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## FROM THE EDITORS

Since 1973, Educational Planning Journal, published with the support and contributions of the International Society for Educational Planning (ISEP) and its members, has served as an international professional forum dedicated to educational planning and, more broadly, to educational change, reform, sustainability, and school improvement. Throughout its longstanding publication history, the journal has provided an important platform for bringing together scholars, researchers, and practitioners from around the world who are engaged in advancing educational planning and improvement. At the same time, it has contributed to the dissemination of innovative practices, policy-oriented discussions, and field-based applications relevant to both researchers and educational policymakers.

In this issue, we are pleased to present four original articles addressing timely and practice-oriented topics, including collaborative leadership models, the characteristics of distance education and learning management systems, school effectiveness and organizational justice, and the role and significance of arts education within the curriculum. Collectively, these articles offer meaningful theoretical insights as well as practical implications for the field of educational planning and school improvement. We would like to congratulate the authors for their scholarly contributions. We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to the reviewers who generously shared their expertise and time in reviewing the manuscripts, to the International Society for Educational Planning (ISEP) and its Board members for their continued support of the journal, and to our former editors for their enduring contributions and guidance throughout the years.

We invite scholars, researchers, and practitioners to submit their research, theoretical contributions, and case-based studies for consideration in forthcoming issues of the journal.

# Literacy Specialists as a Model of Collaborative Leadership

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## Abstract

*Reading specialists have a unique role within the hierarchical educational system. Also referred to as coaches, interventionists, and coordinators, reading specialists are former classroom teachers with responsibilities for both instruction of struggling students and mentoring/staff development for their colleagues. Reading specialists have no supervisory power over the staff with which they work and they answer to multiple stakeholders. The role of reading specialists is varied and usually defined at the local school level, leading to a great deal of variability in the day-to-day tasks while the overall goals remain the same across positions: increase literacy levels for all students within the school. Despite the variability and inconsistency, specialized literacy professionals are credited with being key members of the leadership team in schools deemed highly effective at raising literacy levels. This manuscript will use specialized literacy professionals as a case study to examine the literature and practices of effective informal power in leadership. An effective informal leader in the educational hierarchy requires a deeper understanding of the functioning of the complexity of the formal and informal structures, culture, and mechanisms of power. Based on this understanding, recommendations are provided to help literacy professionals leverage the existing configuration of the organization by developing political skills and using their informal power to influence others.*

**Keywords:** education system, literacy specialist professional, theoretical framework, collaborative leadership, intersectional contexts, practical strategies.

## Literacy Specialists Unique Role in School Organizations

Specialized literacy professionals exist in a unique situation within the hierarchy of the public school personnel in the United States. For licensure as a specialized literacy professional, a teacher license is required, as well as 2-3 years of experience teaching in the classroom at any level (K-12). The specialized literacy professional endorsement is added to the original license through the state department of education but the exact nature of the role and the daily tasks and responsibilities are determined locally, so they may differ between districts or even between schools (Hathaway, et.al., 2016). This can cause role confusion and inconsistency for specialized literacy professionals and those they serve. Literacy specialists traditionally had a role either directly instructing students or providing support to colleagues. There are two reasons for this role inconsistency, funding sources with required roles or goals, and the evolving understanding of the role of instruction for literacy growth (Bean & Goatley, 2021).

Most historians date the beginnings of the specialized literacy professional to the 1920's, at time when the United States educational system began focusing more on content at the secondary level. At that time, students needed assistance with content area comprehension skills so specialized literacy professionals were found at the secondary level working directly with students to help them

glean content knowledge from the texts (Hall, 2004). The role evolved in the 1930s as specialized literacy professionals functioned as supervisors to classroom teachers. They were considered coordinators for the literacy programs. They worked with teachers to improve the overall literacy program at multiple grade levels through more traditional supervisory roles (Mahaffey, Wolfe, & Ciampa, 2020). In the 1940s, researchers were emphasizing remedial instruction for students performing below their peers, so the specialized literacy professionals reverted to the earlier focus on instruction and working directly with struggling students (Bean & Goatley, 2021).

The changes of roles and expectations for specialized literacy professionals thus far were in response to evolutions in the understanding of how instruction contributed to growth in literacy skills. In the 1960's, however, federal level policies and funding with specific goals and restrictions began to determine and further confuse the expectations of specialized literacy professionals. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created the program known as Title 1, intending to provide supplemental support to low socio-economic (SES) students. Materials, resources, and pullout instruction in literacy was provided only to low SES students within a school. Specialized literacy professionals with positions funded by Title 1 were limited to more of an instructional role, working directly with students, but only those that qualified. They were known as Title 1 teachers. Instruction through Title 1 often suffered misalignment with everyday classroom instruction and that was addressed in 1988 when the policy was changed to allow Title 1 funded specialized literacy professionals to work with all students at a qualifying low SES school. This greatly expanded the numbers of students eligible for direct instruction from a specialized literacy professional, in most cases, exceeding the capacity of Title 1 funded professionals to meet the needs.

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act used the literacy arm of the policy, Reading First, to fund specialized literacy professionals in each eligible school, but defined the role as more of a coach for fellow teachers, leaving some schools with literacy experts in either leadership or direct instruction roles depending on the funding for their position. In the years since, school systems have hired specialized literacy professionals under the titles of coach, interventionist, specialist, Title1 teacher, and instructional coordinator. Within these roles, a specialized literacy professional may: work with students, mentor/model for teachers, lead professional development, plan curriculum units, analyze assessment data, and/or organize leadership teams (Bean & Goatley, 2021). The goal for each of these roles, regardless of the daily tasks, is "…one who creates and sustains a culture of literacy learning in the school…" (Historical Foundations, p. 9). The challenge, amidst these myriads of roles and expectations, is to find functional and effective ways to accomplish that task. One tool that has not been present for specialized literacy professionals since the 1930s is that of supervisory power. Whether referred to as a coach or a coordinator, leadership roles in literacy rarely conform to the traditional administrative hierarchy in that the persons within the role are drawn from the pool of teachers in the district, are working with their former colleagues, and are without evaluative power over others in the system. The expectation is that they influence the instructional behaviors of others in the district without the structural power to demand changes (ILA, 2015).

## The Configuration of U.S. Public Schools Organizational Culture

To examine and make recommendations on effective informal power and influence in leadership for literacy specialists, we must understand the organizational configuration of public schools in the United States. The configuration of an organization includes its formal and informal structure, style, culture, and systems (Cummings & Feyerherm, 2010; Millet, 1998). The formal structure encompasses explicitly defined aspects of work such as processes, structures, jobs, and metrics. The informal structure is more implicitly defined and includes understandings of the norms

and how work is done (Anderson, 2024). Any type of organization is a complex social system (Duobiene & Pundziene, 2007). Using an open system's perspective, organizations create outputs from inputs based on transformational processes that take place using feedback mechanisms (Millet, 1998). These parts of the system are organized into a structural design that "establishes how power is allocated and decision-making procedures are formed inside an organization" (Pandey, 2022, p. 102). The structural design of public-school systems in the U.S. are hierarchies, which by design strive to maintain a stable, predictable environment that seeks a state of equilibrium (Millet, 1998) and restricts feedback mechanisms on decision-making from stakeholders (Kwok, 2021).

There are inherent characteristics and assumptions of a hierarchical structure. A hierarchy implies differentiation and inequality among individuals or groups within the organization in accordance with authority, status, power and influence (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Kwok, 2021; MacDonald, 2017). The characteristics of a hierarchy are formalized rules and procedures; top-down and centralized decision-making; suppression of employee perspectives and voices; command and control techniques; unequal access to knowledge; and lack of distribution of formal power (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Barker & Cheney, 1994; Jorstad, 1991; Kwok, 2021; Mintzberg, 1979; Nonaka, 1994).

Organizational culture plays a significant role in influencing the functioning of an organization through its espoused values and underlying assumptions of the world (Norbom & Lopez, 2016; Schein & Schein, 2019). These underlying assumptions influence the perceptions of what success means and looks like within the organization in how work gets done through the day-to-day activities (Howard-Grenville, 2020; Schein & Schein, 2019). Mechanisms of power can be reinforced and perpetuated through the layers of culture, such as being hidden behind espoused values (Jorstad, 1991). For example, the formal structures within a hierarchy suppress multiple truths. The single truth constructed by leadership can become underlying assumptions of the organization in how things are done and further normalize the relations of power to control others with minimal resistance (Barker & Cheney, 1994).

Daniel and Greguras (2014) claim that "power is fundamental to all relationships, is inherent in hierarchical organizations, and affects many organizational processes and outcomes" (p. 1202). The problem is that in hierarchical structures power is often displayed through practices of dominance, coercion, and intimidation (Maner, 2017). These mechanisms of power become dominant and unquestioned eventually resulting in institutionalized power (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Institutionalized power is embedded within the culture and includes the creation of policies that guarantee continued control, structures, and designated positions and roles that force employees to orient to the hierarchy and imposed norms with little resistance (Barker & Chesney, 1994; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). As organizations increase their institutional power, they become less likely to be able to effectively address any challenges from the external environment (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977).

However, there can be parallel structures and hidden hierarchies (Jorstad, 1991) within an organization that constitute the informal structures and power. These structures can help support cross-functional relationships and inter-communication. The social hierarchy within the informal structure is relational, not positional (Cook et al., 2019). Informal leaders are more likely to have a moral or inspiring purpose, possess a shared vision, use inclusive communication, establish and promote equity in relationships, and treat people with respect. Informal leaders more likely to build trust and coalitions (Pielstick, 2000) and can even help moderate the negative impact of a structural hierarchy (Anderson & Brown, 2010), which can help create collaborative efforts to address the internal and external challenges that institutionalized power is ineffective in solving.

Based on this understanding of the design of organization and assumptions of structure, recommendations are provided to help individuals in leadership roles in literacy embrace and utilize the interplay of informal structures and power within their position so that they can influence the behavior of others and help create and sustain a culture of literacy learning in the school. Research has shown that using informal sources of power such as connection and reference powers has a relationship to helping influence culture (Norbom & Lopez, 2016). Much of the required skills, and opportunities for development, of an effective informal leader are leveraging their knowledge of the power mechanisms and political landscape to gain power and influence others (Shaughnessy et al., 2017).

## Literacy Specialists Role as Coaches and Leaders Enhance Organizational Culture in Effective Schools

There are data indicating that Literacy Specialists increase the efficacy of schools with regard to increasing literacy learning for all students. With the definition of Literacy Specialists changing to incorporate a role more focused on coaching and leadership, the focus of literacy instruction can similarly focus more on developing a highly skilled staff of instructors and less on remediation. Research has shown this change to be more effective at raising literacy rates across the entire school. This development in the Literacy Specialist role translates into a view of the Literacy Specialist as a "…leader, teacher, diagnostician, colleague, and agent of change" (Mahaffey, Wolfe, Campo, 2020, N.P.). The Literacy Specialists tasks are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Literacy Specialists Tasks within a school organization*

| Instruction | Diagnosis/Assessment | Leadership |
|---|---|---|
| Planning and collaborating | Evaluating programs | Lead and facilitate school change |
| Support classroom instruction | Planning instruction for individuals | |
| | | Materials |
| Provide specialized instruction | | |
| | Review and analyze data | Grants |
| | | Professional development |
| | | Collaborate with stakeholders |

Within this new model of 'teacher-leader' for the Literacy Specialist role, more students and grades are served, classrooms are supported with resources and information, and a more collaborative approach is facilitated (Mahaffey, Wolfe, Campo, 2020; Toll, 2023, Viklund,2026). The Literacy Specialist helps establish a partnership between stakeholders throughout a building, district, and even community.

School climate research has clearly established that one of the best predictors of student achievement is the establishment and maintenance of a positive learning environment and that this is particularly relevant for low socio-economic status (SES) students considered at-risk. A positive

learning environment consists of four elements: relationships; safety; teaching and learning; institutional environment (Belton & Brinkman, 2024). Of these elements, relationships had the strongest impact on achievement. Literacy specialists are uniquely qualified to facilitate positive learning environments as they are the 'hub' through which people, information, and resources pass. They are the "…individual agents in a system making a difference in how the system functions" (Toll, 2023, p.50).

Being a 'hub' of interconnectedness puts Literacy specialists in a unique position to use informal sources of power to influence culture (Norbom & Lopez, 2016), and to create sub-cultures (Schein & Schein, 2019) within schools that encompass characteristics of less rigid hierarchies than the macro culture for conducting and managing more sustainable change. In contrast to the assumptions of a hierarchy, Literacy specialists can reinforce positive assumptions of human nature and behave in a manner that empowers people not to be passive, but to actively participate in decision-making and improvements within the boundaries of roles and responsibilities of others (Pandey, 2022; Schein, 2016; Schein & Schein, 2019). These sub-cultures can simultaneously achieve the goals and expectations of the school, while differing in their approach to how the work gets done through creating their own norms of how they relate to one another (Schein, 2016, Viklund, 2026); developing a shared understanding of role clarity to address the common role confusion and inconsistency (Anderson, 2024) of Literacy Specialists which then helps to create more effective teamwork to address problems; and, finally, by addressing small wins and showing appreciation (Duobiene & Pundziene, 2007) that might otherwise go unrecognized in a traditional hierarchy. The benefit of being in a position with no evaluative power or formal authority is that Literacy Specialists don't have to spend their time managing others, but can instead spend their energy on being more effective on their tasks (Pandey, 2022) of instruction, diagnosis/assessment, and leadership. To be more effective in these tasks, we recommend they develop several characteristics and associated behaviors of informal power to influence others, conduct change, shape positive culture, and enhance the efficacy of a school organization.

## Literacy specialists' characteristics and qualities of informal power within an effective organization

To build informal power we recommend Literacy Specialists develop and display the following skills and characteristics: conduct objective self-assessment and self-reflection; show empathy and build trust; tolerate conflict and address resistance; manage change through understanding and recognizing change as loss; adopt and model the behavior they expect from others; create resources and gather information; and provide attention and support of small things.

To conduct objective self-assessment and self-reflection, Literacy Specialists need to reflect on the necessary skills for the role they are in, as well as for the challenges that are going to have to expose and confront (Pfeffer, 2010) as they conduct change and shape culture. It is important to be open to receiving difficult, honest feedback from people who are more skilled in the areas they need to continue to develop (Pfeffer, 2010). Doing so helps build confidence and knowledge, and prepares them for being able to tolerate conflict and receive criticism without taking it personally (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002; Pfeffer, 2010). This level of awareness also models a learning (Millet, 1998) sub-culture that can serve as a safe space to learn through trial and error (Dunn, 2020; Heifetz, 1994) and improve social interactions by reflecting on what went well, what did not go well, and the actual versus desired outcomes (Pfeffer, 2010).

The second characteristic is showing empathy and building trust. Instead of focusing too much on the end goals and expectations, Literacy specialists need to understand the process of

mutual concessions and where the other individual/s are coming from (Pfeffer, 2010) which helps you learn about the people you work with on a deeper level—their values, goals, losses, habits, and needs (Heifetz, 1994). Heifetz (1994) refers to this as the reciprocity of inspiration. Build the relationships and a create a shared vision by asking questions as this develops trust as people are loyal to their values and those, they have close relationships with (Acton, 2025; Pielstick, 2000).

Literacy specialists need to be able to tolerate conflict and address resistance. In tense situations where critical feedback is received during change efforts, for example, they need to be able to be disciplined and remain calm by recognizing the attack is on the role and how it's impacting someone else's life (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Change is about feelings (Beeby et al., 1999). Change can feel threating to people in different ways depending on their position and level within the organization (Jorstad, 1991), especially if change is done on people versus with people because they feel powerless and unsupported (Beeby et al., 1999). It's important to recognize change as loss and it can be painful because the comfortable ways of doing work are being transformed. These losses can be feelings of incompetence, identity, loyalty, community, work routines (Heifetz et al., 2009). Instead of understanding individual losses and defensive patterns of response to be able to effectively address them (Heifetz et al., 2009), people too often avoid conflict and challenging situations rather than standing up for their themselves and their values (Pfeffer, 2010). This leads to giving into requests or changing positions (Pfeffer, 2010) and can be a need for control (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), whereas if Literacy specialists are able to be vulnerable and tolerate and work through difficult issues, they can build informal power (Jones et al., 2008).

Social norms of an organization are reinforced through behaviors (Sull & Sull, 2022), so Literacy specialists need to adopt and model the behavior they expect from others. They can build and shape a sub-culture that values diverse view from all levels of the organization (Katz & Miller, 2010) and encompasses positive assumptions of human behavior (Schein, 2016; Schein & Schein, 2019). The sub-culture can rely less on centralization (McGrath, 2019; Roman, 2025), and more on creating a shared vision (Beeby et al., 1999), valuing information and knowledge sharing (Anderson, 2024), participative decision making and approaches to change (Werkman, 2009), and creating feedback mechanisms for continuous learning and development through trial and error. In addition, Literacy specialists can help create resources and gather information to engage a norm of reciprocity. They can perceive opportunities to provide resources that people need or want such as information, social support, or in helping them do their job (Pfeffer, 2010). A sub-culture can provide space that allows deviation from the hierarchical structure norms and permit questioning that can disturb the status quo (Heifetz, 1994; Sarid, 2024) and can result in more buy-in, creative problem-solving, and effective performance.

Finally, it is important to provide attention and provide support for small things as this builds relationships and influence. Provide the available resources of attention and time to the people you work with to learn about them by asking questions and active listening (Pfeffer, 2010). Provide support by helping others do some part of their job that they may find challenging or even mundane (Pfeffer, 2010). Literacy specialists can also provide some structure for the collaborative goals trying to be accomplished including specific assignments, timelines, ground rules for decision-making and handling conflict, and clarity of reporting relationships (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). A brief overview of these skills and behaviors of informal power is summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Skills and Behaviors of Informal Power to Gain Influence*

| Skill | Behaviors |
|---|---|
| Self assess & reflect | Accept advice, reflect, learn through trial and error. |
| Empathy & trust | Build trust and coalitions, facilitate reciprocity of information. |
| Tolerating conflict & addressing resistance | Understand the view of change as loss or threat. |
| Adopt the behavior you want from others | Value information sharing, participative decision making, and shared meaning. |
| Create resources & gather information | Be the resource, show how the research becomes practice. |
| Provide attention & support small things | Use the resources of time and attention. Help build reciprocity through small tasks. |

## Leveraging the Literacy Specialist as Leader to Plan Effective Policy and Programs

The Literacy Specialist role may hold the key to increasing the overall efficacy of the school by incorporating the positive learning environment and planning research to incorporate Literacy Specialists as this 'hub' or 'change agent' (Bean & Goatley, 2021). Paradoxically, the lack of supervisory power inherent in the role may be the key to greater power in the planning process to develop positive learning environments and facilitate change in literacy instruction on the classroom, building, and district levels.

> *Where to start planning is a challenge. Due to immediacy, we often start our professional work at improving parts of the educational enterprise, such as individual performance, leadership for administrators, or assessment, or curriculum development…That works, but only some of the time. Other times, while the symptom for problems is at the operational level, often the problem is somewhere else, such as a faculty objective or inappropriate curriculum, or offering some deliverable that is not what the learners really require to be a contributing member of society. (Kaufman, 2019, p. 7).*

Whilst Literacy Specialists historically have been seen as change agents only within their own school or district, with the accepted role being to incorporate changes that have been led by others at higher levels (district, state, or federal policy makers) into the day of teachers and students with less levels of power but more control over instruction, it is possible to see how the characteristics, qualities, and tasks that add up to effective change within each school, can also lead to agents of change throughout the system as a whole. Because of the history of the Literacy Specialist role, with its changes and adaptations over the decades, a literacy specialist may be in a unique position to influence not only downward, but also upward and outward (Lynham, 2010). To create change outside of your own organization, several pieces must be in place. These include: embracing flexible organizational designs; changing the culture and structure; and creating an environment for 'creative deviance' (Heifetz, 1994, p.188).

One of the most challenging aspects of the role of a Literacy Specialist has been its constantly changing focus and definition. In fact, the role does not have a set definition to this day, with some schools and organizations using that professional in ways that fit or align with the tasks laid out in the chart, but making the time and therefore focus different from school to school. While this is challenging, it also lays the groundwork for the first piece of the puzzle for change agent in an outward and upward manner to be put into place easily. The literacy specialist has, by definition and practice, embraced flexible organizational designs. The characteristics involved in this align with those of gathering information and creating resources, which the Literacy Specialist does daily. The tasks expected of them that will lead to greater acceptance of flexible organizations are those that include reviewing and analyzing data, evaluating programs, and writing grants. Within these tasks, Literacy Specialists are in the perfect position to form leadership groups, such as professional organizations, that are grounded in their daily tasks, and aligned with the characteristics they have already shown. Flexible organizational structures are more open to uncertainty and can adapt to complex problems such as those where the problem and the means for solving it are constantly changing, the aptly named 'wicked problems' (Hanstedt, 2018, p.3).

Recognizing that one way power relationships become control "for institutional maintenance and predictability" (Barker & Cheney, 1994, p. 27), for Literacy Specialists to exert power and influence upward and outward, they must harness the characteristic of understanding change. As with teachers in the classroom, asking for others in your organization to adapt to new norms or behaviors means the Literacy Specialist must understand and recognize that change is a loss of certainty, of routine, of feeling empowered by knowledge and routine (Heifetz et al., 2009). They must use their understanding of immunity to change, or resistance, to model a new way of behaving or knowing in the workplace (Kegan & Lahey, 2001). In short, they must adopt the behavior they wish to see in others. The coaching role has uniquely qualified Literacy Specialists for this part of the change, the steps to helping others see new routines and take small steps to incorporate them have been well documented (Toll, 2023, Goatley & Bean, 2021). The everyday tasks already incorporate this type of change agency. Literacy Specialists are expected to evaluate problems, lead and facilitate school change, conduct professional development, and collaborate with stakeholders. In doing these tasks, they become accustomed to helping colleagues through unpredictability and upheaval.

Perhaps the most powerful change, with the highest probability for extending Literacy Specialists' influence upward and outward, is that of creating an environment for "creative deviance" where those without formal authority or power "can deviate from the norms of authoritative decision making" and can "more readily raise questions that disturb" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 188). This change allows for a diverse group of perspectives to join in solving problems, rather than for organizational maintenance or predictability. It responds to complexity and facilitates adaptability. Literacy Specialists have developed the characteristics of adopting the behavior they would expect to see in others, it is called modeling and is a common practice for demonstrating new instructional behaviors for teachers. The aligned tasks include planning and collaborating as well as supporting classroom instruction. Modeling creative deviance and asking difficult questions could also fall under the purview of Literacy Specialists to model for teachers and administrators in their school. Additionally, the characteristic of creating resources and gathering information lines up with planning and providing specialized instruction as well as collaboration with stakeholders. And, finally, but certainly not least in importance, providing attention and supporting the small things is a characteristic that Literacy Specialists practice through their daily tasks of supporting classroom instruction, planning and providing specialized instruction, and collaborating with stakeholders. These daily tasks lend themselves to the practice of islands of innovation, case studies, small sample

studies showing what is possible and what growth may occur from new techniques. All of these techniques fall into the daily tasks and could be easily redirected to extend influence outward and upward.

## Conclusion

Literacy Specialists have long held the power, knowledge, and practice to influence the instructional practices of their colleagues. Given that they occupy a unique position within school organizations, and that they possess the characteristics and practice the daily tasks of relationship building, knowledge sharing, and resource gathering, it is logical to question whether they would be the professionals capable of extending influence to nontraditional stakeholders in education planning and policy.

Informal leadership structures such as the one occupied by literacy specialists have been shown to lead to better cross functional relationships and better communication (Pielstick, 2000). They act as hubs or intersections for stakeholders across the spectrum of the educational world and can influence culture or form sub-cultures in an informal leadership structure (Goatley & Bean, 2023; Norbom & Lopez, 2016). As the literacy specialist role has evolved, these tasks and characteristics have been shown to be highly effective at transforming the literacy culture and practices within individual organizations. However, the role continues to be seen within a rigid hierarchy where the policies and planning decisions are made at a higher level in the organization and the literacy specialist role is defined mainly as one with influence in order to bring teachers, aides, parents, and others into agreement with those decisions. With the goal of the planning and policy process being to find "what the learners really require to be a contributing member of society" (Kaufman, 2019, p. 7), the loss of the knowledge, practices, and connections of literacy specialists at this level is significant. A stronger approach would be to leverage those characteristics and practices that literacy specialists utilize every day to extend influence into the planning and policy realm. Literacy specialists should have a seat at the table at the state, national, and think tank levels where policies and planning are occurring.

For educational planners within all existing organizations the study of efficacy and influence as it occurs within this specialized and unique role is very useful for improving coaching and capability within the immediate environment (Bean & Goatley, 2021). However, the benefits extend beyond that. Literacy specialists help to close the gap between research and practice by modeling new practices and being a resource (Viklund, 2026). The utilization of a coaching model similar to the literacy specialists in the United States schools can be seen as an intentional, systematic improvement tactic for organizations that practice continuous improvement and seek to build leadership and collaborative approaches from within.

## Author Note

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# Learning Management System Features and Postgraduate Distance Learners' Engagement at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The integration of Learning Management Systems (LMS) has become a cornerstone for maintaining student engagement within the Open, Distance, and e-Learning ecosystem. This study, therefore, investigated LMS features (namely system accessibility, course management, communication tools, and technical support) and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The study was guided by one research questions and four null hypotheses, each addressing one of five specific objectives. Utilizing the descriptive correlational research design, data were collected from 248 students through a structured questionnaire titled "Learning Management System and Student Engagement Questionnaire" (LMSSEQ). Results showed that the level of engagement among distance learners at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, was high (Mean = 3.23). Also, each LMS feature, that is, system accessibility (r = 0.64; P<.05), communication tools (r = 0.61; P<.05), course management (r = 0.59; P<.05), and technical support (r = 0.57; P<.05) had a positive and significant relationship with student engagement. These findings underscore the importance of LMS in providing distance learners with effective interaction, flexibility, and support, thus improving their engagement. It is therefore recommended that Open, Distance, and e-Learning institutions further encourage the use of these LMS features to mitigate learner isolation and enhance students' overall engagement.*

**Keywords:** course management, technical support, distance learners, learning management system, student engagement

## Introduction

In higher education, student engagement seems to be a key predictor of academic achievement, persistence, and satisfaction. Engagement, whether behavioral, emotional, or cognitive, is a great indicator of learning and retention levels (Kahu, 2013). Behavioral engagement encompasses proactive involvement in academic activities, which may be participation in classes (online or face-to-face) and in assignments, as well as contributing to conversations. Emotional involvement refers to the affective responses of the students to the learning setting, such as their interest in, enjoyment of, and belonging to the learning setting. Cognitive engagement is the interest of students in their learning, the effort they make, their persistence, and their learning strategies. As digital learning continues to grow, particularly after the pandemic, it is important to maintain student engagement in online learning. Online isolation and the decreased interaction among students have been reported to impact the academic experience of many students (Bolliger & Halupa, 2018). Online students can feel very isolated among their peers and instructors, resulting in lower levels of

motivation and engagement. Such isolation may be especially acute among new online learners or students who do not have close social support systems. Therefore, student engagement today has to be enhanced with the use of technological tools.

Online courses are now delivered, communicated, and assessed through Learning Management Systems (LMS) as central units. Proper implementation of LMS can also help improve student engagement with content and peers, as well as with the instructor (Al-Frait et al., 2020). LMS provides a well-organized and formalized platform to deliver the course material, communicate, and evaluate student learning. The functionality and design of the LMS have the potential to influence student engagement and student learning. Since LMS is a multidimensional concept, it is critical to consider particular features such as system accessibility, control over courses, communication applications, and technical assistance. System accessibility is the level of ease with which students can use LMS platforms on devices and across network conditions. Engagement may be impaired by poor accessibility associated with a limited bandwidth or other incompatible interfaces (Wang, Han, & Yang, 2015). Research indicates that the more user-friendly the LMS is in terms of its mobile compatibility and ease of access, the higher the engagement levels will be (Alkhalaf, Drew, & Alhussain, 2019; Ifinedo, Rokala, & Hämälainen, 2020). The issues of Internet connectivity, compatibility of devices, and user interface design can have a tremendous impact on students accessing and using the LMS. LMS platforms that are user-friendly and universally accessible give students more power, which increases engagement. Course management is the way content is designed, structured, and presented by the instructors using the LMS. A good course management system increases interest with clarity and direction (Martin, Sunley, & Turner, 2017). Student participation is greatly enhanced by well-structured LMS course pages with easy-to-follow instructions and a well-organized module (Adzharuddin & Ling, 2013). Course management includes the organisation of course content, the design of assessment tasks, and the provision of feedback to students. Coherent LMS management leads to higher engagement and academic performance (Costa, Alvelos & Teixeira, 2012). Strategic course management, such as setting weekly learning objectives and offering varied assessments, accommodates diverse learning styles, translating LMS usage into meaningful student engagement.

Communication tools within LMS platforms, like discussion forums and messaging systems, foster interaction among students and instructors. Engagement is often driven by community, feedback, and dialogue. Students who actively use LMS communication tools demonstrate higher emotional and social engagement (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Communication tools include discussion forums, chat rooms, email, and video conferencing. Interactive features encourage idea-sharing and group projects, deepening cognitive engagement (Cho & Tobias, 2016). The effectiveness of communication tools depends on the extent to which they are integrated into the course design and the extent to which students are encouraged to use them. Technical support includes guidance, training, and troubleshooting services. Effective technical support ensures users resolve issues quickly and understand system functionalities. A lack of technical assistance leads to frustration and reduced engagement (Mtebe & Raisamo, 2014). Technical support includes assisting with technical issues, such as logging in, accessing course materials, and using communication tools. According to Alraimi, Zo, and Ciganek (2015), perceived technical support positively influenced student satisfaction and continued LMS use. Prompt and helpful technical support increases participation in online discussions and exploration of platform features (Sahin & Shelley, 2008).

While each intervention contributes to fostering engagement, the combined effect within a cohesive LMS framework remains underexplored, especially in developing countries. Moreover, although several studies have examined individual LMS features in isolation, few have holistically assessed how these elements interact to impact student engagement across diverse educational contexts (Fithriyaningrum, Kusumawardani, & Wibirama, 2022). This gap is particularly pronounced in African higher education systems, where infrastructural challenges and limited digital readiness complicate LMS implementation. This requires an in-depth examination of how these variables interact to maximize LMS use to achieve improved student results. It is against this backdrop that the study investigated Learning Management System features (namely system accessibility, course management, communication tools, and technical support) and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

## Statement of the Problem

One of the current challenges of higher education, especially in online and distance learning, is still the engagement of students. Since learning institutions have been based on virtual environments, it has become challenging to maintain high rates of student engagement. Engagement, which can be identified as behavioral participation, emotional engagement, and cognitive investment, can have a considerable impact on academic performance, course completion, and student satisfaction. Still, the significance does not eliminate the fact that many studies show a continuous decrease in student participation in learning processes mediated by a Learning Management System (Ofoha & Adegbija, 2022).

This issue of disengagement is reflected in inactive attendance at LMS portals, lack of engagement in discussion forums, and document submissions. Ofoha and Adegbija (2022) discovered that more than two in five distance learners across all Nigerian universities reported insignificant engagement with their LMS systems due to various factors, including struggles to navigate the system, a lack of feedback, and insufficiency in support. This inactivity is especially troubling in the light of the growing popularity of LMS as the main instructional tool in distance learning programmes, as Ayodele and Adedeji (2021) found that almost 45% of the students attending distance learning programmes in Nigeria felt isolated, disconnected, and demotivated. One can attribute this feeling of isolation to the diminished ability to have face-to-face contact, as well as the absence of any solid sense of community within the online learning setting. In addition, learners might not be able to keep motivated and engaged without feedback and regular communication with their teachers.

Poor internet accessibility and accessible technical training worsen infrastructural and technological barriers to regular access to digital learning, given that poor access to both systems is caused by poor infrastructure. The issue of the digital divide and inequality in access to technology and the internet has been a major challenge to student engagement in distance learning activities. Low-income students or students in rural schools might not be able to get the required resources to enjoy online learning activities. The problem is not merely one of convenience but academic survival, as disengaged students are more likely to fail courses and withdraw from programs. Given the growing reliance on LMS platforms as the primary mode of instruction in distance learning, especially in institutions like Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, it becomes crucial to critically examine the extent to which these systems are supporting or failing to support student engagement. The study therefore investigated Learning Management System features (namely system accessibility, course management, communication tools, and technical support) and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

## Purpose of the Study

The study examined the relationship between LMS features and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. Specifically, the study's objectives are to:

1. ascertain the level of postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
2. examine the relationship between system accessibility and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
3. investigate the relationship between course management practices and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
4. assess the relationship between communication tools embedded in the LMS and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
5. determine the relationship between technical support services and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

## Research Question

What is the level of engagement among postgraduate distance learners at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria?

## Research Hypotheses

**$H0_1$:** There is no significant relationship between system accessibility and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

**$H0_2$:** There is no significant relationship between course management practices and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

**$H0_3$:** Communication tools embedded in the LMS do not significantly relate to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

**$H0_4$:** Technical support services do not significantly relate to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

## Literature Review

This section provides a review of the literature for the study. This was carried out under the following sub-headings:

**Learning Management System (LMS)**: The combination of instructional strategies, informational systems (IS), and information and communication technology (ICT) has been a major driving force in structuring the LMS. Mahnegar (2012) described LMS as a range of systems and software used to manage educational or training records, distribute courses over the internet, and offer online collaboration features. LMS is described as an online system or software that is used to plan, execute, and assess a specific learning process. According to Daniels (2016), it is necessary that the institution take into account criteria such as the need to restrict access so that only the students enrolled in the course can access the content and activities. According to Bates (2015), a Learning Management System, widely spread as LMS, and, hence, the use of this acronym in this study may be defined, from the user perspective, as a virtual environment that aims to simulate face-to-face learning environments with the use of Information Technology.

**Students' Engagement:** Distance learning has led to refinements in how engagement is conceptualized and operationalized. The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework reframes engagement as emerging from the interaction of social, cognitive, and teaching presences: social presence enables learners to feel "real" to each other; cognitive presence indexes meaningful learning and inquiry; and teaching presence shapes design, facilitation, and direct instruction. Student engagement refers to "how involved or interested students appear to be in their learning and how connected they are to their classes, their institutions, and each other" (Axelson & Flick, 2010, p. 38). It has also been described as "any sustained connection a learner has towards any aspect of learning, schools, or education" (SoundOut, quoted in Fletcher, 2019, p. 2). In its simplest definition, Martin and Torres (2016, p. 2) submitted that it is "meaningful student involvement throughout the learning environment". According to Fredricks et al. (2004), there three types of engagement namely the Behavioral engagement, which includes students observing community norms and participating in activities, the Emotional engagement, which includes students' feelings of interest, boredom, happiness, sadness, and anxiety, and the Cognitive engagement, which is closely related to motivation and involves students' desire and ability to engage in a variety of strategies to self-direct learning.

## Empirical Review of Previous Studies

This section focus on the empirical review of some studies regarding the variables investigated in this study.

**System Accessibility and Student Engagement:** Torras and Bellot (2016) identified the availability of innovative software programs as a primary factor contributing to LMS integration in higher education institutions. Hashim and Ahmad (2017) demonstrated the significance of accessibility by indicating that students' access to i-Class features, an LMS at the University Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia influenced its utilisation. The issue of system accessibility has emerged as a central concern in the discourse on distance learning, particularly as higher education institutions increasingly adopt digital learning platforms. Fithriyaningrum, Kusumawardani, and Wibirama (2022) conducted an evaluation of Learning Management Systems (LMS) accessibility across 30 Indonesian universities, applying WCAG 2.1 standards and the WAVE tool. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from accessibility testing with qualitative data from student interviews. The results indicated that many LMS platforms in Indonesian universities failed to meet basic accessibility standards, which negatively impacted student engagement, particularly for students with disabilities.

Extending this discourse, Lee and Kim (2024) investigated the online learning experiences of South Korean students with disabilities during COVID-19 lockdowns through a mixed-methods design involving 278 survey participants and 50 in-depth interviews. Their results showed significant disparities in engagement and self-efficacy depending on disability type and the level of institutional accommodations provided. The analysis emphasized the role of adaptive technologies and strong institutional support in improving the learning experiences of students with disabilities. On the same note, Yuwono, Anwar, Sari, and Rejeki (2021) investigated the issues of online learning accessibility within one Central Java university, concentrating on the experiences of 20 disabled students. The research highlighted the fact that access is not only a technical problem but also a pedagogical one, as under-instructional design leads to increased disengagement. As noted in this study, universities must embrace a more comprehensive understanding of accessibility that addresses technical and pedagogical dimensions of online education.

**Course Management and Student Engagement:** The rapid expansion of distance learning has necessitated a rethinking of how course management is conceptualized and implemented in higher education. Course management, often facilitated by digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), refers to the systematic organization, delivery, monitoring, and assessment of teaching and learning activities. The study by Smith and Johnson (2019) was a quasi-experimental one, which sought to establish the correlation between course structure and student engagement in online courses. The researchers compared two parts of an introductory psychology course, one with a high degree of structure, which had regular weekly modules, task lists, and centrally located resources, and another with a low degree of structure where the pacing was not predetermined, and the resources were open-ended. The results indicate that intentional course management activities that minimize uncertainty and offer specific direction may play a significant role in increasing student engagement and motivation in online practices. It is argued that course design is critical, but instructor presence is what enables course management to be translated into engagement (Sheridan & Kelly, 2021). The researchers also highlighted the role that the instructor can play in the formation of a favorable and interactive online learning experience. The results confirmed that course management had a significant direct effect on engagement. Chen and Finch (2019) explored the use of learning analytics to shift course management from descriptive to predictive practices. The study analysed data from 412 students in a blended course, including LMS clicks, assignment submission times, forum participation, and gradebook scores, using a logistic regression model. The model successfully identified students at risk of failing (earning below a C) by the fourth week of the semester with 82% accuracy. This demonstrated the practical application of analytics for proactive course management.

**Communication Tools and Student Engagement:** Distance learning is fundamentally a communication problem: learning happens when people and content interact, and communication tools mediate those interactions. Researchers have therefore treated communication technologies not as neutral channels but as pedagogical affordances that shape what kinds of interactions are possible, how social presence is created, and how cognitive tasks are negotiated. Communication tools within LMS platforms such as discussion forums, chat features, messaging systems, and video conferencing play a crucial role in fostering interactions among students and between students and instructors. Martin and Parker (2014) conducted a quasi-experimental study to investigate the effect of synchronous online video communication tools on student engagement in an online graduate course. In their study, 47 students were divided into two groups: one group participated in weekly optional live video sessions via a web conferencing tool, while the control group only had access to asynchronous communication methods such as discussion forums and email. Interviews further showed that students valued real-time interaction for deepening understanding and reducing feelings of isolation.

Similarly, Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2013) explored the pedagogical potential of integrating Twitter as a formal course tool. In a study involving 125 first-year pre-health students, participants were randomly assigned to either a control group using standard LMS communication or an experimental group that was required to complete discussions and announcements via Twitter. Engagement was assessed using the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) benchmarks. Findings indicated that the Twitter group demonstrated significantly greater increases in collaborative learning and student–faculty interaction compared to the control group. In another study, Rambe and Bere (2019) investigated the use of WhatsApp mobile instant messaging to promote student engagement in a large undergraduate lecture class of 200 students in South Africa. Findings highlighted that WhatsApp supported high levels of behavioral engagement through active

participation and attendance, as well as emotional engagement by reducing anxiety and enhancing students' sense of belonging.

**Technical Support and Student Engagement:** Technical support for distance learners is more than an IT help desk; it is a system of services, tools, training, and processes that enable learners to access, navigate, use, and persist in digitally mediated learning environments. In the literature, technical support is described across several overlapping layers: infrastructural support (connectivity, devices, platform uptime), user-facing technical assistance (help desks, ticketing, live chat, phone support), instructional-technology support (LMS configuration, integrations, assessment tools), and capacity-building (onboarding, just-in-time tutorials, digital literacy training).

The relationship between technical support and student engagement in online learning has been extensively explored in the literature. Bolliger and Wasilik (2009) examined the role of technical support in fostering student satisfaction and engagement in online education. Their survey of 512 students at a large U.S. university showed that student support services, particularly technology support, were significant predictors of engagement. Similarly, Park and Choi (2009) highlighted the importance of technical assistance as a critical success factor in sustaining engagement and reducing dropout in online courses. Their quantitative analysis of 541 students identified five major factors influencing persistence, among which organisational support, specifically timely technical help, proved essential. Technical support has also been shown to mitigate psychological barriers to engagement. Sun and Rueda (2012) investigated the role of technical support in reducing computer anxiety among online learners. Reliable support services not only reduced anxiety but also encouraged higher levels of behavioural engagement, including increased login frequencies and interaction, ultimately contributing to improved academic performance.

## Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two theories, namely the Constructivist Learning Theory and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

**Constructivist Learning Theory:** Constructivist Learning Theory, advanced primarily by Jean Piaget (1936) and Lev Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes that learners actively construct their own knowledge through interaction with their environment rather than passively absorbing information. Piaget argued that learning occurs through processes of assimilation and accommodation, while Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social interaction, scaffolding, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as central to knowledge construction. The central assumptions of constructivism are that (1) knowledge is actively constructed by learners rather than transmitted by teachers, (2) learning is a social and collaborative process where interaction enhances understanding, (3) prior knowledge and experiences shape how learners engage with new information, and (4) meaningful learning takes place when learners are actively involved in authentic, problem-based, and context-driven tasks.

**Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation and interest, which was developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985; 2000). It assumes that people will be more likely to maintain learning when they have met their three fundamental psychological needs, namely: autonomy (a sense of control and choice in learning), competence (a sense of mastery and effectiveness) and relatedness (a sense of belonging and connection with others). SDT assumes that motivation exists as a continuum between extrinsic (motivated by rewards and external pressures) and intrinsic (motivated by personal interest and enjoyment), (2) learning is best promoted when it contributes to intrinsic motivation, and (3) supervisory-facilitating environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, increase persistence, satisfaction and overall engagement of learners.

## Technological Frameworks and Student Interaction

While models such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) are frequently used to predict a user's intention to adopt a system, this study shifts the focus from acceptance to engagement. TAM suggests that "Perceived Ease of Use" and "Perceived Usefulness" are primary drivers of technology adoption (Davis, 1989). Similarly, UTAUT identifies "Performance Expectancy" and "Facilitating Conditions" as key factors (Venkatesh et al., 2003). While these models explain why a student might log in, the current study utilizes Self-Determination Theory to explain the quality of engagement once the student is active on the platform. By focusing on LMS features like communication tools and technical support, this research builds upon the 'Facilitating Conditions' described in UTAUT, moving toward a deeper understanding of how these conditions foster cognitive and emotional investment.

## Research Methodology

This section provides the entire procedure used in carrying out the study under the following subheadings: research design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, research instrument, validation of the research instrument, reliability of the research instrument, and method of data analysis respectively.

### Research Design

The research design used for the study was the descriptive survey design, which is correlational. The study specifically adopted a descriptive correlational survey design because, beyond describing respondents' perceptions, it sought to determine the degree and direction of the relationship between LMS features (system accessibility, course management, communication tools, and technical support) and student engagement. In this approach, variables were measured as they naturally occurred, with no manipulation or treatment, and the relationships among them were analyzed using Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Coefficient at the 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive design allows researchers to collect data from a large population to describe the existing situation among the variables (Creswell, 2014).

### Population of the Study

The population comprises 9,000 students pursuing the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) programme at the Distance Learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample comprises 248 postgraduate students. They were selected using random sampling. The PGDE students' register served as the sampling frame, and only learners with active LMS access were included. Each eligible student was assigned an identification number, after which 248 unique numbers were generated using a computer-based random procedure. The students corresponding to the selected numbers were invited to participate; where any selected student declined or was unreachable, replacements were drawn from a reserve random list. The selection was programme-wide and not limited to a single course cohort.

**Research Instrument**

The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed structured questionnaire comprising Likert-type scale items titled "Learning Management System and Student Engagement Questionnaire (LMSSEQ)". The questionnaire consisted of Section A, which sought information on the Demographic background of the participants, namely gender, age, etc. Age classification was defined a priori as five-year categories to ensure consistency, ease of self-reporting, and meaningful grouping for descriptive analysis. The final category (35+) was used to capture older learners in the programme who were fewer in number and to avoid very small cell sizes that could limit interpretation. Section B focuses on each feature of the LMS, and Section C sought information on student engagement. The instrument was measured on a four-point Likert scale, namely Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), which were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. All negative items were, however, reverse-scored for data analysis purposes.

**Validity of the Research Instrument**

The researchers gave the draft copies of the questionnaire to two Educational Technology experts, who evaluated the items on the basis of their clarity, relevance, and suitability to the objectives of the research. Based on their feedback, adjustments were carried out to ensure that the instrument actually addressed the constructs of LMS and student engagement.

**Reliability of the Research Instrument**

A total of 20 students of the National Open University of Nigeria (10 males and 10 females) participated in a study to pilot test the instrument with a view to estimating the reliability of the instrument. Their responses were analysed using the Alpha reliability test of Cronbach, and the coefficient was 0.85 established. This showed that the internal consistency is moderate and the instrument is reliable for collecting data.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

The data collected was analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographic information and the research question were analysed using descriptive statistics, namely mean and standard deviation. The hypotheses of the study were tested at the level of 0.05 using inferential statistics, specifically the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). To determine the relationship between LMS features and student engagement, the responses from the Likert-scale items were summated to generate composite scores for each variable. Given that these composite scores represent interval-level data, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was applied. This approach allows for a more robust analysis of the linear relationship between the constructs compared to item-by-item categorical tests.

## Results

This section presents answers to the research question, results of tested hypotheses, and a discussion of findings.

**RQ1:** What is the level of engagement among distance learners?

**Table 1.** Students' Engagement among Distance Learners.

| Items | Mean | SD | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|
| I regularly log in to the LMS to access my learning materials. | 3.41 | 1.04 | High |
| I complete my LMS-based assignments and quizzes on time. | 3.36 | 1.11 | High |
| I am attentive and focused while using the LMS for study. | 3.25 | 1.13 | High |
| I feel motivated to learn when using the LMS. | 3.18 | 1.22 | High |
| I enjoy participating in LMS-based class activities and discussions. | 3.12 | 1.15 | High |
| I apply the knowledge gained from LMS materials in other learning tasks. | 3.20 | 1.10 | High |
| I often reflect on what I learn through the LMS. | 3.22 | 1.09 | High |
| I feel emotionally connected to the learning experience via the LMS. | 3.14 | 1.20 | High |
| I actively seek out additional materials within the LMS to deepen my understanding. | 3.28 | 1.08 | High |
| I contribute to group tasks and forum discussions on the LMS platform. | 3.09 | 1.17 | High |

The result in Table 1 shows that distance learners demonstrated a high level of engagement with the LMS. They regularly log in to access materials (3.41), complete assignments on time (3.36), and remain focused during study sessions (3.25). They also show motivation to learn (3.18), participate in class activities (3.12), apply what they have learned (3.20), and seek a deeper understanding through additional resources (3.28). With an average mean of 3.23, this indicates that the level of engagement among distance learners at Ahmadu Bello University was high.

### Test of Hypotheses

This section presents the results of the tested hypotheses. The assessment of Normality was first carried out.

### Data Distribution and Normality Assessment

Before conducting the primary analysis, the data were screened for normality to ensure the appropriateness of parametric tests. For a sample size of (N = 248), normality was assessed through Skewness and Kurtosis values. The Skewness values for the constructs ranged from (0.45) to (+0.32), and Kurtosis values ranged from (-0.62) to (+0.58). Since these values fall within the acceptable range of (pm 1.0) (or (pm 2.0) depending on the source), the data were deemed to be approximately normally distributed. Furthermore, the large sample size (N > 30) invokes the Central Limit Theorem, supporting the use of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and Mean scores as valid measures for this study.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant relationship between system accessibility and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

Table 2. System Accessibility and Students' Engagement.

| Variable | Mean | SD | N | Df | r | p-value | Remark | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| System Accessibility | 17.54 | 1.97 | | | | | | |
| | | | 248 | 246 | 0.64 | 0.00 | Sig. | Reject $H_{01}$ |
| Students' Engagement | 18.92 | 1.65 | | | | | | |

**p < 0.05**

Table 2 shows a moderate, strong, and significant positive relationship between system accessibility and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University ($r = 0.64$; $df = 246$; $p < 0.05$). Based on this result, the null hypothesis ($H0_1$) is rejected. This implies that system accessibility is significantly related to engagement among distance learners at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant relationship between course management practices and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

**Table 3.** Course Management Practices and Students' Engagement.

| Variable | Mean | SD | N | df | r | p-value | Remark | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Course Management | 18.06 | 1.89 | | | | | | |
| | | | 248 | 246 | 0.59 | 0.01 | Sig. | Reject $H_{02}$ |
| Students' Engagement | 18.92 | 1.65 | | | | | | |

**p < 0.05**

Table 3 indicates that there was a significant positive relationship between course management practices and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University ($r = 0.59$; $df = 246$; $p < 0.05$). Thus, the null hypothesis ($H0_2$) is rejected. This implies that effective course management contributes to better engagement among distance learners.

**Hypothesis Three:** Communication tools embedded in the LMS are not significantly related to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

**Table 4.** Communication Tools and Students' Engagement.

| Variable | Mean | SD | N | df | r | p-value | Remark | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Communication Tools | 17.82 | 2.01 | | | | | | |
| | | | 248 | 246 | 0.61 | 0.00 | Sig. | Reject $H_{03}$ |
| Students' Engagement | 18.92 | 1.65 | | | | | | |

**p < 0.05**

As shown in Table 4, there existed a significant and positive relationship between the use of communication tools embedded in the LMS and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University ($r = 0.61$; $df = 246$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H03) is rejected. It means that the availability of communication tools in the LMS significantly related to student engagement.

**Hypothesis Four:** Technical support services do not significantly relate to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University.

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**Table 5.** Technical Support Services and Students' Engagement.

| **Variable** | **Mean** | **SD** | **N** | **df** | **r** | **p-value** | **Remark** | **Decision** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Technical Support | 16.93 | 2.12 | | | | | | |
| | | | 248 | 246 | 0.57 | 0.02 | Sig. | Reject $H_{04}$ |
| Students' Engagement | 18.92 | 1.65 | | | | | | |

**p < 0.05**

Table 5 shows a significant positive relationship between technical support services and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University ($r = 0.57$; $df = 246$; $p < 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis (H04) is rejected. This implies that adequate technical support services were related to the engagement among distance learners.

## Discussion

The result of the research question that examined the level of postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University indicated that it was high across all evaluated dimensions. Students stated that they have regular access to the learning materials, complete LMS-based assignments promptly, pay attention when studying, and use the knowledge they acquire in other activities. They also reported motivation, emotional engagement, and participation in discussions and group activity in the LMS. This high level of engagement is confirmed by the mean score of 3.23. These results are consistent with the past research that has identified the significance of student engagement in an online learning environment. To illustrate this point, studies have revealed that the more actively engaged students are in their learning, the higher their likelihood of continuing their studies, scoring better grades, and reporting greater satisfaction with their learning experience (Kahu, 2013). This indicates that the LMS platform at Ahmadu Bello University facilitates student engagement well.

Result of the first hypothesis, which formulated that there is no significant relationship between system accessibility and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, revealed that there was a moderate, strong, and positive correlation ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.05$), which resulted in the null hypothesis being rejected. This finding implies that the more open the system is, the more engaged distance learners are. This finding is consistent with that of Fithriyaningrum et al. (2022), who reported that many LMS platforms in Indonesian universities failed to meet basic accessibility standards, negatively impacting student engagement, particularly for students with disabilities.

Findings from the second hypothesis, which postulated that there is no significant relationship between course management practices and postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, showed that the relationship between the variables was statistically significant and positive ($r = 0.59$, $p < 0.05$), as a result of which the null hypothesis was rejected. This finding implies that courses structured, organized, and managed via the LMS greatly influence how students interact with the coursework and learning process. This finding is in line with other studies that have found that clear and well-organized course material is positively linked with student engagement and learning outcomes (Smith & Johnson, 2019). It also corroborates an argument that course design is critical, but instructor presence is what enables course management to be translated into engagement (Sheridan & Kelly, 2021).

The result of the third hypothesis, which formulated that communication tools embedded in the LMS do not significantly relate to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, revealed that there was a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.05$), which justified the null hypothesis being rejected. This discovery implies that the presence and efficient utilization of communication tools like discussion forums, chat services, announcements, messaging, and video conferencing greatly help to increase the engagement levels among students. Communication tools are important in that they can support interaction, feedback, collaboration, and a feeling of community all of which are essential to maintain interest and motivation in online learning settings. This finding is in line with other studies that have indicated that communication tools within an online learning setting have the potential to stimulate student interaction and improve the learning process (Martin & Parker, 2014).

Findings from the fourth hypothesis, which postulated that technical support services do not significantly relate to postgraduate distance learners' engagement at Ahmadu Bello University, indicated that there was a significant relationship other than the null hypothesis ($r = 0.57$, $p < 0.05$). This shows that engagement of students in online learning environments is positively related to the presence of effective technical support services. Finding from this study supports that of Park and Choi (2009), who underscored the importance of technical assistance as a critical success factor in sustaining engagement and reducing dropout in online courses. Their quantitative analysis of 541 students identified five major factors influencing persistence, among which organizational support, specifically timely technical help, proved essential.

## Conclusion

This research concluded that the LMS features are critical to student engagement. The combination of forums, chats, messaging, and video conferencing capabilities promotes interaction and collaboration, which is critical to improving emotional and cognitive engagement among the learners. Finally, the research also found that despite the weak relationship between technical support services, they are still an important element of facilitating engagement among distance learners. Responsive and on-demand services minimize frustration, create confidence, and enable successful use of the LMS platform. As such, schools need to invest in the development of a strong technical support infrastructure to help students in their education process.

## Recommendations

To improve the learning experience for distance learners and enhance their overall engagement, we hereby recommend the following suggestions:

1. It should be the aim of Institutional Management to optimize the LMS for all users, including those with limited bandwidth or on mobile devices, and to offer accessibility training.
2. Courses should be well-designed, interesting, and interactive by the Institutional Management.
3. The Institutional Management must promote the effective use of LMS communication tools by instructors and provide opportunities for collaboration with students.
4. Technical support and training of students on LMS and problem-solving must be provided easily and through multiple channels by the Institutional Management.

## Limitation of the Study

One limitation of the current study is that the research instrument, while showing high internal reliability and content validity, has not yet undergone Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) or Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Consequently, the underlying factor structure of the LMSSEQ should be interpreted within the context of distance learners at Ahmadu Bello University. Future research should aim to perform these advanced psychometric tests to further standardize the instrument for use across diverse educational settings.

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## Learning Management System And Students' Engagement Questionnaire (LMSSEQ)

**Section A: Demographic Information**

Please kindly tick (✓) the appropriate option that applies to you.
**Gender:** ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say
**Age Bracket:** ☐ 20–24 years, ☐ 25–29 years, ☐ 30–34 years, ☐ 35 years and above
**Frequency of Using LMS per Week:** ☐ Rarely (Less than once) ☐ Occasionally (1–2 times) ☐ Frequently (3–4 times) ☐ Very Frequently (5 times or more)
**Device Mostly Used to Access LMS:** ☐ Smartphone ☐ Laptop/Desktop ☐ Tablet ☐ Others
**Are you familiar with all the LMS features?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

**Section B**

| S/N | System Accessibility | SA | A | D | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I can access the LMS platform at any time without difficulty. | | | | |
| 2 | The LMS is compatible with different devices (mobile, tablet, computer). | | | | |
| 3 | I rarely experience downtime or login errors on the LMS. | | | | |
| 4 | Internet connectivity issues rarely prevent me from using the LMS. | | | | |
| 5 | The LMS interface is easy to navigate and user-friendly. | | | | |
| 6 | I can easily locate my learning materials on the LMS. | | | | |
| | **Course Management** | | | | |
| 7 | The LMS allows for organised access to course content and schedules. | | | | |
| 8 | Assignments and quizzes are well integrated into the LMS. | | | | |
| 9 | I receive timely feedback on my submitted assignments. | | | | |
| 10 | The LMS clearly shows deadlines and important course updates. | | | | |
| 11 | I can easily track my academic progress through the LMS. | | | | |
| 12 | Course materials are well-structured and easy to follow on the LMS. | | | | |
| | **Technical Support** | | | | |
| 13 | I actively participate in discussion forums provided on the LMS. | | | | |
| 14 | The LMS allows for real-time communication with instructors. | | | | |
| 15 | I regularly receive course announcements through the LMS. | | | | |
| 16 | I can ask questions and get responses through LMS messaging features. | | | | |
| 17 | The LMS encourages interaction with fellow students. | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 | Instructors provide timely responses to messages sent via the LMS. | | | | |
| | **Communication Tools** | | | | |
| 19 | Technical issues I experience on the LMS are resolved quickly. | | | | |
| 20 | Support staff is readily available when I encounter LMS problems. | | | | |
| 21 | The LMS provides clear guidance or tutorials on how to use its features. | | | | |
| 22 | I can access FAQs or help sections on the LMS. | | | | |
| 23 | I feel confident that support is available if I need it. | | | | |
| 24 | The LMS support team communicates effectively. | | | | |
| | **Students' Engagement** | | | | |
| 25 | I regularly log in to the LMS to access my learning materials. | | | | |
| 26 | I complete my LMS-based assignments and quizzes on time. | | | | |
| 27 | I am attentive and focused while using the LMS for study. | | | | |
| 28 | I feel motivated to learn when using the LMS. | | | | |
| 29 | I enjoy participating in LMS-based class activities and discussions. | | | | |
| 30 | I apply the knowledge gained from LMS materials in other learning tasks. | | | | |
| 31 | I often reflect on what I learn through the LMS. | | | | |
| 32 | I feel emotionally connected to the learning experience via the LMS. | | | | |
| 33 | I actively seek out additional materials within the LMS to deepen my understanding. | | | | |
| 34 | I contribute to group tasks and forum discussions on the LMS platform. | | | | |

# The Effect of Organizational Justice on School Effectiveness: Empirical Evidence from Secondary Schools in Addis Ababa

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## Abstract

*The overall objective of this study was to examine the effect of the three dimensions of organizational justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, and interactional justice) on school effectiveness. We used a sequential explanatory mixed methods research approach that consisted of a quantitative phase, in which a cross-sectional survey was administered to generate a broad understanding of teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness, followed by a qualitative phase, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide in-depth explanations of patterns observed in the quantitative results. Participants included 502 teachers from 16 secondary schools in the quantitative phase and 12 teachers in the qualitative phase. The quantitative findings revealed that teachers experienced moderate to high levels of organizational justice and school effectiveness, indicating a general perception of fairness and school effectiveness. Qualitative findings supported this result, as teachers described fair workload distribution, respectful leadership practices, and strong school-community relationships as common school features. The quantitative results also indicated no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness by gender, age, educational level, or work experience. However, school type showed a statistically significant difference, with teachers in non-government schools reporting higher organizational justice and school effectiveness than those in government schools. A moderate, positive correlation was found between organizational justice and school effectiveness, suggesting that perceptions of fairness correlate with effective educational environments. However, SEM results showed no significant direct effects, suggesting that justice influences effectiveness indirectly through mediating factors.*

**Keywords:** organizational justice, school effectiveness, mixed methods, fairness

## Introduction

Over the past three decades, Ethiopia has implemented major education sector reforms through successive Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I–VI) aimed at expanding access, promoting equity, and improving quality. These initiatives have contributed to notable gains in secondary school access. For instance, between 2014–15 and 2018–19, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for Grades 9–10 increased from 39.3% to 48.5%, while enrollment in Grades 11–12 rose from 10.6% to 14.8% (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2021). Recent policy efforts, including the new Education and Training Policy and the General Education Quality Improvement Program, have further sought to strengthen curriculum relevance, address inequities, and enhance school-level performance.

Despite these reforms, learning outcomes in secondary education remain critically low. National examination results highlight a deepening crisis: in both 2023/24 and 2024/25, more than a thousand secondary schools reported zero passing students on the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE), and only 4.7% of all students achieved the minimum passing score in the past four years (Hood, 2023). Although standardized test scores alone do not capture the full complexity of educational quality, these results underscore a persistent gap between policy ambitions and actual school performance. The severity of the problem calls for renewed attention to the internal conditions that support or hinder effectiveness at the school level.

School-effectiveness research emphasizes the importance of leadership, instructional quality, school climate, culture, teacher collaboration, and adequate resources (Khan, 2021; Kirss et al., 2021;Leithwood et al., 2004). Among these internal determinants, teachers' workplace experiences and organizational processes are increasingly recognized as central to schools' ability to consistently deliver strong learning outcomes, particularly in challenging contexts (Bernhardt, 2003). In Addis Ababa, secondary schools continue to face high teacher turnover, declining morale, limited professional growth opportunities, and strained relationships with school management, conditions that have been shown to impede teacher commitment and performance (Mengistu, 2012; Metaferia et al., 2023).

A growing body of research suggests that many of these workplace challenges are closely related to teachers' perceptions of organizational justice, the perceived fairness of decision-making processes, resource distribution, and interpersonal treatment (Greenberg, 1990). When teachers perceive fair procedures, transparent communication, and respectful interactions, they demonstrate higher job satisfaction, more substantial organizational commitment, greater trust in leadership, and higher engagement in professional responsibilities (Colquitt et al., 2001; Moorman, 1991). Conversely, perceptions of unfairness undermine motivation, reduce compliance with organizational expectations, and weaken school performance (Yean, 2016). Although organizational justice has been widely studied in business and public administration, its application to educational settings remains comparatively limited.

Ethiopia is no exception to this, and organizational justice represents a potentially important yet under examined factor in understanding school effectiveness. There are many studies on organizational justice in the school contexts(e.g., Elovainio et al., 2011; Horan & Myers, 2009; Zainalipour et al., 2010), yet only a few have examined their relationship to indicators of school effectiveness or student achievement (Peter et al., 2012, as cited in Kovačević et al., 2013). In the Ethiopian context, research on organizational justice is concentrated in the higher education and health sectors (e.g., Adugna, 2022; Getahun, 2019; Gollagari et al. 2024, Mesfin et al., 2022), leaving a substantial gap in understanding teachers' experiences in secondary schools. This absence is particularly concerning in Addis Ababa, where secondary schools represent diverse institutional environments, public and private, resource-rich and resource-constrained, and where school-level management practices vary considerably. Understanding how teachers perceive fairness within these varied contexts may provide critical insights into persistent performance challenges.

Despite substantial national investment and successive reforms in Ethiopia's secondary education system, school effectiveness remains critically low (World Bank, 2024), as evidenced by persistently poor student performance on national examinations. This ongoing performance crisis highlights the need to look beyond structural and policy reforms and toward the internal organizational processes that shape teacher motivation, collaboration, and instructional engagement, factors widely recognized as central to adequate schooling. However, in Ethiopia, little is known about how secondary school teachers perceive organizational justice, nor how these perceptions

may influence school effectiveness. This lack of empirical evidence limits policymakers' and school leaders' ability to cultivate fair, supportive, and effective school environments that strengthen teacher performance and improve student outcomes (Angris & Dercon, 2024). Therefore, there is a critical need for empirical research that examines the effect of organizational justice on school effectiveness in secondary schools in Addis Ababa, where diverse school types and management practices provide a meaningful context for understanding how perceived fairness may influence overall school performance.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the three dimensions of organizational justice, distributive, procedural, and interactional, on school effectiveness in Addis Ababa secondary schools. The study also explores the relationships among these variables and investigates whether teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness vary by gender, school type, and educational qualification. The following basic research questions guide the study.

- How do teachers perceive organizational justice and effectiveness within their schools?
- Do perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness differ based on teachers' gender, age, school type, educational level, or work experience?
- To what extent do organizational justice dimensions predict school effectiveness?

## Methodology

### Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was employed, consisting of an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. In the first phase, a cross-sectional survey was administered to generate a broad understanding of teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness. The second phase used semi-structured interviews to provide in-depth explanations of patterns observed in the quantitative results. This design was selected because qualitative follow-up data can offer richer insights into the statistical findings and clarify the contextual meanings behind the quantitative patterns (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Ivankova, Creswell& Stick, 2006).

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

The quantitative sample comprised 502 teachers from 16 secondary schools in Addis Ababa (eleven public and five private). A two-stage stratified cluster sampling procedure was used: first, schools were selected, then teachers within those schools. This study used the suggestions by Hair et al. (2010) for determining the minimum sample size taking into account model complexity and basic measurement model characteristics in structural equation modeling. Demographic characteristics, including gender, age, school type, qualification, and teaching experience, were collected to contextualize variations in teachers' perceptions.

For the qualitative component, twelve teachers (six female and six male) from six secondary schools were purposively selected based on insights arising from the quantitative results, adequate professional experience, prior school leadership roles, and considerations of gender. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' interpretations of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, as well as perceived links between fairness and school effectiveness.

### Data Collection Instruments

Organizational justice was assessed using a 23-item scale adapted from Niehoff and Moorman (1993). The scale was chosen for this study, for it is widely used in research on organizational justice across different countries and contexts (e.g., Moorman et al., 1993; Kang, 2007; Ramamoorthy & Flood, 2004). The scale measured three dimensions: distributive justice (7 items), procedural justice (8 items), and interactional justice (8 items). Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The items were adapted to the school context, and validity and reliability checks were conducted prior to full deployment.

School effectiveness was measured using a modified version of Shannon and Bylsma's (2007) instrument, grounded in the correlates of effective schools (Lezotte & Snyder, 2011). The scale was chosen because it is a research-based instrument grounded in Lezotte & Snyder's (2011) framework capturing key factors influencing school effectiveness. The scale comprised 28 items across seven effective-school correlates, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Items assessed teachers' perceptions of school mission, instructional processes, school climate, and support structures. Demographic questions, such as sex, qualification, subject taught, teaching experience, position, school type, and enrollment size, were included to examine subgroup variations.

A semi-structured interview guide was used to understand teachers' experiences of justice (e.g., fairness in resource allocation, opportunities for involvement in decision-making, interpersonal treatment by school leaders) and their views on how fairness affects school effectiveness. Probing questions were used to encourage deeper, more reflective responses.

### Pilot Testing

Content validity was examined following Yusoff's (2019) six-step framework, which included expert review and calculation of the Content Validity Index (CVI). A pilot test was conducted with 50 teachers from Temenjayaze Secondary School in Addis Ababa. Feedback on item clarity, structure, and completion time led to revisions, including rephrasing of long or ambiguous items. Reliability analyses yielded Cronbach's alphas of 0.712 for the School Effectiveness Scale and 0.904 for the Organizational Justice Scale. Items with low or negative item-total correlations were refined to improve internal consistency.

## Measurement Model Assessment

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

The 502 cases were randomly divided into two equal subsamples (n = 251 each). Sample-to-variable ratios exceeded the recommended minimums (Suhr, 2006), confirming the adequacy of the sample for factor analysis. Missing values (0.04%–0.19%) were minimal and handled using the series mean. Univariate outliers were addressed through winsorization to retain sample size and maintain scale integrity. Tests of normality (skewness and kurtosis), KMO values (0.903 for Organizational Justice; 0.816 for School Effectiveness), and significant Bartlett's tests confirmed the suitability of both datasets for factor extraction (Hair et al., 2010).

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was conducted on the second subsample to validate the factor structures. For organizational justice, a three-factor model (distributive, procedural, interactional justice) demonstrated acceptable fit (e.g., GFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.957, RMSEA = 0.074). For school effectiveness, a four-factor model (parent support, safe and orderly environment, student time on task, and mission focus) yielded similarly strong indicators of model fit (e.g., GFI = 0.93, CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.071).

**Validity and Reliability**

Composite reliability (CR > 0.70) and average variance extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50) supported convergent validity for all organizational justice dimensions. However, two school-effectiveness dimensions exhibited slightly lower AVEs; their high CRs justified their retention (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The higher-order construct of school effectiveness demonstrated strong reliability (CR = 0.84) and AVE = 0.63.

## Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS and AMOS 26. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize levels of justice and effectiveness. Independent-samples t-tests and a one-way ANOVA were used to examine differences across demographic groups. Pearson correlation was used to assess the strength of association between the two main constructs. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) tested the predictive effects of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on school effectiveness.

This study applied thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the qualitative data gathered using semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using a deductive thematic analysis approach guided by the quantitative results and the constructs of organizational justice and school effectiveness. The data were analyzed in three systematic stages. The first stage involved data preparation and familiarization, and code generation. Initially, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to create a complete dataset for analysis. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the contents of participants' responses. Then, code generation was conducted. The researcher identified meaningful segments related to the dimensions of organizational justice and school effectiveness, highlighted them, and assigned descriptive codes. This coding was performed by the researcher. Initial codes were generated deductively, informed by the constructs of organizational justice and school effectiveness, as well as findings from the quantitative phase. Segments of texts (phrases/sentences) reflecting meaningful units of information were assigned descriptive codes reflecting participants' experiences (e.g., leadership respect, fairness in workload allocation, participation in decision-making). The coding process was flexible and allowed the incorporation of data-driven emergent codes where necessary. In the second stage of data analysis, codes that were related were grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarities. For example, Codes such as "credit-hour based workload allocation" and "transparent in workload allocation" were grouped under the category "Fair and Transparent Workload Distribution". The result is a structured coding framework that contains all codes organized into meaningful categories. In the third stage, categories were synthesized into themes that captured patterned meanings across the dataset. Themes were developed guided by the research questions. Then, qualitative findings were employed to explain quantitative results.

In order to verify accuracy, member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of interview responses with study participants. Peer debriefing was employed to review and refine coding and thematic interpretations. And interviews were conducted until no new themes emerged, indicating sufficient depth and coverage of the phenomenon under study.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Addis Ababa University. Permission letters to involve participants were secured from the Addis Ababa City education bureau and school principals, and verbal consent was obtained from all participating teachers.

## Results and Discussion

A total of 502 secondary school teachers from Addis Ababa participated in the quantitative phase of the study, with an additional 12 teachers involved in the qualitative phase. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the quantitative sample, including gender, school type, academic qualification, and teaching experience. Of the 502 teacher respondents, 369 (73.5%) were male, and 133 (26.5%) were female. Regarding academic qualifications, 291 teachers (58.0%) held a bachelor's degree, 209 (41.6%) had a master's degree, and only 2 (0.4%) possessed a diploma. Teaching experience varied among participants. Specifically, 159 teachers (31.7%) had 10 or fewer years of experience, 170 (33.9%) had 10–15 years, and 108 (21.5%) had 16–20 years of experience. Only 65 teachers (12.9%) reported more than 20 years of teaching experience. Regarding school type, 344 respondents (68.5%) were employed in government schools, while 158 (31.5%) were employed in non-government schools. The participants represented diverse subject specializations.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of the Sample*

| | | Count | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 369 | 73.5 |
| | Female | 133 | 26.7 |
| Age | Below 30 | 43 | 8.56 |
| | 30-39 | 326 | 64.94 |
| | 40-49 | 105 | 20.91 |
| | 50-59 | 24 | 4.78 |
| | 60 and above | 4 | 0.79 |
| School Type | Government | 344 | 68.5 |
| | Non-government | 158 | 31.5 |
| Qualifications | Diploma | 2 | 0.4 |
| | Bachelor | 291 | 58.0 |
| | Masters | 209 | 41.6 |
| | PhD | - | - |
| Work Experience | Less than 10 Years | 159 | 31.67 |
| | 10-15 | 170 | 33.86 |
| | 16-20 | 108 | 21.51 |
| | 21-25 | 34 | 6.77 |
| | 26 and above | 31 | 6.17 |

*Note.* N=502

### Levels of Organizational Justice and School Effectiveness in Secondary Schools

Data from all 502 questionnaires were used to test the answers to the research questions. The means and standard deviations of teachers' responses to organizational justice and school effectiveness scales are presented in Table 2. On a 5-point Likert scale, the mean score of organizational justice perceptions for 502 participants was 3.61 (*SD*=0.81). This indicates that

teachers agree with statements related to organizational justice, reflecting a positive perception of fairness in decision-making, resource allocation, and interpersonal treatment in schools. The mean score of school effectiveness for 502 participants was 3.60 (*SD*=0.58). This also indicates that teachers generally agree with statements related to school effectiveness, suggesting they view their schools as effective in delivering educational outcomes.

**Table 2**

*Means and Standard Deviations of the Teachers' Responses to the Organizational Justice and School Effectiveness Scales*

| Variable | *N* | *Min.* | *Max.* | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Organizational Justice | 502 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.61 | 0.81 |
| School Effectiveness | 502 | 1.29 | 5.00 | 3.60 | 0.58 |

*Note.* Min.=Minimum; Max.= Maximum

### Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of Organizational Justice

Male (*M*=3.63, *SD*=0.82) and female (*M*=3.63, *SD*=0.82) teachers' perceptions of organizational justice were examined using an independent-samples t-test, which indicated no significant gender difference ($t[500] = 0.65$, $p = .520$, Cohen's $d = 0.07$). Male and female teachers reported comparable perceptions of fairness in their schools. The very small effect size supports the conclusion that gender does not meaningfully influence perceptions of organizational justice. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have found organizational justice perceptions do not vary across demographic characteristics. Dundar and Tabancali (2012) reported that teachers' perception of justice did not differ based on gender, age, marital status, or professional seniority. Similarly, Nwanzu ( 2017) found no significant gender-based differences in perceptions of organizational justice. These findings support meta-analytic results suggesting that the impact of gender on fairness perception is often weak or non-existent (Bauer, 1999; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Jepsen & Rodwell, 2007).

However, this finding is in contrast with studies that report perception differences based on gender. For instance, Simpson and Kaminiski ( 2007) found that women are more concerned with distributive justice, while men tend to prioritize procedural justice. Similarly, studies conducted in diverse cultures, including Turkey, have also reported gender differences in perceptions of organizational justice ( Brockner & Adsit, 1986; Hang-Yue et al., 2006; Leung & Lind, 1986). These variations could be attributed to contextual differences in organizational norms, cultural expectations, and gender roles. In the context of Ethiopian secondary schools, the relatively comparable working conditions, standardized salary structures for teachers, and uniform administrative procedures among gender groups may account for similar perceptions held by both male and female teachers.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there was any statistically significant difference in teachers' perceptions of organizational justice based on age groups. The ANOVA was not significant at $\alpha=0.05$ level, $F([4], [497])=[.48, p=.748]$. This result imply that teachers across age categories experience and evaluate fairness in comparably similar ways.

The present result is consistent with Dundar and Tabancali's (2012) work, which emphasized teachers' organizational justice perceptions do not significantly vary by age. The similarity across age groups may reflect the standardized nature of school organizational processes. Regardless of age, teachers are exposed to similar administrative rules, workload distribution systems, decision-making practices, and interpersonal treatment patterns. In such school environments, perceptions of fairness may be shaped more by institutional leadership behavior than by demographic characteristics.

Contrary to the current finding, Yilmaz (2010) reported that younger teachers tend to hold more positive perceptions of justice than older teachers. This difference may be attributed to contextual and cultural variation between study settings. Overall, the findings provide evidence that age may not be a predictor of justice perceptions, particularly in school environments where working conditions are shared across age groups.

An independent samples *t*-test was performed to evaluate whether there were perception differences between teachers in government and non-government secondary schools. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference, $t$ (500) = –3.15, $p$ = .002, Cohen's $d$ = 0.30. Teachers in non-government schools ($M$ = 3.78, $SD$ = 0.77) perceived significantly higher organizational justice than their counterparts in government schools ($M$ = 3.54, $SD$ = 0.82). Although the effect size was small, the finding suggests that school type moderately affects teachers' perceptions of organizational justice, with non-government schools favored.

From this result, it is clear that organizational justice is not only determined by personal factors but also influenced by school governance structures and working conditions. It is important that organizational justice theory also suggests fairness perceptions emerge from teachers' evaluations of distributive justice (fairness of outcomes such as workload and rewards), procedural justice (fairness of decision-making processes), and interactional justice (respectful interpersonal treatment). According to the findings of this study, it is possible to conclude that non-government schools provided relatively more transparent systems of supervision, accountability, and incentive structures that strengthened teachers' perceptions of fairness.

However, evidence from international studies suggests that school-type differences may not always follow a similar pattern. For example, Vurkun, Katitas, and Korumaz (2025) found a different pattern. They report that teachers working in public schools had significantly higher organizational justice perceptions than those in private schools. They attributed this to the standardized and secure employment conditions of public-school teachers, who benefit from clearly defined rules and formalized procedures. In contrast, private school teachers may experience uncertainty due to contractual employment arrangements and varying administrative practices, which may reduce fairness perceptions. Similarly, Vurkun et al., (2025) emphasized that public institutions may provide more consistent procedural justice due to better regulatory frameworks.

The inconsistency between the present finding and the results of Vurkun et al., (2025) suggests that the effect of school type on justice perceptions is context-dependent. In developing country contexts such as Ethiopia, government schools often face challenges such as resource shortages and large class sizes, and limited administrative flexibility. These structural constraints may reduce teachers' perceptions of fairness. In contrast, non-government schools may be able to provide relatively better teaching conditions and more equitable access to resources that lead to higher perceived organizational justice. Thus, the finding underscores that school type is a significant institutional variable affecting fairness perception.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether teachers' perceptions of organizational justice differed by educational level. The result showed no statistically significant difference between teachers holding a bachelor's degree (M = 3.57, SD = 0.85) and those with a master's degree ($M$ = 3.67, $SD$ = 0.74), $F$([1], [500]) = [2.18, $p$ = .140]. Although Levene's test indicated unequal variances (p = .016), the difference in means was not statistically significant, suggesting that educational attainment did not influence teachers' perceptions of organizational justice. This finding aligns with the general conclusion of organizational justice research that demographic variables often explain a limited portion of variance in fairness perceptions. For instance, Altinkurt, Yilmaz, and Karaman (2025) found that demographic variables tend to exert

weak effects on organizational justice perceptions. This study also suggests that educational attainment may not be a factor in differentiating how teachers evaluate fairness.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine as teachers' perceptions of organizational justice differed based on their work experience. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference among the five work experience groups, F([4],[497])=[1.848, $p$=.118]. The effect size was very small ($\eta^2$ = .015), indicating that work experience explained only a small proportion of the variance in teachers' perceptions of organizational justice.

This finding reinforces the results of Dundar and Tabancali (2012), who concluded that organizational justice perceptions do not differ significantly by professional seniority. It is also in line with the findings of Altinkurt et al., (2015), who found that seniority had a very weak effect on overall justice perceptions and its sub-dimensions. However, this result diverges from studies indicating seniority-based differences. Dalkiran (2017) reported that organizational justice differs significantly according to secondary school teacher seniority. Similarly, Yilmaz (2010) found that justice perceptions differ by seniority and that teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience report more negative perceptions than other groups. Further evidence from Tosun and Gidis ( 2025) suggests that professional seniority produces meaningful differences in justice perceptions. Their study reported that teachers with 21 years or more experience showed higher justice perceptions, due to adaptation to organizational routines and stronger organizational commitment.

The inconsistency in the literature implies that the relationship between work experience and justice perceptions may be shaped by contextual factors. In this study, the finding may imply that teachers, regardless of their experience level, face similar fairness situation in decision-making processes, resource allocation, and interpersonal treatment.

### Differences in Teachers' Perceptions of School Effectiveness

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine if teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness differed by gender. Results revealed no significant difference between male ($M$ = 3.61, $SD$ = 0.61) and female ($M$ = 3.60, $SD$ = 0.49) teachers, $t$(291.02) = 0.22, $p$ = .824, Cohen's $d$ = 0.02. The negligible effect size further supports that gender has no meaningful impact on teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness differed across age groups. The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference among age groups, F([4],[497])=0.727, $p$=.574. The effect size was very small ($\eta^2$ = .006), suggesting that age accounted for less than 1% of the variance in teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness.

The study also examined whether teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness differ by school type (i.e., government and non-government schools) using an independent-samples $t$-test. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference, $t$ (262.18) = –4.31, $p$< .001, Cohen's $d$ = 0.57. Teachers in non-government schools ($M$ = 3.78, $SD$ = 0.64) reported significantly higher perceptions of school effectiveness compared to teachers in government schools ($M$ = 3.53, $SD$ = 0.54). This finding is consistent with Arslan's (2006) assertion that teachers in private schools frequently believe that their institutions are more successful than those in public schools, mostly due to better resources and support systems. A study by Begna (2017) indicated that learning in private schools leads to more academic achievements than in public schools. Moreover, public schools do not meet the minimum quality standards required by the government. It was indicated that private schools differ from public schools in making rigorous selection of students, admitting students of appropriate age from families having higher levels of education. As compared to public schools, private schools provide more access to classrooms and teachers, an attractive work environment,

sufficient facilities, qualified teachers, enriched curricula, and a school management focused on results. Additionally, a study by Mesfin Hailu (2023) confirmed that the results of 12th-grade students in university entrance examinations of private schools were better than those of government schools in Addis Ababa.

A one-way ANOVA was performed to determine whether teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness differed by educational background. The analysis indicated no statistically significant difference between teachers with bachelor's degrees ($M$ = 3.59, $SD$ = 0.60) and those with master's degrees ($M$ = 3.63, $SD$ = 0.57), F([1], [500]) = 0.53, $p$ = .466. The homogeneity of variances assumption was met ($p$ = .960). These findings imply that teachers' perceptions of their school's effectiveness are not influenced by their educational level.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether teachers' perceptions of school effectiveness differed according to their work experience. The results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference among the work experience groups, F([4],[497])=1.786, $p$=.130. The effect size was very small ($\eta^2$ = .014), indicating that work experience accounted for only 1.4% of the variance in teachers' perceptions of organizational justice.

### Relationship Between Organizational Justice and School Effectiveness

The study examined the relationship between teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness using a Pearson product–moment correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficient between organizational justice (OJ) and school effectiveness (SE) is r = .43, with $p$ < .001. The result revealed a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation between organizational justice and school effectiveness, r (500) = .43, $p$< .001. This suggests that teachers who perceive higher levels of fairness and justice in their schools also tend to rate their schools as more effective. In other words, as teachers' perceptions of organizational justice increase, their perceptions of school effectiveness tend to increase as well. The sample size for the analysis was N=502, providing sufficient power to detect moderate correlations. The qualitative accounts supported the quantitative findings. A female English teacher from School 1 explained that "fairness in teaching workload distribution, teachers' participation in decision-making processes as committee members, and assignment of extra-task opportunities that would be a source of income made teachers feel trusted, valued, and more committed to instructional improvement". Regarding this issue, a male Biology teacher from School 2 described:

> *I have spent several years here. No one has ever been disappointed with the decisions of the school administration regarding the distribution of teaching load assignments in our school. Moreover, teachers participate in several committees, including the parent-student-teacher committee, the discipline committee, and the grievance hearing committee. As a result, this made teachers trust the school administrators and be committed to their task.*

These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as Burns and DiPaola (2013), who pointed out that "teachers' perceptions of fairness regarding interactions with school administrators, decision-making processes, and decision outcomes can contribute greatly to understanding school effectiveness" p.10. Furthermore, Senol et al (2025) contend that schools can improve their effectiveness and performance when they have a solid understanding of justice and cultivate a culture of trust. The finding is also consistent with previous studies that showed justice

perceptions enhance effectiveness (Choudhary et al., 2011; Moazzezi et al., 2014; Rana&Rastogi, 2015; Whitman et al., 2012). Greenberg's (1987) theory of organizational justice, which posits that employees' perceptions of fairness in procedures, resource distribution, and interpersonal interactions strongly influence organizational outcomes, supports the findings of this study. Empirical evidence from multiple studies also supported the relationship between organizational justice and different aspects of organizational effectiveness. For instance, Kim and Chan (2022) found that employees who perceive fairness in salary and performance evaluation report higher job satisfaction, which contributes to organizational effectiveness, and organizational justice enhances employee commitment to the organization (Hussain, 2022; Lin, 2014).

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlation between Organizational Justice and School Effectiveness*

| Variable | n | *M* | *SD* | OJ | SE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| OJ | 502 | 3.61 | 0.81 | - | |
| SE | 502 | 3.60 | 0.58 | .434** | - |

*Note.* ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). SE: School Effectiveness; OJ: Organizational Justice

## Direct Effect of the Dimensions of Organizational Justice on School Effectiveness

The structural equation model was evaluated using multiple fit indices to determine overall model adequacy. Results of the structural model showed an adequate fit to the data (CMIN/df = 2.869, CFI = 0.906, TLI = 0.898, SRMR = 0.057, and RMSEA = 0.061). Taken together, the fit indices suggest that the hypothesized model provides a reasonable representation of the observed data. The direct effects of the three dimensions of organizational justice (interactional, procedural, and distributive justice) on school effectiveness are presented in Table 4, based on a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis using the Maximum Likelihood Estimation method. The path coefficient between interactional justice and school effectiveness is positive ($\beta = 0.105$, $t = 0.786$, $p = 0.432$), but not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This implies that teachers' perceptions of fair and respectful interpersonal treatment from school leaders do not have a statistically significant direct effect on perceived school effectiveness. Similarly, the path from distributive justice to school effectiveness is positive ($\beta = 0.481$, $t = 0.790$, $p = 0.49$) but not statistically significant. The coefficient for procedural justice is also positive but not significant. This implies that the direct influence of organizational dimensions on school effectiveness is weak and suggests that it may be mediated by other variables.

**Table 4**

*Summary of the Direct Effect*

| Relationship | | | Estimate | S.E. | C.R. | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SE | ← | IJ | .012 | .015 | .786 | .432 |
| SE | ← | DJ | .019 | .025 | .790 | .429 |
| SE | ← | PJ | .003 | .005 | .700 | .484 |

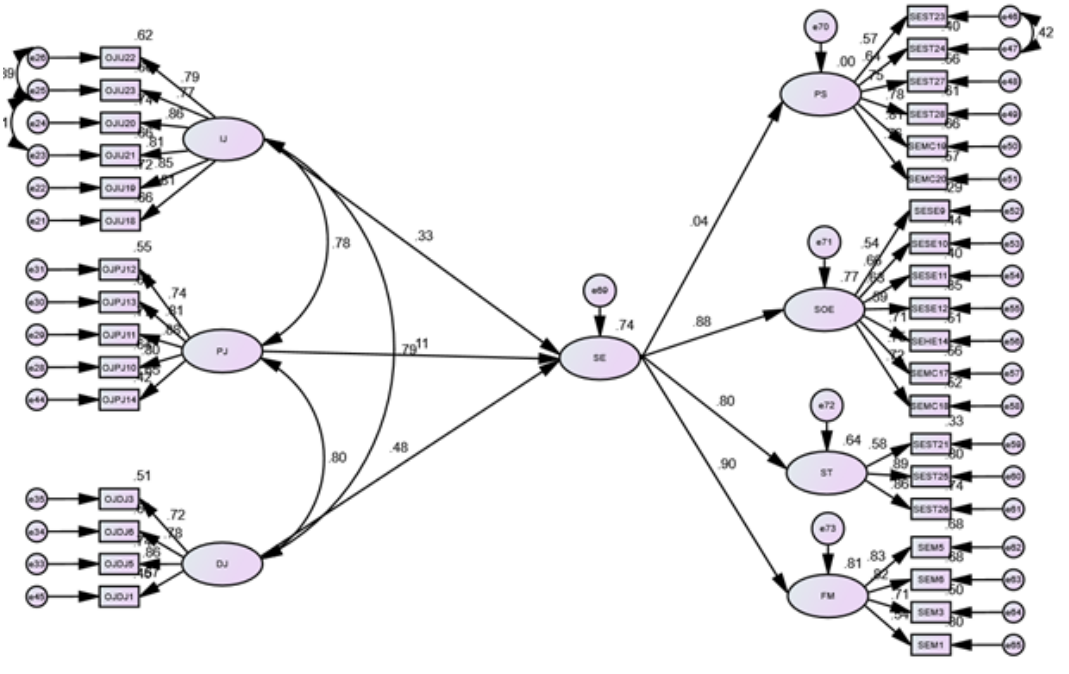
*Note.*SE: School Effectiveness; IJ: Interactional Justice; DJ: Distributive Justice; PJ: Procedural Justice. Significance of correlation $p<.05$.

Despite the significant correlation between the overall organizational justice and school effectiveness, the SEM results revealed that the direct effect of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice on school effectiveness were not statistically significant. This finding is theoretically valuable because it suggests that while organizational justice is related to school effectiveness, its influence may not operate through immediate direct pathways when the justice dimensions are modeled simultaneously.

This may be because organizational justice affects school effectiveness indirectly through mediating variables such as teacher performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and commitment. This interpretation is supported by Ling and Mazni (2025), who found that organizational justice not only has direct effect on teaching effectiveness but also indirectly strengthens effectiveness through organizational identity. This suggests that fairness perceptions may first builds teachers' psychological attachment to the school, which then encourages greater effort, cooperation, and engagement in teaching practices that contribute to school effectiveness.

**Figure 1**

*Estimates of the Dimensions of Organizational Justice and School Effectiveness*




## Qualitative Results

The qualitative phase was guided deductively by the findings of the quantitative analysis. Teachers participated in follow-up interviews to elaborate on their experience with organizational justice and school effectiveness, the relationship between the two, and how justice practices influence school effectiveness. It was identified that there were moderate organizational justice practices in Addis Ababa secondary schools from quantitative analysis. Based on this finding, teachers were asked to share their experience about distributive, procedural, and interactional justice practices and their impact on the teaching-learning process in their school. They specifically discussed the

fairness of resource and workload distribution, decision-making procedures, reward allocation, and principals' treatment of teachers. Three major themes and twelve sub-themes were identified. The themes, sub-themes, and codes are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**
*Thematic Framework Table*

| Theme | Category | Codes |
|---|---|---|
| Theme 1: Organizational justice practices in schools | 1.1 Fair and transparent workload distribution | Workload guided by formal policy; credit-hour-based allocation; transparency, department-level autonomy |
| | 1.2 Equitable resource allocation | Distribution based on formal guidelines; equal access to materials; trust in human resource department-led distribution |
| | 1.3 Consistency and impartiality of policies and procedures | Rule based administration, transparent communication of policies, procedural consistency and accountability |
| | 1.4 Respectful and supportive leadership behavior | Respect, dignity, and professional treatment; non-authoritarian leadership style, empathy and experience of leaders, constructive handling of mistakes |
| | 1.5 Collegial relationship | Family-like environment; strong teacher-principal relationship; professional collaboration among teachers |
| | 1.6 Teachers' exclusion from decision-making | Top-down leadership practices; lack of voice and consultation; reduced ownership and engagement; one-way communication |
| 2. School Effectiveness Factors | 2.1 Strong systems for managing instructional time | Monitoring teacher attendance; minimal instructional time loss; structured compensation mechanisms; use of supervision and reporting system |
| | 2.2 Accountability and monitoring practices | Formal accountability mechanisms; data-based monitoring; role of unit leaders; monitoring of student engagement and progress |
| | 2.3 Strong School-community collaboration | Community involvement in discipline and safety; support from local institutions like Idir; shared responsibility for education |
| | 2.4 Structured but uneven parental participation | Formal committees and meetings; active participation in some contexts (private schools);limited engagement due to economic constraints |
| 3. Link between Organizational justice and School effectiveness | 3.1 Fairness enhancing trust in leadership, teacher motivation and commitment | Fair resource distribution; respectful treatment; increased trust in principals; intrinsic motivation |
| | 3.2 Fairness improving school performance | Increased job satisfaction; emotional well-being; enthusiasm for teaching; positive work environment; indirect influence on school performance |

**Theme 1: Organizational Justice Practices in Schools**

In this study, perceived fairness in organizational justice emerged as a major theme, with participants reporting primarily positive experiences and limited negative ones. Teachers often pointed out issues related to fair and transparent workload distribution, equitable resource allocation, consistency and impartiality of policies and procedures, variations in teachers' participation in decision-making processes, respectful and supportive leadership behaviors, and collegial leadership.

**Fair and transparent workload distribution.** Several participants linked organizational justice to how workload distribution is guided by formal policy, credit-hour-based allocation, collaborative decisions, and considerations of teachers' living circumstances, such as the distance of their living area from the school. During the interviews, most participants described workload distribution as fair in their school. For example, a female English teacher from School 1 explained:

> *The bureau sends circulars to each school outlining weekly credit hours for every subject. These allocations vary by subject — for example, Amharic may have two credit hours, whereas English has three — and school leaders determine each teacher's workload based on this guideline and the number of available staff in each department.*

Similarly, a male Biology teacher from School 2 emphasized that "no teacher has expressed disappointment or lodged a complaint about unfair treatment. Everyone appears satisfied with the arrangement." Other teachers also shared similar views. They highlighted that workload distribution in their schools is fair and aligned with the official standards set by the city education bureau. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that variation exists among subjects due to differences in credit hour requirements. They described the process as generally fair, noting that "workload assignment may differ depending on the subject matter, but it is based on the city administration's directive." School 1 Male Mathematics Teacher.

**Equitable resource allocation.** Several participants linked distributive justice to resource allocation. They emphasized that teachers have equal access to resources and that the allocation of resources is determined by formal rules. Teachers consistently perceived it as fair and standardized. In this regard, a female English teacher from School 1 explained the situation as follows: "All materials are distributed according to established guidelines. The human resource department takes the responsibility of distributing equally and fairly". A male Biology teacher from School 2 emphasized that " there is a guideline prepared by the civil service ministry so that resources are distributed equally and fairly in our school".

**Consistency and impartiality of policies and procedures.** Teachers linked procedural justice to rule-based administration, transparent communication of policies, procedural consistency, and accountability. Many of the participants expressed strong perceptions of procedural justice rooted in formal systems and consistent enforcement in their school. In relation to this, a male Economics teacher from school 6 explained that " policies are implemented equally for all teachers. Rules, regulations, and laws are applied impartially and consistently within the school".

**Variations in teachers' participation in decision-making processes.** Limited teacher participation in decision-making emerged as a sub-theme of critical concern of procedural justice, prominently reflected in participants' accounts. Despite fairness in other areas, low participation of teachers in decision-making is a major gap in organizational justice perceptions of teachers. It is reflected in the lack of voice and consultation of teachers, top-down leadership practices, one-way communication, and reduced ownership. In this regard, a male Mathematics teacher from school

3 explained: “They make decisions independently and then instruct us to implement it, without allowing us to express our views”. In relation to this, a female Chemistry teacher from School 4 expressed her views as “Previously… teachers… discuss… and submit the final plan… However, this year the process has been entirely top-down.”

**Respectful and supportive leadership behavior.** Teachers’ perceptions of interactional justice, which concerns the fairness of interpersonal treatment and communication, revealed positive lived experiences. All participants reported experiences of respect, dignity, and professional treatment, constructive handling of mistakes, and empathy of leaders, which enhances teachers’ sense of morale and fairness. During the interview, a female English teacher from School 1 shared her experience as, “we work like a family. The principal respects us and listens to our concerns… handled privately and professionally”.

Others elaborated that school leaders, including the principal, treat teachers with kindness and professionalism. According to a male Mathematics teacher from School 3, described:

> *Our principal has long years of experience; he understands what teachers value and dislike, and he handles them appropriately and respectfully. The principal is good at handling teachers, but that does not mean he is lenient. When a teacher violates school rules, he ensures that the person is held accountable.*

So, leaders are widely perceived as respectful and humane, strengthening interpersonal justice.

**Collegial relationship.** Furthermore, during the interview, it is prevalent that teachers experience a family-like environment, strong teacher-teacher relationships, and professional collaboration among teachers. During the interview, a female English teacher from School 1 shared her experience as:

> *We work together in this school as brothers and sisters; when I come to teach, I feel free and happy. As a result, I am active in the classroom. I am serving students without reservation. The school leader has created a sense of peace and conducive working conditions.*

Similarly, other teachers noted that their principals handle disciplinary issues professionally rather than aggressively. They shared that when a teacher misses a class, for example, the principal does not shout or embarrass them publicly. Instead, the teacher is called to the office, given the opportunity to explain the reason for the absence, and asked to present a plan for making up the missed lesson. As a male Mathematics Teacher from School 1described”The principal’s treatment of teachers is admirable; he talks to them privately, listens to their explanations, and treats them appropriately”.

**Theme 2: School Effectiveness Factors**

Participants in this study were also asked to describe their opinion on the presence of factors indicating school effectiveness, including parent-school relationship, community collaboration, monitoring of student progress, protection of instructional time from disruptions, and the existence of a positive home-school relationship. The following themes were identified from the analysis: the presence of instructional management and accountability systems, student discipline and learning environment, and community and parental engagement in schools. Instructional management and accountability systems appeared as the dominant theme of school effectiveness.

**Strong systems for managing instructional time.** Several participants expressed their views on the presence of monitoring of teacher attendance, minimal loss of instructional time, structured compensation mechanisms for lost instructional time, and the use of supervision and reporting systems in their schools for managing instructional time. According to a male Mathematics teacher from School 3 described: "If a teacher anticipates missing a class… prepare a compensation plan… another teacher covers my class".

**Accountability and monitoring practices.** Teachers described structured accountability mechanisms for managing instructional time loss. A female English teacher from School1 reported that absenteeism is monitored daily through digital communication: "on a daily basis, the school leadership posts reports identifying teachers who have missed classes… through a Telegram channel". Compensation mechanisms were also widely reported. A male History teacher from School 4 explained that teachers are required to plan substitutes: "if a teacher anticipates missing a class… they prepare a compensation plan… another teacher covers my class." A male Geography teacher from School 5 described a similar system involving formal approval: "the teacher who agrees to cover the class must sign… approved by the deputy director".

**Strong school-community collaboration.** Respondents described the relationship between the school and the community as positive, cooperative, and essential for achieving educational goals. They emphasized that community engagement forms a core component of the school improvement program currently being implemented. These teachers highlighted that education is a shared responsibility involving principals, teachers, students, parents, and the broader community. According to a male Biology teacher from School 2:

> *There is a positive and collaborative relationship between the community and the school. Community engagement is one of the four domains of school improvement programs. Education here is about participation by all—principals, teachers, students, the community, and other stakeholders. When all these works together, the desired results can be achieved.*

Teachers also described the relationship between the school and the community as one characterized by joint efforts to address student behavior and improve academic outcomes. They reported that local organizations such as *Edir* (a traditional social association) and the woreda police are working closely with schools to curb negative community influences that disrupt students' learning. These teachers underscored that student discipline is directly linked to academic achievement. Hence, maintaining discipline is viewed as a shared responsibility between the school and the community. Regarding this, a female English Teacher from School 1 stated that "Edir and the police are actively working with schools to remove disruptive factors such as alcohol-selling centers, chat houses, and shisha houses. A student without discipline cannot earn good grades."

**Structured but uneven parental participation.** Parental participation, however, was described as uneven. Participants from government schools reported that parents often attend meetings only after repeated reminders. A male Biology teacher from School 2 said, "it is very difficult to bring parents… due to the high cost of living… many parents are busy trying to earn a living". Male Economics teacher from School 6 expressed similar concerns: "they tend to prioritize work over meetings." In contrast, male Mathematics teacher from School 5 noted that parental engagement is stronger in private schools: "since this is a private school, parents maintain close ties… and actively follow up on their children's progress."

**Theme 3: Perceived Link between Justice and School Effectiveness**

**Fairness-enhancing motivation, commitment, and trust in leadership.** Interviews with teachers from different secondary schools revealed that perceptions of fairness were closely linked to teachers' motivation, trust, and overall school effectiveness. Most teachers described fairness in their schools as reflected in inclusive decision-making processes, fair resource distribution, and respectful treatment of teachers. They explained that when teachers are included in key school decisions and perceive fairness in resource allocation, this strengthens their trust in school leadership. A male English teacher from School 3noted that "our school engages teachers in decision-making processes, distributes resources fairly, and treats teachers with respect. This enhances teachers' trust in the leadership".

This respondent further explained that, as a result of these fair practices, teachers arrive at school feeling happy and motivated to do their best work. Another teacher similarly reflected that "when teachers feel respected and valued, they work with enthusiasm and take the initiative to perform their duties effectively." School 4 Male Economics Teacher. Both respondents emphasized that fairness fosters commitment and intrinsic motivation among teachers, thereby enhancing the school's overall effectiveness. This is well summarized by one of them, who said, "Teachers' commitment increases when they feel trusted and fairly treated, and this increases the school's performance." In essence, these teachers linked fairness to staff's emotional and professional well-being. When teachers experience equitable treatment and are given a voice in decision-making, they develop trust and motivation that translate into greater commitment and improved school performance.

## Conclusion

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings revealed a clear understanding of how organizational justice influences school effectiveness. This study examined teachers' perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness in secondary schools in Addis Ababa, and it explored the association between the two variables using a mixed-method approach. The quantitative findings indicated that teachers perceived moderate to high levels of organizational justice and school effectiveness. This shows that schools are operating in ways that are viewed as fair and effective. These findings were substantiated by qualitative accounts, where teachers consistently reflected fairness in teaching workload distribution, respectful leadership practices, and strong school-community partnership as defining features of their schools.

The results also showed no significant differences in teachers' perceptions of organizational justice or school effectiveness based on gender or educational level, implying a shared sense of fairness and effectiveness among teachers. However, school type emerged as a significantly differentiating factor. Teachers in non-government schools reported higher perceptions of organizational justice and school effectiveness than government schools. The qualitative findings help explain this difference by pointing to close monitoring and supportive leadership in non-government schools. The study revealed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship between organizational justice and school effectiveness. The correlation analysis demonstrated that higher perceptions of fairness were associated with higher perceptions of school effectiveness. This relationship was supported by qualitative findings, where teachers persistently associated equitable workload distribution, fair decision-making, and respectful treatment with increased motivation, trust, commitment, and instructional effectiveness, which ultimately enhances school effectiveness.

The bivariate analysis indicated a significant association between organizational justice and school effectiveness; however, structural equation modeling showed that the direct influences

of organizational justice dimensions were statistically nonsignificant, even though the standardized regression weights were positive. This suggests that organizational justice may influence school effectiveness indirectly through mediating variables. The qualitative findings provide support for this interpretation, as teachers underscore motivation, trust, and collegiality as ways through which fairness improves school outcomes rather than through direct effects. Overall, the study demonstrated that fairness in schools is a moral responsibility as well as a functional requirement for effective schooling. By linking quantitative findings with teachers lived experiences, the study provides evidence that organizational justice is central to achieving school effectiveness.

## Implications

The study emphasized the importance of fairness in leadership in promoting school effectiveness. School principals should focus on inclusive decision-making, equitable workload distribution, and respectful interaction with teachers. Hence, leadership development programs should prioritize justice as a critical competency. The findings suggest that fairness enhances teachers' trust and motivation, which are essential for retention and performance. Therefore, ensuring fairness in teacher promotion and distributing outcomes reduces dissatisfaction, thereby stabilizing the teaching workforce and contributing to school effectiveness. Since the direct effects of organizational justice dimensions on school effectiveness were not statistically significant, future studies should examine potential mediating factors to better elucidate the underlying mechanisms.

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# Impact of Teaching Method and Stakeholders' Awareness on the Implementation of Ethiopia's Primary Schools' Arts Curriculum: A Comparative Case Study in Two Cities

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to investigate how Performing and Visual Arts education is implemented in enhancing students' artistic expression through exploring the teaching methods and stakeholders' awareness to give insight into the proper implementation of art education for educational leaders. The study employed a qualitative comparative case study research method. Data was collected through in-depth interviews using semi- structured questionnaires, classroom observations, field notes, and by consulting relevant documents. Participants were arts experts, school principals, art teachers, students, and parents, a total of thirty-seven individuals. Even though art teachers are passionate, students are interested, parents are supportive, school principals are coworkers, and art experts are committed, the findings of the study showed the challenges of implementation of PVA education due to a lack of proper planning and usage of teaching methods and integration of the subjects. The study recommends a properly integrated approach, using appropriate teaching methods and educational leaders' careful involvement for the desired outcome.*

**Keywords:** educational leaders, implementation, performing and visual arts education, Primary education, teaching method

## Introduction

Art education is an internationally recognized terms which discuss education through the arts. According to Thong-Ngam (1997), Art education refers to the process of teaching the arts to children, focused on making them become good, smart, and happy pupils who have a broad vision, think far, tend to be good, have virtue, and vision. Art is a body of knowledge that is born out of a set of skills. It primarily includes Performing and Visual arts (PVA) and Literary arts (Klopper, 2010). Art has different types it encompasses architecture, music, opera, theatre, dance, painting, sculpture, illustration, drawing, cartoons, printmaking, ceramics, stained glass, photography, installation, video, film, and cinematography, to name but a few. The role of educational leaders, specifically in developing countries like Ethiopia, is crucial. In accordance with Article 27.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), all individuals possess the right to participate in cultural life and enjoy the arts. This principle is reinforced by the UNICEF (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UNESCO (2006) Road Map for Arts Education. Collectively, these

frameworks establish that arts and culture are essential, rather than peripheral, components of a holistic pedagogical approach vital to child development.

Mid-20th-century Ethiopian education reform aimed to align institutional upgrades with national development. Key strategies included establishing cohorts for overage learners and intensifying teacher training to bridge the gap between academic instruction and socioeconomic needs (World Bank Group Archives, 1962). However, systemic scalability remained limited; between 1952 and 1962, primary enrollment only doubled—from 45,397 to 95,644—underscoring persistent historical barriers to universal access. The Ethiopian education policy landmarks from 1941 onwards with the Establishment of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts and the appointment of the first Minister (Kiros, 1990). In the 1940s, the number of schools and the ratio of students to the general population were very low. In 1942, in poor African countries, school-age children enrolled in elementary schools were 60% to 70 %. During this period, primary school enrollment in Ethiopia was limited to approximately 20% of the school-age population. Proclamation No. 94 of 1947 initiated a critical phase in the development of Ethiopia's education system. By leveraging tax revenue, the government was able to inaugurate primary schools in both Addis Ababa and major provincial districts, notwithstanding the modest scope of the initial funding (Ayalew, 2000). As a prominent sovereign entity possessing a sophisticated and multifaceted cultural heritage, Ethiopia accords significant priority to indigenous traditions within its pedagogical framework. Consequently, national educational directives facilitate and prioritize the integration of aesthetic and tactile arts instruction, specifically aligned with the theoretical frameworks delineated in this investigation.

This study examines theatre, music, dance, and visual arts as the primary components of Ethiopia's primary arts curriculum. It identifies instructional methodology and stakeholder awareness as critical variables, asserting that pedagogical success is contingent upon effective teaching and proactive institutional leadership. Historically, Ethiopian education has prioritized vocational readiness since 1908. A landmark development was the 1930 establishment of the Empress Menen School, which integrated practical and aesthetic disciplines, such as needlework and drawing, into formal instruction (Pankhurst, 1968; Teshome, 1979). Consequently, this research underscores the necessity of strategic leadership and stakeholder engagement to optimize the implementation of contemporary arts education.

## Statement of the Problem

Performing and Visual Arts (PVA) education equips students with the values and emotional competencies needed to navigate globalization and technological change. Beyond fostering personal growth, PVA contributes to job creation and economic empowerment, particularly for women and youth (Patrick, 2014). Contemporary modernization initiatives, supported by the African Union (2020), underscore arts and heritage as vital components of sustainable development. Based on the Ethiopian MoE (2020) framework and other relevant documents, this study investigates stakeholder awareness and the implementation of PVA teaching methods in primary schools across two major Ethiopian cities. PVA education broadens students' worldviews by fostering creativity, critical decision-making, and problem-solving. When purposefully implemented at the primary level, PVA curricula enhance cognitive skills and creative expression, cultivating divergent thinking and long-term adaptability. This research offers significant implications for African primary arts pedagogy by identifying systemic obstacles and resource needs. By addressing ineffective teaching and low stakeholder awareness, the study provides evidence-based strategies to guide policy and curricular reform, ultimately improving educational quality in developing nations. The study investigated the implementation of PVA education in Addis Ababa and Hawassa based on the aforementioned

determinants. Furthermore, the research assessed stakeholder awareness to provide actionable insights for educational planners in Ethiopia, aimed at enhancing systemic instructional efficacy.

## Research Questions

Within the Ethiopian primary school curriculum, the PVA - specifically Theatre, Music, Dance, and Fine Arts—are established as core academic disciplines. This study identifies pedagogical methodology and stakeholder awareness as the primary analytical constructs within the central research framework. Consequently, the following research questions were formulated to guide the investigation:

1. How are teaching methods for PVA currently being implemented in primary schools across the two major cities, and do they align to foster student creativity and problem-solving?
2. To what extent does the level of stakeholder awareness influence the practical implementation of PVA curricula in primary schools within Addis Ababa and Hawassa?

## Literature Review

According to the Ministry of Education Singapore (2018), the primary objectives of arts education extend beyond aesthetic appreciation to the cultivation of holistic student attributes. Specifically, the curriculum aims to develop self-actualized individuals characterized by confidence and critical inquiry. Furthermore, it fosters self-directed learners who demonstrate agency and accountability for their own intellectual growth. Beyond individual development, arts education is positioned as a catalyst for civic engagement, producing active and empathetic citizens who maintain a profound concern for the well-being of others and the broader community.

Extensive literature indicates that arts education augments student competencies in critical and creative cognition, self-concept, cooperative dynamics, and complex problem-solving (Eisner, 2002; Freedman, 2011; Gardner, 1999). The realization of these outcomes is contingent upon the deployment of efficacious pedagogical methodologies and high levels of stakeholder awareness. A substantial body of international scholarship, including seminal works such as *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999), *Critical Links* (Deasy, 2002), and *The Wow Factor* (Bamford, 2006), underscores the transformative capacity of integrated arts programming for cognitive development and social cohesion. Consequently, this study interrogates the intersection of instructional strategies and stakeholder perceptions as critical determinants of curricular implementation. Aligning with the Ministry of Education Singapore (2018), the research emphasizes that student-centered approaches—facilitated through meaningful interactions and positive interpersonal relationships—constitute the fundamental architecture for successful arts acquisition.

Integrated learning method of PVA education in the primary schools has major effects on students' learning abilities and performances (Glenn, 2011). Before the contemporary adoption of integrated learning models, the pedagogical framework originated in 1983 at Hashishi-Oizu Elementary Public School in Japan. Art teachers at this school posited that the arts served as the primary medium for articulating knowledge synthesized via an integrated curriculum (Hashishi-Oizu Elementary School, 1997). The current challenges surrounding the implementation of PVA education are multifaceted, primarily stemming from a pervasive lack of stakeholder awareness. This deficiency is characterized by a limited understanding of the pedagogical benefits of the arts, the persistence of negative sociocultural perceptions, insufficient teacher qualifications, and a resultant lack of instructional confidence (Eisner, 2002; Alter et al., 2009).

## Primary School in Ethiopia and the New Concept of STEAM

The 1961 Addis Ababa Conference of African States highlighted critical deficiencies in Ethiopia's educational development. At the time, Ethiopia's primary school enrollment stood at a mere 3.8% for the 5–14 age demographic, a rate surpassing only that of Niger at 3.3% (World Bank Group Archives, 1962). This starkly contrasts with other African regions, such as West Nigeria and Mauritius, which reported universal participation in primary education during the same period (Kiros, 1990). The primary level education participation rate of Ethiopian primary schools in 1983/84 becomes 42.2 %, which is a great improvement compared with the previous 3.8 percent in the Addis Ababa Conference of 1961 (World Bank Group Archives, 1962). The 1993 strategic goal of the Ethiopian Education policy was a fair and equitable distribution of quality education as rapidly as possible to all regions, particularly to rural areas where 85% of the population lives.

In Ethiopia, the School Improvement Program aims to enhance institutional capacity for prioritizing needs and executing strategic school improvement plans. However, infrastructure and facility upgrades remain significantly below national standards. According to the Ministry of Education (2020-2025), critical deficiencies persist: 20% of primary schools lack sanitation facilities, 60% lack potable water access, only 20% possess a clinic, and approximately 50% lack pedagogical centers for instructional aids. Ethiopia is undergoing an educational paradigm shift toward the STEAM framework, integrating the arts to catalyze innovation and holistic development. This transition, aimed at fostering student creativity and the practical application of knowledge, aligns with the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP VI), which designates STEAM as an essential model for enhancing pedagogical outcomes across scientific and technical disciplines. Consistent with this, the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP VI) of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2010) asserts:

> *Expanding and strengthening science, technology, and innovation in the education system create a wide range of opportunities that can stimulate students' interest in science and convergent creative thinking. This is done through the inclusion of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) education in the national curriculum to prepare citizens to be creative, productive, innovative, and effective. In addition, STEAM-based education will be implemented to improve scientific literacy and utilize the knowledge embedded in the newly revised national curriculum. (EMoE, ESDP VI, 2010, P.72)*

STEAM represents a vital paradigm shift, enhancing the traditional STEM disciplines by integrating the arts to foster greater imagination, communication, and creativity among learners. Despite being among the least urbanized nations globally, Ethiopia is experiencing rapid metropolitan expansion (UNDESA/PD, 2018). This study comparatively evaluates PVA education in two transitioning urban centers: Hawassa, the capital of the Sidama Regional State, and Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. In these evolving contexts, the arts serve as a pivotal catalyst for the modernization and cultural development of the contemporary Ethiopian cityscape.

## Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Stakeholder awareness is fundamental to the successful implementation of PVA. Bagh (2014) and Sawasidibut (1982) emphasize that informed administrators and teachers foster a supportive environment for creative curricula. Furthermore, Thong Ngam (1997) and the Ministry of Education Singapore (2018) highlight that community and parental engagement ensure resource allocation and

cultural relevance, bridging the gap between policy intent and classroom practice. Integrated and student-centered teaching methods serve as critical variables for evaluating the implementation of arts education, as they shift the focus from rote memorization to holistic development. According to Gelen (2011), integrated methods bridge the gap between various disciplines, allowing students to apply artistic concepts to other academic areas. This cross-curricular approach ensures that arts education is not an isolated subject but a core component of cognitive growth. Hashish and Qizu (1997) emphasize that student-centered strategies are essential for fostering creativity and autonomy. By prioritizing the student's personal expression and active participation, these methods ensure that the curriculum is responsive to individual needs rather than being a rigid, teacher-led delivery of content. Together, these constructs determine whether arts implementation is truly transformative or merely performative.

Eisner's Cognitive Theory posited that the arts are fundamental forms of cognition rather than mere expression. He argued that arts education trains students to navigate qualitative relationships and recognize that problems often possess multiple solutions. By prioritizing artistic literacy over standardized testing, his theory emphasizes nuance and professional judgment over rigid rule-following, encouraging students to perceive the world in its inherent complexity (Eisner, 2002). Freedman's and Stuhr's framework modernize the curriculum by shifting focus toward Visual Culture Art Education. This approach extends beyond traditional fine arts. By integrating sociocultural contexts, they move primary education toward visual citizenship, enabling students to critically deconstruct the visual world and making the curriculum more relevant to their lived experiences (Freedman & Stuhr, 2011). Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory validates the arts as essential cognitive domains by defining intelligence as a profile of distinct capacities rather than a single general ability. His theory provides a mandate for diverse learning styles and emotional expression, ensuring that students who may not excel in linguistic or logical-mathematical areas have accessible entry points to the curriculum through music, kinesthetic movement, and visual expression. These scholars provide a robust framework for conceptualizing art education as a cognitive necessity, rather than a pedagogical luxury, within primary curricula.

The efficacy of primary school arts education is fundamentally dependent upon the deployment of appropriate pedagogical methodologies and the active support of informed stakeholders (Gelen, 2011; Hashish-Qizu, 1997). Within the Ethiopian context, the primary school system adopts an integrated curriculum model that synthesizes various artistic disciplines under the Performing and Visual Arts (PVA) framework. Consequently, this study evaluates the implementation of PVA education in primary school by examining the diversity of artistic media employed during instruction, the levels of awareness regarding arts education among key stakeholders and educational personnel, and the quality of pedagogical interactions between instructors and students. By analyzing these variables, the investigation seeks to determine the extent to which the current educational environment facilitates the successful delivery of the PVA education.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study utilizes a Comparative Case Study (CCS) design to investigate the implementation of the PVA curriculum across two distinct geographical and administrative contexts: Addis Ababa and Hawassa. In alignment with the framework proposed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), the CCS design is particularly suited for addressing "how" and "why" questions within complex educational ecosystems. Unlike traditional single-case designs, the comparative approach allows for a "horizontal" comparison across the four selected primary schools, while simultaneously

accounting for the "vertical" influences of regional policy and the "temporal" shifts in curriculum delivery. This design is justified by its capacity to move beyond mere description, enabling a critical analysis of how localized teaching methods and stakeholder awareness levels either facilitate or impede the standardized PVA curriculum.

**Research Setting**

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) identifies 90 distinct ethnic groups within its 2007 Population Census, representing a level of cultural diversity that provides a robust foundation for the implementation of Performing and Visual Arts (PVA) curricula. This study investigates the role of arts education as a critical and transformative subject within the context of rapidly urbanizing centers, specifically Hawassa and Addis Ababa. While the overarching curriculum development and implementation frameworks are established by the Ministry of Education (MoE), the primary school curricula are designed by regional education bureaus in alignment with the General Education Curriculum Framework (MoE, 2020). These administrative contexts suggest that significant efforts by educational planners are still required to ensure the standardized and effective delivery of arts education across Ethiopian primary schools.

**Participants and Sampling Strategy**

Employing purposive sampling, this study identifies participants whose specific professional roles are essential to the research objectives (Yin, 2009). The primary cohort comprises four educational leaders from the Addis Ababa Bureau, four from Hawassa, and one arts specialist from the Federal Ministry of Education. At the school level, each site provided one director, two students, two arts educators, and two parents. These data were augmented by field notes on resource availability and systematic classroom observations (Cohen et al., 2007). While data saturation is anticipated, the sample remains flexible, allowing for adjustments until comprehensive informational depth is achieved.

**Table 1.** Sample size of the study.

| | **Addis Ababa** | **Hawassa** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Educational Experts** | 5 Experts | 4 experts | 9 |
| **Directors/principals** | 2 principals (one from each school) | 2 principals (one from each school) | 4 |
| **Art teachers** | 4 teachers (2 from each school) | 4 teachers (2 from each school) | 8 |
| **Students** | 4 students (2 from each school) | 4 students (2 from each school) | 8 |
| **Parents** | 4 parents (2 from each school) | 4 parents (2 from each school) | 8 |
| **Total** | | | 37 |

The study utilized a purposive, criterion-based sampling approach to select arts educators from both cities. Participants were identified based on three primary criteria: attainment of a diploma-level qualification, specialized expertise in Music or Visual Arts, and a professional background in the Aesthetics curriculum. This selection strategy was designed to examine the alignment between

teacher credentials and the current PVA framework, specifically targeting information-rich cases to evaluate the impact of curricular shifts on instructional delivery.

**Table 2.** Qualifications and work experience of Arts teachers in Addis Ababa and Hawwasa primary schools.

| City | Arts teacher | Gender | Qualification | School type | Year of experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A.A.** | T.1 | M | Diploma in V. art | Private | 8 |
| | T.2 | F | Diploma in Music | | 11 |
| | T.3 | M | Diploma in V. art | Governmental | 22 |
| | T.4 | F | Diploma in Aesthetics | | 8 |
| **Hawassa** | T.5 | M | Diploma in Music | Private | 12 |
| | T.6 | M | Diploma in Music | | 25 |
| | T.7 | F | Diploma in Aesthetics | Governmental | 12 |
| | T.8 | F | Diploma in Aesthetics | | 15 |

The distribution of arts teachers by sex is equitable, though years of experience vary. Notably, all educators possess a diploma, with no variance in qualification levels between public and private school settings.

**Data Collection Procedures**

To address the research questions comprehensively, this study utilized a mixed-source approach, integrating both primary and secondary data. The primary data collection was facilitated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, supported by a standardized interview guide to ensure consistency across stakeholders. These qualitative inquiries were supplemented by direct non-participant classroom observations and the meticulous recording of field notes, providing real-time pedagogical context. Furthermore, a dual-layered investigative strategy was employed to enhance data depth within the educational setting. This involved systematic observations across eight classrooms in four distinct schools located in Addis Ababa and Hawassa. To ensure thematic triangulation, these findings were cross-referenced with a rigorous documentary analysis of educational documents and relevant policy frameworks, alongside the stakeholder interviews.

**Data Analysis**

This study employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to evaluate the impact of pedagogical strategies and stakeholder perceptions on PVA education. The analytical process involved systematic coding of transcribed interviews and the categorization of data through the identification of patterns of convergence and divergence (Gibbs, 2018). By deconstructing raw datasets into manageable segments, key themes-such as instructional resources and stakeholder advocacy-were extrapolated to establish a coherent logical framework supporting the research conclusions.

The observation of eight classrooms yielded a granular perspective of the instructional landscape. Through the application of structured and semi-structured documentation, the investigators captured the proximal dynamics of pedagogical interactions, resource allocation, and the pragmatic execution of the curriculum. This primary evidence is indispensable for delineating the contextual nuances of the learning environment, which are frequently omitted from official reports. To establish a macro-level context, this study analyzed foundational Ministry of Education documents: the General Education Curriculum Framework to assess alignment between learning outcomes and classroom delivery, the School Improvement Program Guidelines to evaluate learning environment quality, and the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) to situate findings within the national education system's strategic developmental trajectories. The comparative analysis was synthesized through the formulation of descriptive summaries for the primary education schools under investigation in Addis Ababa and Hawassa. This evaluative process involved the systematic coding of instructional methodologies employed within arts curricula, alongside an assessment of stakeholder awareness—specifically encompassing the perspectives of educational experts, pedagogical staff, and school directors.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure research integrity, this study adhered to established ethical frameworks for the treatment of human participants (Powell et al., 2011). Formal informed consent was secured from parents and educators, and all interviews were facilitated under the direct oversight of qualified guardians or educators. Furthermore, rigorous protocols were maintained throughout the research process to ensure comprehensive participant briefing, data confidentiality, and the right to voluntary withdrawal. The consent form with the art expertise, school's principals, PVA teachers, students, and parents was discussed to secure truthful interaction between the researchers and participants of the study. Consent was negotiable, and participants were able to withdraw at any point. However, all were highly interested to be participants in the interview.

**Validity and Reliability**

The study ensures validity through triangulation by cross-referencing interviews, field notes, and classroom observations. A purposive sampling approach further validates results by selecting arts educators with the experience of more than five years. These participants meet strict criteria, including diploma-level qualifications and expertise in Music, Visual Arts, or aesthetics. This strategy targets information-rich cases to accurately align teacher credentials with the PVA framework. Reliability is established by using this consistent, criterion-based selection. By following the rigorous framework of Cohen et al. (2007), the researchers maintain methodological consistency. Together, these methods ensure the findings are both truthful and dependable.

## Findings

The study examined the implementation of the PVA curriculum in two metropolitan cities of Ethiopia. Describing the experiences of subjects in the research in relation to the issues under investigation, the relevant quotes of the study topic and what participants said, relevant topics grouped into units of meaning, and writing of textual description were the major steps in searching for the findings of the study.

**Theme one: Teaching methods implemented in the primary schools PVA education**

The teaching methods used in the schools under this study were investigated through in-depth interviews of the participants using field notes and classroom observations. As one art teacher indicated, instruments like flute, piano, drums, clapping sticks, percussion, guitar, keyboard, and electronic instruments, Audio tapes, CDs, sound system, radio, video cassettes, video player, and television are recommended as necessary resources to implement proper teaching methods in PVA at the primary school level. However, many of these materials were not available in the schools where this research was conducted. In a few of the observations, it was detected that the teachers were able to help their students to be able to produce some artworks using the tirade needle and other found objects.

**Table 3.** Required Materials and the Current Reality in the Schools.

| Category | Recommended/Required Materials | Current Reality in Schools |
|---|---|---|
| **PVA/Music** | Flute, piano, drums, guitar, sound systems, radio, video players. | Very limited; some donated instruments or one shared room for all grades. |
| **PVA/Visual Arts** | Pencils, paint, brushes, charcoal, crayons, sponges, wood blocks. | Significant shortage; students often rely on "found objects," needles, or thread. |
| **PVA** | Cameras, computers, internet, TV, film, and video cassettes. | Mostly unavailable; teachers use personal laptops and internet to fill gaps. |
| **Facilities** | Dedicated visual arts classrooms and open spaces for practice. | No proper classrooms; "compacted" rooms force classes to move outdoors. |

Table three delineates the discrepancies between prescribed pedagogical resources and their actual prevalence within the surveyed school environments. Effective student-centered PVA education necessitates diverse instructional resources, ranging from foundational tools and specialized media - such as pigments and textiles - to modern digital technology. Although integrated methodologies ideally require comprehensive materials like cameras and printing supplies, primary teachers often sustain artistic production through the resourceful use of basic tools and natural materials.

**Table 4.** Instructional Methods and Implementation.

| Key Finding | Description of Implementation |
|---|---|
| Adaptation Strategy | Teachers use "open air" teaching to escape overcrowded classrooms, resulting in entertaining and interactive (though unintended) sessions. |
| Student-Centered Focus | Despite material shortages, teachers prioritize active participation and encouragement to keep students engaged. |
| Resource Ingenuity | Use of "found objects" and local materials (e.g., leaves, thread) to facilitate the production of student artwork. |
| Community Gap | Schools are failing to utilize local musicians or PVA professionals as voluntary or part-time resources. |
| Student Motivation | Students show high ambition ("becoming famous artists") and rely on family moral and financial support rather than school resources. |

Table 4 summarizes how teachers and students adapt to the existing school environment. An art teacher from one of the primary schools in Addis Ababa stated the following regarding the implementation of student-centered teaching in PVA education.

> *Our school has a few musical instruments donated by Australia government. In relation to theater and dance subjects, there is a small number of materials in this school. Well-designed arts learning needs a meaningful number of arts materials… Despite these problems, we do our best to make students active participants in arts lessons. (interview with PVA: T.1)*

One of the efforts art teachers were making was taking students out of the classroom and teaching them in the open air. Teachers were taking students to open-air spaces due to compacted classes that prevent them from teaching arts, not to teach drawing landscapes, or to practice a well-designed lesson in the curriculum. Such experience was observed both in governmental and private schools in teaching both the visual and performing arts subjects. However, it was observed that these teaching experiences were entertaining and interactive. One female Arts teacher in a government school stated the impact of infrastructure on the teaching of PVA as follows:

> *The school has few materials. We have some musical instruments. In relation to the visual arts, the shortage of material is huge. We do not have proper visual arts classrooms. The textbook of Performing and Visual Arts for Grade 5 suggested doing many activities. For theater and music, the school has only one special room that all grades can use. The school has a room with some modern music instruments (piano) and a few traditional music instruments. (interview with PVA: T2)*

In relation to the teaching methods used in PVA education, a boy from grade five in the Addis Ababa governmental school suggested the following:

*Whether I do well or not, I expect encouragement from my arts teachers. I expect the school to offer us materials. If the school can do this, we can do better and make our school known by others, and we can become famous artists. I knew this very well. My family is helping me morally, and they are providing me with some art materials. (interview with grade five S.1)*

Data derived from semi-structured interviews and field observations indicate a systemic underutilization of community-based artistic resources. Specifically, schools have not effectively integrated local musicians or Performing and Visual Arts (PVA) practitioners into the instructional framework. The findings reveal that schools lack established mechanisms to leverage these external experts, failing to engage them on either a voluntary or contractual part-time basis to facilitate PVA lessons. Findings reveal that a lack of institutional infrastructure severely hampers the implementation of prescribed PVA teaching methods. To mitigate these deficiencies, teachers need to use personal resources. One participant highlighted this reliance on individual initiative, stating: *"…we teachers are attempting to use internet sources and try to teach art using our own laptops…. In teaching music, …"* (PVA: T.3 Interview, 2024). This underscores a shift from institutionalized instruction to individualized, resource-dependent delivery.

**Theme two: Impact of awareness of stakeholders on the implementation of PVA education:**

The impacts of the implementation of PVA education were related to awareness of the stakeholders. In most cases, it was found that the schools do not use the potential stakeholders (Smith, 2016). As PVA needs the implementation of proper teaching methods, it can be suitably practiced through the support of educational policymakers, educational planners, and educational practitioners. The need for stakeholders' involvement in relation to resources has been well described by one private school principal as follows:

*The materials for the subject [PVA] were provided to the school band through our previous students, such as the prominent Ethiopian musician, Shewandagh, and the known Ethiopian Jazz player Asefa. These known Ethiopian Artists who were our previous students have been giving music education to our students voluntarily. (Interview with private school P.2)*

In the interviews conducted with one PVA teacher in Addis Ababa primary school, the significance of having good awareness was described as follows:

*This year, due to a lack of arts classes, the visual arts students were not able to do the visual arts in the club and after class. Previously, we had the experience that students who were passionately working in the club have even graduated from AAU Ale School of Fine Arts, which is one of the biggest art schools in Ethiopia. (interview with PVA: T.3)*

A parent who sent his child to the government school, but who has good awareness of the significance of the subject, said the following:

*I try to provide him [his child] with some materials like paper and colors. I cannot offer expensive materials. I make my best effort to meet his needs for his education. I do everything I can to offer the materials he needs for his education, including PVA. Every material is expensive. Drawing/painting requires many materials. I am doing what I can, and I promise to fulfill what is within my ability (interview with P.7).*

**Table 5.** Impact of Stakeholder Awareness and Involvement.

| **Stakeholder** | **Key Findings and Impacts** |
|---|---|
| **School Administration** | Often fail to utilize potential stakeholders ; lack of attention to materials and space forces students to copy from boards rather than sketch from life. |
| **Parents** | Awareness varies; some make personal sacrifices to provide expensive materials , while others display low awareness, prioritizing subjects like English or Math over PVA. |
| **Students** | Exhibit high awareness and passion ; some show self-initiated creativity by writing scripts for theater or requesting school art festivals to showcase work. |
| **Prominent Alumni** | Provide vital resources and volunteer their time to teach music in private schools. |
| **Ministry Experts** | Emphasize that local, low-cost instruments should be prioritized over modern instruments to deliver education effectively. |

Table 5 outlines how different stakeholders influence the success or failure of PVA education implementation.

**Table 6.** Institutional and Teacher Qualifications.

| Category | Finding Summary |
|---|---|
| Teacher Qualifications | In both private and public schools, qualifications are generally at the diploma level and do not exceed it. |
| Subject Specialization | Most teachers are qualified in music or visual arts; however, there is a lack of teachers trained for the current “integrated approach” of PVA. |
| Gender & Experience | The ratio of male to female teachers is equal, though their years of experience vary significantly. |
| Systemic Barriers | With over 15 million students, the Federal MoE cannot afford to qualify all teachers in PVA education, requiring collaboration between all stakeholders. |
| Regional Disparity | The lack of qualified PVA teachers is expected to be a significantly greater problem in regional areas outside of major cities. |

Table 6 highlights the systemic challenges related to teacher training and government-level implementation. An art expert in the FDRE Ministry of Education stated the following in relation to the qualification of arts teachers in primary schools of Ethiopia.

> *Improving the qualification of arts teachers is one of the solutions in relation to how art teachers can offer PVA education. We do not have art teachers qualified to teach PVA in its present integrated approach. Especially in the regions, the problem is expected to be greater. We have more than half a million teachers and more than 15 million students. The primary schools are largely qualified to teach general education. Ethiopia Federal MoE cannot offer all these with the qualification of PVA education; all stakeholders need to work together to improve results. (interview with art E.1)*

**Some reflections on stakeholders' awareness of PVA education:**

An expert from the Ministry of Education stated the following logical and acceptable thought on fulfilling the Arts instrument to the proper implementation of PVA education in primary schools. *"At this time, fulfilling the modern instrument can follow after using the local music instruments. Assessable and low-cost materials which can be found around need to be our main sources to deliver* Performing and Visual arts *education"* (interview with Arts expert). According to this expert, offering proper PVA education is possible by using local instruments, such notions cannot be practiced when it comes to making it practical at the classroom level.

The impact of stakeholders' awareness is well explained by one art teacher. Describing the issue, the teacher said, *"students are obliged to copy from the board rather than to sketch from steal life because the school administration does not give proper attention to arts materials and space"* (Interview with art T.6). One visual art teacher in the government school said the following in explaining her observation of parents' awareness of performing and Visual arts education:

> *... at one time I called a parent to discuss ... about a child who does not do his assignment of PVA very well and who is going to loss 30% of his grade. ... as the moment that the parent knew that he was discussing his child's PVA education, that parent said, 'If I knew that I was asked to come to school for this subject [PVA], I would not have come, I have assumed that I was invited to talk about English or mathematics lessons of my child. (interview with, Performing and Visual arts T.2)*

Such experiences indicate some parents' lower awareness of the importance of the Arts subject and their attitude towards the subject, and some students' little interest in the Performing and Visual arts.

**Awareness of arts students on the significance of PVA education:**

The study observed that many students reflect their inclinations to arts education. Students' high awareness was observed to the extent that they could participate even in the planning of arts education. To the question, "What kind of artistic activities do you like to have in the school?" one student in the governmental school in Addis Ababa said: "I wish the school would prepare festivals so that we can exhibit our artworks. If the school has one festival per month, I am happy. We can work more and with passion if the school has such an activity." Students' awareness of the value of

arts education extends to the level that they participated in self-initiated creativity. To the question "How do you participate in the arts activities?" a female student at grade five in a governmental school responds:

> *One day, when me and my friend walk in the field, we observed that the field was full of dirty things. Students drop pieces of paper in the field. We call our friend, collect the papers, and make the surroundings very clean. So, an idea came to our mind on how we should teach students to keep the field clean always. Then we said we need to prepare the theater and teach our friends how to keep the environment clean. We began to write a script on this matter. With the help of our teachers, we make it true. (Interview with a student in one governmental school, Addis Ababa S.2)*

## Discussion

In this study, a detailed description of the two regions of Ethiopia, namely Hawassa and Addis Ababa, four schools PVA teaching methods, and stakeholders' awareness was analyzed, and interpretations were given. The study reveals a significant discrepancy between current instructional practices and the stakeholder awareness required by the Ethiopian General Education Curriculum Framework (MoE, 2020). While participants acknowledge the intrinsic value of arts education in developing cognitive, social, and problem-solving competencies (Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1999), the realization of these benefits remains contingent upon effective pedagogy.

Findings indicate that although student-centered approaches are essential for successful arts acquisition, PVA subjects are currently only nominally integrated. A critical gap exists in teacher qualifications; despite having over seven years of experience and balanced gender representation in both Addis Ababa and Hawassa, no instructors were trained in the newly integrated theater and dance components. Consequently, enhancing both specialized teacher training and stakeholder engagement is imperative to align school practices with national curricular standards. In the four primary schools of Ethiopia, two cities, it is observed that the stakeholders' awareness is found to be good, with its impact on PVA education implementations in the schools under the investigation. Teachers are passionate, students are largely interested, parents are mostly supportive, school principals are generally coworkers, and art experts working in the MoE and in the education bureaus are all highly committed. The stakeholders' awareness is in agreement with literature on the arts education (Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1999), which states that art education has a significant place in students' self-concept, creative and critical thinking.

In relation to the teaching methods used in arts education, this finding is consistent with existing knowledge. Congruent with this, the literature shows that the awareness of stakeholders has a significant impact on the implementation of arts education (Sawasidibut, 1982; Bagh, 2014). As shown in the literature (Alter et al., 2009; Glenn, 2011), the findings of this study indicate that the teaching methods used in PVA education in primary schools have a meaningful impact on students' learning.

## Implication for Educational Planning

Results from the study will make educational leaders need to be aware of the effective implementation of arts education at the primary school, so that all stakeholders can play their own roles. When school principals, arts teachers, and parents have the expected awareness and proper involvement, which make theme able to support the implementation of PVA education, students'

artistic practices could be enhanced. Findings of the study also imply that educational leaders and educational policy makers need to give attention to the difficulties that arts teachers are facing in relation to the shortage of necessary arts materials, the shortage of textbooks, and the practicality of implementing integrated PVA subjects. Proper practice of student-centered teaching of the arts cannot be realized without strong support from educational leaders at all levels. In addition, this study provides insights to all stakeholders, including parents, to be involved in the practicality of PVA education rather than considering the subject only as a motivation to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. As stated in Thong Ngam (1997) and in MoE Singapore (2018), community and parental engagement ensure resource allocation and cultural relevance by bridging the gap between policy intent and classroom practices. The study recommends conducting additional research to improve the current state of the teaching methods of PVA education and for the progressing of using the existing positive stakeholders' attitude.

## Conclusions

The study explores the teaching methods used and the awareness of stakeholders of PVA education in selected primary schools in the capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, and in Hawassa, the capital city of Sidama. Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn as major Implications of Teaching Method and stakeholders' awareness to the implementation of Primary schools' Arts curriculum in two Ethiopian cities. The findings show that the active role of educational planners and practitioners has vital importance to assist for improved level of implementing PVA education. In addition, the role of educational personnel and the expertise in the area has practical importance in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of implementing primary school PVA education. The findings of the study clearly indicate that school principals could contribute to the identification and suggestion of practical solutions to problems related to effective teaching of arts education, and to create awareness in Ethiopian primary schools. Finally, the impact of this study has vital value to enhancing creativity, imagination, self-expression, and to roses and stimulate students towards art education.

## Limitations

Given its qualitative nature and small sample size, this study's conclusions and generalizability are limited to the specific schools investigated. Furthermore, the absence of professional dance and theater teachers restricted the exploration of PVA integration. These limitations underscore the necessity for future research to enhance the implementation of primary school arts education.


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A summary of the reviewers' comments and recommendations on the manuscript will be shared with the author(s). The entire review process will take about four weeks. All the accepted manuscripts in their final publication format will be sent to the author(s) for final approval before publication. Author(s) of accepted manuscripts for publication will be asked to sign manuscript copyright release forms to Educational Planning before publication. All the issues of Educational Planning containing the manuscripts will be published online on the website of the International Society for Educational Planning.

## GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING BOOK REVIEWS

Submission of book reviews is invited with the following guidelines:

1. The book must have been published with a recognized publisher within the last five years.
2. The author(s) and/or editor(s) of the book must be identified.
3. The reviewer cannot be the author(s) or editor(s) of the book under review.
4. The book review must demonstrate a professional tone, and provide positive, constructive and objective feedback.
5. The viewpoints expressed in the book reviews are those of the reviewer and do not represent the opinions of the Educational Planning Editorial Board. The reviewers will bear full legal responsibility of their published review.
6. The book review should range between three to five thousand words.
7. All the submitted book reviews must adhere to the APA Guidelines (7th edition).
8. An abstract of 100-150 words must be provided.
9. The book reviews may include, but not be necessarily limited to, the following sections:
   a. Introduction
   b. Overall description of the book
   c. Strengths
   d. Weaknesses
   e. Major contributions
   f. Comparison with similar books published in the last five years
   g. Potential readership
   h. Use as a textbook or reference material
   i. Recommendations for improvement
10. All submitted book reviews will undergo a blind review process by at least two peer reviewers.
11. The editorial decision regarding publication will fall into one of the following categories:
    a. Accept for publication as submitted
    b. Accept for publication with minor revisions
    c. Revise and resubmit for further review
    d. Reject
12. Drafts of book reviews should be submitted to Dr. T. C. Chan, Editor-in-Chief of Educational Planning.

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## ORGANIZATION

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

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

## PURPOSE

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

## MEMBERSHIP IN THE SOCIETY

Membership in the society is open to any person active or interested in educational planning and the purposes of the Society. To join the Society or renew a membership please complete and submit the enclosed form.

Please forward check/money order/PO to:

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