

# **EDUCATIONAL PLANNING**

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# EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

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THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION

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## FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of Educational Planning includes planning topics such as professional development planning, professional learning communities, autonomy in higher education, and staff job satisfaction and organization commitment.

In the first article, Thigpen and his colleagues provided a framework to assess the perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and support staff regarding the implementation of various dimensions of professional learning communities in schools.

In the second article, Assefa and Zenebe examined the availability of professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, conferences and specialized training programs, and explored how they contributed to addressing the challenges and demands of the school leadership roles in Ethiopia.

In the third article, Bogale and Hussien assessed the practice of institutional autonomy at an Ethiopian university. They found that the overall practice of institutional autonomy at the university was poor. The living autonomy was different from the formal autonomy.

In the fourth article, Degef and Kidane examined the link between job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff in technical colleges of higher education. The findings of their study suggested a tenuous yet statistically significant correlation between job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of academic staff in polytechnic colleges.

It is always interesting to hear how educators worldwide face educational planning challenges and how they come up with positive strategies to overcome them. Through publishing in Educational Planning, educators in the world can share their unique planning ideas with their global colleagues.

Editor: Tak Cheung Chan

Associate Editors: Walt Polka and Holly Catalfamo

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October, 2024.



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# ASSESSING THE FIDELITY OF SCHOOL-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IMPLEMENTATION

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## ABSTRACT

*As schools face increasing student achievement accountability, many educators have turned to school-level professional learning communities (PLCs) as a possible solution. The challenge is that many schools are not implementing PLCs with fidelity. It is imperative that school leaders assess PLC practices to ensure that critical components are being implemented and this research provides a framework to assess the perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and support staff regarding the implementation of various PLC dimensions. The findings indicated that although PLCs were being implemented with fidelity, those dimensions with lower means warranted further exploration. Additionally, responses regarding the influence of PLCs on teacher retention and collective teacher efficacy indicated that both are strongly influenced by effective PLC implementation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, most professional development opportunities were limited to onetime offerings such as conferences, highlighting a need for greater allocated time for educators to collaborate during the school day (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). However, in an age of increased student accountability, schools are constantly seeking new ways to raise student achievement through innovative and evidence-based practices. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) assist in these efforts through “sustained and intensive professional development related to student achievement gains” that involve collaborative approaches to improve academic achievement school-wide (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, p. 5). These approaches employ layered protocols of intervention to promote structured pedagogical shifts that enhance learning communities (Dufour et al., 2016; Oldac & Kondakci, 2020).

Nationwide, schools have chosen to implement PLCs as a means of maintaining compliance with state licensing agencies. For example, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) now requires engagement in professional learning on a continuing basis such as participating in PLCs (GaPSC, 2024). This initiative to embrace PLCs, however, does not mean that schools are implementing PLCs with fidelity. Dufour et al. (2016) noted that the term PLC has become synonymous with “any loose coupling of individuals who share a common interest in education” (p. 10). It is a common misconception that simply providing meeting times for teachers to engage in professional development or sending them to conferences is sufficient. On the contrary, there are critical components that must be in place to ensure that such gatherings result in higher levels of learning for students, and these components need to be implemented to achieve high-

performing schools (Brown et al., 2017). Simply providing information is not sufficient for effective implementation as critical factors related to program content, duration, frequency of delivery, and interactive activities must be well-developed (Liang et al., 2015).

Olivier et al. (2003) developed the *Professional Learning Community Assessment Revised* (PLCA-R) assessment tool to address this need. Through the administration of the PLCA-R, researchers can examine varied identified PLC dimensions to determine which areas are being implemented with fidelity and which areas need further support. These dimensions are the most appropriate areas to focus on due to their strong empirical associations with increased collective teacher efficacy (Kılınç et al., 2021; Lee, 2020; Little, 2020), organizational commitment and teacher retention (Cobanoglu, 2020; Torres et al., 2020), and enhanced relationships and trust among colleagues (Sahin & Yenel, 2021).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Transformational Leadership

The theoretical framework that shaped this study is transformational leadership, as we work to ensure educators are motivated to engage in PLCs and implement the core components with fidelity. Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) described transformational leadership as having six dimensions including building school vision and goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support, symbolizing professional practices and values, demonstrating high performance expectations, and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions.

Beyond transformational leadership as a theory, researchers have begun to study the effects of transformational leadership on PLCs. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) posited that perceptions of school leaders' transformational leadership were a predictor for the PLC characteristic of collective responsibility. Thus, the higher that teachers rated their school leaders' transformational leadership abilities, the more collective responsibility they experienced in the schools. Specifically, "teachers' perceptions of transformational leadership were associated with participation in reflective dialogue and the presence of collective responsibility" (p. 33).

Luyten and Bazo (2019) explored the effect of transformational leadership on learner centered practices via teacher learning and PLCs and noted that "it seems as though school leaders and their teachers are living in different worlds, as their perceptions of transformational leadership and professional learning communities seem unrelated" (p. 21). More importantly, transformational leadership has been shown to positively influence increasing employees' psychological resources, such as self-efficacy or positive mood, leading to higher knowledge sharing. Team-centric, transformational leadership was positively associated with team innovation and individual member learning (Klaic et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is critical to enhancing innovation, and team leaders can enhance learning by engaging in team-centered transformational leadership behaviors, including emphasizing group identity, communicating group visions, and encouraging team building (Asbari, 2020).

Continuous learning should drive positive school culture; thus, placing this framework of transformational leadership within the practice of PLCs allows future researchers to view leadership practices that use team-centered learning as a means of improving schools. Further consideration and research are warranted as such differences in perception could have implications for school leaders and their selected evidence-based approaches with their staff.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Professional Learning Communities

The overall purpose of PLCs is to improve student learning through collaborative inquiry and action research (Dufour et al., 2016). As teachers gather to build shared knowledge, their professional capacity begins to grow with the aid of school leadership structures and cultural contexts (Chen & Mitchell, 2015). Trust et al. (2016) found evidence to support that professional learning networks enhance the social and cognitive aspects of teacher growth. These efforts promote teacher motivation, which can aid in the prevention of teacher burnout (Webb et al., 2009). The shared leadership created through PLC implementation has been found to predict organizational commitment (Cobanoglu, 2020) and a lack of shared leadership negatively impacts teacher retention (Torres et al., 2020). When implemented effectively, PLCs provide teachers with a platform to combine current research with practice (Linder et al., 2012). Additionally, autonomy and choice have a positive impact on teacher perceptions and improve teacher comradery, which is an important feature of a professional community. PLCs also increase teacher self-efficacy and are associated with changes in classroom practices, student behavior, and increased outcome expectancies (Mintzes et al., 2013).

Learning is situated in social practice as a way of understanding such learning is a community that continues to strive for new and better ways to conduct work referred to as anticipatory learning, which require practices to determine full membership of such a community (Lave & Wenger, 2021). Specifically, community creates the structure in which, from a social perspective, people engage in thinking together and, in this way, share their knowledge and insights on how to deal with everyday challenges and issues by utilizing new ways of conducting their professional practice.

### Six Dimensions of Effective PLCs

With the potential to serve as a catalyst for improving student achievement, increasing professional capacity, supporting affective aspects of professional growth, and improving overall teacher motivation, it is imperative that schools implement PLCs with fidelity. In their efforts to demystify PLCs, Hipp and Huffman (2010) conceptualized six dimensions under which attributes of effective PLCs can be classified: Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, Supportive Conditions-Relationships, and Supportive Conditions-Structures, specific to the PLCA-R.

Leadership that is shared and supportive involves the school leader distributing and supporting leadership efforts among staff members. Through shared values, participants are active in establishing the collective vision that guides their schools (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Once PLC members have ownership of the work guided by shared values and vision, they must engage in learning that is collective and applicable. PLC members develop reflective qualities allowing them to challenge their assumptions and grow as educators (Brodie, 2014). Shared personal practice then reflects the collaboration that occurs as mutual accountability and support grow (Dufour et al., 2016). By identifying the need to build relationships, Gray et al. (2016) demonstrated the relationship between collegial trust and academic emphasis within PLCs by identifying the “reciprocal relationship” between enabling school structures and PLCs, asserting that one cannot exist without the other (p. 886). Finally, with supportive conditions and structures, school leaders must ensure that resources are provided to support best efforts (Dufour et al., 2016).

While all six dimensions of a PLC are considered essential, a shared leadership vision coupled with supportive conditions are crucial to any learning community. One common

characteristic of these specific dimensions is the direct impact that school leaders have on each of them. Although elements such as time and isolation have been identified as roadblocks for PLCs, the removal of such barriers does not ensure effective collaboration (Wilson, 2016). For some staff, especially new teachers, learning to collaborate while also learning to teach can present challenges (Gardiner & Robinson, 2011). An understanding of staff perceptions relating to each dimension could serve as a powerful tool for supporting and growing PLCs efforts within a school, especially when in the hands of a competent and capable school leader (Sims & Penny, 2015).

### **Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R)**

The Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) survey was designed as a tool to measure practices in relation to the six identified PLC dimensions (Olivier & Hipp, 2010). Parks (2014) used the PLCA-R to explore teachers' perceptions of PLCs in relation to their gender, years taught, educational level, and grade level and the results indicated a relationship between years of experience and perception of PLCs; those with over 16 years of experience tended to view PLCs negatively, while those with five or fewer years of experience possessed a more positive perception of PLCs. Also, to consider is that principals' perceptions of PLC dimensions vary and are often more positive than those of teachers (Stamper, 2015). However, Gillespie (2016) examined the perceptions of principals and teachers and, unlike Stamper (2015), found no significant differences between the perceptions of principals and teachers.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine which dimensions of PLCs are being implemented with fidelity and which areas need improvement. This study assessed perceptions of school-level practices of effective PLCs among school leaders, teachers, and support staff. This study is significant in that mandates have strengthened requirements for educator professional certificate renewal to reflect participation in professional growth platforms such as PLCs, yet little has been done to ensure that school districts are implementing professional learning with fidelity. When implemented with fidelity, PLCs can improve teacher quality and effectiveness which not only positively impact student achievement but also improve morale and promote social aspects of teacher growth.

For PLCs to result in professional growth and overall school improvement, school leaders must first understand how critical dimensions of PLCs are functioning within their schools. They must be able to determine which dimensions of PLCs are being implemented with fidelity and which dimensions present challenges. Without this critical analysis of the current state of PLCs, there is no way to ensure that the conditions necessary for PLCs to result in school improvement are in place. With this information, school leaders can ensure that conditions are in place to support PLCs so that they will have a better chance to implement effective professional learning that advances school improvement.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Many schools rely on PLCs as a means of professional growth. Research is needed to support school leaders in PLC implementation. Thus, the following research questions guided this study. The study was conducted in one rural school district in the Southeast region of the United States

1. Which of the six dimensions of PLCs (Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, Supportive Conditions-Relationships, and Supportive Conditions-Structures) are implemented with fidelity?
2. Which of these six PLC dimensions present challenges in implementation?
3. To what extent do perceptions of these PLC dimensions vary according to participant role, grade cluster, years of experience, and content area taught?
4. What is the perceived impact of the six PLC dimensions on teacher retention?
5. What is the perceived impact of the six PLC dimensions on collective teacher efficacy?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study utilized a non-experimental quantitative design to analyze survey data regarding the fidelity of PLC implementation relative to six dimensions associated with effective PLCs. These data were collected from school leaders, teachers, and support staff. The research design allowed for the exploration of potential relationships between participants' perceptions of the PLC dimensions and their professional characteristics including participant role, grade cluster, years of experience, and content area taught.

### Participants and Setting

The Curtis County School District (CCSD), a pseudonym, is a small, rural district in the southeastern United States. The county is geographically small and has a population of approximately 11,000 people. CCSD is comprised of four schools, and approximately 2,200 students attend the elementary school (P–5). The middle school serves grades 6–8 and has approximately 500 students, while the remaining 600 students attend high school (grades 9–12). The demographic breakdown of the total student population is 45% White, 28% Black, 22% Hispanic, and 5% multiracial. CCSD is designated as a Title I school district due to its large percentage of low-income students as 100% of students enrolled in the district qualify for free and reduced lunch.

All school leaders, teachers, and support staff members in the four schools in the CCSD were invited to participate in the study. Participants were delineated by professional characteristics, including participant role (school leader, teacher, or support staff, with the latter being inclusive of instructional coaches, media specialists, and other staff who are neither school leaders or teachers), grade cluster (elementary, middle, or high school), years of experience (beginning teacher: 1-5 years; mid-career teacher: 6-20 years; or late-career teacher: 20+ years (more than 20 years), and content area taught (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science/Social Studies, Other (Physical Education, Fine Arts, Career Technical and Agriculture Education (CTAE)), or Not Applicable). (See Table 1.)

**Table 1** *Participant Characteristics*

Baseline Characteristics	N	%
Participant Role		
Teacher	74	70.5
Support Staff	22	21.0
School Leader	9	8.6
Grade Cluster		
Elementary School	49	46.7
Middle School	33	31.4
High School	23	21.9
Years of Experience		
1-5 Years	34	32.4
6-20 Years	39	37.1
20+ Years	32	30.5
Content Area Taught		
English Language Arts	36	34.3
Mathematics	13	12.4
Science/Social Studies	16	15.2
Other	12	11.4
Not Applicable	28	26.7

Note: N = 105

### Research Instrument

The Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) was selected as the survey instrument for this study because the PLCA-R is described as a “formal diagnostic tool for identifying school-level practices that support intentional professional learning” (Olivier & Hipp, 2010, p. 31). It is composed of 52 questions utilizing a four-point Likert-scale with the following ranges: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree. Ratings on this scale were used to ascertain perceptions of teachers related to six dimensions of PLCs. This was accomplished through the inclusion of the following subscales: eleven statements were designed to measure perceptions of Shared and Supportive Leadership, which is the degree to which school leaders participated democratically with teachers sharing power, authority, and decision making; nine statements were designed to measure perceptions of Shared Values and Vision, which is the degree to which the staff share visions for school improvement that have a focus on student learning, and these visions are consistently referenced in the staff work; ten statements were designed to measure perceptions of Collective Learning and Application, which are the staff’s ability to create learning tasks and solutions to address student’s needs; two statements were designed to measure perceptions of Shared Personal Practice, which is the degree to which teacher peers review and give feedback based on observing another’s classroom behaviors in order to increase individual and organizational capacity; five statements were designed to measure perceptions of supportive conditions surrounding relationships as measured by the collegial relationships among the staff including respect, trust, and norms of critical inquiry; and four statements were designed to measure perceptions of supportive conditions involving structures described as a variety of conditions within



the school, such as size of the school, proximity of staff to one another, communications systems, and the time and space for staff to meet and examine current practice.

The internal consistency reliability of the PLCA-R instrument has been established by its authors who stated:

The widespread use of the instrument provided an opportunity to review the dimensions for internal consistency. Our most recent analysis of this diagnostic tool has confirmed internal consistency resulting in the following Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients for factored subscales ( $n = 1209$ ): shared and supportive leadership (.94); shared values and vision (.92); collective learning and application (.91); shared personal practice (.87); supportive conditions-relationships (.82); supportive conditions-structures (.88); and a one-factor solution (.97). (Olivier & Hipp, 2010, p. 30)

## Data Collection

Written permission to use the PLCA-R was granted from the instrument's authors, and an institutional cooperation letter was signed by the superintendent of the participating schools. Once all permissions were obtained, a recruitment email was sent and provided information about the study and informed consent for participation. Participation was completely voluntary as individuals were allowed to opt out at any time without penalty, and participants were informed that the risks of participation were no greater than those of everyday life. Those who chose to participate were provided with a link that directed them to an electronic version of the survey and participants provided implied consent by clicking the link and beginning the survey. The survey was completely anonymous, and all data were collected as de-identified findings. The initial survey window was four weeks; however, to increase response rates, the survey window was extended by two weeks and a 54% response rate was attained.

The survey began by collecting demographic information including participant role, content area taught, grade cluster, and years of experience. Next, participants responded to 52 questions utilizing a 4-point Likert-scale with the following ranges: 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree to measure their perceptions of six dimensions of PLCs. At the end of each of the six dimension sections, there was an open-ended response area for teachers to expand upon the responses provided on the survey. Finally, two open-ended questions were included. These two questions specifically asked 1) How do the elements of a PLC influence teacher retention at your school? and 2) How do the elements of a PLC contribute to collective teacher efficacy at your school?

## Data Analysis

To answer the first two research questions, means and standard deviations were calculated for each of 52 attributes and the six dimensions. Reports generated by the PLCA-R online platform were used to determine the percentages at each level of agreement as well as the mean and standard deviation for each subscale item. Each attribute was reviewed individually to determine which yielded the highest and lowest calculated means. Once all means were analyzed, the researchers referred to the calculated standard deviations (SD) for each item to account for outliers (variance within the group).

To answer the third research question, participant role, grade cluster, content area taught, and years of experience were used as the independent variables (IV). The six PLC dimensions served as the dependent variables (DV). The researchers performed one-way univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests for each PLC dimension by each of the independent variables (participant

characteristics). The researchers then compared the responses of the subgroups for each of the dimensions. For the dimensions that reflected an overall significant difference, a post hoc test was used to help pinpoint specific mean differences. ANOVA results are presented if any significant mean differences were found.

To answer the final two research questions, open-ended responses were reviewed in order to identify patterns and themes in responses. Data were coded through bracketing and representing each segment with a word or phrase which represents its meaning, and these codes were used to generate the resulting themes and these themes were then compared to the survey results. This same process was also used to analyze the open-ended items which allowed for comments to elaborate on responses in each dimension.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

According to Olivier and Hipp (2010), a mean of 3.0 or higher showed general agreement with the attribute; therefore, statements yielding numerical means of less than 3.0 represented a lack of agreement with the attribute. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to the *Shared and Supportive Leadership* dimension, participants noted the importance of communication and shared decision making. Sample responses included “I feel like input is listened to and taken into consideration”, “It has been great that administration has given teachers a voice”, “information from leadership meetings is not passed down”, and “grade level leaders are given more authority when it comes to decision making... instead of having input from all grade level staff.” (See Table 2.)

**Table 2** *Participant Responses on the Shared and Supportive Leadership Dimension*

Attribute	SD	D	A	SA	M	SD
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	1	14	56	29	3.12	.68
The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	7	58	35	3.29	.58
Staff members have accessibility to key information.	2	11	49	40	3.25	.72
The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	10	50	40	3.31	.64
Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	1	13	51	36	3.31	.64
The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	12	50	38	3.26	.67
The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	11	54	35	3.23	.64
Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	10	57	33	3.24	.61
Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	11	56	33	3.21	.63
Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	3	14	54	29	3.09	.74
Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	4	51	45	3.41	.57

*Note:* N = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

For the second PLC dimension, Shared Values and Vision, survey responses yielded relatively high means with most respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing with each attribute statement. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to the dimension of *Shared Values and Vision*, participants indicated a desire for more frequent communication of the school's vision to provide more clarity and also noted a perceived overemphasis on standardized testing results. Sample responses included: "A vision that is communicated too infrequently to be relevant will be difficult for staff to adopt", "there is increased pressure to make sure the learning is focused on how students will test", and "Too much emphasis on test scores...when teachers are doing everything in their power to teach skills." (See Table 3.)

**Table 3** *Participant Responses on the Shared Values and Vision Dimension*

Attributes	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M	SD
A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	1	14	56	29	3.12	.68
Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	7	58	35	3.29	.58
Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	2	11	49	40	3.25	.72
Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	10	50	40	3.31	.64
A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	1	13	51	36	3.31	.64
School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	12	50	38	3.26	.67
Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	11	54	35	3.23	.64
Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	10	57	33	3.24	.61
Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	11	56	33	3.21	.63

Note: N = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

*Collective Learning and Application* was perceived as a dimension of strength among the participants. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to *Collective Learning and Application*, participants indicated that most of the learning occurs through PLCs, though trust and clarity can be barriers to collaboration. Sample responses included “Done through planning and grade level PLCs with content and data”, “Collegial relationships could improve,” and “staff collaboration is hindered by what Lencioni describes as an artificial harmony and fear of conflict.” (See Table 4.)

Items pertaining to the fourth PLC dimension, *Shared Personal Practice*, were indicative of perceived strength among teachers participating in PLCs. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to *Shared Personal Practice*, participants valued opportunities such as peer observations and coaching support; however, they felt that most of the support was focused on new or struggling teachers. Sample responses included “In the past, I have done peer observations...I love this opportunity. There is so much that others do that you can add to your teaching toolbox. I would

recommend to all”, “Opportunities also exist for new or struggling teachers to observe veteran teachers that can help them with areas that they may struggle in”, and “these coaching and mentoring opportunities are not as prevalent or effective for all staff members as they should be. While most coaching attention is understandably directed toward new teachers, it would be beneficial for all staff.” (See Table 5.)

**Table 4** *Participant Responses on the Collective Learning and Application Dimension*

Attributes	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M	SD
Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	4	57	39	3.35	.55
Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	5	62	33	3.29	.55
Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	5	57	38	3.33	.57
A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	1	3	59	37	3.32	.58
Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	8	58	34	3.27	.59
Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	2	7	41	50	3.40	.70
School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	2	9	55	34	3.22	.68
School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	3	57	40	3.37	.54
Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	6	49	45	3.40	.60
Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	6	52	42	3.36	.59

Note: N = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

**Table 5** *Participant Responses on the Shared Personal Practice Dimension*

Attributes	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M	SD
Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	7	57	36	3.30	.59
Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	11	59	30	3.20	.61
Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	54	46	3.46	.50
Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	1	11	60	28	3.16	.64
Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	1	6	50	44	3.36	.64
Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	1	60	39	3.38	.51
Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	1	16	57	26	3.08	.68

Note: N = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

The responses to the items indicated general agreement with statements attributed to the dimension of *Supportive Conditions-Relationships*. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to *Supportive Conditions-Relationships*, participants valued both relationships among adults in the building as well as those among all stakeholders while indicating that both are areas in need of improvement. Sample responses included “I have had years when my team was strong and we were on a roll with teaching and learning”, “staff and stakeholders...implies both have to be equally engaged and that is not my experience”, and “I think caring relationships are a weakness in our school.” Table 6 provides a breakdown of the participants responses regarding *Supportive Conditions-Relationships* dimension. (See Table 6.)

**Table 6** *Participant Responses on the Supportive Conditions- Relationships Dimension*

Attributes	SD	D	A	SA	M	SD
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	1	58	41	3.40	.51
A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	6	60	34	3.29	.57
Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	2	12	49	37	3.21	.73
School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	3	11	57	29	3.13	.71
Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	7	56	37	3.30	.59

*Note:* N = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Responses to items related to the sixth dimension, *Supportive Conditions-Structures*, resulted in high means indicative of general agreement with the attribute statements. Based on open-ended comments pertaining to *Supportive Conditions-Structures*, participants indicated that instructional materials and resources were available to staff and that professional development, and the use of such materials are improving. Sample responses included “Staff technology seems to be on point”, “Every teacher is provided with either a laptop or an iPad. In some cases, teachers have both”, “Utilization of instructional materials and experts is improving,” and “Resources for professional development has so improved since I gained employment.” (See Table 7.)

When analyzing the data collectively across all six PLC dimensions, mean scores generated by attributes within all six of the dimensions were all greater than 3.0, indicating that respondents generally agreed with the statements. Based on these results, the researcher was able to conclude that all six dimensions were being implemented with fidelity. Additionally, based on these findings, a number of the six PLC dimensions appeared to present challenges for implementation based on those with the lowest mean, although not extremely low, the findings were lower than the other dimensions and warrant further exploration.

**Table 7** *Supportive Conditions-Structures Dimension*

Attributes	SD	D	A	SA	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)		
Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	10	51	39	3.30	.63
The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	8	58	34	3.27	.59
Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	2	51	47	3.45	.54
Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	5	46	49	3.45	.59
Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	7	49	44	3.38	.61
The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	1	4	54	41	3.35	.60
The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	3	53	44	3.41	.55
Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	3	4	56	37	3.28	.67
Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including central office personnel, parents, and community members.	5	10	51	34	3.15	.78
Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	1	4	54	41	3.35	.60

*Note:* *N* = 105; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

### Comparison of Dimension Means by Participant Characteristics

A series of one-way ANOVAs were performed to compare overall PLC dimension means by participant characteristics: participant role, grade cluster, years of experience, and content area taught. For participant role, significant mean differences were seen for three PLC dimensions: Shared Personal Practice ( $F = 3.81, p < .05$ ), Supportive Conditions-Relationships ( $F = 3.54, p < .05$ ), and Supportive Conditions-Structures ( $F = 5.75, p < .01$ ). In each instance, group means for Support Staff and School leaders were significantly higher than those for teacher respondents as shown in (Table 8.)



**Table 8** *Group Means Associated with Significant ANOVA Results—Participant Role*

Dimension by Group	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Shared Personal Practice			
Teacher	74	3.19	.47
Support Staff	22	3.48	.49
Leader	9	3.46	.53
Supportive Conditions-Relationships			
Teacher	74	3.18	.47
Support Staff	22	3.45	.58
Leader	9	3.50	.47
Supportive Conditions-Structures			
Teacher	74	3.24	.48
Support Staff	22	3.54	.47
Leader	9	3.66	.34

*Note:* *N* = 105

The only other significant difference seen in PLCA-R dimension means based on participant characteristics was between Shared Supportive Leadership with Science and Other content areas taught, reporting the highest means as shown in Table 9.

**Table 9** *Group Means Associated with Significant ANOVA Results—Content Area Taught*

Dimension by Group	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Shared Supportive Leadership			
English Language Arts	3.06	.49	36
Mathematics	3.02	.56	13
Science/Social Studies	3.44	.55	16
Other Content Areas	3.43	.49	12
Not Applicable	3.36	.43	28

*Note:* *N* = 105

### **Thematic Analyses of Responses to Open-Ended Questions**

Respondents were also asked to respond to two open-ended questions at the end of the survey, which addressed the final two research questions. Three themes emerged for the first open-ended question regarding the influence of PLCs on teacher retention: 1) PLCs help teacher retention, 2) PLCs do not influence teacher retention, and 3) Influence depends on the PLC, as shown in Table 10. Representative comments are noted for each theme.

The second open-ended question sought to provide insight into how PLC elements affect collective teacher efficacy. Three themes emerged from the responses: 1) PLCs help collective teacher efficacy, 2) PLCs do not influence collective teacher efficacy, and 3) Influence depends on the PLC. The most common theme found in the responses was that respondents felt that PLCs helped collective teacher efficacy. (See Tables 10 and 11.)

**Table 10** *Influence of PLCs on Teacher Retention*

Themes	N	Sample Respondent Statements
PLCs help teacher retention	77	<p>“The elements of a PLC can promote teacher retention because it helps to build relationships with colleagues and makes everyone feel safe to learn and grow”</p> <p>“Having a PLC where you feel supported, ideas are heard, and everyone is all in helps you feel like you belong. A sense of family/community helps the work environment which in turn influences teachers to want to stay”</p>
PLCs do not influence teacher retention	8	<p>“PLC does not influence my decision to stay or leave. As for others, I have heard them indicate the same”</p> <p>“The people who have left our dept left for reasons other than PLC, so I would have to say one doesn't influence the other”</p>
Influence depends on the PLC	8	<p>“Some PLCs are stronger than others. When a PLC is open to new staff members, there is great retention. When the PLC is unwelcoming to new staff, the retention is less”</p> <p>“When a teacher is a member of a high functioning PLC where they feel supported, valued and have positive relationships with their peers they usually choose to stay and collectively meet the challenge and demands of improving student achievement. However, when the PLC is dysfunctional, teachers generally have a negative feeling about the overall culture or environment of the school which in turn leads to a lack of motivation and they will more than likely choose to leave”</p>

Note: n = 93; 12 participants chose not to respond, were off topic, or responded “NA”

**Table 11** *Influence of PLCs on Collective Teacher Efficacy*

Themes	N	Sample Respondent Statements
PLCs help collective teacher efficacy	83	“I believe the elements of a PLC contribute to collective teacher efficacy at my school”  “Teachers take a sense of ownership in what transpires at our school because they are involved in the development of school wide initiatives. This leads to greater teacher efficacy, as teachers develop a clear understanding of school level goals, and more importantly, how to hit those goals”
PLCs do not influence collective teacher efficacy	3	“Currently, the elements in place for PLCs aren't contributing much to teacher efficacy”  “I do not believe they do”
Influence depends on the PLC	8	“The PLCs that check all the boxes expect and see results. The other PLCs are very negative, and the results are just not there. They tend to believe that the students just can't get it”  “Teachers who demonstrate a strong self-efficacy also play a large role in the successful leadership of collaborative PLCs. Those teachers are responsible for creating a trusting, effective PLC focused on student's growth and achievement and understand the shared vision. As a result, these PLCs have achieved collective teacher efficacy. On the flip side, those PLCs without strong leadership struggle with collective teacher efficacy”

Note: n = 94; 11 participants chose not to respond, were off topic, or responded “NA”

## DISCUSSION

This study adds to the research conducted using the PLCA-R to assess better understand PLC implementation (Olivier & Hipp, 2010), compares school leaders' and teachers' perceptions of PLC fidelity (Gillespie, 2016; Luyten & Bazo, 2019) as well as the influence of PLCs on teacher retention (Kelly et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2020) and collective teacher efficacy (Boz & Saylik, 2021; Lee, 2020). Overall, the data indicated that respondents perceived that PLCs were being implemented with fidelity and that the dimensions with lower means presented challenges with implementation.

There is a need for school leaders to assess existing perceptions of PLCs within their districts to guard against a false sense of security related to the fidelity with which PLCs are being implemented. By better understanding educators' perceptions, school leaders can attain a more accurate picture of PLC implementation from those who are closest to the collaborative

work to determine how to best allocate time and resources. There is a need to support the effective implementation of PLCs as such support has been linked to high performing schools and increased student achievement (Brown et al., 2017).

The respondents agreed that when PLCs are implemented with fidelity, they contribute to improved teacher retention. These findings are important for school leaders as nationwide teacher shortages are becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. Given the results of this study, along with other previous findings (Kelly et al., 2019; Torres et al., 2020) demonstrating the positive impact of PLCs on teacher retention, it would behoove school leaders to facilitate the implementation of PLCs as well as focus on ensuring that the critical elements of PLCs described in the PLC dimensions of the PLCA-R are present, in order to have a positive impact on the retention of teachers.

In addition to the findings related to teacher retention, this research study found that among PLCs that are perceived to be implemented with fidelity, respondents indicated that PLCs help increase collective teacher efficacy (Boz & Saylik, 2021; Lee, 2020). These findings are significant for school leaders who are seeking to increase student achievement as collective teacher efficacy has been strongly correlated with student achievement and is said to have the greatest effect on student learning (Hattie, 2016).

Study limitations include the use of self-report data and a mid-level response rate (54%) to data collection instrument. This study was also limited to educators in one school district; therefore, results may not be generalizable to other school districts.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

This study contributes to current research related to teacher perceptions of various PLC dimensions and how PLCs influence teacher retention as well as collective teacher efficacy. Findings in this study support previous research that suggests that perceptions of school leaders related to PLCs are higher than those of teachers (Luyten & Bazo, 2019). Based on these findings, it could be argued that school leaders should not depend on their own perceptions when attempting to determine whether PLCs are being implemented with fidelity; instead, they must include the voices of other stakeholders for the collective good of the school.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of this study continue to support ongoing research related to leadership actions that support PLCs, differences in perceptions related to PLCs, and the influence that PLCs can have on teacher retention and collective teacher efficacy. While this study supported previous research findings demonstrating a significant difference between perceptions of school leaders, teachers, and support staff, it did not explore why such differences exist. Researchers should seek a better understanding of these differences in perceptions to guide school leaders' behaviors that might allow them to be more attuned with the implementation of PLCs.

### **CONCLUSION**

As districts continue to seek answers to complex challenges such as increasing student achievement and addressing teacher shortages, it is critical to consider PLCs as a possible solution. This study provides a framework for such assessment and supports the idea that when schools implement PLCs with fidelity, teacher retention, and collective teacher efficacy are positively impacted. With evidence to support the impacts of PLCs on student achievement through increased collaboration and supportive conditions, as well as their positive impact on collective teacher efficacy, which has been directly linked to student learning, transformational school leaders can

focus on strengthening dimensions that characterize effective PLCs. School leaders have the great potential to take steps toward supporting the type of transformation that is needed in order to solve the challenges currently facing our education system.

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# EXPLORING CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERS IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Continuous professional development (CPD) plays a crucial role in enhancing the knowledge and skills of school leaders (Nooruddin & Bhamani, 2019). However, there is a need to understand the perceptions and practices of CPD among public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining the effectiveness of current CPD practices in addressing the professional development needs of school leaders in the city. A mixed design study was conducted, involving a sample of (N=50) school leaders from 20 public primary schools in Addis Ababa. Surveys and interviews were used to gather data on the perceptions and practices of CPD. The sample was selected to represent a diverse range of educational institutions in the city. The study revealed that public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa greatly value CPD as a means to enhance their professional knowledge and skills. They perceive the current CPD practices as highly effective in meeting their specific professional development needs. The availability of diverse CPD opportunities, including workshops, seminars, conferences and specialized training programs, was seen as beneficial in addressing the challenges and demands of their leadership roles. This study contributes to the limited research on CPD practices among school leaders in Addis Ababa. By exploring their perceptions and practices, it provides insights into the effectiveness of CPD programs in addressing their professional development needs. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that educational institutions in Addis Ababa continue to support and invest in CPD programs for school leaders.*

## INTRODUCTION

Continuous professional development (CPD) for school leaders is the ongoing process of enhancing the school leaders' knowledge, skills and competencies to effectively lead and manage schools (Alemayehu, 2021). CPD recognizes the importance of lifelong learning for school leaders, who play a crucial role in shaping education quality and school success (Bubb & Earley, 2007). In the past, school leaders were mainly focused on administrative tasks and regulation compliance (Renihan et al., 2006). However, the evolving education landscape requires them to be visionary instructional leaders, driving school improvement, fostering positive school culture, engaging stakeholders, and creating a conducive environment for student success (Crum & Sherman, 2008).

CPD for school leaders acknowledges the need for continuous learning to meet these demands (Faizuddin et al., 2022). It offers opportunities to enhance knowledge and skills in areas such as instructional leadership, strategic planning, data analysis, school management, effective communication, and fostering inclusivity (Stevenson et al., 2016). By staying updated with research and best practices, school leaders can make informed decisions and lead effectively (Wondimu, 2019).

CPD comes in various forms, including workshops, conferences, online courses, coaching and collaborative networks (Michaelidou & Pashiardis, 2009). These programs focus on building leadership capacities, reflective practices, pedagogical knowledge, and effective communication and collaboration (Nicolaidou & Petridou, 2011a). Research shows that effective CPD positively impacts school improvement, teacher development, student achievement, and overall school outcomes (Khan & Khan, 2014). Investing in CPD supports the growth of school leaders and improves educational experiences for students (Field, 2005).

Addis Ababa, being the political, economic, and cultural center of Ethiopia, represents a diverse and dynamic educational landscape (Ejigu, 2014). The city is home to numerous primary schools, each with its unique characteristics and challenges (Roseman, 2018). Understanding the perceptions and practices of school leaders regarding CPD can shed light on the current state of professional development initiatives in the city and provide valuable insights into the strategies employed by school leaders to enhance their professional growth (Etsegenet, 2019).

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

CPD enables school leaders to stay updated with research and emerging trends (Cheng, 2017), leading to informed decision-making and effective strategies for teaching and learning (Petridou et al., 2017). It equips leaders with instructional guidance skills, supporting teachers in implementing research-based practices and curriculum development (Ng & Szeto, 2016). CPD also develops strategic planning and management skills for setting goals, formulating policies, resource allocation, and progress monitoring (Mestry, 2017).

Moreover, CPD fosters collaboration through networks and communities of practice (Mestry & Singh, 2007). Communities of practice refer to groups of individuals who come together to share knowledge, expertise, and experiences related to a particular profession or field. These communities are formed with the purpose of fostering collaboration, learning, and professional growth among their members (Davenport & Hall, 2002). This allows leaders to exchange ideas, learn from successful initiatives, and support teacher growth through mentoring and coaching, resulting in improved student outcomes (Nicolaidou & Petridou, 2011b). CPD also helps school leaders build effective communication, conflict resolution, relationship-building, and equity-promoting skills, contributing to a positive school culture (Faizuddin et al., 2022). A positive school climate, nurtured through CPD, enhances student engagement, motivation and well-being (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018).

In the Ethiopian context, CPD for school leaders aligns with the broader vision of educational reform and improvement (Kelkay, 2018). The education policy document of Ethiopia's Ministry of Education emphasizes the importance of professional principles, including a code of ethics and professional development, for school leaders and educational personnel. It recognizes school leadership as a specialized profession requiring specific training and skills to effectively lead educational organizations and schools (MoE, 1994). The government has also recognized the importance of empowering school leaders through professional development initiatives, as outlined in the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP IV, 2010) and the MoE (2013) National Professional Standard for School Principals, Ministry of Education Ethiopia. These policy manuscripts emphasize the need for continuous learning, capacity building and leadership development for school leaders to drive educational change and improvement (Taddese & Rao, 2022).

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Studying the perceptions and practices of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa is significant for several reasons. First, it provides valuable insights for policymakers and educational authorities to develop targeted policies and programs that address the challenges of school leaders in the region. Second, understanding the effective leadership practices and strategies employed by school leaders can help enhance their effectiveness and contribute to improved educational outcomes (Desta et al., 2013). Additionally, studying school leaders' perceptions and practices facilitates knowledge sharing, collaboration, and the development of tailored professional development opportunities that can strengthen the overall educational leadership ecosystem in Addis Ababa (Kelkay, 2018). Ultimately, this research can drive school improvement efforts and support the success of students in the region.

Limited research exists on the CPD of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa. Further research is needed to gain insights into their unique context, needs, and challenges, which can inform the development of targeted CPD programs that address their requirements. Additionally, the effectiveness and impact of CPD programs on primary school leaders' professional growth and leadership practices in Addis Ababa need further investigation. Understanding the outcomes and changes resulting from CPD participation can inform the design of effective CPD initiatives.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following two are the basic research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa towards continuous professional development (CPD) programs?
2. What are the current CPD practices and experiences of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

By applying the Situated Learning Theory, researchers can explore the ways in which school leaders in Addis Ababa public primary schools learn from their experiences, interact with their colleagues, and engage in professional development. Situated Learning Theory, developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991), emphasizes the importance of learning within the context of real-life situations rather than in isolation. This theory posits that learning is a social process that occurs through active participation in authentic tasks and communities of practice (Billett, 1996). In the context of CPD for school leaders, the Situated Learning Theory suggests that effective professional development should be situated within the specific context of school leadership and provide opportunities for school leaders to engage in authentic, real-world tasks and challenges (Harrison & McKeon, 2008). It emphasizes the importance of collaboration, reflection, and the development of a community of practice among school leaders. (Sentance & Humphreys, 2018).

When conducting research on the perceptions and practices of Addis Ababa public primary school leaders regarding CPD, the Situated Learning Theory can provide a critical framework for understanding how school leaders learn and develop their leadership skills in the specific context of their schools (Sadler, 2009). By considering the theory's principles, researchers can gain insights into how school leaders perceive and engage in professional development activities (Cobb & Bowers, 1999).

The Situated Learning Theory suggests that learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge and skills in isolation but is deeply rooted in the social and cultural context in which it

occurs (McLellan, 1996). For Addis Ababa public primary school leaders, this means that effective CPD programs should go beyond traditional training sessions and workshops and instead focus on providing opportunities for school leaders to engage in authentic tasks and challenges that are directly relevant to their roles and responsibilities (Collin et al., 2012). These tasks could include problem-solving exercises, case studies, action research projects, or collaborative projects with other school leaders (Filipe et al., 2014). By engaging in these real-life tasks, school leaders can develop a deeper understanding of the complexities and demands of their leadership roles (Drude, 2019).

Additionally, the Situated Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of collaboration and the development of a community of practice (Lave, 1991). School leaders can benefit from engaging in collaborative activities with their peers, such as professional learning communities, mentoring programs, or joint projects (Admiraal et al., 2021). These collaborative experiences allow school leaders to share their knowledge, experiences, and best practices, and collectively reflect on their leadership practices (Rubin, 2009). This can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing CPD programs and inform the design of future professional development initiatives tailored to the needs of school leaders in Addis Ababa and similar contexts.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to gain comprehensive insights into the perceptions and practices of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa regarding CPD. The research design included both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, allowing for a holistic understanding of the topic. A total of 20 public primary schools were selected using a stratified random sampling technique, and 50 school leaders, consisting of principals and vice principals, participated in the study.

### Sampling

The study employed two distinct components for the sampling process: one for surveys and one for interviews. To ensure a representative sample of 20 public primary schools in Addis Ababa for the surveys, the technique of stratified random sampling was used. This approach considered factors like school size, location, and ownership (public/private) in order to include a diverse range of schools for the study. In each selected public primary school, the principal and the three vice principals were included in the pool of sampling for the survey, resulting in a total of 40 school leaders participating, 10 principals and 30 vice principals. Additionally, 10 principals not participating in the survey were intentionally selected for qualitative interviews. Therefore, in total, there were 50 school leaders who participated in the study, 40 sampled for quantitative survey and 10 for qualitative interview.

### Data Collection

**a. Surveys:** A structured questionnaire was developed based on an extensive literature review and piloted for validity and reliability. The survey included questions on demographics, perceptions of CPD, CPD practices, challenges and desired areas for professional development. Surveys were administered electronically or in person, based on participant preferences.

**b. Interviews:** Ten (10) school leaders were interviewed using a semi-structured approach to obtain more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and practices of CPD. The 10 public primary school leaders sampled for the interview are different from the 40 individuals to be surveyed. The 10 school leaders interviewed were school principals of the selected schools.

## Instrument Validity and Reliability

In the survey instrument used for the study, validity and reliability were determined. The instrument employed a 5-point Likert scale as the response format. The validity of the survey instrument was assessed through content validity which ensured that the survey items were relevant and representative of the construct being measured.

Reliability of the survey instrument was also evaluated. This was done through measures of internal consistency reliability. The technique of Cronbach's Alpha was employed to evaluate the internal coherence of the survey items.

*Table 1: The Reliability of the Scales*

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Acceptability
Perceptions Towards CPD	0.832	5	Acceptable
CPD Practices and Experiences	0.796	5	Acceptable

As indicated in Table 1 above, the Cronbach's Alpha values for both variables exceed 0.7 (specifically, 0.832 and 0.796). These values indicate that the instrument demonstrates acceptable internal consistency.

## Data Analysis

**Quantitative analysis:** The survey data collected from the public primary school leaders were subjected to quantitative analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and describe the data, including measures such as frequencies, means and standard deviations. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of the responses of the participants and allowed for a better understanding of the distribution of variables related to perceptions and practices of CPD among public primary school leaders.

**Qualitative analysis:** The qualitative data collected through interviews with the ten public primary school leaders underwent qualitative analysis, specifically employing thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns and themes within qualitative data. The transcriptions of the interviews were carefully examined and analyzed to identify key themes and patterns related to school leaders' perceptions and practices of CPD.

## Ethical Considerations

The study prioritized ethical considerations by implementing measures to protect participants and maintain ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants were fully informed and voluntarily agreed to participate. Confidentiality was protected through anonymization and secure data storage. Data integrity was maintained through rigorous data management and analysis techniques.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the outcomes of surveys and interviews conducted with public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa. It explores their perspectives on CPD, their engagement in CPD activities, the impact on their leadership practices, and suggestions for improvement. It also provides a concise analysis and interpretation of the findings in the context of school leadership in Addis Ababa.

### Research Question 1:

What are the perceptions of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa towards continuous professional development (CPD) programs?

**Table 2:** *The Perceptions of Public Primary School Leaders Towards CPD*

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Continuous professional development (CPD) programs are essential for enhancing the knowledge and skills of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa.	40	3.75	0.93
2	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive CPD programs as valuable opportunities for professional growth and development.	40	3.99	0.74
3	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa believe that participating in CPD programs positively impacts their effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities.	40	4.2	0.82
4	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively seek out and participate in a variety of CPD programs to enhance their knowledge and skills.	40	4.1	0.72
5	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive CPD programs as necessary for staying updated with the latest educational trends and best practices.	40	3.65	0.68
<b>Overall Average</b>		40	3.94	0.78

### Essential CPD Programs for Primary School Leaders in Addis Ababa

According to the Situated Learning Theory, the findings from Item 1, ( $M=3.75$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ), Table 2, suggest that the implementation of CPD programs is crucial for the public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa to enhance their knowledge and skills effectively. Situated learning emphasizes the importance of learning in authentic contexts and through active participation in relevant communities of practice. By participating in CPD programs, school leaders have the opportunity to engage in situated learning experiences where they can acquire new knowledge, learn innovative strategies, and develop essential skills that are necessary for effective leadership in the education sector.

Furthermore, the findings indicate a strong connection or inference between CPD programs and the professional growth of school leaders. Situated Learning Theory highlights the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. CPD programs provide a platform for

school leaders to engage in collaborative learning with their peers, share experiences, and collectively explore solutions to common challenges. Through these collaborative learning experiences, school leaders can enhance their professional growth and develop a deeper understanding of effective leadership practices. Similar to the quantitative data, one of the interviewees said:

*I firmly believe that continuous professional development (CPD) programs are essential for enhancing my knowledge, skills, and effectiveness as an educational leader. They provide valuable opportunities to stay updated with the latest research and best practices, collaborate with colleagues, and engage in self-reflection for continuous growth. CPD programs are crucial for meeting the evolving needs of my students and school community. (Interviewee 1, December 2022)*

Moreover, the findings suggest that CPD programs play a significant role in keeping primary school leaders informed and up-to-date with the latest educational practices and policies. Situated learning emphasizes the importance of learning within the context of real-world challenges and needs. The rapidly evolving field of education requires school leaders to continuously adapt and refine their approaches to meet the changing needs of students and the demands of the education system. CPD programs provide a structured framework for school leaders to engage in ongoing learning, gain insights from experts in the field, and explore emerging research and trends. This situated learning approach ensures that the professional development of school leaders is relevant, timely, and aligned with the current realities of the education sector.

### **Valuable Growth: Perceptions of CPD for School Leaders in Addis Ababa**

Situated Learning Theory provides insights into the findings from Table 2, Item 2 ( $M=3.99$ ,  $SD=0.74$ ), highlighting the importance of the social and contextual aspects of learning. According to Situated Learning Theory, learning is situated within a specific context and occurs through active participation and interaction with others. In the case of CPD programs for primary school leaders in Addis Ababa, the situated learning perspective suggests that the positive perception and recognition of the benefits of these programs are influenced by the social and contextual factors surrounding the leaders' learning experiences.

The findings indicate that school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive CPD programs as valuable opportunities for their professional growth and development. Situated Learning Theory emphasizes that learning is not an isolated individual activity but occurs within a community of practice. CPD programs offer a range of learning opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, conferences, and collaborative activities that are specifically designed to address the needs of school leaders. These structured learning experiences provide a clear direction for professional development and enable school leaders to apply their learning as a platform for school leaders to engage in collaborative learning with their peers, share experiences, and collectively explore solutions to common challenges. Through these collaborative learning experiences, school leaders can enhance their professional growth and develop a deeper understanding of effective leadership practices. The social interaction and collaboration within CPD programs contribute to the positive perception of their value. Just like the numerical data, one of the interview participants expressed a similar sentiment:



*As a primary school leader in Addis Ababa, I value CPD programs for their role in my professional growth and development. They keep me updated with the latest research and best practices, helping me improve my teaching techniques and adapt to student needs. CPD programs also foster collaboration and networking, allowing me to exchange ideas and learn from other educators while building a supportive professional network. (Interviewee 3, December 2022)*

Furthermore, the findings suggest that school leaders in Addis Ababa view CPD programs as valuable because they provide a structured and focused approach to their professional development. Situated Learning Theory highlights the importance of learning within the context of real-world challenges and needs directly related to their roles and responsibilities. The alignment between the learning opportunities provided by CPD programs and the contextual needs of school leaders contributes to their perception of value.

### **Positive Impact: CPD Programs and School Leader Effectiveness**

Situated Learning Theory provides insights into the findings from Table 2, Item 3 ( $M=4.2$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ), highlighting the significance of the social and contextual aspects of learning and belief formation. According to Situated Learning Theory, learning is situated within a specific context and occurs through active participation and interaction with others. In the case of CPD programs for primary school leaders in Addis Ababa, the situated learning perspective suggests that the belief in the positive impact of these programs is influenced by the social and contextual factors surrounding the leaders' learning experiences.

The findings indicate that school leaders in Addis Ababa hold the belief that participating in CPD programs positively impacts their effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities. Situated Learning Theory emphasizes that learning is not an isolated individual activity but occurs within a community of practice. CPD programs provide a platform for school leaders to engage in collaborative learning, share experiences, and exchange knowledge with their peers. Through these collaborative learning experiences, school leaders gain new insights, strategies, and best practices that they believe contribute to their effectiveness as educational leaders. The social interaction and knowledge exchange within CPD programs contribute to the formation of these beliefs. One of the interviewees shared a comparable viewpoint to the quantitative data:

*CPD programs are invaluable for my professional growth and benefit my students and school community. They keep me updated with the latest research and educational practices, providing insights into innovative teaching methodologies and emerging technologies. This knowledge enables me to make informed decisions, implement evidence-based practices, and create an engaging learning environment. CPD programs also offer specialized training for school leadership, equipping me with the skills to effectively lead my school and foster student success and well-being. (Interviewee 5, December 2022)*

Furthermore, the findings suggest that school leaders attribute the positive impact of CPD programs to their ability to acquire new insights, strategies and best practices. Situated Learning Theory highlights the importance of learning within the context of real-world challenges and needs. CPD programs offer opportunities for school leaders to access up-to-date information, research findings, and innovative approaches that are relevant to their roles. This exposure empowers school



leaders to make informed decisions, implement effective instructional practices, and provide better support to teachers and staff. The alignment between the learning opportunities provided by CPD programs and the contextual needs of school leaders contributes to the formation of their beliefs regarding the positive impact of these programs.

### **Active Participation: Primary School Leaders Engaging in CPD**

Based on Table 2, Item 4 ( $M=4.1$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ), it can be inferred that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa demonstrate a proactive and enthusiastic attitude towards their professional development. This implies that these leaders actively seek out and engage in various continuous professional development (CPD) programs. Their proactive approach indicates a commitment to enhancing their knowledge and skills in order to improve their effectiveness as educational leaders, aligning with the principles of Situated Learning Theory.

The Situated Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of learning within authentic and meaningful contexts. Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa, by actively seeking out CPD programs, recognize the value of ongoing learning and growth. They understand that education is a rapidly evolving field, and staying updated with the latest research, practices, and innovations is crucial. Actively seeking out CPD programs enables them to engage in authentic learning experiences that are situated within their roles as educational leaders. One of the individuals interviewed expressed a perspective that aligned closely with the findings derived from the quantitative data:

*Actively participating in CPD programs helps me expand my knowledge and stay updated with the latest research, best practices, and innovative approaches in education. These programs provide valuable insights into teaching methodologies, assessment techniques, and emerging technologies, allowing me to make informed decisions and improve student learning outcomes. Engaging in self-reflection and seeking feedback from experts enhances my leadership practices, leading to a positive school culture and improved student outcomes. Additionally, CPD programs offer specialized training to develop the skills needed for my role as a primary school leader.  
(Interviewee 7, December 2022)*

Through their participation in a variety of CPD programs, primary school leaders in Addis Ababa demonstrate their dedication to professional development, which is a key aspect of Situated Learning Theory. They understand that effective leadership requires a well-rounded set of knowledge and skills. By engaging in diverse CPD programs, they acquire a broad range of competencies, including instructional strategies, curriculum development, assessment techniques, and leadership skills.

### **Staying Updated: CPD Programs for School Leaders in Addis Ababa**

Based on Item 5, ( $M=3.65$ ,  $SD=0.68$ ) in Table 2, it can be inferred that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa recognize the importance of continuous professional development (CPD) programs as a means to stay updated with the latest educational trends and best practices. This recognition aligns with the principles of Situated Learning Theory.

Situated Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of learning within authentic and meaningful contexts. Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa, by perceiving CPD programs as necessary, demonstrate their understanding that professional learning should be situated within their roles as educational leaders.

By participating in CPD programs, primary school leaders engage in authentic learning experiences that are situated within the context of their schools and educational systems. They have the opportunity to explore and apply new strategies, approaches, and best practices that are relevant to their specific educational contexts. This allows them to bridge the gap between theory and practice, integrating new knowledge and skills into their leadership roles and decision-making processes. The viewpoint shared by one of the interviewees closely mirrored the findings obtained from the quantitative data:

*By actively engaging in CPD, I can gain knowledge about new instructional strategies, curriculum frameworks, and assessment techniques that have the potential to enhance my teaching practices and improve student learning outcomes. The programs offer a platform for me to learn and adopt best practices in education. These programs bring together educators from diverse backgrounds, creating an environment where experiences can be shared, and ideas can be exchanged. Collaborative sessions and networking opportunities allow me to learn from the successes and challenges of my peers, expanding my repertoire of effective teaching and leadership practices.*  
(Interviewee 9, December 2022)

The findings indicate that the recognition of CPD programs as necessary reflects the commitment of primary school leaders in Addis Ababa to ongoing professional development, which is a key aspect of Situated Learning Theory. They understand that effective leadership requires continuous learning and growth. By actively participating in CPD programs, they demonstrate their dedication to expanding their knowledge and skills, enhancing their leadership practices, and improving educational outcomes within the situated context of their schools.

## Research Question 2

What are the current CPD practices and experiences of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa?

**Table 3:** *The Current CPD Practices and Experiences of public primary school leaders*

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
6	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa have access to a variety of CPD opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, or conferences.	40	4.2	0.66
7	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively engage in CPD activities to enhance their professional knowledge and skills.	40	4.1	0.78
8	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa receive support and encouragement from their institutions to participate in CPD programs.	40	3.69	0.63
9	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa have opportunities for collaborative learning and sharing best practices through CPD activities.	40	4.11	0.94
10	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive the current CPD practices as effective in addressing their professional development needs.	40	4.21	0.72
<b>Overall Average</b>		40	4.06	0.75

### **Diverse CPD Opportunities for Primary School Leaders in Addis Ababa**

The findings from Table 3, Item 6 ( $M=4.2$ ,  $SD=0.66$ ) viewed through the lens of Situated Learning Theory, suggests that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively seek out and participate in a variety of CPD programs, such as workshops, seminars and conferences. Situated Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of learning within authentic contexts and through active engagement in real-world practices.

This implies that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa recognize the value of learning through participation in CPD programs situated within the educational context. By actively seeking out workshops, seminars and conferences, they purposefully engage in learning experiences that directly relate to their roles as educational leaders. This active participation allows them to acquire knowledge and skills in a meaningful and practical manner. The following perspective articulated by one of the interview participants closely resembled the results obtained from the quantitative data.

*One of the primary CPD opportunities available to me is workshops. These workshops are organized by educational institutions, professional associations, and government bodies. Attending these workshops allows me to engage in interactive learning experiences where I can collaborate with experts in the field and fellow school leaders. I can acquire practical strategies, techniques, and insights that are directly applicable to my leadership role. Workshops cover a wide range of topics, including instructional leadership, curriculum development, assessment strategies, and school management. (Interviewee 2, December 2022)*

Situated Learning Theory also emphasizes the role of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. The findings suggest that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively engage with other professionals, experts and peers during CPD programs. Workshops, seminars and conferences provide platforms for networking, sharing experiences, and exchanging ideas.

### **Active Engagement: Primary School Leaders Pursuing CPD in Addis Ababa**

In the above Table 3, Item 7, (M=4.1, SD=0.78), the active engagement of primary school leaders in Addis Ababa in CPD activities to enhance their professional knowledge and skills aligns with the principles of the Situated Learning Theory. This demonstrates their recognition of the value of learning within authentic contexts and through active involvement in real-world practices.

This signifies that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa comprehend the significance of participating in CPD activities situated within the educational context. By proactively taking part in CPD activities, they immerse themselves in learning experiences that directly pertain to their roles as educational leaders.

Moreover, this indicates that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa acknowledge the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. They actively engage with other professionals, experts, and peers during CPD activities, fostering the exchange of experiences, ideas, and insights. This sociocultural aspect of CPD activities resonates with the Situated Learning Theory, which underscores the role of social engagement in knowledge acquisition and skill development. The viewpoint expressed below by one of the interview participants closely paralleled the findings derived from the quantitative data:

*I understand the importance of staying updated in the field of education and seek out CPD opportunities such as workshops, seminars and conferences to deepen my understanding of educational theories, learn from experts, and acquire practical strategies. Engaging in CPD activities also allows me to network with peers, collaborate, and acquire specific skills that contribute to my effectiveness in leading my school and supporting teachers. As a primary school leader, I prioritize my professional growth through active engagement in continuous professional development (CPD) activities. I recognize the ever-evolving nature of education and actively seek out workshops, seminars, and conferences to expand my knowledge, learn from experts, and acquire practical skills. By engaging in CPD, I not only deepen my understanding of educational theories but also foster collaboration with peers and acquire strategies that enhance my leadership abilities and support for teachers in my school. (Interviewee 4, December 2022)*

Furthermore, this suggests that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa view CPD activities as opportunities to learn within a community of practice. They recognize that learning is not solely

an individual endeavor but flourishes through involvement with experienced educators, researchers, and practitioners. By actively seeking out opportunities to learn from these individuals, primary school leaders can tap into a wealth of knowledge and expertise specific to their professional context.

### **Institutional Support: Encouraging CPD for Primary School Leaders in Addis Ababa**

Based on the data provided in Table 3, Item 8 ( $M=3.69$ ,  $SD=0.63$ ), the support and encouragement primary school leaders in Addis Ababa receive from their institutions to participate in CPD programs can be understood through the lens of Social Learning Theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interactions and observational learning in the process of human development and learning. In this context, the fact that institutions in Addis Ababa provide support and encouragement to primary school leaders implies their recognition of the value of fostering a culture of continuous professional development. By actively supporting CPD participation, institutions implicitly acknowledge the importance of creating an environment that promotes ongoing learning and growth among their leaders.

Drawing from Social Learning Theory, the support and encouragement provided by institutions indicate their understanding of the benefits of learning within authentic contexts and the value of active participation in CPD programs for the professional development of their leaders. An interview participant exhibited a remarkable similarity to the findings from the quantitative data:

*I receive strong support and encouragement from my institution to actively participate in continuous professional development (CPD) programs. My school recognizes the value of ongoing learning and the positive impact it has on my leadership abilities and the overall quality of education provided. My institution understands that CPD programs offer opportunities for me to expand my knowledge, acquire new skills, and stay updated with the latest educational practices. They encourage me to take part in workshops, seminars, conferences, and other relevant CPD activities that align with my professional goals and the needs of the school. By providing support and encouragement, my institution demonstrates its commitment to my professional growth and development.*  
(Interviewee 6, December 2022)

This allocation of resources aligns with the principles of Social Learning Theory, as it emphasizes the importance of providing the necessary resources and support for individuals to engage in meaningful learning experiences. Additionally, the support and encouragement from institutions imply that ongoing learning is valued and prioritized within the educational community. This sends a message that professional growth is not only encouraged but actively supported, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and development among primary school leaders.

### **Collaborative Learning: CPD Activities for Sharing Best Practices in Addis Ababa**

In Table 3, Item 9 ( $M=4.11$ ,  $SD=0.94$ ), the existence of robust collaborative learning opportunities and the deliberate sharing of best practices through CPD activities for primary school leaders in Addis Ababa signifies a comprehensive commitment by their educational institutions to foster a vibrant and supportive professional learning community. The fact that primary school leaders are provided with collaborative learning opportunities implies that their institutions recognize the immense value of social interaction, shared experiences, and collective knowledge construction in the process of professional development. It suggests that leaders have the privilege to actively engage and collaborate with their peers, subject-matter experts, and experienced professionals

during CPD activities. This fosters a sense of shared purpose, facilitates the exchange of diverse perspectives, and nurtures a culture of collaboration and continuous learning.

Furthermore, the deliberate sharing of best practices implies that primary school leaders in Addis Ababa have access to a rich repertoire of practical knowledge, successful instructional strategies, and effective leadership approaches within their professional community. It suggests that leaders are encouraged to share their own expertise and experiences to contribute to the collective wisdom of the community. This sharing of best practices enables leaders to learn from one another, adapt successful strategies to their own context, and continuously improve their instructional and leadership practices. The presence of such collaborative learning and sharing opportunities creates an environment where primary school leaders can actively participate in a vibrant community of practice. It implies that leaders are part of a supportive network where they can engage in meaningful dialogue, receive constructive feedback, and benefit from the collective wisdom of their colleagues. The community of practice fosters the growth of professional relationships, nurtures a sense of belonging, and provides a platform for ongoing reflection, collaboration, and professional growth.

### **Perceived Effectiveness: CPD Practices Meeting Needs of School Leaders in Addis Ababa**

From the findings on Table 3, Item 10 ( $M=4.21$ ,  $SD=0.72$ ), the perception of primary school leaders in Addis Ababa regarding the effectiveness of current CPD practices in addressing their professional development needs indicates a positive alignment between the provided opportunities and their specific requirements. The fact that primary school leaders perceive the current CPD practices as effective implies that these practices are considered valuable and beneficial in supporting their ongoing professional growth. It suggests that the CPD activities provided are relevant, timely, and cater to the specific needs and challenges faced by the leaders in their roles. The viewpoint expressed by one of the interview participants in the following statement bore a striking resemblance to the findings drawn from the analysis of the quantitative data.

*The CPD practices in place provide me with a diverse range of options, including workshops, seminars, conferences and specialized training programs. These opportunities cover a wide range of relevant topics and are designed to meet the specific needs of school leaders like myself. Whether it's instructional leadership, curriculum development, or school management, I can find CPD activities that directly address my professional development goals. The content and delivery methods are well-structured and engaging, ensuring that I gain practical insights and strategies that can be applied directly to my work as a school leader. The current CPD practices foster a collaborative and supportive environment.*

*(Interviewee 8, December 2022)*

The positive perception of effectiveness also suggests that the CPD practices in place are designed to address the evolving demands and changing educational landscape in Addis Ababa. This alignment between the CPD offerings and the needs of primary school leaders demonstrates a commitment to providing relevant and impactful professional development opportunities. Furthermore, the perception of effectiveness indicates that the current CPD practices are likely to be well-structured and thoughtfully designed.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study, which employed a mixed design approach and included a sample of 50 school leaders from 20 primary schools in Addis Ababa, offers valuable insights into the current state of CPD in the educational landscape. The findings of the study indicate that school leaders generally recognize the importance of CPD and its potential to enhance their leadership skills and improve overall school performance. However, there are variations in the extent to which CPD is prioritized and effectively implemented across different schools. Some school leaders actively engage in CPD programs, attending workshops, conferences, and professional development courses, while others face challenges in accessing relevant opportunities due to resource constraints or limited support from educational authorities. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of collaboration and networking among school leaders as key factors in promoting effective CPD. The exchange of ideas, sharing of best practices, and building professional relationships were identified as crucial elements in fostering continuous growth and improvement among school leaders. It is evident from the study that there is a need for concerted efforts from various stakeholders, including educational policymakers, school administrators, and the wider educational community, to enhance the provision of CPD opportunities for school leaders. These efforts should focus on addressing the barriers to access and ensuring the availability of relevant and high-quality CPD programs that align with the specific needs and challenges faced by school leaders in Addis Ababa.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING**

This article highlights the importance of educational planners prioritizing and investing in continuous training and development programs for school leaders. It suggests that allocating resources to support professional development initiatives for school leaders should be a key focus of educational planning. The findings from this study can be used by educational planners to create training programs that specifically target the enhancement of leadership skills. The study emphasizes the need for monitoring and evaluating the impact of professional development programs for school leaders. Educational planning should incorporate mechanisms to assess the effectiveness and outcomes of these initiatives. By collecting data and feedback, educational planners can make informed decisions, refine existing programs, and develop new strategies to enhance the quality and relevance of professional development for school leaders.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire To Be Filled by Public Primary School Leaders

**I: General Information.** Sex: Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_  
 Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Academic Degree: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer (X) according to the following key:  
 SA = **Strongly Agree**; A = **Agree**; U = **Undecided**; D = **Disagree**; SD = **Strongly Disagree**

II.	The Perceptions Public Primary School Leaders Towards CPD	Rating Scale				
		SD	D	U	A	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Continuous professional development (CPD) programs are essential for enhancing the knowledge and skills of public primary school leaders in Addis Ababa.					
2	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive CPD programs as valuable opportunities for professional growth and development.					
3	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa believe that participating in CPD programs positively impacts their effectiveness in their roles and responsibilities.					
4	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively seek out and participate in a variety of CPD programs to enhance their knowledge and skills.					
5	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive CPD programs as necessary for staying updated with the latest educational trends and best practices.					
III.	The Current CPD Practices and Experiences of Public Primary School Leaders	SD	D	U	A	SA
6	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa have access to a variety of CPD opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, or conferences.					
7	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa actively engage in CPD activities to enhance their professional knowledge and skills.					
8	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa receive support and encouragement from their institutions to participate in CPD programs.					
9	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa have opportunities for collaborative learning and sharing best practices through CPD activities.					
10	Primary school leaders in Addis Ababa perceive the current CPD practices as effective in addressing their professional development needs.					

## **Appendix 2: Interview Guides for Public Primary School Leaders**

### **Section 1: Background Information**

1. Can you please provide a brief overview of your role as a primary school leader in Addis Ababa?
2. How long have you been serving in this role, and what motivated you to become a school leader?
3. In your opinion, why is continuous professional development important for primary school leaders?

### **Section 2: Current Practices in Continuous Professional Development**

1. What types of continuous professional development opportunities are currently available to primary school leaders in Addis Ababa?
2. How are these CPD programs designed and organized? Are they mandatory or voluntary?
3. What are the common challenges faced by primary school leaders in accessing and participating in CPD activities?
4. Are there any specific strategies or initiatives employed to overcome these challenges?

# LIVING AUTONOMY OF ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF JIMMA UNIVERSITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to assess the practice of institutional autonomy at Jimma University in Ethiopia. The study employed a mixed approach by collecting research data through a questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and document analysis. Two hundred and thirty-two randomly selected instructors and academic leaders were contacted through the questionnaire, and nine purposively selected informants were interviewed. The quantitative data were analyzed by using mean values, standard deviations, and independent sample t-tests, while the qualitative data were examined by identifying common codes and emerging themes. The findings indicated that organizational, academic, and financial autonomy practices were lower than formal autonomy. On the other hand, staff autonomy was relatively at a medium level, and the overall practice of institutional autonomy at Jimma University was poor. Thus, living autonomy was found to be different from formal autonomy. The study also found that the influence of the internal and external environment might contribute to the divergence. As a result, legal provisions could not guarantee the university's living autonomy, but the relationship between the environment and the university does. Therefore, in exercising university autonomy, educational leaders and managers should take the interface between the university and its environment into account.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the importance of institutional autonomy in higher education institutions has gained global attention. Higher education institutions acknowledge that institutional autonomy, a crucial component of governance, significantly influences their decision-making and overall operations. When given the freedom and flexibility to adapt, institutions can effectively respond to the changing requirements and expectations of their stakeholders. In addition, they strengthen their role in their contribution to the sustainable development of the nation.

According to Levacic (2002), university autonomy is one of the requirements for higher education institutions to be effective and efficient. To respond more quickly to external challenges, address social and economic needs, and manage resources in a more strategic, efficient, and effective way, higher education institutions need autonomy - the ability to independently shape their governance structures within established accountability frameworks.

Enders et al. (2013) provide a comprehensive understanding of autonomy by illustrating two dimensions. First, it refers to the institution's self-capacity, highlighting its ability to act independently and make decisions based on its internal resources and expertise. Second, autonomy also pertains to the institution's relationship with its external environment, emphasizing its independence and freedom from external control or undue influence. Hence, Enders and his coauthors indicated that institutional autonomy should be understood from both perspectives.

Furthermore, Pruvot and Estermann (2017) described operational freedom and the ability to choose the framework and structure of the decision-making process as examples of institutional autonomy that comprises organizational autonomy, academic autonomy, staff autonomy, and financial autonomy. In this article, "formal autonomy" refers to the legal framework of autonomy

granted by the state through policies, rules, and regulations; "living autonomy" refers to the exercise of the legal framework's granted autonomy.

As noted by Shaw (2018), although the policy documents have been articulated to establish autonomous public universities in the four perspectives since the imperial regime, this initiative was suspended during the Derg regime in Ethiopia. The present government, as repeatedly stated in various legislation, policy, and strategic plan documents, has consistently expressed its commitment to developing autonomous and accountable public higher education institutions with a specific focus on universities (the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2019, 2023).

Despite the government's efforts to ensure the institutional autonomy of such universities, there is a difference between formal and living autonomy (Saint, 2009). Several aspects of the internal and external environment in which universities function may construct a distinction between what the legal framework states and what the universities practice.

We selected Jimma University as a study sample to assess the living autonomy of higher education institutions. Evaluating the institutional autonomy, both living and formal, at this research university provides valuable insights for other public universities. Thus, this study intends to examine the status of institutional autonomy and identify the rationales for the divergence of formal and living autonomy in public universities.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Perspectives on Institutional Autonomy**

The conceptualization of institutional autonomy necessitates an understanding of autonomy's essence. In this regard, a wide range of scholars have provided numerous definitions for the idea of autonomy. The conventional definition of autonomy is self-steering or ruling, wherein organizations have the freedom to select the rules and regulations they believe to be useful and to exercise their judgment and initiative (Bain, 2003; Ballou, 1998; de Boer & Enders, 2017; Pizanti & Lerner, 2003; Verhoest et al., 2004). The above definition concentrates on two concepts: protection and actionability. The first is the absence of coercive techniques or the freedom from external intervention, and the ability to make decisions without interference. The second one, which is the ability to act, is concerned with a person's choices, desires, and abilities to use those choices and abilities to control her/his surroundings. This comprises the tools, guidance, and interpersonal support required to genuinely weigh options and reach judgments (Verhoest et al., 2004). On the other hand, there are two aspects to autonomy: interactions within and between the outside worlds. Inward interaction demonstrates how much an entity's environment allows it to govern itself, whereas outward interaction represents an entity's capacity and ability to react to external forces. As a result, we describe the notion of autonomy in terms of proclaimed independence (formal autonomy) and the capacity for thought. In the same vein, Sarpong (2021) pointed out that while universities may have autonomy granted to them through official policies and regulations, the actual implementation and exercise of that autonomy does not always match the formal, stated autonomy.

In describing institutional autonomy, scholars in the area offered many explanations from the perspectives of many dimensions. Berdahl (1990) was the first to characterize autonomy in higher education in terms of its multifaceted nature. He made a distinction between procedural autonomy, which he refers to as the procedures or structures that assist organizations in pursuing their objective (the "how" of the mission), and substantive autonomy, which he refers to as deciding the "what" of the mission. Even though he did not properly define the variables, his attempt (at least) to partition the general concept into two important dimensions is beneficial. Although Berdahl made a significant contribution to our knowledge of university autonomy, his formulation does not

clearly distinguish between features of substantive autonomy and procedural autonomy. Moreover, the categorization of the dimensions was unclear when analyzing the two aspects. For example, although the university views instructors as a component of its substantive autonomy, its primary function is not to hire professors.

Since 2009, the European University Association (EUA) has also been attempting to create a scorecard for institutional autonomy that helps highlight the components of institutional autonomy and substantive autonomy. Presently, European universities use the scorecard as a guide for describing university autonomy (Privot & Estermann, 2017). The EUA university autonomy scorecard, however, has drawn criticism for its approach to data collection and indicator development (Nokkala & Bladh, 2014). Despite these drawbacks, it outlines the metrics under its four (organizational, academic, financial, and staff) dimensions of university autonomy, which are easy to comprehend.

Besides, Maassen et al. (2017) found that the dimensions of university autonomy are influenced by the specific context and ideological views of a given state. This is because institutional autonomy is a relative and relational concept - it describes how universities interact with their environment, government authorities, their stakeholders, and broader society. This perspective is based on formal institutional autonomy.

In summary, universities' institutional autonomy could be better conceptualized by explicitly describing its dimensions in a detailed manner. The EUA scorecard's formulation of autonomy dimensions provides better insights when compared to Berdahl's categorization. Moreover, the EUA dimensions provide an understanding of the essence of the concept by contextualizing the operations. Besides, living autonomy encompasses not only an understanding of its dimensions but also the universities' ability to implement these elements and the impact of environmental factors.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

To meet the demand for skilled labor for a nation's economic transformation, higher education institutions play an irreplaceable role. The important issue is how to raise higher education institutions' productivity so that they develop into inventive and creative businesses, to which enhancing their governance systems contributes a lot.

To improve the governance system of public higher education institutions, Ethiopia has tried several policy reforms. Teshome (2007) pointed out that, despite the government's multiple attempts and efforts for more than two decades to establish effective governance systems in Ethiopian public higher education institutions, the practices of institutional autonomy were not encouraging.

Numerous studies on the governance of higher education institutions, including Gebru (2013), Tamrat and Teferra (2018), Woldegiyorgis (2014), and Gebru, Hondeghem, and Broucke (2020) found that institutional autonomy is quite poor. Furthermore, according to Dabi (2015) and Yohannes (2010), Ethiopian public universities continue to face difficulties due to the erosion of institutional autonomy brought on by poor policy implementation. Studies also showed that government interference in the decision-making process minimizes the institutions' self-reliance. For example, Gebru, Hondeghem, and Broucke (2020), who assessed the institutional autonomy level of Mekelle University using the EUAS tool, found that institutional autonomy was low due to the interferences.

On the other hand, studies conducted on the living autonomy of Ethiopian public universities so far are uncommon or insufficient (de Boer & Enders, 2017). For example, Lebata (2022) conducted a case study on institutional autonomy from the perspectives of formal and de facto (living) autonomy at Adama Science and Technology University and concluded that de facto

autonomy is distinct from formal autonomy as the result of numerous environmental pressures like market and community perspectives, political influence, and excessive resource dependence.

Other local studies that include Lerra (2019), Yohannes (2010), Kassahun (2015), Lerra and Omer (2017), Gebru (2013), Tamrat and Teferra (2018), Woldegiyorgis (2014), and Gebru et al. (2020) are primarily concerned with the governance structure of higher education as a whole or the level of institutional autonomy and accountability. These studies fail to conduct in-depth investigations on the influence of the public research university environment (internal and external) and the discrepancy between the formal autonomy provided by the legal framework and the actual practices (living autonomy). However, analyzing the reasons behind these differences can shed light on the current state of institutional autonomy in the governance of higher education institutions. Therefore, this study is focused on examining the current state of institutional autonomy and the reasons behind its deviation from the legal guarantees found in higher education governance legislation and policy guidance. It investigated institutional autonomy from the perspective of the four dimensions of autonomy: organizational autonomy, academic autonomy, financial autonomy, and staff autonomy.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects of institutional autonomy does Jimma University exercise?
2. To what extent does Jimma University exercise the different aspects of institutional autonomy?
3. What aspects of the environmental factors affect the exercise of institutional autonomy at Jimma University?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study employed a pragmatic worldview that allows the use of a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods design to assess the current state and the influence of its environment on living autonomy at Jimma University. The mixed method allows the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. In this study, the values and knowledge gained from both types of data were useful in developing a holistic picture of the up-to-date state of living autonomy in the university. It is also less time-consuming because both qualitative and quantitative data collection occurs concurrently during the same visit to the field (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2012). Moreover, by merging the characteristics of the quantitative and qualitative traditions, mixed-methods research provides answers to questions that cannot be answered with a single method (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

#### **Research Participants**

Jimma University, categorized as a research university by the Ministry of Education of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, was purposively selected as a sample institution for this study for several reasons. One reason is the willingness of the principals of the university to take part in the study. The second reason is that it was found to be convenient for the researchers due to the fact it is accessible through alternative transportation facilities (travel/flight). The other cause is that a similar investigation had not been conducted at the university before.



## Sampling Techniques

Multi-stage sampling method was employed to select academic leaders (deans, department heads) and academic staff (instructors). First, colleges, schools, faculties, and departments were selected using simple random sampling, and then academic leaders and instructors were drawn using the same technique. On the other hand, a purposive sampling technique was used to select two senior professors, a finance director, a human resources director, a college dean, two vice presidents, and two senior experts on institutional autonomy from the Ministry of Education for interview participants. These interviewees were selected because of their position and experience in the university. These participants were given codes to make the discussion of qualitative data impersonal. Accordingly, labels (JU1, JU2, JU3, JU4, JU5, JU6, JU7, JU8, and JU9) were assigned respectively.

## Research Instruments

This study gathered data by using a self-designed questionnaire, semi-structured interview questions, and document analysis. The questionnaire is composed of three sections: respondents' demographic background, instructors' and leaders' perceptions of institutional autonomy practice, and respondents' opinions on the effect of internal and external environments on the realization of legally provided autonomy. These closed-ended items were five-point Likert scales where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

The content validity of the items was approved by two experts in the area, both of whom were from the Educational Planning and Management Department in the College of Education and Behavioral Studies at Addis Ababa University. Likewise, the inter-item reliability analysis of each questionnaire scale (as indicated in Table 1) exceeds Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 showing better consistency.

**Table 1**  
*Reliability of Constructs*

Constructs	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Organizational Autonomy	11	.885
Academic Autonomy	18	.924
Financial Autonomy	10	.898
Staff Autonomy	7	.918

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the construct validity of institutional autonomy and reveal the factor structure. We used principal components and direct oblimin rotation methods for this analysis. The reason for this is that the principal component method is the most frequently and easily used method in practice, and the direct oblimin rotation method is used when it is considered that there is a relationship between factors.

Initially, it was found that the Kasier-Meyer-Olikin (KMO) sample adequacy value was 0.899, indicating that the sample size was sufficient for exploratory factor analysis. According to Field (2009), this value is deemed sufficient when it is above 0.50 and classified in the "excellent" category between 0.80-0.90. We also found that the KMO values calculated for each item were the lowest, at 0.82, confirming that the sample was sufficient. In addition, as a result of Bartlett's test,  $p < 0.05$  and its finding showed that the correlations between the items were large enough for EFA.

The EFA revealed that institutional autonomy comprised 46 items with 4 sub-dimensions

(factors), accounting for 71.02% of the total variance. This led to the conclusion that institutional autonomy was a valid feature. We determined the factor loads to have the lowest value, 0.606. Therefore, Field (2009) accepted factor loads of 0.40 and above as ideal, indicating that the items significantly contributed to the factors. The factors identified were organizational, academic, financial, and staff autonomy.

The qualitative data were gathered using semi-structured interview guide questions derived from the research questions. The questions were designed to gather information on the realization of institutional autonomy, encompassing its essence, practice, challenges, and impact on the university's internal and external environments. In addition, document analysis was employed. Documents such as education policies, higher education proclamations, autonomous university proclamations, education sector development plans, Jimma University legislation, and various procedures were analyzed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The quantitative and qualitative data were collected in December 2023 concurrently. The return rate of the questionnaire was 92.8%. The quantitative raw data were entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24, where we performed further transformations. Descriptive statistics like frequency distribution, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics like the independent sample t-test were calculated. The results were presented in tables. On the other hand, interviews were conducted at the interviewee's convenience, with an average duration of one hour and thirty minutes per interview. The data were then transcribed and grouped under themes that were aligned with the research questions. The qualitative data also underwent content and thematic analyses in an inductive approach. The results were presented using both direct and indirect quotes. The simultaneous presentation of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed the beauty of the two forms of information, projecting a concrete and vivid account of the issues under investigation. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative data results were triangulated by identifying the points of convergence and divergence, integrating the findings, and lastly interpreting and presenting the results to answer the research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since the study involved interacting with human beings, the study adhered strictly to the ethical protocols for data collection and analysis. The researchers communicated with concerned bodies of all administrative levels from the Ministry of Education through the university's president's office to the target colleges, schools, institutes, and offices to elicit participants who were willing to provide information. The participants were assured about the confidentiality of their responses and that the information they provided would be solely used for academic purposes.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

A larger proportion of the study participants were male, 186 (80.2%), and largely 180 (77.6%) were aged between 31 and 50 years old. The majority of the participants' work experience ranges from 6 to 15 years. About 93.5% of the respondents hold second and third-degree, while respondents with lecturer and assistant professor academic rank constituted 90.5% of the sample. Thus, these diverse demographic characteristics of the participants may indicate that the data obtained from them would be representative.

Autonomy is a complex concept from a higher education perspective. We followed the four dimensions mentioned earlier to simplify its assessment and analysis. These dimensions: organizational, academic, financial, and staff autonomy were used to assess the living institutional autonomy at Jimma University.

### Organizational Autonomy

Organizational autonomy refers to universities' independence in selection procedures for the executive head, dismissal of the executive head, term of office of the executive head, inclusion and selection of external board members, and capacity to decide on organizational structure (Estermann et al., 2011). Table 2 presents the perceptions of university instructors and academic leaders, based on this concept and the institutional autonomy legally granted to Jimma University by Higher Education Proclamation number 1152/2019.

As indicated in Table 2, most respondents did not think Jimma University had a lot of freedom to do things like choosing its president and vice presidents, running public ads for presidential recruitments, replacing vice presidents when their terms ended, selecting voting board members, and setting up its organizational structure (with an overall mean score of 2.08). Both groups of respondents, instructors (mean 2.12) and academic leaders (mean 1.95), rated similarly. Furthermore, the table showed a slight deviation from the respective mean value among respondents' perceptions of organizational autonomy indicators (see standard deviation values, which are about 0.71). Thus, respondents view the exercise of organizational autonomy as low, without much dispersion of responses from the mean score.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variable*

Variables	Respondents								
	Instructors			Academic Leaders			Total		
	N	Mean	Std. D	N	Mean	Std. D	N	Mean	Std. D
Organizational	178	2.12	0.71	54	1.95	0.68	232	2.08	0.71
Academic	178	2.09	0.66	54	2.07	0.68	232	2.09	0.66
Financial	178	2.3	0.80	54	2.18	0.59	232	2.28	0.76
Staff	178	2.65	0.80	54	2.57	0.95	232	2.63	0.99
Institutional	178	2.29	0.63	54	2.19	0.52	232	2.29	0.61

NB: Mean < 2.5 = low; mean  $\geq 2.5$  and < 3.5 = medium; and mean  $\geq 3.5$  = high; N = 232.  
Source: own field data collected in 2024.

The qualitative data collected through unstructured interviews with key respondents also confirmed the results of the quantitative data. The majority of the interview participants highlighted the inapplicability of the legal framework in real contexts. Almost all of the interview respondents agreed that the board members' nominations and assignments came from the government, and the university's organizational structure also comes from the same source - the Ministry of Education or the Federal Civil Service Commission. The interview participants believe their contribution in this regard is very limited. A university professor explained his view as:

We heard the names of the university board members from the university announcement, and we believe that they were given by the ministry. Still, I am right because the proclamation also gives authority to the ministry. In my view, since the university is public property, that is the way to control and give priority to the public or government interest. It is a fact that the university's organizational structure is approved by the Ministry of Education and Civil Service Commission. I believe that it is their responsibility to amend the structure since it is considered one of the public sectors (JU2).

The legal provision of Higher Education Proclamation 1152/2019, Article 46, sub-articles 1–3, explains that the assignment of four out of the seven board members, including the chairperson is the responsibility of the ministry, while the university consults on the selection of the remaining three. This suggests that the government has been primarily responsible for nominating and appointing board chairs and members.

This aligns with the findings of Bladh's (2007) and Verhoest et al. (2004) studies, indicating that state control is evident when the government appoints the majority of board members as the number of members representing university staff diminishes. Furthermore, the updated university autonomy proclamation 1294/2023 does not specify the board chairperson assignment in the current autonomy policy reform, allowing the government to manipulate university governance to its advantage. Therefore, the university autonomy practice in this regard is low.

Moreover, although the legal provision bases the nomination and appointment of leadership positions on competition, the practice often deviates from the written law. One of the interview participants described the process of assigning university leaders in the following manner:

As to my reading from the higher education proclamation 1152/2019, article 52, sub-articles 1–5, dictate the assignment of the president and vice presidents. All the statements in the sub-articles explain that they are selected through a competition-based approach on the given requirements set by the ministry and accomplished by the committee assigned by the board. After all, the assignment of a president is approved by the ministry, and of the vice president is by the board, but the members and the person who leads the committee are assigned by the board, so all of these accomplishments couldn't deviate from the interests of the board, regardless the competency level of the candidates. The ministry and the board can approve the second or third candidate based on the authority given by the proclamation and the procedures. In my view, it goes to the government assignment. Here it seems that the political interest gets the upper hand, which is taken as normal by the university community (JU1).

Nearly all interviewees confirmed that the state nominated and assigned the Jimma University's president, primarily based on the candidate's political membership to the ruling party. The respondents indicated that the university does not properly implement the written competition criteria and processes for higher official assignments. In other words, they noted that it seems Jimma University's President is a political appointee, and every nomination is based on the decisions and recommendations of the ruling political party at the federal level. In the same way, informants indicated that Jimma University's vice president nominations and appointments follow the same process. In addition, the majority of the interviewees revealed without variation that the removal of presidents and vice presidents upon the expiry of their terms of office also goes to the government authority. They pointed out that the procedures written on the paper were not more important than for the sake of formality. However, all the informants clarified that the appointment of academic leaders, such as deans and department heads adhered to the legal provisions. Thus, the living autonomy seems to be less practical than the formal one except for the assignment of academic leaders (college deans and department heads).

### **Academic Autonomy**

Academic autonomy, which independently determines the university's mission and involves the freedom to decide the core operations of the higher education institution including the autonomy to determine student admission standards, admittance numbers, programs, curriculums, research, and community service areas, the respondents' perceptions (see Table 2) are low with an overall mean of 2.09. Both groups of respondents (instructors and academic leaders) rated their perceptions almost identically (instructors' mean 2.09 and academic leaders' mean 2.07).

Furthermore, the table shows a slight deviation from the respective mean value among participants' perceptions of academic autonomy indicators (see standard deviation values, which are approximately 0.66). This suggests that participants' views of the exercise of academic autonomy are low, with little spread of responses from the mean score.

The qualitative data from the interviews also affirmed the quantitative findings. The participants agreed that academics are subordinate to the Ministry of Education, as they believed that the university simply follows orders from the higher authorities. For example, the 2023 Graduate Admission Test's standards were set by the Ministry, with no room for the university to flex according to its context-specific needs. This is despite the Higher Education Proclamation 1152/2019, which states that the Ministry shall determine the entrance requirements and standards for undergraduate students but not for graduate students. One university official elaborated on this issue, the person stated it as:

I think the ministry is knowingly getting involved in the operation of the universities, specifically with academic issues. To me, it is about the quality issue, which worries the government in general. The undergraduate student number is determined by the ministry because of resource implications, but the issue of graduate students for the 2023–2024 academic year entrance exam (Graduate Admission Test) for admission is a quality-ensuring strategy, in my view. Even the exit exam for the undergraduate is also to control the quality aspect, though it erodes the autonomy of the university (JU6).

Almost all of the interview participants raised concerns about the problematic nature of academic autonomy at the university. They attributed this partly to the university's internal inability to enforce the rules and regulations set by the Ministry and other relevant bodies. For instance, the Higher Education Proclamation 1152/2019 clearly states that the university has the freedom to handle the selection and admission of Masters of Science (MSc), Master of Arts (MA) degrees, and Degree of Philosophy (PhD) students through the setting of the entrance exams for the programs and development of different criteria for quality assurance, and. However, the university's internal environment poses challenges to the implementation of such formal autonomy. Furthermore, the informants stated that the opening and closing of new programs are under the Ministry's authority.

However, this outcome is inconsistent with Lerra's (2019) finding that showed that university academic communities in Ethiopia are autonomous in designing new curricula for both undergraduate and graduate programs based on local, regional, and national demands. The reason may be that the Ministry launched a harmonious curriculum, especially for the undergraduate program.

### **Financial Autonomy**

In the context of a public university in Ethiopia, financial autonomy involves determining the tuition fees for private applicants, mobilizing additional income, internally disbursing the generated amount, assigning the required amount for the research fund, and conducting its procurement activities.

Table 2 illustrates participants' low (overall mean of 2.28) perceptions of Jimma University's freedom to exercise its legally granted autonomy concerning financial issues. Both groups of respondents rated their perceptions almost identically (instructors' mean 2.30 and academic leaders' mean 2.18).

The table also depicts a slight deviation from the respective mean value among respondents' perceptions of items in financial autonomy (see standard deviation values, which are about 0.76). This suggests that participants rated the poor exercise of autonomy with minimal deviation from the mean score.

The qualitative data also support the findings of the quantitative data. Almost all of the respondents to the interviews pointed out that without the role and procedures of the Ministry of Finance and the board, the university does not have the freedom to utilize its financial resources for the accomplishment of its mission. As an expert from the Ministry of Education explained:

To my knowledge, the university could generate money; it is required to prepare a plan and be able to distribute the budget with the knowledge and permission of the government, as it did for government-appropriated funds. The university could not use the money it generated if it went beyond what was planned, and it could not transfer a budget from one budget head to another on its own without the knowledge of the Ministry of Finance. Besides, the university cannot decide the amount of compensation for extra work and payable allowances; it needs a rate of payment determined by the government (JU9).

The majority of the interview informants also pointed out that the procurement processes were conducted by the government agency established for this purpose. The university's freedom in the procurement process is limited, as it can only decide how many items to buy from the suppliers identified by the government agency.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data have shown that Jimma University's practice of exercising its financial autonomy seems minimal. This finding corroborates Bain's (2003) study that found that universities that earn most of their budget from the government lack confidence in exercising their autonomy and are very much concerned with responding to governmental expectations and priorities.

### **Staff Autonomy**

One dimension of university autonomy is staff autonomy. This dimension concerns the freedom to determine academic staff profiles and criteria for recruitment, promotion, and firing. It also discusses the university's independence in determining academic staff workload and individual performance evaluation procedures. In this case, Table 2 shows that participants thought Jimma University had a medium level of freedom to use the legally granted autonomy to decide on the profile of academic staff, hiring, promotion, workload, procedures for individual performance rating, and firing. The overall mean score for this was 2.63. Both groups of respondents rated their perceptions almost identically (instructors mean 2.65 and academic leaders mean 2.57).

Furthermore, the table showed a relatively higher deviation from the respective mean value among respondents' perceptions of staff autonomy indicators (see standard deviation value, which is about 0.99). As a result, respondents view the exercise of staff autonomy as a medium, with a significant dispersion of responses from the mean score.

The qualitative data from different key informants also affirmed the quantitative data result. Most of the respondents to the interview questions indicated that the university has relative freedom concerning academic staff decisions. Almost all of the interviewees pointed out that in the case of academic staff recruitment, selection, and promotion, the university is working almost without the interference of an external body. One informant was quoted stating this issue as:

As for me, Ethiopia is currently undergoing higher education policy reforms, including the current autonomous university proclamation of 2023, which specifies the criteria for being an autonomous university. Yes, there is a certain level of staff autonomy, but the university also needs to consider self-sufficiency through its income-generation mechanisms and cost-reduction strategies. The current ratio of academic staff to administrative staff is about one to three. Strategic thinking is required for the internal capacity development of the line staff (JU8).

This study examines the practice of institutional autonomy from four perspectives: organizational, academic, financial, and staff autonomy. The overall practice status of institutional autonomy, as depicted in Table 2, is low (overall mean of 2.27). Both groups of respondents rated their perceptions almost identically (instructors mean 2.29 and academic leaders mean 2.19). Furthermore, the table also showed a slight deviation from the respective mean value among participants' perceptions of institutional autonomy (see standard deviation values, which are about 0.61). As a result, participants' views of institutional autonomy are low, with little dispersion of responses from the mean score. Of the other four dimensions of institutional autonomy, staff autonomy has a better status (mean 2.63) in practice than the other dimensions. Besides, organizational and academic autonomy is relatively lower (mean 2.08 and 2.09, respectively) than the rest of the dimensions.



An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare instructors' and academic leaders' perceptions of institutional autonomy. The test results show that there is no significant statistically significant difference between instructors' and academic leaders' perceptions of the university's exercise of institutional autonomy ( $t(230) = 1.036, p = 0.301$ ) in scores for instructors ( $M = 2.29, SD = 0.63$ ) and academic leaders ( $M = 2.19, SD = 0.52$ ). The magnitude of differences in the mean (mean difference = 0.098, 95% CI: -0.088 to 0.284) was not significant.

## University Environment

Regarding the impact of the university environment, the majority of the interviewees concurred that both the internal and external settings hinder the implementation of legal provisions. For example, they agree on the weak internal capability to realize what is stipulated in the legal framework and lack of assertiveness or failure to resist the government's top-down decision. In line with this, almost all of the interview respondents pointed out that, the university community's awareness of the current legal policy provisions and the concept of university autonomy were also the other concerns from the university side. Besides, they pointed out that the lack of capacity-building programs for the university leadership is also another internal environment factor.

On the other hand, the external environment also influences the practice of formal autonomy. The majority of interview informants agreed that government interference through various mechanisms to manipulate the university's operation is the main aspect of the environment. One of the university interviewees made the following observation:

In my view, the budget is one of the controlling mechanisms. To me, exercising any aspect of autonomy is impossible without the independence of financial resources since it is the major input in realizing other dimensions of institutional autonomy. The other is a leadership assignment. I think this task bears a strong political undertone. That is the way to steer the university toward what the government requires (JU5).

The above view is shared by most of the interview respondents. This finding corroborates the Olsen (2009) study, which found that universities are considered to be national political instruments, and the government often seeks to steer them to realize their political presence. The other study result that confirms the above finding is the work of Ordorika (2003) and Verhoest et al. (2004), in which they found that one of the areas where the state has consistently intervened and limited university autonomy has been the assignment of university leadership. Moreover, almost all of the interviewees pointed out that the rules and procedures from different stakeholder groups, for instance, the Ministry of Education and Finance (approvals for new and termination of programs, procurement processes, budget transfer processes, repeated reporting, etc.), limit the exercise of the university's formal autonomy.

The above outcome is consistent with de Boer and Enders (2017), who stated that the use of different mechanisms in the form of intervention, such as reporting, approval, and setting a general framework that could guide and limit the extent of living autonomy. Jimma University's living autonomy seems vulnerable to systemic government influence, and it is divergent from formal autonomy. Due to the negative impact of the environment, the practice of institutional autonomy becomes less than the formal autonomy provided. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the provisions in the policy frameworks (proclamations, rules, procedures, manuals, etc.) do not guarantee living autonomy; rather, the relationship between the environment and the university context matters.



## **CONCLUSIONS**

Except for staff autonomy, which is at a medium level, the other three dimensions (organizational, academic, and financial) of autonomy of Jimma University are significantly lower than formal autonomy. Both groups of respondents had a similar view of the practice of institutional autonomy in the university. This study concluded that the overall assessment of autonomy practice is lower than formal autonomy. Thus, living autonomy is divergent from formal one.

The study showed that the influence of internal and external environmental factors may cause a divergence between actual (living) autonomy and formal autonomy. Among the internal context, the capability of the university and the knowledge about university autonomy are the major environmental factors, while political influence, rules and procedures from different stakeholders, and shortage of financial resources from external environmental factors are the major environmental factors. As long as the government is the major financier of public universities, expectations are that it will continue to monitor the university's operations. Since university autonomy is impossible without sufficient financial resources, therefore, the legal framework provisions cannot guarantee the level of autonomy in public universities.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING**

University autonomy is one of the key strategic elements that universities require to accomplish their mission. According to the findings of this study, Jimma University's institutional autonomy is lower than its formal autonomy. The deviation of the university's living autonomy from formal ones hinders its functionality in fulfilling its purpose. The study also identified that the university environment influences the practice of formal university autonomy as per the provision of the legal framework. In higher education institutions, it is difficult to meet the needs and expectations of the key stakeholders without a supportive environment to exercise their formal autonomy. Consequently, the concerned government agencies and the public universities themselves should take into consideration the relationship between the university and the environmental factors that determine the status of a university's living autonomy.

Given the inherent limitations of absolute freedom, public research universities require comparatively greater freedom to fulfill their missions effectively. Therefore, educational leaders and managers should take into account the role of the relationship between the university and its environment in promoting the realization of university autonomy.

Further research would better support this line of inquiry, as different categories of public universities strive to realize university institutional autonomy. We might explore various university autonomy realization mechanisms and shared experiences across different contexts to identify the most effective strategies. Moreover, larger cases with larger samples may yield more generalizable findings.

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# THE INFLUENCE OF JOB SATISFACTION ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT OF THE ACADEMIC STAFF IN ETHIOPIAN POLYTECHNIC COLLEGES

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## ABSTRACT

*The study examines the link between job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff at the north Shewa Zone Polytechnic Colleges, Ethiopia. The study employed a quantitative methodology and utilized a correlational research design. Researchers selected a total of 264 academic staff members. Two questionnaires, namely the Job Satisfaction Survey and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire, were used to gather data. Researchers analyzed the data using SPSS version 20, applying statistical methods such as mean score, standard deviation, Pearson  $r$  correlation, and regression analysis. The findings of the study suggest a tenuous yet statistically significant correlation between job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of academic staff in polytechnic colleges. In addition, the regression analysis revealed that the job satisfaction of academic staff had a restricted impact on their three aspects of organizational commitment, namely affective, continuance, and normative, as well as their total commitment. Hence, it is recommended that polytechnic colleges need to aim at improving communication and teamwork, fostering a healthy work atmosphere, and offering chances for professional growth. To further investigate this topic, it is advisable to conduct a qualitative study to ascertain the restricted impact of job satisfaction on organizational commitment and delve into unexplained variables.*

## INTRODUCTION

Job satisfaction is a crucial factor in improving efficiency, reducing employee turnover, and minimizing absenteeism. Furthermore, it substantiated that individuals with a heightened level of affective commitment exhibit prolonged tenure within the organization, and employees experience a sense of desire and emotional connection to their workplace (Motalebi & Marşap, 2020). Besides, both job satisfaction and organizational commitment have a concurrent and substantial negative impact on turnover intention (Ekhsan, 2019). This implies that the more committed and satisfied employees are, the lower is the probability of leaving the organization. Thus, these two elements are vital for the efficiency of organizations in order to retain competent individuals.

According to Hendri (2019), organizational commitment and job satisfaction are factors that affect employee performance. Job satisfaction is also crucial for the performance of educational organizations. Organizational effectiveness depends on the capable performance of its employees. Nugroho et al. (2020) also suggested that educational institutions address factors that contribute to academic staff job satisfaction, including income, opportunities for advancement, collegiality, and appropriate supervision. Thus, both job satisfaction and organizational commitment are crucial determinants of the efficacy of an educational institution and the performance of its academic staff.

Researchers conducted studies in different echelons of educational organizations. In both private and government higher educational institutions, there were strong connections between job satisfaction and employee commitment. For example, Bashir and Gani's (2020); Sari and Seniat's (2020); and Cahyono et al.'s (2020) studies depicted a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in universities in varied contexts. Babalola's (2016)

study proposed that job satisfaction is a crucial factor for organizational commitment in African countries, particularly in Oyo State, Nigeria. Getahun et al. (2016) conducted a study in Ethiopia that revealed a positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment in primary schools, while Abebe and Markos (2016) also demonstrated this correlation within public higher education.

The aforementioned studies in different countries indicated that there was a link between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in different levels of educational organizations at dissimilar extents. But there were limited studies in polytechnic colleges (PTCs) in an Ethiopian context.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **The Link between Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment**

Researchers have conducted several studies on the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in various organizations and contexts. For instance, Khan and Jan (2015) in hospitals; Ismail and Razak (2016) in the Fire and Rescue Department; Candelario et al. (2020) on employees of government agencies; Ferdus and Kabir (2018) in private banks; Pham Thi et al. (2021) in small and medium-sized enterprises; and Ebraze et al. (2019) in the ministry of health and medical education. The findings of these studies indicated that the job satisfaction of employees had an impact on their organizational commitment. Therefore, it is evidenced that a satisfied employee demonstrates dedication to the organization.

Research studies have also examined the correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in various educational institutions. According to a study by Gopinath (2020) in higher education institutions, the organizational commitment of academic leaders in Tamil Nadu universities had an impact on their job satisfaction. Mahmood Aziz et al.'s (2021) study also revealed a direct relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment in private institutions located in the Kurdistan area of Iraq. The study noted that employee satisfaction positively correlates with increased levels of organizational commitment. Moreover, improving job satisfaction has the potential to lead to a rise in organizational commitment.

Job satisfaction and organizational commitment have a strong and statistically significant association at higher education institutions in Vietnam (Nguyen et al., 2021). This research offers a complete methodology for Vietnamese higher education institutions (HEIs) to enhance staff performance and retention. It achieves this by analyzing the various factors that influence satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn impact performance outcomes. Cahyono et al.'s (2020) study also found that job satisfaction significantly and favorably influences lecturers' organizational commitment in a private higher education institution. In addition, Sari and Seniati (2020) identified a notable and favorable association between the employment satisfaction of academics and their organizational dedication. Bashir and Gani (2020) have found that job satisfaction significantly affects the organizational commitment of university professors in India.

Furthermore, Ingsih et al. (2020) found that income and workplace environment have a significant influence on job satisfaction. Moreover, the amalgamation of remuneration, work setting, and contentment with the job explained 97.4% of the disparity in organizational dedication. Batugal (2019) also established that job satisfaction predicts organizational commitment. The results are crucial for improving organizational commitment and exploring various strategies to increase job satisfaction among the academic members of the St. Paul University System. In contrast, Romi et al. (2020) found that job satisfaction does not have a statistically significant impact on organizational commitment by using structural equation modeling among higher education lecturers in Indonesia.

This implies that there are inconsistent results regarding studies of the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Manalo et al. (2020) employed structural equation modeling (SEM) to investigate the influence of motivation and job satisfaction on organizational commitment and work engagement among teachers in private secondary schools. The results indicated that motivation and job satisfaction had notable and favorable impacts on both organizational commitment and work engagement. Instructors who possess a strong sense of motivation and satisfaction in their career also exhibit a notable level of dedication and loyalty to their organization.

With regard to polytechnics, the Loan (2020) study revealed that many elements of organizational commitment, including normative commitment, continuance commitment, and emotional commitment, exert a substantial and positive impact on job satisfaction. Enhancing job satisfaction among Polytechnic personnel is dependent on strengthening organizational commitment. While Omar, Salleh, et al.'s (2020) study acknowledges the importance of dedication in relation to job satisfaction, it also highlights a lack of studies specifically focused on polytechnic personnel.

In an Ethiopian context, the study conducted by Getahun et al. (2016) revealed a positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment in primary schools located in Bonga Town. The study also suggested that educational leaders should establish a favorable climate to bolster teachers' organizational commitment. In addition, in order to augment teachers' job satisfaction, educational leaders should include teachers in the decision-making process and offer capacity-building training specifically tailored to the subject matter at the school level. Besides, Abebe and Markos (2016) demonstrate a positive correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment within the setting of public higher education. The study recommended that the university prioritize promotion, fringe benefits, and contingent rewards in order to enhance instructors' job satisfaction inside the educational institution.

Hence, the aforementioned studies have demonstrated a correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment to different extents and contexts. However, there needs to be more research in developing nations like Ethiopia, particularly regarding the influence of job satisfaction among academic staff on their organizational commitment to polytechnic colleges with different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the findings of these studies exhibited discrepancies, with the majority originating from domains beyond technical and vocational education.

### **Factors influencing Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment**

Several studies found that there were links between job satisfaction and organizational commitment to different extents and contexts. Besides, there are many factors that can affect these two variables. For instance, the Mwesigwa et al. (2020) study showed that a number of factors, such as job satisfaction, academic staff age, length of service, position level, and leadership styles used, have an impact on organizational commitment among academic staff in public institutions. The Nguyen et al. (2021) study confirms that several external factors, including job characteristics, supervision, working conditions, salary, and recognition, have a substantial and beneficial impact on job satisfaction.

Organizational culture influences both commitment and job satisfaction. According to the findings of Batugal's (2019) study, fostering an organizational culture that values and respects each member of the staff ultimately results in increased levels of employee job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Enhanced job satisfaction and a more favorable organizational culture correlate with greater organizational commitment. Batugal and Tindowen's (2019) research also illustrates that among the four distinct categories of culture, clan culture has a marginally positive



influence on educators' job satisfaction and a substantial positive influence on their organizational commitment.

Additionally, leadership is a component that influences job satisfaction. Cahyono et al.'s (2020) research provides evidence that several elements of transformational leadership, such as the idealistic effect, customized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, significantly and positively influence job satisfaction. Babalola's (2016) study found that job satisfaction, the quality of supervisor-employee interactions, and the laissez-faire leadership style significantly influenced organizational commitment. Besides, Metaferia et al.'s (2023) study empirically demonstrates that transformational leadership significantly predicts instructors' organizational commitment in the Ethiopian context. Furthermore, the research suggests that enhancing the execution of transformational leadership can enhance educators' dedication to the institution, leading to superior academic achievements.

Abebe and Markos (2016) study in Ethiopia suggested various job satisfaction-related factors, such as promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, task nature, and communication, influence organizational commitment. Furthermore, the study have found that employees who possess higher educational qualifications, have been with the organization longer, are married, and are older exhibit greater levels of commitment. Conversely, Getahun et al. (2016) identified gender as the only demographic variable that demonstrated a significant and positive correlation with job satisfaction in their research.

Strengthening organizational commitment, specifically in terms of normative commitment, continuity commitment, and affective commitment, is a prerequisite for increasing job satisfaction among polytechnic personnel (Omar, Salleh, et al., 2020). Additionally, the Omar, Rafie, et al. (2020) study revealed that it is critical to improve the performance of polytechnic personnel by increasing their job satisfaction. Thus, various factors affect job satisfaction and organizational commitment, nevertheless studies in the context of polytechnic colleges in Ethiopia are scarce.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It is clear that human resources are integral to the formulation and implementation of all strategic decisions undertaken by organizations. Talented and skilled individuals are crucial for the proper functioning of any organization, particularly those in the educational sector. Consequently, administrators have the responsibility of formulating efficient techniques that enhance employees' contentment and dedication to the organization (Nguyen et al., 2021). Job satisfaction significantly impacts employees' organizational commitment in educational institutions (Abebe & Markos, 2016; Getahun et al., 2016; Yunarti et al., 2020). Educational institutions should take into account the correlation between job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of academic staff.

While studies suggest that satisfied employees are likely to be dedicated to the organization, practical observations have shown turnover among academic staff. Besides, there were challenges in finding qualified and competent academic staff in the study field (Tamrat, 2022). This could be attributed to insufficient focus on the job satisfaction of academic staff in polytechnic colleges. However, the new educational policy in Ethiopia, MOE (2023), prioritizes technical vocational education and training (TVET) to enhance the quality of education.

Omar, Rafie, et al. (2020) demonstrate a strong and positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. This implies that improving job satisfaction among employees at Polytechnic College is critical in order to enhance their performance. Widodo and Damayanti (2020) also found that job satisfaction has a direct impact on organizational commitment at Indonesian vocational schools, alongside factors such as incentives and personality traits. But Romi et al. (2020) found that job satisfaction had no statistically significant effect on organizational



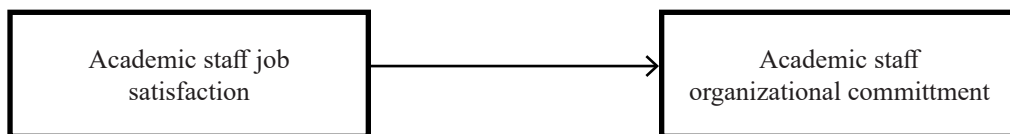
commitment. This suggests that the findings of studies on job satisfaction and organizational commitment were inconsistent. Besides, a local study by Getahun et al. (2016) suggested further investigation of the variables due to the incongruity of the results with existing theories and findings of the study in educational organizations.

Moreover, as noted by Loan (2020), there is a scarcity of research on the impact of job satisfaction on employee commitment in non-western nations. Omar, Salleh, et al. (2020) also noted a lack of study of the link between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, specifically among polytechnic staff. Because the aforementioned studies were conducted in a different setting with different cultural factors than the one in Ethiopia, it is important to find a link between job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of academic staff in polytechnic colleges in developing countries, especially in Ethiopia.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the study, as indicated in Figure 1, academic staff job satisfaction is considered an independent variable, and organizational commitment is considered a dependent variable.

*Figure 1 Conceptual framework*



Organizational commitment is a variable that comprises affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is an employee's desire to stay with the organization in which they have great interest. Continuance commitment is defined as an employee wanting to stay with the organization in order to continue considering the cost of leaving. Normative commitment is also defined as employees having an obligation to remain in the organization. Organizational commitment questionnaires can measure these factors (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Job satisfaction is characterized by whether an employee of an organization is satisfied or dissatisfied at polytechnic colleges. It can be measured with a job satisfaction survey. It consists of nine facets, such as pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, coworkers, operating procedure, contingent reward, communication, and nature of work (Spector, 1985). According to the review of related literature, several research results indicate that there is a link between two variables in different local and international contexts.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the research study is to examine the influence of academic staff job satisfaction on organizational commitment at North Shewa Polytechnic Colleges in Ethiopia.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to achieve the objective of the study, the following fundamental questions were formulated:

1. What is the relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and organizational commitment at polytechnic colleges?
  - 1.1 Is there a relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and affective commitment?
  - 1.2 Is there a relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and continuance commitment?
  - 1.3 Is there a relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and normative commitment?
2. To what extent does academic staff job satisfaction influence organizational commitment in polytechnic colleges?
  - 2.1 To what extent does academic staff job satisfaction influence affective commitment?
  - 2.2 To what extent does academic staff job satisfaction influence continuance commitment?
  - 2.3 To what extent does academic staff job satisfaction influence normative commitment?

## SIGNIFICANCES OF THE STUDY

The study will have the following practical, policy, and theoretical significance: Gaining insight into the correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment holds practical significance for academic institutions. The results of this research can provide valuable guidance to administrators, human resources experts, and policymakers in creating impactful policies and interventions to improve employee engagement, satisfaction, and organizational commitment. This insight can enhance decision-making processes pertaining to recruiting, retention, professional development, and organizational culture.

Implementing well-crafted policies can enhance leadership and management practices at academic institutions. Efficient leadership has a vital role in promoting job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff. Educational planners and policymakers have the capacity to offer training and development programs for leaders, create standards for leadership conduct, and encourage responsibility and openness in decision-making procedures to enhance satisfaction and organizational commitment.

An understanding of the correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment might provide valuable insights for developing strategies to retain and attract highly skilled academic staff. Colleges can boost job satisfaction and organizational commitment by understanding the contributing variables and implementing focused tactics to promote a favorable work environment. Consequently, this can enhance the rate at which employees stay in the workforce and entice highly skilled employees to enter the academic sector. The findings of the study can also enlighten current theories and frameworks and potentially pave the way for the creation of novel models or hypotheses.

## METHODOLOGY

### Study Setting

The objective of this research is to investigate the correlation between job satisfaction and the organizational commitment of academic staff in the polytechnic colleges of the North Shewa zone of Ethiopia. The zone is approximately 130 kilometers from the Ethiopian capital. Ethiopia proposes technical vocational education and training (TVET) establishments at distinct levels, including centers, colleges, and polytechnics, to offer a variety of training levels. TVET colleges offer instruction from level 1 to level 4, while polytechnic colleges provide instruction and training from level 1 to level 5 (MOE, 2008). However, the new educational policy, MOE (2023), has elevated the five levels of training provided in polytechnic colleges to eight levels (I–VIII). According to MOE's (2008) national TVET strategy, public TVET institutions in the education sector focused on producing middle-level technical graduates at the post-Grade 10 level. It has now improved to the post-12th grade level in Ethiopia (MOE, 2023).

In regard to the qualifications of academic staff, they are expected to be qualified at three levels, A, B, and C, in accordance with the five levels of training (I-V) designated for TVET education; Level A indicates that an academic staff member possesses a Masters of Art or Master of Science (MA/MSC) who provides instruction and training for level five (V) trainees. Level IV TVET trainees are required to receive instruction from trainers who have at least a B-level qualification and hold a bachelor's degree. Level C academic staffs, which possess an equivalent college diploma, provide instruction and training at Levels I, II, and III. Hence, the academic staff who have been providing training and leveled as A, B, and C level teachers are termed TVET 'trainers' or instructors. As part of the Ethiopian new education and training policy, MOE (2023), the TVET academic staff possess up to a third-level education (PhD) level.

Some of the challenges identified in the Ethiopian educational development roadmap with regard to the TVET sector were: the dearth of qualified and driven academic staff in TVET; the lack of academic staff's practical experience in the industrial sector; and the lack of sufficient salaries, rewards, and incentives for academic staff. Furthermore, lack of dedication from both academic staff and students is observed towards collaborative training initiatives with the industry sector. Moreover, academic staff has access to a restricted program for ongoing systematic professional development (Teferra et al., 2018). Polytechnic colleges in the research area that offer education and training from levels one to eight also face these socio-economic challenges. Consequently, this could potentially impact the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of academic professionals.

### Research Design

The study followed the quantitative method. It is appropriate for studying problems using numerical questionnaires (Gay et al., 2012). Researchers used a correlational research design to explore the relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The design is used to determine the magnitude and direction of the relationship between dependent and independent variables. But the design cannot prove causality (Cohen et al., 2018). Previous researchers, such as Motalebi and Marşap (2020) and Candelario et al. (2020) employed a correlational research design, and Getahun et al. (2016) followed the research design in an Ethiopian context.

## Participants

The study was conducted at three polytechnic colleges in the North Shewa Zone. Researchers selected 264 academic staff members to participate in the study using stratified simple random selection approaches to ensure equal inclusion of all academic staff members in polytechnic colleges. The polytechnic colleges' departments were used to perform random sampling within specific groups or strata. Subsequently, we autonomously choose random samples from each department to ensure the incorporation of every stratum in the sample. Researchers also estimated the sample size using Cohen et al.'s sample size determination table, accounting for a 95% confidence level (Cohen et al., 2018).

## Data Collection Instrument

To measure academic staff organizational commitment, the study employed a 5-point Likert scale, Allen and Meyer's organizational commitment questionnaire (OCQ), which includes affective, normative, and continuance commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990). Studies such as Donald et al. (2016), Batugal and Tindowen (2019), Motalebi and Marşap (2020), Allida (2021), and Candelario et al. (2020) used Allen and Meyer's organizational commitment questionnaire. In the local context, Getahun et al. (2016) and Metaferia et al. (2023) used JSS and OCQ to collect and analyze data.

To assess academic staff job satisfaction, the study employed a Spector (1985) job satisfaction survey. It is a 6-point Likert scale with 36-item questionnaires that include nine facets of job satisfaction. In their local study, Abebe and Markos (2016) also used Spector's (1985) job satisfaction survey (JSS). They tested the validity of the questionnaires with the aforementioned local and other country studies and found them to be valid. The researchers analyzed the reliability of both questionnaire items and found that the results for each factor of job satisfaction and organizational commitment were above 0.75. According to Singh (2007), it was reliable. Both Allen and Meyer's organizational commitment questionnaire and Spector's job satisfaction survey have been used in international and Ethiopian contexts. Many research studies checked the validity and reliability of the data gathering tools, confirming the validity and reliability of the results.

## Data Collection Procedure

The study used the two types of questionnaires mentioned above to collect data from the academic staff. The questionnaires were disseminated to the sample of 264 academic staff of polytechnic colleges, soliciting their cooperation in response. Out of the 264 academic staff, 221 participated in the study by returning the questionnaires. Hence, the number of participants was adequate for the purpose of analyzing and deriving conclusions from the study (Cohen et al., 2018).

## Data Analysis Technique

Researchers used descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations to analyze the extent of academic staff organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Investigators also used the Pearson  $r$  correlation coefficient to evaluate the link between two variables. Local context Getahun et al. (2016) used Pearson  $r$  to analyze the data on local context, and Allida (2021) also used the mean and correlation to analyze the data. Linear regression analysis was also used to analyze data to demonstrate the extent of the influence of academic staff job satisfaction on their organizational commitment to colleges. Previous studies such as Donald et al. (2016), Khan and Jan (2015), and Motalebi and Marşap (2020) also analyzed their data using correlation and regression analysis.

## DATA RELATED FINDINGS

### The Link between Academic Staff Job Satisfaction and the Three Components of Commitment

Table 1 shows the link between academic staff job satisfaction and three types of organizational commitment. Accordingly, the correlation value ( $r = 0.15$ ) and two-tailed significance ( $p = 0.03$ ) indicate a positive, albeit weak, relationship between job satisfaction and affective commitment. The  $p$ -value suggests that the presence of this link is improbable to be a result of random chance. Therefore, we can deduce a weak positive correlation between job satisfaction and the emotional connection and loyalty (affective commitment) that academic staff members feel towards their college.

*Table 1 Link between academic staff job satisfaction and three types of commitment*

		Affective Commitment	Continuance Commitment	Normative Commitment
Job Satisfaction	Pearson r	.15*	.11	.16*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03	.09	.02
	N	221	221	221

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.11$ ) suggests a positive but weak relationship between job satisfaction and continuance commitment. However, the two-tailed significance ( $p = 0.09$ ) exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.05 for statistical significance. Therefore, based on this research, there is insufficient evidence to establish a significant association between job satisfaction and continuance commitment at polytechnic colleges. The correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.16$ ) indicates a weak but positive relationship between job satisfaction and normative commitment. The statistically significant two-tailed significance ( $p = 0.02$ ) indicates that it is highly unlikely to attribute the presence of this association to random chance. Therefore, we can deduce that a weak positive correlation exists between job satisfaction and normative commitment, referring to the sense of duty and ethical responsibility academic staff members feel towards their polytechnic colleges.

### The Link between Academic Staff Job Satisfaction and organizational Commitment

Table 2 displays the correlation between the job satisfaction of academic staff and their total organizational commitment.

*Table 2 Link between academic staff job satisfaction and overall organizational commitment*

Variable	Organizational commitment	
Academic staff job satisfaction	Pearson correlation	.20*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	221

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

According to this information, the correlation value ( $r = 0.20$ ) suggests a positive but weak relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The two-tailed p-value of 0.00, indicating statistical significance, implies that the likelihood of this association occurring by chance is extremely low. Consequently, based on this analysis, there is evidence of a weak positive association between the job satisfaction and dedication of academic staff in colleges. The presence of a weak positive connection suggests that there may be other relevant elements that have a stronger impact on devotion than job satisfaction.

### The Influence of Academic Staff Job Satisfaction on Affective Commitment

According to Table 3, the R-squared value of 0.022 suggests that job satisfaction, the independent variable, can explain approximately 2.2% of the variation in affective commitment, the dependent variable. In essence, job satisfaction only accounts for a minimal portion of the variations in academic staff's affective commitment among academic staff members. The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model, which includes job satisfaction as an independent variable, is statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the F-value (4.83) indicates that the model has a relatively low degree of significance, highlighting the limited capacity of academic staff job satisfaction to predict affective commitment in colleges.

Table 3 Influence of academic staff job satisfaction on affective commitment

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.022</b>		<b>ANOVA</b>				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.11	1	2.11	4.83	.030 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	95.98	219	.44		
	Total	98.06	220			

a. Dependent Variable: affective commitment b. Predictors: job satisfaction

<b>Coefficients</b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.60	.36		4.42	.000
	Job satisfaction	.25	.11	.15	2.20	.030

The unstandardized coefficient for job satisfaction is 0.25. These data indicate that, on average, every additional gain in job satisfaction is associated with a projected rise of 0.25 units in affective commitment. The beta coefficient of 0.15 suggests that job satisfaction has a weak yet positive effect on affective commitment. The t-value of 2.20 suggests that the coefficient for job satisfaction is statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05 ( $p = 0.03$ ). According to the analysis, job satisfaction has a statistically significant impact on academic staff's affective commitment or emotional attachment to their job. However, as the standardized coefficient shows, the impact magnitude is rather small.

### The Influence of Academic Staff Job Satisfaction on Normative Commitment

Table 4 shows an R-squared value of 0.025, indicating that job satisfaction, the independent variable, can account for about 2.5% of the variation in normative commitment, the dependent variable. In essence, job satisfaction is responsible for a limited portion of the variations in normative commitment among academic staff members.

*Table 4 Influence of academic staff job satisfaction on normative commitment*

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.025</b>		<b>ANOVA</b>				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.58	1	2.58	5.53	.020 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	102.31	219	.47		
	Total	104.89	220			

a. Dependent Variable: Normative commitment b. Predictors: job satisfaction

<b>Coefficients</b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. E	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.61	.37		4.31	.000
	Job satisfaction	.27	.12	.16	2.35	.020

The ANOVA analysis indicates that the regression model, which includes job satisfaction as an independent variable, is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the F-value of 5.53 suggests that the model possesses a weak level of statistical significance, underscoring the limited capacity of academic staff job satisfaction to predict normative commitment.

Table 4's coefficient indicates that the job satisfaction coefficient is 0.27. The statistics suggest that an increase in job satisfaction leads to an average projected gain of 0.27 units in normative commitment among academic staff. After accounting for the standardized variables, the beta coefficient of 0.16 suggests that academic staff job satisfaction has a weak, positive effect on normative commitment. The t-value of 2.35 suggests that the coefficient for job satisfaction is statistically significant at a significance level of  $p = 0.02$ . This correlation only explains a small fraction of the variability in academic staff's normative commitment judgments.

### The Influence of Academic Staff Job Satisfaction on Continuance Commitment

According to Table 5, the R-squared value of 0.013 suggests that job satisfaction, the independent variable, can explain around 1.3% of the variation in continuance commitment, which is the dependent variable. In essence, job satisfaction only accounts for a small portion of the variations in academic staff members' levels of commitment to their jobs. The results indicate that the regression model, which includes job satisfaction as an independent variable, exhibits a greater than 0.05 significance level ( $p = 0.09$ ). This suggests that the statistical significance does not meet the conventional levels of significance. The F-value of 2.84 suggests that the model does not have

a strong level of significance, highlighting the limited ability of job satisfaction to reliably predict continuance commitment.

The coefficient for job satisfaction in Table 5 is 0.19. These study findings indicate that, on average, every additional improvement in job satisfaction among academic staff members is associated with an estimated rise of 0.19 units in their level of commitment to continue working in their current position. The beta coefficient of 0.11 suggests that job satisfaction has a weak, albeit positive, influence on continuance commitment after considering the standardized coefficient. The t-value of 1.69 indicates that the coefficient for job satisfaction is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ( $p = 0.09$ ). These study findings indicate that there may not be a statistically significant relationship between academic staff job satisfaction and their commitment to continue working in their current positions.

*Table 5 Influence of academic staff job satisfaction on continuance commitment*

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.013</b>		<b>ANOVA</b>			
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	1.32	1	1.32	2.84	.093 <sup>b</sup>
Residual	101.65	219	.46		
Total	102.70	220			

a. Dependent Variable: Continuance commitment b. Predictors: job satisfaction

<b>Coefficients</b>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.67	.37		4.49	.000
Job satisfaction	.19	.12	.11	1.69	.093

### **The Influence of Academic Staff Job Satisfaction on Overall Organizational Commitment**

Table 6 shows that the R-squared value of 0.04 suggests that the independent variable, staff job satisfaction, may explain approximately 4% of the variability in staff organizational commitment, which is the dependent variable. In essence, job satisfaction explains only a minor portion of the variability in the college staff's level of dedication. Besides, the ANOVA results indicate that the regression model, which includes staff job satisfaction as an independent variable, is statistically significant at the 0.05 significance level ( $p = 0.003$ ). The F-value of 9.21 suggests that the model has a weak level of significance, highlighting the limited predictive power of job satisfaction on staff organizational commitment.



Table 6 The influence of academic staff job satisfaction on overall organizational commitment

<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.040</b>		<b>ANOVA</b>				
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.97	1	1.97	9.21	.003
	Residual	46.84	219	.21		
	Total	48.81	220			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational commitment b. Predictors: job satisfaction

<b>Coefficients</b>						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.62	.25		6.44	.000
	Job satisfaction	.24	.08	.20	3.03	.003

The coefficient Table 6 also indicates that the unstandardized coefficient for job satisfaction is 0.24. These data show that, on average, a single improvement in academic staff job satisfaction is associated with a 0.24-unit increase in staff organizational commitment. The beta coefficient of 0.20 suggests that there is a positive relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The t-value of 3.03 indicates that the coefficient for job satisfaction is statistically significant at the 0.05 level ( $p = 0.003$ ). Therefore, the level of job satisfaction among academic staff has a positive and statistically significant influence on their organizational commitment to the college. However, the degree of impact is relatively small. Thus, academic staff job satisfaction is essential to enhancing their organizational commitment in polytechnic colleges.

## DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of academic staff job satisfaction on their organizational commitment at North Shewa Polytechnic Colleges. The finding also indicates that there is a positive correlation between academic staff job satisfaction and both affective and normative commitment among academic staff members. The offered statistical significance level does not show a conclusive association between academic staff job satisfaction and continuance commitment. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the magnitude of these associations is very feeble. In the South African context, Donald et al. (2016) found a favorable correlation between various dimensions of organizational commitment, such as affective and continuous commitment, and job satisfaction. The Allida (2021) study also revealed that while there was a modest and favorable association between normative commitment and job satisfaction, emotional commitment exhibited a significant and positive link. Allida also proposed that educational organizations should provide employees with both intrinsic and extrinsic incentives as a means to enhance job satisfaction.

The result is also consistent with Getahun et al.'s (2016) study, which revealed a positive correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The finding of this study is also consistent with Abebe and Markos's (2016) study in an Ethiopian context. Nevertheless, the result is not consistent with Yunarti et al.'s (2020) study in Merauke, Indonesia, and Nguyen et al.'s (2021) study in Vietnam, where they found a strong positive link between job satisfaction and

organizational commitment. In order to effectively address students' right to a quality education, Yunarti et al.'s (2020) study proposed that academic leaders prioritize promoting teachers' organizational commitment by increasing their job satisfaction. Thus, a tenuous correlation between academic staff job satisfaction and organizational commitment factors in polytechnic colleges may indicate an inherent problem with the college's culture and climate.

The regression analysis also revealed that staff job satisfaction explains approximately 4% of the variability in staff organizational commitment. Unexplained factors account for the remaining majority of the variance. Hence, the impact of job satisfaction among academic staff on predicting three forms of organizational commitment, as well as the overall organizational commitment of academic staff, only explains a small portion of the variability. This research suggests that as job satisfaction increases, there is a slight increase in organizational commitment. As a result, job satisfaction made a relatively small contribution to the study's prediction and enhancement of staff organizational commitment. This implies that there are some other unexplained variables that predict organizational commitment besides job satisfaction in polytechnic colleges. Academic job satisfaction predicts their commitment, but it is not the primary or dominant factor in this specific scenario.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND EDUCATIONAL PLANNING**

The findings of the study would have implications for educational planners, policymakers, and practitioners. Job satisfaction and organizational commitment are essential for educational organizations since they enhance job performance and help the academic staff stay motivated in their jobs. However, a tenuous correlation between academic staff job satisfaction and commitment suggest that academic staff perceive a less connection to the college's objectives and vision. The findings would have a practical implication for the college to prioritize the improvement of academic staff engagement by actively involving staff members in decision-making processes, promoting transparent communication, and creating avenues for them to share their ideas and knowledge. This participation can foster a feeling of ownership and dedication among the academic staff.

Besides, the weak correlation can impact the college's capacity to attract and retain high-caliber personnel. Potential applicants may be disinclined to join an organization if current employees exhibit a lesser degree of dedication. Hence, the study helps the polytechnic colleges tackle these concerns to cultivate a favorable reputation and establish themselves as an appealing workplace for prospective hires.

In general, educational planners and responsible bodies, such as college administrators and zonal and regional skill and training bureaus, could use the findings of this study to consider extra aspects and ways to boost organizational commitment levels. To improve the overall training process, they might prioritize retention tactics, academic staff engagement, training and professional development, cultivating a positive corporate culture, and conducting regular assessments in polytechnic colleges in order to improve the overall training process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FIELD PRACTICES AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Administrators of polytechnic colleges should develop and enforce effective procedures to guarantee the involvement and dedication of academic staff. Furthermore, educational planners and policymakers should prioritize the development of factors that enhance job satisfaction, such as aligning job roles with individual skills and abilities, fostering supportive relationships between supervisors and employees, ensuring a healthy work environment, offering fair compensation, implementing a transparent and motivating system for rewarding and recognizing achievements, enhancing communication and collaboration, cultivating a positive work environment, providing opportunities for professional development, and addressing any obstacles that impede job satisfaction in collaboration with relevant authorities, such as zonal and regional labor and skill departments.

Due to the high unexplained variance in predicting the three types of organizational commitment and the overall organizational commitment based on the predictor (academic staff job satisfaction), considering more variables is crucial, especially the mediating and moderating variables, and more advanced statistical analysis is needed. Furthermore, qualitative research is needed in this scenario to ascertain the underlying causes of the weak correlation and acquire a more profound comprehension of the prevailing dynamics for future research.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The objective of the research is to investigate the correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment among academic staff in polytechnic colleges. The findings of the study indicated that the weak correlation between academic staff job satisfaction and commitment suggests that external factors, such as job market conditions or the availability of other employment prospects might have a substantial influence on determining organizational commitment. Academic staff's organizational commitment to the polytechnic college may decrease if they perceive more favorable alternatives outside, regardless of their level of job satisfaction. Furthermore, the individual's distinct values, motives, and career goals may have a greater impact on their organizational commitment to the college, thus overshadowing the significance of academic staff job satisfaction.

Moreover, a weak correlation between job satisfaction and organizational commitment also suggests that academic staff might lack motivation and satisfaction in their respective positions and responsibilities due to a higher percentage of unexplained variables. This might have a negative impact on the performance and training capacity of academic staff in polytechnic colleges. Moreover, academic staff may choose to remain employed even if they are dissatisfied with their current roles. This could lead to a higher rate of employee turnover since individuals may be more likely to leave the organization when they find better opportunities elsewhere.

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The editor of *Educational Planning*, a refereed journal of educational planning issues, invites the submission of original manuscripts for publication consideration. *Educational Planning* is the official journal of the International Society for Educational Planning. The audience of the journal includes national and provincial/state planners, university faculty, school district administrators and planners, and other practitioners associated with educational planning.

The purpose of the publication is to serve as a meeting place for scholar-researcher and the practitioner-educator through the presentation of articles that have practical relevance to current issues and that broaden the knowledge base of the discipline. *Educational Planning* disseminates the results of pertinent educational research, presents contemporary ideas for consideration, and provides general information to assist subscribers with their professional responsibilities.

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The Society was founded December 10, 1970, in Washington, DC. Over 50 local, state, national, and international planners attended the first organizational meeting.

Since then, its continued growth demonstrates the need for a profession's organization with educational planning as its exclusive concern.

## **PURPOSE**

The International Society for Educational Planning was established to foster the professional knowledge and interests of educational planners. Through conferences and publications, the society promotes the interchange of ideas within the planning community. The membership includes persons from the ranks of governmental agencies, school-based practitioners, and higher education.

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