special schools and disability service associations.

3.1 Sampling and Participants

Purposeful and criterion sampling techniques were used to select 26 participants, including 6 students with visual, hearing, or orthopedic impairments and 4 Health and Physical Education (HPE) teachers

for individual interviews. Additionally, 16 students participated in two focus group discussions (FGDs). Selection criteria for student participants included prior experience in PE, ability to express opinions, and involvement in Paralympic activities. HPE teachers were selected based on their experience with inclusive PE practices and relevant training.

3.2 Data Sources and Collection Methods

Multiple data sources were used for triangulation:

1. Semi-structured interviews with 10 participants (6 students, 4 teachers) explored lived experiences, participation, and pedagogical practices. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, audio-recorded, and supported with Braille notes.

2. Focus group discussions involved 8 students per school, selected for diversity in disability type, gender, and educational background. FGDs aimed to capture shared experiences in inclusive PE.

3. Observations were made during practical PE sessions using a checklist to document teacher-student interactions, instructional adaptations, and accessibility conditions.

4. Document analysis included national education policy documents, special needs strategies, curriculum guidelines, and relevant school-based records to enrich contextual understanding and validate interview data.

3.3 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was employed. Data analysis began concurrently with data collection to identify patterns and refine subsequent interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Emerging themes were interpreted using iterative coding, leading to the identification of three major themes:

1. Participation experiences of students with disabilities in PE

2. Barriers to inclusive participation

3. Strategies employed by teachers for inclusion

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance credibility, the study employed triangulation across data sources and member checks where participants reviewed interpretations. Peer review was also conducted by educational researchers for validation. Ethical practices included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting participants' rights to withdraw at any time. Rapport was established through transparency about research goals and procedures.

4 Results

Under this section of the study, we presented and interpreted the data revealed by informants in terms of our key research questions and to link these with the key considerations highlighted in the literature review. Based on the information elicited by informants (SWDS, HPE teachers) and literature review, three major themes and nine sub-themes emerged. Themes were analyzed and interpreted as follows: the three themes emerged includes:

Practical class participation experiences of SWD'S in HPE subject in regular school

Barriers which affect SWDS participation in HPE subject in a regular school

Strategies applied by health and Physical Education teachers to create effective inclusive Physical Education practical classes in the schools

Practical class participation experiences of SWDS in HPE subject in regular school

For the sake of having convenience for the data analysis, we categorized the schools as school A for Wolaita Sodo secondary school and school B Dilla secondary school. In short, the study sites were coded as school A and school B. Students with physical disabilities and HPE teacher's names were similarly changed. They were coded as SWD1 (student with disability One), SWD2 (Student with a disability), SWD3 (Student with disability), SWD4 (Student with disability Four), etc. Students with disabilities who took part in the focus group discussion are coded with pseudonyms. Participants are coded by considering acronyms FGD for focus

group discussion and their respective no. order 1 and two sessions. For instance, FGD1, FGD2, FGD3 and so on. Physical education teachers were also coded HPET1 HPET2, HPET3, and HPET4.

With regard to grade level, sixteen out of twenty-two participants are drawn from grade 12 while six of them are considered from grade 11. Researchers considered the 2021/2022 academic year grade level of subjects. Regarding the bio data of the respondents, among the 22 students with disabilities, categorically, 16 with visual, 3 with mobility, 1 with both visual and mobility and 2 with hearing impairment were involved as research participants. Similarly, four health and physical education teachers who were teaching in grade ten to eleven are invited to face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Two were female HPE teachers while the rest two were male teachers. Concerning appropriateness of their age to their respective grade level: Among twenty-two students with a disability, nineteen are between 18 and 20. Three of them are between the ages of 22 to 24. Among four HPE teachers, three are in the age 38 to 41 while one HPE teacher is 25 years old. Accordingly, the three HPE teachers served in teaching for 15 years in different schools. One HPE teacher had two years teaching experience in school B.

4.1 Theme 1: Participation Experiences of SWDs in Practical HPE

Participation is widely viewed as a key indicator of inclusion in educational contexts (Maxwell, Alves, & Granlund, 2012). It is considered essential for accessing the four main sources of self-efficacy identified by Bandura (1997): mastery experiences (achievements from performance), vicarious experiences (learning through observation), verbal encouragement, and the influence of emotional and physiological states.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY) developed by the World Health Organization (2007) defines participation as being actively involved in life situations. In the context of PE, this means that students are not only present but also meaningfully engaged. Imms *et al*. (2016) stress the importance of distinguishing between mere presence and actual involvement, emphasizing that students might be physically in class without feeling included or emotionally connected to the activity. King (2013) also underlines that for participation to be impactful, students must find the experience meaningful.

Therefore, to truly promote inclusive education in PE, it is important to actively involve students with disabilities in planning and organizing activities. Scholars like Fitzgerald, Jobling, and Kirk (2003), as well as Fitzgerald (2005, 2012), argue that student voices must be considered, particularly when designing adaptive strategies that support both their physical involvement and emotional investment.

In light of this, the current study explores how students with physical disabilities experience both theoretical and practical aspects of PE in secondary school. The analysis focuses on their level of involvement and how it changes as they transition from special school to mainstream education.

Among the 22 student participants, 16 had visual impairments, 3 had mobility impairments, 2 had hearing impairments, and 1 had both visual and mobility impairments. These students shared a common experience of active and enjoyable participation in HPE during primary education, particularly in special schools. However, their participation declined significantly upon transitioning to mainstream secondary schools.

SWDS4 noted:

"I was playing football, running, and jumping until grade six in Shashemene. There was a sports teacher who helped us with exercises to improve physical fitness."

SWDS2 echoed:

"Football was my favorite. After grade six, I never had the opportunity to play again."

Students frequently expressed that HPE teachers in secondary school neither encouraged nor adapted learning opportunities for them. Another student stated:

"I never attended practical classes from grade seven

onward. Teachers did not encourage us or support us with the theoretical parts either."

Many students with visual impairments described that the environment in primary schools was supportive, featuring adapted equipment like sound balls and safe playgrounds. These adjustments allowed them to participate with confidence. In contrast, the absence of such support in secondary schools resulted in their marginalization.

One focus group participant said:

"In primary school, I was the first runner in a 1000-meter race. After grade seven, I lost motivation due to lack of support from teachers and classmates."

Another added:

"When the HPE teacher enters the class, I leave. I have no reason to stay. We don't get exams or classwork. It's like we don't exist."

Students with hearing impairments noted similar exclusion. The lack of sign language interpretation services left them unable to engage with the lessons. However, some demonstrated resilience and managed to learn practical activities by observing peers or watching television. One hearing-impaired student reported winning medals in regional contests, despite minimal school support.

Students with mobility impairments reported that their needs were entirely overlooked. For example, SWD7 shared:

"I sit outside while others go to the field. I feel ashamed. I can't perform like them. Sometimes I ask why I was born disabled."

Others noted that inaccessible equipment and poverty limited their ability to participate. As one student described:

"We lack proper sports kits and even food. We can't focus on physical education while worrying about hunger."

On the other hand, among the target group of students with physical disabilities those with visual impairment, hearing loss and physical challenge (lower and upper) impairment are the list benefited in secondary schools. Accordingly, they are highly overlooked learners in regular secondary schools. Because mainstreaming schools are not ready to facilitate accessible learning ground for students with visual and mobility impairment. Similarly, sign language interpreters are not employed who might support both HPE teachers and deaf students. Moreover, The contents to be taught, method of delivery, and assessment including the equipment for sport classes are not modified for crutch and wheelchair users.

The informants also inform us there is also gender disparity variation between male and female participants. The findings show that four out of six who are female participants in FGD and two female participants in a semi-structured interview, they reported that they had rarely participated in sport event even in a special school for the Blind. They are involved only in practical classes scheduled for sport classes. Thus, female students with disabilities have low participation even in primary school for the Blind. The main reason explained by female students with disabilities, they do not take part actively in sport activities such as playing football jumping body movement-related activities.

The finding obtained from interviews and FGD were also confirmed in other similar studies conducted in a different setting. Different adaptations and modifications are required, depending on the type of disability. Meaningful learning experiences for students with disabilities in PE are extensively dependent on teachers' skills and attitudes toward communicating and structuring their teaching in an inclusive direction (Jordan, Glenn, and McGhie-Richmond 2010). Participation restriction may be experienced if the activity is not adapted to students in need of special support (Smith 2004; Coates and Vickerman 2010; Healy, Msetfi, and Gallagher 2013). Students with physical disabilities describe good days in PE as lessons in which they experience a sense of belonging, their participation as skillful, and where you share benefits (Goodwin and Watkinson 2000). Encouragement, reinforcement, help, and guidance facilitate positive peer interaction (Seymour, Reid, and Bloom 2009). Patience and social encouragement are examples of caring support (Goodwin and Watkinson 2000).

A significant decline in these indicators for most SWDs. This pattern suggests that secondary schools are ill-prepared to sustain inclusive education practices. The positive experiences of SWDs in special primary schools were made possible through teacher support, curriculum adaptation, and an enabling environment. The absence of these factors in secondary school reflects systemic neglect. Moreover, the lack of encouragement, support, and structured participation opportunities leads many students to internalize feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and despair. Their gradual withdrawal from HPE—once a source of joy and pride—symbolizes how institutional barriers suppress their self-efficacy and motivation. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which highlights that participation and mastery experiences are central to developing confidence and resilience.

In sum, this finding confirms as evidence of a broken continuity in inclusive education. While early schooling provides a foundation for active engagement, secondary education environments fail to uphold inclusive values, thereby limiting the holistic development and well-being of SWDs.

4.2 Theme 2: Barriers Affecting SWDs' Participation in Health and Physical Education (HPE)

The data from interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations revealed multiple barriers that significantly hinder the participation of students with disabilities (SWDs) in HPE classes in mainstream secondary schools. These barriers fall under four major sub-themes:

5.2.1 Lack of Knowledge and Skills Among HPE Teachers

SWD3 from school B, explained that: "HPE teachers are not ready to teach students with visual impairment in grade 11 and 12. When I leave the class in sport period, HPE teachers are willing for my class absence". (SWD3). SWD2, in her turn from school B revealed: "We are not oriented to take sport subject. School principals and HPE teachers do not tell us that learning HPE subject is compulsory like all other subjects. Accordingly, we are lacking proper guidance and counseling (SWD2).

Another informant with hearing impairment from school A described that "It is Lack of sign language skill competence and positive feeling among teachers and school communities which restrict us not to actively participate in sport class" (SWD5).

One of the FGD participants from school B, in Dilla town said "It is because there are no trained HPE teachers who are qualified with proper diversified knowledge and skill." That is mainly to modify the practical exercises and contents as per the nature and type of physical impairment in the school. He also discussed that, "HPE teachers who are assigned in grade nine and ten informed us they took one course on adaptation of physical education to students with disabilities. However, they told us they have little knowledge and skill to modify the games for students with disabilities." He continues to narrate that "They are often complaining the environment is not friendly for you despite the fact that we are willing to train you but we do not have sport equipment which respond to your need and interest." "To your surprise, even we do not have sport equipment for students with no disabilities."

The data revealed significant systemic and instructional barriers that hinder students with disabilities from fully participating in Health and Physical Education (HPE) classes. A student with visual impairment (SWD3) expressed that teachers in Grades 11 and 12 were unprepared and unwilling to accommodate her needs, resulting in her being allowed—and even expected—to miss HPE sessions without consequence. This highlights a lack of accountability and inclusion in upper secondary physical education. Similarly, SWD2 reported the absence of orientation and counseling regarding the compulsory nature of HPE, indicating a communication gap between school administration, teachers, and students with disabilities. Another participant with hearing impairment (SWD5) identified teachers' lack of sign language skills and negative attitudes within the school community as major obstacles to participation in sport classes.

Further insights from a focus group discussion in School B underscored the lack of specialized

training among HPE teachers. Although some instructors reportedly completed a single course on adapting physical education, they admitted limited knowledge and competence in modifying activities to suit students with diverse impairments. These teachers also cited environmental inaccessibility and a critical shortage of adapted and even general sport equipment as factors that prevent meaningful participation. Collectively, these narratives underscore the urgent need for teacher capacity building, accessible infrastructure, and inclusive policy enforcement to ensure equitable access to physical education for students with disabilities.

"We don't even have sport equipment for students without disabilities, l*et al*one for SWDs."

The inadequate teacher preparation was compounded by a lack of resources and environmental constraints. These findings emphasize the need for professional development programs focused on inclusive pedagogy, especially in adapting PE content to meet the diverse needs of SWDs.

5.2.2 Inflexible Curriculum and Systemic Tradition

Participants also pointed to rigid curricular structures that did not accommodate students with disabilities. For example, FGDSW6 noted that mathematics, sciences, and HPE were often presumed unsuitable for students with visual impairments, not because of policy but due to tradition and misconceptions. SWD1 explained:

"We're victims of a curriculum designed for students without disabilities."

Despite no legal barriers preventing SWDs from learning science and PE subjects, teachers and school leaders continue to exclude them. This systemic neglect is worsened by the absence of curricular adaptations, assessments, or instructional methods that account for different learning needs.

5.2.3 Negative Attitudes and Low Expectations from HPE Teachers

A recurring theme in both student and teacher interviews was the prevalence of negative or defeatist attitudes. Some HPE teachers admitted discouraging SWDs from participating, citing safety risks, lack of resources, or assumptions about student ability. One teacher (PE4) said:

"I don't encourage students with physical impairments to do practical exercise because the field isn't safe."

Another HPE teacher (PE2) reported trying to modify lessons but later gave up due to students' lack of motivation and inadequate school support. Teachers also expressed concern about large class sizes, time constraints, and the absence of inclusive education experts. These statements reflect a broader institutional failure to prioritize inclusive values, leaving motivated teachers demoralized and unsupported.

Based on the view reflected by HPE teachers in schools A and B, respectively the barriers discussed are similar to opinions raised by students with disabilities involved in semi-structured interviews and FGD. The barriers are associated with a lack of knowledge to identify and provide required adapted practical training mainly for those with hard moderate and profound visual, hearing, and physical impairment. They also mentioned the scarcity of sport adapted equipment, most restrictive playing ground, inadequate skill training in the field of inclusive education, sign language, and low level of concern to a diverse group of learners in the classroom are the challenges to deliver required special educational practical class to the target group of the school. The PE teachers also reported even though that PE teachers showed interest and tried to modify the equipment and playing setting, students with disabilities are found with low initiative and motivation to do practical exercise. They also added lack of required support from special needs education experts, school principals and other general education teachers increased their anxiety to contribute their professional support for students with disabilities. Their report also showed that PE teachers are getting discouraged and demotivated to support students with disabilities. This is caused due to absence of institutionally established support from school to the federal level. Absence of coordinated communication between HPE teachers, experts, parents school principals, and leadership from woreda to ministry level. The other contribut-

ing factor is the existing curriculum teachers' guide and textbook are not adapted to accommodate the unique learning need and interest of students with disabilities.

One considerable finding is that HPE teachers have a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in a regular class. Lower optimism was the perceived Support. Teachers perceive the support received from the school, the presence of a multidisciplinary support team, and material resources are the major hindrances. These barriers negatively affected their motivation to support students with disabilities. They also explained that students with disabilities will perform similarly to students with no disabilities. The problem is the required facilities such as the absence of suitable playground for all, lack of modified sport equipment, the inflexibility of the existing curriculum and absence of the structurally responsible body in the education sector to support them. The finding also showed that HPE teachers are with more doubt and frustration to accommodate students with a wheelchair and multiple disabling conditions and students. Their reason is that, for students with such type of impairment, the school environment, classroom, walkway and workshop are more painful and poorly structured. That is to address as per the unique need and interests of the learners. Despite some HPE teachers having received workshops on inclusive HPE, many felt unequipped to handle the complexity of teaching students with multiple disabilities. Their frustrations highlight the need for ongoing, practical training and school-level structural support.

5.2.4 Inaccessibility of the Physical Environment

Both direct observations and informant testimonies confirmed that the school environments in School A and B were largely inaccessible. Classrooms, corridors, toilets, and playgrounds presented serious physical obstacles, especially for students with mobility or visual impairments. One FGD participant noted:

"The playground is full of open ditches and stones. It's dangerous."

Observations conducted in mid-October 2022 documented that students with disabilities did not attend HPE practical sessions. Instead, they remained in classrooms, sat under trees, or visited the library while their peers participated in field activities. In both schools, adapted sports materials and inclusive playground designs were entirely absent.

Additionally, HPE teachers reported that there was no budg*et al*location for adapted equipment, no special needs coordinators, and no inclusion of disability issues in annual school plans. This systemic neglect further reinforced the exclusion of SWDs.

The findings presented in Theme 2 highlight a multi-layered exclusion of SWDs in HPE practical classes. Structural, attitudinal, instructional, and environmental barriers converge to limit their access to physical education—despite it being a compulsory subject in the national curriculum. From a socio-ecological perspective, these barriers are not isolated to individual teachers but are embedded in broader institutional and cultural systems. This exclusion contradicts inclusive education frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), both of which advocate for the right of every learner to participate meaningfully in all aspects of education—including physical education. Teachers' lack of training aligns with findings from Florian (2008) and Fitzgerald (2012), who emphasize that effective inclusion demands that teachers adapt instruction and environment rather than expect learners to adapt. While the research reveals that some teachers are willing to support SWDs, their efforts are often undermined by insufficient resources, lack of institutional support, and deep-seated misconceptions. Moreover, the routine exclusion of visually impaired students from core subjects like math, physics, and HPE is a symptom of systemic tradition rather than policy. This perpetuates low expectations and internalized stigma among students. As Coates and Vickerman (2008) and Goodwin and Watkinson (2000) argue, the absence of inclusive strategies can diminish students' sense of belonging and self-worth.

4.3 Theme 3: Strategies to Enhance Participation of Students with Disabilities (SWDs) in HPE Practical Classes

Students with disabilities and Health and Physical Education (HPE) teachers proposed multifaceted strategies to address the exclusion experienced in HPE. These strategies emerged in six thematic areas:

5.3.1 Provision of Adaptive Equipment and Skilled Personnel

Participants emphasized the urgent need for training materials adapted to the unique needs of SWDs. They also stressed the importance of hiring and continuously training HPE teachers specialized in adaptive physical education. HPE Teachers demonstrated interest in inclusive practice but admitted that institutional support and professional development opportunities were lacking.

5.3.2 Curriculum Adaptation and Sport Counseling

HPE teachers and SWDs called for curriculum reform that integrates guidelines for inclusive HPE instruction. They urged the Ministry of Education and subordinate bodies to institutionalize this change. Furthermore, participants suggested incorporating sport-specific counseling services into subject selection and placement processes to help SWDs make informed decisions.

5.3.3 Attitude Change and Awareness Building

Negative stereotypes and assumptions about disabilities were recognized as major barriers. HPE Teachers and students recommended school-wide and community-level awareness campaigns to foster empathy and promote inclusive attitudes toward SWDs.

5.3.4 Improving Accessibility

Participants highlighted the need for accessible school infrastructures, including ramps, safe play areas, and adapted PE fields. They also recommended assigning sign language interpreters to support students with hearing impairments. Accessibility—both physical and communicative—was considered central to inclusive participation.

5.3.5 Promoting Research

HPE teachers proposed national-level research initiatives to explore the inclusion of SWDs in HPE. These efforts would help identify systemic gaps, inform policy, and support sustainable planning for inclusive education.

5.3.6 Monitoring and Evaluation

Participants suggested establishing formal monitoring systems to assess SWDs' participation in HPE. They proposed integrating disability indicators into education reports and forming inclusive student sports clubs to institutionalize and track progress.

5 Discussion

This study sought to understand the lived experiences, challenges, and possible solutions for inclusive pedagogy in HPE practical classes. The researcher's reflection is incorporated below, aligned with the study's three guiding questions.

5.1 How Do SWDs Describe Their Experience in HPE Classes?

Participants' narratives reveal a sharp contrast between their experiences in special primary schools and mainstream secondary settings. In their early education, students with disabilities—particularly those with visual impairments—experienced full inclusion in HPE, facilitated by trained teachers, adapted activities, and supportive environments. However, in mainstream secondary schools, this inclusivity eroded. Most were excluded from practical lessons, left idle, or allowed to leave class altogether, which diminished their motivation and sense of belonging.

This finding is consistent with Black and Stevenson (2023), who emphasized that participation—not mere physical presence—is a core measure of inclusion. When inclusion is reduced to integration without adaptation, students experience symbolic inclusion but functional exclusion. Moreover, the absence of adaptive materials, lack of peer collaboration, and inactive teaching practices further widened the participation gap in physical activities.

Imms *et al.* (2016) also argue that for inclusion to

be meaningful, students must not only be present but must also find personal relevance and emotional engagement in the learning experience. These elements were largely absent in the current study's context, highlighting a disjuncture between policy intentions and classroom realities.

The experiences shared by SWDs point to a critical disconnection between primary and secondary schooling environments. While primary special schools offered inclusive and adaptive HPE, students felt abandoned in mainstream secondary schools, often being left in classrooms or discouraged from participating altogether.

As researchers, we were struck by the stark contrast between the inclusive practices in special primary schools and the exclusionary nature of mainstream secondary settings. This finding illustrates that inclusion is not merely a matter of placement but requires sustained systemic support, adapted resources, and skilled teaching. The dissonance between policy rhetoric and lived experiences highlights a failure to implement inclusive education at the secondary level.

This aligns with Black and Stevenson (2023), who stress that inclusion without participation is superficial. Similarly, Imms *et al*. (2016) emphasized the importance of personal engagement and meaningful involvement, both of which were clearly absent for SWDs in the study context.

5.2 What Barriers Hinder Inclusive Pedagogy in HPE?

The barriers were multi-dimensional:

- **Limited Teacher Competence:** Teachers often lacked training in adaptive pedagogy and expressed fear of causing injury or doing harm (Beyazoğlu & Özbek, 2024).
- **Rigid Curriculum:** Students with visual impairments were often discouraged or barred from taking HPE and other subjects deemed incompatible with their disability (Qi & Ha, 2022).
- **Inaccessible Environments:** School facilities—playgrounds, classrooms, toilets—were not designed with disability in mind (CDC, 2024).
- **Negative Attitudes:** Teachers and peers occasionally held deficit-based views of SWDs, perceiving them as incapable or unfit for HPE (Maher & Fitzgerald, 2020).

Observing HPE sessions firsthand revealed a distressing reality: students with disabilities were not only physically excluded but also emotionally sidelined. While many teachers expressed good intentions, their lack of training, confidence, and support hindered effective inclusion. During our school visits, it became painfully clear that SWDs were simply occupying space during PE time rather than participating meaningfully. This finding reinforces the need for urgent intervention across teacher training institutions and curriculum developers.

5.3 What Strategies Can Enhance SWDs' Participation in HPE?

Participants proposed specific, actionable solutions:

- Continuous training for teachers on adaptive physical education (Makopoulou *et al*., 2023).
- Curriculum reform to embed inclusive pedagogy and accommodate a range of disabilities (Florian & Spratt, 2021).
- School-wide attitude transformation and public awareness (Delgado-Gil *et al*., 2023).
- Physical infrastructure reform, appointment of support staff, and formation of inclusive clubs (Ben Rakaa *et al*., 2025).

The strength of this study lies in the solutions offered directly by the participants themselves. These are not abstract or generalized ideas, but grounded, context-specific recommendations from those closest to the problem. As researchers, we believe these voices carry moral and practical urgency. The call for disability to be understood not as a limitation but as part of human diversity (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2021) must be heard at all levels of education leadership. Inclusion is not an add-on—it is a right.

Despite national efforts reflected by Ethiopian government in policies like ESDP VI and GEQIP-E (MoE, 2020; World Bank, 2023), practical implementation remains fragmented. The study affirms

that inclusive pedagogy demands a shift in mindset, structure, and practice. Without it, policies will remain theoretical ideals far removed from the realities of students' lives.

6 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the study explored the participation of students with sensory and physical disabilities in HPE practical classes in Ethiopian secondary schools. The findings revealed a consistent pattern of marginalization and exclusion—students with disabilities were often sidelined, left unengaged, or removed from HPE activities altogether. In contrast, their experiences in primary special schools were marked by inclusivity, adaptation, and teacher commitment. Unfortunately, this inclusive momentum was lost upon entry into mainstream secondary education. Teachers, while occasionally well-meaning, lacked the skills, resources, and institutional support to deliver inclusive HPE. Meanwhile, students with disabilities reported feelings of isolation, reduced self-confidence, and missed opportunities for physical and social development. Thus, this study reveals a critical disconnect between Ethiopia's inclusive education policies and the realities in its secondary schools. Unless inclusive pedagogy is embraced not just in policy but in practice—through training, infrastructure, curriculum, and attitude reform—students with disabilities will continue to be left behind. As educators, policymakers, and researchers, we must act not out of charity but justice.

Recommendation

To create a genuinely inclusive Health and Physical Education (HPE) environment for students with disabilities, a coordinated effort across all levels of the education system is essential. Teachers of HPE must begin by cultivating a strong understanding of the varied nature of disabilities, including orthopedic, visual, and hearing impairments. This awareness must be paired with a positive attitude and an openness to adapt teaching practices. Teachers are encouraged to revise their lesson plans and teaching materials to include diverse, communication-friendly, and participatory activities that accommodate all learners. Flexibility, creativity, and a commitment to inclusive values are crucial to dismantling the discriminatory practices often embedded in physical education.

Secondary schools also hold a central role in this transformation. They must prioritize teacher training in adapted physical education and inclusive pedagogy. Beyond training, schools are urged to provide accessible and affordable instructional materials, ensure the availability of adapted sports equipment, and improve physical infrastructure—such as playgrounds, walkways, and restrooms—to guarantee accessibility for students with disabilities. Raising awareness among students, parents, and staff is also key to building a school culture that embraces diversity. Schools are further encouraged to establish inclusive sports clubs and to support research initiatives that inform inclusive teaching strategies and curriculum adjustments.

At the zonal and woreda level, education offices in the Wollaita and Gedio zones must commit to the regular monitoring and evaluation of student participation in HPE. They should ensure that inclusion of students with disabilities is reflected in education plans and reporting frameworks. Such localized accountability mechanisms can help identify and address challenges early.

Finally, the Ministry of Education has a vital leadership role. It is recommended that the MoE issue national guidelines on how HPE should be adapted for students with different types of disabilities. Teacher education programs must be revised to build the necessary competencies for inclusive instruction. Furthermore, nationwide awareness campaigns and capacity-building efforts should be initiated to reach regional and local stakeholders. The Ministry, in collaboration with development partners, must also allocate dedicated funding for the procurement of adapted sports equipment and update curricular and counseling frameworks to align with the specific needs of students with disabilities. Stronger coordination across federal, regional, and school-level actors will be necessary to ensure that inclusive HPE is not only envisioned in policy but realized in practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgments

We are very much grateful for Research Dissemination office Dilla University for funding to under took the research.

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Somaliland Education Partners Policies and School Leadership Practices Improvements: Case Studies from Hargeisa, Somaliland

Mustafe Baroudi[1,*], Befekadu Zelelke[1], Bahahri Ademi[2], and Fayera Dinsa[2]

[1]Department of Educational Planning and Management, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia;
[2]Department of Educational Planning and Management, Haramaya University, Harar, Ethiopia.

Received: 25 September 2024 Accepted: 04 October 2024 Published: 24 October 2024

ARTICLE INFO.

Key words/phrases: Contributions, Education partners, Improvements, Leadership practice, Policies, Stakeholders

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to explore the policy gap in Somaliland Education Partners and Improvement Programs of school leadership practices. Six urban public primary schools in Hargeisa sub-districts were taken as case studies to observe how international education policies and programs improved targeted schools' leadership practices. A purely qualitative research design, with a case study research approach, was employed. Thus, the key policies and programs from various foreign partners and how they promoted those schools' principal leadership practices were emphasized. Through school continuous professional development (CPD), context-fit capacity-building seminars, upgrading courses, and school leadership experience-sharing arrangements were used as the elements of reference. During the primary data collection, 37 sample units were reached as participants. These samples were chosen using a purposive cluster sampling technique. The sample units were 12 members from school principals and deputy principals, 12 from school supervisors and Community Education Committee (CEC), and 6 schools' sub-district education office heads. Additionally, 1 person from Hargeisa district education office and 6 representatives from school foreign partners participated. The primary data were collected using observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussion methods. Additionally, dozens of educational policies, strategies, and programs from education partners were scanned and analyzed as secondary data. Primary data were thematically analyzed, while the secondary data were examined using themes, patterns, and content analyses. Finally, the results revealed a significant disparity between the documented policies and programs and the actual school leadership practices. The actual school leadership practices were more authoritarian, autonomous, and dictatorial in style. Finally, lack of decentralization, weak accountability, and uncoordinated and inconsistent continuous professional development remain the studied schools' leadership challenges. As a recommendation, Somaliland education partners should coordinate, decentralize, and contextualize their school improvement programs.

1 Introduction

Global education leadership policies are increasingly focused on fostering quality in education systems worldwide. In reference to the Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM 2024/5), strong leadership is crucial for ensuring that educational goals are met, with a particular focus on empowering school and system leaders. The report calls for investment in and empowerment of school and system leaders. Yet, all research points toward

*Corresponding Author; Email: baaruud04@gmail.com;
Article DOI:10.20372/dje.v03i02.04

the critical need for strong leaders to continuously improve education quality. According to Tan, C.Y. (2024), school leaders are second only to teachers in transforming student outcomes. Meanwhile, politicians wield huge influence in making equitable and inclusive education a national priority. Thus, this study explored the Somaliland education policies, procedures, and practices employed by international school partners to support public primary schools in the country, as the government has consistently relied on external partners to complement its efforts to provide quality schooling to its next generations.

By gathering data from various sources, including educational policies, education sector strategic plans, analytical education reports, and curriculum frameworks, the study offers a comprehensive outlook on the roadmap for the education sector over the next five years to identify the gaps and shortcomings of these documents. The education policy gap refers to the difference between what is intended by education policy and what is implemented, and this gap can hinder educational progress and contribute to illiteracy (Angrist, N. & Dercon, S., 2024). This gap can pertain to areas such as quality, quantity, compliance, and utility (Mrema, T.V., 2024). Therefore, school leadership practices are activities that involve intentionally influencing activities and relationships based on a clear sense of direction taken by school principals (Schlicht-Schmälzle, R., 2024). Unfortunately, the 2021 Education Sector Analysis report highlighted significant setbacks in primary education delivery and in achieving the learning outcomes set out in Vision 2030. However, the Ministry of Education and Science developed its own vision in 2015 (Vision 2015–2030). In this vision, it recognized education as a critical pillar that facilitates achieving its national developmental goals.

Nevertheless, Somaliland, officially the Republic of Somaliland, is a de facto state in the Horn of Africa, recognized internationally as a de jure part of Somalia. It is located on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden and bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Ethiopia to the south and west, and Somalia to the east. Based on Somaliland's National Development Vision (2030), it envisions its citizens enjoying inclusive and quality education. Supporting this vision, the Somaliland Education Act (2018), Somaliland National Education Policy (2021), Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan (SESSP), and Somaliland Education Partnership Compact (2023) were produced and showed how the government is committed to its educational policies.

On top of that, the government considers its educational partners crucial players in realizing its educational policies, programs, and interventions (Somaliland Education Act, 2018; Somaliland National Education Policy, 2021; Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan, 2024; Somaliland Education Partnership Compact, 2023). For instance, SEPC (2024) articulates a shared commitment between the government of Somaliland and its partners. During the fiscal year of 2024, the government allocated around 14% of its national budget to public education (Somaliland National Budget, 2024). This budget was in addition to the support provided by educational partners to its education system. In the preceding year, 2023, the Minister of Education and Science (MoES) mobilized educational stakeholders, both local and international, such as the Educational Sector Committees, Educational Task Teams, Civil Society Organizations, and International Partners like UN Organizations (MoES, 2021; UN Somalia, 2024).

Currently, more than 20 UN and other international agencies, funds, and programs operate throughout Somaliland. For example, according to James, S. (2021), between 2019 and 2020, WFP alone injected more than $50 million into Somaliland, with education taking a lion's share. Similarly, from 2017 to 2021, the UN Joint Program on Local Governance (JPLG) was a five-year project combining five UN agencies, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN-HABITAT, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). These projects worked to strengthen the role and capacity of local governments to deliver services to citizens in Somaliland, such as primary education (UNDP, 2013).

Correspondingly, according to the Girls' Education

Challenge Report (GEC, 2022), the annual Joint Review of the Education Sector (JRES, 2024), the Education Sector Analysis (ESA, 2021), and the Education Master Action Planning (EMAP, 2020), all have not produced proportionate results at the primary education level as required. These various documents failed to promote school leadership practices and, consequently, school academic performance. Similarly, the Education Management Information System, National Learning Assessments, Joint Reviews of the Education Sector, and the Education Sector Strategic Plan proved the country's education services rely heavily on donations from international partners.

Nevertheless, a major gap in Somaliland's education policies, plans, and frameworks is the failure to adequately address the improvement of school leadership practices. In primary education, girls constitute only 30.5%. The quality of education is primarily affected by factors such as a shortage of qualified teachers and the absence of a standardized curriculum. Therefore, this study addresses the critical challenges in providing quality public education, with a particular focus on the role of international education partners in enhancing public schools' leadership practices.

All these strategies and national policies were intended to transform the education sector to higher standards. According to F. Obsiye and H. Tadesse (2023), despite the involvement of Western partners, significant shortcomings remain in Somaliland's education system, particularly in terms of quality. This gap is one of the factors that forces Somaliland families to enroll in private schools or become less favorable to public schools. The lack of coordinated policies aimed at enhancing school leadership styles, practices, and routines contributes to low student enrollment and high dropout rates, particularly among girls and marginalized communities. Since education partners are networks of national, regional, and provincial associations that facilitate and create opportunities for better-quality education (IEL, 2024).

The study aimed to address the following research question: What are the policy gaps in Somaliland's education partners and school leadership practice improvement policies? The primary objective of this study is to examine the policy gap in Somaliland's education partners and school leadership practice improvement policies. According to Somaliland Standard (2022), Hargeisa local government, through the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), plays an active role in supporting public primary schools.

2 Review of Related Literatures

2.1 Conceptualizing School Leadership

Conceptualizing school leadership involves understanding the multifaceted nature of a school leader's role. It encompasses creating a vision, fostering collaboration, driving positive change within the school community, and ensuring optimal learning environments. It is about navigating the complexities of the school's context and addressing the needs of the wider community. The Somaliland Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2022-2026 outlines the priorities for the education sector. It builds on previous plans and improves those previous policies with new thinking. Key policies include expanding access to quality education for all children, enhancing the relevance of education, and ensuring an efficient and effective education system. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is responsible for implementing these policies and is working to improve teacher training, curriculum development, and the overall quality of learning.

2.2 School Leadership across the World

School leader tasks have become increasingly complex due to globalization, knowledge-based economies, and greater student diversity. As Pont, B. (2014) stated, increased governmental focus on educational policy reforms has shifted the role of school principals and administrative leadership, with more autonomy and accountability. This article focuses on how partners' policies can ensure that school leaders contribute to school improvement. It builds on an international study that analyzed practices across 22 education systems and supports the professionalization of school leadership (OECD, 2008). Key strategies that many countries have adopted include: clarifying the role of school leaders based on the tasks that have the most significant

impact on school outcomes, ensuring specialized training and development programs that work with the conditions, and attracting qualified professionals to public primary schools is crucial (OECD, 2024b).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring Report in 2024–2025 examines the requirements of good leadership in education and how they vary between countries and over time (GEM, 2025). There is a growing belief that educational leadership is the second most important factor, after teachers, in explaining learning outcomes. This will make teaching and school leadership a sustainable profession that is well-supported by governments, partners, and stakeholders. These stories highlight how, in the hands of committed and creative leaders, schools can overcome cultural barriers and improve educational quality. Beyond the statistics, this demonstrates that educational leadership has the power to transform not just schools but also the communities around them.

2.3 Somaliland School Leadership Styles and Practices

The realities of school leadership in Somalia-Somaliland are complex. There are neither post-secondary educational headship programs nor school-based apprenticeship programs. Due to the absence of clear governmental and partner policies and programs, there are no institutions that prepare and develop principals or school leadership in general. There is no formal training and leadership development for public and private primary head teachers in Somaliland (Sood, K. & Tarah, A., 2024). In contrast, there is a growing global recognition of the importance of school headship preparation through professional development and training. Comparatively, the procedures used in Africa are inadequate, and their inductions and in-service trainings are inappropriate in developing countries (UNICEF, 2025). According to a recent document published by the federal government of Somalia, one of the key components of its ESSP is the enhancement of the quality of education and children's learning outcomes through the provision of school-based coaching for head teachers to improve school performance (ESSP, 2017). To achieve this, comprehensive and consolidated training programs will be developed. Somaliland has its own ESSP, which includes extensive references to increasing the number of female head teachers. However, there is no mention of any direct government policy for preparing, developing, and training head teachers.

This makes it more difficult for school leaders to learn how to enact any type of leadership other than daily unavoidable managerial tasks (Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E., 2014, p. 236). Furthermore, it leaves head teachers untrained, with no professional development programs available to them, and the leadership that is tyrannical and abusive is on the rise in many schools. Abusive leadership is a destructive form of leadership that has a lasting negative influence on subordinates. Mullen, Fiset, and Rhéaume (2018) argue that empirical evidence suggests that scholars on this topic are concerned about the damaging effect of destructive forms of leadership. Teachers become demotivated when they are abused rather than appreciated. It is very difficult to operate in an environment that is abusive. Different forms of abuse from school principals include hurling insults, talking down to someone in the presence of others, and ridicule. From professional development to meeting the equity needs of children, shifting their pedagogical practice, and much more, educators felt empowered to solve the issues that students were facing in their schools.

2.4 Somaliland Education Partners

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have set benchmarks for inclusive and equitable education as an international agenda, of which Somaliland is a part (Vargas-Baron, E., Diehl, K., & Small, J., 2022). However, implementing these ideals remains challenging due to the lack of standardized frameworks and policies. Additionally, lack of funding and effectiveness has sabotaged educational policies and affected Early Childhood Education (ECE) expansions (Bwalya, T., 2023). In Somaliland, ECE policy development is influenced by international standards and local socio-political realities. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) outlined a strategic plan in 2017, emphasizing child rights, inclusiveness, accountability, and relevance. However, the 2021 MoES Education

Sector Analysis (ESA) report highlights issues such as inadequate resources, limited trained personnel, and inconsistent program implementation, which hinder children's learning readiness (Melesse & Obsiye, 2022).

2.5 United Nation Organizations & Somaliland education projects

An extensive relationship exists between the United Nations and Somaliland. This bond was highlighted during a recent visit of senior UN officials to the capital of Somaliland, Hargeisa. The UN headquarters envoys visited Hargeisa with other officials from other UN agencies operating in Somaliland, including the Country Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Cesar Arroyo; the Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Johann Soffione; and the Country Program Manager for UN Women, Sadiq Syed (UN Somalia, 2021). For example, in collaboration with the Somaliland Government, UNICEF introduced the project "Education Cannot Wait," a $6.7 million project.

However, the prominent UN units involved in Somaliland education initiatives are, among many others, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, and UN Women. Somaliland and UN organizations launched multimillion-dollar programs, designed to take several years, to increase the access, quality, and inclusiveness of education. Addressing the education needs of children affected by emergencies is one of UNICEF's priorities (UNICEF, 2024). Working with partners, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the United States Agency for International Development provided clean, safe drinking water, learning materials, and teachers' monthly incentives in Somaliland.

2.6 International Organizations involved in Somaliland education

Many international organizations have been involved in education in Somaliland. In addition to fighting against poverty, some international organizations and communities help Somaliland manage the long distances to school, safety concerns, and social norms favoring boys to maintain schooling. They also support Somaliland education in terms of solving the lack of teachers, particularly female teachers, and the low availability of sanitation facilities. These are some factors that some organizations and researchers acknowledged as preventing parents from enrolling children in public schools, particularly girls (UN in Somalia, 2024). As part of Somaliland's development, the European Union is working with educational authorities to support and positively change Somaliland's efforts in education. For instance, the European Union and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have provided funds for educational projects in Somaliland, including the "Horumarinta Cilmiga" (Somaliland Standard, 2019).

Several NGOs, such as Save the Children International, Care International, and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), work with the Somaliland government. Windle Trust International has also supported Somaliland to improve English language instruction for teachers. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Finland, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Government of the Netherlands, Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Islamic Relief, Mercy Corps, CARITAS, Africa Education Trust (AET), and Education Development Trust (EDT).

These international organizations are involved in Somaliland's education infrastructure. They also support the capacity development of education authorities at all levels, as well as school communities and children, to support crisis-affected children. In a nutshell, the international community plays a crucial role in supporting Somaliland's education system. This support focuses on improving access, retention, and the quality of education, especially for vulnerable groups like girls and those in rural areas. However, the gap in improving school leadership practices, which is the backbone of schools' and education quality improvements, remains.

2.7 International Education Partners' Policy Gap

Somaliland's primary education is facing significant challenges, yet the government and its partners show an unwavering determination to improve it.

As foreign partners continue to collaborate with local partners, communities, and the government in shaping the future of education in Somaliland (n.a., 2024). The potential elements for better outcomes are developing transformative policies and programs, which immensely focus on schools' leadership practices with continued efforts and strategic interventions, and it becomes increasingly integral. According to the journey of improving education in Somaliland, the ESS Plan (2022-2026) is ongoing and filled with promises and opportunities. It is a journey that international partners are proud to be a part of, working alongside the people and the government of Somaliland to turn Vision 2030 into a tangible reality.

However, according to Atasoy, R. (2020), the much-documented policies and manuals are not effectively implemented, particularly in school leadership elements. The challenges are impactful when they arise from primary school leadership practices. The government, UN, and international education partners need to seriously consider school leadership-related items in their policies and program development. The first part of this challenge lies in the disconnection between policy formulation and practical execution, particularly in the components of school leadership. Foreign partners have the potential to transform principals' daily practices, taking a new course towards a future where every child in Somaliland has access to the quality education they deserve, enabling them to thrive in a global community.

Based on Brooks, J. S., & Brooks, M. C. (2024), policies are crafted with the intention of guiding actions and fostering a specific environment. Yet, when these ideals remain confined to paper, the intended impact on the ground is compromised. One significant consequence of policies merely existing on paper is the lack of tangible outcomes. This gap can leave children vulnerable to inadequate schools, as the policy aims are not translated into actionable practices (Save the Children, 2021). Addressing the gap between policy documentation and implementation requires a multifaceted approach. This involves not only revisiting and strengthening policy frameworks but also fostering a culture of accountability.

Stakeholder involvement in policy implementation, along with regular monitoring and evaluation of the practical application of these policies, will be highly significant. For instance, Troy, V., Mumford, M. A., Campion, M. A., & Morgeson, F. P. (2007) Skills Model, or "skills-based leadership model," can be applied to evaluate public schools' leadership attributes. According to Mumford *et al.* (2000), the Skills Model identifies the key skills for effective leadership. These attributes involve engaging stakeholders to address the gaps to promote school leadership practices, providing a series of instructional leadership topics, ongoing coaching programs, and, finally, following an overall program evaluation. Additionally, supporting effective school leader cohorts and experience-sharing activities to build principal skills and design their leadership capacities.

To bridge this gap, implementing school-level leadership support programs, policies, and frameworks would be extremely beneficial in easing the burden of delivering quality education as a public service. In support of this argument, during the National Education Conference (2023), different teams conducted national education policy reviews and public discussions. The concept of policy work refers to the processes of interpreting and translating policies into practice. The goals for school principals included gaining a deeper understanding of educational policy, school leadership, legal issues, and organizational structures, as well as being able to read and interpret documents and comprehend the structures and cultures of organizations.

2.8 Theoretical Framework of School Leadership Practice

A theoretical framework for school leadership practice provides a structure for understanding how leaders influence and guide schools. It encompasses various leadership styles, theories, and models that inform how leaders operate and interact with their school communities. These frameworks help analyze leadership effectiveness, guide decision-making, and ultimately improve educational outcomes. The analytical framework used in this study is grounded in the theory of policy work. From the perspectives of Scanlon, D., MacPhail, A., & Calderón, A. (2023), the challenge of practices is

that they are not stable; rather, they are sophisticated, contingent, complex, and unstable. Thus, evaluating principals' leadership practices requires a complicated process of interpretation and translation. Therefore, in this study, governmental and partners' policies, programs, and frameworks are converted into practicums and program intentions. The concept of policy decoding is both retrospective and prospective (Ball, Maguire, and Braun, 2012, p. 43). It is a process of meaning-making from smaller to larger scales through recoding, considering the culture and history of the institution and the policy biographies.

The importance of a theoretical framework provides a lens for understanding leadership practices. By understanding and applying relevant theories, leaders can improve their ability to influence and guide their schools. It promotes continuous improvement, providing a framework for evaluating leadership practices and making adjustments for better outcomes. In essence, a theoretical framework for school leadership provides a foundation for understanding, practicing, and improving leadership in educational settings. It helps leaders navigate the complexities of their roles and work towards creating positive and successful learning environments for all. Here's a breakdown of key aspects of a theoretical framework for school leadership:

2.8.1 Transformational and instructional Leadership:

Focuses on inspiring and motivating followers to achieve a shared vision, often involving change and innovation. Emphasizes the leader's role in shaping teaching and learning, focusing on curriculum, instruction, and student achievement.

2.8.2 Distributed and transactional Leadership:

Shares leadership responsibilities among various stakeholders, promoting collaboration and collective responsibility. Relies on a system of rewards and punishments to motivate performance.

2.8.3 Situational Leadership:

Situational school leadership is an approach where school leaders adapt their leadership style based on the specific needs of their followers and the context of the situation. This means that instead of relying on a single leadership style, leaders adjust their approach to best support and guide teachers, staff, and students. Leaders assess the situation and the readiness of their followers (teachers, staff, or students) to determine the most effective leadership style.

2.9 Conceptual Framework of School Leadership Practice

A conceptual framework for school leadership practice provides a structured approach to understanding and guiding leadership behaviors within an educational setting. It outlines key dimensions, principles, and skills that effective school leaders should possess and utilize to foster a positive and productive learning environment. Somaliland is fully committed to realizing the international policy of equal access to quality education. The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) provides the resources it requires with the help of various international partners. Thus, this study observed the gaps and limitations of these policies and frameworks, how these policies increase school leadership and practices, and it examined how these programs would enhance principals' leadership practices and daily activities. This would provide insights for policymakers and international partnerships to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of school leadership activities. Therefore, the following conceptual frameworks would help provide equitable educational opportunities and prepare children for primary education (Figure 1).

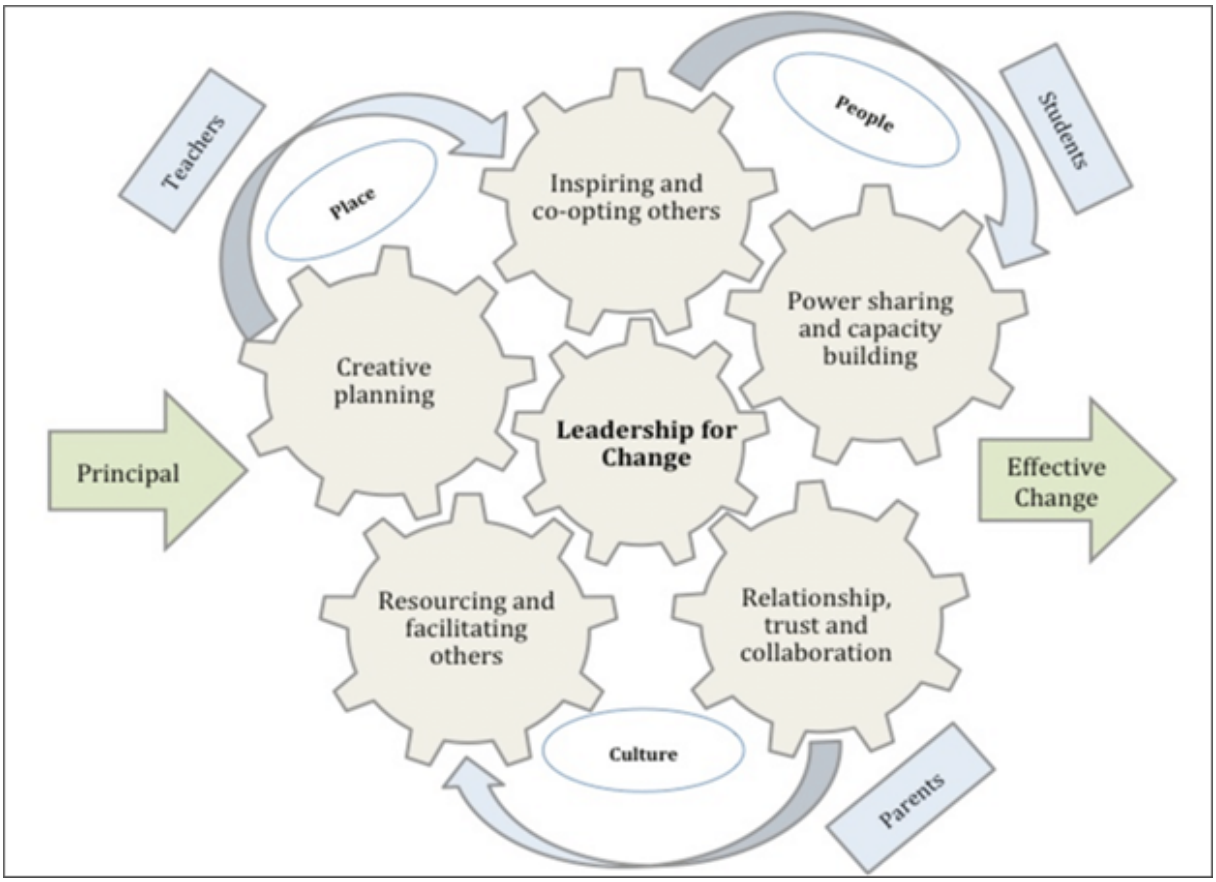

Figure 1: Conceptualization of education leadership & school principal leadership practice; (Source: Abu Salahudin, 2016)

3 Research Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Research Methodology

This study presented policy work as a phenomenon. It draws on the theory of policy work and its actual implications. It examined various cases from different perspectives and objectives, especially in education spheres. It builds on previous research by Jensen (2019) and Jensen and Ottesen (2022), which explored how the education of school leaders is situated, experienced, and legitimized. Therefore, this study consists of six cases based on principals' observations of daily practices, as well as policy texts and tools provided by international partners relevant to school leadership improvement programs. This diffuse phenomenon makes case study research a necessary tool. When research seeks to explore a complex issue, understand unique situations, or gather rich qualitative data through detailed analysis, the case study approach is highly effective.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative research is a methodology used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that possibly govern such behaviors. It focuses on exploring and interpreting phenomena in their natural settings. It aims to uncover the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. According to Tanis, E. (2024), this research method explores an in-depth understanding of perspectives and behaviors through non-numerical data. Common examples of this research method include case studies, ethnographies, content analysis, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology. These approaches are used to collect primary data through interviews, focus groups, observations, and record management. This research design is often used to investigate complex social issues or develop new theories. However, a case study is an in-depth examination of a specific individual, group, organization, event, or phenomenon (Priya, A., 2021). The aim is to understand the complexities within

a particular context. The strengths of case studies lie in their ability to provide rich, detailed, and contextualized understanding, allowing researchers to explore complex phenomena in depth. However, the limitations include the difficulty of generalizing findings to broader populations and the potential for researcher bias.

3.3 Research Populations

Somaliland has 989 public primary schools. According to the Somaliland Central Statistics Department (2024), this number is part of a total of 1,145 primary schools. The remaining 156 are privately owned schools. Both parts produce a broader education system as public and private schools at primary and intermediate levels. These primary schools are spread across 23 districts in Somaliland territory. However, this case study focuses on public and urban primary schools located in nine different sub-districts within the Hargeisa District. The study explored the similarities and differences among public school principals, as well as the scope and origins of their leadership improvement programs supported by international partners.

3.4 Research Samples and Sample Size

In qualitative research, sample size is not predetermined. Instead, it is determined by the principle of data saturation. This principle means continuing data collection until no new information or insights emerge on that particular issue. However, typical sample sizes range from a few participants, e.g., 5–30 for in-depth interviews, or 6–10 for focus groups (Table 1). These figures are estimated and depend on the research question and methodology. According to Ahmed, M. (2024), this method helps to identify the most informative cases, guaranteeing information-rich responses from a knowledgeable audience. Thus, the researchers use their judgment, such as knowledge, experience, availability, and willingness, to select the participants who are most likely to provide relevant information.

However, in this research, the researchers decided to reach 6 different schools (Table 2).

Table 1: Sampling & Samples Size

S.No.	Categories	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Rationale
1	School Principals & Deputies	12	Purposive	
2	CECs' Chairpersons	6	Purposive	
3	School Supervisors	6	Purposive	
4	DEOs' Officers	1	Purposive	
5	Parent-teacher Ass	6	Purposive	
6	Sub-district Ed. Heads	6	Purposive	
		37		

Table 2: Case-studied school profile

S.No.	School Name	Sub-District	Number of Students	Remarks
1	Janan Da'ud	Ahmed Dhagah	1200	Army Bracks
2	Riis	Ga'an Libah	1800	Pure Urban
3	Qu'dhaDheer	Mohamed Moge	2500	Pure Urban
4	Digaale	Mohomoud Haybe	1100	IDP
5	Biyo-dhacay	26 June	2000	Pure Urban
6	FadimoBihi	31 May	1600	New Locality

These schools are primary, public, and urban schools. The purpose of this study was to explore the policy gap in Somaliland Education Partners and School Leadership Practice Improvement Programs as Case Studies in Hargeisa District urban public primary schools to observe how international education policies, programs, and interventions improve schools' leadership practices. Six public primary schools were taken as case studies to find out the key policies and programs from their respective foreign partners to promote those schools' principal leadership practices through continuous professional development (CPD), context-fit capacity-building seminars, upgrading courses, different schools' leadership experience-sharing arrangements, and school autonomy and decentralization policies.

3.5 Research Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was applied in this case study research. According to Priya, A. (2021), case study research is a qualitative research approach. It focuses on an in-depth analysis of a specific subject within normal situations. Thus, this method is used to understand complex issues by exploring a single unit of the population to know it in more detail. Specifically, case studies are particularly useful when a researcher wants to understand the "how" and "why" of a phenomenon (Glette, M. K., 2022). As a sampling method, purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique, was the appropriate technique because it is the method by which the researcher deliberately selects the participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research question (Stratton, S. J., 2024). With this technique, the goal is not to generalize findings to a larger population but to gain in-depth insights into a particular phenomenon. This approach allows for a targeted exploration of specific themes and the acquisition of in-depth insights. However, as a limitation, purposive sampling can be prone to bias, and the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population. To gain insight into principals' activities, extended observations were used as a convenient method for primary data collection.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The study used selected public primary schools as case studies to illustrate its findings. Observation notes, one-to-one interviews, and five-to-seven-person focus group discussion (FGD) sessions were conducted to collect the primary data. The primary data of the study were collected between June 17, 2023, and July 31, 2024. Field observation notes, recorded focus group discussion sessions, and documented semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used as data collection instruments. From 45 to 60 minutes was the time allotted for each session of these interviews and focus group discussions. Transcripts were recorded using an iPhone mobile device. Interviews were conducted in Somali, recorded recorded with participants' consent, and

Table 3: Some Somaliland Policies

S.No.	Policy	Time-Frame	Status
1	Somaliland Education Act	2018-	Active
2	National Education Policy	2015 – 2030	Active
3	Somaliland Multiyear Resilience Program	2019 – 2021	Passive
4	National Education Drought Response Plan	2021 – 2022	Passive
5	ESA	2021	Passive
6	GPE Guidelines	2023	Passive
7	Guidelines for Enabling Factor Analysis	2024	Passive
8	Independent Technical Advisory Panel	2023	Passive
9	Education Sector Strategic Policy	2022 – 2026	Active

transcribed verbatim before being translated into English. Written and formal consent letters were pre-arranged and shared with the respective targeted members of the research samples. After their approval, meetings were planned at a mutually convenient time, location, and manner.

During the field notes, non-verbal cues and contextual cases were considered and noted. The secondary data were scanned and studied from their sources, such as online platforms, institutional archives, school records, and government-released policies. Document analysis offered a comparative basis for assessing how observed practices aligned with policy frameworks and standards outlined in official documents, such as the ESS Plan 2022–2024 (Table 3).

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

3.7.1 Primary data analysis

The first step in the interview analysis involved a holistic and selective reading of the transcripts several times, while the second step focused on identifying how interpreted and translated policy texts were reflected in designs and practices. Secondly, focus group transcripts were analyzed alongside the documents and textual materials, which had previously been investigated through content analysis. The third step involved analyzing the engagements of policy actors, declarations, and implementations on one hand and principal leadership practices on the other hand, using a discourse analytical perspective. According to Fairclough (2013), the analysis was guided by the typology of policy work and policy actors developed by Paulsson, & Macheridis (2022), which was used to illustrate the various types of policy actor engagement in the leadership practices of the programs.

3.7.2 Secondary data analysis

Qualitative secondary data analysis involves using existing qualitative data, collected for a different purpose, to answer researchers' specific objectives. This approach allows researchers to explore topics from new perspectives. Using different theoretical lenses, researchers need to carefully consider issues like data adequacy, contextual knowledge, and researcher positionality. It is a cost-effective and efficient way to leverage existing data, involving the analysis of various techniques like thematic, iterative, coding, and categorization of interview transcripts, field notes, and policy documents. Initial open coding was used to identify key concepts and recurring themes, which were then refined into categories through axial coding. The codes were subsequently organized into broader themes, including the learning environment, instructional delivery, management, supervision, and challenges in policy implementation.

3.7.3 Research Trustworthiness

In policy gap research, trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence stakeholders, particularly policymakers, can have in the research findings. According to Johnson, J. L. (2020), ensuring that the evidence presented in the research is accurate, reliable, unbiased, and relevant increases the likelihood that the research will be used to inform policy decisions. Key aspects of trustworthiness in policy gap research include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.7.4 Research credibility and transferability

In qualitative research, credibility is analogous to internal validity in quantitative research, focusing on the truth value of the findings. It determines whether the data collected and the subsequent interpretations are accurate and representative of the participants' reality. A credible study provides confidence that the findings are not simply the researcher's interpretations but are grounded in the participants' experiences. Researchers employ various methods to enhance credibility, including:

- Prolonged engagement and persistent observation: Spending sufficient time with participants and observing the phenomenon in depth.
- Triangulation: Using multiple data sources, methods, or perspectives to confirm findings.
- Member checking: Seeking feedback from participants on the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations and summaries.
- Peer debriefing: Discussing the research process and findings with colleagues to identify potential biases or areas for improvement.

- Negative case analysis: Exploring and analyzing instances that contradict initial findings to refine the understanding of the phenomenon.
- Detailed description: Providing thorough accounts of the research context, methods, and findings to allow readers to assess the credibility of the study.

In research, transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other contexts, situations, or populations. It is a crucial aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research, similar to generalizability in quantitative studies, but with a focus on applicability to similar, rather than broad, contexts. Essentially, it asks: "To what extent can these findings be useful or relevant in other situations?" Key aspects of transferability include:

- Providing detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, and specific circumstances allows others to assess the relevance of the findings to their own situations.
- Clear explanations of how participants were selected and the characteristics of the sample are important for understanding the potential applicability of the results.
- Describing the research methods used, including data collection and analysis techniques, helps readers evaluate the rigor and potential transferability of the study.

3.7.5 Research dependability and conformability

Dependability assesses the consistency and stability of the research process, and confirmability examines the objectivity of the findings, ensuring they are grounded in the data rather than researcher bias. Dependability focuses on the stability and replicability of the research process. It ensures that if the study were repeated with similar participants and in similar contexts, the findings would be consistent. To establish dependability, researchers should provide a detailed description of the research methods, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques. An audit trail, documenting all decisions and changes made during the research process, can also enhance dependability. This allows other researchers to assess the rigor and consistency of the study and potentially replicate it.

However, confirmability refers to the objectivity of the research findings, ensuring they are based on the data collected rather than researcher bias or preconceptions. Researchers should strive to minimize their influence on the data and findings. Strategies to enhance confirmability include peer debriefing, member checking, and reflexive journaling. Peer debriefing involves discussing the research findings with colleagues or experts to identify potential biases or alternative interpretations. Member checking allows participants to review and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretations. Reflexive journaling involves reflecting on the researcher's own biases and perspectives throughout the research process. By implementing these strategies, researchers can demonstrate that their findings are grounded in the data and not simply a reflection of their own biases.

3.8 Ethical Consideration

According to Kadam, A. R. (2017), ethical considerations are essential to ensure informed consent, protect participants' privacy, and maintain sensitivity toward those involved in the case studies. Before the data were collected, the participants were informed and agreed to participate in the study. It was also confirmed that no information would be disclosed without the consent of the study participants and would be kept confidential.

4 Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

According to the Education Act (XEER LR.77/2018), the National Education Policy (NEP, 2015–2030), and different sets of education subsector policies, plans, and guidelines, such as the Somaliland Multi-Year Resilience Program (MYRP, 2019/21) and the Somaliland National Education Drought Response Plan (NEDRP, 2021/22), all of which inform planning processes and provide a broad framework for the nation's promotion of education, Somaliland and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) hold overall responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and

overseeing education sector policies and programs, including those outlined in this research.

To enhance the quality of education, the Ministry of Education and Science collaborated with state and non-state educational partners. For this reason, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its partner, Education Cannot Wait (ECW), along with several international organizations, contributed to Somaliland's education infrastructure. They are crucial for ensuring education for refugees and displaced individuals during emergencies and protracted crises, donating $2.6 million. For instance, the Education Sector Analysis report (ESA, 2021) highlights both the financial and technical capacity challenges that become barriers to the government's effective implementation of its national educational policies.

Still, education sector stakeholders have a substantial number of requirements to implement the priority reforms to achieve the intended policy outcomes. Therefore, the study focuses on the policy gaps in school leadership practices and Somaliland Education Partners, particularly promoting and implementing programs to enhance school leadership practices. Thus, the initiative addressed the barriers that hinder effective school leadership practices. Many partners have hugely contributed to Somaliland's public primary education; however, their policies are not sufficiently focused on promoting schools' leadership practices.

The Global Partnership for Education ITAP report (GPE ITAP, 2024) identifies key challenges, such as limited human capacity and equipment, poor data quality, reliability, and timeliness, inconsistencies across data sources, and gaps in the use of data for planning and decision-making.

The Education Sector Coordination Committees (ESCC, 2024) agreed with these findings and have prioritized strengthening the Education Management Information Systems policy framework, expanding national research and knowledge management capacity with a particular focus on Most Vulnerable Children (MVCs).

4.2 Discussions

Due to the numerous competing national developmental priorities, it will not be optimal to rely on external resources to mobilize the government's budget and allocate additional resources to key reforms in public education priorities, especially school leadership promotions. The Government of Somaliland (GoSL) needs to establish a forum that aligns donor financing with the ongoing coordination between donor resources and strategies to set priorities and fosters mutual accountability among key stakeholders in education.

The Government of Somaliland and its partners have assessed the country's progress in addressing the four enabling factors for education system transformation. For example, Somaliland has developed preparedness plans to ensure the continued provision of core educational services during droughts and natural disasters. The Somaliland Multi-Year Resilience Program and the Somaliland National Education Drought Response Plan significantly challenge the mainstreaming considerations within program planning and monitoring.

Consequently, the country analysis and supporting documentation were submitted to the Independent Technical Advisory Panel (ITAP, 2023). There is a pressing need to improve data security and completeness beyond access indicators and to increase the utilization of complementary data sources. Because the Education Management Information System (EMIS, 2023) does not incorporate knowledge generated from surveys and studies conducted by partners and institutions of higher learning, promoting the widespread use of data is essential to fostering evidence-informed decision-making, planning, and policymaking. Additionally, according to the Guidelines for Enabling Factor Analysis (GEFA, 2024), the final findings and recommendations account for designing interventions to address bottlenecks.

Somaliland education faces issues like policy gaps, inadequate funding, and a shortage of qualified teachers. On top of that, the lack of standardized curricula, poor policy implementation from foreign partners, and donor dependency are part of the challenge.

Prioritizing education funding to improve infrastructure, teacher salaries, and learning materials is crucial. Consequently, student learning outcomes, particularly in public primary schools, are affected.

Finally, the national education policy gap in Somaliland is the lack of a comprehensive framework to address school leadership practices and how they could be improved. This hinders the ability to effectively improve principal leadership skills, attitudes, and styles.

5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study suggests practical implications for improving public primary school leadership routines, such as establishing a well-designed education policy framework. Most policies, strategies, guidelines, or manuals on educational improvements and school leadership place less emphasis on promoting principals' daily activities. Education policy priorities are not clearly linked to promoting school leadership practices, which contributes to expanding quality learning in public primary schools. In Somaliland, where over 50 percent of school-age children are out of school, unequal access to education remains a major issue in vulnerable communities. Children from rural, nomadic, and pastoralist communities face severe barriers in accessing basic education, with only 12 percent enrolled in primary schools.

5.2 Recommendations

Somaliland educational partners, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), should design and implement tailored and specialized programs targeting public primary school leadership teams. By focusing on critical school leadership components, these initiatives will substantially improve education performance. These strategies, which are currently missing from Somaliland's national primary education policies, should be standardized and support the national primary education system by improving both the quantity and quality of educational leaders, which is crucial for enhancing the overall education sector in Somaliland.

Limitations and Implications for Further Studies

The main purpose of this study was to assess the current policies and programs concerning the challenges of public primary principal practices in government public primary schools as case studies in Hargeisa City administration. The research utilized a qualitative method design approach to deeply understand the existing policy gaps. However, the biggest implication that the researchers encountered was the lack of credible literature reviews fairly assessing Somaliland education development policies or programs, particularly in leadership domains. On the other hand, the research was limited to six public primary schools in Hargeisa, which makes it difficult to generalize its outcomes. However, this research was delimited to school leadership practices in public primary schools and the gap that exists in educational partners' policies, programs, and protocols.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The corresponding authors declare that there is no potential competing interest in relation to this study.

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DJE - 2024 3(2):56–67

Dilla Journal of Education

https://www.du.edu.et/duj

Impacts of Decentralized Educational Management in Gedeo Zone and Its Implications in Quality Education

Megene Macho Gidessa [1,*] **and Dereje Markos Morka** [1]

[1]Department of Educational Planning and Management, Dilla University, Dilla, Ethiopia.

Received: 29 September 2024 Accepted: 08 October 2024 Published: 29 October 2024

ARTICLE INFO.

Key words/phrases: Decentralization, Education, Educational management, Educational quality, Local autonomy, Knowledge progression

Abstract

The general objective of this study was to assess the impacts of decentralized educational management. in the city administration of Gedeo zone Dilla. In this study, the explanatory mixed research design (quantitative qualitative) was used as both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used. In general, 109 sample population were employed; 100 (one hundred) teachers from 452 (four hundred fifty two teachers) were selected through simple random sampling method, and 2 (two) supervisors from 3 (three supervisors), 2 (two) education office managers, 3 (three) principals, and 2 (two) PTA were selected through purposive sampling. Accordingly, the researchers used questionnaires, semistructured interviews, and observation to collect adequate data. SPSS software was used for quantitative data analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to break down the quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic content analysis method. In this respect, this study approved that there is school-community participation in the school development process and that school management has a significant role in the management of school development. In addition, this study identified that decentralized educational management. reforms have been hampered by centralizing practices, including the dominant roles of politicians, weak administrative capacity at the local government and school levels, as well as a limited resource base of local governments. Finally, recommended that it would be sound to grasp and advance implementation of the realistic transfer of decision making power that assumes local governments and schools and then stakeholders are established to appreciate, respond, and be accountable to the local needs.

1 Introduction

Advocates of decentralization argue that transferring authority and decision-making power to school principals, supervisors, teachers, and parents enhances school effectiveness. Donnelly, Skarsdóttir, and Watkins (2017) explained that empowering these actors strengthens engagement at the grassroots level where teaching and learning occur while also encouraging education to better respond to the needs of local communities (Donnelly, Skarsdóttir, & Watkins, 2017). According to Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy (ETP, 1994), in a decentralized system, principals, vice-principals, department heads, and senior teachers serve as instructional supervisors within their schools. Grauwe and Carron (2007) further emphasized that school supervision, when carried out within schools themselves, reflects the principles of school-based management. They noted that enabling schools to monitor and improve the quality of the services they deliver, while empowering internal supervisors, helps institutions remain responsive to their environments. Similarly,

*Corresponding Author; Email: maganemachogidessa@gmail.com;

Article DOI:10.20372/dje.v03i02.05

USAID (2019) reported that supervisors who are close to classrooms and the school community tend to be more effective than those removed from this context.

Although the ultimate authority remains within the broader management structure, decentralization divides school governance into smaller, more manageable parts. The success of such systems can be evaluated across four interrelated conditions. The first relates to the socio-cultural context, where decentralization is influenced by societal development and community life. Second, political experience moving from central to local levels significantly affects the process. Third, the presence of sound strategic planning and management is essential. Finally, the most critical factor is empowering grassroots actors, as local representatives are better positioned to voice community needs and confidently engage in school governance (Shabbir, Ishtiaq, & Muhammad, 2017). In Ethiopia, decentralized education management was formally introduced in 2000 (JICA, 2012). Responsibility for primary and secondary education lies with the Woreda Education Office (WEO), while Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) oversee Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs). At the national level, the Ministry of Education (MoE) retains responsibility for formulating education policy, strategies, and managing higher education. These roles were legally defined under Proclamation No. 41/1993, which specified the powers and duties of both central and regional authorities.

Decentralization has thus become one of the major reforms in Ethiopia's education system, with significant responsibilities devolved to regional, woreda, and school levels (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). To strengthen this, the government has promoted school-based management (SBM), which expands local authority over academic, financial, and human resource decisions. Effective implementation, however, requires a multistage approach combined with capacity building for stakeholders across all levels. SBM is expected to foster efficient resource use, strengthen teacher performance, improve schooling outcomes, and promote educational equity (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013).

Equity has been incorporated into Ethiopia's education policy framework, but challenges remain due to weak data systems and limited awareness of gender and equity policies among teachers and professionals, which hinders effective implementation at community level (USAID, 2019). To address these issues, the Ministry of Education aligned reforms with national development priorities, drafting the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap 2018–2030. This roadmap acknowledged the importance of bridging gender gaps in access and participation but lacked a clear strategy to achieve this. As Mavuso (2021) and Kimani (2011) observed, educational management essentially involves applying general management principles to the education sector. Accordingly, the practice of educational management can be understood as the adaptation of management theories and techniques to meet the unique demands of educational institutions.

More typically, researchers have considered numerous literature and recognized that there are gaps on the subject of decentralized educational management. For example, Fitsum (2017) exposed that the school lacked bottom-up initiatives, political and party engagement influenced the professional decision-making, delayed board meetings affected appropriate financial decisions and irregularities among the schools in the fund endorsement. These were major challenges according to the investigation on the decentralized school-based governance structures and fiscal decision-making. Similarly, Kelemu (2023) studied the adequacy of capacity building and stakeholder participation in decentralized education management and identified that the most challenging factors troubling decentralized educational management are related to the availability of resources, decision-making process, education budget, and skilled human resources. In addition, Etefa (2018) evaluated the implementation of decentralized educational management, and concluded that there are challenges in relation to the insufficiency of training for stakeholders, the shortage of skilled manpower, and the lack of adequate participation of stakeholders. Therefore, the above studies overlooked the impacts of decentralized educational management on educational quality. Therefore, in this study, the following re-

search questions and specific objectives were active in order to fill the gaps.

The research questions are:

- How well do secondary school stakeholders understand the practices of decentralized education management?
- What are the assumptions of decentralized educational management with respect to improved teaching and learning services?
- How can the vital grains of decentralized educational management be grasped?
- What are the main challenges that hinder the effectiveness of decentralized educational management?

The specific objectives are:

- Review the alertness of stakeholders in the practices of decentralized educational management at different levels
- Assess the implications of decentralized educational management regarding improved teaching and learning facilities
- Explore the way to grasp decentralized educational management towards improved teaching and learning in secondary schools
- Examine the main challenges that were influenced throughout the implementation of decentralized educational management

2 Methods

Explanatory mixed research design (quantitative qualitative) was used for this study. A research design is the overall plan to obtain answers to the questions being studied and to handle some of the difficulties encountered during the research process. And qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used in this study. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview were the main data collection tools in this study. In addition, the researchers developed an observation guide and observed secondary schools. Researchers observed the developments and properties available, as well as the overall organizational setup of secondary schools, through an observation checklist. The descriptive and thematic data analysis approach was used in this study. The data obtained through questionnaires from teachers was calculated, tabulated, and the frequency counts were changed into individual mean, weight mean, and SPSS analysis was figured. And descriptive statistics was used for the quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data was analyzed using words and explanation. Additionally, the thematic content analysis approach was used to analyze qualitative data.

2.1 Research Ethics

In this study, data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. To ensure that the process was ethically sound, several principles were carefully observed. These included securing informed consent, guaranteeing voluntary participation, avoiding deception, ensuring no harm to participants, and safeguarding privacy and confidentiality. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research and Dissemination Office of Dilla University, which formally communicated the aims of the study to relevant stakeholders. In addition, official permissions were sought from the Gedeo Zone Education Department and the Dilla City Administration Education Office to conduct the research in selected secondary schools.

Once approval was granted, written requests were submitted to school administrations to gain access to the research sites. At each school, the purpose of the study was clearly explained to prospective participants, and the researcher presented certification from Dilla University along with letters of permission from the respective education offices. Throughout the fieldwork, ethical principles such as anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary involvement, and the principle of "do no harm" were consistently observed.

2.1.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Many national constitutions and international research standards emphasize that studies involving human participants must be conducted with clearly documented informed consent (Fabian, 2015). The principle of informed consent reflects the impor-

tance of open and respectful engagement between researchers and participants. It ensures that individuals are fully aware of what information is being collected, the reasons behind it, and the potential implications for them (Kumar, 2011). In this study, participants were thoroughly briefed about the objectives of the research, their expected roles, and the fact that participation was entirely voluntary. They were assured that their involvement was intended to contribute freely to social improvement. Moreover, no form of deception was used, and participants did not receive compensation for their participation.

2.1.2 The Right to Anonymity and Confidentiality

The literature stresses that information obtained from participants should be used strictly for research purposes; using it otherwise is considered unethical (Kumar, 2011). From the outset, the research team recognized participants' right to remain anonymous and to have their privacy and confidentiality protected. This principle was communicated clearly to all participants.

To protect the data, secure measures were put in place both during and after fieldwork. Participants were assured that anything shared during individual interviews would not be discussed outside the research team. Furthermore, in reporting and dissemination, names and other identifying details were not disclosed. Instead, pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of all participants.

2.1.3 No Harm

Social researchers are expected to consider the possible consequences of their work and to actively prevent any harmful effects (Fabian, 2015). Ethical practice goes beyond legal compliance, requiring researchers to reflect on the broader implications of their activities. Importantly, obtaining informed consent does not release researchers from the responsibility of protecting participants from potential risks. Hence, preventing harm was treated as a central ethical principle in this study.

The researchers made clear to participants that they were fully accountable for upholding ethical standards and demonstrated this commitment throughout the study. Above all, respect and professionalism were maintained in all communications with stakeholders, and all activities were conducted in line with established principles of scientific research ethics.

3 Results

The main objective of this study is to assess the impacts of decentralized educational management regarding improved teaching and learning facilities. In general 109 sample population were effective; 100 (one hundred teachers) were selected through simple random sampling method from 452 (four hundred fifty two teachers), and two supervisors from three supervisors, two education office managers, and three principals were selected through purposive sampling. Accordingly, the researchers used questionnaires, semistructured interviews, and observation to collect adequate data. Therefore, the data presentation tables below provided discussion on various topics of this study as follows.

As demonstrated in Table 1, 33% of respondents replied completely agree on item number one. Similarly, most of the respondents (56.7%) agreed on item 1 that teachers are familiar with decentralized educational management. Moreover, the mean value and standard deviation indicate (1.84) and (.799), respectively. Contrarily, as can be seen from table 5, for item 1, (6.2), (2.1) and (2.1) share of the respondents answered neutral, disagree and completely disagree, respectively. Also, 57.7% of the respondents replied agree for item 2, as well as 32% completely agreed. Agreeing to these understandings, one can measure that teachers shared awareness and secondary schools were exercising decentralized educational management.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on practices of decentralized educational management

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	Teachers are concentrating on decentralized educational management	Completely agree	32	33	1.84	0.799
		Agree	55	56.7		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		
2	Decentralized education management improved teaching and learning	Completely agree	31	32	1.82	0.736
		Agree	56	57.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
3	School-community sufficiently participating in the decision-making process at school	Completely agree	33	34	1.8	0.745
		Agree	54	55.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
4	School managers can decide on school annual plan without consulting Woreda education Office	Completely agree	31	32	1.88	0.807
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	8	8.2		
		Disagree	4	4.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on practices of decentralized educational management

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	Teachers are participating in the problem-solving process at school	Completely agree	32	33	1.82	0.764
		Agree	55	56.7		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	3	3.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
2	There is active school and community participation in the school development process	Completely agree	31	32	1.87	0.824
		Agree	55	56.7		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	3	3.1		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		
3	School management plays a significant role in handling school activities without referring to woreda education offices	Completely agree	32	33	1.87	0.837
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	3	3.1		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		

As discussed in Table 2, the average percentage (56 %) of respondents who answered agreed for item number one and the thirty-three percent (33%) responded completely agree. Whereas limited aggregate 6.2, 3.1, and 1 percentages of the respondents replied neutral, disagree, and completely disagree, respectively, for item number one. The mean value and standard deviation for item number one show 1.82 and 0.664 respectively, which strengthen reliability of the responses by the respondents. Furthermore, 32% of the respondents replied completely agree for item number 2 in Table 2; consistently 56.7 percent of the respondents replied agree with the statement under this item. Also, 6.2, 3.1 and 2.1 percentages of the respondents responded neutral, disagree, and completely disagree, respectively, for item number two. Furthermore, according to Table 2, 33% of the respondents replied completely agree for item number three and 54.6 percent of the respondents were replied agree. And 7.2 percent of the respondents were disagreed, 3.1 and 2.1 percentages of the respondents replied neutral and completely disagree, respectively. Furthermore, the mean value and standard deviation for item 3 are shown at 1.87 and 0.837 respectively. Consequently, one can assume that school management has an important role in managing school activities through the practices of decentralized educational management in secondary schools.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on the effects of decentralized educational management

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	Decentralized educational management improved teaching activities and students' participation in instructional process	Completely agree	27	27.8	2.01	0.907
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	9	9.3		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
2	Woreda Education Offices are authorized for the placement of teachers and decentralized educational management facilitated impressive progress on educational expansion	Completely agree	28	28.9	1.93	0.845
		Agree	56	57.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	4	4.1		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		
3	Regional Education Offices are authorized for educational planning and program at regional level	Completely agree	28	28.9	2.1	1.046
		Agree	47	48.5		
		Neutral	10	10.3		
		Disagree	8	8.2		
		Completely disagree	4	4.1		
		Total	97	100		

As Table 3 indicates, 27.8 and 54.6 percentages of the respondents answered completely agree and agree respectively for item 1. Yet again for item one, 7.2, 9.3 and 1 percentages of the respondent answered neutral, disagree, and completely disagree, respectively, for the item number one. Also, the mean value (2.01) and the standard deviation (0.907) are observed from Table 3 for item number one. And 28.9 percent of the respondents responded completely agree for item 2, besides, majority of the respondents (57.7%) responded agree for item number two. Likewise, 7.2 percent of the respondents responded neutral, 4.1 percent disagree, and 2.1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree. Also, the mean value and standard deviation for item 2 distributed as 1.93 and 0.845 respectively. For item 3, 28.9 percent of the respondents responded completely agree, 48.5 percent agree, 10.3 percent neutral, 8.2 percent disagree, and 4.1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree. Moreover, mean value reading 2.10 with standard deviation1.046 shows respective stability with each other. From this one can agree that decentralized educational management has an input on schooling success.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on the effects of decentralized educational management

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	School management is authorized for teachers' assessment and decentralized educational management improved access to education	Completely agree	28	28.9	1.97	0.895
		Agree	54	55.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	6	6.2		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		
2	Woreda Education Offices in collaboration with the school management board are responsible for teacher promotion and development	Completely agree	26	26.8	1.99	0.884
		Agree	56	57.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	6	6.2		
		Completely disagree	2	2.1		
		Total	97	100		
3	Educational decentralization created a conducive teaching and learning environment in the school and improving gender equity	Completely agree	26	26.8	2	0.924
		Agree	57	58.8		
		Neutral	5	5.2		
		Disagree	6	6.2		
		Completely disagree	3	3.1		
		Total	97	100		
4	Decentralized educational management improved teachers' performance and fairness in schooling	Completely agree	28	28.9	2.01	0.952
		Agree	52	53.6		
		Neutral	8	8.2		
		Disagree	6	6.2		
		Completely disagree	3	3.1		
		Total	97	100		

As Table 4 specifies, 28.9 percent of the respondents responded completely agree, and above average (55.7 percentages) of the respondents responded agree for item number one. Also, 7.2% of the respondents responded neutral, 6.2% of the respondents disagree, and 2.1% of the respondents replied completely disagree. As presented in Table 4b, 1.97 mean values and 0.895 standard deviation are evident for item number one. Similarly, 26.8 percent of the respondents responded completely agree, besides, 58.8 percent of the respondents responded agree for the item number three. Therefore, one can predict that educational decentralization is supportive of improving the teaching and learning environment in secondary schools.

According to Table 5, 34% of the respondents replied completely agree and 56.7 percent of the respondents responded agree on behalf of item number one. However, 6.2 percent of the respondents responded neutral, similarly 2.1% disagree, and 1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree for item number one. As to Table 5a, the mean value and standard deviation for item number one indicated 1.79 and 0.735 respectively. And 35.1 percent of the respondents replied completely agree, and 53.6 percent of the respondents responded agree for item two. In addition, the sum of responses replied as completely agree and agree captured higher percentages (88.7%) for the item number two. However, 6.2 percent of the respondents responded neutral, 4.1 percent disagreed, and 1 percent of the respondents replied completely disagree for item number two. On the other hand, 33% of the respondents responded completely agree, 54.6 percent agree, 5.2 percent neutral, 6.2 percent disagree, and 1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree for item number three. Furthermore, the mean value (1.88) and the standard deviation (.845) are evident for item three as in Table 5. From this one can rationalize that there are contradictions in the effectiveness of educational decentralization.

Table 5: Challenges to effective application of educational decentralization

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	Frequent shortage of sufficient skilled human resource troubling effectiveness of decentralized educational management in secondary school	Completely agree	33	34	1.79	0.735
		Agree	55	56.7		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
2	Low academic achievement of students triggered by poor support system for parents and stakeholders at local levels	Completely agree	34	35.1	1.82	0.804
		Agree	52	53.6		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	4	4.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
3	Absence of sufficient water and sanitation service continuing in secondary school	Completely agree	32	33	1.88	0.845
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	5	5.2		
		Disagree	6	6.2		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		

Table 6: Challenges to effective application of educational decentralization

No.	Items	Responses	Fr.	%	Mean	SD
1	Absence of essential training on management of education in woreda education offices as well as school level	Completely agree	33	34	1.82	0.777
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	3	3.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
2	There is a scarcity of material resources for school management in secondary school	Completely agree	34	35.1	1.79	0.749
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
3	The necessary resources for teaching and learning are not sufficiently obtainable in secondary school	Completely agree	33	34	1.8	0.745
		Agree	54	55.7		
		Neutral	7	7.2		
		Disagree	2	2.1		
		Completely disagree	1	1		
		Total	97	100		
4	Local governments are troubled by the scarcity of vital resources and the lack of cooperative accountability across the sector	Completely agree	32	33	1.89	0.888
		Agree	53	54.6		
		Neutral	6	6.2		
		Disagree	3	3.1		
		Completely disagree	3	3.1		
		Total	97	100		

As indicated in Table 6, 34% of the respondents replied completely agree, 54.6 percent agree, 7.2 neutral, 3.1 disagree, and 1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree for item number one. Additionally, 35.1 percent of the respondents responded completely agree for the item number two, as well 54.6 percent of the respondents responded agree for item number two. Nevertheless, 7.2 percent of the respondents responded neutral, 2.1 percent disagreed, and 1 percent of the respondents responded completely disagree for item number two. Also the mean value and standard deviation for items one and two are shown as 1.82 and 0.777, and 1.79 and 0.749 respectively. From this, one can agree that the major challenge for educational decentralization is connected with inadequacy of resources in secondary schools.

Furthermore, when education managers were asked how they define decentralized educational management and its manifestation in their setting, they had the following views:

> *Educational decentralization is one that strengthened the participation of stakeholders in schooling and is a functioning program in our location.* (Manager A)

> *Decentralized educational management is about enabling local-level decision-making capacity.* (Manager B)

> *There is decentralized educational management in our educational system. Some of the improvement that demonstrate the appearance of educational decentralization are empowered and engaged local stakeholders, private investors allowed to participate in schooling and practices of decision making at school levels.* (Manager C)

> *Decentralized educational management is about dealing with all stakeholders to improve schooling through collaborative effort of school community, society, government, NGO, and private institutions. With this regard, there are growing attempts in our education system.* (Manager D)

According to the above discussion with education managers, one can say that there is a practice of educational decentralization. Furthermore, these shows that education managers are aware of the concepts of decentralized educational management. As skill and device remain extremely necessary for improving education systems, some norms need to be questioned. The drumbeat about decentralized educational management practices for its own sake is misdirected, since there is a shortage of skilled educational managers at all levels that affects the system.

Impacts of Decentralized Education Management on Quality Education

When education managers were asked to express their views on the relationship between decentralized educational management and quality education provision, some shared the same views, and their responses were as follows:

> *There is a significant relationship between decentralized educational management and the provision of quality education. Our education system improved access to education, fairness with school distribution, and gender equity through decentralized educational management. I think there are promising openings, and then quiet decentralized educational management is expected a lot to accomplished entire issues of educational quality.* (Manager A)

> *I think there are recovery performances in allocating local necessities and building schools in each village. Community participation is a typical prospect of decentralized educational management from various enabling structures that enhanced the establishment of schools in every locality.* (Manager B)

> *I think enhanced communication between stakeholders has been achieved through decentralized educational management. Now we are concerned about quality education, since this achievement is the cornerstone of various aspects of the education system. Decentralized educational management created the condition that empowered stakeholders and improved access to education, expansion, and equity; these are vital requirements for the educational quality which would be difficult if tried by the solo attempt of the government.* (Manager C)

From these, one can say that the significance of decentralized educational management is understood by education managers. Above all, these show that there is agreement between different education managers regarding the contributions of educational decentralization.

b. The challenges faced by decentralized educational management

Education managers were asked to discuss the challenges they face throughout the practices of decentralized educational management, majority of them agreed with quantitative data and shared the same outlooks, and their responses were as follows.

> *I think the shortage of experienced human resources across the levels is the pronounced*

problem meant for impediment of decentralization. Political decisions appropriated with little or no agreement with the needs of the local school context are also wrongdoing. (Manager A)

The shortage of dedicated stakeholders is a challenge for the firm achievement of decentralized educational management. As a result, educational decentralization is contributing to the lifespan. (Manager B)

The insufficiency of ongoing training for stakeholders caused by the material resource shortage at school is troubling for decentralized educational management. (Manager C)

Doubtful communication system and ineffective management of educational information are major difficulties. Underprivileged home-school communications and reduced parental supervision of their children are also remaining problems. (Manager D)

3.1 Discussions

The main objective of this study was to assess the impacts of decentralized educational management in the city administration of Gedeo zone Dilla and its implications on quality provision. In view of that, this study was guided by this major objective and the following research questions; how well the secondary school stakeholders realize the practices of decentralized management of education? What are the assumptions of decentralized educational management regarding improved teaching and learning services? How can the vital grains of decentralized educational management be grasped? And what are the major challenges that hinder the effectiveness of decentralized educational management?

In general, this study identified that teachers have experience with the practices of decentralized educational management. Teachers are well informed about the practices of decentralized educational management, in which 81% of respondents agreed on the constructive influence of educational decentralization. Implementation of educational decentralization has allowed school-community participation in the school development process. Similarly, this study realized that there is the concept of school-community participation in the school development process, besides school management has a significant role in the management of school development, but not in action. Despite the fact that school management has a legitimate and extensive role in managing the school development program, there is no comparable exercise supply. Decentralized educational management has facilitated impressive progress in educational expansion, and access to general education has improved in Ethiopia, but educational quality remains a massive challenge.

The majority of education managers, as well as 85% of teachers, agreed that a shortage of skilled workers plus essential resources exists among the main challenges opposed to decentralized educational management. Furthermore, the challenges that delayed the provision of quality education in the Dilla city administration secondary school persisted in addition to the developing expansion through the undertaking of decentralized educational management. The insufficiency of capacity building for stakeholders at subsidiary levels has hampered the effectiveness of decentralized educational management. Also, preposterous material and human resources were disturbing educational decentralization, as well as provision of quality education. Deficiency of sufficient water and sanitation service in Dilla city administration secondary schools leads to a blinking teaching and learning process. Therefore, there is an enormous need to develop a strategic plan that may improve the proficiency of various stakeholders in order to improve school management in the entire Gedeo zone, then exactly in the Dilla city administration secondary schools.

4 Conclusions

This research study recognized that annoying political interference, the absence of indispensable central management support, and reduced participation of stakeholders are major challenges faced by the effectiveness of educational decentralization. Effectively decentralized educational management is not about the number of layers of management, but carefully resolving the significant question of the distribution of educational services among different schools in the organizational structure. Consequently, learning enhancement is based on the

principles of notable power and responsibility sharing among various stakeholders in the management system. As educational decentralization does not reduce the contributions of top-level management to educational improvement, there should be an active communication and support system through a functional share of responsibility with local and central management. There is no effective educational decentralization and school improvement if each level is excited to undertake the power to make decisions, but unexpectedly to pass on the responsibility for implementation to others. It may even threaten the maneuver of effective accountability machines. Therefore, better understanding and application of the decentralized educational management system will maximize its benefits to improving the teaching and learning process.

5 Recommendations

- It is better if stakeholders across the sector understand that adequate allocation of teaching and learning material resources is a fundamental necessity and it is essential to provide uninterrupted preparation for stakeholders at the grassroots level of the education sector on educational organization and management;
- It is blameless that all stakeholders consider efficient, relevant, and consistent supervision and monitoring of the school system to confirm their level of amenability to quality assurance and to identify and eliminate poor qualities or rebels. This workout may moderate the number of the teaching and the non-teaching staff who are not committed to duties and do not comply with the operational standards;
- It would be sound if educational organizations at each level grasp and advance implementation of the basic principle of educational decentralization that assume local governments and school then stakeholders are wisely established to appreciate, respond, and be accountable to the local needs.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, the researchers would like to express genuine appreciation to Dilla University for allocating the financial support to help accomplish and come up with this research output. Moreover, the researchers would like to thank all the principals, teachers, and parents, Dilla City Administration Education Office experts, for their support during my data collection.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The corresponding author declares that there is no potential competing interest among the authors.

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