Exploring educational dynamics: Insights from the rhetoric and realities of leaders, teachers, students, and parents' contributions to improving educational quality

Getu Shiferaw Wolle (Ph.D.) iD

Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education, Bahir Dar University; Associate Editor-in-chief, Bahir Dar Journal of Education

Abstract

This issue presents the multifaceted dynamics shaping education and institutional development. Drawing on a diverse collection of ten research findings and one book chapter review, it explores factors influencing educational outcomes, such as parental involvement, teacher effectiveness, culturally responsive pedagogy, inclusive education challenges, strategic management, emotional intelligence, and the role of leadership in research productivity. Additionally, the current issue brings to light some factors that influence education quality, taken from studies that examine the contributions and impacts of key stakeholders, including educational leaders, teachers, students, and parents. This editorial provides insights that underscore the significance of addressing these interconnected issues to improve educational quality and promote institutional success in Ethiopia and beyond.

Introduction

In an era of rapidly evolving educational landscapes, understanding the multifaceted aspects of educational dynamics is crucial for fostering institutional effectiveness and enhancing learning outcomes (Graham & Colin, 2023). This issue of Bahir Dar journal of Education presents a diverse range of topics, each shedding light on critical elements influencing education from primary through higher education. Our latest collection of articles offers a comprehensive exploration of key issues impacting education from multiple perspectives. The articles in this issue can be categorized in two ways.

In one way, they can be categorized across different education levels. In this regard, some articles explore various educational problems at the pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels while others examine educational aspects at the TVET and higher education levels. In another way, the articles included in the present issue can be seen from the rhetoric-reality gaps of key stakeholders' (leaders, teachers, students, and parents') contribution in improving quality. Nowadays, the quest for quality education has become a

national priority in many education systems (MoE, 2023; Molla & Tiruneh, 2023), with stakeholders across various sectors continually emphasizing its importance. However, the gap between the rhetoric and the realities on the ground often remains substantial.

Leaders play a key role in improving education quality by shaping the vision, goals, and culture of educational institutions (Leithwood et al., 2004). They are responsible for creating an environment where educators feel empowered to innovate and students are encouraged to thrive. Effective leaders prioritize professional development for teachers, ensuring that they have access to the latest pedagogical tools and resources. By fostering a culture of continuous learning, leaders help educators stay up-to-date with the best teaching practices and technologies, which in turn enhance student outcomes (Aradom & Charles, 2022). Moreover, they establish systems for regular assessment and feedback, helping institutions to refine their approaches and address gaps in teaching and learning.

In addition, leaders contribute to improving education quality by promoting inclusive policies that ensure equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. They work to eliminate barriers to education, such as socioeconomic disparities, and advocate for policies that support diversity in the classroom. Leaders also play a crucial role in securing funding and resources to enhance infrastructure, integrate technology, and support extracurricular activities that enrich the learning experience (Young et al., 2023). Through their strategic decision-making, leaders build partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and government agencies to create a supportive network that nurtures students' academic and personal growth.

For example, at the helm of educational reform in Ethiopia, leaders articulate ambitious visions of inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Policies are crafted, strategic frameworks developed, and budgets allocated, marking significant strides towards transforming educational landscapes. Yet, translating these goals into effective and sustainable change requires navigating complex bureaucratic processes, mobilizing resources effectively, and ensuring accountability at all levels. The challenge lies in bridging the gap between policy formulation and on-the-ground impact, where leadership must align rhetoric with actionable strategies that prioritize educational excellence and equity.

Thus, from key stakeholders' contribution perspective, studies from this issue indicate that the understanding of strategic management among Ethiopian public university leaders is crucial for the sustainable success of institutions. However, the rhetoric of strategic leadership often outpaces the reality of its execution, leading to challenges in achieving long-term educational goals. Similarly, the perceived impact of deans' transactional leadership behaviors on research outputs emphasizes the critical role of academic leadership in fostering an environment conducive to research and innovation. The mediating effect of workplace learning capability further highlights the complexities involved in translating leadership rhetoric into tangible academic success.

Similarly, teachers play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of education by creating an engaging and supportive learning environment. Their ability to design effective lesson plans, utilize innovative teaching methods, and adapt to diverse student needs fosters a culture of active learning (Michaelowa, 2001). By integrating technology, applying differentiated instruction, and encouraging critical thinking, teachers ensure that students not only absorb information but also develop the skills needed for future success. Their

2

continuous professional development, through workshops and collaborations, helps them stay updated with modern educational trends, ensuring their teaching remains relevant and effective.

Beyond the classroom, teachers contribute to improving education quality by actively participating in school improvement initiatives and policy development. They provide valuable insights into curriculum reforms, assessment methods, and student welfare programs (Sampaio et al., 2022). Teachers also collaborate with parents and communities to create a well-rounded educational experience that addresses the emotional, social, and academic needs of students. Their dedication to mentoring, research, and lifelong learning sets an example for students and peers alike, promoting a culture of excellence within the education system.

More specifically, studies revealed that faculty members at the tertiary level play a critical role in shaping education quality (Tena & Motuma, 2024). Researchers suggest that while there is a growing understanding of the importance of professional development among faculty, there remains a gap in practice, with implications for teaching quality. Furthermore, studies on teachers' practices in inclusive instruction, particularly for students with visual impairments, reveal that while there is rhetoric around inclusivity, the implementation in classrooms remains challenging. Additionally, the exploration of culturally responsive pedagogy in mathematics teaching shows that while teachers acknowledge the importance of cultural relevance, their competencies in this area vary, often depending on the level of support and professional development they receive.

Correspondingly, students play a pivotal role in improving education quality by providing valuable feedback on teaching methods, curriculum content, and learning environments. Their firsthand experience in the classroom allows them to identify strengths and areas for improvement, helping educators tailor their approaches to better meet students' needs. Active student participation in course evaluations, focus groups, and academic committees promotes a more responsive and adaptive educational system (Charles & Harriett, 2017). When students voice their opinions, they empower institutions to implement changes that enhance teaching effectiveness and create a more engaging, relevant, and student-centered learning experience.

Additionally, students contribute to education quality through peer-led initiatives, mentorship programs, and collaborative learning. By sharing knowledge and skills with fellow students, they foster a supportive academic community that enhances learning outcomes for everyone. Peer tutoring and group discussions not only reinforce students' understanding but also encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Moreover, students who engage in research and innovation projects contribute to advancing the academic field, introducing fresh perspectives and solutions that benefit both their peers and educators. Their active involvement is essential in cultivating a dynamic and evolving education system.

Despite students are at the heart of educational quality (Carmichael et al., 2001), their academic performance is influenced by various factors, including developmental assets and hedonic well-being, emotional intelligence, and instructional effectiveness. Studies show that effective teaching practices, such as those found in culturally responsive pedagogy, further contribute to enhancing students' educational experiences and achievements. The interplay

between emotional intelligence and academic performance reveals the importance of holistic support systems that address both emotional and academic needs.

Parents play a vital role in improving the quality of education by actively engaging in their children's learning process (Gerald & Hungi, 2016). When parents collaborate with teachers and school administrators, they help create a supportive learning environment both at home and in school. This involvement can range from attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering in school activities, and providing feedback on educational policies to monitoring homework and fostering a culture of curiosity at home. Their engagement helps educators better understand the unique needs of each student, enabling more personalized and effective teaching methods, which leads to improved student outcomes.

Moreover, parents contribute to educational quality by advocating for better resources, infrastructure, and policies that benefit all students. When parents are informed and involved, they can push for necessary changes such as updated learning materials, enhanced school safety, or improved extracurricular programs (Lemessa et al., 2023). Their advocacy can also extend to supporting initiatives that promote equity and inclusion in education, ensuring that all children, regardless of background, have access to high-quality learning experiences. In this way, parents serve as key partners in creating a thriving, well-rounded educational environment.

For instance, parental involvement in preschool education has been proven to significantly contribute to children's developmental outcomes (Hagos & Micheal, 2021; Moon & Hofferth, 2016). However, the reality is that such involvement is often inconsistent across different communities, with varying levels of awareness and engagement from parents. The challenges faced by micro and small enterprises and TVET programs are integral to understanding the broader educational context.

In sum empirical and theoretical literature evidences that improving the quality of education is a collaborative effort that involves leaders, teachers, students, and parents (Kufi, 2013; Lukala & Mramba, 2022). Educational leaders play a crucial role by setting clear visions, creating supportive environments, and driving policies that enhance teaching and learning. Teachers, as the frontline implementers, contribute by delivering engaging, high-quality instruction and fostering a positive learning environment. Students, through active participation, curiosity, and responsibility for their own learning, directly influence educational outcomes. Parents, on the other hand, support learning by providing conducive home environment and engaging with schools to ensure that their children's educational needs are met. Together, these stakeholders create a dynamic system that continually works toward improving the overall quality of education.

Coming to the present issue, it offers a comprehensive analysis of recent studies ranging from classroom dynamics to institutional leadership. To provide brief highlights of each, for example, the research on developmental assets and hedonic well-being among youths by Meseret Ayalew Dejenie, Amare Sahle Abebe, and Dawit Asrat Getahun underscores the importance of understanding how student characteristics can shape their overall well-being. The study revealed the significant role that gender, school type, and location play in shaping students' internal and external asset profiles. Their findings emphasize the need for context-sensitive approaches to enhancing students' well-being, particularly in varying educational settings such as rural and urban schools. The study

underscores the importance of tailoring interventions to the unique needs of different student populations to foster better developmental outcomes.

A study by Addis Tsegaye Zegeye, Amera Seifu Belayneh, and Solomon Melesse Mengstie investigates the perceptions and practices of faculty members regarding professional development, shedding light on areas for improvement at institutions. Their qualitative research highlights a gap between the perceived and actual benefits of professional development programs, revealing a need for more engaging and contextually relevant training. The study suggests that enhancing teachers' motivation and sense of responsibility toward professional growth is essential for improving teaching quality and institutional success.

The article on parental involvement in preschool education by Simegn Sendek Yizengaw highlights how active parental participation contributes to better developmental outcomes for children, reinforcing the need for collaborative efforts between educators and families. Despite minimal involvement observed in the study, parental support significantly contributes to children's academic competence and social skills.

Ermias Kibreab Tesfaye and Belay Hagos Hailu's article indicated that inclusive education remains a significant challenge, particularly for students with visual impairments. The study indicated, while teachers demonstrated adequate knowledge of inclusive instruction strategies, their self-efficacy and attitudes towards inclusion significantly influenced their practice. This study sheds light on the factors affecting teachers' inclusive practices, offering guidance for developing more effective instructional strategies. The research highlights the need for continued professional development and supportive measures to enhance inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Culturally responsive pedagogy in mathematics education is investigated through the perceptions and competencies of teachers by Bihonegn Ayalew, Alemayehu Bishaw Tamiru, and Solomon Melese Mengistie's study. Their findings suggested that while culturally responsive pedagogy is occasionally practiced, increased teaching experience and cultural competence positively influence its implementation. This study emphasizes the need for culturally relevant teaching methods to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

Institutional leadership and its impact on educational success are also critically examined. The understanding of strategic management among Ethiopian public university leaders and the influence of deans' leadership behaviors on research productivity underscore the importance of effective leadership in driving institutional success. For example, the study by Asrat Dereb Ebssa and Dawit Asrat Getahun on strategic management in Ethiopian public universities revealed that the leaders' understanding was limited and inconsistent to potentially impacting institutional sustainability. The study also identifies gaps in leaders' conceptualization and practical application of strategic management principles, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach to strategic planning and implementation in higher education. Similarly, Ayetenew Abie Tesema, Getnet Demissie Bitew, and Solomon Melese Mengistie's study on the influence of perceived leadership behaviors on research productivity at universities, on the other hand, offers insights into how workplace learning capabilities mediate these relationships, pointing to ways in which leadership practices can be optimized for better research outcomes.

Zekarias Tadesse, Alemayehu Bishaw Tamiru, and Mulugeta Yayeh Worku's article on the development of micro and small enterprises and the challenges faced by TVET programs with implications for curriculum development revealed the misalignment between TVET interventions and enterprise needs. The study proposed strategies to improve TVET program implementation, including enhancing curriculum development to address systemic challenges sustainably. It also suggested how TVET programs can be better aligned with industry needs to support entrepreneurial growth.

Teacher effectiveness in English-medium instruction and its impact on academic achievement is assessed using a value-added model by Getu Tefera Woldegebriel, Abiy Yigzaw, Kassie Shiefere, and Zewdu Emiru. This study provides evidence on how effective teaching practices can lead to improved student outcomes. The study revealed a strong relationship between effective teaching and improved student performance, emphasizing the need for ongoing teacher training and support to

A study by Dagne Tafa and Belay Tefera examines how understanding and managing emotions can influence university students' academic performance. This research highlights how emotional competencies influence academic success, offering a refined understanding of the interplay between emotional and cognitive factors.

Like earlier editions of Bahir Dar Journal of Education, the current issue features a book review. In this regard, Mulugeta Yayeh Worku offers a critical examination of the concepts "educational process" and the educated person from the perspectives of Richard Stanley Peters' significant philosophical work. This review serves as a timely reminder of the enduring importance of philosophical inquiry in shaping our understanding of education. In this article, the reviewer emphasizes the need for greater conceptual clarity around these two concepts, as well as a stronger commitment to their practical application.

Generally, the collections from the current issue revealed that while there is widespread agreement on the need for improved quality in education, the paths to achieving this are troubled with challenges, requiring coordinated efforts and a clear understanding of each stakeholder's role. The studies also underscored that addressing the rhetoric-reality gap in education quality is not impossible. However, it requires a rigorous effort from all stakeholders to align intentions with actions. In this regard, leaders must focus on practical implementation strategies that address on-the-ground challenges. Teachers, on their part, needs to actively participate in ongoing professional development initiatives to enhance their effectiveness. Students should also be empowered with the necessary resources and support systems to engage fully in their education. It is also imperative to engage parents in the multifaceted aspects of education in meaningful ways.

We believe that the articles featured in the September 2024 issue will be instrumental to advance the quest for quality education. By exploring the complex interplay among student characteristics, teaching practices, institutional leadership, and curriculum development, we hope that this edition will be important in bridging the gaps between educational rhetoric and reality. The insights shared in this issue are also expected to inspire continued dialogue and drive actionable initiatives among educators, policymakers, and researchers.

Finally, we would like to extend our deepest gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and editors for their invaluable contributions in bringing this issue to fruition. Your steadfast commitment to enhancing our understanding and advancing education is truly remarkable.

Together, we can effect meaningful change and elevate the quality of education in Ethiopia and beyond. Thank you for being a crucial part of this journey.

References

Aradom, B. T., & Charles., N. K. (2022). The role of school leadership toward improving student's achievement: A case study of secondary schools in Changchun, China. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, *6*(4), 6744 – 6755.

Carmichael, R., Palermo, J., Reeve, L., & Vallence, K. (2001). Student learning: The heart of quality in education and training. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher education*, *26*(25), 449-463. http://doi.org/10.1080/026002930120082023

Charles, G., & Harriett, P. (2017). Student academic performance: The role of motivation, strategies, and perceived factors hindering Liberian junior and senior high school students learning. *Education Research International* 2017(1) https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/1789084

Gerald, M. M., & Hungi, N. (2016). Parental participation improves student academic achievement: A case of Iganga and Mayuge districts in Uganda. *Cogent Education*, *3*(1), 1264170. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1264170

Graham, J., & Colin, C. (2023). Exploring the dynamics of education in Australia: Policies, practices, and progressions in the 21st century. *International Journal of Science Review*, *5*(3), 14-23. https://doi.org/10.54783/influencejournal.v5i3.178

Hagos, G., & Micheal, M. W. (2021). Parental involvement in children's academic achievements: A case of Ethiopian schooling. *The International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, *28*(1), 123–140, https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/CGP/v28i01/123-140

Kufi, E. F.(2013). The role of different stakeholders in Ethiopia in the improvement of educational quality. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, *2*(1), 11-24. https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2012.51

Leithwood, K., Karen, S. L., Stephen, A., & Kyla, W.(2004). How leadership influences student learning. *The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement*. www.education.umn.edu/carei

Lemessa, R., Temesgen, S., Endale, A., & Negesse, G. (2023). Family involvements in education and quality of education: Some selected 2nd cycle public schools in west shoa zone, Ethiopia. *Cogent Education, 10:* 2197669, https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2197669

Lukala, M. S., & Mramba, P. T. (2022). contributions of educational stakeholders towards access to quality education in Morogoro municipality *East African Journal of Education Studies*, *5*(3), 311-319. https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.5.3.945

Michaelowa, K. (2001). Primary education quality in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa: Determinants of learning achievement and efficiency considerations. World Development, *Sciences Direct, 29*(10), 1699–1716. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(01)00061-4

Ministry of Education. (2023). *Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia education and training policy*. Ministry of Education.

Molla, T. & Tiruneh, D. T. (2023). *Ethiopia's education system is in crisis – now's the time to fix it*. https://theconversation.com/ethiopias-education-system-is-incrisis-nows-the-time-to-fix-it-217817

Moon, U. J., & Hofferth, S. L. (2016). Parental involvement, child effort, and the development of immigrant boys' and girls' reading and mathematics skills: A latent difference score growth model. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *47*, 136–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2016.01.001

Sampaio, M., Vítor, R,. Daniela, M., & Vítor, D,. T. (2022). Comparative indices of the education quality from the opinions of teachers and principals in TALIS. *Cogent Education*, 9: 2153418. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2153418

Tena, B., & Motuma, F. (2024). Policy reforms and unresolved educational challenges in Ethiopia: Implications for the University of Education. *Bahir Dar Journal of Education*, *24*(1), 147–167. https://doi.org/10.4314/bdje.v24i1.10

Young, D. C., White, R. E., & Williams, M.A. (2023). "The roles of educational leaders in the policy process", policy matters (transforming education through critical leadership, policy and practice). *Emerald Publishing Limited, Leeds*, 83-102. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80382-481-920231006