EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Vol. 32 No. 3

The Journal of the International Society for Educational Planning
PROMOTING THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

International Society for Educational Planning

Educational Planning is the peer-reviewed refereed journal of the International Society for Educational Planning (ISEP). Educational Planning, published quarterly by ISEP, is available in both paper copies and online on the ISEP website. The Journal is assigned ISSN 2998-7067 (digital) and ISSN 1537-873X (paper) by the National Serials Data Program of the Library of Congress. The journal is completely online starting in January 2025. *For manuscript submission and membership information please see submission of manuscripts. The Journal is indexed in the H. W. Wilson Education Index and the SCOPUS Index. The articles are part of the EBSCO Database and the ERIC Database.*

EDUCATIONAL PLANNING
A JOURNAL DEDICATED TO PLANNING, CHANGE, REFORM, AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 32 NUMBER 3
2025

FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of Educational Planning covers significant planning topics such as planning issues in higher education, K-12 school principalship and curriculum planning, and inclusive educational practices and policy implementation.

In the first article, Cinar, Yucel and Demirci describe the development of the 'Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale' by collecting practical data to establish its validity and reliability. The scale can be very useful in many educational planning situations.

In the second article, Assefa investigates how low salaries combined with high living expenses affect satisfaction levels and overall well-being and service quality performance of Ethiopian university faculty members. He calls the attention of the authorities to help improve the working conditions of the Ethiopian higher education faculty.

In the third article, Attakumah, Ndiritu and Njihia investigate the relationship between exogenous inputs and graduation rate in graduate research degree programs in two public universities in Ghana. The findings indicated that students' situations, including prior experience, interest and sponsorship through scholarship, were positively related to graduation rates.

The next two articles are dealing with school principal leadership in Ethiopia and the United States. The study of Getaneh and Zeleke aims to enhance understanding of the practices related to principal preparation in Ethiopia. The findings revealed the large gaps between policy intention and practical implementation.

The article by Xiao and Chan is focused on school principals' role as curriculum leaders. The findings of their study in the United States indicate that school principals consider curriculum leadership as their most important role of the principalship.

The next article written by Jimenez, Clegorne, Croft and Buckman presents their study on determining whether the use of graphical aids in standardized mathematics testing is effective in lessening the achievement gap between English Language Learner (ELL) students and their non-ELL counterparts.

The last two articles are selected on the discussion of inclusive education policy and practices in Canada and Ethiopia. The article by Alyass and Buist examines the history of special education in Ontario, Canada, the challenges currently faced by disabled students, and the current policies and planning surrounding inclusion. Recommendations for future planning for inclusive education are also given.

Countries in the world face similar educational challenges. They manage these challenges differently according to the needs of their countries. Educational Planning can serve as a platform for exchange of international experiences. Countries can help one another in collaborative projects.

Editor: Tak Cheung Chan
Associate Editors: Walt Polka and Holly Catalfamo
Assistant Editor: Selahattin Turan

August, 2025.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Demoze Degefa Alemu (Ph.D.) is an assistant professor and Faculty at Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Language Studies, and Department of Educational Planning and Management, Ethiopia. His areas of research include higher education policy and management.

Ghofran Alyass is a disabled woman, researcher, professor at George Brown College, and the founder of BeyondAbilities International, formerly known as BeyondAbilities. This organization provides online programs and services to youth and adults with disabilities. She holds a Master of Education Degree in Social Justice Education specializing in disability educational policy from OISE, University of Toronto. She also has an honour Bachelor of Arts in Disability Studies from the Toronto Metropolitan University, a college certificate in preparatory in Liberal Studies, and a college diploma in Community Services from George Brown College. She is a disability advocate, program facilitator, and author of a recent book, "You Have 24 Hours to Live". Ghofran is interested in and pursues research that explores persistent barriers for students with disabilities within academia. Her research seeks to find the policy's role in current accommodation practices and how student voices can influence better change. Ghofran is also interested in researching alternative non-medicalized ways students can access accommodations, particularly in higher education.

Easaw Alemayehu Assefa is an esteemed educator and academic leader with over 20 years of experience in advancing educational practices and addressing social challenges. He holds a Ph.D. degree in Educational Policy and Leadership and an M.A. degree in Educational Leadership and Management from Addis Ababa University. As the Academic Director at Amigonian School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he oversees curriculum development and teacher training while fostering inclusive learning environments. Dr. Assefa's extensive research, with over 30 publications, focuses on critical educational issues, including diversity management, gender equality, and the rights of marginalized groups. He is also a Senior Fellow at Displaced International, advocating for the rights of internally displaced people and refugees. Committed to educational equity and social justice, Dr. Assefa believes in the transformative power of education to empower individuals and communities.

Daniel Attakumah is a lecturer in the Education Studies Department at St Francis College of Education in Ghana. He holds a Ph.D. degree in Educational Planning and Economics of Education, an M.Phil. degree in Educational Planning, a Bachelor's degree in Educational Foundations and an IIEP-UNESCO/UNICEF/GPE MOOC certificate of successful completion with honors in Mainstreaming Early Childhood Education into Education Sector Planning. He teaches Research Methods in Education, School Management and Administration, Teaching Methods and Assessment in Schools. His research interests are Higher Education, Education Policy, Strategic Planning in Education, Assessment in Schools, Teacher Education, Resources Management and Utilization in schools.

David G. Buckman, Ph.D., is the Dean of the School of Education and Assistant Vice Chancellor of Workforce Development at the University of South Carolina Aiken. A nationally recognized scholar and administrator, Dr. Buckman's research focuses on school human resources, including pay equity, retention, and succession planning. He has held academic leadership roles at the University of West Georgia, Augusta University, and Kennesaw State University, where he led initiatives in accreditation, faculty development, and strategic partnerships. He is President-Elect of the National Education Finance Academy and Associate Editor for the Journal of Education Human Resources. Dr. Buckman's work bridges research, policy, and practice in educational leadership, human resources, and finance.

Abigail Buist is a disabled woman, researcher, and educator. She is completing a Master of Arts Degree in Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of Toronto, OISE, where she is exploring educators' views on Inclusive Education. Abbey also holds an undergraduate degree in Disability Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University. She is passionate about disability and inclusion.

Tak Cheung Chan, Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership, Kennesaw State University, Georgia, is a graduate of the University of Georgia. He was a classroom teacher, assistant school principal, school principal, and district office administrator. His previous experience in higher education includes serving as a faculty member of educational leadership at Valdosta State University, Georgia Southern University and Kennesaw State University. His research interests include educational planning, facility planning, school business administration, school finance, and international education.

Süheyla Oran Çınar was born in Eskişehir in 1979. She has been working as an English teacher for 23 years and has taught English in various cities across Turkey. She has also been working as a Senior Teacher for one year. She earned her Master's degree in Educational Management, Supervision, Planning, and Economics from Eskişehir Osmangazi University in 2019, and completed her Ph.D. degree in Educational Management at the same university in November 2024. Her research interests include the use of educational games in teaching English, organizational silence in schools, gaining and maintaining power strategies, and corporate culture. She has published three articles, one in an international journal and two in national journals. She is married and has two children.

Nicholas Anthony Clegorne is a Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Kennesaw State University. Dr. Clegorne's research and scholarship are focused on developing more capable participatory leaders through P-20 curricular design and intervention. Dr. Clegorne's primary areas of study are postsecondary engineering preparation programs and graduate educational leadership programs. Of particular interest are problem-solving and leadership-coupled professional competencies. Dr. Clegorne's recent research (most recently funded by an NSF REE award) aligns with this theme and investigates professional leadership-coupled competencies and related gaps within Engineering Curricula.

Sheryl Croft is Professor of Educational Leadership in the Bagwell College of Education of Kennesaw State University, Coordinator of the Doctorate in Educational Leadership, and Director of Teaching in the Urban South (TITUS), a multi-state affiliation of scholars dedicated to providing and ensuring educational opportunities for marginalized students throughout the Southeast. In 2020, she served as Program Co-Chair for the 2020 AERA Conference themed "The Power and Possibilities for the Public Good When Researchers and Organizational Stakeholders Collaborate." As a veteran education practitioner with over thirty-five years' K-12 experience, she has served on every level of leadership from classroom teacher to principal to director for high schools to assistant school superintendent. As a scholar, her work is informed by and lies at the intersectionality of informed practice and research that seeks to improve educational opportunities for students marginalized by systemic inequities.

Cavide Demirci completed her doctoral studies in Educational Sciences at the Faculty of Education, Hacettepe University. She currently continues her academic career at the Faculty of Education, Eskişehir Osmangazi University where she serves as a professor. Demirci has conducted extensive research in the field of education, publishing numerous articles on active learning approaches, foreign language teaching, and student-centered learning strategies. Additionally, she has made significant contributions to the implementation of innovative methods in science education and has held various academic and administrative positions. Prof. Dr. Demirci's numerous scientific articles have been published in international journals, and she has also led projects aimed at enhancing the quality of education.

Albert M. Jimenez, Ph.D., is a Professor of Educational Leadership at Kennesaw State University. His research focuses primarily on teacher and leader evaluation and the improvement of evaluation techniques, validity and inter-rater reliability, instrument construction, the improvement of mathematics assessment for English language learners, and improving school culture through leadership. Dr. Jimenez has a background in many assessment techniques through his extensive quantitative training while serving as a psychometrician at the Georgia Center for Assessment at the University of Georgia and in serving as a Faculty Fellow for Assessment as Kennesaw State University. Dr. Jimenez has recently served on the advisory board of the Bridging Theory and Practice: The Rowman and Littlefield Leadership Series. His most recent publications have appeared in the Journal of School Public Relations, the Journal of Educational Supervision, and Educational Planning.

Befekadu Zeleke Kidane (Ph.D. and Associate Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership Studies) is a senior staff in the Department of Educational Planning and Management of the College of Education and Language Studies at Addis Ababa University. He has earned his Ph.D. degree, in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies, M.A. and B.A. degrees in Educational Administration from Addis Ababa University. His research areas are related to educational leadership and policy studies with most of his publications focusing on leadership style, staff commitment, staff job satisfaction, higher education leadership, gender and leadership, TVET graduates' employability, etc. He has served for many years as a consultant in different national and international organizations. He started his career as an educator in secondary school teaching and served in different positions in the education sector.

Abebayehu Desalegn Lojamo is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Policy and Leadership at Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Language Studies., and Department of Educational Planning and Management, Ethiopia. She is also a lecturer at Wolkite University, Department of Educational Planning and Management, Wolkite, Ethiopia. Her area of research includes inclusive education, gender and leadership.

John Kiruru Ndiritu is an experienced educationist with over 15 years' experience in the education sector. He holds a Ph.D. degree in Educational Planning and Economics of Education, a Master of Education degree and a Bachelor of Education degree from Kenyatta University. Currently, Ndiritu is the Director in Charge of Quality Management System and Performance Contracting at Kenyatta University. He has also served as an Executive Dean and Associate Dean in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the same University. He is a lecturer, researcher and an education consultant. Professionally, he also holds an Advanced Certificate in Education Sector Planning, Financial Management, and Budgeting in Education as well as Cost Analysis in Education, all from IIEP/UNESCO. Ndiritu teaches Educational Planning, Management and Policy, Economics of Education and Research Methodology to undergraduates and postgraduates. He has also supervised many postgraduate students at both master's and doctoral levels.

Mukirae Njihia is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Educational Management, Policy and Curriculum Studies in the School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Kenyatta University. He holds a Ph.D. degree in Educational Planning and Policy from Kenyatta University, an Advanced Certificate in Education Sector Planning from IIEP/UNESCO and a certificate in Education for Sustainable Development from the Earth Charter Institute. He teaches courses in educational planning, educational policy, and educational monitoring and evaluation. His research interests are education financing, education decentralization, curriculum, ICT in education, teacher education and education for sustainable development.

Haile Getaneh Terfasa is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Policy and Leadership at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He is a senior lecturer at Ambo University, Department of Educational Planning and Management, Ethiopia. He has earned M.A. and B.A. degrees in Educational Administration from Addis Ababa University. He started his career as an educator and served as principal in Junior and comprehensive secondary schools; Dean of College of Teacher Education and in different positions in Oromia National Regional State Education Bureau. His research interests are in Educational Administration, Leadership, Policy and Management.

Hongying Xiao earned her Doctoral Degree in educational leadership and management (2016) from Tsinghua University, China. Dr. Xiao is currently serving as the Associate Dean of the Institute of Social Governance and Development, Tsinghua University. She is also the Director of the Office of Strategy, Development and Cooperation of the School of Social Sciences, Tsinghua University. She also serves as the Executive President of Hetang Poetry Society, Tsinghua University. Her research interest is focused on the governance and community relations in higher education. Dr. Xiao has published her work in highly esteemed education journals and also assumed leading roles in significant research grant projects funded by the Chinese Central Government.

Cemil Yücel is a professor at the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Sciences at Eskişehir Osmangazi University. He works in the Division of Educational Administration. He earned his bachelor's degree from Ankara University in 1990, his Master's degree from Ohio University in 1996, and his Ph.D. degree in Educational Administration from Virginia Tech in 1999. He began his academic career as a research assistant at Afyon Kocatepe University and later held academic and administrative positions at Uşak University. Between 2016 and 2018, he served as the Dean of the Faculty of Education at Eskişehir Osmangazi University. His research interests include educational administration, instructional leadership, organizational behavior, and education policy. Yücel has numerous national and international publications, and his studies on university satisfaction and distance education are particularly noteworthy.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE 'GAINING AND MAINTAINING POWER STRATEGIES SCALE': A VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY STUDY

SÜHEYLA ORAN ÇINAR
Ministry of National Education, Eskisehir, Turkey
CEMIL YÜCEL
CAVIDE DEMIRCI
Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Eskisehir, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In environments where individuals are the subjects, power struggles are inevitable. To gain or maintain power, people use tactics such as political tactics, influence tactics, impression management, and non-verbal impression management. Previous studies have examined these tactics either separately or together using various methods. This study aims to develop a comprehensive tool incorporating all these approaches, benefiting both literature and researchers. After a literature review, 51 items were initially created. Expert evaluation reduced them to 34, and a pilot study excluded five items with factor loadings below .60. The final 29-item scale was tested on data from 805 teachers in 55 schools in Eskişehir's Tepebaşı and Odunpazarı districts. Exploratory factor analysis grouped the items into four sub-factors, explaining 73.717% of the variance, with loadings from .701 to .898. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated acceptable model fit ($X^2/df = 3.092$), good fit (RMSEA = .052), and excellent indices for CFI, GFI, AGFI, NFI, NNFI, RFI, and IFI (.99). Cronbach's alpha was .941, with subscale coefficients from .915 to .961. These results suggest the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale is a valid and reliable tool.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The concept of "power" is intertwined with almost all scientific disciplines, from social sciences to natural sciences, and is defined differently in each field. Throughout history, power has played a significant role in human relationships and has been a crucial factor in shaping many social and political developments (Fromm, 1990). The desire to acquire power is an important motivation for individuals, as power could influence human behavior, either to adopt, persuade, or establish authority (Schwartz, 1994). Once individuals acquire power, they tend to strive to maintain it and avoid losing it (Adler, 2011).

Power is crucial because it enables individuals to obtain what they desire (Eroğlu, 1998). To understand whether an individual possesses power or not, it is essential to see how much influence he/she has over others' actions and behavior. Those who influence others can be said to have power (Güney, 2015). Although it varies on an individual level, the "desire to be powerful" has manifested itself in various areas of contemporary life and is inherently competitive in nature. If not directed properly, it can lead to negative processes both at the organizational and individual levels (Horuz & Taşgit, 2020).

As a social being, humans engage in mutual interactions with their environment. People tend to maintain their relationships by leaving a positive first impression. The primary goal in interaction is for the impression formed by the other party to align with what the individual desires. For this reason, individuals put effort into leaving the impression they seek. These impressions can range from being liked, to being emulated, or even being feared (Doğan & Kılıç, 2009).

Montagliani and Giacalone (1998) define impression management as the conscious and

active effort to direct social interaction in order to gain social power (Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998); Kaplan et al. (1990) view it as the tactics an individual uses to create a desired identity and image in others (Kaplan et al., 1990). Since individuals care about how they are perceived and evaluated by others, they aim to shape the impression they make, which in turn can be used to influence the direction of social interaction (O'Callaghan & Doyle, 2001). In an organization, an individual aiming to achieve or maintain a specific position strives to solidify their place by leaving positive impressions. In impression management, individuals generally aim to create a positive image of themselves, and sometimes they may even attempt to alter or damage the image of others in a way they believe will benefit them (Doğan & Kılıç, 2009).

One of the prerequisites for ensuring organizational effectiveness is the need for harmony between employees at various hierarchical levels. In other words, individual goals should align with organizational goals. When individual goals take precedence, a power struggle arises, with both superiors and subordinates attempting to influence others to gain or maintain power (Bilgin, 1993). Power is one of the most important tools within an organization, and without it, the continuity of the organization cannot be ensured (Bayrak, 2000). Power impacts all activities within an organization, and individuals engage in efforts to influence one another and acquire power (Alkan & Erdem, 2019). The struggle for power among employees effectively turns organizations into political arenas, where individuals or groups form alliances or leverage certain characteristics to participate in this power game (Mintzberg, 1985). This leads to the formation of political structures within organizations (Erol, 2014).

Individuals seek to gain power by influencing those around them and may resort to political behavior for this purpose. Political behavior is defined as the strategic adjustment of one's actions with the goal of benefiting oneself in the short or long term (Ferris et al., 1989). At its core, political behavior involves the desire to influence others and achieve one's goals through this influence (Bağcı & Bursalı, 2011). In organizations that are inherently political, it is likely that all individuals' behaviors will also be political (İslamoğlu & Börü, 2007). Political behavior is not solely exhibited by subordinates; it can also be exhibited from top to bottom or horizontally. The main aim in this context is to influence others to protect or gain power. The power relations and struggles within an organization have the potential to positively or negatively affect its stakeholders. Therefore, it is essential to examine the political behaviors and tactics employed by individuals in the organization to gain or maintain power.

Significance of Developing the Instrument

This study was conducted to fill this gap in the literature, since there is a lack of sufficient research on the strategies or tactics applied by organizational members in the gaining and maintaining power, which is a driving force in the functioning of organizations. A review of the literature reveals that these tactics have been examined by researchers from many different perspectives. Political tactics have been studied in relation to teachers' ability to influence school principals (Mintzberg, 1985). Studies on organizational politics and tactics have highlighted the impact of political behaviors in various organizational settings (Allen et al., 1979; Bursalı & Bağcı, 2011; Ferris et al., 2000; Pfeffer, 1992).

The concept of teachers' political skills has also been explored in relation to interpersonal strategies and organizational behavior (Akçakanat & Uzunbacak, 2017; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Proactive influence tactics have been studied in relation to the internal-external locus of control (Bilgin, 1993), organizational commitment (Koşar & Pehlivan, 2020; Tekben & Koşar, 2019), job performance (Yurttaş et al., 2020), and organizational justice (Çetin & Çınkır, 2014).

Impression management tactics have been examined together with various constructs in the literature such as personality traits (Acaray & Günsel, 2017), self-efficacy perception (Çetin & Basım, 2010), job satisfaction (Hasçeltik & Özmen, 2019), and organizational justice (Binay & Yıldız, 2017).

However, there has not been a study that addresses both the strategies for gaining or maintaining power and that examines all influence tactics together. Studies on influence tactics have typically focused on just one specific tactic or explored tactics only superficially. Given that all tactics exhibited by employees are essentially applied to gain or maintain power (Alkan & Erdem, 2019), this study examines influence tactics, political tactics, impression management and nonverbal impression management, all within the framework of gaining and maintaining power.

In some scales, such as Political Skill Inventory (Ferris et al., 2000), the Influence Tactics Questionnaire (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), and the impression management scale (Bolino & Turnley, 1999), the focus is on specific dimensions of power. None has integrated all of dimensions of power. Notably, nonverbal impression management has not been included in a single, unified scale about power. In this regard, this study is significant as it provides a comprehensive analysis by combining all these dimensions into one scale, offering a more holistic understanding of power dynamics in organizations.

New users of the scale will gain insights into various strategies individuals employ to acquire and sustain power within organizational settings. By administering the scale, users can collect data on leadership behaviors, decision-making tactics, and influence patterns, which can then inform leadership training programs, organizational assessments, and further academic research.

The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale is designed specifically for educational administrators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to understand how teachers in school settings acquire and maintain power. This scale is also relevant for leadership development program participants and researchers focused on organizational behavior within educational institutions. New users of the scale will gain valuable insights into the various strategies that teachers use to exert influence and establish authority within their schools. By administering this scale, users will be able to gather data on teachers' leadership behaviors, decision-making tactics, impression management, and political strategies. This information can be used to inform leadership training programs, improve school management practices, and guide organizational assessments. Ultimately, it offers a comprehensive tool to help educational leaders identify how power dynamics operate within schools and to better understand the influence tactics employed by teachers to navigate these dynamics.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study is developed to seek answers to the following questions:

1. Is "The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale" a valid measurement tool?
2. Is "The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale" a reliable measurement tool?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Power is one of the oldest and most influential concepts in human history, shaping social relationships and structures. Although there is no universally accepted definition (Hodgkinson, 2008), power is generally described as the capacity to influence others (Lines, 2007). For instance, Koçel (2005) emphasizes directing others toward desired behaviors, while French and Raven (1959) define power as the potential to influence or assert authority. Pfeffer (1992) highlights power's role in overcoming resistance and aligning behaviors with intended changes.

Power is closely linked to influence tactics. French and Raven (1959) identified five bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent. Later, Falbo (1977) categorized 16 influence tactics into rational/irrational and direct/indirect dimensions. Kipnis et al. (1980) expanded on this by introducing the Organizational Influence Strategies Scale, which grouped tactics into hard, soft, and rational categories. Subsequent studies (Schriesheim & Hinkin, 1990; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl & Seifert, 2002; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) refined these classifications, eventually identifying 11 core dimensions.

Yukl's contributions are particularly prominent. He grouped influence tactics into three main categories: impression management, proactive influence, and political tactics (Yukl, 2013). Proactive tactics—such as rational persuasion, consultation, collaboration, and pressure—are consciously used to gain support or compliance.

The concept of impression management, introduced by Goffman (1956), refers to how individuals shape others' perceptions in social interactions. Leary and Kowalski (1990) categorize impression tactics into assertive (e.g., self-promotion, ingratiation) and defensive (e.g., excuses, justifications). These tactics help individuals achieve goals or protect their image (Basım et al., 2006; Yiğit, 2018).

In addition to verbal strategies, nonverbal impression management—including appearance, gestures, and tone of voice—also plays a vital role (Rosenfeld et al., 1995; Sampson, 1995). Such cues can influence perceptions even more than words.

Lastly, political tactics refer to intentional efforts to gain or maintain power within organizations, often beyond formal roles (Van Dijk, 2005). These tactics target access to resources such as status, authority, or expertise. Important classifications come from Allen et al. (1979), Vecchio (1988), and Appelbaum and Hughes (1998).

METHOD

The reliability and validity of "The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale" were evaluated using quantitative approach. Descriptive survey design was used in this study. Quantitative research method is a research approach that aims to generalize the findings to a population by measuring the opinions, attitudes, and tendencies of a sample of a certain size on a particular topic in numerical terms (Creswell, 2013). The survey model is a method used to quickly access large datasets or to summarize important information in order to describe the current situation (Karasar, 2010).

Study Group

The study sample consists of 805 teachers from 55 schools in the Tepebaşı and Odunpazarı districts of Eskişehir, which together represent approximately 27% (accepted as sufficient by Krejcie & Morgan, 1970) of the 206 schools in these districts. Cluster sampling was used to select schools, ensuring the sample reflects the population. The sample size calculation indicated that at least 367 teachers should be included for a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (Büyüköztürk et al, 2017; Cochran, 1977; Karasar, 2010). After ethical approval, data were collected from 805 teachers (292 from Tepebaşı and 513 from Odunpazarı).

The 55 schools include 29 in Odunpazarı and 26 in Tepebaşı, with 38% of the schools being elementary, 38% middle schools, and 24% high schools. Teachers were selected across all school types, with an average of 20-30 scales per school. Demographic data in Table 1 below show that 65.7% of the teachers are female, 34.3% male. The majority (81.9%) hold bachelor's degrees, with 16.9% holding a master's degree. In terms of professional experience, 39.4% have 11-20 years of service, and 37.6% have 21-30 years. Regarding tenure at their current schools, 73.2% have worked there for 1-10 years.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentage Distributions of the Demographic Characteristics of the Teachers Participating in the Study

	Category	F	%
Gender	Female	529	65.7
	Male	276	34.3
	Total	805	100
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	659	81.9
	Master's Degree	136	16.8
	PhD Degree	10	1.2
	Total	805	100
Professional Seniority	1-10 Years	134	16.6
	11-20 Years	317	39.4
	21-30 Years	303	37.6
	31-40 Years	49	6.1
	41 Years and above	2	0.2
	Total	805	100
Years of Service in the School	1-10 Years	589	73.2
	11-20 Years	187	23.2
	21-30 Years	24	3
	31 Years and above	5	0.6
	Total	805	100
School Type	Elementary School	357	44.3
	Middle School	263	32.7
	High School	185	23
	Total	805	100

Data Collection Tool

The data were collected using the "Personal Information Form" and "The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale" developed by the researchers. The first section includes demographic information about the teachers, while the second section consists of a 29-item, five-point Likert-type scale. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, as well as reliability analyses, were conducted separately for each sub-dimension.

Before developing the scale, existing instruments in the literature were reviewed. It was concluded that no comprehensive tool covered influence tactics, impression management, non-verbal impression management, and political tactics together. Existing tools focused on only one or two topics. This scale, however, uniquely integrates all four topics, offering a comprehensive tool that significantly enhances the understanding of power strategies and fills a critical gap in the literature.

The primary aim was to create a single measurement tool for tactics (strategies) used in gaining and maintaining power. After reviewing relevant literature, 51 initial items were drafted. Following a detailed review, similar items were combined, reducing the number to 40. Three Turkish language teachers then reviewed the wording and grammar, leading to further revisions for clarity.

Expert opinions were sought for content validity, resulting in the removal of 6 unsuitable or redundant items, leaving 34 items. The scale was formatted as a 5-point Likert type: (1) None, (2) Very Few, (3) Some, (4) Most, and (5) Almost Everyone. A pilot test revealed 5 items with factor loadings below .60, which were subsequently removed. The finalized scale consisted of 29 items, ready for data collection.

FINDINGS

Analysis of Construct Validity and Factor Structures

In the study, the construct validity of the scale was examined using data obtained from 805 teachers. In general, the validity of a scale is assessed in terms of content validity, construct validity, and criterion validity. In construct validity, the aim is to assess how well the indicators of a construct align with each other, how much they correspond, or how well different constructs are distinct from one another (Neuman, 2010). One of the most commonly used techniques for evaluating construct validity is factor analysis, which is a statistical technique that aims to explain a large number of variables with fewer factors by grouping variables that measure the same construct or characteristic (Büyüköztürk, 2012; Tavşancıl, 2010).

For this reason, to determine whether the data is suitable for factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted. The Bartlett test examines whether there is a relationship among the variables through partial correlation, and the significance of the calculated chi-square statistic indicates whether the data matrix is suitable. A KMO value of .60 or higher is expected to indicate that the data is suitable for factor analysis (Büyüköztürk, 2012).

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of the data was measured at .941, and since this value is higher than .60, it was concluded that the scale is suitable for factor analysis according to the KMO test result. Additionally, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be statistically significant ($\chi^2(371) = 21.554.546$; $p < .01$). Based on this, it was decided to proceed with the factor analysis of the scale with 29 items.

In exploratory factor analysis, the correlations between the items in the scale are calculated. The items in the scale correlate with certain factors and differentiate from each other. In this study, the minimum value for the factor loadings was determined to be .60. The recommended minimum values for factor loadings in factor analysis may vary depending on the type of study and the type of analysis used. However, according to the literature, the accepted minimum value for factor loadings is .50 (Hair et al., 2010), while Field (2013) considers this minimum value to be .40; Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) state that it should be at least .32. The lowest factor loading of an item in the scale was measured at .701. Given these values, it can be said that the factor loadings of the scale are acceptable according to the aforementioned studies.

The factor analysis conducted using the Varimax rotation technique revealed that the items were grouped under 4 different factors. The distribution of the factors and the variance explained by each factor are presented in Table 2 below. It was observed that the loadings of all items in the scale were above .70 and grouped under four factors. The explained variance ratio for the entire scale was measured as 73.717.

Table 2 *Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale (n=805)*

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Item 44	.832			
Item 51	.824			
Item 47	.813			
Item 43	.813			
Item 48	.810			
Item 50	.806			
Item 40	.804			
Item 46	.804			
Item 3		.830		
Item 2		.821		
Item 1		.796		
Item 6		.793		
Item 7		.773		
Item 4		.757		
Item 5		.748		
Item 8		.701		
Item 19			.898	
Item 18			.890	
Item 17			.871	
Item 16			.831	
Item 20			.828	
Item 21			.827	
Item 15			.731	
Item 27				.824
Item 25				.821
Item 28				.799
Item 26				.789
Item 29				.744
Item 22				.718
Eigenvalue	6.273	5.703	5.153	4.249
Explained Variance %	21.632	19.665	17.769	14.651
Cumulative Variance %	21.632	41.297	59.066	73.717

In the "Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale," the first factor comprises 8 items related to political tactics, labelled as the "Political Tactics" dimension. The second factor, also with 8 items, pertains to impression management and is named the "Impression Management" dimension. The third factor includes 7 items focused on nonverbal impression management, thus labelled the "Nonverbal Impression Management" dimension. The fourth factor, consisting of 6 items, describes influence tactics and is termed the "Influence Tactics" dimension. Factor analysis confirmed that the scale has a four-factor structure. The correlations between the factors in the scale have been measured using Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Spearman's Rho Correlation Analysis Results for Determining the Relationships between the Sub Dimensions of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale

Sub Dimensions		1	2	3	4
1. Political Tactics	r	-			
	p				
	n				
2. Impression Management	r	.632**	-		
	p	.000			
	n	805			
3. Nonverbal Impression Management	r	.099**	.136**	-	
	p	.000	.000		
	n	805	805		
4. Influence Tactics	r	.496**	.392**	.329**	-
	p	.000	.000	.000	
	n	805	805	805	

***Statistically significant (p<.01).*

According to the Spearman's Rho correlation analysis results presented in Table 3, it was observed that all four sub dimensions identified in "The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale" have positive relationships with each other at the p<.01 level. This indicates that the results support the conceptual structure of the scale.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of 'The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale'

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to test the suitability of the identified factors after conducting the exploratory factor analysis of the gaining and maintaining power strategies scale, LISREL 12 software was used for the CFA and a diagram as shown in Figure 1 below was generated after performing the CFA.

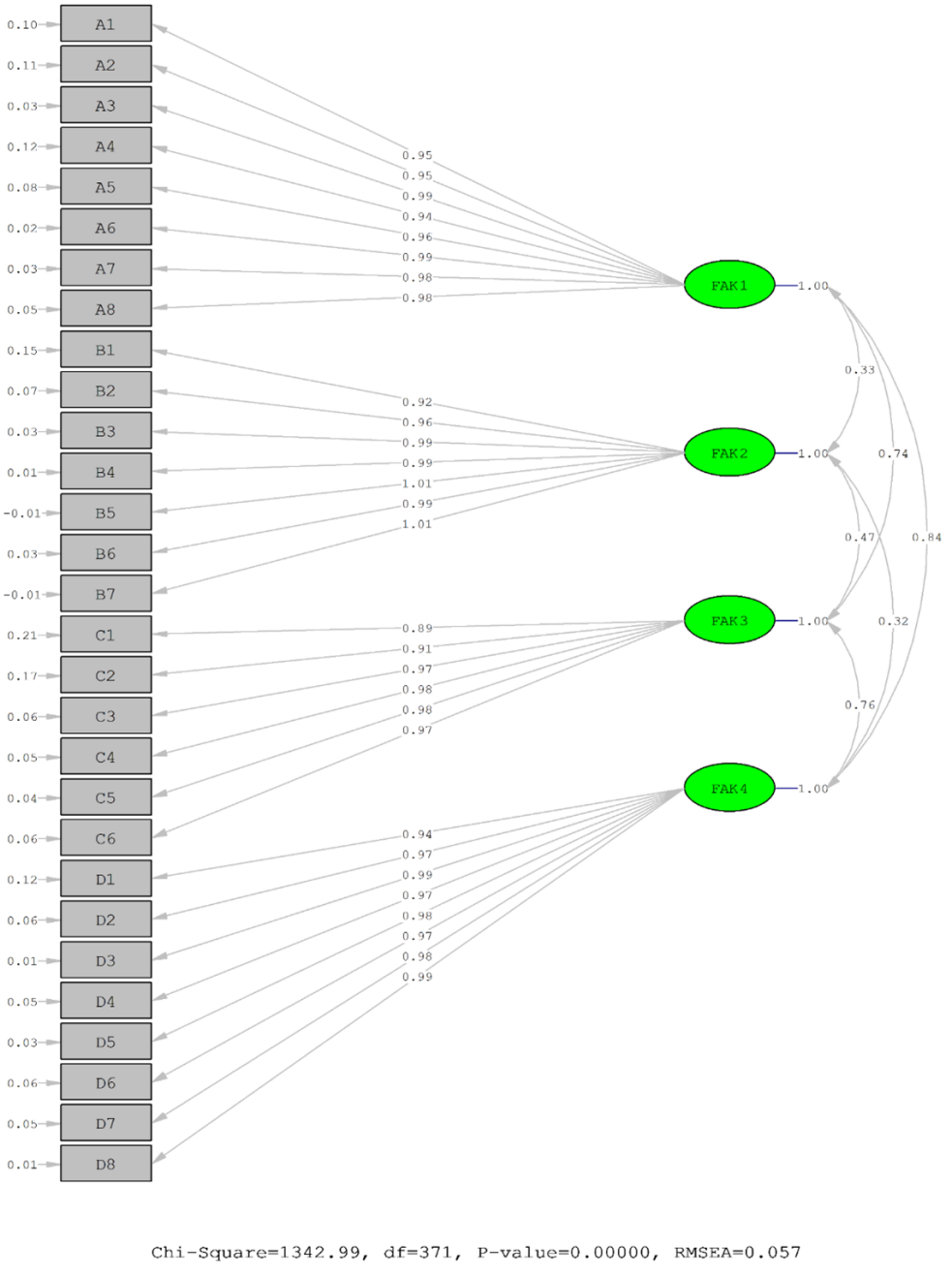

Figure 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale: Initial Diagram

The fit indices of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale tested through confirmatory factor analysis are provided in Table 4 below:

Table 4

CFA Fit Indices of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale

Indices	**Values**
Chi Square (X^2)	1342.99
Df (degrees of freedom)	371
X2/df	3.619
p value	.000
CFI (Comparative Fit Index)	.992
GFI (Goodness of fit index)	.991
AGFI (Adjusted goodness of fit index)	.989
NFI (Normed fit index)	.989
NNFI (Non-normed fit index)	.991
RMSEA (Root mean square error approximation)	.057
PNFI (Parsimony normed fit index)	.904
PGFI (Parsimony goodness of fit index)	.845
RFI (Relative fit index)	.988
IFI (Incremental fit index)	.992

After the exploratory factor analysis, the factors of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale were tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the values of the fit indices in Table 4 and the diagram in Figure 1 were obtained. Following the analysis of the model in the LISREL program, the suggested modification indicated that the relationship between the errors of some items in the scale was stronger compared to their relationships with other items, and these changes pointed to a higher likelihood of better defining the items (Şimşek, 2007).

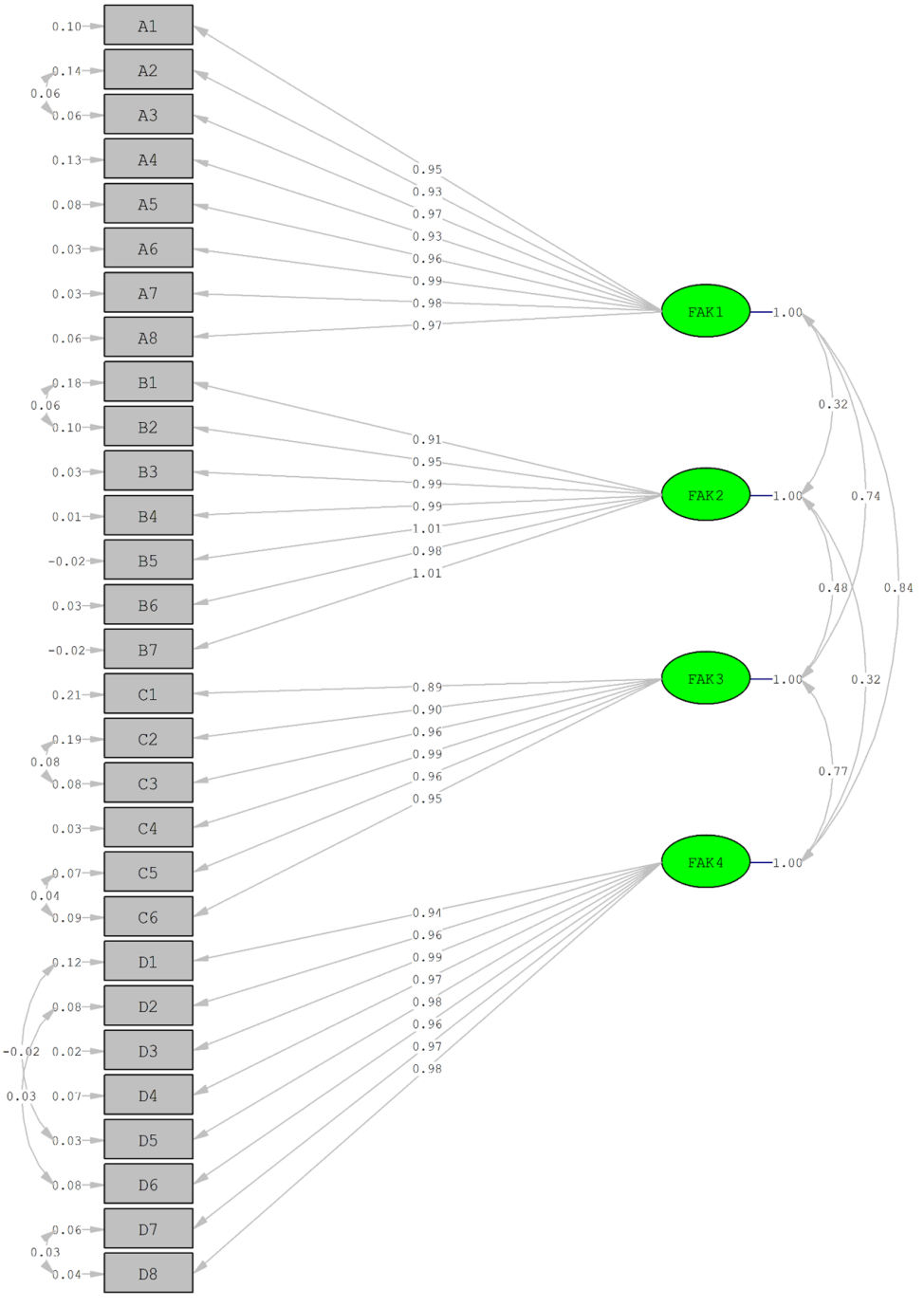

Figure 2

Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale: Second Diagram

Since the program recommended making these changes for a better model fit, after implementing the changes, the analysis was conducted again, and the diagram resulting from the correction in Figure 2 above and the fit index values after the modification in Table 5 below were obtained.

Table 5

Secondary CFA Fit Indices of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale

Indices	Measured Value	Excellent Fit	Good Fit	Acceptable Fit
X^2/df*	3.092	$X^2/df \leq 2$	$2 < X^2/df < 3$	$3 < X^2/df < 5$
CFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
GFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
AGFI*	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
NFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
NNFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
RMSEA***	.052	≤ .05	.05 < RMSEA < .08	.08 < RMSEA < .10
PNFI****	.89	.95 < PNFI < 1.00		.50 < PNFI < .95
PGFI****	.83	.95 < PGFI < 1.00		.50 < PGFI < .95
RFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
IFI**	.99	≥ .95	≥ .90	≥ .85
p value	.000			

**Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003), Kline (2016), Hooper et al. (2008).*
***Baumgartner & Homburg (1996), Bentler (1990).*
**** Steiger (2007), Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003).*
***** Meyers et al. (2006).*

The fit index values obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis indicate that the data fit the model well. In the studies by Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003), the X^2/df ratio below 2 is classified as excellent fit, between 2 and 3 as good fit, and between 3 and 5 as acceptable fit (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Kline (2016) states that a X^2/df ratio below 3 indicates good fit (Kline, 2016). Hooper et al. (2008) indicate that a X^2/df ratio between 2 and 3 is good fit, and between 3 and 5 is acceptable fit (Hooper et al., 2008). Based on these results, the X^2/df ratio measured at 3.092, which is slightly above the good fit threshold indicated by the researchers, shows an acceptable fit according to the studies by Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003), Kline (2016), and Hooper et al. (2008). After adjustments, the AGFI value measured at .99 is considered an excellent fit index according to Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003); the CFI, GFI, NFI, RFI, IFI, and NNFI values, all measured at .99, are considered excellent fit indices according to Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) and Bentler (1990). After the adjustment, the RMSEA value was found to be .052. The RMSEA value is a fit index that measures how well the model fits the data, typically ranging from 0 to 1. A value closer to 0 indicates a better fit of the scale (Şimşek, 2007). According to Steiger (2007) and Schermelleh-Engel et al. (2003), a RMSEA value between .00 and .05 indicates excellent fit, while a value between .05 and .08 suggests acceptable fit. Based on this, the RMSEA value of .052 can

be considered as acceptable fit. The PNFI value of .89 and the PGFI value of .83, measured in the confirmatory factor analysis, can be considered to show acceptable fit according to the criteria of .50 < PNFI-PGFI < .95 expressed by Meyers et al. (2006).

Findings about the Reliability of the Scale

Reliability refers to the ability of a measurement tool to produce stable and consistent results. In Likert-type scales, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient is used to determine reliability. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient can also be expressed as a measure of the internal consistency of the scale items. For a scale, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value between 0 and 1 is expected, and an acceptable value is generally considered to be .70. In the reliability studies of the Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies scale, Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient was calculated to determine the internal consistency of the scale items, and the results are presented in Table 6 below:

As seen in Table 6, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient for the entire scale was measured as .941. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the subdimensions of the scale were calculated as .961 for "Political Tactics," .937 for "Impression Management," .936 for "Nonverbal Impression Management," and .915 for "Influence Tactics." These values indicate that the internal consistency of the scale is quite high for all four subdimensions.

Table 6

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients for Sub Dimensions Determined after Factor Analysis (n=805)

Sub Dimensions	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient
1. Political Tactics	8	.961
2. Impression Management	8	.937
3. Nonverbal Impression Management	7	.936
4. Influence Tactics	6	.915
Total Scale	29	.941

After the validity and reliability studies conducted for The Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale, a scale form consisting of 29 items was obtained. The scale was prepared in a 5-point Likert format, with response options as follows: "(1) None, (2) Very Few, (3) Some, (4) Most, and (5) Almost Everyone."

DISCUSSION

It is inevitable that various approaches to gaining power or maintaining the power one possesses are exhibited across all segments of society. The data collection tools, used to determine what approaches individuals exhibit toward gaining or maintaining power, or to what extent these approaches are demonstrated, are generally used to measure only a single strategy (political tactics, influence tactics, impression management or nonverbal impression management). Therefore, the lack of a comprehensive tool to measure these approaches collectively was identified, and it was thought that a measurement tool capable of assessing all these approaches together would contribute to the literature. In this regard, measurement tools for political tactics, influence tactics, impression management, and nonverbal impression management, as demonstrated in the literature, were

reviewed, and an instrument to measure these four approaches using a single tool was developed. Validity and reliability analyses were conducted.

As a result of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, as well as reliability testing, it was concluded that the 'Gaining and Maintaining Power Strategies Scale,' with four subdimensions and 29 items, is a valid and reliable instrument. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that a single tool can be used to identify the gaining and maintaining power strategies exhibited by teachers and is significant because it will provide ease for researchers and future studies.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are derived from the author's (Çınar, 2024) doctoral dissertation and are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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STRUGGLING FOR SURVIVAL: THE IMPACT OF LOW SALARIES AND HIGH LIVING COSTS ON FACULTY MEMBERS AT ETHIOPIAN UNIVERSITIES

EASAW ALEMAYEHU ASSEFA
Displaced International, USA

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how low salaries combined with high living expenses affect satisfaction levels and overall well-being and service quality performance of Ethiopian university faculty members. Research data came from surveys and interviews of 200 faculty members. The research shows compensation levels are lower than professionals' contribution to the institution which creates substantial job dissatisfaction among faculty members because of both inadequate wages and high cost of living expenses. The survey participants described economic limitations that create adverse impacts on their instructional efficiency and research output and professional-personal integration. More immediate budget enhancements through salary adjustments, incentive programs and better institutional resources must become a high priority for Ethiopian universities to resolve this situation. Educational planners should develop specific retention approaches to draw and maintain quality faculty who will enhance institutional quality. Improving faculty financial circumstances leads to enhanced education quality alongside better academic results in educational institutions. The document serves as the basis for additional academic research on economic challenges faculty members face within institutions of higher learning.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

University education systems worldwide benefit from effective operation (Assefa, 2023; Balzer, 2020) when faculty members experience financial stability. Low-paying salaries and high living costs negatively impact teaching quality, research output, and institutional values (Babcock, 2024). The interplay between living costs and faculty salaries is a crucial component of educational theories that directly influence the quality of education and the operational efficiency of universities (Houghton et al., 2021). The cultural acceptance of fair compensation as a key factor in attracting qualified personnel is evident globally (Assefa, 2024; Kaddoura & Al, 2023). Educational theories, such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, confirm that professionals, including professors, require financial security to enhance their work performance (Maslow, 1943; Zhou et al., 2022). Individuals need to address their economic needs before they can progress toward developmental goals and meaningful student engagement (Ansorger, 2021; Maslow, 1943).

Institutions with below-average pay scales experience numerous adverse outcomes, including decreased job satisfaction and institutional commitment, alongside higher faculty turnover rates (Sintayehu, & Hussien, 2021; Umeh, 2023). Financial pressures hinder faculty members' ability to fully dedicate themselves to teaching and research responsibilities, negatively affecting the learning environment for students (Ahmad et al., 2024). High living expenses perpetuate a cycle of dissatisfaction among employees, exacerbating these challenges (Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). Therefore, educational institutions must base their policies for improving faculty well-being and performance on financial considerations to achieve their objectives (Doğan & Arslan, 2024).

Research from various university contexts indicates that faculty members face negative outcomes when pay rates are low while local living costs remain high (Alemayehu, 2021; Gerashchenko, 2024). Empirical studies show that faculty in understaffed institutions frequently endure significant financial strain, leading to increased turnover and declining job satisfaction

levels (Olowonefa et al., 2022). Investigations within educational institutions confirm that salary discrepancies across different organizations directly impact faculty stress levels, increasing the potential for burnout among teaching staff (Ahmad et al., 2024).

Developing countries encounter escalating challenges that complicate their situations. Numerous studies have identified three primary issues faced by educational institutions in these regions: inadequate salary compensation, minimal institutional support, and limited access to resources (Shaoan et al., 2025). Research indicates that economic difficulties in Nigeria adversely affect employee morale, faculty performance, and overall workplace satisfaction (Haruna & Pongri, 2024). Existing literature highlights the necessity for financial support for higher education educators operating under unstable economic conditions with restricted institutional funding.

In Ethiopia, the combined factors of limited compensation and high living costs present a unique situation that requires thorough research attention (Teferra & Altbach, 2004). The current compensation package for teachers at Ethiopian universities fails to meet welfare standards, as urban cost increases outpace their already constrained salaries (Adamu, 2024). For instance, the gross monthly salary for full professors in Ethiopia is approximately US Dollar 358, which reduces to US Dollar 234 after tax and pension deductions. According to Adamu (2024), this net income is insufficient to cover the rent of a basic two-bedroom apartment in the local area. The significant gap between faculty earnings and essential living costs creates an extreme sense of unfairness. This situation becomes particularly dire when university staff find their salaries inadequate for survival and feel compelled to seek additional work outside their institutions (Adamu, 2024). Consequently, universities face a major crisis as economic pressures adversely affect both faculty recruitment and retention, thereby compromising educational quality (Halabieh et al., 2022).

Educational employees often seek supplementary income through tutoring or consulting due to insufficient funds for basic living expenses (Solomon & Du, 2024). The dual responsibilities of teaching and additional work diminish faculty focus on research and student engagement (Wang et al., 2016). As a result, students receive a lower quality of education because faculty members struggle to balance their professional commitments with financial concerns (Vican et al., 2020). Research addressing the unique challenges faced by Ethiopian university faculty members has been limited thus far (Tareke et al., 2024).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do low salaries impact the job satisfaction and overall well-being of faculty members at Ethiopian universities?
2. What are the effects of high living costs on the professional performance and retention of faculty members in Ethiopian universities?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to fill a gap in the scholarly literature by examining the comprehensive effects of inadequate pay and high living expenses on Ethiopian university faculty. While economic research in higher education is extensive globally, there is a lack of studies addressing the specific issues encountered by Ethiopian instructors. This investigation focuses on this context to enhance understanding of the effects of economic stress on faculty welfare and educational standards in Ethiopia.

The findings of this research will provide valuable insights into institutional change and policy development. This study presents first-hand evidence regarding faculty conditions, enabling stakeholders to recognize the urgent need for salary reforms, improved support systems, and adjustments to living allowances. Ultimately, this research seeks to foster an ethical environment for faculty at Ethiopian universities, thereby enhancing the quality of higher education in the country.

LIMITATIONS

1. Sample Size: The study had a limited sample size which affected the generalizability of the findings to all faculty members across Ethiopian universities.
2. Response Bias: Participants might have provided socially desirable responses or may not have fully disclosed their financial struggles, leading to biased results.
3. Cross-Sectional Design: The study employed a cross-sectional design, which did not capture changes over time or the long-term impacts of low salaries and high living costs.
4. Regional Variations: The study did not account for regional differences in living costs and salaries, which varied significantly across different areas of Ethiopia.

DELIMITATIONS

1. Focus on Faculty Members: The study specifically targeted faculty members at Ethiopian universities, excluding other staff or administrators who also experienced similar challenges.
2. Geographic Scope: The research was designed to focus on the faculty of Ethiopian universities. Faculty in other universities in other countries were not involved.
3. Financial Aspects: The study concentrated on low salaries and high living costs, deliberately excluding other factors that might have affected faculty wellbeing.
4. Time Frame: The research was conducted within a specific time frame, which did not capture seasonal variations in living costs or salaries

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a valuable framework for understanding the combined effects of inadequate pay and high living costs faced by teaching staff in Ethiopian universities (Maslow, 1943; Mingzhi, 2025). This operational framework illustrates that unmet needs create barriers to faculty performance and overall wellness.

Physiological Needs

The hierarchy begins with physiological needs, which encompass essentials like food, shelter, and clothing. Ethiopian faculty members often struggle to meet these basic requirements due to low salaries, leading to significant financial hardship (Maslow, 1943; Smith & Sweet, 2021). This inability to satisfy fundamental needs disrupts their focus on teaching and academic responsibilities (Colclasure et al., 2021).

Safety Needs

Following physiological needs, safety needs are crucial for stability. Ethiopian faculty members face challenges in securing their basic life requirements, which further compounds their financial difficulties (Tessema & Abebe, 2011). This financial strain impacts their ability to concentrate on their teaching roles and academic duties (Adamu, 2024).

Love and Belongingness Needs

The next level involves love and belonging needs, which are essential for social connections. Faculty members' financial struggles hinder their ability to engage fully with colleagues and students, affecting their sense of belonging within the academic community (Adamu, 2024).

Esteem Needs

Esteem needs, which pertain to recognition and self-worth, are also affected by financial constraints. When faculty members cannot afford basic living necessities, their professional esteem may diminish further impacting their academic performance (Maslow, 1943; Mingzhi, 2025).

Self-Actualization Needs

At the pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization, representing the realization of personal potential (Maslow, 1943; Smith & Sweet, 2021). Financial limitations often restrict faculty members' opportunities for research and professional development (Gonzalez et al., 2019). Without meeting lower-order needs, the pursuit of self-actualization becomes significantly hindered, limiting their engagement with the academic community (Al Maamari, 2025; Maslow, 1943).

This study aims to explore the effects of low wages and high living expenses on the wellbeing and productivity of Ethiopian university faculty members through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. It highlights the interconnectedness of basic needs, economic hardship, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of education, extending beyond the limits of mere employment.

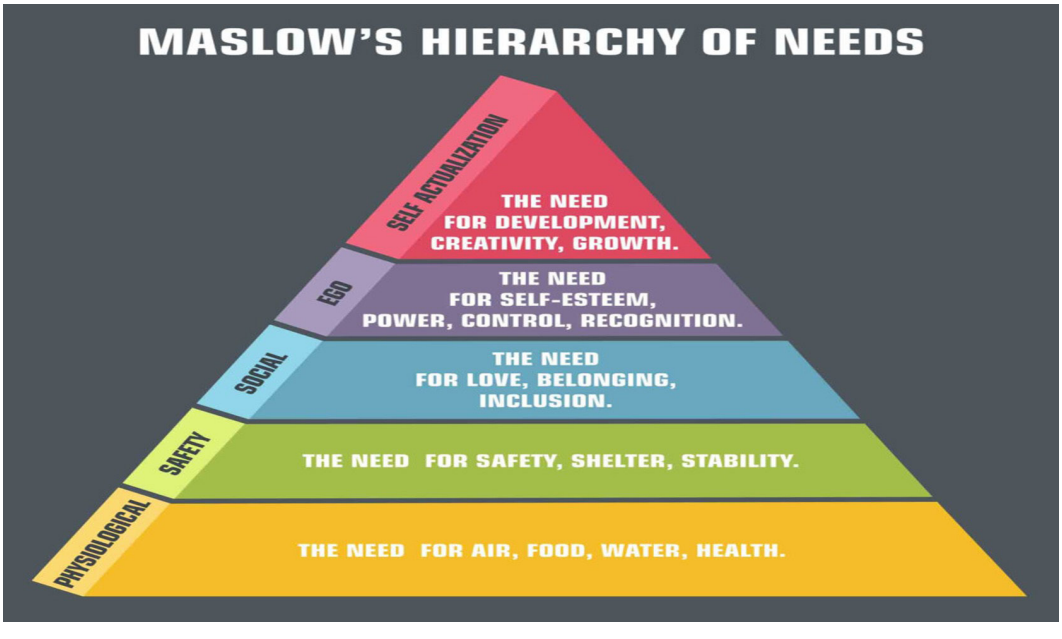

Figure 1: *Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was used to include quantitative and qualitative approaches to conduct a comprehensive assessment about how Ethiopian government university faculty members are affected by their reduced salaries and increased living expenses (Tang, 2025). This research design utilized surveys and interviews as complementary tools that produced complete insight into the problems while collecting statistical patterns together with extensive personal testimonials (Fàbregues & Guetterman, 2025).

Participants

A total of 200 faculty members served as the target participants throughout this research in various government universities across Ethiopia. Research participants represented several areas of study in addition to different levels of seniority and years of teaching experience. The 200 participants were distributed with 60 males and 140 females across five different Ethiopian government universities. Stratified sampling offered a method to obtain diverse faculty member representations for the study. The sampling approach included various academic fields including humanities, science, engineering and social sciences and different national locations because it allows participant inclusion.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys

A structured questionnaire was developed as the primary tool for collecting quantitative data. The questionnaire aimed to gather information on faculty experiences related to salaries, living costs, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. The survey included a mix of closed-ended questions using Likert scale formats to measure perceptions and experiences. Key areas of focus included:

- **Demographic Information:** Questions regarding age, gender, academic rank, years of service, and the specific government university where respondents were employed.
- **Salary Levels and Perceived Adequacy:** Faculty members were asked to report on their current salary and evaluate their sufficiency in meeting their basic needs and maintaining a desired standard of living.
- **Living Costs:** The survey included questions about various living expenses such as housing, transportation, food, healthcare, and any additional costs that impacted their financial situation.
- **Job Satisfaction and Engagement:** Participants were asked to rate their overall job satisfaction, engagement levels, and the perceived impact of financial stress on their teaching and research activities.
- **Intentions to Stay in Current Positions:** Faculty members were queried about their plans to remain in their current positions, considering factors such as salary and living costs.

The surveys were distributed electronically to facilitate ease of access and data collection. Faculty members were invited to participate via email, with follow-up reminders sent to encourage participation. This method ensured a higher response rate and allowed participants to complete the survey at their convenience.

Interviews

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a selected subset of faculty members to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perspectives. Approximately 20 faculty members were chosen for interviews based on their survey responses, ensuring a diverse mix of demographics, academic ranks, and experiences. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their thoughts and experiences in detail. Key topics explored during the interviews included:

- Personal Experiences with Salary and Living Costs: Faculty members were invited to discuss their financial circumstances and how these impacted their daily lives and professional responsibilities.
- Coping Strategies: Participants shared the strategies they employed to manage financial stress, including any adjustments they made to their lifestyles or teaching practices.
- Impact of Economic Pressures: The interviews explored how low salaries and high living costs affected faculty members' teaching effectiveness, research output, and overall job satisfaction.
- Suggestions for Institutional Support: Faculty members were asked to provide recommendations for how universities could better support them considering the financial challenges they faced.

Interviews were conducted in-person. Each interview was recorded (with consent) to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data

The survey data were analyzed using statistical software called SPSS version 25, to calculate descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. The results were presented in tables to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation. Descriptive statistics were particularly useful for summarizing the demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as the overall trends in salary adequacy and living costs.

Qualitative Data

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to faculty experiences. This analysis involved several stages, including:

1. **Familiarization:** Researchers read through the transcripts multiple times to become familiar with the content and identify initial ideas.
2. **Coding:** Key phrases and concepts were coded to organize the data into meaningful categories.
3. **Theme Development:** Codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the essence of faculty experiences regarding low salaries and high living costs.
4. **Interpretation:** The themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions, highlighting the nuanced experiences of faculty members and the systemic challenges they faced.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

The study's survey instrument demonstrated both validity and reliability. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to ensure that the items were relevant and accurately reflected the constructs being measured. Validity was established through content validity, which involved a thorough literature review and consultations with subject matter experts. These experts ensured that the items were appropriate for the constructs of "Impact of Low Salaries" and "Effects of High Living Costs." Their feedback led to refinements in item clarity and comprehensiveness. To further validate the instrument, a pilot test was conducted with a representative sample. Participant feedback from this test confirmed consistent interpretation of the items, supporting construct validity. As shown in table 1 below, reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with values exceeding 0.7 specifically 0.79 and 0.84 for all variables indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Overall, this rigorous approach demonstrates that the survey instrument is both valid and reliable for measuring the intended constructs.

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items	Acceptability
Impact of low salaries	0.79	6	Acceptable
Effects of high living costs	0.84	6	Acceptable

Table 1: *The Reliability of the Scales*

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring they understood the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were informed that their involvement in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without facing any penalties.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process by anonymizing participant data and securely storing all collected information. The reporting of results ensured that individual identities were not disclosed, safeguarding the privacy of all participants.

FINDINGS

Impact of Low Salaries on Faculty in Ethiopian Universities

RQ1: How do low salaries impact the job satisfaction and overall well-being of faculty members at Ethiopian universities?

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Low salaries significantly affect my overall job satisfaction.	200	4.64	0.88
2	I often feel stressed due to my salary not being sufficient to meet my basic living expenses.	200	4.76	0.71
3	My motivation to engage in teaching and research is negatively impacted by my salary level.	200	4.83	0.92
4	I believe that my salary does not reflect my contributions and efforts as a faculty member.	200	4.77	0.82
5	Low salaries diminish my sense of well-being both personally and professionally.	200	4.66	0.87
6	I would consider leaving my position if my salary does not improve in the near future.	200	4.58	0.66
	Overall Average	200	4.7	0.81

Table 2: Impact of Low Salaries on Faculty Job Satisfaction and Well-Being

Impact on Job Satisfaction

Table 2 Item 1 documents that faculty members strongly agree (mean=4.64) that low salary levels notably affect their job satisfaction while demonstrating a standard deviation of 0.88. The high mean value demonstrates that faculty members show strong support for the idea that inadequate pay negatively impacts their job satisfaction. Standard deviation levels remained low because most faculty members consistently expressed their dissatisfaction regarding salary effects on their work satisfaction.

The Hierarchy of Needs Theory by Abraham Maslow states that salary meets fundamental basic needs of individuals for both physiological and safety requirements. People who lack satisfaction in their work experience may be dissatisfied because they lack financial security. Academic personnel with low salaries fail to reach motivational heights and experiences high fulfillment which leads to negative consequences on their performance and well-being. One interview respondent replied,

> *The insufficient pay level creates an ongoing dissatisfaction with my current work. Worrying about financial stability constantly occupies my mind thus preventing me from dedicating sufficient attention to teaching and research duties. Finances become an obstacle that reduces both my work motivation and my enthusiasm. Inadequate compensation makes it challenging to experience professional respect when working as an education professional.*

As heard in the interviewee, financial worries directly affect their job satisfaction levels because money directly impacts motivational levels. The interviewee's sentiments serve as evidence to support Maslow's theory because faculty success in meeting their physiological and safety needs determines their ability to achieve job satisfaction and role fulfillment. The necessity for institutions to revise compensation scales becomes evident because it will boost both job contentment and professional achievement levels.

Financial Stress

The study outcome in Table 2, Item 2 indicates that faculty members experience high levels of stress because their earnings fall short of meeting their essential expenses with a mean score of 4.76 and standard deviation of 0.71. A considerable number of faculty members report experiencing stress from their insufficient compensation according to the high mean value. Data clustering shows a unified opinion because the standard deviation value remains low thus indicating faculty members share similar perspectives about how their income affects their financial situation.

The shortage of sufficient income to cover basic needs disrupts people's physical and security requirements as described by Abraham Maslow's Needs Hierarchy model. Unmet fundamental requirements trigger stress together with anxiety that leads to poor performance and decreased satisfaction at work. This finding establishes that adequate compensation matters because faculty need to concentrate on their work duties instead of managing financial insecurities. One interview respondent replied,

> *The inadequate amount of my salary causes me ongoing stress because it fails to cover my essential living costs. The worrisome thoughts about paying my bills along with everyday essentials make it difficult to focus on my job duties. When stress adds intensity to my life it removes my teaching enthusiasm and steals my energy. My job performance is worth more than what I earn because my pay does not match my commitment at work.*

The qualitative findings suggest that faculty experiences stress because of low pay which substantiates data from the survey about salary-related stress. Stress develops due to neglected physiological needs which prevents people from fully achieving their personal and professional goals according to Maslow's theory. The support of faculty personal and professional development requires proper attention to salary issues within the work environment.

Motivation and Engagement

The ratings collected through Table 2 Item 3 reveal faculty members feel strongly that their teaching and research motivation suffers from their current salary payment level since respondents scored mean of 4.83 with 0.92 standard deviation. A strong agreement exists among faculty members that salary levels substantially determine their teaching and research motivation because the mean score shows a very high value. The overall data shows distinct dissatisfaction patterns because of salary-related issues even though the standard deviation indicates limited response variability.

Research by Abraham Maslow demonstrates that individuals require satisfying their physiological requirements and feeling valued to develop strong motivational levels. Perceived insufficient salaries cause faculty members to experience undervaluation which decreases their professional motivation along with their involvement in their academic work. The revealed importance of sufficient compensation proves how faculty members need financial security to concentrate on their teaching duties as well as research pursuits. One interview respondent replied,

My pay level demotivates me to perform teaching duties and research activities. My colleagues from different disciplines earn high salaries which makes me uncertain about my teaching effectiveness. The awareness of salary restrictions related to my current position makes me experience decreased work enthusiasm.

The findings in this section confirm quantitative results that show teachers feel less motivated because of insufficient pay which demonstrates how insufficient compensation diminishes engagement among faculty members. The sentiment reinforces Maslow's theory because insufficient respect in the workplace results in reduced motivation within professional positions. The success of faculty teaching and research requires organizations to resolve compensation problems that affect their motivation and performance.

Recognition of Contributions

The results in Table 2 Item 4 indicate faculty members strongly agree that their salary does not match their professional contributions because they rate it at 4.77 on a 5-point scale with standard deviation 0.82. A substantial number of faculty members agree that their pay does not correspond to their professional work through a high mean score. Data show that employees register a general level of salary dissatisfaction although their opinions vary slightly in extent.

The Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs Theory suggests that workforce feelings of underappreciation related to compensation lead to failures in meeting their esteem requirements. Evaluation of teaching staff reveals that insufficient compensation for their work leading to feelings of being undervalued and lack of motivation. The study confirms that compensation alignment with workplace contributions stands as a critical factor to boost productivity and job happiness among the faculty members. One interview respondent replied,

The salary I receive fails to match the level of my teaching dedication as well as my research pursuits. Hours upon hours of classroom instruction and research and mentoring activities fail to reflect properly in my insufficient paycheck at the university. The salary disconnection limits my morale as well as my dedication to the institution.

The interviewee believes their compensation fails to match their scholarly value which represents a common concern among teaching staff. According to Maslow's theory the employee's perception aligns with unmet esteem needs preventing both fulfillment and motivation. It is essential to address salary-contribution differences because such resolution builds support for faculty contributions and strengthens total staff satisfaction.

Sense of Well-Being

Provided data in Table 2 Item 5 demonstrates that low salaries cause significant negative effects on both personal and professional well-being of respondents with a mean score of 4.66 and standard deviation at 0.87. Many educators report that insufficient salary levels negatively impact their entire well-being to a significant extent based on the high mean score. A standard deviation of 0.87 indicates faculty members exhibit unified agreement that income levels at work affect their personal and professional life.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory links well-being specifically to the success of achieving physiological along with esteem needs. The perception of low salaries leads school staff members to experience ongoing professional and personal distress that affects their life quality and work performance. Insufficient compensation represents a crucial determinant which affects both workers' general wellness alongside their job contentment levels. One interview respondent replied,

My happiness along with my work satisfaction suffer when earnings remain low. My ongoing financial stress overwhelms me which damages both my mental health and my quality of presence as an educator for my students. The combination of financial concerns prevents me from experiencing happiness in my work.

The quoted statement from the interviewee demonstrates that monetary stress leads to major consequences for both personal health and work performance. The interviewee's view confirms Maslow's theory by showing how unresolved needs weaken both personal wellness and work commitment. The welfare of faculty depends on addressing salary concerns since such attention helps them succeed both professionally and personally.

Job Retention Considerations

The data in Table 2 Item 6 demonstrates faculty members intend to explore employment alternatives because their compensation remains stagnant in the upcoming months with a mean score of 4.58 and standard deviation of 0.66. The high mean score demonstrates widespread faculty member intent to quit their career positions because of inadequate salary. The small standard deviation confirms that faculty members across the board express this concern because their responses are generally aligned.

People who fail to receive adequate financial support according to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory will actively look for alternatives which offer better security and fulfill their needs. The data highlights the immediate need for institutions to address faculty pay because welfare retention depends on resolving salary problems. One interview respondent remarked,

I would leave my current position unless my salary receives an increase during upcoming months. My life as a teacher continues to bring me joy while the financial struggles become unbearable. I will pursue better career opportunities whenever I locate them since I will not delay my decision.

The interviewee expressed willingness to leave because of salary issues which demonstrate severe negative effects of insufficient payment on faculty retention. The interviewee's statements support Maslow's theory because paying employees adequately remains crucial for building both organizational commitment and employee loyalty. The institution requires immediate attention to salary concerns because satisfied employees bring stability to both faculty retention and organizational success.

Effects of High Living Costs on Faculty in Ethiopian Universities

RQ2: What are the effects of high living costs on the professional performance and retention of faculty members in Ethiopian universities?

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Increased living costs make it difficult for me to maintain a work-life balance.	200	4.77	0.74
2	I often worry about my financial situation, which distracts me from my professional responsibilities.	200	4.82	0.82
3	High living costs lead me to reduce my involvement in extracurricular academic activities	200	4.69	0.95
4	I feel that the financial burden of living expenses impacts my effectiveness in the classroom.	200	4.81	0.78
5	The rising cost of living affects my ability to collaborate with colleagues on research projects.	200	4.71	0.99
6	If living costs continue to increase, I am likely to look for job opportunities outside my current institution.	200	4.66	0.67
	Overall Average	200	4.74	0.83

Table 3: Effects of High Living Costs on Faculty Performance and Retention

Living Costs Affect Work-Life Balance

The assessment in Table 3 Item 1 obtained a mean score of 4.77 and standard deviation of 0.74 regarding how rising living costs affect work-life balance. Most faculty strongly agree that increasing living expenses interfere with their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance according to the high mean score. The minimal standard deviation value demonstrates how most participants have a unified viewpoint about this topic.

The attempt to balance professional and private responsibilities under Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory links directly to satisfaction in physiological requirements and esteem needs realization. Increasing living expenses may force faculty members to perform more work while taking on additional tasks that generates stress and leads to burnout. The survey result demonstrates why financial pressures need proper attention to enhance faculty well-being and job satisfaction. One interview respondent stated,

> *Rising costs of living create an obstacle for me to achieve balance between work obligations and personal life. Working extended hours to survive takes up all my available time along with no time for either family or personal activities. The ongoing schedule management tires me completely and negatively impacts my general life satisfaction.*

The interviewee demonstrates how escalating living expenditures destroy professional performance and strain personal life quality. The interview data confirms Maslow's theory because unmet physical requirements lead individuals to experience difficulties in maintaining life balance. The resolution of elevated living expenses must be handled because it builds conditions that permit faculty members to succeed both at work and in life.

Financial Worries Distract from Professional Duties

The finding in Table 3, Item 2, *"I often worry about my financial situation, which distracts me from my professional responsibilities,"* shows a mean score of 4.82 with a standard deviation of 0.82. This high mean indicates a strong consensus among faculty members that financial worries significantly distract them from their work. The standard deviation suggests that responses are relatively consistent, reinforcing the widespread nature of this concern.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, financial insecurity directly impacts an individual's ability to focus on higher-level needs, such as self-actualization and job performance. When faculty members are preoccupied with financial issues, it can detract from their engagement and effectiveness in teaching and research. This finding underscores the importance of addressing financial concerns to support faculty members' professional responsibilities and overall job satisfaction.

One interview respondent noted,

> *Financial worries interfere with my ability to fulfill my occupational obligations. My attention during lectures and research tasks shifts repeatedly to the worry about handling my bills and expenditures. Work-related tension works against both my occupational performance and my love for educational instruction.*

The interviewee's acknowledgment of the impact of financial worries on their professional focus highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, emphasizing that unmet physiological needs can lead to distractions that hinder professional fulfillment. Addressing financial concerns is essential for creating a supportive environment where faculty can fully engage in their responsibilities and thrive in their roles.

High Living Costs Reduce Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The finding in Table 3, Item 3, *"High living costs lead me to reduce my involvement in extracurricular academic activities,"* shows a mean score of 4.69 with a standard deviation of 0.95. This high mean indicates that many faculty members feel compelled to limit their participation in extracurricular academic activities due to the pressures of rising living costs. The standard deviation suggests some variability in responses, but the overall trend points to a significant concern regarding financial constraints.

In the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the stress of high living costs can detract from individuals' ability to engage in activities that fulfill higher-level needs, such as belongingness and esteem. When faculty members prioritize financial stability, they may feel unable to participate in academic activities that enhance collaboration, networking, and professional growth. This finding highlights the importance of addressing financial pressures to encourage broader involvement in academic life.

One interview respondent shared,

> *The high price of living forces me to reduce participation in all academic extracurricular activities. I used to go to workshops and conferences until I started passing on them since it became too costly to participate in them. The high expenses create a sense of separation between me and both my academic colleagues and my academic discipline.*

The interviewee's experience underscores the impact of financial constraints on faculty engagement in academic activities, revealing a sense of loss in professional connection and growth. This sentiment aligns with Maslow's theory, suggesting that unmet financial needs can hinder participation in fulfilling and enriching experiences. Addressing the challenges of high living costs is crucial for fostering an environment that promotes faculty engagement and professional development.

Financial Burden Affects Classroom Effectiveness

The finding in Table 3, Item 4, *"I feel that the financial burden of living expenses impacts my effectiveness in the classroom,"* shows a mean score of 4.81 with a standard deviation of 0.78. This high mean indicates a strong agreement among faculty members that financial pressures significantly affect their teaching effectiveness. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a consistent sentiment across respondents regarding this issue.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, financial burdens can impede an individual's ability to focus on higher-level needs, such as self-actualization and performance. When faculty members are preoccupied with financial difficulties, it can detract from their ability to fully engage with students and deliver high-quality instruction. This finding underscores the critical need for institutions to support faculty in managing financial burdens to enhance educational outcomes.

One interview respondent remarked,

> *My stressful financial situation with living expenses makes it harder for me to deliver my best teaching performance to my students. My concern about finances creates obstacles that prevent me from offering appropriate care to my students. The distraction in my thinking interferes with my performance as a teacher so I assume it affects my teaching methods.*

The interviewee's acknowledgment of the impact of financial stress on their teaching effectiveness highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, indicating that unmet physiological needs can lead to distractions that hinder professional performance. Addressing financial concerns is essential for creating a conducive environment where faculty can focus on their teaching responsibilities and enhance student learning outcomes.

Rising Living Costs Hinder Collaboration on Research Projects

The finding in Table 3, Item 5, *"The rising cost of living affects my ability to collaborate with colleagues on research projects,"* shows a mean score of 4.71 with a standard deviation of 0.99. This high mean indicates that a significant number of faculty members feel that financial pressures related to the rising cost of living hinder their ability to engage in collaborative research. The standard deviation suggests some variability in responses, but the overall trend points to a widespread concern.

In the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the inability to collaborate effectively can be linked to unmet social and esteem needs. When faculty members face financial constraints, they may be less able to participate in collaborative opportunities that require travel, funding for materials, or time away from other paid responsibilities. This finding highlights the necessity of addressing financial challenges to foster a collaborative academic environment.

One interview respondent stated,

> *The increasing living expenses make it harder for me to work jointly with colleagues on academic investigations. The increasing expenses force me to decline various professional engagement opportunities. This situation creates feelings of loneliness which concerns me about professional opportunities and scientific progress.*

The interviewee's experience emphasizes the detrimental impact of financial pressures on collaborative efforts, which are essential for professional growth and innovation. This sentiment aligns with Maslow's theory, illustrating how unmet financial needs can hinder professional engagement and development. Addressing the financial barriers created by the rising cost of living is crucial for promoting collaboration and advancing research within the academic community.

Rising Living Costs May Prompt Job Search Elsewhere

The finding in Table 3, Item 6, "If living costs continue to increase, I am likely to look for job opportunities outside my current institution," shows a mean score of 4.66 with a standard deviation of 0.67. This high mean indicates that many faculty members are considering seeking employment elsewhere if living costs continue to rise. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a consistent concern among respondents regarding this issue.

According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, the pressure of rising living costs can lead individuals to reassess their job satisfaction and seek opportunities that better meet their financial needs. When faculty members feel that their current institution cannot support their basic financial requirements, they may feel compelled to explore alternatives that offer better compensation or benefits. This finding underscores the urgency for institutions to address financial concerns to retain talent and stability within their work force.

One interview respondent expressed,

> *The increasing cost of living will make me pursue employment opportunities away from my present institution. I adore my employment together with my coworkers yet financial stability requires my attention. The better job opportunities I discover might force me to leave the current position.*

The interviewee's consideration of leaving due to financial pressures highlights a significant challenge faced by faculty members. This sentiment is consistent with Maslow's theory, suggesting that unmet financial needs can drive individuals to seek more secure and fulfilling employment. Addressing the challenges posed by rising living costs is essential for fostering loyalty and commitment among faculty members, ensuring that they feel valued and supported in their roles.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights the critical impact of financial stress on the health, job satisfaction, and work performance of faculty members at Ethiopian universities. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of these implications for academic institutions and their teaching staff in Ethiopia.

The average response score of 4.64 indicates that faculty members perceive significant issues regarding their insufficient pay. Gonzales-Macedo et al. (2023) support the notion that faculty satisfaction is directly linked to their evaluations of salary adequacy. Ethiopian faculty report reduced job satisfaction, believing their salaries do not reflect their contributions and responsibilities, exacerbated by the country's economic conditions. The finding of an average score of 4.77 underscores dissatisfaction with wage distributions, aligning with Tesfaye et al. (2021), who note that professors in developing nations, including Ethiopia, often view their earnings as inadequate relative to their professional duties.

Moreover, the data reveal that 4.76 mean value of teaching personnel experience stress due to their salaries being insufficient to cover basic living costs. The rising inflation and escalating living expenses contribute significantly to this financial strain. A mean score of 4.82 indicates that faculty members frequently worry about their financial situations to the extent that it distracts them from their work responsibilities. This aligns with research by Sultana et al. (2024) which demonstrates that financial stress diminishes performance quality and can lead to professional burnout.

The findings also indicate that many educators struggle to maintain a work-life balance due to increasing living costs, reflected in a study result score of 4.77. This aligns with Vavasseur's (2024) financial analysis, which finds that faculty work-life conflict arises as educators allocate personal time to address financial concerns. High living expenses compel faculty to reduce their

involvement in extracurricular academic activities, as shown by a total score of 4.69. Financial limitations deter lecturers from participating in professional development programs, networking activities, and collaborative research, hindering their engagement with the academic community and obstructing their professional growth.

Given these insights, it is imperative for Ethiopian universities to implement proactive solutions aimed at salary adjustments and improvements in the cost of living. The data suggest that enhancing faculty satisfaction, commitment, and performance effectiveness hinges on addressing financial well-being. Institutions should prioritize strategies that improve faculty conditions, recognizing that financial stability supports academic productivity.

In summary, the findings from this research underscore the urgent need for Ethiopian universities to address financial challenges facing faculty members. By implementing these recommendations, institutions can create a more supportive environment that enhances faculty satisfaction and ultimately improves the quality of education delivered to students.

CONCLUSION

This research conducted an all-encompassing study of variables that influence faculty member job satisfaction and well-being together with professional effectiveness at Ethiopian universities. The research data demonstrate the extensive influence of inadequate wages and growing daily expenditures on university teaching staff who require immediate attention from their institutions.

Financial problems show high levels of consensus among faculty, so they become a widespread problem that affects both their workplace satisfaction and mental state as well as their ability to teach and conduct research. Research data prove that faculty compensation fails to match their work value while creating financial pressure to pay bills which requires urgent action.

The research showed that financial pressures create adverse effects on both faculty work-life balance and collaboration which stands as vital for maintaining an active academic organization. Ethiopian education faces a substantial danger to its stability together with educational quality because of faculty turnover potentially created by financial stressors.

University management teams together with policymakers need to establish faculty support and compensation systems due to this recent data. The enhancement of faculty satisfaction and retention requires employments strategies including competitive salary changes and financial help schemes and cost-of-living reduction programs.

By tackling these monetary issues schools will simultaneously improve educator working environments and enhance education standards in Ethiopia. Future research must monitor the lasting effects of financial burdens on academic staff wellbeing together with institutional performance since this data will help Ethiopian universities conserve their best teaching personnel.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

The outcome of this research reveals the essential requirement for educational planning to tackle financial hardships among faculty members so universities can enhance teaching quality and research activities. A thorough assessment of faculty pay systems should occur to verify their competitive standing against living expenses whereas incentive programs must be launched to celebrate faculty achievements in different fields of academia and financial assistance programs need to be established to support faculty financial balance. The successful retention of faculty depends on additional funds allocated for professional development programs and workplace balance support and the development of retention-oriented strategies. Persistent investigations into faculty financial

wellbeing should lead to educational planning efforts because they help develop policies that adapt to academic sector developments. These combined approaches seek to produce better satisfaction and involvement among faculty members who will subsequently enhance educational standards and preserve institutional stability across Ethiopian institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Revising Faculty Compensation Structures

Universities should conduct a comprehensive review of faculty compensation packages to ensure they are competitive with local living costs. This review should include adjustments to salaries and benefits to better reflect the value of faculty contributions.

2. Implementing Financial Assistance Programs

Establish financial assistance programs that provide support for faculty members facing economic challenges. This could include cost-of-living allowances, emergency funds, or low-interest loans to help faculty manage their financial burdens effectively.

3. Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities

Allocate additional funding for professional development programs that support faculty growth. These programs should focus on enhancing teaching skills, research capabilities, and leadership training to foster a more engaged and competent academic staff.

4. Promoting Work-Life Balance Initiatives

Develop and promote initiatives that support work-life balance for faculty members. This could involve flexible work arrangements, mental health resources, and community-building activities that foster collaboration and reduce isolation among faculty.

5. Conducting Ongoing Research on Faculty Wellbeing

Encourage continuous research into the financial wellbeing and job satisfaction of faculty members. This data should inform educational planning and policy development, ensuring that institutions can adapt to the evolving needs of faculty and maintain high educational standards.

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CORRELATION BETWEEN EXOGENOUS INPUTS AND GRADUATION RATES IN GRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMS IN GHANA'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

DANIEL ATTAKUMAH
St. Francis College of Education, Hohoe, Ghana
JOHN KIRURU NDIRITU
MUKIRAE NJIHIA
Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT

A country's research output depends primarily on the number of research graduates churned out from its higher education institutions. These institutions work with some exogenous phenomena to produce research graduates. This study investigated the relationship between exogenous inputs and graduation rate in graduate research degree programs in two public universities in Ghana. The data of the study were generated from a sample of 318 M.Phil. degree and Ph.D. degree students and graduates from nine applied science and sixteen humanities departments. Stratified random and snowball sampling techniques were used to sample respondents for the research. A questionnaire and document analysis guide were used to obtain data to test the hypothesis at $p<.05$ alpha level of significance. The findings of the study indicated that students' situations, including prior experience, interest and sponsorship through scholarship, were positively related to graduation rates and significantly predicted research students' graduation rates. The study suggested that universities should put in efforts to secure sponsorship for critical graduate research degree programs. Enrolment policy in these programs should target students with reliable sponsorship and those with prior research experience to improve graduation rates in research degree programs in public universities.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is of paramount interest to individuals and society as it provides private and social benefits. Tertiary education exposes individuals to diverse career opportunities and increases their likelihood of higher incomes. Graduates from higher education often enjoy an improved quality of life and can build valuable networks. These benefits are the result of graduates' exposure to up-to-date labor market information and their ability to make informed job choices based on their versatile skills, expertise, and experiences (McMahon, 2018; Smith, 2020).

Higher education offers some advantages to society, including enhanced political engagement, strengthened social cohesion, and a reduction in crime rates, among other benefits. The research aspect of higher education empowers individuals to bridge knowledge gaps, disseminate existing knowledge, foster innovation, cultivate critical thinking skills, enhance professional practice, and inform crucial policymaking, among other contributions. These benefits have propelled higher education to a position of great importance, garnering significant attention from various stakeholders, most especially in less developed countries. Contemporary society places a great significance on the number of research graduates produced by universities and factors such as external influences that impact the completion of research degrees graduation rates, entry into the job market, and successful employment at any given time (Johnson, 2021; McMahon, 2021; Wolfe, & Haveman, 2003).

At the peak of higher education are research degrees. Research degree completion refers to the percentage of students in a cohort who had completed and submitted their theses or dissertations for examination within a specified period. Graduation rate, on the other hand, refers to the percentage of students in a cohort adjusted for transfers into and out of the cohort who passed their theses/ dissertations assessment and obtained their degree certificates successfully in a particular graduation session. Research degree completion and graduation rates have been adopted by some corporate organizations and governments globally as a sign of competence, success and value in assisting learners to finish their programs of study (Byrne, Jorgensen & Loukkola 2013; DIISR, 2011; Hall, Evance & Nerad 2006).

Exogenous inputs in the context of this study refer to phenomena outside the control and manipulation of the universities, but which the universities must work with to achieve their goals and objectives. These exogenous inputs include students' interests, prior experiences, sex, age, family background, enrolment status, employment status and sponsorship status. These variables influence postgraduate research degree completion and graduation rates from the universities invariably.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Student Characteristics and Graduation Rates

Ho, Wong and Wong (2006) researched enablers and drawbacks to masters and doctoral theses completion at Trinity Western University and reported that domestic chores of caring for children, cooking and washing take a lot of study time from graduate research students and compel them to finish their research programs late. The researchers asserted that married research students' delay in thesis finishing resulted from pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, among others. Students' attributes, help from their immediate family, accessibility of inputs and supervisors' attributes were found to be the enablers of study completion.

Yusuf and Aina (2018) reported that variables including sex, age and work type had a statistically significant influence on the doctoral degree completion period. The researchers observed that, on the contrary, work status has a significant negative relationship with duration to degree finishing among terminal degree students, such that those who work while pursuing their studies. The study reported that on average, a terminal degree took 5.7 years to complete in Nigerian library schools. A survey technique to collect and analyse quantitative data was employed in the study.

Richardson, Evans and Gbadamosi (2014) researched full-time study university students who studied alongside their jobs and found that university students expressed having difficulty in balancing studies, especially satisfying study task schedules, and at the same time keeping their job schedules. The researchers noted that working students experience reduced self-study time because of their employment and job duties. Gittings, (2010) studied the issues of whether students' characteristics affect their degree completion. Age, gender, financial support, employment status, change of employment, enrolment status and marital status were examined using correlation and regression analysis. The researcher found that full employment while schooling significantly predicted terminal degree finishing. Full-time employees studying for terminal degrees were more likely to complete their degrees early. The researcher found further that an increase in age positively predicted degree completion. Students were more likely to complete the programs early as their ages increased.

Funding and Graduation Rates

Dougherty, Jone, Lahr, Natow, Pheatt, and Reddy (2016) examined the effect of sponsorship policies on higher education and explained the tools used by governments to carry out performance funding. The researchers found that state degree completion sponsorship processes have different stages of effect on higher education. The effects include society's consciousness of issues that are important to governments, contests among institutions for sponsorship and awareness of different stages of sponsorship and forms of sponsorship. Degree completion sponsorship also influences institutions to focus and review their policies as well as practices to meet degree completion targets set by governments.

Ampaw and Jaeger (2012) indicated that retention and completion rates in doctoral programs were highly predicted by the sponsorship given to the students. Also, the kind of sponsorship to the terminal degree programs was very important as different sponsorship schemes showed varied effects on program completion and graduation among doctoral students. The study inferred that research scholarships made the greatest impact on research program completion measured up against candidates receiving different sponsorship kinds, including graduate assistantships.

Palmer (2015) noted that degree finishing information was vital in reducing withdrawals or dropouts, increasing degree completion and enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in aid of quality. The researcher observed further that research degree accomplishment characteristics were broadly considered as a gauge for excellence and good delivery in education. Research degree finishing statistics serve as a measure of a university's productivity in terms of graduates, competence and usefulness as a source of research knowledge. In Australia, for instance, research degree finishing serves as the delivery indicator for funding reasons through the Research Training Scheme (Palmer, 2015).

Subject Specialization and Graduation Rates

In another study that examined the variations in rates in terminal degree finishing in Norway, Kyvik and Olsen (2014) classified the indicators of terminal degree finishing rates into the training system, the program, the research milieu, the students, the socio-cultural context and the subject of specialization. The researchers noted that these variables were significant in determining if a research student completed his/her programme and graduated within the scheduled time or not. The researchers reported that 60% of students with scholarships who enrolled in 2005 had finished their degrees within five years while the number that were awarded their terminal degrees in ten years rose to 80%.

Research into enrolment and completion rates of masters' degrees in blended learning programs at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana revealed that students' study completion numbers were far behind students' enrolment numbers every year in sampled physical sciences and humanities programs (Osei, Otchere, Banunle, & Dontwi 2017).

Researchers further found that graduate research programs varied by discipline. Students in the biological, physical sciences and engineering completed their programmes of study earlier than students in the humanities and social sciences. Furthermore, Kim and Otts (2010) noted that changing the programme from one's prior specialization to a new specialization at the doctoral level prolonged the duration for a terminal degree finishing in biological, physical and social sciences.

Exogenous Inputs and Graduation Rates in Ghana's Higher Education

Botha (2018) researched the trends of research degree completion at the University of Ghana and found that the lack of time on the part of research students to undertake their research caused delays in their study completion. This is because most students who were fully employed had difficulty managing their employment and study tasks at the same time. Research students' circumstances, which have to do with their family and social obligations, made it difficult for them to concentrate on their research and finish on time. Another difficulty was accessing the library and Internet facilities because they were located at places where these facilities could not be reached. Lack of financial support was also a challenge because most students were unable to secure sponsorship for their studies. These are all exogenous phenomena, indicating that exogenous inputs are crucial variables to graduate degree programs in Ghana. Exogenous inputs are thus significant phenomena whose influences on research students' graduation rates need to be researched to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in Ghanaian universities.

Interest, Experience and Graduation Rates

Students who have a strong interest and desire for learning were found to perform significantly higher than students who had a low interest in learning. Researcher has further indicated that undergraduate students held the opinion that their lecturers had the most influence on their learning processes, followed by their peers at the university (Güngör, 2021).

Kim and Otts (2010) found that the research students' pre-terminal degree training institution affected students' time spent on research degrees in all subject areas they sampled in their study. The researchers also note that students from highly ranked universities completed their studies earlier than students from lowly ranked institutions.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to test the education production function model of Hanushek (1968) by relating exogenous inputs to study completion and graduation rates in graduate research degree programs in Ghana's public universities. The study objective was to investigate "if exogenous inputs do have a statistically significant relationship with research students' graduation rates in graduate research degree programs in Ghana's public universities".

The study may provide some understanding to key stakeholders in graduate education on exogenous inputs which relate significantly to graduation rates at the graduate research degree level and may inform policy in the universities about which exogenous inputs should be considered in facilitating graduate research degree completion and graduation rates in the universities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was developed around the Education Production Function model of Hanushek (1968). The model associates educational output with school inputs, where the output is a function of the different inputs invested into the school system (Hanushek, 1968; Hanushek, 1979). The education production function model is expressed as Y= f(X1... X3, X4...Xn,) where Y is the output produced of the products and Xs are the inputs into the school system. In this study, "Y" is the graduate research students' graduation rates, the Xs are exogenous inputs that affect universities' graduate research degree training, denoted by XI...X7.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What relationship exists between exogenous inputs and research students' graduation rates in graduate research degree programs in Ghana's public universities?
2. How significant is the relationship that exists between exogenous inputs and research students' graduation rates in graduate research degree programs in Ghana's public universities?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A correlation research design involving Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Principal Component Regression (PCR) was employed to analyse the research data. A sample of 255 M.Phil. and Ph.D. degree students and 83 M.Phil. and Ph.D. degree graduates sampled from two public universities in Ghana participated in the study. Stratified and proportionate random sampling techniques were used to sample the research students, while the snowball sampling technique was used to sample research graduates. Questionnaires and document analysis guides that experts validated were used to collect the data for the study. Principal Components Analysis involves the derivation of principal components which are a combination of the independent variables X_1, X_2, X_3,...Xn to come up with composite variables PC_1, PC_2, PC_3….PCn aiming to locate a small number of factors in a large sample of independent variables which account for a large variation in the data set. The Principal components are linear combinations of the independent variables (Xs) or the questionnaire items. The principal component regression established the graduation rates that relate to different exogenous inputs and takes the form: $Y= \beta_0+\beta_1PC_1+\beta_2PC_2+\beta_3PC_3…….\beta_ZPC_Z$, where Y is the research students' study completion and graduation rate, β_0 is the constant or intercept, β_1 is the slope, and PCs are the exogenous inputs in the model. One-way analysis of variance test established if exogenous inputs predict research students' study completion, resulting in differences in their graduation rates. Independent and composite variables would be derived from the questionnaire items. The composite variables were extracted by SPSS and designated as the same, indicating these were variables with a strong correlation with graduation rate. This is necessary because not all the independent variables have a strong correlation with graduation rates. All questionnaire items in the research student and research graduate questionnaire constitute the independent variable (Principal Components). The extracted principal components with eigenvalues greater than one in the principal component analysis constitute the Composite Variables in the model. The composite variables were then regressed against the graduation rates obtained in the departments of universities.

Validity of Instrument

Validity focuses on the exactness of the results from the data collection instrument or the comprehensiveness, meaningfulness, and usefulness with which a measuring instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Questionnaires used to collect data in this study were self-developed. The questionnaires were given to three experts in the Department of Educational Management Policy and Curriculum Studies, Kenyatta University, to read through and provide a content validity rating of each item on the questionnaire. The experts were also given the objective and hypothesis of the study to read through. The content validity index provided for each item by the expert was then computed by expressing the total number of relevant ratings over the total number of ratings. Items that had a content validity index of 0.6 or more were retained and items with a lower content-related validity index were revised to improve their content validity.

Reliability of Instrument

The split-half method was used to determine Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient for the reliability of the questionnaires that were administered to respondents. The split-half method measures the internal consistency of test items. Items on the questionnaire were divided into two groups using odd and even numbers. Items with odd numbers constituted one set of the questionnaire while items with even numbers constituted the other set of the questionnaire. Each respondent therefore had two different scores which were used to calculate the split-half reliability (Adams & Wieman 2010; Taber, 2018). The Statistical Product for Social Science was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire. Items that had Cronbach's alpha correlation coefficient range from 0.6 and more were retained, while items with 0.59 and below reliability coefficients were reviewed. This was in line with Straub, Boudreau and Gefen (2004) who opined that the reliability coefficient should be equivalent and more than 0.6 to be fair.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethical requirements for the research were satisfied. The researchers obtained ethical clearance (ECH 072/20-21) from the University of Ghana Ethics Committee for Humanities and permission from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology to carry out the research in the two institutions. At the research sites, participants were told the purpose of the study and their right to decide to participate or not to participate in the study. Anonymity of participants was adhered to as the instruments did not require their names or index numbers. Participants voluntarily provided data for the research to be accomplished.

RESULTS

The study established Inter Item Correlation Matrix of Exogenous Inputs that relate to research degree completion and graduation rate in Ghana's public Universities in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation between Exogenous Inputs Questionnaire items Measuring Effects of the Inputs on Research Students' Graduation Rates

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14	V15	V16
V1	1															
V2	.48	1														
V3	.34	.56	1													
V4	.39	.49	.50	1												
V5	.29	.32	.40	.51	1											
V6	.21	.17	.27	.47	.65	1										
V7	.01	.11	.28	.27	.41	.51	1									
V8	.08	-.01	.01	.13	.19	.31	.19	1								
V9	.02	.11	.06	.20	.16	.20	.04	.30	1							
V10	.03	.05	-.08	.12	-.06	.12	-.03	.25	.31	1						
V11	-.16	-.11	-.08	-.04	-.04	-.05	-.10	.19	.14	.18	1					
V12	.11	.16	-.09	.07	-.02	.03	.02	.15	.01	.46	-.04	1				
V13	.20	.13	.23	.08	.06	.08	.02	.04	.18	-.06	.20	-.18	1			
V14	.09	.14	.11	.14	.12	.08	.14	.18	-.09	-.06	.07	-.18	.06	1		
V15	.09	-.04	-.04	.08	-.12	-.08	-.11	.08	-.07	.20	.05	.22	.03	.16	1	
V16	.01	-.13	.02	.04	.05	.04	.02	.26	-.06	.19	.13	.18	.03	.16	.44	1

n=318, Correlation Coefficients (r) > 0.03 were significant at 0.05 level (One-tailed)
Determinant = 2.2

The inter-item correlation shows the relationship between each questionnaire item or variable and other questionnaire items as well as itself. The items that lie diagonal in Table 1 show the correlation between each questionnaire item and itself. Table 1 shows that correlations between; V1 and V1 (1) V1 and V2 (.48), V1 and V3 (.34), V1 and V4 (.39), V1 and V5 (.29) V1 and V6 (.21), V1 and V7 (.01), V1 and V8 (.08) V1 and V9 (.02), V1 and V10 (.03), V1 and V11 (-.16), V1 and V12 (.11), V1 and V13 (.20), V1 and V14 (.09), V1 and V15 (.09), V1 and V16 (.01). The correlations between each questionnaire item and the other items have also taken a similar form as what pertains between item 1 and other items.

The inter-item correlations in Table 1 show several small but significant correlations. This indicates that few variables account for a large variance in the dataset. Table 1 shows that the determinant which is a measure of collinearity is 2.2 >.001, indicating that collinearity is not a problem in the dataset. The data is thus suitable for principal component analysis.

The exogenous inputs questionnaire items (variables) have the following definitions: V1 My prior research knowledge; V2 My interest; V3 My enrolment status; V4 My association with peers; V5 My age; V6 My sex;, V7 My immediate family; V8 My study leave status; V9 My sponsorship through salary; V10 My sponsorship through a personal loan; V11 Loan from student loan scheme; V12 Self sponsorship; V13 Sponsorship from my immediate family; V14 Sponsorship from my employer; V15 Scholarship; V16 Sponsorship from Ghana Education Trust fund. The correlation matrix shows that the questionnaire items have important correlation coefficients, meaning questionnaire items have an association with each other meaning the dataset can be subjected to principal component analysis and principal component regression in the subsequent sections.

Prioritizing Exogenous Inputs that Influence Postgraduate Research Students' Degree Completion and Graduation Rate

Prioritization of exogenous input is the use of principal component analysis to identify and select the independent variables or exogenous input questionnaire items that provide high levels of variation in the data set. Prioritization of exogenous inputs that influence postgraduate research respondents' study completion and graduation began with a test of the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. This is followed by Bartlett's test of sphericity, followed by factor loadings, commonalities, principal component analysis and principal component regression as the final step.

Factor Loadings, Communalities and Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

The ratings of the exogenous inputs were first analysed using principal component analysis to establish variables that most significantly explained the variation in the dataset. This was to ensure efficiency and reduce redundancy in the data set measuring the effects of exogenous inputs on graduate research degree study completion and graduation rate. The assumption of normality was satisfied meaning that the distribution of the data was normal and the correlation between the variables or questionnaire items was also significant. This made the data set appropriate for principal component analysis. Further, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) and Bartett's test are significant. The KMO and Bartlett's Test results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.68
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1336.84
	Df	120
	Sig.	.000
Source: Field Questionnaire	n=318	

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy in Table 2 is significant with 0.68 which is in line with 0.60 and higher suggested by (Cerny & Kaisser, 1977: Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974; Kaiser, 1970). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows a linear relationship between the original variables or questionnaire items ruling out any possibility of an identity matrix. The test is significant since it recorded a value of (.001) was smaller than the alpha level ($\alpha = .05$; df = 120, significance

= .001). This means the association between most of the questionnaire items used in the principal component analysis had a positive linear relationship with no significant outliers. The sample was also sufficient and therefore appropriate for PCA. The study extracted the commonalities from 16 exogenous input variables. The commonalities are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Communalities Extracted from Exogenous Inputs

Variable	Initial	Extraction
V1. My prior research knowledge	1.000	.45
V2. My personal interest	1.000	.52
V3. My enrolment status	1.000	.47
V4. My association with peers	1.000	.55
V5. My age	1.000	.67
V6. My sex	1.000	.73
V7. My immediate family	1.000	.58
V8. My study leave status	1.000	.76
V9. My sponsorship through salary	1.000	.87
V10. My sponsorship through personal loan	1.000	.57
V11. Loan from student loan scheme	1.000	.55
V12. Self-sponsorship	1.000	.88
V13. Sponsorship from immediate family	1.000	.88
V14. Sponsorship from my employer	1.000	.88
V15. Scholarship	1.000	.56
V16. GETfund	1.000	.56

n=318, Method of Extraction: Principal Component Analysis

Table 3 shows that all 16 items (variables) on the questionnaire generated extractions with significant correlations which range between 0.45 to 0.88 high enough to produce a good PCA result. This shows that there are significant loadings because higher extraction values usually produce good results. The high extracted communalities were an indication that a large proportion of each variable can be explained by the six principal components extracted. The eigenvalue of each item on the exogenous inputs questionnaire and the total variance explained by each item is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Total Variance Explained by Exogenous Inputs that Facilitate Research Students Mean Graduation Rate

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squares		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.54	18.26	18.26	4.54	18.26	18.26
2	3.77	15.18	33.44	3.77	15.18	33.44
3	2.84	11.42	44.87	2.84	11.43	44.87
4	2.73	10.99	55.87	2.73	10.99	55.87
5	2.11	8.49	64.36	2.11	8.49	64.36
6	1.49	6.00	70.37	1.49	6.00	70.37
7	1.37	5.51	75.88			
8	1.28	5.18	81.05			
9	1.09	4.40	85.45			
10	.78	3.14	88.59			
11	.75	3.02	91.61			
12	.68	2.75	94.37			
13	.47	1.87	96.24			
14	.38	1.55	97.78			
15	.32	1.30	99.09			
16	.23	.92	100.00			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Table 4 shows the variance explained by each one of the 16 exogenous inputs principal components. Table 4 illustrates further that a total of six principal components were extracted out of sixteen variables based on eigenvalues greater than one rule. The six latent principal components (new variable) extracted explained (70.37%) of the variance in the data set. The eigenvalues greater than one rule were used to determine the contribution of each exogenous input component to the total variance explained and the number of principal components to be retained in the analysis (Gall et al, 2003; Kaiser, 1970).

Principal component one explained (18.26%) of variance in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree completion and graduation with a value of 4.54. Principal component two explained (15.18%) of variance in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree finishing and graduation rate with a value of 3.77. Principal component three accounts for (11.42%) of variance in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree completion and graduation rate with an eigenvalue of 2.84. Principal component four explained (10.99%) of variance in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree finishing and graduation rate with an eigenvalue of 2.73. Principal component five explained (8.49%) in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree finishing and graduation rate with eigenvalue 2.11. Principal component six explained (6.0%) of variance in exogenous inputs as a predictor of research degree completion and graduation rate with a value of 1.49.

The implication is that principal component one provided the most significant variation in the independent variable (exogenous inputs) followed by principal component two, then component three, component four, component five and component six respectively. The remaining ten components which were not extracted were not significant in predicting the dependent variable (graduation rate).

The six principal components extracted and the questionnaire items that correlated with each one of them are shown in the rotated component matrix plane in Table 5.

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix for Exogenous Inputs

Variable	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Personal interest	.81					
Prior research knowledge	.75					
Association with peers	.72					
My immediate family		.71				
My sex		.65				
My age		.60				
My enrolment status		.57				
Sponsorship from Scholarship			.71			
Sponsorship from GETfund			.69			
Self-sponsorship			.59			
My sponsorship through salary				.87		
My sponsorship through a personal loan				.58		
My study leave status				.57		
Sponsorship from immediate family					.88	
Loan from student loan scheme					.56	
Sponsorship from my employer						.87

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, n=318

Coefficients below 0.3 were suppressed

The rotated component matrix in Table 5 shows exogenous inputs loaded on each of the six derived principal components. In other words, the rotated component matrix shows exogenous inputs questionnaire items that correlated strongly with the six exogenous inputs' principal components. Table 5 shows that principal component one seems to measure the extent to which respondents' situation influenced their study towards research degree completion and graduation. It indicates further that the exogenous inputs questionnaire items or variables; my interest (.81), my prior research knowledge (.75) and my association with peers (.72) loaded highly on principal component one. The second principal component appears to measure respondents' characteristics and correlate with the questionnaire items or variables; my immediate family (.71), my sex (.65) my age (.60) and my enrolment status (.57) loaded moderately on principal component two. Principal component three seems to measure research students' sponsorships and had a high correlation with

the questionnaire items; my sponsorship from scholarship (.71), sponsorship from Ghana education trust fund (.69) and self-sponsorship (.59) loaded moderately on principal component three.

Principal component four measures research students' sponsorship through salary and personal loans. The questionnaire items that correlated with principal component four were; sponsorship through salary (.87), sponsorship through personal loan (.58) and study leave status (.57). Principal component five measured students' sponsorship through immediate family and received high loadings from the questionnaire items; sponsorship from immediate family (.88) and loan from students' loan scheme (.56). Principal component six also measured respondents' sponsorship through their employers and correlated strongly with the questionnaire item: Sponsorship from my employer (.87).

Research Question 2: How significant is the relationship that exists between exogenous inputs and research students' graduation rates in graduate research degree programmes in Ghana's public universities".

Principal Component Regression of Exogenous Inputs against Research Respondents 'M.Phil. and Ph.D. Students' and Graduates' Mean Graduation Rate

Principal component regression was performed to establish the effect of the six extracted exogenous inputs' principal components on graduate students and graduates' study completion and graduation rate. The six exogenous inputs' principal components extracted through principal component analysis were regressed against research respondents' (M.Phil., Ph.D. students and graduates) mean study completion and graduation rates. This process helped to establish the correlation coefficient (r) between exogenous input components and research respondents' study completion and graduation rate. The coefficient of determination (R2) helped to determine the percentage of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variable. MPhil participants' study completion and graduation data for three cohorts and Ph.D. study completion and graduation data for three cohorts were used to establish the mean graduation rate.

Table 6 shows the principal component regression of exogenous inputs on research participants 'M.Phil. and Ph.D. students and graduates' mean graduation rates.

Table 6: Principal Component Regression of Exogenous Inputs on Research Participants 'M.Phil. and Ph.D. Students and Graduates' Study Completion and Mean Graduation Rate

	R	R-Square	Adjusted R^2	P-Value
Predictor Variable	.851	.725	.719	.001
Exogenous Components				

*P<.05, Dependent Variable: Research Students Graduation Rates, n=318

Source: Field Questionnaire

Table 6 displays the principal component regression output of exogenous inputs components as an independent variable against research students' mean graduation rate as the response variable. The regression output displayed in Table 8 indicates that there is a strong positive correlation (r=851) between exogenous inputs components which is the independent variable and

postgraduate research students' mean graduation rate which is the response variable. This means when exogenous input components were rising, research student, study completion and graduation rates also increased. The coefficient of determination (R^2=.725) suggests that 72.5% of the variance in research students' mean study completion and graduation rate can be explained by exogenous input principal components. The adjusted R^2 shows (71.9%) of variation in research students' mean study completion and graduation rate can be attributed to the two exogenous inputs principal components that significantly affect graduation rates. These are exogenous inputs principal component one PC1 (students' situation) and exogenous inputs principal component three PC3 (sponsorship).

Additionally, the study established the regression coefficients and the significance of the values of the regression coefficients to the dependent variable which were research students' mean graduation rates in Table 7.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients of Exogenous Inputs Principal Components and Graduate Research Participants' Mean Graduation Rates

	Coefficients/ Beta (β)	*Standard Error*	*t Stat*	*P-value*
Intercept	1.536	1.208	1.271	0.205
PC_1	2.512	0.089	28.138	0.000
PC_2	-0.154	0.095	-1.611	0.108
PC_3	0.473	0.168	2.826	0.005
PC_4	0.169	0.137	1.234	0.218
PC_5	0.006	0.118	0.054	0.957
PC_6	0.110	0.244	0.448	0.654

P<.05; Dependent variable: Research Students Graduation rates, n=318

Source: Field Questionnaire

The regression model:

$Y = 1.536 + 2.512PC1 - 0.154PC2 + 0.473PC3 + 0.169PC4 + 0.006PC5 + 0.110PC6 + \varepsilon$

extracted from Table 7 is significantly affected by exogenous inputs component one PC_1 (research students' situation) which correlates strongly with exogenous inputs questionnaire items (variables): My interest, my prior research knowledge and my association with peers. Exogenous inputs component three PC_3 (sponsorship through scholarships) which correlates strongly with exogenous inputs questionnaire items (variables): My sponsorship through scholarship, my sponsorship through GETfund and self-sponsorship. On the other hand, research student graduation is not significantly affected by the remaining four exogenous components as there is no significant linear relationship between postgraduate research students' mean graduation rates and principal components two (PC_2), principal component (PC_4), principal component (PC_5) and principal component six (PC_6). This means that PC_2, PC_4, PC_5 and PC_6 do not have a significant effect on postgraduate research students' mean graduation rates. The regression coefficient suggests that a unit increase in PC_1 (Personal interest, prior research knowledge and association with peers) leads to 1.538 increase in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate; a unit increase in PC_2 (age, immediate family and sex) leads to -0.154 decrease in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate; a unit increase in PC_3 (sponsorship through scholarship, sponsorship through GETfund and self-sponsorship) leads

to 0.473 increase in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate; a unit increase in PC_4 (sponsorship through salary, sponsorship through personal loan and study leave status) leads to a -0.169 decrease in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate; a unit increase in PC_5 (sponsorship from immediate family and loan from students' loan scheme) leads to 0.006 increase in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate; a unit increase in PC_6 (sponsorship from employer) leads to 0.110 increase in postgraduate research students mean graduation rate.

An analysis of variance test was carried to determine the significance of the relationship between exogenous inputs' principal components and research students and graduates mean graduation rates as well as illustrate the sum of squares with the degrees of freedom as presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Analysis of Variance on Exogenous Inputs Principal Components and Postgraduate Research Students Mean Graduation Rates

	DF	*SS*	*MS*	*F*	*Sig.*
Regression	6	7566.202	1261.034	136.481	0.001
Residual	311	2873.530	9.240		
Total	317	10439.732			

P<.05, Dependent Variable: Research Students' Graduation rates

Source: Field Questionnaire

The analysis of variance result displayed in Table 8 shows that F(6, 311)=136.481 was significant at p<001. This implies that the model fits the data well and hence exogenous input components are a good predictor of research students' mean graduation rates for the public universities in Ghana. The study thus established that exogenous inputs do have a statistically significant relationship with study completion and graduation rates in graduate research degree programmes in Ghana's public universities. Also, some exogenous inputs components have been found to be a statistically significant predictor of research students mean graduation rates in graduate research degree programmes in Ghana's public universities.

DISCUSSION

The regression coefficients meant that exogenous input component one "students' situation" and component two "students' sponsorships" were significant predictors of graduation rates from research degree programs. A spread of these components comprised of students' interest, prior research knowledge and association with peers for component one. Exogenous input component three "students' sponsorships" comprised of sponsorship through scholarships. Ghana education trust and self-sponsorship significantly influence research students' study completion and graduation rates. This finding is similar to the findings of Gungor (2021) who noted that undergraduate students who had a strong interest in learning always had statistically higher achievement than students who had a low interest in learning. The findings further agree with the findings of Yusuf and Aina (2018) who established that financial support significantly influenced research students' program completion period at the university.

The finding that respondents 'personal interest, prior research knowledge' and financial support significantly predicted research study completion and graduation rates agrees with the findings of Kim and Otts (2010) who posited that research students' pre-terminal degree training

affected their time on study completion and graduation rates. The result further support Yusuf and Aina (2018) who established that sponsorship status has a statistically significant relationship with research students' degree completion period. This finding is however contrary to the results of Kim and Otts (2010) that students in the biological, physical sciences and engineering sciences completed their programs of study earlier than students in the humanities and social sciences. It is significant to note that the focus of most previous studies was to find out what were the causes of delays in research degree completion and graduation. The current study, however, focused on exogenous indicators that facilitate research degree completion and graduation. This enables the universities to leverage exogenous variables that contribute to timely research degree completion and graduation to churn out more research graduates on schedule. In summary, understanding the role of exogenous inputs and their impact on research degree completion and graduation rates is essential for improving internal efficiency in research degree programs. Understanding the role of exogenous inputs help in informing policy decisions on admissions and program schedules for research students in universities. These findings underscore the need for further research to explore how Ghana's public universities leverage exogenous inputs to improve internal efficiency.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Results from the study will make educational administrators and planners be aware of the critic calibre of individuals to be admitted to research degree programmes considering resource implications for the universities. Individuals with high interest and prior knowledge may complete the study timely and free resources for other cohorts. On the other hand, individuals with low interest and less prior knowledge may stay longer on their programs in the university thus requiring more resources to support them for program completion.

The kind of research students admitted also has cost implications. This may require planning for different durations for different categories of students leading to additional training costs for students without prior research experience. The findings further imply planning to secure funding through scholarships and grants to support research students with weak and strong backgrounds based on prior knowledge to improve their study completion and graduation rate.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that students' interest, prior study experience and sponsorship status correlated strongly with their research degree study completion and graduation rates at the university and predicted graduation rates. Universities, therefore, must craft policies to attract research students into subject areas of their interest with prior study experiences to leverage students' strengths. New students without prior research experience needed exposure to practical research experiences such as writing concept papers and publication of research articles during their course work. Academic counsellors need to put in more effort to whip up students' interest in various areas of subject specialization in their departments to stimulate their interest in whichever research titles they may come up with. Further, universities must develop labor market-driven competitive research programs to attract experienced students. Sourcing for sponsorships for critical programs is important so that research students admitted to such programs can be fully funded to allow them time to focus on their studies towards completion and graduation within the scheduled time. Finally, the study concluded that exogenous inputs had a significant influence on graduate research degree students' study completion and graduation rates. University administration needs to give attention to recruit students for admission to graduate research degree programs of universities.

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A GLIMPSE AT PRINCIPAL PREPARATION IN OROMIA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

HAILE GETANEH
BEFEKADU ZELEKE
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

Purpose *–This study aims to enhance understanding of the practices related to principal preparation in Oromia NRS, Ethiopia, by providing a background discussion on the principal preparation policy.*

Design/methodology/approach *–The study employed a qualitative case-study design where Federal and Regional Education policies for the selection and preparation of secondary school principals were analyzed using semi-structured interviews and document analysis.*

Findings *– The findings revealed the prominence of policy-practice gaps as the principal selection was based on unwritten, non-merit criteria (where acquaintance and political loyalty dominated over merit).The finding also unveiled that the recent principal preparation programs particularly, EdL, PGDSL, and ScL were donor-driven, short-lived, and frequently changed (three times between only 2010/11 and 2014). Moreover, though the MA in ScL training curriculum-guide was found to be aligned with the competencies outlined in the NPSSPE, the absence of harmonized training modules and the short duration of the training program were flaws.*

Originality/value *–The study sheds light on the leadership preparation of secondary school principals in Oromia NRS and raises several issues and challenges.*

Practical implications *–The findings from the study on leadership preparation practices for secondary school principals in Oromia NRS highlight several critical implications for educational policy, planning, and practice.*

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is considered to be a major concern of an organization for it plays a pivotal role in determining the success of an organization. By the same token, there seems to be a consensus in the literature that schoolleadership is a key factor in school effectiveness (Hargreaves, et al., 1998, cited in Salfi et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2006; OECD, 2014). Oftentimes, people associate a successful school with an equally successful principal. The implication is that the leadership behavior of the school principal and the performance of the school are related to one another.

Evidence of the positive impacts of effective leadership is increasingly supporting the widely held notion that successful schooling depends on it (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2008; Leithwood et al. 2006; OECD, 2014). For instance, Leithwood et al. (2006) explore that "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning"(P. 4). These researchers conclude that "there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership" (Leithwood et al., 2006, P. 5) which vividly calls for the pressing need for the professional preparation of school principals toenhance their school leadership skills, knowledge, and competencies.

Invariably, school principals are required to play a vital role in improving school outcomes by thestrategic leadership position they occupy.To be an effective leader; however, they must learn and understand the importance of the various leadership roles and responsibilities that enhance

positive performance within their respective schools which, in turn, calls for the pressing need for the preparation and development of principals. Strengthening this notion, Bush and Jackson(2002) maintained that, "…if schools are to be places in which teachers learn, teaching and learning are powerfully planned and delivered, students achieve and leadership is widely distributed; [then] the development of school leaders is a critical component in system building"(p.418).Eacott and Asuga(2014) in their study of school leadership preparation and development in Africa, emphatically argued that "without significant attention to the preparation and development of school leaders, government initiatives aimed at building world-class education systems are unlikely to succeed"(p. 919). All these research results imply that education systems need to attract,select, prepare,and continuously develop professional principals to efficiently carry out the task of leading today's secondary schools which are significantly changing and becoming exceptionally challenging.

Despite the enormous expectations of school principals; however, some international studies on principal preparation revealed that many are poorly prepared for the task. Bush and Jackson(2002), for instance, observe that principal preparation is neglected in many countries, and has been progressively de-emphasized in England over the past decade.Recent studies conducted in Sub-Saharan African countries also revealed a lack of training for secondary school principals in leadership and management as a major drawback. For instance, in a study done in Tanzania, Kuluchumila (2014) found that "manyTanzanian school heads lack leadership knowledge and skills because of the shortage of training institutes"(p.10). In a similar vein, in a study done in South Africa, Mathibe (2007) also acknowledges: "... South African principals are not appropriately skilled and trained for school management and leadership" (P. 523). Bush and Oduro's(2006) study of beginning principals in Africa also found that there is no formal requirement for principals to be trained as school managers; rather they are often appointed based on successful evidence as teachers with the embedded assumption that "…this provides a sufficient starting point for school leadership"(p.362). Here, it is sensible to argue that school principalship is a different role from classroom teaching and, hence, requires specific preparation and development. In connection to this, Crow et al (2008) suggest that "if school leaders and leadership are important, then perhaps we should be deeply concerned with how leaders learn to do their jobs" (pp.2-3).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In Ethiopia, even though the year 1908 is well documented as the milestone for the introduction of modern education (Alemayehu,2012; Seyoum, 1996; Tekeste, 1996; 2006; Wagaw,1979), evidences show that the issue of educational leadership preparation has a relatively short period of history in the country(Maeregu et al.,2016; Tekleselassie,2002;).The few available studies (Ayalew et al,1995) recognized that the training of school principals dates back to the 1950s when it was to be organized first at the American University of Beirut and later on by the teacher training school in Addis Ababa. Even with this development, archival pieces of evidence reveal that the first secondary schools in Ethiopia were headed by expatriates.For instance, "Haileselasie First SecondarySchool(Kotebe), the first secondary school which was established in 1945 in Addis Ababa,was headed by Mr. F. Shaw, an expatriate from Britain" (Imperial Ethiopian MoE,1952,p.98). The secondary schools later opened in the capital cities of their respective provinces were also headed by expatriates, mostly British and Indians(Ibid).Other studies further documented that the Faculty of Education at Addis Ababa University assumed the task of training school principals in the 1960s (Ayalew,et al.,1995;Tekleselassie,2002). School principals' training, both at diploma and undergraduate degree levels, with different names: EdAd[1] and EdPM[2], continued to be under the

1 Educational Administration

2 Educational Planning and Management

auspices of Addis Ababa University and the MoE until the early 1990s.

With the advent of the EPRDF[3] to power in 1991; however, Ethiopia has introduced a broader educational reform to tackle the existing educational problems. As a result, the government set a new Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994. The ETP, among other areas of the education reform package, recognizes the very importance of competent and effective school leaders for the success of schools and the entire education system of the country, as well (MoE, 1994). The policy document further emphasizes the need for the management of teachers and other education personnel to be "democratic, professional, coordinated, effective and efficient" (P.30).

Within the framework of the policy, the government also launched six ESDPs[4] with a timeline from 1996/97–2024/25 as strategies for the implementation of the ETP. The ESDP is divided into six phases (ESDP I–VI), each of which provides a sector-wide implementation framework to put the policy statement into practice(MoE,2015). Educational leadership and management have been acknowledged by all six of the ESDPs as a key strategy for implementing the policy. ESDP I, for instance, intended that "head teachers will be trained in school management, leading to better-managed schools…." (MoE, 1997, P.9).ESDP IV also emphasizes improving the standard for quality at all levels and appears to link this need for excellence to the efficacy of educational leadership—a point that has also just been duly noted in the recently designed and unveiled ESDP VI(MoE, 2021).

In light of these policy initiatives and strategic emphasis areason leadership preparation, the Ethiopian MoE has been developing and executing different guidelines,usually referred to as 'Blueprint'. One of these was the ETDP[5] Blueprint which was introduced in 2007(MoE, 2007). The Blueprint provided a new direction for the professional preparation of school principals. In the document, the professional position of educational leadership is indicated and it states that "educational management, in itself, is a unique and vast profession. It has its own set of scientific theories and guidelines for application. Therefore, the specialists who are in charge of educational leadership will be trained in this profession"(MoE,2007,p.25).Accordingly. Secondary school principals, for instance, have been trained in EdLM[6] in summer programsatvarious public universities.This was done asper the Blueprint (MoE,2007) whichstates that principals for secondary schools should be Master's degree holders who attended specialized training on school leadership. The Blueprint further addresses the introduction of the licensing and re-licensing of teachers and educational leaders in the system and its subsequent implementation by ensuring that the professionals meet the set standard that will serve as a guarantee for them to continue in the profession (MoE,2007;MoE,2013a;MoE, 2013b).

Later on, with an informed interest in professionalizing the school principalship, the Ethiopian MoE established the NPSSP[7], detailing the required knowledge, abilities, and attitudes that principals at all levels are expected to display (MoE, 2013a). The NPSSPismeant to describe principals' roles and consolidate the profession in the country by explaining the professional practice of principals in a common language. Consequently, the standard is organized into three domains: school vision and community leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership. The three domains are composed of five competencies which are supposed to serve as the building blocks for preparation, certification, and professional development(MoE, 2013a).

3 Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
4 Education Sector Development Programs
5 Ethiopian Teacher's Development Program
6 Educational Leadership and Management
7 National Professional Standard for School Principals

Following the establishment of the NPSSP, the MoE has revised the former Blueprint and replaced it with the Blueprint of 2013.Consequently, a new graduate program on school leadership named PGDSL[8] was developed and launched by MoE in collaboration with Regional Education Bureaus(REBs) for both primary and secondary school principals (MoE,2013b).Accordingly, Universities were preparing school principals through both summer programs and a combination of face-to-face and distance modalities. Arguably, this program limits professional preparation of principals to a diploma level being two-year summer training as opposed to the former two-year regular MA program for secondary school principals. The candidates for the program were a combination of first and second-degree holders in subject areas; they were nevertheless to be assigned to two different levels (primary and secondary schools) upon graduation—which is unfair. Trainees did not support the PGDSL program due to de-motivating aspects of the program for lacking certification which leads to career development.Sooner, the program faced a challenge from the trainees for secondary school principalship. Consequently,while the PGDSL program continued to be provided only for primary school principals; a new graduate program called MAScL[9] for secondary school principals was introduced(MoE, 2014). Though the guidelines give the impression that the current MAScL training would equip secondary school principals with professional skills, the scant collection of studies(e.g.,Gurmu,2019; Maeregu et al.,2016; Yohannes,2019) hasfound that the policy of principals' preparation is lacking such impact in practice which opens a door for further research.

Generally, despite the pervasiveness of the deterioration of the quality of education at all levels in general, and that of secondary schools in particular, and the vested interest in school leadership in improving school effectiveness, few researchers examined the leadership preparation of secondary school principals in Ethiopia. Oromia, one of the twelve national regional states in Ethiopia, is where such study is a missing gap. And, I believe, this lack of study in itself justifies the need to conduct the proposed study. Hence, this study set out to explore the practices associated with the preparation of principals in government secondary schools of Oromia NRS[10] guided by the following key questions:

1. What policy-practice gaps are there regarding the :
   1.1 Selection of secondary school principals in Oromia NRS?
   1.2 Leadership preparation of secondary school principals inOromia NRS?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was carried out with a qualitative case-study design. A case-study design, as Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described it, is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37). As such, it is particularly useful for exploring a phenomenon in-depth, like policy translation, within its state and local context. Since the purpose of this study is to understand how Oromia NRS interprets and implements the National policy on principal preparation at the local level, therefore this design is well-suited for such a study.

Sources of Data and Data Gathering Tools

The data for this study were mainly accessed from two major sources: research informants and publicly available relevant documents. The relevant informants include three department heads

8 Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership
9 Master's Program in School Leadership
10 National Regional State

of EdPM from principal training Universities, one pertinent Education Official from the Oromia REB[11], and three experts from Woreda/Town Education Offices who were recruited using purposive sampling for they are appropriate education officials who have a stake in principal preparation policy formulation and execution. Moreover, four incumbent secondary school principals (two of them attended a university-based preparation program) were selected using a snowball sampling technique to learn their livedexperiences related to their selection for the position and preparation. Due attention was given to the reflections of informants in analyzing and reporting from the insiders' view of the research participants. In this regard,the in-depth semi-structured interview guide helped the researcher to learn whether or not there is a policy-practice gap in secondary school principal selection and preparation in Oromia NRS. Participants (principals, Education experts from Regional and Woreda Education Offices, and HoDs from Universities) were represented anonymously as P1-4,EB-1,EO1-3,and U1-3, respectively.

The second major source of data for this study waspublicly available relevant policy documents.Hence,important national and regional policy documents related to the selection and preparation of principals for secondary schools were gathered and analyzed to get meaningful explanations of the problem. Furthermore, conducting document analysis was believed to help in making a comparison of matches and/or mismatches on what has been stated in the policy documents and their implementation on the ground.Accordingly, policy documents such as Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994), the Education Sector Development ProgramsI, V, and VI (MoE,1997; 2015; 2021),Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap(2017-30)(MoE,2017), the National Professional Standard for School Principals (MoE,2013b), Ethiopian Teachers',Principals'and Supervisors' Development Blueprint(the revised Blueprint) (MoE,2013a);the National Curriculum Framework for MA Degree in School Leadership (MoE,2014), and the revised guideline for Principals', Assistant principals, and Supervisors' selection, Placement and Career Development Guideline(OEB,2018), were consulted to assess and analyze both the practices and challenges on the selection and leadership preparation processes of principals in secondary schools of Oromia NRS.

Method of Data Analysis

In this study, the data collected through an in-depth semi-structured interview protocol and documentreview was analyzed qualitatively. After revisiting each interview result to ensure the accuracy of the data, the researchers first transcribed and organized all interview data. In doing so, each participant's interview, both the recorded and short notes, were transcribed verbatim and analyzed according to the data analysis procedures suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007); Creswell (2007); and Saldana (2021), called for development of coding, categorizing, mechanical sorting, and analysis of the data within each coding category.Data triangulation by document analysis was made to cross-check the data collected through interviews. Various strategies were employed to ensure the reliability of the findings. Data was triangulated by incorporating additional information gathered on selection and preparation policy and guidelines. Participants also took part in a member-checking process as suggested by Creswell & Poth (2018), allowing them to give feedback on the preliminary findings to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the data and its interpretations.Generally, the fact that every interview session was audio-recorded, preserving the respondents' opinions in their original form, and a member-checking process also added credibility to the data used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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This section presents and discusses the data collected from an in-depth semi-structured interview and document analysis. The data were analyzed qualitatively through thematic analysis. The results are organized around two key questions that guided the study.

Principal selection for school leadership position

Developing effective school leadership starts with the selection and preparation of skilled and well-equipped principals. Successful change depends on appropriately selected and supported principals given the required combination of autonomy and accountability to perform.Principal selection is, therefore, a crucial mechanism to ensure that schools are led by the most suitable principals.

In this regard, an attempt was made to look into the practices of principal selection for secondary schools in Oromia NRS using interview and document analysis.In Oromia, the usual practice is that principals are first recruited to leadership roles and are then made to attend the training. The National Curriculum Framework for MA Degree in ScL training proposed the following criteria for selecting secondary school principals fortraining programs (MoE,2014, PP 16–17):

1. MA/MSc/MEd holders, BSc/BA/BEd + PGDT holders, (Degree in EdPM and subject area + PGDSL are advantageous)
2. Five years of teaching experience in a government or private school;
3. Potential to serve as a school leader, and the commitment to work as a school leader for a reasonable number of years; unit leadership, and department headships are also advantageous;
4. More than 75 % in performance evaluation during the last three semesters;
5. Age not older than 48;
6. Females and teachers with disabilities get an additional 3 %;
7. A pass in the entrance exam (minimum of 50 %) prepared by the universities thatoffer the program.

A close look into the same policy document reveals that only the following three are weighted among those proposed criteria.

1. University GPA = 40%
2. Performance Evaluation over the last three semesters = 40%
3. Experience in teaching or as a school principal = 20 %. (MoE,2014, P.17).

As can vividly be observed from the criteria proposed above, the 'potential to serve as a school leader and the commitment to work as a school leader for a reasonable number of years' (MoE, 2014,p. 16) constitute some of the important variables to consider when choosing applicants for the training. They are not weighted, though. Some of the key informants express doubts even about the successful application of the weighted criteria in Oromia NRS. One of the participants(P-1), for instance, vehemently argues,

> …the selection criteria are not adequate for identifying candidates with the requisite potential. It rather appears to be nominal for one is required to produce a support letter from the Woreda Administration office, even to apply for the position, inwhich- case, only those who have political partisanship will get priority.(P-1, December,2023).

Another key informant, who was a graduate of EdPM himself,through the self-sponsored weekend program for being denied the chance to participate in a government-sponsored training program, similarly explains the procedure and challenges applicants face during competition. He notes,

> Applicants are required to submit a recommendation letter with their academic credentials which is impossible to get unless you are a member of the ruling party or have some kind of acquaintance with Woreda officials(P-4, December,2023).

Even though, the policy by MoE(2013a;2014) dictates that the selection of secondary school principals for the MAScL preparation program should be based on merit, as the data analysis reveals, loyalty and favoritism(Old-boy-ism) were given priority in the regional state. This implies that the current education system appears to give priority tounwritten and defective selectioncriteria and therefore the process cannot bring competent and experienced candidates to the preparation since selection for training is made among those incumbent principals.However,researchers in the fieldnote that such an approachresults in an injustice in the application pool, where the less competent person is more likely to get hired (Aravena, 2020; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015).

The finding of this study is consistent with the findings of Gurmu(2019) that found political affiliation is the main criterion considered in Ethiopia to select primary school principals forpositions. It is also consistent with the finding of Ashebir et al.'s study(2021) that found that, in most cases, the selection, recruitment, and assignment of school leaders for leadership development in Bale Zone of Oromia NRS were political affiliation. Furthermore,the finding of the current study is also similar to the finding that Palmer and Mullooly (2015) identified as problems with the selection procedures, such as their highly subjective nature and the prominence of non-merit criteria like the incumbents' gender, race/ethnicity, politics, favoritism, in principal selection.

Inconsistency and frequent changes in a principal preparation program

Effective school leadership is built upon the foundation of strategic selection and preparation of capable principals, as successful change hinges on empowering these leaders with the right mix of autonomy and accountability. As the responsibilities of school principals evolve in response to changing educational demands, societal expectations, and diverse school environments, the literature emphasizes the necessity for reform in leadership preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).Consequently, when a country introduces a new principal preparation program, it is equally important to determine the optimal duration for the program to remain functional and active to ensure a positive impact on school leadership. In this context, research suggests that a principal preparation program should ideally remain active for a minimum of 3 to 5 years after its introduction as the timeframe allows for adequate implementation, refinement, and assessment of the program's effectiveness (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011;Tan, 2014).

In light of this context, an attempt was made to investigate the rationale behind the frequent changes in principal preparation programs for secondary schools, i.e., from EdAD to EdPM, to EdL, to PGDSL, and ScL in the Oromia NRS of Ethiopia, through interviews and document analysis.In response to this, HoDs of Educational Planning and Management from principal preparation program hosting universities confirmed that there is afrequent change of preparation programs with even a sudden interruption of the existing/functioning program. All three key informants from universities indicate that except for EdAd that remained functional for a longer period, (from its inception in the 1970s by Addis Ababa University till 2000, the time it was changed to EdPM by MoE's authoritative decision), other principal training programsunderwent fast changes (U-1;U-2,U-3).

One of the HoDs, a graduate of EdPM himself, critically observed the existing frequent changes inthe principal preparation programsfor secondary school leadership. He went on to explainthe existing practice and hadthis to say;

> Principal preparation programs have frequently changedin recent years; i.e.,EdPM was changed to EdL which was under implementation from 2010-2012 but was then immediately changed to PGDSL in 2013 which was further changed to MScL for secondary school level principals in 2014.Today, all the programs have been interrupted and there is no clear direction from MoE therefore, where we are heading is unknown. In our case, we are dealing with those self-sponsored MA candidates who joined earlier in weekend and summer programs.
>
> Haile: that is amazing. But what do you think is the reason behind thesefast changes?
>
> U-1: I think it has to do with Donors' influence. When donors come up with a certain project, they come with a lump-sum fund and a definite time-frame. When the project terminates, looking for another donor, with a different project, appears to be a must. Hence, the shortage of resources and the donor's varied interests are the root- causes for frequent changes in the principal preparation programs(U-1,December 2023).

On this particular issue, a response by one of the HoDs (U-2) is quoted as "I am aware that changes in principal preparation programs are fast these days. Particularly, the changes from EdL to PGDSL then to ScL which took place between only 2010/11 and 2014 are unbearable".

Another key informant, an expert from the Oromia Education Bureau,also explained the reasons for the frequent changes in principal preparation programs. He notes;

> Of course, there are frequent changes in preparation programs for both teachers and school principals. Mostly, the changes are made at the Federal MoE level, following changes ingovernance and education policy. As these reforms require huge resources, financial and technical support from partners, donors and other international organizations that have a stake in education reform appear to be crucial. Even then, the courses and the training materials are prepared by professionals from universities under the auspice of the MoE (EO-1, December 2023).

As can be learnedfrom the responses of key informants drawn from principal preparation program hosting universities and the OEB, the recent principal preparation programs particularly, EdL, PGDSL, and ScL were donor-driven, short-lived, and frequently changed between only 2010/11 and 2014. However, research suggests that a principal preparation program should ideally remain active for a minimum of 3 to 5 years after its introduction as the timeframe allows for adequate implementation, refinement, and assessment of the program's effectiveness (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011; Tan, 2014). A case in point is the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) whichprovided initial training and continuous support over 3-5 years where leadership programs have led to improved leadership practices and student outcomes across various schools (AITSL, 2014). The other notable example is Singapore's National Institute of Education (NIE) Principal Preparation Program with the duration of 1-2 years of initial training, followed by continuous professional development over 3 years where this approach to principal preparation has resulted in high-performing schools, with principals being equipped to lead effectively in a rapidly changing educational landscape(Tan, 2014). Therefore, Ethiopia needs to learn from the

proven experience of these countries and incorporate these lessons into its educational framework to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of its principal preparation programs and ultimately improve school performance and student achievement.

The finding of this study is consistent with the finding of Yohannes's study (2019) whichfound that there were frequent program changes, three times in less than half a decade, in the principal preparation program in Ethiopia.

Leadership Preparation Practices of Principals

The purpose of this section was to learn from informants the alignment of competencies with the recent University-based training for secondary school principals(MAScL) to develop their leadership competencies envisioned in the NPSSPE as outlined in the policy document of MoE(2013b, p.12). Accordingly, the following sections sequentially convey the research findings on the alignment of competencies of the NPSSPE with principals' university-based preparation programs.

Competencies acquired under School Vision and Community Leadership(Domain I)

EdPM HoDs[12] at the hosting Universities were also asked to explain whether or not the current training programs for secondary school principals in place are aligned with the NPSSPE.The three HoDs at the sample university responded more or less in the same fashion. For example, one of the respondents (U-2) said, "The curriculum guide for the MA degree in ScL program was prepared and appears to be based on the competencies of the NPSSPE designed by the federal MoE. Yet, as there is no centrally prepared trainingmodule, variation in the delivery of the courses is certain".

One of the interviewees (U-1), who was a graduate of EdPM himself, forwarded that there wasalignment of the competencies outlined in the NPSSPE particularly with MScL preparation. He added,

> …as far as my knowledge of the ScL is concerned, the National Curriculum Frame-work for MA Degree in ScL was prepared by a team of EdPM professionals whowererepresentatives of seven universities under the auspices of MoE. Other programs like EdPM were not for these and were designed long before the formulationof the NPSSPE(U-1,December2023).

Informant principals also echoed that the university-based training helped them to develop competencies expected of them to perform and discharge their duties and responsibilities accordingly. For instance, one of the principal respondents who claimed to have graduated with an MA degree in ScL in 2018felt that the newly introduced principal preparation program helped him to acquire important leadership skills. He added,

> During my university days, I come to know how to create a vision for my school and lead my staff and students in that direction. I can say the course 'Instructional Leadership (ScL 602)' helped me a lot more than any other course in this regard. I found the course very practical and pertinent to school-level leadership, though I feel inconvenienced with a course like school-community relations.
>
> Haile: You reflected a feeling of inconvenience with a course school-community relation;Why uncomfortable? I mean, anything wrong related to its content, method of delivery, or what forced you to say so?
>
> P-1: You know, it was a distance course and we were told to attend tutorial classes during semester break atour university but they failed to do so due to a shortage

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> of budget. Even the contents are downloaded from the internet and do not reflect the Ethiopian context. This is the area where I'm feeling unsuccessful both in my training and career so far (P-1, December2023).

Another respondent who reported that she is a graduate and hasa Master's degree in EdLM acknowledged that the training she attended atthe university helped her to lead and manage secondary school affairs properly. The following quote illustrates this:

> I have taken important courses like Strategic and school development Planning, and instructional supervision which dealt with contemporary issues in school leadership today. The course 'Leadership in Education'; though more theoretical, also helped me to wisely handle the complex issues in today's secondary school. So, these are important skills I acquired from the training program I attended (P-2, December 2023).

Data generated from document analysis also reveal that "School Community Relations(ScL 608)" is one of the core courses in the curriculum of the MA program in the ScL training program with 2 Cr.hrs and five chapters. The curriculum guide further identified five competencies to be acquired by the trainees after successful completion of the course:

> Competence #1. Understand the concepts and philosophy of school community relationship;
>
> Competence #2. Build a school culture that ensures community participation in school governance, school resources management, and instructional processes;
>
> Competence#3. Identify potential school-community partnerships and areas of participation;
>
> Competence #4. Manage diversity in schools and community;
>
> Competence #5. Identify challenges and design mechanisms to resolve the problems faced in the school-community relationship (MoE,2014, pp.65-70).

In addition to this, out of the eight competencies in the course ' Instructional Leadership(ScL 602)', the fifth chapter and the fifth competency that reads as "Facilitate the involvement of parents in the learning of students" is devoted to eliciting parental involvement in the education of their children(MoE, 2014, p.28). The curriculum guide further identified five competencies to be acquired by the trainees after successful completion of the course:

> Competence#1.communicate the school's vision, mission, and goals ;
>
> Competence#2.Manage the school curriculum and instruction effectively and inclusively
>
> Competence#3. Ensure that teachers are applying academic standards in their work with students;
>
> Competence#4. Shape and maintain an academically oriented school climate;
>
> Competence#5. Facilitate the involvement of parents in the learning of students;
>
> Competence#6. Establish and maintain systems and structures that strengthen the quality of teaching and learning including students with special School needs and students at risk;
>
> Competence#7. Monitor quality of instruction concerning input, process, and output to enhance students' and school performance;
>
> Competence#8. Apply interpersonal approaches and techniques of supervision to enhance teachers' professional development and improve students' performance" (MoE,2014,pp.27-28).
>
> In general, as can be understood from thequalitative data analysis, the University- based

MA in ScL preparation program, in particular, seems to be aligned with the competencies outlined in the NPSSPE, the policy document of MoE(2013a, p.12) and hashelped incumbent principals in the process of acquiring leadership skills and competencies designed for the program. However, the fact that some courses are offered in a distance modality than face-to-face (E.g. School- Community Relation) and/or for a limited duration of time (as the summer program is only six weeks long), as well as lack of central prepared training module whereby the depth and scope, of course, contents are usually determined by the course instructors based on their prior reading and experience are obvious shortcomings because the graduates believe that they could not gain as much as they should from the courses.

Competencies acquired under Instructional Leadership (Domain II)

In connection to the alignment of the competencies that are categorized under 'Instructional leadership Domain II', a pertinent document, the curriculum guide for MA in ScL(MoE,2014) prepared centrally under the auspice of Ethiopian MoE was also reviewed. The data generated from this official document reveal that the competencies were outlined in different courses. One of these courses found to be 'Instructional Leadership(ScL 602)',which was organized into eight major themes with three credit hours, where four of the important competencies are outlined in clear terms:

> *Competence #3.Ensure that teachers are applying academic standards in* their work with students;
>
> Competence #4.Shape and maintain an academically oriented school climate;
>
> Competence #7. Monitor quality of instruction concerning input, process, andoutput to enhance students' and school performance ;
>
> Competence #8.Apply interpersonal approaches and techniques of supervision to enhance teachers' professional development and improve students' Performance" (MoE,2014,p.28).

Besides, the competencies are indicated in one of the corecourses of the program known as ' Foundations of School Leadership(ScL 601)' organized into five chapters with four credit hours. Out of the five competencies outlined for the course in the curriculum guide, competence No.Four whichreads as: *'Lead self, teams, and organizations effectively and efficiently'* (MoE,2014,p.21) relate itself to one of the two competencies presented above. Moreover, in the course ' School Resources Management(ScL 605)', two of the nine competencies, i.e., competence No 2 which reads as *" Ensure that procedures and practices support staff and students to contribute to the realization of a conducive learning environment"* and competence No 5 that reads as *" Acknowledge excellence and challenge poor performance at all levels and ensure effective and corrective action and follow-up;"*(MoE,2014,p.46), were purposely included in the curriculum guide of MA in ScL to help secondary school principals acquire basic competencies outlined in the NPSSPE, during their stay in University-based two years ScL in-service preparation program designed and agreed upon by both the Federal MoE and Regional Education Bureaus(MoE,2014).

Therefore, based on the evidence secured from qualitative data sources, it appears to be safe and logical to generalize that the curriculum guide for MA in ScL University-based two-year ScL in-service preparation program was aligned with the basic competencies categorized under '*Instructional leadership Domain II*' as outlined in the NPSSPE, the policy document of MoE (2013b, p.12),than the former preparation programs like EdPM and EdL.

Competencies acquired under Administrative Leadership (Domain III)

In connection to the competencies that pertain to managing support services to enhance learning for all students, principals, and Woreda-level education experts were consulted through interviews. The principals reflected that they have a kind of understanding, acquired just from the training they get as well as from reading manuals. However, they forwarded inhibiting factors for its practicality from their school context. For instance, one of the principals who is currently serving in one of the rural secondary schools of West Hararge, expressed the reality in his Woreda as follows:

> Even though, I believe, that I have adequate know-how for managing and organizing different support services to enhance learning for our students, due to a shortage of budget, support services are not facilitated in my school for we are using the meager resourceswe have at hand, year after year, for running the teaching-learning process confined only in the classroom, as usual. Owing to the absence of chemicals and apparatus, for instance, teachers are teaching Chemistry theoretically like History. This is very sad and disgusting news for the thinking mind; you can't practice at least what you have in mind. What is the purpose of having certain skills unless a school you are leading is running short of budget?(P-2, December,2023).

Participant P-1 likewise says that "of course, having the skill is only a necessary precondition to enhance students' learning; however, possession of the skill alone is not sufficient to bring about the desired behavioral change in students- the availability of adequate budget is equally important".

Data generated from document analysis also reveal that "School Resource Management (ScL 605)" is one of the corecourses in the curriculum of the MA program in ScL training with 4 cr. hrs in Ethiopia. The same course with a different course number 'Resource Management in Education, (EdPM 602)' is also one of the major courses in the curriculum of the MA program in EdLM training program with the same credit hours. The curriculum guide for MA in ScL, in particular, identified the following nine competencies to be acquired by the trainees after successful completion of the course:

Competence#1. Mobilize, allocate, and utilize resources to support learning and teaching;

Competence#2. Ensure that procedures and practices support staff and students to contribute to the realization of a conducive learning environment;

Competence#3. Ensure that resources are managed in line with the finance & material utilization, public code of conduct, policies, and accountability practices;

Competence#4. Assign, develop, and retain staff appropriately and manage their workload to achieve the vision and goals of the school;

Competence#5. Acknowledge excellence and challenge poor performance at all levels and ensure effective and corrective action and follow-up;

Competence#6. Prepare an HR (human resource) plan for the school;

Competence#7.Ensure the proper allocation, distribution, and utilization of different school funds;

Competence#8.Ensure the proper allocation, utilization, and maintenance of school materials and property (buildings, playground and other facilities);

Competence#9. Ensure the proper utilization of time and information (MoE,2014, pp.27-28).

In general, as can be understood from thequalitative data analysis, the University- based

MA in ScL preparation program, in particular, seems to be aligned with the competencies outlined in the NPSSPE, the policy document of MoE(2013a, p.12) and hashelped incumbent principals in the process of acquiring leadership competencies designed for the program. However, the fact that some courses are offered in a distance modality than face-to-face (E.g. School Community Relation) and/or for a limited duration of time (as the summer program is only six weeks long), as well as lack of central prepared training module whereby the depth and scope of course contents are usually determined by the course instructors based on their prior reading and experience are obvious shortcomings because the graduates believe that they could not gain as much as they should from the courses. Worsening the situation, onthe verge of completion of thisstudy, all the exiting university-based principal preparation programs were terminated. In anNRSwhere the percentage of qualified secondary school principals appears to be only 29.9% (OEB,2018), which is almost similar to the national percentage of only 29% (MoE,2021), the policy intention to professionalize principalship(MoE,1994;MoE,2013a;MoE, 2013b) is far from reaching and revealthe prominence of a policy-practice gap.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the preceding results obtained from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, the following conclusions were drawn and recommendations were forwarded thereof.

Even though, the policy by the federal Ethiopian MoE(2013a;2014) dictates that the selection of secondary school principals for the position and MA in ScL preparation program should be based on merit; the qualitative data analysis conducted in this study reveals that the prominence of unwritten, non-merit criteria such as the applicants' loyaltyfor the ruling-party and favoritism(Old-boy-ism) were given priority in the selection of secondary school principals in Oromia NRS.

The study also unveiled that the recent principal preparation programs particularly, EdL, PGDSL, and ScL were donor-driven, short-lived, and frequently changed (three times between only 2010/11 and 2014).However, research suggests that a principal preparation program should ideally remain active for a minimum of 3 to 5 years after its introduction as the timeframe allows for adequate implementation, refinement, and assessment of the program's effectiveness (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011; Tan, 2014).

Furthermore,the existing University-based MA in ScL preparation program, in particular, seems to be aligned with the competencies outlined in the NPSSPE, the policy document of MoE(2013a, p.12), to help incumbent principals in the process of acquiring leadership competencies designed for the program. However, the fact that some courses like 'School Community Relation' are offered in a distance modality rather than face-to-face and/or for a limited duration of time (the summer program lasts only six weeks), as well as the absenceof centrally- prepared and harmonized training-module—where the breadth and depth of the course contents are typically decided by the course instructors based on their prior knowledge and experience—are evident flaws, though, as the graduates feel they could not benefit as much from the courses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PLANNING, AND PRACTICE

The findings from the study on leadership preparation practices for secondary school principals in Oromia NRS highlight several critical implications for educational policy, planning, and practice.Hence, the Oromia Education Bureau needs to:

1. Emphasize merit-based criteria over loyalty and acquaintance (Old-boy-ism) to bring eligible professional principals to secondary schools in the regional state.
2. Reconsider the placement of principals who have MA degrees in ScL, EdPM, and EdL; but

are deployed to teach in primary schools, for one or the other reason, as the current practice entails negative implicationsonthe utilization of meager resources.

3. Closely monitor how policies and strategies are being translated into action at the Woreda Education Office level and ensure adherence to the National policies(MoE,2013a;2014) selection and placement of professional principals for secondary schools in the regional state.

The Federal MoE also needs,

4. To improve the longevity and effectiveness of principal preparation programs, ultimately leading to improved educational leadership and outcomes, MoE needs to;
   - 4.1 develop strategies that promote the sustainability of principal preparation programs beyond donor- -funding. This may include partnerships with local educational authorities and institutions to foster ownership and investment in the programs.
   - 4.2 prioritize long-term funding commitments to ensure that these programs can operate for the recommended duration. This will facilitate ongoing training and support for principals.
   - 4.3 establish a stable framework for principal preparation programs that minimizes frequent changes. This stability will enable educational leaders to fully engage with the curriculum and develop the necessary skills over time.
5. In collaboration with Universities need to prepare a harmonized training module aligned with the NPSSPE to ensure consistency in the process of preparation of professional principals.
6. Revisit the existing selection criteria and attach value to experiences rendered in school as unit leadership and department headship to ensure school leadership succession.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Due to the methodological constraints and the exploratory nature of this study, additional conclusive research is necessary. A study that explores alternative approaches to preparing school principals for secondary school leadership, utilizing a larger sample size and incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, could enhance the findings.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to express their gratitude to all the study participants for their willingness and genuine involvement, as well as for providing valuable data for the research.

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MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROLES AS CURRICULUM LEADERS

HONGYING XIAO
Tsinghua University, China
TAK CHEUNG CHAN
Kennesaw State University, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine school principals' perceptions of their roles as curriculum leaders in middle schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area. A questionnaire was developed by the researchers to explore the aspects of curriculum leadership in the areas of development, organization, implementation, evaluation and improvement. In data collection, a total of twenty-four school principals were invited to personal interviews with the researchers. Principals' responses during the interviews were categories by curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. The majority opinions of the principals were coded with the main themes emerged. As a result of data analyses, the findings of the study show that middle school principals perceived that they played a very significant role as curriculum leaders in the middle school level in the areas of curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement with special attention to vertical alignment between the elementary schools and high schools.

INTRODUCTION

School principals take the lead in the school education team in developing, organizing, implementing and evaluating school curricula. Wiles (2009) claimed that school curriculum leadership is shared among principals, assistant principals for curriculum, team leaders, department heads and lead teachers. Weber (2010) listed five reasons for the need of curriculum leadership at school: Curriculum leadership provides opportunities: 1) to clarify curriculum issues; 2) to develop and empower future leaders; 3) to support continuous improvement; 4) to establish learning goals; 5) to improve alignment. School principals are under strong pressure to assume the curriculum leadership role. Budget cuts at all levels, accountability movements and increased educational demands are among these pressures (Finkel, 2012). Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) also stressed that "strong, intentional leadership in curriculum development is a necessity for strong instructional leadership" (p. 188). To be an effective curriculum leader, a school principal needs to be knowledgeable about the historical background of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices (Glasper, 2018) in addition to covering the contents of the mandated statewide testing (Ediger, 2014; Roelke, 1996). A school curriculum leader's daily responsibilities also include: learning from other school leaders; making time for classroom observations; and creating open dialogues with parents and staff (Adkins-Sharif, 2019).

The researchers in this study want to clarify the roles of the middle school principals as curriculum leaders by examining the self-perceptions of school principals through face-to-face interviews. The findings of this study will help policy makers to develop curriculum policies to reflect on the middle school leadership roles and to meet student needs. The findings will also help educational leadership preparation programs in higher education to evaluate and improve their current programs in preparing modern curriculum leaders in the middle school level.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of the middle school principals concerning the leadership roles they play in school curriculum development, organization, implementation and evaluation. Middle schools in the United States have their own organizational structure of clustered design both physically and academically. Managing the clustered pattern of curriculum design in middle schools could be different from those of elementary schools and high schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following major research question served as a guide to the development of the study:

What are the middle school principals' self-perceptions of their roles as curriculum leaders in school?

The following research sub-questions are also developed in support of the major research question:

How do middle school principals perceive their roles as curriculum leaders in:

a. developing, organizing, implementing, evaluating and improving curriculum?
b. supporting faculty, acquiring resources, involving community and identifying outstanding features in curriculum planning?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of interindividual differences in perception by Beatty (2022) is served as the theoretical framework of this study because it recognizes the notion that school principals are individually different from one another because of their racial, social, economic, family and education backgrounds. The theory of Beatty (2022) on interindividual differences in perception states that differences in the perception of humans are originated from the individual brain structure or factors such as culture, upbringing and environment. She summarizes that the three major influences of individual differences on social perception are the characteristics of (1) the person being perceived, (2) the particular situation, and (3) the perceiver. The unique exploration of individual and comparative perceptions provides a solid foundation on which this study is designed.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

School Principal and Curriculum Leadership

The Wallace Foundation (2013) developed a curriculum leadership model of five key responsibilities of a school principal in serving his or her role as a curriculum leader: 1) shaping a vision of academic success for all students; 2) creating a climate hospitable to education; 3) cultivating leadership in others; 4) improving instruction; and 5) managing people, data and processes. A similar curriculum leadership model consisting of three stages was also developed by McTighe and Thomas (2003) identifying desired results, analyzing multiple sources of data, and determining appropriate action plans for student achievement. A school principal's role to serve as a curriculum and instructional leader in school has also been confirmed by McDermott (1984) and Ediger (2002).

A principal as school curriculum leader will support the school curriculum by helping teachers and staff to design a curriculum to suit the student needs (Dufour, 2002; Ediger, 2014;

Garner & Bradley,1991; Lee & Dimmock, 1999). Glatthorn (1987) also asserted, "One of the tasks of curriculum leadership is to use the right methods to bring the written, the taught, the supported, and the tested curriculums into closer alignment." (p. 4).

Shellard (2002) claimed that a principal serving as a curriculum leader must have skills in observation, analysis, improvement of teaching, learning theory, and approaches to instructional planning. These skills can be learned and improved by participating in professional development activities (Boston et. al. 2017; Townsend et.al. 2018).

However, current literature of school principals as curriculum leaders is not all positive. Cole-Foppe' study (2016) found that teachers perceived principals to have devoted insufficient amount of time in school curriculum matters. Kleidon (2018) and Ng et al. (2015) found that principals felt that they were under prepared to serve as curriculum leaders. In the study of Naidoo and Petersen (2015), principals explained their daily leadership duties to be purely managerial. The findings of the study by Sasson (2016) and Shaked (2019) also indicated that school principals were only moderately involved in instructional leadership activities. Cardno (2003) identified that school principals' high administrative workloads and external agency demands were barriers to exercising their curriculum leadership role. Alsaleh's study (2019) also disclosed that school principals' curriculum leadership role was blocked by government bureaucracy.

Principal's Role in Developing Curriculum

Oliva (2001) claimed that the school statements of aim and philosophy actually reflect the common needs of students. This is what the school principals as curriculum leaders should lead the school to achieve. The five types of needs are: 1) the needs of the students in general, 2) the needs of the society, 3) the needs of special students, 4) the needs of particular communities, and 5) the needs derived from the subject matter (Oliva, 2001). Beach and Reihartz (2000) also stated that school principals play a key role in curriculum development as they work with teachers to plan for curriculum activities to suit individual student needs. They are held responsible for developing school curriculum based on data and resources to set the direction of their schools and improve instruction (Louisiana Department of Education, 2016). As a matter of fact, the school principals are given the state core curriculum standards and they are asked to lead their schools to tie their school curriculum to the state standards (Jenkins & Pfeifer, 2012).

Principal's Role in Implementing Curriculum

Sowell (2018) found that school principals as leaders in curriculum and instruction favored the following practices: prioritizing classroom visits, helping teachers use data, acknowledging teachers' work, providing for teachers' professional development, working collaboratively with teachers, and distributing leadership to teachers. In implementing school curriculum, chose to provide professional development opportunities to teachers to facilitate curriculum implementation process (HoyteIgbokwe, 2018).

A collaborative approach to curriculum leadership in implementing school curriculum is promoted by many known scholars. Gaustad (1995) proposed that the principal should encourage and promote a cooperative working environment. George (2001) encouraged the cooperative idea that would effectively secure a teacher buy-in through teacher team effort. Fraint (2002) agreed that teachers with traditional and nontraditional approaches could work together as a team in implementing the curriculum. Mayfield (2018), Thessin (2019) and Zhang and Henderson (2018) discovered that the collaborative approach in implementing curriculum would lead to teacher empowerment to co-lead the instructional programs at their schools.

However, Gideon (2002) was more cautious in stating that teacher collaboration needed to be developed over time to be effective. He claimed that school principals must encourage teachers to constructively use their team planning efforts to consistently renew or revise strategies over the course of the academic year in curriculum implementation.

Principal's Role In Evaluating Curriculum

Ittner, Hagenauer and Hascher (2019) studied school principals' practices for curriculum improvement. They found that curriculum evaluation helped principals to implement the school curriculum more effectively. Oliva (2001) also supported the idea that curriculum evaluation helped to determine changes that need to be made to the curriculum. More specifically, Garner and Bradley (1991) developed six dimensions for principals to evaluate and maintain dynamic curricula: 1) convey to others what has been accomplished; 2) formulate an evaluation plan; 3) use multiple criteria for evaluation; 4) use evaluation to improve curriculum; 5) ask for teacher and student feedback; and 6) use the evaluation results to make modifications to the curriculum. They acknowledged that curriculum evaluation was to solicit valid evidence to develop effective strategies to meet educational goals.

Differences in Curriculum Leadership

Hagan, Shedd and Payne (2005) studied the variation in principals' perceptions of injustice and found that their perceptions could vary among different racial and ethnic groups, particularly among White Americans, African Americans and Hispanic Americans because of the different racial and ethnic environments in which they are situated. Hersey and Blanchard (1977) elaborated school principals' different reactions by referring to their principle of the situational leadership which explores that effective leadership style is task-relevant, and principals adapt their leadership style to the characteristics of the student group they serve. The style of curriculum leadership could be changed according to the tasks that are aimed to achieve.

In the review of literature, the researchers recognize that school principals need to have a clear understanding of the roles they play as curriculum leaders in school. They could lead all the teachers and staff in school to meet the educational needs of the students. The performance of this study is needed because there are very few empirical studies on school principals' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as school curriculum leaders. School principals need to be encouraged to boldly implement innovative curriculum measures.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Creswell (2005) claimed that qualitative research investigates research issues of how, what, and why in situations calling for in-depth exploration to provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon. This study is intended to solicit middle school principals' perceptions on curriculum matters. By participating in personal interviews, principals are free to express their feelings and thoughts toward curriculum leadership. This qualitative research procedure creates descriptive data in written or spoken words and observable behaviors (Fetterman, 1998; Hatch, 2002). As Patton (2002) explained, researchers interview people to find out those things they cannot directly obtain through their personal observations including the feelings, thoughts, and intentions of the interviewees.

Research Setting

Twenty-four middle school principals of five school districts (four county districts and one city district) in the Atlanta City Metropolitan area participated in this study. The city district has a student population of 52,000. The student population of the four county districts ranges from 93,000 to 180,000. The majority of students in these five school districts are White students (45%). The minority of students consist of Black, Hispanic, Asian and students of other races (55%). (See Table 1 for school district demographics.) All the middle schools are organized in clusters of classes. Besides the school principals, the assistant principals, the academic coaches and the department heads are also involved in a team effort to work with school curriculum.

Table 1 School District Demographics – Student Population and Race

		Race				
District	Student Population	White %	Black%	Hispanic %	Asian %	Others %
City	8,624	20	37	38	2	3
County 1	178,527	22	32	31	11	4
County 2	96,133	11	62	18	7	2
County 3	110,878	37	31	22	6	4
County 4	92,334	28	42	15	12	3

Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement – Georgia School Grades Reports (2022)

Participants

A total of twenty-four school principals were involved in the study. They are all from five school districts in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The demographic information of the school principals is cited in this section for the readers' reference. Forty middle school principals were randomly selected from five school districts in the Atlanta area and were invited to participate in the study through personal fact-to-face interviews. Twenty-four (60%) of them agreed to participate in the study. Of all the 24 principals, 10 of them (42%) were males and 14 (58%) females. Thirteen of them (54.2%) were White and 11 of them (45.8%) were Black. Fifteen school principals (62.5%) have had 1 to 10 years of experience as principal and 9 (37.5%) have had more than 10 years as principal. Six of them (25%) have earned their Master's degree in educational administration. Seventeen of them (70.8%) have earned their Education Specialist degree in educational administration. One of them (4.2%) has earned her doctoral degree in educational administration. (See Table 2: School Principal Demographic Information)

Table 2 School Principal Demographic Information (24 School Principals)

School Level	Gender %		Race %		Degree Earned %			Year as Principal %	
Middle	Male	Female	Black	White	MEd,	EdS.	PhD.	1-10 Yrs.	11 Yrs. or more
	42.0	58.0	45.8	54.2	25.0	70.8	4.2	62.5	37.5

Source: Governor's Office of Student Achievement – Georgia School Grades Report (2022)

Research Instrument

The researchers developed their research instrument for data collection with the school principals. The contents of the questionnaire were generated with reference to current literature on school curriculum leadership. The instrument includes a principal's demographic data section and nine open-ended questions relating to the principals' roles in different aspects of curriculum leadership. Principals' demographic section was added to help readers understand how the principals' backgrounds could possibly influence their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities as curriculum leaders. The first draft of the instrument was sent to a panel of five school principals to check for the validity by reviewing the instrument against the purpose of the study and provide recommendations for improvement in the contents, the language, and the format of the instrument. As a result, the original 12 questions were reduced to nine. The language of the questions was revised as advised by the panel. School principals who served on the panel did not participate in the study. The final version of the research instrument is included in Figure 1 in the following.

Figure 1. Middle School Principal Interview Questionnaire

Gender: Race:

Highest Degree Earned: Years as School Principal:

Interview Questions:

A. How do you perceive your role as a school principal in the following curriculum activities?

1. Developing the curriculum
2. Organizing the curriculum
3. Implementing the curriculum
4. Evaluating the curriculum
5. Improving/changing the curriculum
6. Supporting the faculty
7. Acquiring resources in support of curriculum
8. Involving the community

B. What are the characteristics of an outstanding curriculum?

End of Interview

Data Collection

All the participating school principals were contacted by the researchers for scheduling interview appointments. A copy of the questionnaire was delivered to the principals before the appointments to facilitate the principals to prepare for the appointments. Each face-to-face interview took about an hour and was audio-recorded. All the audio recordings were transcribed into written passages for review. The researchers cross-examined all the transcribed passages for clarity and consistency. The codes derived by different researchers were checked for consistency of interpretation (Gibbs, 2007).

Data Analysis

Open coding method of qualitative data was used to examine, compare, break down, conceptualize, and categorize the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The principals' responses were classified and coded by categories of curriculum development, organization, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. The coding process is designed to break down the data into manageable segments to generate emerging themes and recurring response patterns (Schwandt, 2007). For the convenience of reporting and confidentiality, all the school principals were identified by numbers, from Principal 1 (P1) to Principal 24 (P24).

FINDINGS

As a result of data analysis, the qualitative data were coded and major themes emerged to provide answers to the research questions as follows:

Principal's Role in Developing the Curriculum

The Curriculum Committee of the Georgia State Department of Education started to develop the school curricula of all levels and forward them to the school districts for implementation. Before passing the curricula to the school principals, the school district curriculum committees of all the disciplines then help to examine all the curricula to make sure that they meet the local student needs (P2; P3; P21). At the school level, principals claimed that they had no authority to further develop or change anything in the established curricula. However, they work with the teachers to implement the curriculum by strictly following the state and district guidelines. The school principals also check the curriculum contents required for program completion and accreditation (P5; P14).

Principal's Role in Organizing the Curriculum

Principal 6 and Principal 11 emphasized that a school principal's role in organizing the curriculum is to support teachers in scheduling, pacing, matrix, mapping, and assessment issues of curriculum implementation. Many school principals stressed the significance of middle school curricula in the cluster organization. They mentioned that curriculum organization should include "checking for vertical alignments between elementary school and high school curricula" (P 12; P 15; P 18; P 20; P 24).

Principal's Role in Implementing the Curriculum

School principals basically leave the work of curriculum implementation as teachers' responsibilities. Teachers are given a free hand in their instructional approach to achieve the educational goals (P 1; P 7; P 12; P 16 and P 18). Principal 24 simply stated that her main job was "to monitor curriculum implementation through direct teacher observation, web blogs, to provide resources for teachers, and to offer staff development opportunities" Because of the cluster class instructional setting, middle schools have taken a team approach to curriculum implementation by establishing grade level cluster teacher teams for discussing and sharing effective strategies to meet student needs (P 3; P 8; P 9; P 16; P 20 and P 22).

Principal's Role in Evaluating the Curriculum

Almost all the principals are depending on the grade level cluster curriculum committees to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum in the teaching and learning process within their clusters. Many principals do frequent class observations to verify that classroom activities are conducted in compliance with the school curriculum (P 5; P 11; P 16; P 20 and P 21). They provide feedback to the teachers during and after their observations with recommendations for improvement. End-of-year state testing data are often used by school principals to assess the extent of achievement of school curriculum goals and objectives.

Principal's Role in Improving the Curriculum

All the school principals have indicated that they were presented with the curriculum for implementation. They had no direction from the State or the school district to improve the curriculum the way they wanted it to be. However, they could voice their recommendations for improvement to the decision-making body. (P 7; P 14 and P 23). Middle school principals and teachers take

advantage of a team approach through their cluster design system to discuss how the curriculum could be improved to better serve the students (P 2; P 3; P 5; P 9; P 13; P 17; P 22; P 23 and P 24).

Principal's Role in Supporting the Faculty

Many school principals have made it clear that they support the faculty by making themselves accessible in responding to faculty requests. They visit classrooms and attend grade level cluster meetings to provide feedback (P 11 and P 18). They also offer professional development opportunities to teachers for their pedagogical advancement to align with the school goals and objectives (P 5; P 8; P 10; P 13 and P 19).

Principal's Role in Acquiring Curriculum Resources

Many school principals conduct a need assessment of the curriculum resources they need and the budgeted dollar amount. In this way, they are in a better position knowing the resource shortages of the school. They help their teachers by identifying the funding sources and encourage their teachers to use the state and district appropriations (P 8; P 11 and P 14). They also look at application for federal, state and local grants for funding student learning activities (P 2; P 3; P 7; P 9; P 13; P 17 and P 22). In addition to making full use of local school activity funds, they also establish close relationship with school business partners and parent teacher associations for their contributions to support the curriculum implementation.

Principals' Role in Involving the Community in Curriculum Issues

In promoting school and community relationship, P 3, P 9, P 20 and P 23 stated that they invited parents to serve on curriculum committees. They worked with the school communities including the school council, school partners, citizens advisory committees, parent teacher associations, and local government departments for school curriculum activities. The school issues monthly newsletters of school activities to keep the school communities informed of what are going on at school. For some of the school activities like frequent PTA meetings, open schools and curriculum workshops, parents and community volunteers are invited to participate.

Principal's Indication of an Outstanding Curriculum

School principals considered an outstanding curriculum to be relevant to daily lives, in-depth and challenging to the students (P 2; P 4; P 12 and P 14). Many principals (P 8; P 9; P 12 and P 24) emphasized that achieving vertical alignment is an outstanding characteristic of the school curriculum at the middle school level. In the case of the cluster curriculum design, horizontal alignment among the different disciplines is essential. Some principals also indicated that an outstanding curriculum should involve the use of technology in curriculum implementation (P 11; P 21 and P 24).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicated that middle school principals showed high degree of enthusiasm in inviting the community to make curriculum decisions. This is in agreement with Wallace Foundation's study (2013) demonstrating that school principals were very much engaged with the communities in school curriculum issues.

Many middle school principals in this study said loud and clear that curriculum development needed to meet the student needs. These comments fully reflected the same viewpoints of Beach and Reihartz (2000), Oliva (2001) and Garner and Bradley (1991).

In support of the teachers in curriculum implementation, the principals in this study allowed the teachers the flexibility to achieve their curriculum goals. The successful collaborative effort between the principals and the teachers is confirming the findings of current literature (Gaustad, 1995; George, 2001; Mayfield, 2018; Sowell, 2018; Thessin, 2019). Oliva (2001) urged principals to serve as mentors to the teachers. School principals in this study also helped their teachers to take advantage of the state appropriations as well as apply for other state, federal, and private foundation grants for instructional purposes.

Quite different from the findings of the studies of Naidoo and Petersen (2015), Sasson (2016), and Shaked (2019) showing limited involvement of school principals in curriculum issues, school principals in this study have been enthusiastically active in serving their role as school curriculum leaders.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited to its design, location and participants. This is a qualitative research of interview approach. An attempt to try other research designs such as quantitative or mixed-methodology could yield different results. The study is limited to data collection in the Atlanta area. Studies involving larger geographical areas could make their findings more generalizable and comparable. Additionally, the principals in this study were asked to self-report their personal perceptions. Perceptions from teachers, parents and other community leaders could generate new perspectives.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

In curriculum development, middle school principals in this study have certainly prioritized student academic needs on top. They understand that they need to follow the curriculum guidelines set by the state and the school districts while they could make improvement recommendations. Principals in this study have identified their strategies in working with their teachers for curriculum implementation and development through a grade level cluster team approach. The findings of this study clearly indicate that middle school principals have expressed their perceptions of focusing on the tasks they are assigned to accomplish. They could help shape the educational policies of schools. Practicing and aspiring middle school principals can discuss the findings of this study in relation to the challenges they are facing in curriculum leadership.

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STRUCTURAL ACCOMMODATIONS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL MATHEMATICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR LESSENING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

ALBERT M. JIMENEZ
NICHOLAS CLEGORNE
SHERYL CROFT
Kennesaw State University, U.S.A.

DAVID G. BUCKMAN
University of South Carolina Aiken, U.S.A.

ABSTRACT

This quantitative study was designed to determine whether the use of graphical aids in standardized mathematics testing is effective in lessening the achievement gap between English Language Learner (ELL) students and their non-ELL counterparts for middle-grade aged students. The data used for this study include data from 2,659 students and come from a series of district-generated benchmark examinations for grades six through eight. Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis was implemented using the Rasch Item Response Theory model in Bilog-MG to locate all the items that exhibited DIF between ELLs and non-ELLs. The premise is that DIF exhibiting items should not be those with a useful graphical aid. Only four of the 31 DIF exhibiting items contained a useful graphical aid, with three of the four favoring ELL students. This finding aligns with previous work, suggesting that graphical aids in mathematics exam creation should be used as a way to better allow ELL students to show their understanding of mathematics knowledge and better ensure fairness and accessibility for all learners, specifically ELL students.

INTRODUCTION

Starting in 2001 with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), there has been an increase in standardized testing and the importance placed on their results (Breiner, 2015; Rush & Scherff, 2012). States began implementing standardized testing programs to assess how schools were meeting the requirements of NCLB. The increase in testing has been particularly impactful to the English Language Learner (ELL) population. Testing is complicated for ELLs because of learning a new curriculum as well as simultaneously learning the language of the test. Solano-Flores and Trumbull (2003) say it best, "existing approaches to testing ELLs do not ensure equitable and valid outcomes because current research and practice assessment paradigms overlook the complex nature of language" (p.4). Research consistently shows that without accommodations, ELLs often underperform their native English-speaking peers (Authors 2017, DeStefano, 1998; LaCelle-Peterson, 1998).

While some research has addressed this issue (Authors, 2017), the focus has typically been on examining primary school-aged ELLs. The link between mathematics test scores and reading ability has been acknowledged and discussed extensively throughout the years (e.g., Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004; Aiken, 1971; Johnson, 1949; Monroe & Engelhart, 1931). Though examinations in mathematics contain many number-based problems, other elements can become problematic for English Language Learners (ELLs), including levels of linguistic complexity and the prevalence of non-math vocabulary (Abedi, & Lord, 2001). This research hopes to expand the focus on ELLs in middle grades and examine whether mathematics standardized testing practices

can be made fairer.

Several standardized testing accommodations available to ELLs, include, but are not limited to, translation to the student's native language, the use of glossaries and dictionaries, extended testing time, oral administrations, and structural accommodations such as graphical aids (Abedi, 2009; Abedi, Courtney, & Leon, 2003; Abedi, Courtney, Mirocha, Leon, & Goldberg, 2001; Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004; Castellon-Wellington, 2000; Hofstetter, 2003). Another accommodation, graphical aids, when embedded in educational tests can assist students in understanding and correctly interpreting the content of the text (Author, 2017). Though these aids can be quite helpful, graphical aids which are irrelevant to the text can confuse students. For graphical aids to be helpful, readers must be able to combine the information gained from the graphic with the information in the text (Reinking, 1986). The meaning of a graphic depends heavily upon the meaning the graphic holds for the creator, which is shaped both culturally and socially (Harvey, 2013). As a result, these graphics may or may not be very useful for ELLs, whose cultural backgrounds and experiences often differ from those of standardized test developers.

OBJECTIVES

Research has shown that useful graphical aids, which provide additional avenues to solve standardized mathematics problems, can dramatically lessen the achievement gap between ELLs and their non-ELL counterparts in elementary grades (Authors, 2017). While this finding is important to improve both the education and the resultant opportunities that this tool affords elementary students, there exists a lack of similarly focused research that assesses these results as students continue into later grades. This study seeks to determine whether useful graphical aids can allow standardized mathematics questions to function similarly across ELL and non-ELL student groups in the middle grades as mathematics concepts and calculations become more difficult, making these examinations fairer.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Research Connecting Themes and Arguments in ELL

In the U.S., researchers have highlighted that language barriers within the population of students categorized as English Language Learners (ELL) are a significant factor when predicting student achievement (Sheng, Sheng, &Anderson, 2011). For example, data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) eighth-grade NAEP Reading assessment, illustrated that, on average, native English-speaking students score 660% higher than their ELL peers in terms of proficiency. Further, achievement deficiencies do not diminish as ELL students matriculate. Instead, the achievement gap between ELLs and their native-speaking peers increases as students advance through school (Kim & García, 2014). This persistent gap underscores the urgent need for holistic strategies that combine language instruction with cultural responsiveness, academic interventions, and family engagement.

The Hispanic population is the second largest in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Spanish-speaking students encompass over 74% of the nation's ELL population (NCES, 2020a), so identifying methods to alleviate the language barriers associated with student instruction and assessment is warranted. However, despite efforts to address these barriers, systemic challenges persist. Schools often lack adequately trained bilingual educators, comprehensive instructional resources, and tailored professional development for teachers working with ELL students (Lopez, 2016). This lack of resources aligns with broader concerns that ELL students are underserved due

to systemic inequities that limit access to culturally responsive teaching methods, which are shown to promote language acquisition and achievement (Gay, 2010). Moreover, cultural disconnects between educators and ELL families may hinder meaningful engagement, further exacerbating achievement gaps. Villegas & Lucas (2002) suggest that fostering culturally responsive practices, including integrating students' home languages and cultural backgrounds into learning experiences, can bridge these gaps.

To further highlight the potential concern of the impact of language barriers on student achievement, when focusing specifically on the Hispanic population, the National Center for Education Statistics (2022) reports on student dropout noted when comparing the Hispanic student population to white and black students on dropout rates, Hispanic students had a 7.9% dropout rate while white and black student dropout rates were 4.3% and 5.7%, respectively. Over the last two decades, school systems have made efforts to improve dropout rates thereby improving graduation rates, as NCES (2020[b]) highlights national dropout rates of 4.2%, 6.4%, and 8% for White, Black, and Hispanic students. Nonetheless, it remains evident that the dropout rate of the Hispanic student population was much higher than that of most other racial groups (i.e, Asian, White, Two or more races, and Black), but less than Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native. This persistent dropout disparity highlights the importance of creating interventions that address language barriers while also promoting a sense of belonging in educational settings (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

Although graduation is the ultimate goal of the U.S.'s K-12 school system, research notes that other factors can significantly influence this sought outcome. Research notes that the greatest predictor of graduation is student achievement—specifically, English achievement (Sheng, et.al, 2011). This finding reinforces the notion that language acquisition must be paired with effective instructional interventions. Policies that focus solely on English proficiency, without accommodating content mastery through alternative instructional methods, risk leaving ELL students behind (August & Shanahan, 2006). The inclusion of scaffolded instruction and bilingual support strategies has been shown to enhance ELL achievement by combining language development with subject mastery (Goldenberg, 2008). If proficiency in English is one of the most potent factors influencing one's prospect to graduate, it appears that ELL students must not only overcome their language barrier but meet a level of proficiency deemed adequate for all students, including native English speakers, to graduate high school.

Achievement Levels of ELL Students

For ELL students, the passage rates on the mathematics high school exit exams are 30 to 40 points lower than native English-speaking students (Xiong & Zhou, 2006). Likewise, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), uncovered that in 2022, ELL fourth-grade students scored 23 percentage points below their non-ELL counterparts in mathematics, and ELL eighth-grade students scored 36 percentage points below non-ELL students in mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022). The level of math deficiencies of ELL students found between fourth and eighth grade highlights how language barrier issues impact subject areas outside of reading. Studies indicate that these challenges are compounded when ELL students are excluded from enrichment programs or gifted education, further limiting their academic trajectory (Ford, Cabell, Konold, Invernizzi, & Gartland, 2013).

Early intervention in addressing language barriers can be extremely valuable to future student success as language barrier issues snowball, limiting a student's ability to meet and exceed state-specific achievement metrics. For instance, Halle, Hair, Wndner, McNamara, & Chien (2012)

study found variance in reading and math achievement between ELLs and native English speakers as determined by the grade at which English proficiency is attained. Their study indicated that ELL students identified as proficient in English by kindergarten attained similar achievement levels as native English speakers in both reading and math. ELL students who were proficient by first grade displayed small gaps in reading and math achievement compared to native English speakers; however, the gaps appeared to close or narrow over time. The largest initial gaps in reading and math achievement compared to native speakers ELLs was found in ELL students who were not proficient by first grade. Nonetheless, the researchers indicated that the gap narrowed in reading and grew over time in math. This widening math gap suggests that content-specific interventions in math for ELL students are particularly urgent (Halle et al., 2012). Providing targeted math interventions designed to align with language development strategies may offer a promising solution to close these achievement gaps (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006).

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ELLS

For the purposes of this research, accommodations provided to ELLs function as "support provided students for a given testing event either through modification of the test itself or through modification of the testing procedure to access the content in English and better demonstrate what they know" (Butler & Stevenson, 1997, p.5). The goal of any accommodation is not to alter the construct under study but rather to provide students with a fair way to access the construct and display their knowledge about it (Clark-Gareca, 2016). According to the literature, the typical accommodations allowed to ELLs are testing in the student's native language, oral administration of the test, simplifying question-wording, use of published and modified dictionaries, and extra time for test taking. Each of these, while well-meaning, can impact the validity of the examination. For example, Table 1 provides a discussion of the most typically used accommodations (Author, 2017).

Despite the availability of accommodations, systemic implementation gaps persist. School districts frequently struggle with inconsistent policies, limited resources for accommodation tools, and insufficient teacher training (Abedi, 2009). Consequently, while accommodations may improve access to content, their effectiveness is contingent upon strategic implementation and teacher preparedness. Research has shown that professional development focused on accommodations best practices can improve teacher confidence and increase the effective use of tools that support ELL success (García & Tyler, 2010).

Accommodation Type	Selected Studies	Overview of Impact
Testing in Native Language	Llabre & Cuevas (1983), Hofstetter (2003), Anderson, Jenkins, & Miller (1996), Kopriva (2000)	Students perform better when tested in English when also taught content in English; Translating tests into other languages results in a high probability of having two different tests; Translating instructions into native language is beneficial only when combined with extra time; Can call into question the validity of test scores
Oral Administration of Testing	Castellon-Wellington (2000), Hafner (2001)	Accommodation not shown to be beneficial to ELLs; Not directly geared to meet the linguistic needs of these students and may be more appropriate for students exhibiting cognitive or physical impairments; Can call into question the validity of test scores
Additional Time for Testing	Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord (2004), Abedi, Courtney, & Leon (2003), Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker (2000), Abedi (2001), Abedi, Lord, Kim, & Miyoshi (2000)	Typically most used accommodation; Generally has positive impact on ELL success; Most effective when used in conjunction with another accommodation; Can call into question the validity of test scores
Use of Published Dictionaries	Abedi, Courtney, Mirocha, Leon, & Goldberg (2001)	Found to be ineffective; Difficult to implement administratively; Can provide content help which may provide an unfair advantage to those receiving accommodation: Can call into question the validity of test scores
Modified/Customized Dictionaries	Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker (2000)	Accommodation shown to be somewhat effective, but for both ELLs and non_ELLs; Biggest barrier to this accommodation is the extra work, time, and expense to customize dictionaries: Can call into question the validity of test scores
Modification of Question Wording or Linguistic Simplification	Abedi & Lord (2001), Hofstetter (2003), Abedi, Lord, Hofstetter, & Baker (2000), Brown (1999), Lotherington-Woloszyn (1993)	Generally, small, significant increases in achievement have been found with this accommodation, with some exceptions; Shown to be the best at reducing the achievement gap; Difficult and expensive to implement; Can call into question the validity of test scores

Figure 1. Outline of Selection of Non-Structural Accommodations used with ELLs

Jimenez, Nixon and Zepeda (2017) also discussed what was termed a "structural accommodation,' providing useful graphical aids to enable ELLs to better to display mathematics knowledge, which also applies to the current study.

Use of Graphics: What is Helpful

Research shows that visual cues are valuable for learning across settings regardless of the language spoken. For example, Campbell & Cuba (2015) argue that children understand and interpret visual cues before becoming verbally literate. Regarding ELLs, Fairburn and Fox (2009) recommended, among other things, that tests written in English, but administered to ELLs, should provide graphical/visual supports where possible.

In providing graphics, the National Assessment Governing Board (2007, p.65) in the Assessment and Item Specifications for the 2009 Mathematics Assessment provided guidance for the use of graphical aids in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Math items:

- Use visuals that mirror and parallel the wording and expectations of the text.
- Illustrate only necessary information in the graphics.
- Represent each important part of the visual image.

Because of the value these images have for ELLs in displaying mathematics knowledge (Authors, 2017) and because these graphics can make mathematics items function more similarly for ELLs and non-ELLs, graphics "must be carefully chosen to serve a purpose in the assessment tasks, and none should be present simply for visual interest" (WestEd, 2014, p.4-3). Using graphics improperly can contribute to "substantial confusion and distract test takers from what items are asking students to do" (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language barriers for students in middle grades, when compared to those in elementary school, become increasingly more difficult and problematic as the academic language used in these grades becomes more complex and challenging to comprehend (Francis, et.al., 2006). If the findings from the elementary study apply for middle grades students as well, as students enter high school,the impact on lessening the achievement gap becomes even more significant. This is because the ability to display actual math knowledge while entering high school can prevent one from having to enroll in remedial mathematics courses and enable more of a focus on college-preparatory courses (Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Despite the large variety of accommodations available for ELLs, more empirical evidence must be collected on the various accommodations to strengthen the decision-making process for test creation, particularly in terms of validity (Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord, 2004). Through an investigation of graphical aids as an accommodation, this study seeks to add to the knowledge base regarding accommodations that may be useful for ELLs and do so in a way that is less impactful to the validity of the assessment.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This research aims to answer one essential question: Does the use of graphical aids on mathematical questions, where appropriate to the content, help to lessen the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs in middle grades? At the elementary school level, the inclusion of useful graphical aids does in fact lessen the achievement gap on standardized mathematics examinations

(Jimenez, Nixon & Zepeda, 2017). In fact, the researchers hypothesize not only will graphical aids have a similar, positive effect for middle school grades, but that the impact of graphical aids on test fairness will have an even more significant impact for middle school children than for elementary school children. This significant impact at the middle school level is expected due to the increased difficulty of the curriculum (Francis et al., 2006), the increased emphasis on academic language use (Francis et al., 2006), and an increased understanding by the students of the importance of individual courses and test outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Participant Selection and Description

The data for this research come from a diverse, urban school district in the southern United States. The grades under examination are 6-8. Test scores for a total of 2,659 students were collected and analyzed for the current study. All students in the given grades across the district were included in the analysis. Table 1 shows the number of students who were classified as ESOL (English for Speakers of Languages), Gifted, or SPED (Special Education) during this school year. Under 20% of the students belonged to any of these three categories. Students receiving ESOL services were considered ELLs for the analyses in this study.

Table 1

Services Received by the 2,659 Participants

Grade	ESOL		Gifted		SPED	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
6	54	856	160	750	149	761
	5.90%	94.10%	17.60%	82.40%	16.40%	83.60%
7	54	828	108	774	143	739
	6.10%	93.90%	12.20%	87.80%	16.20%	83.80%
8	44	823	130	737	118	749
	5.10%	94.90%	15.00%	85.00%	13.60%	86.40%

To further describe the participants of this study, Table 2 provides the race and gender, as well as Free and Reduced Lunch status of the students. Males and females were represented fairly proportionately in the data. Free and Reduced Lunch status was included as an indicator of socioeconomic status. As is evident in the table, students receiving free lunch comprised the majority of the sample. Regarding racial background, the majority of the students were Black, while a fairly even number of students identified as Hispanic or White.

Table 2

Demographic information for the 2,659 students

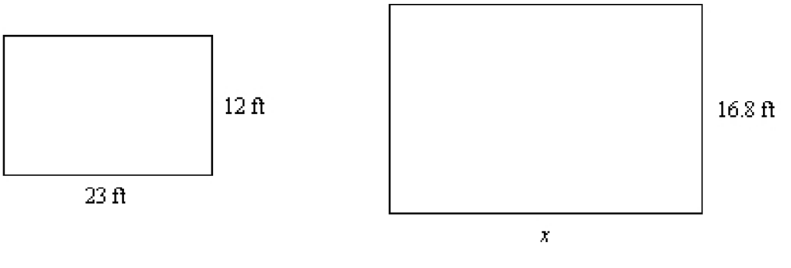
Grade	Race					Gender		Free/Reduced Lunch		
	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multi	White	Male	Female	Free	Reduced	Paid
6	22	501	169	48	169	462	448	583	68	259
	2.4%	55.1%	18.6%	5.3%	18.6%	50.8%	49.2%	64.1%	7.5%	28.5%
7	10	520	168	32	148	466	416	589	62	229
	1.1%	59%	19%	3.6%	16.8%	52.8%	47.2%	66.8%	7.0%	26%
8	21	491	150	36	168	424	443	534	62	270
	2.4%	56.6%	17.3%	4.2%	19.4%	48.9%	51.1%	61.6%	7.2%	31.2%

Instrumentation

The school district implemented a benchmark testing program which was designed to prepare students for the end of the year state assessment in mathematics. Each student in these grades took three benchmark examinations, each consisting of approximately 30 items. The three benchmark examinations for grades 6-8 contained 93 questions. The first two tests in each grade contained 30 questions each, while the final test contained 33 items. The questions included on the benchmark examinations were of three types: (1) those with a graphical aid deemed useful in assisting a student to come to a solution, (2) those with no graphical aid, and (3) those with a graphical aid, but one deemed unhelpful. For analysis purposes, questions that either had no graphical aid or an unhelpful graphical aid were combined into a "no graphical aid" group. See Figures 2, 3 and 4 for examples of each type.

Variables included in the analyses are individual responses (scored dichotomously; correct or incorrect) to these items and the students' ELL status (ELL or non-ELL).

Two similar rectangles are shown below. The larger rectangle is 1.4 times the size of the smaller rectangle. What is the value of x?



A. 16.4 feet

B. 32.2 feet *

C. 38.6 feet

D. 48.3 feet

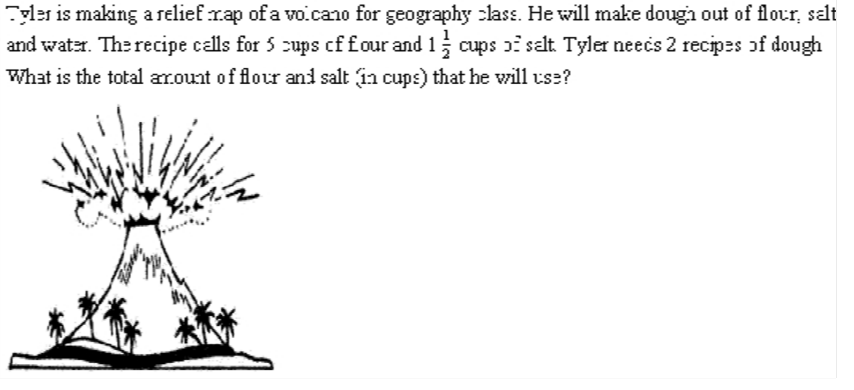
Figure 2. Example of a question with a graphic aid deemed helpful.

Find the least common multiple of 2, 6, and 10.

A. 60
B. 30*
C. 120
D. 90

Figure 3. Example of a question without a graphic aid.

Tyler is making a relief map of a volcano for geography class. He will make dough out of flour, salt, and water. The recipe calls for 5 cups of flour and 1 ½ cups of salt. Tyler needs 2 recipes of dough. What is the total amount of flour and salt (in



A. 6.5 cups
B. 15 cups
C. 13 cups *
D. 12 cups

Figure 4. Example of a question with a graphic deemed unhelpful.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Differential Item Functioning (DIF) analysis, as pioneered by Educational Testing Service in the 1980s (Zieky, 2011), was implemented using the Rasch Item Response Theory model in Bilog-MG to locate all the items that exhibited DIF between ELLs and non-ELLs. DIF was chosen as the analysis method because it allows for groups of students of different demographic categories, but at similar academic ability levels, to be compared to determine if items function similarly for both groups. Items that do not function similarly in the DIF analysis may be unfairly biased against one of the groups. The basic premise of this research is that if graphical aids really do lessen the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs on mathematics examinations as is argued here, items exhibiting DIF should not possess graphical aids as these should all function similarly for both groups. If this reasoning holds, items exhibiting DIF should be those which do not contain useful graphical aids.

RESULTS

The three benchmark examinations for each grade 6-8 contain exactly 93 questions, comprising a total of 279 items included in the study. Of the 279 items, 47 were classified as containing a useful graphical aid. DIF analyses resulted in 31 total items exhibiting DIF. Table 3 provides the breakdown and percentages for each of these categories.

Table 3

Results for the 279 Items

Graphic Aid		DIF	
Useful	Not Useful/No Graphic	Yes	NO
47	232	31	248
16.85%	83.15%	11.11%	88.89%

If the argument holds, a vast majority of the items with useful graphical aids should not exhibit DIF. Of the 31 items exhibiting DIF, only 4 contained a useful graphical aid. While this finding initially appears contradictory to the research hypothesis, close examination of the DIF parameters produces a notable finding. Of the 4 items with a graphical aid that exhibit DIF, 3 have negative parameter estimates, indicating that these items actually favor ELL students over their non-ELL counterparts. The remaining item is reading-intensive, and additional research is required to determine whether having a reading intensive item the cause of the discrepancy. It is unclear at this point, beyond speculation, why these three items had negative parameter estimates. As noted by Abedi, et al, however, accommodations should ideally "yield an interaction effect, where the accommodation improves the performance of [ELLs] but not the performance of native English speakers" (2004, p. 6). Thus, while it appears that these graphical aids function in an appropriate manner by assisting ELLs to better show mathematical ability, their impact on native English speakers is a cause for further investigation. This unique finding will be examined more closely in subsequent research.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

With the current state of education's focus on standardized testing, any structural changes initiated during the construction of a standardized examination which lessens the achievement gap between ELLs and non-ELLs can have a profound impact. Given that of the four items that contained graphical aids, three have negative parameter estimates, actually favoring ELL students over their non-Ell counterparts, suggesting that graphic aids can be used as accommodations to improve "the performance of [ELLs]…" to better show mathematical ability.(Abedi, 2004, p. 6). This finding, while inconclusive, offers a potential strategy to enhance the mathematical ability of non-native English speaking children.

Additionally, the findings of this study have specific implications for teachers of non-English speaking children. Specifically, the study suggests that graphical aids can be useful in assessing ELL students' ability to understand mathematical concepts and improve performance. Assessing ability levels of ELL students can serve as an important tool to develop strategies that address or redress students' performance levels. In other words, graphical aids can provide regular classroom teachers as well as ELL teachers a tool with which to further differentiate or modify mathematics instruction. Even though more research is necessary, using such a tool appropriately

has the potential to facilitate student understanding in math courses and thus improve overall student achievement.

The impact of this finding is meaningful for students, teachers, and test creators, and is significant in that it provides empirical evidence that is rare in this field. The current study facilitates future DIF applications to test items that include useful graphical aids of many forms. Subsequent studies of this nature can lead to vast improvements in equitable testing and a greater overall understanding of good practices within the test and item construction process.

CONCLUSION

While the results of this study suggest that graphical aids help access ELL students' understanding of mathematical concepts and performance, the results have negligible results for native English speakers. The impact of this finding is meaningful for students, teachers, and test creators, and is significant in that it provides empirical evidence that is rare in this field. The current study facilitates future DIF applications to test items that include useful graphical aids of many forms. Subsequent studies of this nature can lead to vast improvements in equitable testing and a greater overall understanding of good practices within the test and item construction process.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the uniqueness of the data allowed for an examination of this "structural accommodation" free from other accommodations, the data were not collected to discover the usefulness of this accommodation. Had it been, other information about ELL classification and English proficiency would have been gathered enabling for a deeper investigation into the impact of this type of accommodation.

Future research avenues will include research addressing the limitation outlined above as well as research examining the impact the graphics deemed unhelpful might have had on test takers, as their inclusion violated standards for mathematics item design as outlined by the National Assessment Governing Board (2007) and WestEd (2014). One final avenue for future research is to examine how, if at all, structural accommodations might benefit students in other disciplines, potentially strengthening the reliability and validity of other standardized examinations to improve equity in testing for all students.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN ONTARIO CANADA: AN OVERVIEW

GHOFRAN ALYASS
George Brown College, Canada
ABIGAIL BUIST
University of Toronto, Canada

ABSTRACT

The education system in Ontario is created to exclude Disabled people and other marginalized groups. Instead of building an environment for disabled students to thrive, they are instead viewed as incapable and as a burden on the system. Under the current special education model, disabled students are segregated instead of included. Exclusion of disabled students impacts not only the students but families and educators as well. Drawing on the works of several researchers, this paper will examine the history of special education in Ontario, the challenges currently faced by disabled students, and the current policies and planning surrounding inclusion. Recommendations for future planning will also be given.

BACKGROUND

"Inclusion is not just inviting someone to sit at your table. It is believing they belong there" (Carella, 2024). The above quote is from a disability advocate and mother. As it pertains to the issue of exclusion of students, Carella (2024) sheds light on the issue of exclusion of disabled and marginalized students within the Ontario education system.

The works of several authors will support the discussion of this paper in stating that the current model of education in which disabled and marginalized students have to operate creates many barriers, one that does not include disabled and marginalized students but instead excludes them. Carella (2024) provides a formula for educators and schools to guide them toward understanding what inclusion entails and to recognize that their current teaching practices are exclusive and need to be changed to become inclusive. In stating that "inclusion isn't just inviting someone to sit at the table," Carrella (2024) illustrates what is being practiced within the current education model known as "special education," where educators and schools are inviting disabled and marginalized students without ensuring that disabled and marginalized student do feel that they belong and the education is meeting their needs, but instead, assuming that the current education model is sufficient in meeting the needs of disabled and marginalized students. According to Slee (2018), "Inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny" (Slee, 2018, p.1). This exclusion affects not only students but also the families and educators working with them to educate and advocate for them. Educators face many challenges when working to provide quality education for disabled and marginalized students in the K-12 education system. These challenges include limited resources to develop their teaching material to support those with diverse learning styles, educators often face barriers when explaining their lack of control over the standards and practices of special education, and among the biggest challenges faced by teachers is the lack of training teachers have on disability and working with disabled students given that the implementation of knowledge of disability in current teacher education programs in Ontario is little to none McCrimmon, A. W. (2015). Students with disabilities and students who are marginalized are negatively impacted by the current structure of the K-12 education system. They are excluded in many aspects of the decision-making process in their educational journeys, including their educational placement (Munuk et al., 2024). Disabled

students lose their self-esteem as a result of constantly having their abilities questioned as learners within a classroom. Incorporating the words of Carella (2024) as the basis of this paper, this paper will discuss the history of special education in Ontario; this paper will provide statistics on IEPs, the article will go on to discuss the statements made about inclusive and accessible education in the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with disabilities (2018), the article will then discuss the 'empty vessel' concept, which refers to the outdated belief that students are empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge, and how it is vital to be attentive and put an end to teaching practices that situate students as empty vessels Rodriguez (2012). Finally, this article will discuss the lack of planning for students with disabilities within schools. In conclusion, this article provides an overview of the IEP placement and assessment process in the province of Ontario. This article will then conclude by providing recommendations for future planning, as well as discussing the educator's role and its influence on the experiences of disabled and marginalized students.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGIES

Throughout this paper, disability has been framed in many ways. The first common way disability is framed is what is known as "people first language" Titchkosky (2001). People first language is used when the individual prefers to have their disability separated from them and be referred to as people with disabilities or, as it relates to this article, "students with disabilities. Secondly, this article uses disabled students, which refers to disability as an identity. The framing D/disabled is also used to honour those in the disability community who choose to refer to their disability as a label at times and identity at other times. Another way disability is referred to is using the lowercase "d," which refers to disability as a label or diagnosis given to the individual. Finally, when a person is referred to as a Disabled person with a capital "D," the individual wishes to have their disability be viewed as their identity.

Throughout this paper, the terms inclusive and exclusive education are used. Before defining inclusive education, it is important to note that there is not one universal, agreed-upon definition. For this paper, we will follow the UNESCO (1994) definition of inclusion, which states that all children should have the opportunity to learn together, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Exclusive education is the opposite of this and involves children with Disabilities learning in a separate environment from their non-disabled peers.

HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

Special education is often assumed to be a new education model, but it has been around for many years. According to Schlifer (2005), " [in the 1860s]Residential schools – variously referred to as asylums, institutions, colonies, or training schools – were first established in Canada to serve children in the parlance of the day as deaf and dumb, blind and idiotic or feeble-minded" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2). In viewing this quote, it is vital to take a deeper look at whether an inclusive education is indeed provided if such derogatory language is used to refer to people with disabilities. Furthermore, one should examine how special education has evolved to determine if there has been improvement. The author continues to map out the timeline of special education in Canada by identifying the next significant year for its development. According to the author, in the 1880s, special classes were first introduced "with the formation of unruly classes for incorrigible and delinquent students, ungraded classes for slow learners and 'steamer classes' for immigrant children" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2).

Furthermore, the author states that schooling became more normal for children in Canada, yet "More seriously handicapped children were still relegated to institutional settings or excluded from education altogether" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2). This continued until 1906, when the first special day classes were in place. According to the author, those day classes were "for children with physical problems – those who were described as crippled, sickly and malnourished" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2). According to the author, the special classes for children with disabilities in the province of Ontario were officially established in 1910. Furthermore, in the 1920s, the special classes included more children with disabilities, such as "deaf children, blind children, and gifted children, as well as lip-reading and sight-saving classes" (Schafer, 2005, p. 2). The next milestone discussed in the timeline is from 1920 to 1960, when special institutions and classes continued to play a significant role in the education of students with disabilities. The way that Schlifer (2005) outlines the reason that students with disabilities continue to be segregated is necessary to be attentive to and use as proof to be critical of the claim that the current model of education that is used to educate students with disabilities is inclusive. According to Schlifer (2005),

> Segregation was rationalized on the grounds that the public school system could not provide for grossly deviant children, and the low incidence of specific disabilities in the population made it difficult to group affected children locally for educational purposes. Educators also believed that segregated classes could offer handicapped students the most benefits (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2).

The author continues to map out the emergence and development of special education, highlighting that in the 1960s, civil rights movements emerged, and parents, advocates, legislators, and systems began to reject the idea that exceptional students should be educated separately. Furthermore, "Agitation by parents and professional groups led to new legislation and many of the changes that are apparent in special education today" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2). Finally, the author highlights that "[the] practice of special education came of age, and the true movement towards integration got underway" (Schlifer, 2005, p. 2).

As with Dis/ability, racialized students have had a challenging history in Ontario schools as well. In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau introduced multiculturalism policies in Canada, marking the beginning of multicultural Education in Ontario schools (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d.). Multiculturalism rested on the assumption that exposure to different cultures would automatically result in greater tolerance and acceptance; however, that was not the case (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d.). According to Rezai-Rashti et al. (n.d.), "exposing students to cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity did not necessarily result in the reversal of discriminatory attitudes and behaviours" (p. 144). According to Rezai-Rashti et al. (n.d.), in 1985, the Ontario Ministry of Education created an advisory committee for race relations, and a report was created that argued that "multicultural policies were not effective because of lack of coordination, untested assumptions, and the focus on the exotic dimensions of culture" (p. 144). It was during this time that anti-racist education was developed, with its ultimate goal being to empower students and foster social change (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d.). In the mid-1990s, the NDP government in Ontario introduced new policies surrounding race relations, but these policies were subsequently repealed after the Conservative government took office in 1995 (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d.). In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a report called No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools that discussed how sure students, including "immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special needs are at risk for lower levels of educational opportunity and achievement" (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d p. 149). Despite these

findings, marginalized groups still struggle in Ontario's education system as there has not been a systemic way found to enforce anti-racist policies (Rezai-Rashti et al., n.d). It should also be noted that racialized students are more likely to be in special Education in Ontario and are overrepresented in behavioral, intellectual, and language disabilities specifically (Galabuzi, 2014). Racisoizrd children are less likely to be diagnosed as gifted or with learning disabilities and autism than their white peers (Galabuzi, 2014). This makes these diagnoses more privileged (Galabuzi, 2014).

Traditionally, students have been viewed as empty vessels. According to Rodriguez (2012), "Historically, biologists have identified teaching as cooperative behaviour in which the "teacher" changes his or her actions to aid a naïve "student" in acquiring knowledge or skills (p. 177-178). Originally it was believed that learning was a kind of physical transaction but now we know it is not a physical transaction but rather "one where the accepter of information begins to form an internal structure that replicates properties of the information imported in relation to his or her environment (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 181). It is essential to consider factors such as a student's goals, settings, and circumstances. Knowledge is not transmitted as an object but instead emerges through interactions (Rodriguez, 2012).

IMPLEMENTATION OF IEPS AND POLICIES OF EDUCATING DISABLED STUDENTS IN ONTARIO

One measure taken by administrators and educators within the education system is the implementation of an Individual Education Plan for Students with Disabilities, Racialized Students, and Marginalized Students. Those working within the Ontario Education system assume that an Individual Education Plan for Disabled, Marginalized, and Racialized Students provides them with an inclusive education. According to Dworet, B. et al. (2002),

> Children with exceptionalities who require special education services and programs would be characterized as having needs in one or more of the following categories: physical, behavioral, learning disabled, speech and language, giftedness, autism spectrum disorder, developmental delays, or vision and hearing impairments (Dworet, B. et al. p.23).

Furthermore, for students in the K-12 education system to have access to specialized programming, students must undergo an assessment through the school that involves both academic and non-academic personnel. Furthermore, Minuk et al. (2024) discuss the identification of disability for educational placement purposes. According to the author, "School-based disability identification is often the gateway for accessing supports and services that enable students with intellectual disability to benefit from educational placement in inclusive, specialized, or some combination of settings" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 1). Similar to Dworet-Benett., et al. (2002), Minuk et al. (2024) also discuss the identification of disability and, more specifically, refer to it as school-based disability identification. Minuk et al. (2024) discuss the identification process within Ontario schools, stating, "This common practice often involves a multidisciplinary evaluation and team-based decision-making process including education professionals and, when possible, the parent of the child referred for evaluation" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 2). Minuk et al. (2024) make a critical distinction between general disability identification for diagnostic purposes and school-based disability identification for educational placement purposes. Minuk et al. (2024) "Though disability labels are complicated by linkage to a deficit-model conception of disability, they continue to be a relevant factor in determining access to educational services, supports, and opportunities for students with unique educational needs" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 2). Through this discussion by Minuk et al. (2024), it is crucial to be critical and ask how the current Ontario education model can

be considered inclusive education if it still relies on defining disability using a deficit approach and referring to it as a diagnosis. Furthermore, Minuk et al. (2024) go on to discuss placement and draw a distinction between educational placement and programming. According to the authors,

> While placement refers to where students with disabilities access their education, programming encompasses what students will learn within those placements and how (e.g., accommodation to learn using assistive technology). The degree to which students with disabilities are placed in and access programming in general education classrooms can have a profound and lasting impact on their opportunities to learn appropriate academic content, socialize with their typically developing peers, and become a valued member of the school community (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4).

Prior to presenting the data on placement and identification in the Ontario education system, Minuk et al. (2024) outline the various types of educational placements in the Ontario education system. The first special education program placement is referred to as a regular class with indirect support. According to the authors, a regular class with indirect support placement is defined as "Where the student is placed in a regular class for the entire day, and the teacher receives specialized consultative services" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4). Next, the authors define an educational placement category they refer to as regular class with resource assistance, which they state that "[this is] where the student is placed in a regular class for most or all of the day and receives specialized instruction, individually or in a small group, within the regular classroom from a qualified special education teacher" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4). Next, the authors define an educational placement category they refer to as regular class with withdrawal assistance.

> "[This is] Where the student is placed in a regular class and receives instruction outside the classroom, for less than 50% of the school day, from a qualified special education teacher" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4). The second last special education placement the authors define is special education with partial integration. According to Minuk et al. (2024), "[special education with partial integration is] where the student is placed in a special education class for at least 50% of the school day and is integrated with a regular class for at least one instructional period daily" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4). Finally, is the full special education class placement, which is "where the student is placed in a special education class for the entire school day" (Minuk et al., 2024, p. 4).

Lack of Planning and Policy's Role

One of the major contributors to exclusion in education is the lack of planning that takes place. Disabled students have suffered exclusion for decades because of the lack of planning within the K-12 Ontario education system. The lack of planning for diverse learners and learning styles results in students with disabilities and marginalized students, such as racialized students, showing up in classrooms and being framed as "unexpected" by the education system and the schools they come into. When parents, caregivers, and families attempt to advocate for their disabled children and question educators and administrators about the teaching practices and support their children are receiving, the response they receive from educators and administrators within K-12 education is that the educational practices they are implementing are policy-guided. The government and the Ministry of Education in Ontario mandate them. In Ontario, the educational policy that guides educational practices up to post-secondary education is the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018). This policy was developed to address the barriers faced by students with disabilities. It is worth noting that this policy has made claims but does not hold itself accountable for these claims, and policy claims are not reflected in institutional practices.

The Policy

The policy states that "The Code guarantees the right to equal treatment in education, without discrimination on the grounds of disability, as part of the protection for equal treatment in services. This protection applies to elementary and secondary schools, and colleges and universities, both public and private"(the Ontario Human Rights Code, 2018, p. 4). In the literature on inclusive education, also referred to as special education, Slee (2018) responds to the above policy statement. In this response statement, Slee (2018) states that "inclusive education isn't dead, it just smells funny" (Slee, 2018, p. 1). This brief yet thought-provoking statement highlights that there is an education model in place for students with disabilities and racialized students, "it just smells funny" (Slee, 2018, p. 1). In the statement that follows the argument where the author attempts to highlight that an education model for Disabled students exists, one needs to be critical before calling it inclusive. One of the reasons the current special education model does not adequately include diverse learners, including students with disabilities and marginalized students, is due to issues in teacher preparation (McCrimmon, 2015). In their work, McCrimmon (2015) highlights the lack of existing courses within bachelor's of education programs that cover the topic of inclusive education or childhood disabilities. In citing the Council of Ministers of Education (2008), McCrimmon (2015) highlights that "Canadian educators experience multiple challenges in their classrooms, including increasing class sizes, longer working hours, reduction of funding to support learning initiatives, and demands by administration and/or parents to meet or exceed curricular demands" (McCrimmon, 2015, p. 234).

It is vital to examine the discussion by McCrimmon (2015), as it unpacks several issues and challenges that teachers face. These challenges stem from the lack of planning for diverse learners in the education system, as well as the mention of reduced funding, larger class sizes, and demands by administration and/or parents to meet or exceed curricular demands, which communicate two vital points. Firstly, it is a reality that these challenges are a result of policy and its role in allocating funding and influencing class sizes. McCrimmon's work was published in 2015, and shortly after, the province of Ontario faced these challenges and changes, as highlighted when the Liberal Ford government took charge in 2018. Thus, the issues raised by McCrimmon (2015) are influenced by government policy. Secondly, McCrimmon (2015) also highlights that "teachers must adapt their educational practices to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, particularly students with exceptional learning needs" (McCrimmon, 2015, p. 234). The adaptations that teachers are being asked to make are policy guided. This means that when the government creates constraints, such as "reduction of funding" (McCrimmon, 2015, p. 234) and "long working hours" (McCrimmon, 2015, p. 234) are created by policymaking teaching practices and the challenges faced by educators in the K-12 education system policy-guided.

This means that the lack of planning for diverse learners, such as disabled, racialized, and other marginalized students within education, is beyond just a lack of preparation of teachers and schools but this lack of planning, lack of preparation leading to exclusion is a result of policy procedures that guide educational practices. The policy's influential role in the planning of educators and those working within schools is evident in The Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018). In its statement of "Undue hardship," the policy states that educators are to provide accommodations and access to education to the point of undue hardship. The policy defines undue hardship using specific criteria. According to the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018), "The Code prescribes only three considerations when assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship: [these considerations include] cost, outside sources of funding if any, health and safety requirements, if any" (the Ontario Human Rights Commission,

2018, p. 84). Furthermore, the section on undue hardship clarifies that "No other considerations can be properly taken into account under Ontario law. Therefore, factors such as business or institutional inconvenience, student or instructor morale, third-party preferences, and collective agreements are not valid considerations in assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship" (the Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018, p. 84).

As a response to this policy statement, this article will now return to McCrimmon (2015), who particularly addresses teacher preparation attitudes toward working with students who are said to have "exceptional needs" (McCrimmon, 2015, p. 235), according to the author "One of the most commonly investigated challenges in IE is teacher willingness and preparedness to adopt the tenets of IE in the classroom. Research has indicated that female teachers are generally more accepting of students with exceptional learning needs than are male teachers" (McCrimmon,.2015, p. 235). It is worth noting that the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018) was enacted in response to several complaints made to the Human Rights Tribunal. For the purpose of highlighting the role of policy on education in general but more specifically on educational planning and practices, it is important to note that prior to the passing of the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018), Ontario schools were following various reports that the Ontario Human Rights Commission wrote. One of these reports was titled "The Opportunity to Succeed: Achieving a Barrier-free Education for Students with Disabilities," published in 2003.

Similarly to the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities and the work on educational planning done by McCrimmon (2015), the 2003 report also mentions the right to education in stating, "In Canada, Education is recognized and legislated as a fundamental social good. A publicly-funded education system, accessible to all, is recognized as a core responsibility of government. At the international level, various United Nations conventions recognize the importance of education to persons with disabilities, including the Covenant on Economic, Social And Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Declaration of the Rights of Disabled Persons" (the Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, the 2003 report outlines that there are significant barriers experienced by students with disabilities in the Ontario education system. According to the report, "the key barriers are inadequate funding, physical inaccessibility, cumbersome and time-consuming accommodation processes, negative attitudes and stereotypes, and a lack of understanding of the rights and responsibilities of all parties under the Code and Commission policy" (the Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003, p. 5 & 6). Another major issue regarding policy and its role in addressing the persistent lack of planning for students with disabilities in Ontario's K-12 education system is that policy statements are in place to guide inclusive education practices. However, educators are not provided with guidance on implementing these policy guidelines and enacting them in their teaching practices within Ontario's K-12 Education System. As a result of this lack of knowledge as it pertains to enacting policy in teaching practices, which concludes that there is a lack of planning for students with disabilities and racialized students to be included in Ontario K-12 classrooms thus, what becomes evident is that "inclusive education isn't dead. It just smells funny" (Slee, 2018, p. 1). Furthermore, Slee (2018) discusses inclusive education. Slee (2018) includes a chapter entitled "A Time for Frank Speaking," which discusses the sociology of education and the structure of education as a whole. The chapter emphasizes the reality that, within our current educational structure, when it is said that the attempt is to create inclusive education, we are creating an exclusive education system that sorts and groups students based on various intersections in their identity. The quality of Education one receives depends on one's race, ethnicity, social location, socio-economic status, race, gender, and perceived ability or disability. The chapter discusses how hierarchies that structure the current education

system and how institutions operating within this system are actively perpetuating hierarchies. With thought-provoking and compelling data, Slee (2018) sheds light on how education is exclusive, not what policymakers claim it to be. Through data, this chapter provides insight into how education is divided, again shedding light on the reality that it is exclusionary. Therefore, as shown in this section, the issue of lack of educational planning to include disabled and racialized students is a significant issue brought on by inadequate policy, insufficient teacher training and education, and lack of funding, amongst other issues that result in the exclusion of disabled and marginalized students due to the harsh reality that they are not planned for within education overall including K-12 education classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PLANNING AND ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR

As mentioned earlier, the way the current system is not only impacts students with disabilities but their educators as well. Although some efforts are being made to include students with disabilities in classrooms, the same cannot be said for teachers. There is limited research on teachers with disabilities and their inclusion in schools (Wilson et al., 2018). Despite the stigma they face, teachers with disabilities who have negative experiences have a positive impact on their disabled students (Wilson et al., 2018). Having more inclusive spaces where educators with disabilities are not discouraged and stigmatized could have a positive impact on the system overall and lead to more equitable treatment for students with disabilities. While Ontario does have the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018), there are no policies addressing accessibility for teachers and other educators. Policies for educators can have a positive impact on both teachers and students.

Educators can support students with disabilities as well. As previously discussed, the lack of adequate policies and education contributes to ableism within the Ontario school system. While the issues are primarily systemic, proper education on disability could help educators create more inclusive environments for their students. This education could be part of post-secondary education and could also be offered as workshops for in-service teachers and educators. It is the role of the educator to create inclusive spaces and provide support to students; however, it is equally important that educators themselves feel supported and are equipped with the proper tools and education needed to succeed. Understanding intersectionality and the unique situations that racialized students face is also imperative. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for inclusion, as individuals face unique challenges.

While the Policy on Accessible Education for Students with Disabilities (2018) exists in Ontario, there is room for critique and improvement. This policy does little to address the systemic barriers that disabled students face and fails to take an intersectional approach that addresses the challenges that racialized students who are disabled face. For inclusive education to work, the voices of people with disabilities and other marginalized communities must be uplifted and heard. Future policies should be developed with the needs and wants of students with disabilities in mind, and we should adopt a critical approach. Furthermore, to truly have an equitable and inclusive environment, proper teacher education and funding are imperative. As Slee (2018) discusses, students with disabilities are not properly planned for in our education system, and a critical look at current policies and practices is necessary. Moving forward, it is imperative to develop better policies that have a lasting, positive impact on both students and educators; policies should be treated as more than just written text and should be evident in our practices. Secondly, students with disabilities and

teachers should be involved in discussions surrounding policy development to ensure their opinions are reflected. Finally, teacher training needs to be enhanced to apply a non-ableist and universal design for the learning approach.

CONCLUSION

Disabled students are and have always been excluded from the education system. This exclusion is a result of an education system that was created to exclude disabled and marginalized students. The current education system was not designed to meet the needs of disabled students and does not value disabled students as learners, considering them as incapable of learning. Instead of building an education system where all learners can thrive, disabled and marginalized students are being educated in an education model known as special education. In this model, disabled and marginalized students are segregated instead of included within the classroom. However, despite all the exclusion students encounter, those who have the "upper hand" in the Ontario education system claim that disabled students are learning within an inclusive education system.

This paper explored the history of special education in Ontario. It delved into the ways that people with disabilities continue to be harmed in our education system and the current practices used. While all students with disabilities are excluded and singled out in Ontario's education system, it is especially prevalent in racialized populations. Students with disabilities are not viewed as capable or valued in the current education system and instead are considered a burden. They are excluded not only in the classroom but also in the planning process. Policies and procedures are often created without considering the needs and wants of these students.

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' REFLECTION ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE OF ADDIS ABABA INCLUSIVE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTERS

ABEBAYEHU DESALEGN LOJAMO
Wolkite University, Ethiopia
DEMOZE DEGEFA ALEMU
Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the awareness of educational leaders on global, regional and national inclusive education legal frameworks that guide the implementation of inclusive education in inclusive schools (resource centers) of Addis Ababa. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used. Data were collected through interviews of research participants and review of current available inclusive education documents. Fifteen educational leaders from the Ministry of Education, school principals, teachers and itinerant teachers participated in the study. The participants were asked about their awareness of global, regional and national inclusive education legal frameworks. The findings showed that the participants perceived favorable policy and legal environments for adopting inclusive education. However, educational leaders administrating inclusive education have varying levels of awareness and understanding of the legal frameworks. Leaders at the Ministry of Education and itinerant teachers had relatively better awareness than school principals and teachers about the legal frameworks. That could be attributed to the educational qualifications and training of the itinerant teachers and the Ministry of Education experts. Therefore, professional development for increasing the awareness of the principals and the teachers on inclusive education policies is needed because their awareness determines the successful implementation of inclusive education.

BACKGROUND

Inclusive education refers to an approach that ensures all children, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, or backgrounds, are provided with equal opportunities to participate in mainstream educational settings. It emphasizes the removal of barriers to learning and participation, advocating for a system where diversity in the classroom is embraced. According to UNESCO (2005), inclusive education is not only about providing access to education but also ensuring that it is meaningful, equitable, and flexible enough to meet the needs of all learners. The idea behind inclusive education is rooted in the belief that every student has the right to an education that allows them to develop their potential to the fullest (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010).

The importance of having a well-defined legal framework to guide inclusive education is crucial. Global, regional, and national legal frameworks provide a structured approach to ensuring that inclusive education is implemented effectively. At the global level, documents such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (2006) emphasize the right of individuals with disabilities to access quality education in inclusive settings. Similarly, regional frameworks, such as the African Union's policy on inclusive education, advocate for educational practices that cater to the diverse needs of students across the continent. National policies, including Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy and the National Special Needs Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2010), provide localized guidelines that directly influence the practice of inclusive education in schools.

The benefits of understanding inclusive education policies are immense. Educational leaders who are aware of these policies are better equipped to create and implement strategies that promote inclusion in their schools. They are able to advocate for resources, design appropriate curricula, and ensure that teachers receive the necessary professional development (Sharma et al., 2018). Moreover, understanding these frameworks allows educational leaders to align their practices with both national objectives and international standards, ensuring that students with disabilities are not only included but are supported in ways that foster meaningful learning experiences (Forlin, 2010). This alignment is particularly significant in resource centers like those in Addis Ababa, where a lack of awareness of these policies can impede the effective delivery of inclusive education.

Despite the critical role that these policies play in shaping inclusive education, existing studies have largely focused on barriers to inclusion, such as inaccessible infrastructure or teacher preparedness, without thoroughly examining the legal frameworks that underlie successful inclusion. Research conducted by Girma (2017) and others has concentrated primarily on the challenges students and teachers face in the Ethiopian context but has not given enough attention to the role that legal frameworks and leaders' awareness of these policies play in overcoming these challenges. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by assessing both the legal frameworks that guide inclusive education and the level of awareness of educational leaders in Addis Ababa's resource centers.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Following the global declarations and conventions, different ideologies, concepts, and paradigms of "disability" have influenced the education of children with special needs. Prior to the 1970s, for example, academic interest in disability discourse was almost entirely limited to the medical and individualist view of disability (Barton, 1993), also known as the "personal tragedy model" (Carson, 2009), which regards the challenges people with impairments face because of the way their bodies were formed.

This model assumes that impairment is characterized by a lack of competence in an individual's body, mind, and behavior. It is a factor within the individual; hence the solution is to change the individual. The majority of legislation and regulations were then based on this biological concept of disability in order to fix defects in the child (ACPF, 2011). The medical model had been mirrored in certain respects in international policy texts dealing with disability and services to persons with disabilities (for example, the 1975 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons).

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 2015-2030 acknowledged the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, sub-regional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer group and others (UN, 2015).

Inclusive education implementation demands inclusive leadership, which is an important component of inclusive education implementation (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Cobb, 2015; Liasidou & Antoniou, 2014; Thurlow et al., 2019). Many stakeholders, including teachers and students, may be unaware of the need of implementing inclusive education (Opoku, 2021). As a result, school

leaders' role in raising awareness of the needs of students with disabilities is crucial for educating the school's community and advocating for students with disabilities to receive proper educational services.

However, despite the clear importance of understanding and implementing policies towards children with disabilities, there is a significant gap in the current literature regarding the awareness of educational leaders about these frameworks. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by identifying the global, regional, and national legal frameworks that support inclusive education and assessing the level of awareness of educational leaders in Addis Ababa inclusive education resource centers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educational policy or legal frameworks are defined as the rules, regulations, and guidelines that govern how educational systems operate, ensuring that all students, including those with disabilities, have equal access to education. An inclusive education policy/legal framework specifically outlines the principles, practices, and strategies that promote the inclusion of all students, regardless of their individual needs or challenges (UNESCO, 2009). These frameworks are essential for the effective implementation of inclusive education as they provide both the structure and the resources necessary for schools to accommodate diverse learners (Ainscow, 2016).The successful implementation of inclusive education relies heavily on the awareness and understanding of these frameworks by educational leaders. Leaders who are familiar with national, regional, and global inclusive education policies are in a better position to ensure that schools meet the needs of all students, especially those with disabilities (Sharma et al., 2018). When educational leaders are well-versed in the legal requirements of inclusive education, they are more likely to advocate for necessary changes in the curriculum, teaching methods, and school infrastructure, thus creating an environment that truly supports inclusion (Deng & Zhu, 2013).

However, despite the clear importance of understanding and implementing these policies, there is a significant gap in the current literature regarding the awareness of educational leaders about these frameworks. For example, Girma (2017), have primarily focused on challenges like infrastructure, teacher preparedness, and the lack of resources, but they have not delved deeply into the legal frameworks that guide inclusive education. The absence of this critical focus has resulted in a lack of understanding about how national, regional, and global policies can shape the practices of school leaders, limiting the overall effectiveness of inclusive education programs (Forlin, 2010).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study attempts to understand and document implementers' understanding of global, regional, and national legal frameworks that support the implementation of inclusive education. By doing so, it seeks to highlight the importance of policy awareness for the successful implementation of inclusive education in resource centers. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What global, regional and national legal frameworks (policies) do exist to guide the implementation of inclusive education in inclusive education resource centers of Addis Ababa?
2. How are educational leaders aware of these inclusive education policies for successful implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it could generate a clear understanding of the participants' views and experiences, and it could capture participants' perceptions as they occur in their actual world (Dangal, 2009). Therefore, to seek answers to the research questions, a qualitative research approach with case study design was employed.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Inclusive schools (inclusive education resource centers) are schools that accommodate both students with disabilities along with non-disabled students in their school. The study participants are itinerant teachers, teachers, school principals, and experts from ministry of education. Itinerant teachers are focal people that are in charge of facilitating the meaningful engagement of students with different disabilities in the teaching and learning process in the schools while general teachers instruct all the students in the classroom. School principals are instructional leaders who lead the overall teaching learning process in the schools. The Ministry of Education experts are individuals at the Ministry of Education, Inclusion Department, who are in charge of administering inclusive education at the national level.

Considering the experiences that these inclusive education resource centers have in practice, the researchers selected three inclusive education resource centers (schools) from Addis Ababa purposively. From the selected three schools, three types of respondents (School principals, itinerant teachers and teachers) were selected. Besides, experts from the Ministry of Education (MoE) Inclusion Department were involved in the study. The researcher purposively selected a total of fifteen respondents because they are practitioners and believed to provide in-depth information on the issue under study.

Method of Data Collection

Interview: Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the research participants to learn about their awareness of the legal issues of inclusive education. This semi-structured interview process would provide data that were inaccessible through observation (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010).

Document review: -In addition to the above data gathering approach, the researcher, through a thorough review of literature, examined different global, regional and national policy documents about inclusive education. Additionally, at the school level, different school policies, guidelines and any other important documents about inclusive education were reviewed.

Method of Data Analysis

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then, thematic analysis method was used. This type of analysis considered organizing and transcribing the data, reading the data to get a general sense of its meaning, coding the data, combining similar codes to form themes and categories and interpreting the data coming from the participants (Walsh, 2003). Thus, considering the above procedures, both the interview and document review data were analyzed thematically.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

First, the researcher approached the participants and got their consent to participate in the study and also requested their consent for audio taping the interviews. The participants' consent also covered the purpose of the research endeavor. To protect the participants from any risk because of their participation in this study, pseudonyms were used for their real names. Accordingly, Resp1, Resp2… were used in making the necessary identification in the reporting process. Finally, to avoid the researcher's bias in describing the understandings that emerged during the analysis and to increase the trustworthiness of the researcher, the drafts of the transcripts were delivered to the participants to ensure maximum data validation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of data analysis, the findings of this study are secured and presented in response to the research questions by the following order:

> Research Question 1: What global, regional and national legal frameworks (policies) do exist to guide the implementation of inclusive education in inclusive education resource centers of Addis Ababa?

Available global, regional and national legal documents relating to policies of inclusive education were searched through government offices, university libraries and the Internet. The data collected from these documents were thematically analyzed to generate the answer to Research Question 1.

Global Policies Developed to Support the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Some of the key international legal frameworks that play a crucial role in promoting and protecting the rights of people with disabilities include:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The UDHR serves as the foundational document for the human rights movement, setting the stage for subsequent treaties. Articles such as the right to education (Article 26) and the right to non-discrimination (Article 2) promote the idea that all individuals, including people with disabilities, must be treated equally. Although the UDHR does not explicitly mention disabilities, its principles of universality, equality, and dignity form the moral basis for the inclusion of people with disabilities in education and society. The UDHR provides a general framework for advocating for inclusive education and can be used as a basis for pushing further legislative changes, such as the CRPD, which specifically targets people with disabilities.

2. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)

The ICERD highlights the importance of non-discrimination, especially concerning race, and can be extended to cover the intersection of race and disability. While it does not explicitly mention disability, it creates obligations for states to ensure that people with disabilities, including those from marginalized racial groups, are not discriminated against in educational settings. The convention's emphasis on equality before the law supports the inclusion of people with disabilities, reinforcing the importance of addressing multiple forms of discrimination that may affect educational access.

3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The CRC is explicitly aligned with inclusive education, particularly through Article 23, which highlights the right of children with disabilities to "enjoy a full and decent life." It ensures access to education, health, and rehabilitation services, supporting the child's social integration and individual development. This provision directly ties the right to education for children with disabilities to the wider goals of inclusion and accessibility. The CRC's call for appropriate assistance and the promotion of positive awareness for children with disabilities is a strong push towards ensuring their full participation in educational systems.

4. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education

The Salamanca Statement is perhaps the most direct document related to inclusive education. It articulates the need for schools to accommodate all children, including those with special needs, in a shared educational environment. It rejects the segregation of children with disabilities and promotes the integration of special needs education within the broader educational system. By encouraging educational systems to design programs that cater to the diverse needs of children, including those with disabilities, it advocates for a shift towards inclusive, child-centered pedagogies that can serve a wide range of abilities. This document underlines the importance of leadership in reforming schools and educational practices to accommodate diversity.

5. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD is the most comprehensive framework for the inclusion of people with disabilities in all spheres of life, including education. Article 24 of the CRPD explicitly commits to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in general education systems, emphasizing that they should enjoy the same rights to education as their non-disabled peers. It calls for the provision of accessible educational environments, curricula, and support services to ensure full participation. The CRPD's focus on non-discrimination, accessibility, and equality directly correlates with the fundamental principles of inclusive education.

6. The Marrakesh Treaty

While not specifically focused on education, the Marrakesh Treaty provides an important context for access to information and knowledge, which are critical components of inclusive education. The treaty aims to ensure that people with print disabilities can access published works in accessible formats, a key factor in enabling equal participation in education. This treaty supports the educational needs of students with visual impairments, recognizing their right to education and access to learning materials.

7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The SDGs, particularly Goal 4 on Quality Education, incorporate disability into global development agendas. SDG 4 advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, with a special emphasis on people with disabilities. It calls for accessible education facilities, inclusive curricula, and the recruitment of qualified teachers to address the needs of disabled students. Additionally, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities and SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities further emphasize the importance of inclusive environments, highlighting that people with disabilities should have equal access to public services, including education. SDGs ensure that inclusive education is integral to global development, providing a broad framework for inclusive policies across nations.

Regional Policies in Africa

The regional legal frameworks represent significant strides in promoting the rights of people with disabilities in Africa, particularly in the context of inclusive education. A review of these frameworks reveals their potential in shaping inclusive education systems across the continent, while also highlighting the need for strong educational leadership at national and school levels to effectively implement these policies.

1. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

ACHPR (1981) does not explicitly mention the rights of people with disabilities but establishes critical human rights principles such as human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination that provide a foundational basis for advocating for inclusive education. Article 18(4) of the ACHPR requires states to care for and protect the "aged and disabled," suggesting that people with disabilities should not face exclusion. This aligns with the universal right to education (Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR), which is implicitly extended to individuals with disabilities in the context of the ACHPR. Although the Charter does not specifically discuss education for people with disabilities, the principles of equality and non-discrimination extend to the educational sphere, meaning that all people, regardless of ability, should have access to quality education, a core component of the right to education.

2. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)

The ACRWC, adopted in 1990, represents a key regional instrument specifically dedicated to the rights and welfare of children in Africa. It is inspired by the global standards set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) but tailored to the unique context of the African continent. Article 13 of the ACRWC focuses specifically on "handicapped children" (the terminology used in the Charter). It mandates State Parties to take proactive measures to ensure these children have equal access to training, employment preparation, and recreational opportunities compared to their non-disabled peers. The article further emphasizes the importance of providing special care for children with disabilities and facilitating their integration into society. Additionally, the ACRWC reinforces the principle of non-discrimination, guaranteeing that all children, including those with disabilities, are entitled to enjoy the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Charter without any form of discrimination. It calls for the necessary protection and care to ensure their well-being, considering the rights and duties of their families or legal guardians. Overall, the ACRWC reflects a firm commitment to advancing and protecting the rights of children in Africa, with clear recognition of the need to prioritize the rights of children with disabilities to ensure their full development and social integration. The ACRWC builds on the ACHPR by explicitly calling for equal opportunities for children with disabilities, making it a significant regional policy framework for advancing inclusive education. However, like the ACHPR, the implementation of these rights requires leaders' awareness on the ground at all educational levels, from national ministries to individual schools.

3. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa

The African Disability Protocol (2018) is the most comprehensive and focused regional framework on disability rights in Africa. It provides detailed provisions specifically addressing the needs and challenges of people with disabilities, including their right to education. The Protocol emphasizes the right of people with disabilities to accessible education, which includes physical

access to schools and learning materials, as well as the development of inclusive teaching methods and curricula. It also calls for the elimination of harmful cultural practices that exclude or stigmatize persons with disabilities, a barrier that has historically hindered the educational rights of individuals with disabilities in many African contexts.

National Legal Frameworks for Inclusive Education in Ethiopia

This section examines the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's comprehensive legal frameworks designed to protect the rights and welfare of people with disabilities. These frameworks are grounded in the constitutional principles and values and are further reinforced by Ethiopia's adherence to international and regional instruments dedicated to disability inclusion.

1. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The Constitution of Ethiopia enshrines principles of equality and non-discrimination, making explicit the responsibility of the state to support people with disabilities. Article 25 guarantees equality before the law for all citizens, including people with disabilities. This reflects the principle of non-discrimination, a cornerstone of inclusive education. Article 41(5) commits the state to allocating resources to support people with disabilities, including educational and rehabilitative services. This aligns with the right to education, ensuring that people with disabilities have access to the resources necessary to fully participate in society.

2. Proclamation No. 1263/2021: Definition of Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs

Proclamation No. 1263/2021 further supports the rights of people with disabilities through several provisions that require the formulation of inclusive policies and strategies. Article 19, Sub-Article 11 mandates that all formulated policies and strategies must be beneficial to people with disabilities, promoting their participation and equality. This includes policies related to education. Article 36, Sub-Articles 1(d) and 1(n) specifically task the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs with ensuring that people with disabilities are actively included in societal activities, including education. These provisions align with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which calls for full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in society, including access to inclusive education.

3. Education and Training Policy (ETP 2023)

The Education and Training Policy of 2023 (ETP 2023) represents a positive progression compared to its 1994 predecessor in addressing the needs of students with special needs and/or disabilities. ETP 2023 commendably recognizes the persistent low participation rates of students with special needs and disabilities. Under its 'Basic Assumptions' section, it acknowledges the outstanding challenges that remain in the system, such as low participation rate of special needs students, particularly people with disabilities and adults. Under the 'Curriculum' section, it declares that curricula that address students with special educational needs, including special talents and gifts, disabilities and special learning needs, shall be developed. One of the positive aspects of the Education and Training Policy of 2023 is its recognition and commitment to address the needs of students with special needs and/or disabilities. The policy acknowledges the existing gaps and barriers that prevent these students from accessing quality education and learning opportunities and declares that curricula that suit their needs and abilities shall be developed. By providing students with disabilities with curricula that support their academic and social development, as well as their

participation in mainstream school environments, the policy aims to recognize their diversity and potential.

4. Education Sector Development Plan VI (2020-2025)

The Ethiopian Education Sector Development Program VI (ESDP VI) is the latest phase of the plan that aims to improve the access, quality, equity, and relevance of education in the country. One of the key focus areas of ESDP VI is to address the educational needs and rights of students with special needs, who have been historically marginalized and disadvantaged in the education system. ESDP VI acknowledges the challenges and gaps in providing quality and equitable education for these students, such as poor school infrastructure and facilities, shortage of human resources, poor planning and implementation of the school improvement plan, shortage of budget and resources, lack of accountability and quality assurance mechanisms, and lack of data and identification of students with special needs. ESDP VI sets some strategic objectives and interventions to address these challenges and gaps, and to ensure the rights and inclusion of these students in the education system, such as improving the school infrastructure and facilities, increasing the human resources, enhancing the preparation and implementation of the school improvement plan, allocating sufficient budget and resources, strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms, and developing and implementing a comprehensive and reliable system of data collection, analysis, and reporting. The strategic objectives and interventions outlined in ESDP VI to improve educational access for students with special needs demonstrate compliance with Article 24 of the CRPD, which advocates for an inclusive education system. Additionally, the commitment to equipping inclusive education resource centers with materials for learners with special needs aligns with the CRPD's call for appropriate resources and support, ensuring the full development of students with disabilities.

5. Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2022/23-2029/30)

The Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2022) is a plan by the Ministry of Education to make education to be accessible and enriching for all students, especially those with special needs. The strategy is based on the right to education for all, as enshrined in the constitution and international agreements, and has four key objectives: access, capacity, environment, and governance. To achieve these objectives, the strategy focuses on six priority areas: building an inclusive workforce, developing inclusive learning, equipping schools for all, empowering educators, building strong partnerships, and ensuring data-driven progress. The strategy also assigns clear roles and responsibilities to different actors, outlines a timeline and budget for implementation, and establishes a monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure accountability and impact.

6. National Children's Policy (2017)

The National Children's Policy of Ethiopia, enacted in 2017, demonstrates a commendable commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by children with disabilities. In the critical area of education, the policy prioritizes access to inclusive education for children with disabilities. This focus represents a crucial step towards fulfilling their right to education, as guaranteed by Article 24 of the CRPD. Inclusive education necessitates the creation of learning environments that effectively accommodate the diverse needs of children with disabilities and ensure their full participation in the educational process. Furthermore, the policy demonstrates an approach to supporting the well-being of children with disabilities. Its focus on children in difficult situations and the provision of essential social and other services is commendable. A holistic approach, encompassing broader social services, is essential for their development and successful

integration into society. By recognizing this, the Policy takes a worthy step towards creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all children. It is very crucial for leaders to be aware of this legal framework.

In a nutshell, Ethiopia's national legal framework for disability rights demonstrates a significant commitment to fostering an inclusive environment where people with disabilities can exercise their rights and contribute meaningfully to the nation's development. The reviewed proclamations, policies, and strategies highlight a comprehensive approach that addresses inclusion of disability in education. However, educational leaders' awareness of these legal frameworks is crucial to ensure effective implementation of inclusive education in inclusive education resource centers of Addis Ababa.

Research Question 2: How are educational leaders aware of these inclusive education policies for successful implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia?

The educational leaders' reflections on their awareness and understandings on policies/ legal frameworks that guide the implementation of inclusive education were thematically analyzed under four categories: awareness of Ministry of Education experts, awareness of school principals, awareness of itinerant teachers and awareness of teachers. These findings are presented in the following sections:

Awareness of Ministry of Education experts

Inclusion experts from Ministry of Education Inclusion department replied:

> Based on my reading on this matter, inclusive education aims to provide equal opportunities to all students, regardless of their physical condition, ethnic background, cultural difference, family background and any other conditions. (Resp9)

> It is a right for every child to get education at the right age. There are global policies that promote education of students with disabilities. Standing on these global policies, Ethiopia has already prepared different legal frameworks regarding the education of students with disabilities. Inclusive education resource centers leaders particularly are supposed to use the legal frameworks as references for implementing inclusive education for students with disabilities. (Resp4)

Another respondent stated that:

> Inclusive education bases its foundation on international standards like the Education for All Movement, Salamanca Framework for Action in Education of Students with Special Educational Needs, and UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Ethiopia endorsed these international policy frameworks. For example, Inclusive education strategies were developed in two stages to support the education of students with disabilities. (Resp5)

One more participant conveyed that:

> Globally and regionally, there are different legal frameworks which serve as foundation for national legal frameworks for inclusive education. Ethiopia has ratified different international and regional legal frameworks on inclusive education that guide the education of students with disabilities such as EFDRE Constitution, Education and Training policy, inclusive education strategy, education sector development plans, national children's policy etc. However, while there were several national initiatives and guiding documents to promote the implementation of inclusive education, this country does not have a specific policy on inclusive education. (Resp10)

The above responses of Ministry of Education experts indicate their insight on global and regional frameworks guiding inclusive education, particularly the Education for All (EFA) movement, the Salamanca Framework, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These frameworks serve as a foundation for Ethiopia's legal and policy documents such as the Education and Training Policy and the National Special Needs Education Strategy. The experts underlined the importance of aligning local practices with these international standards, emphasizing the role of resource center leaders in leveraging these legal frameworks to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities. Their responses align with the findings of Forlin (2010), who highlights the crucial role of policy frameworks in guiding the successful implementation of inclusive education, particularly when these policies are well understood and effectively applied by educational leaders.

However, there is a discrepancy regarding the lack of a specific, stand-alone policy on inclusive education in Ethiopia, as noted by the third participant. This gap in policy is consistent with the study of Girma (2017), who identified a lack of a comprehensive national inclusive education policy as a barrier to its full implementation in Ethiopia. While the country has made significant walks by ratifying international agreements, the absence of a dedicated policy specifically addressing inclusive education is challenging the effectiveness of these initiatives. Similarly, studies by Mutesi et al. (2020) and Tefera, Mulate and Admas (2015) emphasized the challenges in policy coherence and implementation, suggesting that without a focused inclusive education policy, bringing of students with disabilities into mainstream education remains inconsistent and insufficiently supported at the ground level. Thus, while the experts acknowledge the importance of these frameworks, the lack of a singular, comprehensive policy on inclusive education in Ethiopia remains a significant concern for the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Awareness of school principals

An inclusive education resource center principal stated that:

> I took a day training about inclusive education last year. After that training I understood that bringing students with disabilities is necessary these days. This school is already accommodating disabled students. However, to be honest with you, I don't really know the global and regional policies that advocate for inclusive education. But I heard about some national legal frameworks developed in our country to foster the learnings of students with disabilities. (Resp8)

Another respondent was asked if he knew global, regional and national legal frameworks about inclusive education. He replied:

> To be honest with you, I had inclusive education policies on the training but I do not specifically know their names and the content as well because I am busy with different school activities. As the school has high number of non-disabled students as compared to students with disabilities, my attention is always on the daily school routines. Next time, I think I should equip myself with inclusive education policies because helping students with different disabilities is necessary. But for now, my understanding about inclusive education and its policies is very limited. (Resp15)

A school principal from other resource center replied about his awareness of global, regional and national inclusive education legal frameworks. He replied that:

> I am aware of some policies from the Ministry of Education regarding overall school leadership, not a legal framework about students with disabilities. I haven't had much exposure to international policies. I don't recall ever receiving training or information on global, regional and national legal frameworks or how our practices connect with legal frameworks. I believe we should be aware of different legal frameworks which help us to implement inclusive education in a better way. (Resp 2)

The above-mentioned responses from the inclusive education resource center principals reflect a significant gap in awareness of global, regional, and national legal frameworks guiding inclusive education. Although these principals acknowledge the importance of accommodating students with disabilities, their understanding of the specific policies that underpin inclusive education remains limited. One principal mentioned having received basic training but admits to lacking detailed knowledge of the global and regional policies advocating for inclusive education, highlighting a deficiency in policy awareness. Likewise, another principal acknowledged the need to better equip themselves with inclusive education policies but is constrained by the daily demands of managing school activities. This reflects the findings of Ludago, (2020) and Sharma et al. (2018), which emphasize that while school leaders may recognize the importance of inclusive education, their ability to implement inclusive practices is often hindered by a lack of awareness of the policies that support such practices. In line with Forlin (2010), this lack of awareness suggests that effective implementation of inclusive education requires educational leaders to have not only practical knowledge but also a solid understanding of relevant legal frameworks.

The lack of exposure to international, regional, and national legal frame works among the principals aligns with broader challenges in the Ethiopian education system, as identified by Girma (2017) and Tefera et al. (2015), who noted that many educational leaders face difficulties in translating inclusive education legal frameworks into practice due to insufficient training and professional development. The principals' recognition of the need to familiarize themselves with these policies indicates an awareness of the gap, but their limited exposure to specific legal frameworks points to a crucial barrier in the effective implementation of inclusive education. This aligns with Alemayehu, (2019) and Mutesi et al. (2020), who suggest that the success of inclusive education initiatives is largely dependent on how well school leaders understand and integrate these frameworks into their daily practices. Therefore, the findings from these principals underscore the

urgent need for comprehensive, policy-focused professional development for school leaders to ensure the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Teachers' Reflection on Global, Regional and National Legal Frameworks

Awareness of itinerant teachers

Itinerant teachers were asked the same question about their awareness on global, regional and national legal frameworks which support the implementation of inclusive education. One of them replied that:

> As an itinerant teacher supporting inclusive education, I've had the opportunity to receive training on both national and international frameworks because my educational background is special needs education from Addis Ababa University. At the national level, I'm familiar with the Ethiopian government's commitment to inclusive education, particularly through the Education and Training Policy and the National Special Needs Education Strategy. Additionally, I learned in some trainings about international frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which emphasizes the right of every child to be educated in an inclusive environment. These frameworks have been instrumental in guiding my work and in advocating for the appropriate adjustments to teaching methods, resources, and school infrastructure. However, while I understand the importance of these legal frameworks, I also recognize that many school leaders are not aware of them. This disconnect can sometimes create barriers to implementing inclusive practices fully. (Resp 6)

Itinerant teachers were also asked about the policy of inclusive education. One of them replied that:

> I know there are different international, regional and national documents prepared for the successful implementation of inclusive education. For example, globally, there is Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is a foundation, Salamanca Declaration, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Sustainable Development Goal and etc. (Resp13)
>
> Regionally, there is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and others. Nationally, there is Special needs education strategy, education sector development programs and etc. I am aware of them because my B.A. degree is Special needs education from Dilla University. We learned about different global and local documents which support inclusive education. (Resp1)

Some other itinerant teachers mentioned that:

> Global and national policies are fundamental for the realization of inclusive education. But when we see the overall awareness of school principals and district leaders about inclusive education and its policies, their understanding level is below my expectation. (Resp14)

> This might be associated with their academic background. I mean, majority of stakeholders those are leading inclusive education both at inclusive education resource centers and at sub-city and district level are subject matter graduates. (Resp11)

> Adding on this: They didn't attend inclusive education. Even some school principals are not school leadership trainees. They do have only teaching experience. Their association with inclusive education legal frameworks and other relevant document is not a criterion to assign them in inclusive schools those accommodate students with different disabilities. (Resp3)

The responses from itinerant teachers reveal a good understanding of global, regional, and national legal frameworks that support inclusive education, particularly due to their specialized backgrounds in special needs education. They are well-versed in international frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and regional policies such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa. This knowledge enables them to effectively advocate for necessary adjustments in teaching methods and resources. However, they also highlight a significant gap in the awareness of these policies among school principals and district leaders, which can hinder the full implementation of inclusive education. This finding aligns with the findings of other known authors (Abernathy, 2012; Ball, 2012; Praisner, 2003; Williams, 2015) which stress that the lack of awareness among educational leaders can impede effective implementation of inclusive education. The itinerant teachers further point out that many school leaders lack formal training in inclusive education, which is consistent with Girma (2017) and Tefera et al. (2015), who found that educational leaders in Ethiopia are often not adequately prepared to implement inclusive education due to insufficient training and professional development. As such, the responses underscore the importance of providing systematic training for school leaders to bridge the gap between policy awareness and effective inclusive education practices, thus ensuring the successful implementation of inclusive education across the country.

Awareness of teachers

Teachers who are teaching students with different disabilities together with non-disabled students replied about his awareness on policies:

> I have been teaching a mixed classroom of students with disabilities and non-disabled students for a few years now, and I always believe that supporting students with disabilities is just the right thing to do, you know, it's about being humane and doing what's best for them. I haven't heard of any specific laws or frameworks from the government or internationally that support inclusive education, to be honest. (Resp7)

> Another respondent added, I just focus on giving them the help they need in the classroom—adapting materials or offering extra support where possible. My main goal is to make sure they feel included and have the same opportunities as the other kids. If there are any legal frameworks, I haven't been made aware of them, but I believe inclusion is just about being compassionate and fair to everyone, regardless of their abilities. (Resp12)

Teachers' responses reflect that there is a misconception that inclusive education is simply about being compassionate, rather than being informed by specific policies or frameworks. Teachers assume that inclusion is solely about individual effort and humanitarian values, not realizing the role that formal, legal frameworks play in guiding inclusive practices. The responses also reflect a genuine commitment to inclusive education but reveal a significant lack of awareness regarding the legal frameworks that support it. While the teachers express a strong personal belief in the importance of including students with disabilities based on compassion and fairness, they admit that they are not familiar with any specific national or international policies or legal frameworks related to inclusive education. This lack of awareness is concerning, as research by Dessalegn et. al (2016) and Dixson, (2021) emphasize that teachers' understanding of inclusive education policies is crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices. According to Allan (2007), the teacher's approach may be limited by lack of awareness on policy guidance, which can lead to inconsistent practices across classrooms. The lack of awareness about legal frameworks of inclusive education is also consistent with the findings of Girma (2017), who notes that many teachers are often unaware of the legal frameworks that can guide their inclusive practices. Therefore, the teachers' responses highlight the need for increased training and awareness of relevant legal frameworks to ensure that inclusion goes beyond personal beliefs and is attached in established legal frameworks that support equitable education for all students.

CONCLUSIONS

Different global, regional and national inclusive education legal frameworks were analyzed by reviewing different documents. The reviewed legal frameworks highlight a comprehensive approach that addresses the inclusion of students with different disabilities in education. However, their successful implementation hinges on effective leadership at all levels of the education system. Leaders become effective if they are aware of the existing global, regional and national policies prepared for successful implementation of inclusive education. The findings show that there is favorable policy and legal environment for adopting inclusive education. However, educational leaders in Addis Ababa, running inclusive education have varying levels of awareness and grasp of the legal frameworks governing inclusive education. Leaders at Ministry of Education and itinerant teachers have relatively better awareness than school principals and teachers about the legal frameworks. That could be attributed to their educational qualifications and training. Therefore, there is a clear need for increasing awareness of educational leaders regarding the global, regional, and national legal frameworks that guide inclusive education because their awareness on these policies determines successful implementation of inclusive education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

For effective implementation of inclusive education, educational planners must ensure that leaders are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to align their schools' practices with legal frameworks. This could involve revising curricula, creating targeted professional development programs for teachers and administrators, and fostering a policy-driven approach to inclusive education. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into how educational planning can be improved by integrating inclusive education policies into both leadership practices and teaching methodologies, thereby enhancing the overall inclusivity and quality of education in resource centers. By highlighting the gap in awareness of global, regional, and national inclusive education policies among educational leaders, this study underscores the importance of incorporating these policies during the planning phase of the policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, there is a clear need for increasing awareness among educational leaders regarding the global, regional, and national legal frameworks that guide inclusive education. Therefore, it is recommended that regular professional development programs and workshops be organized for school leaders to familiarize them with policies such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the African Union's inclusive education agenda, and Ethiopia's National Special Needs Education Strategy. These programs should aim to equip leaders with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate for and implement inclusive education practices effectively.

Second, the study highlights the importance of aligning local practices with global and regional standards. It is recommended that policymakers at the national level strengthen the integration of these frameworks into teacher training curricula, ensuring that all educators, including leaders, understand the legal obligations and best practices for inclusion. This alignment can be achieved through curriculum reforms that incorporate inclusive education policies and emphasize the importance of a rights-based approach to education.

Finally, it is recommended that educational leaders at the Ministry of Education level actively engage in monitoring policy awareness of inclusive education practitioners at school level and enhance their awareness.

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