

School Accountability for Learning Outcomes: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Ethiopia

Begna Ordofa¹ and Amare Asgedom²

Abstract

This qualitative multiple-case study aimed to develop an understanding of school accountability for learning outcomes in Ethiopian secondary schools. Data were collected from 36 key school stakeholders, including teachers, directors, education experts, parents, and students through interviews and focus group discussions. Documentary analysis and observations were also used as data sources. Two schools, one high-performing and another low-performing, were chosen for this purpose. Pritchett's theoretical framework was used to guide the research. The findings of the study revealed that the four design elements (delegation, finance, information, and motivation) in the relationship of accountability were incoherent with learning outcomes in the low-performing school compared to the high-performing school. Academic activity is overlooked, and numerous extracurricular activities were witnessed in the low-performing school. Besides, both schools were facing serious financial difficulties. Enrollment, pass/fail, dropout, discipline, and construction were data types frequently used in low-performing school, whereas process data and student performance data were often used in high-performing school. Participants in the low-performing school believe that nothing will happen to them if their students fail. In contrast, participants in the high-performing school believe that they can be held accountable for student performance. Parents in low-performing school come to school only when their children cause disciplinary problems or when they are absent, and they are unaware of the importance of holding the school accountable for their children's performance. In high-performing school, however, parents and teachers collaborate and share responsibility for improving student performance. Hence, the low-performing school focused on schooling, while the high-performing school-focused on learning outcomes. Implications of the study include ensuring appropriate school systems that are coherent regarding learning outcomes and supporting front-line providers. In addition, further research on this topic is suggested in the Ethiopian education system as a whole.

Key terms: accountability relationship; learning outcomes; Delegation; Finance; Information; Motivation

¹ PhD candidate, Curriculum Instruction, CEBS, AAU, Email-begnahordofa@gmail.com

² Professor of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, AAU, Email-asgedomamare@gmail.com

Introduction

Background of the Study

Assuring learning at school is a struggle for the souls of nations and/or children in the present time (Hanushek, 2019; Mishra & Mehta, 2017; Nolan, 1997). This has been closely linked with a nation's economic well-being. However, learning is in crisis in many countries around the world, with millions of students leaving school without acquiring the most basic skills (UNESCO, 2014). Mbiti (2016) found that even if developing countries spent more on education and access improved, the level of learning registered remained low. In Africa, 75 percent of third-grade students have difficulty understanding a simple English sentence (World Bank, 2018), and 175 million young people in poor countries cannot read a sentence in whole or in part (UNESCO, 2014). According to the 2018 EGRA (Early Grade Reading Assessment) results, only 6.2% of Ethiopian children in grades 2 and 3 reached the intended reading benchmark across all languages (USAID, 2019). The EGRA 2021 performance results show that this outcome is declining (USAID, 2021). In the Ethiopian five successive National Learning Assessments (from 2000 to 2015), the mean of the various subjects in grades 4 and 8 was less than 50% (Tiruneh et al. 2021). The Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap Report indicated that many secondary school students lack the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to prepare for the world of work (Tirussew et al. 2018). Also, the fact that only 3.3 percent of the examinees achieved the minimum score of 50% (and above) on the 2021–2022 Ethiopian Higher Education Certificate Examination was shocking for many stakeholders (Fana News, 2023).

It is a global practice that schools are expected to be accountable for student achievement (Rosenblatt & Wubbels, 2021). The term "accountability" implies the obligation to act responsibly and be accountable to others for one's actions to maintain effectiveness in one's service. The concept, which is especially well-known in Western societies, is theoretically derived from political science studies and ought to be regarded as a crucial tenet of democratic systems (Ricci, 2018). According to Kim (2018), school accountability is an educational reform that uses standards that students must meet to assess their learning outcomes scientifically and holds schools accountable for the results. It is a principle to admire and blame educational outcomes measured by student achievement. It is a data-based activity that aims to improve learning outcomes. These imply that accountability and learning outcomes are highly linked in schools.

School accountability in Ethiopia is addressed in various reports, documents, and guidelines, though the practice was not formally introduced in the system. For instance, the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030) report recommended establishing an accountability system at different levels of education (Tirussew et al. 2018). In addition, the Education Sector Development Programme 6 (ESDP VI) emphasizes the need for accountability to improve learning outcomes in the country's education system (Ministry of Education, 2021). Therefore, this study aimed to explore the understandings and experiences of school accountability for learning outcomes in selected secondary schools in Ethiopia, with a focus on schools in Nekemte town of Oromia regional state.

Statement of the Problem

Various measures, such as working on inputs and processes, have been carried out in many education systems worldwide to address the learning crisis. World Bank (2018) noted that inputs and processes matter to achieve learning. On the other hand, research evidence in many countries (including Ethiopia) shows that this approach has not been able to minimize the problem (Glewwe et al., 2009; Mbiti et al., 2019; Asadullah, 2005; Tirussew et al. 2018). For instance, Ethiopia has invested heavily in the education sector, focusing on inputs and processes, but quality issues still remain low. The Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap Report indicated that for many years, great emphasis has been placed on inputs such as book supply, teacher qualification, plasma education, new curricula, and school improvement packages. In addition, reforms have been made in the teaching and learning process, such as active learning methods, normative continuous assessment, and action research; however, these approaches have not yet improved learning outcomes (Tirussew et al. 2018). The World Bank (2018) pointed out that providing sufficient resources for education is crucial, but resource scarcity in the system explains only a small part of the learning crisis. One reason is that inputs often don't get to the front lines. It is wasted if the inputs are not used effectively and help agents teach to the student's level. Inputs and processes must be coherent with learning. We argue that this is possible by realizing accountability for learning outcomes in the school system. The system or context in which the input and process function matters in order to improve student learning outcomes, particularly the accountability system (Yan, 2019; Mbiti, 2016; Pritchett, 2015).

Nations have increased their use of accountability systems in education to improve students' academic achievement (Rosenblatt & Wubbels, 2021; Parker, 2015) as inputs and processes can only have a major impact in the context of a high accountability system (Yan, 2019; Mbiti, 2016). Accountability has been viewed as a significant factor influencing some aspects of school culture (Begna&Amare, 2022).And this has been espoused by many studies showing that school accountability helps improve learning outcomes (e.g., Yan, 2019; Mbiti, 2016). However, no empirical studies on school accountability have been conducted in the Ethiopian context (Begna & Amare, 2022). Exploring the understanding and experiences of accountability among secondary schools was not specifically addressed. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the accountability relationships in secondary schools, particularly its coherence with learning outcomes. Pritchett's model of coherence between learning outcomes and design elements of accountability (delegation, finance, information and motivation) was used as a guiding framework in this research to realize this purpose. We believe this study will spark more research on this topic in the Ethiopian education system. It attempted to understand school accountability for learning outcomes by exploring the experiences of two secondary schools identified as 'high achievers' and 'low achievers' based on EHEECE results in their natural settings. The overarching research question that the study asks relates to how the design elements of accountability in school are coherent with the learning outcomes in selected secondary schools in Nekemte town. To answer this overarching research question, the following sub-research questions were posed:(1) How do participants in each school describe their delegation in relation to the learning outcomes?(2) How do each school's financial resources support learning outcomes?

- (3) What information is most frequently sought to assess each school's performance?
- (4) How do participants describe the alignment of the motivational activities with the learning outcomes at their respective schools?

Theoretical Framework

This section begins with the introduction of Pritchett's theoretical framework and a review of related literature that can be used as the theoretical foundation for the study.

In his recent work, Pritchett (2015) described educational systems as having actors and relationships with one another. He designed a framework for an educational system that demonstrates an accountability relationship. The framework developed comprised of four sets of actors (see the blocks in Figure 1), with clearly defined accountability relationships between the actors. Pritchett stated that educational systems succeed when there is an adequate flow of accountability in the system, which he defined as coherence between, within, and across accountability connections. Accountability relationships exist between principals and agents. The principal establishes goals for the agent to meet in order to perform according to the delegation. Figure 1 depicts Pritchett's theoretical framework as a matrix of four principal-agent relationships and four design elements for each relationship. This four by four theoretical framework is described briefly in the ensuing paragraphs.

The four principal-agent relationships are politics, compact, management, and voice/client power (Pritchett, 2015). *Politics* is defined as the interaction between citizens (as the principal) and the highest executive, legislative, and fiduciary authorities of the state (as the agent). A *compact* is an interaction between the highest

executive, legislative, and fiduciary authorities of the state (as the principal) and education authorities and organizations (as the agent). *Management* is a relationship between education authorities and organizations (as the principals) and school directors and teachers, or front-line providers (FLP) (as the agents). And *voice, or client power*, is the relationship between the recipients of services, parents or children (the principal), and the providers of services, the directors and teachers (the agent). Figure 1 displays the operation of an educational system. The arrows depict actor relationships, which Pritchett refers to as accountability relationships. The feedback loop resembles an electric circuit through which accountability flows. The performance of the system deteriorates if the circuit breaks at a certain point.

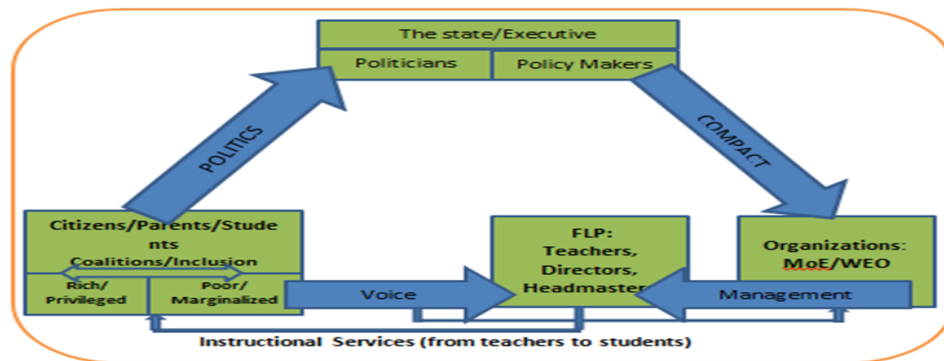


Figure 1: The basic accountability triangle showing a system of education with 4 relationships of accountability, each with four elements (DFIM) - adopted from Pritchett (2015).

As Pritchett puts it, these accountability relationships are built around four design elements: delegation, finance, information, and motivation. These elements are thought to be vital to increasing learning outcomes.

Delegation (D) is a mission or an officially set goal that must be achieved by a school. Schools are service providers dedicated to facilitating students' learning (Gordon, 2022). The World Development Report (World Bank, 2018) noted that the education system in many countries suffers from a misalignment of overarching learning goals. Thus, a clear and coherent delegation to learning outcomes is important to generate relevant performance information for accountability (Normore, 2004).

Finance (F) is the resource allocated to an agent to perform their task. Accountability is the need to communicate how resources are used to achieve goals (Ricci, 2018). However, educational finances are often allocated in ways that are incompatible with effective learning, which front-line providers are given to accomplish (World Bank, 2018; Pritchett, 2015). Insufficient funding for education is a challenge for improving school learning in low-income countries. Coherent financing of learning outcomes is the way to meet these challenges, and information related to students' academic achievement should be collected and utilized to measure schools' performance (Chung, 2015; Baker, 2012).

Information (I) is about how the principal assesses the agent's performance at school. In this era of accountability, data use in schools is critical to increasing transparency and improving learning (Smith & Benavot, 2019; Wayman & Jimerson, 2014). Effective use of data requires clear goals, and agents use it in their daily work to enhance learning outcomes (Hoogland et al., 2016). However, lack of access to quality data and coherence around the use of data are challenges at school (Schildkamp et al., 2014; Dyson, 2020).

Motivation (M) is about how the principal motivates the agent based on their performance. Accountability helps boost employee motivation (Ricci, 2018). It is influenced by situational incentives, personal preferences, and interactions between these two factors (Heckhausen & Heckhausen, 2018). Rewards and sanctions based on educational outcomes are key features of school accountability, including access to government funds, greater autonomy in the use of resources, and bonuses for educators. Sanctions can include deprivation of autonomy or limitation of resources, and schools can be closed if they are inadequate (Munoz-Chereau et al., 2022; Ryan et al., 2017).

The coherence of these four elements to learning outcomes is essential for high school performance (Pritchett, 2015). Coherence is known as a consensual focus, and it describes how all components of a system work together (World Bank, 2018). According to Robinson et al. (2017) and Reiersen and Becker (2021), effective learning occurs within a coherent school system. This is due to the fact that it enables school actors to shift the agenda from being a mile wide and an inch deep to being focused, sustained, and shared. It also enables students to receive close support, which can improve their learning outcomes (Robinson et al., 2017). Thus, coherence in this study is defined as the alignment of design elements to learning outcomes (see Table 1).

This study focused on the *Management* type of accountability relationship (see Table 1). Such type of relationship exists at the school level. The Woreda Education Office (WEO) is the principal, while teachers and school directors are the agents. Here, parents and students are also considered as principals to whom teachers and the principal account for learning outcomes. It is assumed front-line providers as well as

the WEO account to users or the community at large for their children’s academic achievements.

Table 1: The coherence of the design elements to learning outcomes in a principal-agent relationship

The 4x4 analytic matrix for system of basic education				
Four design elements of each relationship of accountability	Principal-Agent relationships of accountability			
	Management	Voice/client power	Politics	Compact
Delegation → Learning Outcomes				
Finance → Learning Outcomes				
Information → Learning Outcomes				
Motivation → Learning Outcomes				

Table 1 shows the coherence of each design element with the learning outcomes (LOs). The arrow shows that the element is aligned with the learning outcomes. According to Pritchett, one key reason for the unsatisfactory results in learning outcomes is that education systems have long been structured with an emphasis on enrollment goals rather than learning and lack coherence for learning throughout their systems. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the coherence of the four design elements with learning outcomes at a school level which is called management relationships of coherence.

Method

Design of the Study

The study involved multiple qualitative case study to examine school accountability for learning outcomes. Two schools (high-performing and low-performing school) were selected based on their performance in the Ethiopian Higher

Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE). This method should not be confused with experimental research method. It is descriptive and a case study method as it does not deal with controls of variables. Almost all of the students, i.e. (98%) from the high-performing school scored over 400, while only 6.1% of the students from the low-performing school scored similar scores. The understanding and experiences in these two schools can help us identify coherence of the four design elements (delegation, finance, information and motivation) with learning outcomes in school, providing a clear picture of the topic under investigation

Context of the Study

The study was conducted in Nekemte town, Oromia region, western Ethiopia. The town is located approximately 328 kilometers from Addis Ababa. This particular research site was selected purposively since the first author works and lives there. He has the experience of working with schools in the town, which is crucial in qualitative research. S-A is a private school established in 1993 (E.C.) with 314 students and 23 staff. S-B is a public secondary school separated from a primary school and became independent in 2004 (E.C.). It had 2,348 students and 47 staff. (Note that these numbers were taken during data collection (2022/23). The national exam (EHEECE) results for the academic year 2021/2022 showed that S-A outperformed all other schools in the town, while S-B had the lowest mark. S-B was less successful, and students lacked discipline. So, many parents want to send their children to S-A because of its academic success and discipline.

Participants

The participants of this study were teachers and school directors (agents); parents and students (principals), and the WEO (principal). These actors were believed to be important for the realization of the aim of this study. An interview was conducted with 16 teachers (T01–T16) who were selected based on their position and experience (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Position is to mean the description of the responsibilities of the participants in the school or the WEO (see Table 1) like the head of a department, homeroom teacher, etc. Accordingly, we have included 4 school directors (that is, 2 main directors from the two schools and two vice directors only from S-B), see Table 1 (SD01–SD04), 2 education experts (EE01 & EE02), and 4 parents (two from each school). Additionally, 10 academically superior students, 5 from each school, and all grades except grade 9 participated in the focus group discussions. However, we could not address other principals and agents as the theoretical framework suggests. This is because we focused on one of the four principal-agent relationships: the management accountability relationship, which is mainly practiced at the school level. This delimitation is made due to the limited capacity of the researchers in terms of time and financial resources. In fact, we acknowledge that this is one of the limitations of this study, as it affects the credibility of the findings.

Sampling Technique

In this study, we purposefully selected two cases based on their achievement in the EHEECE results. One is a high-performing secondary school, and the other is a low-performing one. These two types of schools were chosen because they are found

at different extremes based on students' academic achievement. This gap in academic achievement allows us to easily uncover coherencies and incoherencies in learning in schools, leading to a better understanding of accountability for learning outcomes. We selected teachers and education experts using a purposive sampling strategy based on their positions and working experiences. The students were selected based on their classroom performance, which was related to their rank in the classroom. Students' mark list was used to select these students. This might have helped us find better students who can express their ideas about their school well. Availability sampling technique was used for the school directors. Parent participants were selected based on their availability at the time of data collection. Table 1 presents the background of the participants.

Table 1

Background of participants

Participants	School type	Position	Working experience in years
T01	S-A	Teacher	12
T02	S-A	Homeroom teacher	14
T03	S-A	Teacher	10
T04	S-A	Head of department	17
T05	S-A	Teacher	25
T06	S-A	Homeroom teacher	17
T07	S-A	Head of department	15
T08	S-B	Teacher	25
T09	S-B	Unit leader	7
T10	S-B	Teacher	8
T11	S-B	Teacher	12
T12	S-B	Unit leader	8
T13	S-B	Teacher	16
T14	S-B	Teacher	19
T15	S-B	Teacher	11
T16	S-B	Teacher	22
SD01	S-B	Main director	41
SD02	S-A	Main director	38
SD03	S-B	Academic vice director	17
SD04	S-B	Administrative vice director	22
EE01	Woreda Education Office (WEO)	Head of the WEO	21
EE02	Woreda Education Office (WEO)	Secondary school supervisor	19

Note: S-A: the high performing school; S-B: the low performing school

Methods for Data Collection

To collect primary data, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, document analysis, and naturalistic observation were used. These are thought to help explore detailed information about accountability for learning outcomes in schools. Participants were given the best opportunity to share their experiences, understandings, and feelings related to school accountability.

Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview tool was created in accordance with the study's aforementioned research questions. Even though the semi-structured interview had predetermined questions, the sequence of these open-ended questions were altered based on the interviewer's opinion of what was acceptable and inappropriate with a particular interviewee, allowing flexibility for better understanding (Robson, 1993). We conducted interviews with school leaders, teachers, parents, and students face-to-face in the school compound to understand the participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). At their consent, interviews with the head of WEO and a secondary school supervisor were held in their offices. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, depending on the participants' willingness to contribute. With the exception of 2, who did not consent to be recorded, everyone was tape-recorded and then verbatim transcription was done.

Focus Group Discussion

To supplement the aforementioned data collection techniques, we also conducted focus group discussions with students (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Five students from each school were divided into two focus groups for two separate discussions. With the consent of the participants, each FGD was tape-recorded. The

discussion was held using the local language (Afan Oromo) in the school compound. Participants were advised to openly communicate their thoughts and experiences with school accountability before the conversation. We made an effort to encourage everyone to use this platform to share their thoughts. The first conversation, in S-A, took 80 minutes, while the second, in S-B, lasted 50 minutes.

Document Analysis

To see their focus, we acquired and conducted a qualitative analysis of documents, including annual reports and teacher evaluation checklists. These served to complement the data gleaned through interviews (Bowen, 2009). The document's data were analyzed and evaluated in order to derive meaning, gain insight, and build an empirical knowledge base. This study included documents that were compiled at the school as well as the WEO. The required information was gathered through the use of text notes and a few numbers. Documentation is crucial, especially for qualitative case studies that result in detailed case descriptions (Yin, 2017).

Naturalistic Observation/Field Notes

To gain a better understanding of the school context, observations were made on the physical aspects of the school, such as the classroom (e.g., blackboards, desks, and class size), library, and laboratory rooms, and the types of information displayed on school walls, notice boards, or gates. The field notes method was mainly used to capture the necessary data from these places. This method is known for its flexibility. It allowed me to record all aspects of the school environment, including the school's resources, particularly those related to teaching and learning activities, and the information utilized in the school. An observation checklist was not used to collect

observational data as quantification is not the attention of this study and cannot provide contextual information for the whole school. Hence, this method of data collection was used to augment the data from the interviews and discussions. Furthermore, by documenting the context in which people work, observation captures the entire social setting in which they function (Mulhall, 2003).

Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis techniques were used to analyze the data for each research question. The analysis was conducted in two steps: within case analysis and doing a cross-case analysis. In the first phase, the first author familiarized himself with the transcribed data through several readings. Then, the data were inductively arranged into four categories pertaining to the research questions. The strategic questions driving our analysis were: (1) how do participants in each school describe their delegation in relation to the learning outcomes? (2) How do each school's financial resources support learning outcomes? (3) What kind of information is most frequently sought to assess each school's performance? (4) How do participants describe the alignment of the motivational activities with the learning outcomes at their respective schools? The questions were constructed based on the theoretical framework (Patton, 2002). Secondly, the same author created and collated codes based on their relevance to answering the particular research question and considered consistent codes to generate higher-order themes. In the third phase, to check coding consistency, the initial codes and raw data were sent to the co-author for critical review. Besides, a colleague from a university has checked the final themes to see whether it is pertinent to the aim of the study. Fourthly, the themes and raw data were shared with both authors, and discussion was held to realize the accuracy and

consistency of the raw data (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). The final themes were well described in the fifth step to indicate the findings. Finally, the two authors organized and reviewed the manuscript in an iterative way to ensure its comprehensiveness and coherence with the research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Credibility of the Study

To enhance the credibility of the research, we conducted peer debriefing of the interview guidelines to uncover biases right from the beginning. We also did a prolonged data collection process in the research area. Rapport was also established, allowing interviewees to speak freely and at ease. Besides, documentary evidence was combined with data from interviews and observations in order to reduce bias and establish credibility (Merriam, 1988). A total of four data collection tools were used in this study for triangulation purposes. In addition, we went back over the audio-recorded interview and the field notes to double-check and recheck emerging themes' consistency with the original data. Eventually, a thorough discussion was held with the second author on these themes.

Findings

This study explored the relationship of learning outcomes with accountability by trying to understand the experiences of two secondary schools identified as 'high achievers' and 'low achievers' based on EHEECE results. The findings in the two cases (S-A and S-B) are presented in this section. As a result, delegation to learning outcomes, financial support for learning, information sought to assess school performance, and motivational activities for learning outcomes are the broader concepts (themes) that the initial themes attempt to describe. The initial themes

presented in paragraphs under each case are categorized based on these four major themes.

Participants' Views about Delegation in Relation to Learning Outcomes

Case S-B

The first initial theme that emerged from the data collected in case S-B was that *academic activity was over looked*. This initial theme shows the participants' concern about the focus given to the teaching and learning activities in their schools in relation to learning outcomes. Almost all participants in the school described their thought in support of this initial idea. For instance, a teacher (T10) in the school said: "*The school leaders have limitations in supporting academic activity. They focus on the superficial aspects of the school. They have forgotten the main task—realizing student learning.*" Similarly, another teacher (T11) said: "*I think that more attention is paid to constructing additional buildings and generating income. Learning is secondary in this school. The school's focus is not on academic activities.*" Students said, "*Whether or not we understand what we learn in class is none of their business.*" Hence, academic activity is not their main concern. They also indicated their worries about additional tasks in school.

The second initial theme that emerged in this case was *learning outcome was muddled by numerous additional tasks*. This second theme manifests the presence of many tasks unrelated to the learning experience in the school. Most of the participants reflected that numerous additional tasks unrelated to the learning activities were observed in the school, including construction and income generating activities . Also, more missions are to be accomplished in the school, like realizing access, equity,

increasing enrollment, grade attainment (promotion from grade to grade), disciplining the school, reducing dropouts, staffing, and administrative tasks. And all these tasks make front-line providers extremely busy. A teacher interviewee (T08) said: "*Most of our staff, including the Heads of School, moves here and there without having the ultimate academic outcome or learning outcome in mind. They are not focused. That's what I feel.*" Moreover, generating income (internal revenue) is considered as another big task at the school. The academic vice director indicated,

Most of our income comes from the community. But the community has not been able to continuously support the school due to the current inflation, and it is a very big problem for us to generate revenue. Therefore, we have to sell different natural resources like grass, Eucalyptus, wood, etc. (SD03)

Thus, many additional activities diverted the attention of the agents from learning. Participants in Case S-A have expressed their thoughts on this aspect, delegation, as reported below.

Case S-A

The first initial theme from the data collected in case S-B is that *learning outcome is a big agenda*. This theme indicates that learning outcome is the primary concern for the school. The participants' views indicated that parents need their children's learning to improve. The school also needs it to maintain its acceptance in the town. Therefore, their mission is to be instrumental in student learning. Many participants shared that learning outcomes are big agenda items in this particular school. For instance, one of the participants from parents said, "*The school's motto is*

the learning outcomes. We focus on improving the learner's academic performance. And we expect all learners to do well in school and to achieve this motto."Similarly, another teacher participant said:

You know that too much importance is attached to students' exam results. The school management encourages us to support the students in our extra time. Therefore, in this school, the issue of learning outcomes is a big agenda as it is crucial to the destiny of the school.
(T03)

Hence, learning has got its right position in this school. The classroom activity was another issue which the participants emphasized.

The second initial theme that emerged concerning delegation is highly focused classroom activity. This theme indicates the better place given to classroom activity in the school. Many participants at the school indicated that teachers are actively involved in classroom activities. Parents are also actively engaged in following their students' learning activities. Homeroom teachers always track students' readiness in the classroom. Each student should bring his or her vision with an action plan and post it in the classroom. Giving homework and classwork, correcting and giving feedback, and monitoring progress are serious tasks for all school agents, including parents. Learning activities are given to students regularly. In relation to this, one of the participants (SD02) said, "*Parents follow their children's learning at school and at home. They always check their children's work and sign below it. They provide feedback whenever they encounter any error in the teaching-learning process.*" In addition, another parent participant said, "*Parents have an obligation to come*

whenever the school wants them to discuss their children's learning activity." Therefore, classroom activity has got focus in the school. Next, the findings related to the finance theme are presented.

Financial Support for Learning at Each School

Case S-B

The first initial theme in this case is that *finance is not supporting learning*. This theme notes that finance is not supporting learning in the school. Any participants indicated that construction is the type of activity that takes up the most budget allocation in the school. A teacher participant (T16) said, *"The school management focuses on the construction of buildings. Much attention is paid to this activity by allocating budgets. I think it is important to support the teaching-learning process. Unfortunately, that's not their focus."* Similarly, another teacher participant (T08) said, *"I know our leaders build buildings, but I doubt they have a similar focus on improving students' academic performance."* He added, *"We have financial issues. However, most of the funds raised are used to construct additional buildings."* According to our observations, the blackboard is unsuitable for writing because it is torn and rough, making it difficult for students to see. The financial policy on the other hand, does not give consideration to resolving these issues. The 2022/23 annual report noted that 79.03% of the internal revenue is spent on construction, while only 11.79% is spent on learning and teaching activities. Thus, one can clearly note that the school's financial policy does not support learning. The participants also raised issues related to lack of resources.

The second initial theme under this major theme is *lack of resource is a big agenda*. The initial theme shows that lack of resource is a serious issue in the school. Almost all participants reported that the school lacks resources. For instance, a teacher respondent (T08) indicated: *"This school lacks resources; for example, we do not have a laboratory. Besides, there are not enough classrooms. Furthermore, blackboards are of poor quality (some have holes in them)."* The second director participant (SD03) said, *"We could not meet the goal due to a crowded classroom and other school resource shortages."* Another teacher participant (T14) added, *"In our school, a lack of desks is common."* Hence, participants discussed the scarcity of resources but not any strategies for dealing with this issue and improving learning. In the same line, the views of participants from case S-A related to finance are presented in the following sub-section.

Case S-A

The first initial theme in this school under finance is *financial resources is allocated to teaching-learning activities*. This theme describes the better financial support for learning in the school. The participants indicated that school fees are the only source of finance at this school. However, it is spent on supporting students' learning, next to salaries. The director of the school said:

"This money collected from parents enables us to purchase all materials required for the teaching and learning process, such as charts, models, reference books and textbooks, chalk, chemicals, blackboards, more desks, computer papers, and other materials that directly support classroom activities. However, salaries consume a large amount of the budget." (SD02)

Similarly, a teacher participant (T06) said, “*The main source of finance for this school is mainly school fees collected from parents. The budget is spent on the teaching and learning materials.*” This implies that although most of the budget is allocated to salaries, the next focus area of the school is supporting students’ learning by allocating a budget for learning teaching activities. On the other hand, the participants showed their feelings about how they struggle with the shortage of financial resources in the next paragraph.

The second initial that emerged in this school is *wrestling with the conundrum of lack of resources*. This particular theme shows agents' struggle with this problem to improve learning. The participants indicated that, despite intsourceconstra, agents are striving to improve learning in the school. A teacher participant (T04) said, “*The school has no laboratory, but we use different mechanisms to make our teaching activities meaningful to the students.*” The other teacher participant (T01) also reported: “*We know the state of our country's economy; it cannot afford to fulfill every learning material for schools. As a result, as a geography teacher, I use videos about plate tectonics and continental drift. Rather than simply lecturing from the textbook, I realized that this approach engages my students.*” Hence, the lack of resources is challenging the school. The next major theme is related to information.

The Most Common Type of Information Sought to Assess each School's Performance

Case S-B

Efficiency, discipline, and construction as dominant information is the first initial theme that emerged from the data in this school. This theme indicates the dominant information produced in the school. The participants showed that the

information shared at the school includes school attendance, dropout, pass/fail, and discipline. Many of them indicated that attendance is the most common data in the school, and it is reported to the Woreda Education Office. Next to school attendance, student discipline is another issue that takes up much time. One of the teacher participants (T10) in the school said, "*We share information with parents only when students cause disciplinary problems or are absent from school.*" A student in the focus group discussion also indicated: "*The school does not worry whether we understand or not what we are learning in the classroom. Rather they only come to us when they feel that we are out of discipline.*" One of the participants (T13) said, "*The issue raised for discussion is more about constructing buildings. Academic issues take up a small proportion of the discussion time.*" Likewise, an expert from the Woreda Education Office (EE01) noted that it is common for construction-related information to be included in the report. Besides, information related to club activities, test scores, financial issues, portion coverage, percentage covered by classroom assessments, test types, exam time, load distribution, school dropouts, shortage of instructional materials, and class schedule are the main focus of the school.

The following paragraph shows the second initial theme reflecting the major information.

Loose parent-teacher relationship in learning is the second initial theme that emerged in this school. This idea shows weak interaction between parents and teachers on improving learning outcomes. Many participants reported that the exchange of information between parents and teachers is absent in the school. A teacher participant (T08) said, "*Since my first day at this school, I have not encountered a parent who came and asked me about his or her children's learning.*"

Another teacher participant (SD04) noted, "*We have no communication with parents. The connection between teachers and parents is weak.*" Thus, weak parent-teacher connection is noted in the school. Finally, participants' views in case S-A regarding the theme information is presented next.

Case S-A

The first initial themes linked to information in case S-A are *students' performance, attendance, discipline, and classroom activities, reported as dominant information*. This theme indicates the link that information produced in the school has with students' learning. Many participants from the school said that the students' test results are the information that is mainly produced and exchanged in the school. From our observation, the photos of the top scorers in the national exams are posted on the school gate. In this regard, a teacher participant (T06) reported: "*Exam or test results are the big topics that we share with parents.*" It is also noted that parents' feedback is welcomed to improve students' performance. The other data communicated is attendance. Respondents revealed that students' attendance and discipline are important information in this school. A teacher (T01) said, "*If a student is absent, we immediately exchange information with his or her parents over the phone.*" Similarly, stakeholders seriously share information about student behavior in the classroom and at home. Student discipline is important for the acceptance of the school by the community. The situation in the classroom is also another piece of data exchanged in the school. In addition, information about classroom activities is tracked by the school management and parents. For example, activities such as homework, class work, portion, and class time are traced by these actors. Observation is held by the school management. Hence, classroom interaction is another piece of data collected and

utilized in the school. Finally, the participants explain the parent-teacher relationship below.

The second initial theme that emerged in this school is *strong teacher-parent relationship is important to improve student performance*. This theme indicates the significance of strong interaction between parents and teachers in improving learning outcomes. Participants from the school said that parents work cooperatively with teachers to improve student performance. A teacher participant (T03) indicated, "*We share information about student achievement with parents through different mechanisms, including meetings. Parents must check and sign on the test sheet and the student's exercise book.*" Similarly, T01 reported, "*exam or test results are important pieces of information that we share with parents, and their feedback is valued in order to improve students' performance. We also notify parents when the student fails to complete his or her homework.*" Hence, strong parent-teacher connection for the purpose of improving learning outcomes is clearly observed in the high-performing school (S-A). The next major theme is related to motivation.

Participants' Views about Motivational Activities at each School in Relation to Learning Outcomes

Case S-B

Unfocused and blurred motivational activity was the first initial theme that emerged from this case. The theme indicates the obtuse motivational activity in the school. The main rewarding activities in the school are those that are not directly related to learning, such as the construction of additional buildings, income generation, and teacher participation in administrative tasks. One of the WEO (EE02)

experts indicated that one of the major criteria for rewarding schools is constructing buildings. He said this school has rewarded as it has already constructed two additional classrooms. On the other hand, the school leader said that teachers who actively participate in administrative activities like income generation can be rewarded. Also, rewards for proximity to the management body are known in the school. Besides, many participants complain that the criterion lacks transparency. Others were not sure about the presence of motivational activities in the school. For instance, participants reported that punishment is not common in the school. A director participant (SD01) said, "*We have not punished any teacher so far. We simply provide a piece of advice to correct him or her. So, no punishment, but we have a culture of rewarding.*" One head teacher (T11) participant noted, "*When a teacher makes mistakes, we secretly call him or her at the office and give him or her a piece of advice.*" Hence, the school has a very weak motivation system for learning outcomes. Besides, the idea presented in the next paragraph was boldly manifested among the participants in the school.

The second initial theme that emerged in case S-B related to motivation is *students' lack of interest in learning demotivates agents*. This theme indicates students' behavior demotivates agents in the school. Many participants showed that agents think that students perform poorly in school. They also have no interest in learning. As a result, teachers are discouraged from teaching them. One of the teacher participants (T10) indicated, "*I think students' lack of interest in their learning is a big issue in our school.*" The other teacher (T12) added, "*Students have low interest in learning. As a result, many teachers are discouraged from teaching.*" Similarly, another teacher participant (T13) said, "*All staff members of the school think that*

students have lost interest in learning. As a result, most of them are demoralized and discouraged from teaching their students." Therefore, students' lack of interest in their learning at school is one of the demotivating factors in the school. The third idea boldly manifested in the school was presented next.

The third initial theme that emerged in S-B is *parents' weak engagement in motivation*. Parents interviewed at this school said they wait for the school to summon them. They do not come to the school proactively question the agents about the students' progress. One of the parent participants said, "*The school does not call us to discuss. They are not accessible to the community. They generally do not discuss or negotiate with the school community.*" An interviewee (T14) said, "*The parent-teacher relationship is very low.*" In addition, a teacher participant (T08) said, "*We do not know the student's family. They never came and asked us about children's learning.*" Thus, parents do not hold the school to account for learning of their children and have weak engagement in motivation in the school. The next section deals with the initial themes related to motivation in the case of S-A.

Case S-A

According to the participants' view, *parents 'vote with feet'*. This initial theme indicates parents' active involvement in motivational activities in the school. In the high performing school (S-A) parents would withdraw their children from the school if they perform poorly on their tasks. One of the teacher participants (T02) said, "*If the classroom activity is poor and students' performance is not good, parents will take their children out of the school.*" On the other hand, parents give recognition to better teachers. Parents thank and reward good teachers. One of the parent

respondents said, *"If I'm very happy with the performance of a teacher, I will give him or her some gift."* Thus, parents are involved in motivating agents based on learning outcomes. The second participants' point of view in S-A was presented next.

Students and strong school system involving accountability as motivators is the second initial theme that emerged in S-A. This theme describes another motivator in the school. Participants in the school indicated that students' interest motivates teachers in the school. One of the teacher participants (T01) indicated, "We do not have any support or motivation from the school. What motivates us is the students' interest." Another interviewee (T07) said, "The main thing that creates such initiation in the teachers is neither from the school management nor the salary we earn, but it is from the strong interest of the students in their learning. "This implies that students' interest is taken as a motivator in the school, a kind of intrinsic motivation. Similarly, student participants indicated that students reward better teachers. *The other motivator is the school system. For instance, the students said, "The school policy urges us to work hard. It urges us to identify what we want to be in the future and work hard to realize it." They said that discipline and competition are the icons of this school. Also, the school system urges agents to be answerable for the students' performance. One of the participants indicated:*

"The teacher is regularly evaluated by the school management. The teacher is evaluated on whether he or she has improved learning outcomes. If students fail, the teacher will be accountable for that. If the teacher cannot perform well, he or she will be fired immediately."
(T01)

, TB4 also reported, *"If class work, homework, or both are not given and not commented on by the teacher; if the teacher fails to manage his or her classroom; or if he or she exhibits poor time management, the school will take immediate action, and they must leave with no excuse."* Hence, the participants believe that their activities in the classroom have their own consequences for the school management and parents. Hence, a strong school system, which involves accountability, motivates teachers and students to work hard and encourages students' learning.

Inter-Case Analysis

This section presents the inter-case analysis of the two cases (case S-A and case S-B). This section helps us understand and learn more about each case. This analysis method aims to assess the coherence of the four design elements with learning outcomes and understand accountability for learning outcomes in each case. It is not about examining the elements in relation to one another. The term inter-case analysis is sometimes used as a general umbrella term for the analysis of two or more case studies to produce a synthesized outcome (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). The four-dimensional elements: delegation, finance, information and motivation are the center of the presentation.

Delegation

The first question of this study was designed to explore how participants in each case described their delegation in relation to the learning outcomes.

*Table 2**Inter-Case Analysis on Delegation*

Theme	Schools	
	S-A	S-B
Delegation to learning outcomes	Learning outcome is a big agenda; classroom activity is highly focused; learning outcome is better	Academic activity is overlooked; learning outcome is muddied by numerous additional tasks like constructing additional buildings and income generation; learning outcome is not improving

Table 2 shows the initial themes related to delegation for learning outcomes in the case. The low-performing school tends to focus more on realizing input and enrollment, while the high-performing school is more concerned with learning outcomes and classroom activities. Similarly, the learning outcome is muddied by numerous additional tasks in the low-performing school. In contrast, no additional task was noticed that exacerbates the academic activity in the high performing school. What is curious about this result is that in the high performing school (S-A), the learning outcome is a big agenda item, while in the second secondary school (S-B), this important delegation is overlooked due to the fact that it is obscured by many additional activities. As a result, they could not improve the learning outcome. In the high-performing school, no other competing task diverts the agents' attention from focusing on supporting learning. They have a clear direction, and it is easy for them to focus on improving learning. By and large, this study reveals that delegation in the low-achieving school are related to schooling, while in the high-performing school, they are related to improving students' academic performance. Financial resources are the next point of discussion in this section.

Finance

The second research question of the study was designed to explore how the financial resources support learning outcomes in each school.

Table 3

Inter-Case Analysis on Finance

Themes	Schools	
	S-A	S-B
Financial support for learning	Finance supports learning; lack of resource	Finance not supporting learning; lack of resource

Table 3 shows the initial themes identified in each case. Both S-A and S-B generally have similar financial resource statuses. Almost all participants in the two cases indicated that the schools were characterized by financial deficits. Participants in S-B indicated that finance does not support learning, whereas respondents in S-A believe that finance supports learning and teaching activities. The construction of additional buildings consumed most of the internal revenue in S-B. However, this scenario was not reflected in S-A. At this school, more money (besides salary) was spent on teaching materials that directly support students' learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, financial allocation in S-B was inconsistent with improving learning outcomes. Lack of resources was the characteristic of each case. Theme related to information is the concern of the next section of the analysis process.

Information

The third research question in this study was designed to identify the dominant type of data or information produced in the schools.

Table 4

Inter-case Analysis on Information

Themes	Schools	
information	S-A	S-B
sought to assess school performance	Student performance; attendance; discipline; classroom activities; strong teacher-parent relationship to improve student performance	Attendance; discipline; grade attainment or pass/fail, enrollment, gender parity, number of SNED and female students; income generation; constructing; loose parent-teacher relationship on improving students' learning

Table 4 shows the initial themes that are identified in each case. Attendance and student discipline common for both cases. On the other hand, student performance and classroom activities are the landmark of S-A. In addition, strong parent-teacher relationship was noticed in S-A on improving learning in the school. S-B tends to produce data related to construction and income generation activities. Hence, S-B places more value on input data while S-A on student performance.

Finally, motivational activities between the two cases are analyzed in the next section.

Motivation

The fourth research question in this study was designed to explore the

motivational activities in each case in terms of learning outcomes.

Table 5

Inter-Case Analysis on Motivation

Themes	Schools	
	S-A	S-B
motivational activities for learning outcomes	Parents ‘vote with feet’; Students and strong school system involving accountability as motivators: Agents felt that they are accountable for their actions in the school	Unfocused and blurred motivational activity; students' lack of interest to learning demotivates agents; parents' weak engagement in motivation; No answerability: agents do not think that they are accountable for the students' achievement

Table 5 shows the initial themes identified in each case. In S-B, students' lack of interest in learning and poor parental oversight demotivated agents. In S-A, students' greater interest in learning and strong parental oversight motivated agents positively. What was surprising is that in S-B, insufficient attention seems to be paid to the issue of answerability based on learning outcomes. The participants felt that no matter what the outcome of the student academics was, nothing would happen to them. In S-A, participants felt that their students' learning outcomes determined their future. For instance, parents can withdraw their children if the students' performance is very low.

Overall, this inter-case analysis indicates that school accountability in S-B was inconsistent with learning outcomes. Rather, it was coherent with schooling. In S-A, learning outcomes were central to school accountability.

The discussion of the core findings of the present study in relation to relevant literature, evidence from previous research studies, and the researchers' personal and professional reflections are presented below

Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings in order to reach a conclusion. A comparison is also made between the cases to get a better understanding of the topic.

Delegation and its Coherence to Learning Outcomes

Participants from the schools described the school's delegation in different ways. The low-performing school stated that its mission is not centered on academic activities. The high-performing school, on the other hand, indicated that academic activity is the primary task in the school. Similarly, the results showed that the low-performing school has a lot more competing missions than the high-performing school. Schools were supposed to be delegated mainly to ensure students' learning (Pritchett, 2015). However, reality does not always reflect this. This delegation has been muddled by numerous additional tasks. The result of the study shows that in low-performing school, many missions are given to the school's frontline workers, teachers, and school directors. The major missions are constructing buildings, generating income, ensuring enrollment, equity, and grade attainment, realizing the

bureaucracy or process, and school discipline, competing with learning outcomes. Most of these missions are related to schooling. A school system that stands for schooling but not for learning cannot improve learning outcomes (Tirussew et al. 2018). Furthermore, it appears that the low-performing school was admitting more students, with more than 90 students in each classroom. This suggests that they intend only to increase the number of students in the school. Hence, we can understand that their delegation is increasing enrollment, not on improving learning achievement. This finding coincides with the result of the Ethiopian education development roadmap [2018–30] (Tirussew et al. 2018). And, according to the writers' view, too many competing missions to a school can make agents' delegation pointless and unclear and it diverts their attention from focusing on academic activities. Normore (2004) noted that without clear missions and their understanding by all stakeholders, it is difficult to achieve school accountability. On the contrary, in the high-performing school the mission appeared to be mainly focused on improving students' performance. Fewer competing tasks take their attention away from academic performance. They have a clear direction. Hence, it is easy for them to focus on improving learning. Almost all of the participants indicated that the primary agenda of the school is improving students' academic achievement. As a result, their performance on the national examination indicated that the school is doing well. Kim (2018) indicated that the recent trend in the school system around the world is making schools accountable for learning outcomes aimed at improving students' academic achievement. Moreover, Pritchett (2015) noted that accountability must be coherent with learning outcomes to foster student learning. However, the World Bank (2018) showed that the education system in many countries suffers from a misalignment of

the overarching learning goals. Other goals intervene and challenge efforts to improve learning outcomes. Also, the different parts of the education system do not work together.

Compared to the high-performing school, incoherence in delegation of learning outcomes is observed in the low-performing school. We contend that schools must have distinct missions that are consistent with enhancing student learning. In actual fact, this mission should be given more financial support.

The Coherence of Financial Resources to Learning Outcomes

The second objective of this study was to understand how finance supports learning in schools. Financial support for learning is the first general theme that was derived from the initial themes found in the result section. It means that the first thing (i.e., students' learning) should be supported first. The evidence has shown that the school finance is not supporting learning in low-performing school. This is contrary to the finding of the high-performing school. However, financial deficiency is a feature of both schools.

In poor countries like Ethiopia, being selective in allocating budgets is crucial. Finance is an important resource to support agent's performance to achieve learning outcomes (Ricci, 2018). Many of the blackboards in the low-performing school is not suitable for teaching and learning activities. However, the school has been spending more money on constructing new buildings. This implies that construction takes precedence over supporting teaching and learning activities. This is because constructing more buildings is a rewarding activity at the school, which might have also resulted in poor academic achievement. In relation to this, Willis and

Kissane (1997) argued that school accountability should be based on student outcomes and not on inputs like school buildings. Almost all teachers at this school reported that financial resources do not support student learning. Pritchett (2015) noted that finance is being utilized incompatibly with what front-line providers are given to accomplish, improving learning in many education systems. And this will affect the learning outcomes negatively. However, this scenario is not reflected in the high-performing school. More money is spent on buying instructional materials (e.g., blackboards, models, charts, and books) that directly support classroom teaching and learning activities. In addition, parents spend more money to support students' learning. Jhang and Lee (2018) showed that parents' involvement in school is related to the students' achievement. Therefore, financial allocation at the low-performing school is inconsistent with improving learning outcomes compared to the high-performing school.

Hence, the result shows that financial resources are loosely allocated for supporting learning in the low-performing school. The school also mainly focuses on supporting construction (school improvement) more than any other activity (i.e., input). According to Bush et al. (2006), as cited in Xaba & Nugbane (2010), incoherent financial resources for learning are the main challenges in the school system. We think that more budgets should be allocated to schools in Ethiopia, and they should be utilized in accordance with learning outcomes.

The Coherence of School Information to Learning Outcomes

Using data on information flow, a comparison was made between the two schools based on four major themes in order to gain insight into the subject being

studied. The evidence suggests that data related to efficiency is common in both schools. Similarly, the status of students' discipline is important information exchanged among actors in the two schools. However, the difference comes when we come to construction and data flow between teachers and parents. Accordingly, in the low-performing school, construction is an essential activity. Besides, in the document analysis, data types related to input, access, and process are predominantly utilized in this school. The WEO receives a written report from the school. But no evidence was found for using the report to improve school accountability for learning outcomes in the low-performing school. Data linked to student learning is important for making informed decisions in education, as it helps policymakers and other stakeholders make informed decisions (World Bank, 2018; Hoogland et al., 2016; Schildkamp et al., 2014). On the other hand, the learning-based parent-teacher relationship is stronger in the high-performing school than in the low-performing school. In the latter school, the big issue discussed with parents is about inputs, including financial issues, not learning outcomes. However, data mainly related to students' learning is needed for all stakeholders, including parents, to diagnose existing problems in student learning and seek strategies (Custer et al. 2018). Moreover, data exchange will improve transparency, which is one of the features of an accountability system (Smith & Benavot, 2019).

The low-performing school showed incoherence in information utilization for learning outcomes compared to the high-performing school, which has better coherence with the learning outcome. We believe that schools should seek out more useful data for learning and foster a culture of using reports to improve students'

academic performance. They should also develop mechanisms for parents to constantly exchange up-to-date information, primarily about their children's learning.

Coherence of Motivational Activities with Learning Outcomes

This is the study's fourth goal, which sought to understand how school motivational activities were linked to academic achievement.

The result of this study shows that motivational activity is an unfocused and blurred task in the low-performing school. In addition, parents' engagement in motivation is very weak in this school. On the other hand, a strong school system involving accountability motivates agents in the high-performing school. Parents also punish the same school by pulling out their children from the school if the school does not perform well on student performance ('voting with feet'). But punishment is not well known in the low-performing school. Loh and Hu (2014) noted that school accountability is characterized by motivating agents based on their performance. They will be judged effective or ineffective based on the academic performance of students. For instance, if schools are not effective, sanctions like school closures, external intervention of programs, or deprivation of autonomy in using resources are common in many education systems around the world (Munoz-Chereau et al., 2022). Hence, we suggest a variety of motivational activities be designed in the Ethiopian education system to encourage achievement of high learning outcomes.

Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed at investigating school accountability for learning outcomes in two secondary schools using a qualitative case study methodology. It was revealed a policy gap exists related to school accountability despite the numerous failures in secondary school learning outcomes in Ethiopia. The findings of this study may help address the current pressing issue of learning outcomes in the Ethiopian education system.

The findings of the study revealed that the four design elements (delegation, finance, information and motivation) in the relationship of accountability were incoherent with learning outcomes in the low-performing school compared to the high-performing school. There are numerous extracurricular activities at the school, which led them to place less emphasis on supporting academic activities. Both schools are facing serious financial difficulties. Additionally, the high-performing school uses data for processes and student performance, unlike the low-performing school that frequently uses data for efficiency, equity, enrollment, discipline, and construction but not for learning outcomes. In the high-performing school, parents and teachers work together and share responsibility to enhance student performance, but in the low-performing school, parents come to school only when students cause disciplinary problems or are absent from school. Finally, the findings of this study indicated that motivational activities in the low-performing school are either meaningless or unrelated to student performance. Furthermore, parents are unaware of the importance of holding the school accountable for their children's performance. The participants in the low-performing school believe that nothing will happen to them if their students fail; there is no answerability, whereas participants in the high-

performing school believe that they can be held accountable for their actions. Based on the evidence from the two schools, it is possible to conclude that the presence or absence of accountability for learning outcomes may explain the performance difference between the two schools. As the research framework is new, testing it further in more schools may generate a good theory.

These findings have significant implications for our understanding of how accountability is important to improving learning outcomes in school. We believe that schools should focus on improving student learning by aligning the four design elements (delegation, finance, information and motivation) with the learning outcomes. Besides, the study implies the need for the Ministry of Education and the Regional Education Bureau to ensure effective policies and accountability mechanisms involving parents in delivering instructional services at school. We suggest also more research to be conducted on this topic in the Ethiopian education system as a whole.

References

- Asadullah, M. N. (2005). The effect of class size on student achievement: Evidence from Bangladesh. *Applied Economics Letters*, 12(4), 217-221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350485042000323608>
- Baker, B. (2012). Revisiting the age old question: Does money matter in education? Albert Shanker Institute, 12. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528632.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2023)
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative research journal*, 9(2), 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Browes, N. (2021). Test-based accountability and perceived pressure in an autonomous education system: does school performance affect teacher experience? *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 33(3), 483-509. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-021-09365-9>
- Chung, I. H. (2015). Education finance reform, education spending, and student performance: Evidence from Maryland's Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act. *Education and Urban Society*, 47(4), 412-432. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124513498413>
- Custer, S., King, E. M., Atinc, T. M., Read, L., & Sethi, T. (2018). Toward Data-Driven Education Systems: Insights into Using Information to Measure Results and Manage Change. Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED583026.pdf> (accessed 31 July 2023)
- Dyson, L. (2020). Walking on a tightrope: Agency and accountability in practitioner inquiry in New Zealand secondary schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 93, Article 103075. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103075>
- Fana News. (2023, January 27). “12 ኛክፍል ብሔራዊ ፈተናው ጤን ላይ የገኙ ምህረት ሚኒስቴር የሰጠው ሙሉ ለሙሉ ግለጫ” [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4SlyE3we9Nk>

- Glewwe, P., Kremer, M., & Moulin, S. (2009). Many children left behind? Textbooks and test scores in Kenya. *American economic journal: Applied economics*, 1(1), 112-35. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.1.1.112>
- Gordon, S. P. (2022). The Service-Oriented School. In *Developing Successful Schools: A Holistic Approach* (pp. 37-60). Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06916-1_3
- Hanushek, E. A. (2019). Testing, accountability, and the American economy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 683(1), 110–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716219841299>
- Heckhausen, J., & Heckhausen, H. (2018). Motivation and action: Introduction and overview. *Motivation and action*, 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65094-4_1
- Hoogland, I., Schildkamp, K., Van der Kleij, F., Heitink, M., Kippers, W., Veldkamp, B., & Dijkstra, A. M. (2016). Prerequisites for data-based decision making in the classroom: Research evidence and practical illustrations. *Teaching and teacher education*, 60, 377-386. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.07.012>
- Hunziker, S., & Blankenagel, M. (2021). Multiple case research design. *Research Design in Business and Management: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers*, 171-186. Springer Gabler, Wiesbaden. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-34357-6_9
- Jhang, F. H., & Lee, Y. T. (2018). The role of parental involvement in academic achievement trajectories of elementary school children with Southeast Asian and Taiwanese mothers. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 89, 68-79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.09.003>
- Johnson R., B., & Christensen L. (2014). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches* (5th ed.) USA. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Kim, J. (2018). School accountability and standard-based education reform: The recall of social efficiency movement and scientific management. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 60, 80–87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2017.11.003>
- Loh, J., & Hu, G. (2014). Subdued by the system: Neoliberalism and the beginning teacher. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 41, 13–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.03.005>
- Mbiti, I. M. (2016). The need for accountability in education in developing countries. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(3), —pp109–132. <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.30.3.109>
- Mbiti, I., Muralidharan, K., Romero, M., Schipper, Y., Manda, C., & Rajani, R. (2019). Inputs, incentives, and complementarities in education: Experimental evidence from

- Tanzania. Quarterly Journal of Economics, 134(3), 1627–1673.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjz010>
- Ministry of Education (2021). Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education: Education Sector Development Programme VI (ESDP VI) 2013 – 2017 E.C. 2020/21 – 2024/25 G.C.
https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/ethiopia_esdp_iv.pdf,
(accessed 15 January 2023)
- Mishra, P., & Mehta, R. (2017). What we educators get wrong about 21st-century learning: Results of a survey. *Journal of Digital learning in Teacher education*, 33(1), 6-19. 10.1080/21532974.2016.1242392
- Moser, A., & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *European journal of general practice*, 24(1), 9-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375091>
- Mulhall, A. (2003). In the field: notes on observation in qualitative research. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 41(3), 306-313. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.2003.02514.x>
- Munoz-Chereau, B., González, Á., & Meyers, C. V. (2022). How are the ‘losers’ of the school accountability system constructed in Chile, the USA and England?. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 52(7), 1125-1144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1851593>
- Nolan, M. (1997). Art connections: Using the Humanities to prepare the secondary student for the age of information. *Reading & Writing Quarterly: Overcoming Learning Difficulties*, 13(4), 369-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057356970130407>
- Normore, A. H. (2004). The edge of chaos: School administrators and accountability. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 42(1), 55-77. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230410517477>
- Begna, O., & Amare, A. (2022). School accountability and its relationship with learning outcomes: A systematic literature review. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 6(1), 100358. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022>.
- Parker, G. (2015). Teachers' autonomy. *Research in Education*, 93(1), 19-33.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage.
- Pritchett, L. (2015). Creating education systems coherent for learning outcomes: Making the transition from schooling to learning. *Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE)*. https://riseprogramme.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/RISE_WP_005_Pritchett.pdf.

- Reierson, C. A., & Becker, S. R. (2021). Coherent school improvement: Integrating outcomes-based assessment and trauma-informed practice. *Improving Schools*, 24(2), 124-136. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480220953640>
- Ricci, P. (2018). Accountability. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*. Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_2321
- Robinson, V., Bendikson, L., McNaughton, S., Wilson, A., & Zhu, T. (2017). Joining the dots: The challenge of creating coherent school improvement. *Teachers College Record*, 119(8), 1-44.
- Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rosenblatt, Z., & Wubbels, T. (2021). Accountability and culture of school teachers and principals: An eight-country comparative study. Routledge.
- Ryan, S. V., Nathaniel, P., Pendergast, L. L., Saeki, E., Segool, N., & Schwing, S. (2017). Leaving the teaching profession: The role of teacher stress and educational accountability policies on turnover intent. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 66, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.03.016>
- Schildkamp, K., Lai, M. K., & Earl, L. (Eds.). (2013). *Data-based decision making in education: Challenges and opportunities*. Dordrecht Heidelberg: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4816-3>
- Smith, W. C., & Benavot, A. (2019). Improving accountability in education: The importance of structured democratic voice. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 20, 193-205. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09599-9>
- Srivastava, P., & Hopwood, N. (2009). A practical iterative framework for qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 76–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800107>
- Tiruneh, D., Hoddinott, J., Rolleston, C., Sabates, R., & Woldehanna, T. (2021). Understanding achievement in numeracy among primary school children in Ethiopia: Evidence from rise Ethiopia study (Vol. 21, p. 071). RISE Working Paper Series. https://doi.org/10.35489/BSG-RISE-WP_2021/071
- Tirussew, T., Amare, A., Jeilu, O., Tassew, W., Aklilu, D., & Berhannu, A. (2018). Ethiopian education development roadmap (2018-30). An integrated Executive Summary. Ministry of Education Strategy Center (ESC) Draft for Discussion: Addis Ababa.

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2014). Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. Education for All Global Monitoring Report. <http://hdl.voced.edu.au/10707/288709>.
- USAID (n.d.). READ II Activity Year IV Quarter IV Progress Report Period: July 1, 2021-September 30, 2021. Retrieved on August 27, 2023 from https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZPN3.pdf
- USAID. (2019). Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) 2018 End line Report. Addis Ababa. USAID. <https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/ethiopia/education/reports/early-grade-reading-assessment-2018>
- Wayman, J. C., & Jimerson, J. B. (2014). Teacher needs for data-related professional learning. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 42, 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.11.001>
- Willis, S., & Kissane, B. (1997). Systemic approaches to articulating and monitoring student outcomes: Are they consistent with outcome-based education? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 23(1), 5–30. https://www.academia.edu/download/69772807/s0191-491x_2897_2900002-320210916-1140-6pdlqj.pdf.
- World Bank (2018). *World Development Report 2018: Learning to Realize Education's Promise*. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/28340>
- Xaba, M., & Ngubane, D. (2010). Financial accountability at schools: Challenges and implications. *Journal of Education*, 50. <https://repository.nwu.ac.za/handle/10394/17960> (accessed 31 July 2023).
- Yan, Y. (2019). Making accountability work in basic education: Reforms, challenges and the role of the government. *Policy Design and Practice*, 2(1), 90–102. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2019.1580131>
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.