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Report-driven management accountability in primary school curriculum implementation in Ethiopia: is it driving or diverting teachers' focus?

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Abstract

The study explored teachers' reflections on management accountability relationships between School Management Bodies (SMBs) and teachers for curriculum implementation in primary schools. An exploratory case study type and a multiple case study research design were employed. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and documentary reviews. The findings reveal that accountability, as conceived by the teachers, is a necessary commandment that promotes reporting, increases the workload to perform urgent work, and fosters greater fear. The result affirms that SMBs primarily hold teachers accountable for the preparation of student-related reports driven by top-down administrative commandments to satisfy the needs of the district education offices to routinize the teachers' roles and facilitate accountability at a great level. The study also indicates that lowering teachers' efficiency was the most compelling pressure as a consequence of holding teachers accountable. This study discloses that rigorous penalties were exercised only for teachers' code of ethics rather than for failures observed during curriculum implementation that contributed to diverting teachers' focus from classroom curricula practices. The study recommends that the government should re-conceptualize the shift in teachers' practices and design an innovative educational accountability policy that will intrinsically drive teachers to classroom curricula practices.

***Keywords**: autonomy, curriculum implementation, management accountability relationships, report-driven*

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1. Introduction

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia launched educational reforms based Education and Training Policy in 1994 it promulgated and which called for accountability with greater community engagement as the final and most localized level of the decentralized primary education system (Policy, 1994). Similarly, the 2002 school guideline has brought about changes in educational structures, management, and accountability in the Ethiopian primary (grades 1–8) education system (MoE, 2002). These documents promoted decentralization and empowered School Management Bodies (SMBs) to closely follow up, control, and hold teachers accountable for curriculum implementation (MoE, 2002). This was reiterated in the Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) III (MoE, 2005) with the government's decision to decentralize essential decision-making from regions via zones to the District/*Woreda* education offices (WEOs) and more to the school level, to enable the education system to be more responsive to school situations (MoE, 2005).

SMBs [School Principals, Supervisors, and Parent Student Teacher Associations (PSTAs)] have the responsibility of managing schools and holding teachers accountable for meaningful implementation of the curriculum (MoE, 2002). Reform efforts in the post-2002 Ethiopian primary education system in general and the changes in school management bodies, in particular, triggered the transfer of power and the sharing of responsibilities in the schools' management system (MoE, 2002). These reforms introduced increased accountability for significant implementation of the curriculum (MoE, 2002, 2007, 2015) for students to engage with curricula through school management accountability relationships with teachers.

Accountability pertains to a management practice in which an individual takes responsibility for their actions in an organization (Guijt, 2020). These responsibilities can be positive or negative, and either augment or inhibit the smooth running of the organization. The teacher accountability movement is among the most debated and important topics of modern educational reforms. Wagner (1989, p. 2) defines accountability as "to render an account of, to explain and answer for". In the context of teachers' work, this means teachers have to take responsibility in some public form for the way they discharge their duties by recognizing their responsibilities for the processes and outputs. Ballard and Bates (2008) argue that it is important to hold teachers accountable for students' learning. Holding teachers accountable improves heir attitude towards their duties and, invariably, quality instruction and improved learner attainment are guaranteed.

Teachers are accountable to students, parents, principals, SMBs, and governments through educational structural organizations such as WEOs, zone education offices, and regional education bureaus (MoE, 2002). However, this study primarily focused on the management accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers, which is an essential element of effective curriculum implementation. In the primary school system, the management or bureaucratic accountability relationship is defined as the relationship that connects SMBs and teachers, comprising internal processes for SMBs to provide professional development to monitor teachers to hold them accountable (Di Gropello, 2004; MoE, 2002; Pritchett, 2015; WDR, 2004) for the implementation of the curriculum. It is the form of a top-down bureaucratic or administrative accountability system used in schools to catch teachers doing things right in the classroom.

Management system manages expectations using a hierarchical arrangement based on a supervisory relationship between subordinate and superior for meaningful implementation of the curriculum. In the context of this study, curriculum implementation is the process of translating the components of designed curriculum documents into classroom practices as intended (Fullan, 1999), where SMBs are likely to hold teachers accountable for their duties and responsibilities. Thus, teachers are expected to teach content, arrange instruction, manage the classroom, and evaluate students' progress (MoE, 2002).

The management accountability link can be associated with the notion of rewarding good behavior and punishing unacceptable behavior (Beckmann, 2000). This link marks sustained concern for oversight, surveillance, and institutional constraints on the exercise of power for the implementation of the curriculum (Beckmann, 2000; Maile, 2002). In essence an accountability system helps everyone do their job more responsibly by providing information about schools' or teachers' practices along with occasions for curriculum implementation (Darling-Hammond, 1991). To this end, how teachers receive accountability, for what purpose accountability is implemented, and what steps are taken to implement the education system through SMBs are the main intention of this study.

1.2 Statement of the problem

One of the purposes of educational accountability is to improve the implementation of curricula. Nevertheless, contemporary teacher accountability systems have become rooted in testing, evaluation, and dis/incentivization as means for shaping teacher practice and defining teacher quality (Lingard, 2010; Smith, 2016). From the

international perspective, in the name of equity, student protection, and global competitiveness, high-stakes accountability practices have also steadily weakened teacher professional expertise (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Hardy, 2018) to implement curriculum effectively. Teachers are not only responsible for adhering to multiple strands of standards, including content, teaching, and discipline-specific standards, but they must also meet requirements for evaluation frameworks and rubrics associated with state and/or federal-level policies (Garver, 2020; Taubman, 2010).

In the same way, datafication is one tactic used to keep educators filled with activity. It refers to the use of test performance data as an accountability mechanism for governing school and teachers' work. Such a trend has been problematized in education in general and particularly in the developed world (Roberts-Holmes & Bradbury, 2016; Takayama et al., 2017). There is inadequate research about how this trend plays out in developing societies, like Ethiopia, and about curriculum implementation in particular. Therefore, in this study, it is necessary to look at the problem of management accountability and whether they are driving teachers to the classroom curricula practices or the preparation of student-related reports. Consequently, recent research has shown the importance of school management in explaining variation in students' related data. For example, numbers, and data significantly give shape to the working lives and experience of teachers (Ball, 2015).

The datafied teachers face mounting pressures to rely on numerical data reports to govern their pedagogical decisions and classroom curricula practices (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Holloway, 2019). In these data environments, the quality and the practices of the teacher are narrowly understood as numbers, with improvement conceived as increasing these numbers, rather than improving practice and enhancing

collaboration (Perryman, 2009; Taubman, 2010). Likewise, there is evidence that teachers from public schools are required to execute administrative and other imposed duties (David et al., 2019; Kim, 2019). In a similar study context, Beyessa (2023) reports that in the study area, 3.27% of grade 8 students took the regional exam and were advanced to boarding secondary schools in the 2016–2018 and 2020–2022 academic years. Although there are many factors affecting student results, the fact that student failure rates do not seem to decrease year over year suggests that management accountability relationships have not been given enough attention in schools to hold teachers accountable for implementing the curriculum to the required standards. Examining how internal pressures were generated is crucial to determine what problems the teacher is accountable for.

To fill this gap, this study uses the Ethiopian primary schools' environment as an example to explore the SMBs' practices in using the management accountability relationship to either drive teachers to improve curriculum implementation in the classrooms or hinder them from doing so. Motivated by these rationale and gaps stated above, this study aims to explore whether the teachers are subjected to management accountability consequences for implementing the curriculum in the classroom or for the processing of student-related reports. Accordingly, this study attempted to answer the following research questions: How are accountability-related exercises for teachers conceived? What are the driving purposes of such accountability-related exercises? What are their consequences?

2. Review of related literature

2.1 Concept of Management Accountability

There was a constant educational search and inquiry for a complete understanding at the start of the twenty-first century of educational accountability and its connection to the quality of curriculum implementation. Within the education sector, accountability for education delivery in general and curriculum implementation in particular is not a new concept. Adams and Kirst (1999) list six categories of approaches to accountability: bureaucratic, legal, professional, political, moral, and market. Similarly, the World Development Report (WDR) WDR (2004) and Pritchett (2015) proposed the four accountability relationships of the education system: namely, politics or voice, compact, management, and power. Voice accountability relationship links curriculum users with the policy makers or curriculum developers. Power and market accountability also interchangeably use the same approaches in connecting curriculum users with implementers. They argue that the management accountability relationship is the shortest route and internal accountability system for schools to implement curriculum by overseeing the day-to-day activities of the teachers.

Therefore, this study is underpinned by the management accountability approach because it includes systematic efforts and actions to make teachers effective in curriculum implementation (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Pritchett, 2015). It is about creating new ways to enable teachers to discharge their responsibilities more effectively. Teachers are the frontline curriculum implementers in the classroom and they are responsible for that. This accountability relationship explains what issues and the necessary penalties connect SMBs with the teachers (Ehren & Baxter, 2020; Gershberg et al., 2023; Komba, 2017; Pritchett, 2015).

Thus, the management accountability relationship is multidirectional and focuses more on the internal accountability approach. It is increasingly characterized by internal monitoring for the implementation of school curricula by emphasizing teachers' duties and responsibilities. For example, Carnoy et al. (2003) indicate that internal accountability works at the level of personal responsibility that teachers shoulder for students in their classrooms. This relationship is arguably the most impactful and advanced, underlining the importance of public school curriculum implementation by linking SMBs and teachers to improve curriculum implementation (Pritchett, 2015; WDR, 2004). In Ethiopia, SMBs have been authorized to execute majority of educational activities to create management accountability relationships with teachers for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum. Through the internal management accountability relationship, SMBs are the central driver for teachers to perform their duties and responsibilities. These processes may be rule-bound in large bureaucracies (MoE, 2002; WDR, 2004) that undermine teacher expertise, autonomy, and professional discretion (Holloway, 2020).

Hereafter, management accountability relationships have milestone implications for serving as an effective solution for deepened classroom curriculum implementation in the school system, where SMBs and teachers extensively interact together. By and large, this relationship is promised for the implementation of the curriculum for interconnected constructs that are working together. Accountability measures such as rewards for good professional behaviors and penalties for poor performance behaviors are applicable by SMBs after monitoring the implementation of the curriculum. This management approach incorporates a variety of procedures to improve the implementation of the curriculum. This accountability depended on SMBs emphasizing

the use of systematic evidence, focusing on student learning, and encouraging careful monitoring of teaching (Leithwood, 2005). Failures of management accountability relationships are also common in public schools. Teachers rarely receive (explicit or implicit) incentives for the successful implementation of the curriculum. There are no stipulations for quality instruction, no measurement of effectiveness or productivity, and few rewards or penalties (WDR, 2004). However, the context of the schools matters that this approach includes systematic efforts to create an effective implementation of the school curricula.

2.2 Measures of management accountability

Accountability measures refer to the processes and mechanisms put in place to ensure individuals are held responsible for their actions, decisions, and performance. In the context of this study, SMBs should conduct regular evaluations of teachers' instructional practices to ensure they are effectively implementing the curriculum. This can include classroom observations, review of lesson plans and student work, and feedback sessions with teachers. Teacher evaluations are an essential tool for holding educators accountable and ensuring the quality of education provided to students. The implementation of the curriculum is usually a collective responsibility that needs accountability measures. SMBs are empowered to participate and make decisions on performance evaluation, promotion and dismissal of teachers, and other related matters (MoE, 2002).

A focus on management accountability uses assessment, reward, and punishment as its core driver of teachers to implement curriculum in primary schools. In this case, according to the Ethiopian Federal Civil Servants Proclamation SMBs can take the

necessary actions against those teachers and educational professionals who do not live up to their duties and responsibilities (Proclamation, 2002). These measures can be called disciplinary penalties. These measures include (a) simple disciplinary penalties such as oral warnings, written warnings, and fines of up to one month's salary; and (b) rigorous disciplinary penalties like fines of up to three months' salary, downgrading, and dismissal from the job. The purpose of disciplinary action is to correct work-related behavior.

Teachers are expected to do according to their duties and responsibilities as outlined by the immediate supervisor, SMBs and to comply with applicable policies, procedures, and laws. For this reason, the SMBs, for example, have the right to take appropriate measures against any administrative worker who negatively influences a student who demands proper engagement in the curriculum (MoE, 2002). However, most teachers are evaluated by school evaluation criteria. This evaluation criterion helps in the promotion of teachers from one career level to the next resulting in salary increases (See, Appendix B). By implementing a robust evaluation system, SMBs can hold teachers accountable while also fostering a culture of continuous improvement in the implementation of the curriculum (MoE, 2002).

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Research design and approach

Qualitative research can take many different forms, but to investigate the management accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers in its real context, a single case study was used. This is because a case study design is well-situated for exploratory research aiming to elucidate a deep description of the questions studied (Yin, 2003).

This design enables us to gather information from numerous primary schools and provide a comprehensive picture of the results.

According to Creswell (2009), a research approach known as the qualitative technique aims to explore the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human situation. Thus, to better understand the management accountability interactions, we conducted an exploratory case study as part of a qualitative research technique.

3.2 Participants

Every qualitative research project depends on the participation of its participants, who supply essential data for the study. To fulfill this goal, our approach is comparable to what is known as purposive sampling, which is a technique for efficiently identifying and choosing respondents who are most likely to be knowledgeable about the topic of interest (Creswell, 2014). We employed purposive sampling because it ensures that volunteers with the necessary experience or knowledge of the phenomenon under the study will be examined by the investigators (Gay et al., 2009). In light of the zone's stability status, or area, six (6) elementary schools from three districts were selected to serve as research sites. Since 2002, the school has been operating a school management framework, and from six primary schools, two teachers with more than 20 years of experience have been taken from one school. In total, twelve teachers were taken. These teachers are thoroughly familiar with what accountability management practice looks like in the school over a long period. Since we believed that school administrators and supervisors were political insiders and we disagreed with them, we concentrated on the sampled teachers. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the perspectives of the teachers

to discern between the actual management accountability relationship practices that either drive or divert the focus from the implementation of the curriculum.

3.3 Data collection instruments

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers who directly implemented the curriculum. In addition, we employed document reviews that were pertinent to the implementation of the curriculum and management accountability.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

To choose the interview questions, we formulated research questions based on the literature review and distributed them to three teachers and two primary school principals. Their recommendations led to changes in them. The questions were decided upon after consulting with two academicians holding doctorates in curricular studies - one from Wollega University and one from Addis Ababa University. It was assumed that these interviewees can provide genuine information about the topics of the study. The teachers voluntarily and eagerly talked much to address what was happening in the school. The interviews lasted between 60 and 75 minutes.

3.3.2 Documents

Apart from interviewees, reviews of documentaries are also an important source of information. Documents such as teachers' evaluation rubrics, education policies, and education management guidelines specify the duties and responsibilities of teachers, concerning the implementation of the school curriculum. These secondary sources were used as they expanded our understanding of theories, key concepts, and empirical

results. They helped us to differentiate what is on the documents and what the teacher's practice looked like.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

To improve the research's internal validity and reliability, triangulation was used to obtain the data (Merriam, 1998). Hence, several qualitative procedures were used to establish the validity and reliability of our research. These procedures included triangulating data from various sources, such as document reviews, interviews, and recordings were led to a more valid, reliable, and diverse construction of realities about the management accountability relationship between SMBs and the teachers. Since the issue of accountability was examined for the first time in this district, all the teachers participated with great enthusiasm and enthusiasm during the data collection and addressed their experiences and ideas. We believe that this improved the validity of the data.

Additionally, member-checking transcripts were presented to some participants to get relevant feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). We used them to assess how accurately the qualitative findings reflected the participants' experiences and perspectives. Hence, the final report was returned to the six teachers, one from each school, who were contacted via mobile phone to offer any observations and confirm that the information they had provided was accurately documented. We confirmed the truth of the findings from the participating teachers about the issue of management accountability relationships weakening and discriminating against teachers' professional work. Lastly, to improve the accuracy of the report, we consulted the advice of two senior teachers from two

primary schools who were not involved in the study and who reviewed the data and provided further insight.

3.5 Data Analysis

The study reported the most likely and significant themes from the data set using the most often utilized data analysis method - thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis as it offers core skills for performing many other forms of qualitative analysis. To conduct interviews in Afaan Oromo, which is the the instructional medium in primary schools in the region, tape recording was used. Google Translate was then used to transcribe the interviews into English. We read the transcripts from the interviews, which were coded thematically. Then, we identified the patterns in making the meaning across the data to derive them that highly invite management accountability relationships. For analysis, we coded respondents as Teacher One (T1) through Teacher Twelve (T12).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results of the study

This section discusses the following findings from the study. Beyond the themes of the international literature review, there are emerging themes that were uniquely treated by the management accountability relationship to drive or divert teachers' focus from implementing the curriculum.

4.1.1 How do teachers conceive accountability?

Accountability-related exercises for teachers are typically conceived to improve the implementation of the curriculum. These exercises are designed to hold teachers accountable for their performance in the implementation of the curriculum. Thus, teachers need to see how teachers convene and welcome the practices of management accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers. Accountability is fundamentally implemented in schools as a command tool for teachers to do urgent and additional work quickly, teachers highlighted that:

> Accountability is a directive to intimidate teachers (T4 and T6). Accountability is usually used to compel the teachers (T8, T10, and T12). Accountability is used when any message from district education offices comes to the school to enforce teachers (T7 and T11). Accountability is used to keep the teacher busy. It is useful for reporting urgently needed student-related reports, not for what is being done in the classroom (T1 and T3). Accountability is a tool for ordering additional work (T5 and T9). I think accountability is a tool thrown from the top down to make the teacher work in fear. It is a confusing task for the teacher to stay calm and not complete the classroom curriculum practices in a given plan. (T9)

4.1.2 Accountability ensured

Although teachers have various duties in schools (See Appendix B), information from teachers shows that critical themes attracted the role of management accountability. The themes were strongly exercised by SMBs in selected primary schools that fostered increasable reliance on numerical comparison of the schools, WEOs, and the like. These themes are students' enrollment rate, dropout rate, test scores, and promotion that were

primarily and seriously linked to teachers' evaluation rubrics for holding teachers accountable.

4.1.3 Enhancing enrollment rates

Concerning enhancing enrollment rates, MoE usually gives an enrolment plan to the Regional Education Bureau (REB), the REB also gives an enrollment plan to the WEOs then WEOs give an enrollment plan to the schools through official letters and informal telephone messages. These are the top-down accountability flow of the Ethiopian education structure of the primary schools. Several teachers addressed that:

> SMBs generally see enrollment as teachers' task, and they are not concerned with which schools effectively implement the curriculum (T4). If the required number of students is not enrolled, teachers take an official letter from the school walk through the countryside, and enroll the remaining students they want. This inhibits my job to perform properly (T6). This student enrollment issue diverts me from implementing the curriculum as planned (T5). If teachers refuse or are reluctant to participate in students' enrollment roles their efficiency will be low (T1 and T11). To enhance the enrollment rate it is the responsibility of the teacher to participate in students' registration for more than a month. (T7 andT9)

Regarding the role of teachers, they cannot be held accountable for the execution of the curriculum for which they were not responsible, neither can they be held responsible for something for which they were not autonomous to decide to do or to do otherwise (Bailey, 1980). However, several teachers indicated that:

> Failing schools are relatively unranked schools that have failed to demonstrating yearly progress in enrollment rate data by grade level and gender. Student enrollment is the main score against which school work competes and SMBs make the teacher take the responsibility (T3). ...MoE receives funds by the number of students enrolled, which puts pressure on the schools to increase the number of students in the school and the SMBs also tried to share the pressure to the teachers to participate in students' enrollment. My job is not to go around rural villages to complete the enrollment plan of MoE but to teach students according to the curriculum plan (T10). Enrolling students is the primary responsibility of the SMBs. …the teacher leaves their classroom curriculum implementation and participates in searching for students who are not enrolled for a month and a half or even more. (T12)

4.1.4 Reducing dropout rates

Reducing dropout rates is another emerging aspect of the management accountability relationship that invites teachers to be held accountable. The assumption from MoE is that once students enroll, they should not be dropped. Because the school competes with the dropout rate, consequently, SMBs emphasized their role in reporting the reduced students' dropouts to the WEOs. Therefore, the teachers are always subject to accountability pressure to reduce the rate of dropouts. Some participants observed that:

> The majority of students do not like to attend school regularly. They have little hope for their future careers (T2 and T7). MoE used enforcement to reduce the dropout rate….teachers travel from village to village on foot to search for dropped-out students and this is part of teachers' evaluation. (T2, T4, and T8)

In the actual situation, the management accountability relationship is highly emphasized and operational for reducing student dropout rates, which is considered as one of the criteria of teacher evaluation without taking other variables related to it in general and students in particular into account. Some teachers discuss their school experiences:

> Students do not like going to school regularly, and they see this as a democratic right (T5). They do have side jobs that supplement their daily income which is useful for their survival (T9). Students' families are farmers and they drop out to help in agricultural activities (T6). Students have their businesses that make them drop out (T12). Students drop out because they have economic and family problems but, teachers are forced to bring them to school by wasting their classroom instructional period (T7 and T1). If the students' dropout rate increases, the school will be out of competition. Teachers are responsible for searching for the dropped students (T1 and T3). Teachers are accountable based on the number of dropped students. (T10)

4.1.5 Improving students' test score

Regarding improving students' test score issues, Fullan (2011, p. 153) warns against unintended consequences that may occur when policymakers rely too heavily on student's test scores to punish teachers, even though these are important but "wrong" drivers of curriculum implementation. While this is known, improving students' test scores is a serious emerging theme and a usual trend that SMBs exercise management accountability relationship with teachers in diverting teachers from the actual

implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. In this regard, some teachers reported that:

> Even SMBs evaluate teachers by raising questions like, "Why is this number of students' test scores lower?" or "Why did this number of students not score high?" ... and teachers are implementing a curriculum under the hard pressure of SMBs (T11 and T4). SMBs are only interested in holding teachers accountable for statistics and figures to satisfy the needs of their bosses, WEOs, or MoE, but not for the genuine practice of the curriculum in the classroom (T9). SMBs put pressure on teachers to improve students' overall test scores from the previous year because they have the desire to be liked, popular, and blessed in front of the WEOs. (T8 andT2)

Increasing the students' test scores is not only the role of teachers but also the role of students, parents, SMBs, and other supportive environments. Indeed, students are responsible for their learning (Frymier, 1998). On the other hand, holding teachers accountable to improve a fixed percentage or several students' test scores is a serious issue of a commandment from SMBs. Several teachers sadly highlighted their common trend of enhancing students' scores by saying:

> MoE seriously needs improved students' test scores to beg funds (T11). Improving student results is a tedious and time-consuming task for teachers because teachers are held accountable for what students do. For example, if the cumulative average of students' scores from last year is 60%, a teacher will be held accountable for improving the students' mean score by 65 to 70% for the next year. This is the common usual practice in primary schools (T8, T6, and

> T9). SMBs force teachers to improve students' test scores by 5% to 10% and they are looking to report to the WEOs. ...teachers were forced to emphasize enhancing students' test scores as their primary duties. (T11 and T6)

By considering the burden of improving students' test scores one teacher described that:

> Monitoring for holding teachers accountable for classroom practices like lesson plans, content, skills, instructional arrangements, and evaluation procedures has gotten less emphasis from the SMBs. Simply teachers are enforced through interaction with SMBs to improve the students' test scores by adding some amount of marks. (T3)

When teachers reflect on the improvement of students' test scores about their evaluation issues, they say:

> SMBs assumed that if students' test scores improved, they generalize as if the curriculum was effectively implemented in the classroom (T1). If students' results do not show improvement, then teachers' efficiency results, which are used for their career advancement, must be lowered. It is assumed that good teachers have good test scores. The logic goes that bad teachers who have bad test scores should be held accountable. (T3 and T6)

When one teacher expressed his views on putting a burden on a teacher to please the top education officials,

> In practice, my role is to implement the curriculum as intended but not to force students to pass the exams. I dislike recording students' results for the sake of school rank. I have a responsibility to produce acceptable outcomes and well-

> disciplined citizens, not simply to satisfy top education officials with outcomes. The better teacher, in my opinion, has more confidence in deciding on various issues of the curriculum implementation process. Many accusations were made during the meeting and personally for failing to raise, manipulate, and improve students' test results. (T6)

If the student's test scores increase, the teacher is praised and on the other hand, if the student's grade decreases, the teacher is blamed. Regardless of where the student's test scores are increased, SMBs are mostly focused on outcome. This demoralizes teachers to diverts them from the actual implementation of the curriculum. Teachers highlighted their everyday views by saying:

> SMBs forced teachers to manipulate numbers to raise students' results to be ranked among schools in the Woreda and hence WEOs get rewards. This is essentially linked to the REB to be ranked among all regions of the country (T2, T4, and T8). High test scores are assumed to be high-quality curriculum implementation practiced in the school. If teachers ethically record students' tests according to students' performance, they must be blamed and warned….SMBs initiated by the WEOs' experts to disrupt teachers' professional practice to implement the curriculum as intended. (T11 and T12)

4.1.6 Students' promotion

In the context of this study, student promotion is a critical issue for SMBs to exercise management accountability relationships with the teachers. The assumption from the MoE, REB, and WEOs is that if students attend the class for several months or a year, they should be promoted to the next class. Yet there are no guidelines that fix the

number of students' promotions and rather it is the top-down initiation and commandment to make teachers' roles uninteresting. Teachers emphasized:

> Now and then, teachers do have a meeting with SMBs on issues that violate the education guidelines. The big issue is promoting (100%) students to the next class. These issues are directly linked to teachers' evaluation and efficiency results, which are used as consequences to hold teachers accountable, but there is no job loss or reduction in salary in this regard. (T3 and T)

Whether students work or not, there are inevitable conditions that force the teacher to increase the marks and promote them. Teachers indicate their experiences as:

> Some students improve their test scores to be promoted and some do not. The promotion of students from one grade to the next without the acquisition of foundational reading and numeracy abilities is free. How all students are promoted to the next class without successfully including them in the curriculum? Teachers are accountable for promoting students illegally by adding some amount of marks (T9 and T10). My role is to implement the curriculum as intended but not to force students to pass the exams through mark manipulation. I dislike recording students' results for the sake of school rank. (T4)

Correspondingly, various school stakeholders are dissatisfied and point the finger at teachers even when students are detained and perform poorly. One teacher specifically addressed:

> If students failed, they would not be satisfied; if students failed, parents would not be satisfied; if students failed, SMBs in general and school principals, in particular, would not be satisfied; if students failed, WEOs' curriculum and instruction experts would not be satisfied; if students failed, Regional Education Bureau curriculum developers would not be satisfied; and if students failed generally, the government and politicians would not be satisfied. (T9)

The same respondent argued and elaborated on his point by asking the following questions:

> How can I satisfy all of these stakeholders while remaining accountable? Why should I not be held accountable for what happens in the classroom? How can I tell the difference between accountable and non-accountable teachers when it comes to curriculum implementation? Are teachers held accountable if they meet the needs of all stakeholders? It is my responsibility to teach the students while learning and passing the exams are the students' responsibilities, and it is difficult for me to predict how many students will pass the exam. Holding me fully accountable for students' advancement is therefore inappropriate and unfair, and it undermines my credibility that this does not help, as it works to the detriment of my work. (T9)

4.1.7 Measures to Ensure Teacher Accountability

Accountability through management can generate rewards or sanctions. Accountability is consequential to the actors, either a reward earned because of outstanding performance or sanctions imposed for poor performance. According to Ethiopian Proclamation No. 270/2002, accountability measures are either simple or rigorous

disciplinary penalties (Proclamation, 2002) applicable to teachers who do not live up to their duties and responsibilities. In actual practice, if teachers show weakness in participating in various activities such as enhancing enrollment rates, reducing the dropout rate, improving test scores, and promoting all students, they will be subjected to hard punishments. Even though no guideline supports this, these approaches seriously force teachers to perform their primary duties and responsibilities. Teachers highlighted that:

> If students are dropped from my class I will be subjected to low efficiency results (T6). I have to promote all students unless I cannot get a promotion from one level to another (T4). Teachers are forced to enhance the enrolment rate of students by traveling on foot in rural parishes for not to lose their promotions and salaries (T1 and T2). I am forced to add marks…I do not like to collide with SMBs negatively. (T5)

For the classroom implementation of the curriculum, the actual accountability measures are soft Therefore, an informal accountability mechanism was exercised. This accountability approach overemphasized the enforcement of teachers for classroom curricula practices. In this case, teachers indicated that:

> For poor performance instructional practice, teachers will be advised to improve their practices (T4, andT6). If teachers cannot teach, they will transfer to the lower classes (T3 and T5). If teachers have weak content knowledge, they will get oral warnings, or written warnings (T1 and T4). No dismissal from the job regarding poor practices of teachers in the implementation of curriculum. (T2, T9 and T12)

One of the mechanisms to ensure accountability of teachers in Ethiopia is to use teacher evaluation results, which play a decisive role in determining teachers' benefits (promotion and salary increase). When teachers feel accountable, they unconsciously attempt to participate in preparing and reporting related to students in order to avoid missing these benefits. On the other hand, there are penalties, such as a series of fines of up to three months' salary, downgrading, and dismissal from the job (Proclamation, 2002) that apply as high-stake management accountability relationships in the internal practices of schools. In this regard, teachers highlighted that:

> If teachers are addicted to alcohol and smoking seriously punished and they would not receive a promotion (T5 and T6). If teachers have addictions like drinking alcohol or smoking they will be downgraded or dismissed from the job (T1, and T3). When teachers are absent for three or more days without reasonable evidence they are subjected to fines on salaries. (T2 and T4)

4.2 Discussions

Accountability is seen to be a means of implementing curriculum effectively (Reeves, 2004). However, teachers conceived that accountability is the most powerful instrument exercised by SMBs to hold teachers accountable for routinizing the teachers' role. In classroom work, bad teachers are not found when equality of responsibility is applied. Accountability in teaching involves a commitment to fostering a positive learning environment and enables teachers to exhibit professional behaviors in school processes (Öztuzcu Küçükbere & Balkar, 2021). Nevertheless, the findings of the study indicate that accountability is a tactic used to intimidate and press teachers, often used when district education offices visit schools. It helped report student-related data but not

classroom activities. Accountability is also used to place extra work orders and make teachers fearful, as maintaining patience when deviating from the prescribed schedule is challenging.

In primary schools, teacher accountability is bound to lead to attaining quality instruction. There is a strong focus on the activity of teachers in classrooms. However, to divert teachers from classroom time, there is a problem across the globe. In a study prepared for the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) (Chisholm, 2005) was found that there are many international studies involving countries such as Australia, Korea, Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and Egypt… that were conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on educators' workload. The study revealed that despite increased workloads, the percentage of working time spent teaching as opposed to other activities such as administrative or additional activities is larger than 50% in only a minority of countries. Similarly, the study has indicated that pressures from the inside were driven by the authoritative pressure from the external bureaucratic accountability relationship to drive teachers to report student-related data and numbers.

In the same way, the findings of the study reversal that SMBs were exercising their management accountability relationship to hold teachers accountable for administrative roles and paperwork namely enhancing students' enrollment rate, reducing dropout rate, improving students' results and promotions by giving less emphasis on the role of teachers in the classroom. That is the qualities of the teachers were narrowly defined by the reportable numbers rather than enhancing the practice of classroom curriculum. The sanction in this case is lowering teachers' efficiency results, which diverts teachers from the actual implementation of the curriculum. As such, all educators are likely to

say that they have too much administrative work; but this cannot be an explanation for not implementing in the classroom, as paperwork time is not classwork time. In other words, when the educator is in the classroom and teaching, administrative work should not be done. Administrative time is outside the classroom, so the explanation of too much form-filling is not an explanation for why the curriculum is not being implemented in the classroom.

Accountability is something that is traditionally imposed on teachers. Tradition is meaning to carry out the orders of the central education office (Reeves, 2004) to the school teaching-learning process to make teachers busy. A strong focus on what is relevant to exams and generating test data, however, leads to compromises in the broader educational and curricular goals to implement in the classroom (Menken, 2006). The results of the study also indicate that SMBs were aligned with the WEOs experts and they exhibit management problems such as lack of working with the school management guidelines, limitations of leadership and managerial capacities, problems of coordination and communication, lack of trust between them and teachers and rigid internal structure that misguides teachers by bullying with evaluation results.

Recently scholars have highlighted political pressures and data-based accountability mechanisms as important variables influencing English language teaching practices (Ali & Hamid, 2020; Gholaminejad & Raeisi-Vanani, 2021) to divert their pedagogical practices. SMBs are the political leg of the ruling party to be manipulated with the top-down political orders that satisfy the needs of the MoE to put pressure on teachers to work on students-related numbers as a traditional accountability relationship. Indeed, politicized implementation of the curriculum has powerful to divert teacher role through

management accountability relationship by removing their responsibility to implement the curriculum as intended (Chisholm & D., 2005; Reeves, 2004).

Political or technical procedures that shift the focus of the curriculum implementers away from the implementation of the curriculum as planned may be the reason why the management accountability relationship isn't working (WDR, 2004, 2018). Increased accountability pressures make it more difficult for teachers to create the very positive relationships and trusting learning environments that they maintain are necessary to work productively in schools in challenging circumstances that are subject to school external roles. The findings of the study disclose that the management accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers is observed to be a weak force for better implementation of curriculum and conversely, this accountability relationship was working for diverting teachers' role out of the adequate implementation of the curriculum by generalizing that good student-related attractive number report implies to the good teachers' evaluation. An increase in report-driven loads from the district education offices (politicians) via SMBs often leads teachers to be diverted from their effectiveness and minute time to meet the major teaching duties such as designing their duties for productive implementation of the curriculum. Indeed, the study shows that teachers have experienced pressure depending on the SMBs and the nature of contextualized reporting school environment.

Teachers face considerable and increasing pressure in their working lives. Hence, the management accountability relationship has harmed teachers' ability to be held accountable for what happens in the classroom. However, SMBs would rather put pressure on teachers to hold them accountable for improving student-related reports to meet the needs of school stakeholders. The saddest and worst part is that there is no

solid evidence that these approaches to manipulating students-related reports and accountability are linked to the teachers' duties in the classroom. In the present controversy over the management accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers, the prevailing allegation is that students-related numbers are hard data whereas; curriculum implementation practices are easy and the implication, less worthwhile. Such dichotomy is unproductive and false to divert teachers from actual practices of classroom implementation of curriculum. Students-related reports create the illusion of precision but the best practice for SMBs is to hold teachers accountable by bullying mechanism with the teachers' evaluation results.

5. Conclusions

In light of the evidence, the case was driven by the desire for a deep and detailed analysis of the report-driven management accountability in primary school curriculum implementation demonstrating either driving or diverting the focus or the role of teachers. The aim of the study was not to produce or come up with a wide generalization (e.g., the growing dominance of reports as an important part of making teachers' work visible) in schools but to look more closely at the experience of the participants and examine how report-driven accountability relationship, as a complex phenomenon, diverted the core practice of teaching profession from the implementation of the curriculum. Accountability is the responsibility to ensure that students are meeting academic standards and making progress in the implementation of the curriculum. However, the results have revealed that accountability is conceived by the teachers as a technique used to frighten and put pressure on teachers while facilitating reporting, allocating more work, and fostering fear.

The results have also shown that management accountability relationships were compromised for the curriculum implementation due to SMBs often forced by bureaucratic educational structural ladder or top-down model from the district educational offices that imposed responsibilities and expectations on teachers. It should be noted that because the MoE needs students-related attractive reports for getting donations or funds from its international development partners, management accountability relationships were primarily operational for holding teachers accountable for preparing reports as driving principles such as promotion of 100%; improving students' scores by a certain percentage over the previous year's average score, increasing enrolment rate by a certain proportion, reducing the dropout rate, etc., with little emphasis on the actual teachers' practices of classroom curricula. The result of this study revealed that teachers did not ignore the diverting reports for they knew that those reports were part of the mixture of the educational and political landscape.

This study disclosed that teachers were forced to promote students by adding some amount of marks that disrupted the school management guideline for the sake of achieving ranks. Ultimately, the school principals and supervisors will get promotions and rewards based on the ranks they 'achieved'. This means that the teachers left their classroom curriculum implementation and were forced to prepare attractive data and reports. The competition among primary schools, WEOs, and REBs has initiated SMBs to exercise strong management accountability relationships to hold teachers accountable for student-related reports by linking or threatening teachers with their evaluation results, promotion, and salary increase. Conversely, it was perceived that soft and forgiving accountability forms such as frequent advising, and oral warnings were exercised for weakened implementation of the curriculum that diverted teachers

from their authentic implementation of the curriculum. This is because teachers are politically vulnerable and have too little power to choose and implement their professional duties and responsibilities beyond collecting good students' results to get good evaluation results. There are no laws or clear educational accountability policies and guidelines that prevent teachers not to being manipulated in collecting a set of data for their reports.

While prior authors have studied the problem already, no sufficient inquiries have been made considering the situation of teachers who are significantly experiencing diverting reports for accountability relationships in primary schools. This article contributes to our understanding of the complex interplay of accountability relationships between SMBs and teachers' role as an emerging accountability culture in Ethiopia needs careful re-imagination of the accountability policies and practices as a precise driver of teachers to the classroom curricula practices. The contributions to this special issue take on an exciting journey across a variety of educational domains and aspects of student-related reports. The study recommends that teachers should be given time and space through management accountability relationships to prioritize the implementation of curriculum over report preparation.

6. Limitations and further directions

The present study has attempted to offer a clearer view of the issue, but it is not a thorough explanation addressing the primary school system level educational accountability. More comprehensive research may be needed to conduct country-wide research that includes all levels of the educational structures to come up with holistic and more comprehensive conclusions. This case study was limited to a single zone

administration, and hence the findings may not be generalizable to the Oromia regional state or the country. Large-scale research is needed to re-thinking the practice of accountability relationship between SMBs and teachers as it drives or diverts teachers' focus to or from the implementation of the curriculum. The findings of this case study showed that the data were predominantly focused on a small sample of teachers' reflections. A larger sample study may be needed to provide a clearer picture of teachers' accountability at primary schools in the country.

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Ethical Approval

Since this study is part of my dissertation, it was conducted with the permission of the Institutional Review Board of the College of Education and Behavioral Studies (CEBS), Addis Ababa University with protocol number: CEBS_C & I_006/2024 dated May 20, 2024.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declarations Competing for Interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests concerning the research.

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Appendix-A

Major components of teachers' evaluation format for primary schools

No.	Planned activities	Level of performance				Total	*Focus area of teachers' accountability
		1	2	3	4		
1	Prepare annual and weekly plans and conduct teaching and learning						
2	Responsible for respecting working hours and attending flag ceremonies						
3	Respect and uphold school ethics						
4	Participate in increasing students' enrollment (bringing students) and providing on- time report						*
5	Activities done to reduce students' dropout and absenteeism						*
6	The role played in the assembly, committee, and department						
7	Book distributed and collected						
8	Giving tutorials for female students and slow learners						
9	Activities carried out to maintain the school atmosphere, restrooms, and classrooms clean						
10	Using different teaching methods						
11	Completing the textbook contents on time						
12	Replace wasted instructional time and report on time						
13	Evaluation of students' textbooks						
14	conducting action research						
15	Work hard on school discipline and safety						

16	On-time report on increasing students' results by 5 to 10 %						*
17	Provide quality and timely reporting of education activities						
18	Good exemplary work on planting and maintaining trees						
19	Work hard on increasing students' promotion						*
20	CPD plan, practice, and on- time report						
21	Attempts were made to increase school revenue						
22	Perform or implement various management duties assigned to the teacher						
Overall result							

Teacher's name_____ Approval of School principal

Sing_____Date_____ Name _____ Sign. ____Date_____

Supervisors' approval

Name_____Sign____ Date____