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Assessing the Educational Effect, Student Perceptions, and Satisfaction with School Feeding Programs in Addis Ababa's Public Primary Schools

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Abstract

Across the globe governments have been implementing school feeding programs (SFPs) aiming at enhancing students' health and educational outcomes. This study examined the effect of the government funded school feeding program on educational outcomes in Addis Ababa's public primary schools. Using an Interrupted Time Series design and a cross-sectional survey design, the research examined changes in enrollment, dropout rates, and promotion levels, as well as students' perceptions and satisfaction with the food provision. Data were collected from school records and 173 students across 27 schools in five sub-cities. Results have indicated that the SFP significantly improved educational outcomes, including increased enrollment, reduced dropout, and enhanced promotion levels. Moreover, regardless of demographics, more than 80% of beneficiary students perceived the program as important, with 87.4% reporting high level of satisfaction with the food provision. These findings suggest that SFPs can be an effective tool for improving educational outcomes in developing countries though potential adverse consequences such as dependency and sustainability need careful consideration.

Keywords: School-Feeding Program, educational outcomes, interrupted time series analysis, students perceptions, satisfaction

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Introduction

Background of the Study

In the history of school feeding the prominent school meal movements were started in Europe in the late 18th century aiming at reducing inequality, and improving health, nutrition and educational progress. Initially private organizations and individual donors (Levenstein, 2003; World Food Program [WFP], 2020) funded the provision of in-school meals. It was during the global food, fuel, and financial crises of 2008 that school feeding got new prominence as a potential safety net and as a social support measure. Following the crises, school feeding programs (SFPs) were implemented in several poor countries as a key response to the social shocks. Besides, in 2013, the report titled 'the State of School Feeding Worldwide', prepared by the World Food Programme (WFP), was published providing the first picture of SFPs around the globe. The report also helped a lot as a continuing and systematic process to describe and better understand the strengths and challenges of SFPs (Drake et al., 2016; WFP, 2020).

Recent evidence have indicated that globally at least 368 million, about 1 out of every 5, pre-primary, primary and secondary school children receive a meal every day at schools in 161 countries in year 2020. Out of these, the first four largest school feeding programs are found in India, Brazil and China, the United States, and Egypt with 90, 40, 30 and 90 million children respectively in year 2020. Besides, among the children receiving school meals around the world, about 188 million (68%) were found to live in one of the five BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries (WFP, 2020). Further, in terms of having the largest number of SFPs: South

Asia (107 million), Latin America and the Caribbean (78 million), take the lead followed by East Asia and the Pacific (58 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (53 million) (Global Child Nutrition Foundation [GCNF], 2021; WFP, 2020).

In-school feeding programs have two primary objectives. The first objective is to alleviate short-term hunger among attending children. Since a hungry child has less attention span and more difficulty to accomplish composite tasks, many argued that, short-term hunger has an adverse effect on school children learning achievements. Thus, providing in-school meal early in the school day helps for school children to reduce their hunger prior or/and during classes, to improve their attention span and focus better, as well as to avoid their need to leave the school to find food. Second, the provision of meal will create opportunity for beneficiaries to become more efficient and successful in school, and thus eventually leading to facilitating learning, reducing dropout and improving promotion rates (Bundy et al., 2009; Drake et al., 2016; GCNF, 2021; Ramin, 2018).

A study by Hinrichs (2010) showed positive contribution of the SFP implementation in enhancing both educational and health outcomes. However, according to this study, the effect size of the program on educational and health outcomes as well as on students' grade level were not similar. Besides, a higher effect on educational outcomes was found in higher-grade levels compared with earlier grade. In addition, some of the positive contributions of SFP include enhancement of academic performance (Chepkwony et al., 2013; Kazianga et al., 2009); improved level of students' efforts and attentiveness (Afridi et al., 2013), a significant increase in

attendance rate (Ahmed, 2004; Alderman et al., 2012; Hinrichs, 2010; Sarah et al., 2008); and reduction of household food costs (Dheressa, 2011)

A study by Jisook et al., (2009) showed that the satisfaction of beneficiary students on meal services were highly related with the quantity and quality of food, waiting time for meals, adequacy of eating place, and suitability of the school meal environment. Besides, it was reported that students receiving adequate food were highly satisfied (Jisook et al., 2009). Lee and Jang (2005) also indicated that students are more likely to be satisfied when there are no prolonged waiting times for meals, adequate dining rooms in a school, as well as adequate space, suitable chairs and tables in the dining rooms. Other studies also reported that students have received uneven meal quantity in schools which lack own cafeterias (dining rooms), have problems with a high risk of safety accidents in the food preparation and serving process, and improper meal temperature (Kim & Lee, 2004).

In Ethiopia, the first SFP funded by WFP was launched in 1994 in Tigray region targeting 25,000 children in 40 schools, and this was extended to Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) and Somali regional states. In 2004, the number of beneficiaries and the coverage of schools grew to 650 thousand students and 1,200 schools (WFP, 2019). Before 2019, SFPs supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were implemented in some public primary schools in Addis Ababa. The beneficiaries were students having a family with poor economic background. However, before 2019 a number of students with similar economic background in both beneficiary schools and non-beneficiary public schools

in Addis Ababa went to school without eating food (Belachew, 2021; Tefera et al., 2021).

The first city government-funded SFP was launched in September 2019 in Addis Ababa. In addition, in 2019, the city council approved a proclamation that established the "Feeding Agency" (hereinafter the Agency), which is accountable to the mayor. The rationale behind the establishment of the Agency include: increasing the access and equity of primary education for all children in the capital, reducing short-term hunger, enhancing educational outcomes of public primary school students, and managing the provision of in-school feeding in public schools in a consistent and integrated manner. Accordingly, the Agency has been providing in-school feeding in public pre-primary and primary schools (grades 1 to 8) located in Addis Ababa (School Feeding Agency (SFA), 2021; Addis Nigari Gazeta (ANG), 2019 & 2021).

These days, governments, including the city administration of Addis Ababa, are showing an ever-increasing demand for evidence-based information that can help them to better understand, and thus serve as a guidance to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their school feeding programs and scale up the programs (Drake et al., 2016; Paul et al., 2016). Therefore, the main purpose of the study was to assess the performance of the SFP in public primary school students in Addis Ababa.

Statement of the Problem

Findings from empirical studies have shown that in-school feeding programs, when well designed and effectively implemented, can have the potential to alleviate short-term hunger and improve attention span. Further, it helps to avoid a need to leave the school to find food, to advance education outcomes of school going children; and

to benefit parents through transferring the cost of schooling (Africa Union Commission [AUC], 2018; Bundy et al., 2009; Drake et al., 2016; Ramin, 2018). Since the commencement of the SFP, the Agency has been providing in-school feeding two times a day, every day for all public pre-primary and primary school students free of charge. For instance, in 2019/20 academic year, approximately 382 thousand students in Addis Ababa received a breakfast and a launch every day from the city administration funded SFP. Besides, the number of beneficiaries in public primary schools grew to a total of 528 thousand and 629 thousand students in school years 2020/21 and 2021/22, respectively (SFA, 2021).

In general, it can be assumed that the SFP can play positive roles in enhancing the health status and educational outcomes of public primary school students in Addis Ababa. However, it requires empirical evidence to tell whether the SFP has been practically contributing to the same or not in the study area. A preliminary desk review was conducted to understand what is already known, and it revealed that there is a paucity of studies examining the issue of interest. In other words, despite some prior studies that assessed performance of the SFP in Addis Ababa and/or, most of them did not provide adequate empirical evidence around the contributions of the program, satisfaction of beneficiary students with regard to various aspects of the food provision along with the key factors affecting its efficiency and effectiveness in the study area.

For instance, some studies focused on the SFPs funded by non-governmental organizations such as WFP and other donors rather than by government. Besides, these studies were conducted in rural contexts such as protracted refugee situations in SNNPR, Somali and Afar regions as well as in Amhara and in other regional states

(Asmamaw, 2014; Dheressa, 2011; Ramin, 2018; TANGO International, 2009; Yigzaw, 2019). This indicates the context and geographical coverage gaps in these studies.

There are also studies that evaluated the SFPs implemented in Addis Ababa. However, some focused on assessing only the factors influencing success of the program in Arada sub-city (Michale, 2021); the SFP and its contribution to quality education in first cycle in Yeka Sub-city (Mulat, 2019). Besides, the effect of SFP funded by NGOs and individual donors on the school performance of primary public school children in Arada sub-city (Abiy, 2017); the practice and challenges of the SFP (Belachew, 2021) and specific issues such as effects of COVID-19 (Tefera et al., 2021). In addition, none of these studies did assess either effect of the SFP using panel data or the satisfaction of beneficiary students on various aspects of the food provision, only few employed using mixed approach. Except a study by Abiy (2017), none has drawn on the existing body of documented data from school record. These imply a combination of thematic, methodological and context gaps of existing studies to provide adequate empirical evidence with regard to the topic of interest of this study.

In general, given the geographical coverage, thematic and methodological gaps, it is difficult to generalize the findings obtained from the existing studies to the population of interest. Put differently, existing studies provide little importance for understanding the performance of SFP to enhance educational outcomes, satisfaction level of beneficiary students as well as the key factors affecting efficiency and effectiveness of the government funded SFP in public primary schools in Addis Ababa.

Hence, this study aimed to fill the gaps by assessing/addressing the following three main research questions:

To what extent does the SFP affect the educational outcomes of public primary school students in Addis Ababa?

How important do beneficiary students perceive the SFP to be?

To what extent are beneficiary students satisfied with the provision of meals?

Scope of the Study

The study was delimitated to assess the effects of the SFP, its perceived importance level, and satisfaction level of beneficiary students with the food provision. In other words, thematic issues including process evaluation and cost-benefit analysis were not the focus of the current study. Besides, it covered only five sub-cities and 27 public primary schools in Addis Ababa indicating that the SFPs implemented at pre-primary level was out of its scope. In terms of time scope, the study assessed the topic of interest delimited to academic years ranging from 2016/7 to 2021/2.

Significance of the Study

Overall, the study could be useful for decision makers, program-implementing schools and various actors, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders as well. Specifically, it is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge on the effects of SFP on educational outcomes in urban settings of developing countries, providing insights into how SFPs can influence various aspects of educational participation and performance. Further, it provides quantitative evidence on students' perceptions and satisfaction with various aspects of the meal provision in an urban Ethiopian context,

an area often overlooked in previous research. Moreover, it identifies areas for improvement, draws lessons and offers recommendations to inform evidence-based policy decisions. Besides, it serves as reference for future research.

Methods

Research Designs

The study employed two research designs, combining an Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis with a cross-sectional survey.

The ITS design, a quasi-experimental approach, was utilized to assess the effect of the School Feeding Program (SFP) on educational outcomes by comparing trends comparing the pre- and post-intervention, with the pre-intervention period serving as a counterfactual, addressing the first research question (Bernal et al., 2017; Biglan & Wagenaar, 2000; Glass et al., 2008; Kontopantelis et al., 2015). This design is particularly suitable and robust in detecting changes when randomized controlled trials are not feasible due to ethical or practical constraints (Bernal et al., 2017; Lopez et al., 2018). In this study, the universal nature of the SFP in Addis Ababa precluded the use of a control group, making the ITS design an appropriate alternative. Thus, alternative designs such as controlled before-and-after studies were not feasible due to the universal implementation of the SFP, which left no suitable control group.

On the other hand, the cross-sectional survey design addressed the second and third research questions, focusing on students' perceptions of the SFP and satisfaction with the food provision. The survey design allows for the collection of standardized information from a large sample, facilitating generalization to the broader population, while aligning well with the research objectives of assessing student perceptions and

satisfaction (Ponto, 2015). This design was considered most appropriate and efficient over other designs for it yields maximal information and provides an opportunity for considering many different aspects of the topic of interest, accurately describing a situation and applying measurement strategies that minimize bias and maximize the reliability of the evidence collected (Kothari, 2008; Kumar, 2014). While longitudinal surveys could provide insights into changes over time, the cross-sectional nature of the survey design is more appropriate for capturing current attitudes towards an ongoing program, at a specific point in time.

Data collection methods

For the ITS analysis, administrative data on enrollment, dropout rates, and promotion levels were collected from school records covering six academic years (2016/17 to 2021/22), with three years each in the pre- and post-intervention period. A pretested standardized structured school questionnaire was used to gather gender-disaggregated data for each academic year, resulting in 162 school-year observations (27 schools × 6 years).

Student Survey

The student survey questionnaire included three major sections. The first section comprises items to assess the respondents' demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The second and third sections include items assessing the students' perception concerning importance of the SFP and level of satisfaction with various aspects of the food provision, respectively. The questionnaire used a combination of response options, including checkbox indications and Likert scales.

Data Collection Procedure

Trained research assistants administered the student survey face-to-face within selected schools, using child-friendly language to enhance comprehension and ensure accurate completion.

Instrument development and validation

Validated instruments from existing literature on student satisfaction and school feeding programs informed the selection of both the school and student questionnaire items (e.g., Gelli et al., 2016; Bundy et al., 2009). Particularly, the selection of the student survey items was grounded in the need to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability in capturing the satisfaction levels of school-age children.

The survey questionnaire development involved pilot testing, and experts and fellow researchers' consultation to ensuring content validity and strengthening the dependability and conformability of the approaches used in the study's approaches. Feedback from the pilot testing and consultation was used for refinement of wording for clarity and comprehension. Furthermore, comprehensive documentation of data collection, analysis procedures, and decision-making processes was ensured by maintaining all records. This transparency helps to assess reliability of the interpretations and overall trustworthiness of the results, while allowing for potential replication and verification of the study's findings.

Sampling Design

The study employed a random sampling method combining stratified and random sampling techniques to select sample subcities, schools and students in the study.

Sample size determination

The required sample sizes for subcities, schools, and students were determined using established statistical formulas and power analysis. For subcities, Yemane's (1997) formula was applied to calculate the sample size based on a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, yielding approximately 9.8 subcities. Adjusting for small populations with Finite Population Correction (FPC), the sample size resulted in five subcities representing 50% of the total, ensuring geographical and socioeconomic diversity while being manageable. Likewise, the initial sample size for schools was calculated based on Yemane's formula, resulting in a minimum of 78 schools. However, due to resource constraints, the number was adjusted to 30 schools (out of 137), which aligns with the finite population correction method to maintain feasibility while ensuring diversity (Israel, 2003). For students, the necessary sample size was determined conducting a power analysis using SPSS, assuming a medium effect size ($f = 0.25$), $\alpha = 0.05$, and a power of 0.80 for a one-way ANOVA across five subcities. The analysis indicated a sample size of 200 students, which is sufficient for achieving reliable and valid results, remaining feasible for data collection (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2018).

Sampling Techniques, Criteria and Procedure

The study employed a multi-stage sampling approach to select a representative sample from subcities, schools, and students, using a combination of stratified and random sampling techniques.

In the first stage, using a stratified random sampling technique, the population of subcities were stratified into two distinct subgroups (strata) based on geographic location (i.e., inner and outer city), ensuring representation across different contexts. Each of the first and second groups consist five subcities located at inner city and outer city, respectively. Then, five subcities (Lideta, Addis Ketema, and Kirkos from the first, and Gullele and Akaki from the second group) were randomly selected, employing probability proportional to size technique. This ensured that subcities located at inner cities consisting larger number of schools had a higher chance of selection.

In the second stage, a comprehensive list of all primary schools within each selected subcity was obtained, and then a final sampling frame comprising eligible schools was compiled by screening them on the basis of certain inclusion criteria. Accordingly, only schools that had implemented the SFP for three academic years, with accessible administrative records for the six-year period (2016/17 to 2021/22), and having enrolled students in grades 1-8 were included in the sampling frame. The sample size of schools required from each selected subcity was assigned proportionate to the total number of eligible schools in the subcity. Finally, 30 schools were randomly selected from selected subcities, proportionate to the number of schools in each subcity.

In the third stage, first, sections from grades 4-8 within each sampled school were selected randomly. Then, within the selected sections, selection criteria were used to screen students for inclusion in this study. The study then involved students who were enrolled from grades 1-5 in the sampled schools during the pre-intervention period and those who participated in the SFP at least for two years The study also included those students who were attending classes in grades 4-8 during the data collection period.

Finally, using a stratified random sampling technique, a random sample of 200 students was drawn from the selected schools.

Operational definitions of key concepts and variables

Interrupted Time Series (ITS) Analysis: This refers to a quasi-experimental design that uses longitudinal data to evaluate the impact of an intervention by comparing trends before and after its implementation, controlling for pre-existing trends (Bernal et al., 2017).

School Feeding Program (SFP): It is a structured initiative providing regular meals to students within the school environment, aimed at improving nutrition and educational outcomes (WFP, 2020).

Educational Outcomes: The phrase refers to the measurable indicators of student performance and engagement, including enrollment, dropout rates, and promotion level (Kristjansson et al., 2016).

Student Perceptions: Self-reported views and opinions of students regarding the importance and effect of the School Feeding Program on their health and educational experience, collected through surveys (Bundy et al., 2018).

Meal Satisfaction: The degree of contentment expressed by students regarding various aspects of the provided meals, including quality, quantity and variety, measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Aurino et al., 2019).

Measurements and Procedures

In the ITS regression analysis, there was one independent variable, nonexistence vs. existence of the SFP. The independent variable was coded as a dummy variable (0= nonexistence of SFP, 1= existence of SFP). It also included three primary dependent variables that are overall enrollment, dropouts, and promotion levels. In addition, subgroup analyses were carried out to find out the program's effect on these outcomes for female and male students separately. Thus, the ITS design included nine models, which means three related to the three primary dependent variables and six for the gender-based assessment. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from sample subcities and schools, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

With regard to the procedure, the ITS analysis was conducted following a three-step approach, using Stata statistical software. First, we specified a single-group ITSA model with the 2019/20 academic year (year number 4 in the model) as the intervention point, and then we estimated the initial model using the 'xtitsa' command with the 'vce (robust)' option to account for potential heteroscedasticity. Second, we run the initial ITSA regression model using the 'actest' command, generating residuals and testing

them for autocorrelation. This step involved analyzing the output to identify the optimal number of lags that accurately captured the autocorrelation structure within the data. Moreover, identifying the correct autocorrelation structure involved the following steps: visual inspection of autocorrelation function (ACF) and partial autocorrelation function (PACF) plots (Box et al., 2015), comparison of models with different autocorrelation structures using information criteria such as AIC and BIC (Burnham & Anderson, 2004), and checking for remaining autocorrelation in the residuals using Ljung-Box test (Ljung & Box, 1978). Hence, the final model was selected based on the best fit according to these criteria, balancing model complexity with explanatory power. Finally, we refined the regression model by incorporating the identified optimal lag structure based on the autocorrelation analysis. Then, we re-estimated this refined model to produce the results.

Regarding the survey design, participants were presented with a standardized structured questionnaire consisting two major measures (perceived importance of the SFP and satisfaction with the food provision) and additional items assessing demographic information. The first measure comprises seven items designed to assess the participants' perceptions the importance of the SFP in providing nutritious meals, preventing hunger during school, enabling full-day attendance, increasing attentiveness, reducing meal costs. The items were coded as a dummy variable (0= disagreement, 1= agreement with importance of the SFP). The scores of the seven items were totaled to create an index for the perceived importance measure (Cronbach's alpha .89).

The second measure includes eight items to assess the participants' level of satisfaction with regard to quality, quantity, diversity, and timeliness of the food (both breakfast and lunch) provided to them from the SFP. All the eight items were measured on a five point Likert scale (1, highly dissatisfied to 5, highly satisfied). Participants responded to eight questions, four regarding breakfast provision and the other four concerning lunch provision. The scores of these eight items were averaged to beneficiary satisfaction measure (Cronbach's alpha .92).The use of a 5-point Likert scale was chosen for its balance between having enough points of discrimination without overwhelming respondents with too many options, making it more suitable for children compared to scales with more points (Mellor & Moore, 2014; Revilla et al., 2014). The variety offered by a five-point scale encourages children to provide honest feedback without the pressure of having to select extreme options, likely leading to more reliable data, as respondents are more likely to express their true feelings.

Prior to administering the survey, the instrument was translated to Amharic and back translated to English by the researcher, assisted by language experts to ensure conceptual equivalence (Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). The translation process involved identifying and resolving any discrepancies in meaning between the original and translated versions.

Concerning procedure in the student survey, first, participants were provided with information about the objectives of the study and the importance of their participation in the survey. Besides, participants were told about their right to stop taking part in the survey whenever they need to do so. After obtaining informed consent, participants were invited to reflect on the items included in the questionnaire. Further,

the study utilized major strategies to mitigating potential response bias, such as social desirability bias. These include assuring anonymity and confidentiality to respondents (Krumpal, 2013), ensuring voluntary participation, using indirect questioning techniques for sensitive items (Fisher, 1993), and incorporating reverse-coded items to detect acquiescence bias (Weijters et al., 2013). Besides, trained research assistants administered the student survey face-to-face within selected schools, using child-friendly language to enhance comprehension and ensure accurate completion.

Statistical Analysis

Interrupted Time Series Analysis: the ITS regression analysis was used to assess the effects of the SFP on educational outcomes, controlling for pre-existing trends and potential confounding factors (Bernal et al., 2017; Biglan & Wagenaar, 2000; Wagner et al., 2002). The standardized ITSA regression model (accounted for autocorrelation) took the following form in equation 1.

$$Y_t = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T_t + \beta_2 X_t + \beta_3 X_t T_t + \varepsilon_t \qquad (1)$$

Where: Y_t is the aggregated outcome variable measured at each equally spaced time point t. β_0 is the intercept or starting level of the outcome variable. β_1 represents the slope or trend of the outcome variable until the introduction of the intervention. T_t is the time since the start of the study. β_2 represents the change in the level of the outcome that occurs in the period immediately following the introduction of the intervention (Thus we look for significant p-values in β2 to indicate an immediate treatment effect). X_t is a dummy (indicator) variable representing the intervention (pre-intervention periods 0, otherwise 1). β_3 represents the difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention slopes of the outcome; and $X_t T_t$ is an interaction term.

In general, significant p-values in β2 indicate an immediate treatment effect, while significant p-values in β3 show a treatment effect over time (Linden, 2015). In addition, STATA (version 15) served as a tool for the purpose of processing, tabulating, and summarizing the quantitative data.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics: Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize students' perceptions and satisfaction levels. Moreover, inferential statistical techniques such as chi-square, t-tests, and ANOVA were employed to assess differences in perceptions and satisfaction across demographic groups. Besides, Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 23) was used for processing, tabulating, and summarizing the quantitative data. In addition, it was used to encode data, calculate, and generate some graphs.

Additional Robustness Checks

To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, several additional robustness checks including sensitivity analyses, subgroup analyses, and alternative model specifications were conducted. The sensitivity analyses included varying the intervention start date and excluding potential outliers. The separate subgroup analyses conducted for overall, female, and male students help to examine potential gender differences in the SFP effect. Different model specifications were tested to ensure consistency of findings.

Overall, before undertaking the various statistical tests, normality check was carried out using both a histogram and Q-Q Plot and the appropriate goodness of fit tests.

Results and Discussion

Results

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of participants

Five subcities and 27 public primary schools in these subcities were participants of the ITS design. Of these, six schools were found in Lideta, five in Kirkos, five in Gulele, nine in Addis Ketema, and two schools in Akaki sub-cities. All the schools included grades 1 to 8. Note that initially the study aimed to include 5 sub-cities, 30 schools, and 200 students. However, the final sample consisted of 5 sub-cities, 27 schools and 173 students, excluding three schools and associated students from Akaki subcity, due to missing data. We noted that the uneven distribution of schools across sub-cities could introduce bias if the excluded schools differed significantly from those included. To address this, first, we conducted a missing data analysis and found that the missing data were not random. Second, we conducted comparative analysis comparing the demographics and socio-economic characteristics of excluded schools associated students with those included to identify potential bias and found no significant differences. Besides, a relatively large number of sample students were drawn from selected schools from Akaki. Cases with huge incomplete data on educational outcomes and related variables were also removed from the final analysis, leading to a reduction of sample size).

Participants of the survey were 173 (52 %, female) students from the sampled 27 public primary schools. The near-equal representation of participants with a slight majority of female students aligns with broader population trends towards gender parity in education (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2022). Participants were between 10 and 17 years old (M =12.98, SD =1.86). The age range and mean age suggest that the sample primarily consists of pre-adolescents to early adolescents, which aligns with typical school attendance ages (Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia [CSA], 2021). Nearly 59% and 37% of the participants respectively responded that the head of their household are fathers and mother, and the remaining four percent indicated the household heads were others such as sisters or brothers. This result suggests that a significant proportion of students live in households headed by fathers. The substantial representation of mothers also highlights the role of women in family leadership. Besides, as participants reported, overall there were 307 (51.14 %, female) school age children in the households of students who provided valid responses. Of these, about 83 % were enrolled in public primary schools. Overall, the above figures imply similarities between the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of participants. The figures further indicate the opportunities that the school age children and their parents had in terms of benefiting from the government funded SFP in the study areas.

Overall, these demographic and socio-economic characteristics can significantly influence how beneficiaries perceive the program and their satisfaction level with food provision, making it essential to explore their relationships further.

Effect of SFP on Educational Outcomes

Effect of SFP on Enrollment

As shown in the regression output Table 1, the starting level of average number of enrolled students were estimated at 863.8 students per school per year, and the number appeared to decrease, but not significantly, every year prior to 2019/20 by 22 students ($p = 0.104$, $CI = [-50.6, 4.7]$).

Table 1

ITSA Regression Results of the Effect of SFP on Enrollment

	Description	**Overall**	**Female**	**Male**
		Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
_t(Since 2016/7)	Trend at the time since the start of the study	-22.93	-17.41*	-5.45
		(14.11)	(7.46)	(6.93)
_x4(2019/20)	Trend at the first year of the intervention	32.2*	17.97*	13.5
		(14.17)	(7.93)	(8.83)
_x_t4	Annual trend during the intervention period	40.23**	21.60**	19.22*
		(13.34)	(6.64)	(7.82)
_cons	Constant	863.77***	466.44***	408***
		(92.31)	(48.01)	(49.48)
_b[_t]+_b[_x_t4]	Post-intervention linear trend	17.3*	4.19	13.78**
		(8.40)	(3.97)	(4.71)
N	Number of observations	162	162	162
N	Number of Schools	27	27	27

Note: Numbers in brackets are robust standard errors; *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$

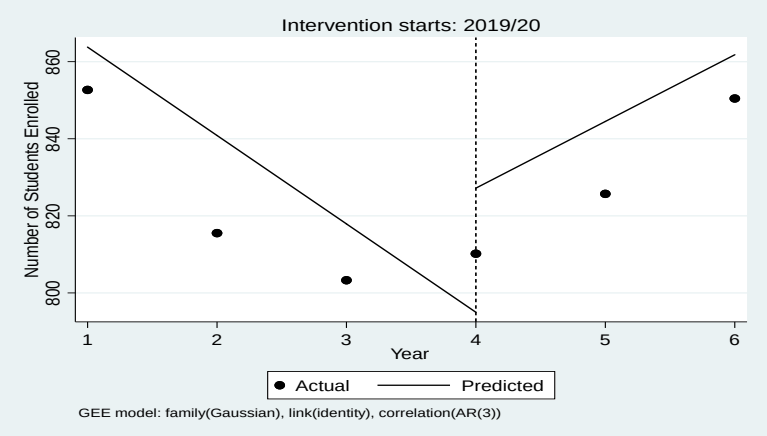
Source: Survey data, 2022

In the first year of the intervention (2019/20), there appeared a significant increase in the average number of overall enrollment by 32 students (p =.023, CI = [4.4, 59.98]), followed by a significant increase in the annual trend of enrollment (relative to the pre-intervention trend) by 40.23 students per school per year (p = 0.003, CI = [14.1, 66.4]). Figure 1 provides a visual display of these results.

The result further shows that after the introduction of SFP, the average number of enrolled children significantly increased annually by 17.3 students (p =.04, CI = 0.8, 33.8]).

Figure 1.

Single-group ITSA with GEE model _ Enrollment Source: Survey data, 2022



With regard to results disaggregated by gender, as depicted in Model 2 and Model 3 of Table 1, the average number of female and male students enrolled initially

was estimated at 466.4, and 408 students, respectively. Enrollment of both female and male students showed a decline; however, the decrease for males was not significant. The annual average decline rate for female and male students was 17.4 (p=0.020) and 5.5 (p=0.432), respectively. In the first year of the intervention (2019/20), there appeared to be a significant increase of 17.97 (p=0.024) female and a non-significant increase of 13.5 (p=0.126) male students. These were followed further by a significant increase in the annual trend of average enrollment (relative to the pre-intervention trend) of 21.6 (p=001) female and 19.2 (p=0.014) male students at the 1% and 5%, respectively. On the other hand, the results from the lincom estimate further indicate that after the introduction of the SFP, average enrollment for males significantly increased at the 1% level annually by a number of 13.8 students and insignificantly by 4.2 female students.

Effect of SFP on Dropouts

ITSA results indicate that the overall initial dropout rate was 10.4%, 5% for females and 5.5% for males. Since the beginning of the study (i.e., 2016/7), the dropout trend of total students declined by 1.77, although this decrease was not statistically significant.

Likewise, the analysis disaggregated by gender shows a non-significant increase in the total dropout rate (0.478) and the dropout rate of female students (1.29). Looking at the trend at the first year of the intervention, the findings have shown a non-significant decrease of 1.94 and an increase of 0.15 female and male students respectively. Besides, the annual trend during the intervention period dropout of female students exhibited a decrease (but not a significant one) by 0.08, while it showed an

increase by 0.78 for male students though the variation was not significant. Figure 2 shows these results.

Table 2

ITSA Regression Results of the Effect of SFP on Dropout

	Description	**Overall**	**Females**	**Males**
		Model 4	**Model 5**	**Model 6**
_t(2016/27)	Trend at the time since the start of the study	-1.77	-.478	-1.29
		(1.94)	(.92)	(1.08)
_x4 (2019/20)	Trend at the first year of the intervention	-1.75	-1.94	.15
		(2.6)	(1.44)	(1.47)
_x_t4	Annual trend during the intervention period	0.7	-.08	0.78
		(2.08)	(1.00)	(1.14)
_cons	Constant	10.44**	5**	5.46**
		(3.45)	(1.58)	(1.91)
_b[_t]+_b[_x_t4]	Post-intervention linear trend	-1.07**	--.56**	-0.5**
		(.31)	(.17)	(0.19)
N	Number of observations	162	162	162
N		27	27	27

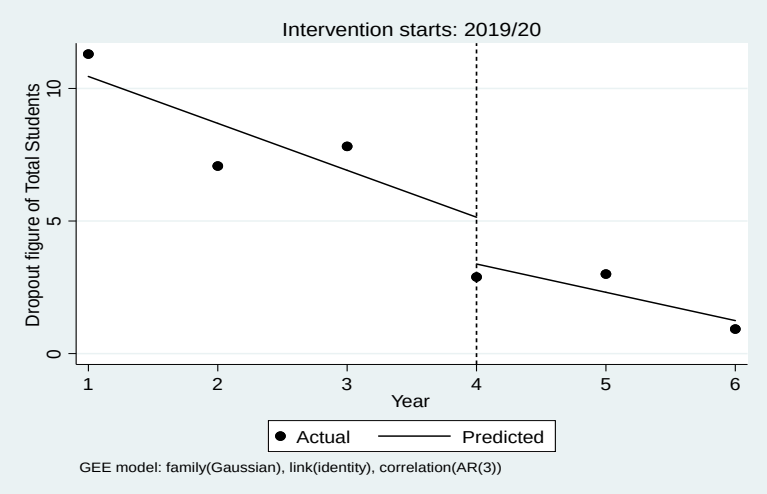
Note: Numbers in brackets are robust standard errors; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05
Source: Survey data, 2022

On the other hand, the results from the lincom estimate indicate that after the introduction of the SFP, the dropout significantly decreased annually by 1.07 (p=

0.001) for total, by 0.56 (*p*= 0.001) for female, and by 0.5 (*p*= 0.007) for male students at the 5% level.

Figure 2

Single-group ITSA with GEE model_ Dropout. Source: Survey data, 2022



Effect of SFP on Promotion

The average number of students promoted to the next grade at the starting level was estimated at 809.4 per school. The slope prior to intervention was decreased non-significantly by 22.74 (*p*= .121, *CI* = [−51.4, 5.98]) students per school per year followed by a significant change in the average number of promotion immediately following the introduction of the intervention (compared with counterfactual) by 60.5 students (*p*= .002, *CI* = [21.95, 99.1]). Besides, the post-intervention annual trend of promotion showed a sustained significant increase of 43.3 students per year per school at 1% level (*p*= .001, *CI* = [17.6, 69.12]).

Table 3

ITSA Regression Results of the Effect of SFP on Promotion

	Description	Overall	Female	Male
		Model 7	**Model 8**	**Model 9**
_t	Trend at the time since the start of the study	-22.74	-18.4*	-4.93
(-2016/7)		(14.65)	(7.52)	(7.46)
_x4	Trend at the first year of the intervention	60.5**	37.2***	24.8*
(-2019/20)		(19.67)	(9.57)	(11.63)
_x_t4	Annual trend during the intervention period	43.33**	24.2***	19.91*
		(13.2)	(6.35)	(7.84)
_cons	Constant	809.4 ***	4.11 ***	368.02***
		(89.22)	(46.39)	(43.41)
_b[_t]+_b[_x_t4]	Post-intervention linear trend	20.6 **	5.8	14.99**
		(7.9)	(3.7)	(4.58)
n	number of observations	162	162	162
N	number of groups	27	27	27

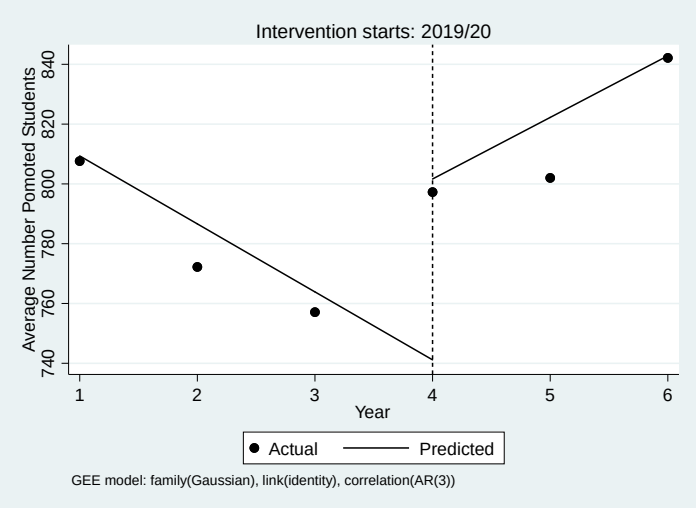
Note: Numbers in brackets are robust standard errors; and *** $p<0.001$, ** $p<0.01$, * $p<0.05$
Source: Survey data, 2022

The result further indicates a significant higher increase of 20.6 students at 1% level. ($p = .009$, $CI = [5.13, 36.1]$) in post-intervention slopes of promotion as compared to the pre-intervention period. Figure 3 provides a visual display of the result for Model 7.

Overall, the results indicate that the program has both significant immediate and sustained effect over time in increasing the average number of students promoted to the next grade at a school level.

Figure 3

Single-group ITSA with GEE model _ Promotion. Source: Survey data, 2022



Results of the analysis disaggregated by gender show that the average numbers of female and male students promoted to the next grade were estimated to be 441.8 and 368.02 per school, respectively. The annual trends in promotion appear to decrease significantly by 18.4 at 5% level (p= .014, *CI* = [33.12, 3.66]) for female students, and insignificantly for male students by 4.93 (p= .509, *CI* = [19.55, 9.69]). At the first year of the intervention, significant increases in the promotion trends of students were found for female by 37.2 level at 0.1 % level (p< .001, *CI* = [18.45, 55.95]), and for male by 24.8 level at 5 % level (p= .011, *CI* = [1.99, 47.6]). The level of the post intervention

annual trend also appeared to significantly increase by 24.2 for female ($p < .001$, CI = [17.75, 36.65]) and by 19.91 for male ($p = .011$, CI = [4.55, 35.26]) students per school at 0.1% and 5% level, respectively.

Besides, as compared to the pre intervention trend, the post intervention annual trend of promotion showed higher a significant increase of 14.98 male students at 1% level ($p = .001$, CI = [6.01, 23.96]), and insignificant increase of 5.8 female students per year per school.

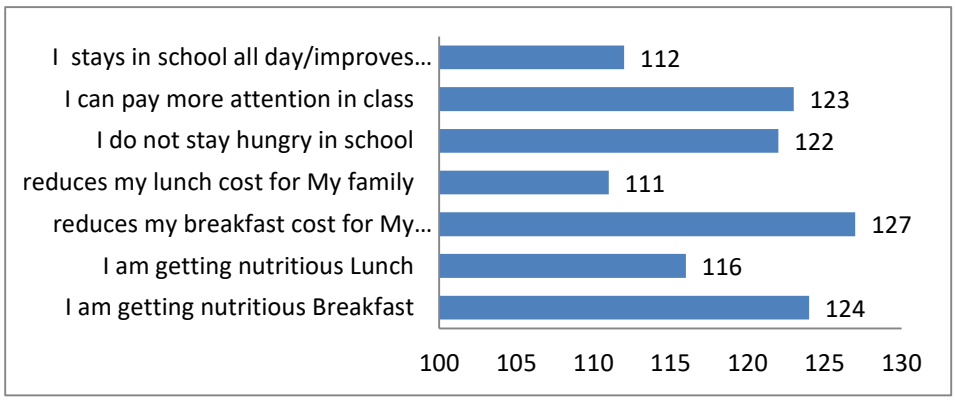
Perceived Importance of the SFP and Beneficiary Satisfaction

Perceived Importance of the SFP

Results of the descriptive analysis indicate that majority of the students had positive opinion/ perception with regard to the importance of the SFP. The program was perceived as important for them in various ways: not to be hungry during school (92.4%), to become more attentive in class (89.1%), to get nutritious food both at breakfast (88.6%) and lunch times (85.3%), and to show full-day attendance at school (84.2%). Furthermore, participants showed positive agreement regarding the program's contribution in reducing the costs of breakfast (92.7%) and lunch (88.1%) for their parents.

Figure 4

Perceived Importance of the SFP .Source: Survey data, 2023



Beneficiary Students' Satisfaction on the SFP

As shown in Table 4, the majority of the sampled students responded that they were highly satisfied with the timeliness (4.51), food diversity (4.33), quantity (4.25), food quality (4.21) of the food provided both at breakfast and lunch hours. The results further show that most of the beneficiary students were highly satisfied with the food provision with a mean score of 4.21.

Moreover, the study conducted additional tests to find out if there existed significant differences in the average scores of participants' satisfaction level with the food provision, based on gender, grade level, and school location. Accordingly, result of the t-test indicates no significant difference between the average scores of male and female students (t= .48, p=0.34).

Table 4

Satisfaction Levels of Beneficiary Students in Addis Ababa

No.	Items	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	Descriptive Level
1	Average Satisfaction on food provision time	139	4.51	0.79	highly satisfied
2	Average Satisfaction with Quantity of food provided	134	4.34	0.89	highly satisfied
3	Average Satisfaction with Diversity of food provided	135	4.33	0.896	highly satisfied
4	Average Satisfaction with Quality of food provided	135	4.21	0.97	highly satisfied
5	Average Satisfaction with the food provision (overall mean)	140	4.37	0.75	highly satisfied

Source: Survey data, 2022

Analysis of differences in mean scores based on the two independent variables measured on ordinal scale (subcities and students' grade level) were undertaken using two tests of analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA's F-test ($F(4,135) = 8.368$) of significance results in $p < 0.001$ indicating the influences of Subcity on the average score of students' satisfaction level. Furthermore, pair wise tests were conducted to test which differences between groups are significant. The results confirm mean scores in Akaki was found to be significantly lower than Kirkos, Lideta and Addis Ketema respectively with $p < 0.001$. Mean scores in Gulele was also significantly lower than Kirkos, and it was statistically indifferent between/among Kirkos, Lideta and Addis Ketema ($p>0.05$). A possible reason for the variations could the differences in sample sizes.

On the contrary, the F-test test of ANOVA indicate the mean scores among grade levels to be more or less similar (F (4,135) = 1.371, p=.247). This finding is not in agreement with some studies that reported differences in effect size of the program on health and educational outcomes on grade levels (Hinrichs, 2010). Overall, these results imply that majority of the students are highly satisfied with the food provision regardless of their gender and age.

Discussions

Discussion Related to Educational Outcomes

One of the aims of this study was to assess the effects of the SFP in increasing of the rates of enrollment and promotion and decreasing the rate of dropouts. The study found enough evidence that the SFP resulted in statistically significant change in the level and trend of overall of enrollment, promotion, and dropout growth.

The evidence suggests that the immediate treatment effect of the SFP on the level of enrollment and promotion occurs in the period immediately following the introduction of the intervention. However, the level of dropouts at the first year of the intervention had a decreasing trend compared with the counterfactual, but this change was not significant.

The study also found another important divergence between the results of enrollment and promotion, and dropout concerning their annual trend during the intervention period. While the post intervention trend in the enrollment and promotion increased per year per school at significant levels, the decrease observed in the annual level of dropout was not significant.

Despite these divergences, the study found that the SFP affect all the three primary outcomes over time at a significant level. Overall, the study provides evidence regarding the program's immediate effect on enrollment and promotion growth as well as it's over time effect on the three primary outcomes.

These findings were entirely consistent with the study's predictions and findings from previous studies with regard to the effects of existence of the SFPs on educational outcomes (Afridi et al., 2011; Hinrichs, 2010).

The study also estimated the program's immediate and over-time effect on the educational outcomes based on gender differences. As compared to the pre-intervention period, the numbers of enrolled students were higher for both female and male students. However, the change in the level of enrollment was significant only for female students. This indicates that the program did not result in immediately affecting the enrollment growth of male students. On the other hand, the results suggest the annual trends in the level of enrollment for both female and male students were significantly growing during the intervention period. Conversely, the program was found to have a significant sustained over time effect on the enrollment growth level of only male students. One possible explanation for such the level of dropout could be the growth of enrollment trends at the time since the start of the study were decreasing for both but significantly only for female students.

Concerning dropout, the numbers of dropouts were lower for both female and male students at the first year of the intervention. The annual trends in the levels of dropout growth were decreasing per school for both as compared to the pre-intervention trend. However, the change in the level of dropout was significant only for male

students. These results suggest that the SFP had a significant immediate effect in reducing the level of male students' dropout growth as compared to female students. Despite this, the study provides evidence concerning the SFP's effect in reducing both the female and male students' levels of dropout growth over time. The results are in line with studies that indicated the effect of SFP on dropout grouch (Asmamaw, 2014).

With regard to promotion, the study found out that the levels of promotion growth trends at the first year of the intervention as well as the annual trends during the intervention period were significantly higher than the pre-intervention period. These indicate an immediate effect of the SFP in increasing the level of female and male students promoted to the next grade. Nevertheless, the program was found to have a positive significant sustained over time effect only on the level of male students' enrollment growth. In other words, though increasing; the overtime effect of the SFP in changing the level of female students' enrollment growth was insignificant. One explanation for this could be the existence of significant difference between preintervention and postintervention slopes. For instance, the promotion growth trend for male students at the time since the start of the study were decreasing but not significantly, and the vice versa is true concerning female students. Another explanation might be the analyses were undertaken based on aggregated data at city and school level. Thus, time-variant factors across the schools may account for the divergence of results.

Overall, the SFP has significant immediate effect on female and over time effect on male students enrollment growth; significant immediate effect on male and over time

effect on both male and female students dropout growth; and significant immediate effect on both as well as over time effect on male students promotion growth.

Discussion Related to Perceived Importance and Satisfaction

The study found out the SFP was perceived as highly important by majority of beneficiary students. It appears that the SFP have benefited primary school students to get nutritious breakfast and lunch, to come to, and stay in schools (to improve their attendance) and to become more attentive and remain alert during class, and in reducing short term hungry. There was also evidence that benefits of the SFP were not associated with student's gender. Besides, the SFP have played a role in reducing food (breakfast and lunch) costs for families that they used to spend for cooking/preparing breakfast and lunch for their children. The findings are in line with previous studies which reported positive contribution of the SFP implementation in enhancing both educational and health outcomes (Ahmed, 2004; Hinrichs, 2010; Dheressa, 2011; Alderman & Bundy, 2012; Afridi et al., 2013). Moreover, this study found that majority of the students were highly satisfied with the timeliness, diversity, and quantity of the food, and satisfied with the food quality. Overall, most students were highly satisfied with the SFP. The results are in line with studies which indicated that beneficiary students receiving adequate food were highly satisfied (Jisook et al., 2009); and when there are no prolonged waiting times (Lee & Jang, 2005).

In general, the findings of this study imply that the SFP has been performing well in terms of contributing to enhance the educational outcomes and satisfaction level of beneficiary students in public primary schools in the study areas. Overall, the statistically significant changes of average values found on most of the educational

outcome indicators suggest that the positive effect of the program improve educational outcomes. Furthermore, it could also be inferred that the SFP has positive contribution to attract students to come to, and stay at schools.

Nevertheless, there are concerns with potential adverse consequences warranting attention. For instance, students and families might become overly reliant on the program. Strategies such as integrating the SFP with broader food security and poverty alleviation initiatives and implementing nutrition education programs to promote sustainable food practices can help to address the concern (Aliyar et al., 2015). Besides, implementing the SFP on a regular basis is highly costly. The costs may threaten long-term sustainability of the government funded SFP. This calls for a need to exploring local food sourcing to reduce costs and support local agriculture, and seeking diverse funding sources, including public-private partnerships, to ensure sustainable finance sources for the program (Drake et al., 2016).

Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

On the whole, this study provides interesting insights into the effects of the SFP on educational outcomes, its perceived importance, and the beneficiary students' level of satisfaction with the food provision. It is found that the existence, presence or implementation of the SFP led to an increase in enrollment and promotion rates and a decrease in dropouts, compared to when the SFP did not exist. The study also found that the majority of the beneficiary students strongly agreed with the importance of the SFP in providing nutritious food, reducing short-term hunger, helping them to attend school, being more attentive during learning times attending school regularly, and

reducing food costs for their parents. Besides, this study found that the majority of beneficiary students were highly satisfied with the food provision.

Thus, on the basis of the overall findings it can be fairly concluded that existence of the SFP put a significant effect in enhancing the educational outcomes of public primary students in Addis Ababa. Besides, the SFP was regarded as highly important and highly satisfactory for beneficiary students.

Implications

The funds required for implementing the SFP in the study areas were made available from the city administration. The results imply the need for the city administration to continue its strong commitment to the SFP by allocating adequate fund and disbursing it timely to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of the program.

Since the SFP has significant effects on educational outcomes as well as beneficiary students satisfaction, the feeding agency and program implementing schools needs to work in collaboration with relevant public sectors and NGOs and members of the community so as to strengthen their sense of ownership and performance of the SFP as well.

Another implication is that a particular attention is needed in schools found in Gulele Subcity where a comparatively lower level of beneficiary satisfaction was found. Hence, key stakeholders are required to further assess in which school and why such results were found.

Moreover, the results indicate the need/possibility to further enhance the diversity and quality of food provided to beneficiary students. Concerning this, relevant

public sectors such as the Bureau of Education (BoE) are expected to enhance the health and nutrition of beneficiary students. This can be done by including the nutrition, health, and sanitation issues into the curriculum of major subjects such as biology and social study, developing nutrition/operational guidelines, and providing training related to food preparation and sanitation for implementing schools as well as cooks and caterers.

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Characteristics of Adolescents' Family Environment: The Case of Selected Secondary Schools in Addis Ababa

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Abstract

Family Environment (FE) contributes to a plethora of positive and negative outcomes in its members. Nonetheless, little is known about the characteristics of the FE as perceived by adolescents in the Ethiopian context. Aiming at examining characteristics of FEs, this study was conducted on 477 Ethiopian adolescents (214 males and 255 females, with 8 missing cases) attending two government schools and one private secondary school in Addis Ababa City. Data were gathered using Family Environment Scale (FES) and demographic items. Descriptive statistics, one-variable chi-square test, independent samples t-test and One-Way ANOVA were used to analyze the data. Conflict, Achievement Orientation and Control were found to be the salient features that characterize a relatively greater number of the adolescents' families, with a less balanced overall quality of the FE. Moreover, family structure, fathers' and mothers' educational levels and family income were found to contribute to variations in the adolescents' FEs. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords*: family environment, family environment scale, adolescent*

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Introduction

Behavior develops within certain environmental contexts. A number of experts in social psychology including Fiske (2014) assert that behavior is, to a greater extent than people realize, a response to context, thereby extolling the power of the situation and the legitimacy of situationism as a subject of scientific inquiry. According to James Mark Baldwin, one of these contexts–social relationships–mainly those involving parents and siblings, exert a remarkable effect on the development of the thinking and feeling of the human child (Bretherton, 2009). Indeed, positive family environments (FEs) are the foundation of a strong society. Nonetheless, there is a huge gap in the empirical literature examining family and other environmental characteristics. Exemplar among psychologists who have been dealing with variables related to persons and their environments was Lewin (1951). Lewin developed and depicted his field theory using the formula: B = f (P, E). This formula indicates that behavior B is a function of the interaction between person P and environment E. According to Moos (1996), there are some emphases on environmental factors in various fields, including biology, psychiatry, and social and community psychology. Yet, the structure of attributes of environments has not been given as much attention as the structure of attributes of persons (Saucier et al., 2007).

Influenced by Henry Murray's notions of the beta press, Rudolf H. Moos and his colleagues at the Social Ecology Laboratory of Stanford University expounded the social ecological approach based on the assumption that the way an individual perceives the environment tends to influence the way the individual behaves in that environment (Moos, 2003). In this manner, Moos and his colleagues developed the Social Climate Scales to measure and describe the social climates. The Social Climate

Model is one of the several conceptual models that psychologists use to understand the interactions between the environment and individuals. The model conceives of environments via three major dimensions: social interactions within the environments (the relationship, R, dimension), how the environments may foster or stifle personal developments (the personal growth, PG, dimension), and the extent to which the environments tend to change or maintain the existing conditions (the system maintenance, SM, dimension) (Moos & Moos, 2009). This study employed the Social Climate Model as its theoretical framework and the Family Environment Scale (FES) (one of the Social Climate Scales), to assess adolescents' FEs. Of the various FE assessment tools, the Family Environment Scale (FES) is the most widely used due to its comprehensiveness (Charalampous et al., 2013). Table 1 depicts the three dimensions of the FES and descriptions of its 10 subscales. Despite paucity of comprehensive empirical studies that employ dimensions of the FES to examine the quality of adolescents' FEs, some studies documented the relations between characteristics of FEs and various outcomes. For instance, Chivukula and Agarwal (2016) found a statistically significant and positive correlation between

Table 1

Descriptions of the Ten Subscales of the Family Environment Scale

Dimension	Subscale	Description
Interpersonal Relationships	Cohesion	The degree of perceived commitment, support and help family members provide for each other.
	Expressiveness	The degree to which family members are encouraged to express feelings and problems.
	Conflict	Amount of openly expressed anger, aggression and conflict among family members.
Personal Growth	Independence	The extent to which family members are assertive, make own decisions, and are self-sufficient.
	Achievement Orientation	The extent to which school and work activities are cast as indices of achievement or areas of competition.
	Intellectual-Cultural Orientation	The extent to which family members show interest in political, social, intellectual, and cultural activities.
	Active-Recreational Orientation	The extent to which family members emphasize participation in social and recreational activities.
	Moral-Religious Emphasis	The extent to which family members emphasize ethical and religious issues and values.
System Maintenance	Organization	The extent to which the family endorses clear organization and structure in planning family activities and responsibilities.
	Control	The extent to which rules and procedures are followed and enforced by family members.

Source: Moos and Moos (2009) and Charalampous et al. (2013)

psychological wellbeing and components of FE (i.e., cohesion, expressiveness, independence, active-recreational orientation, and organization) and negative relations between psychological wellbeing, conflict, and control. Other researchers have identified conflict, inability to express emotions, poorer communication, disorganization as salient features of low quality FEs that stifle adolescents' healthy development whereas higher family cohesion (relationship dimension of FE) , clear familial roles (organization) and open communication (expressiveness), are labeled as

characteristics of high quality FEs that lead to positive outcomes (Reis et al., 2021). The positive outcomes resulting from high-quality FEs are also evident in other studies. For example, Bell et al. (2001) found that youth in more cohesive families with lower family conflict and control experienced more social competence and satisfaction in their relationships with the opposite sex, and less social avoidance, shyness, and fear of negative evaluation. Thus, FEs with low quality are considered risky environments characterized by conflict, anger, aggression, relationships that lack warmth and support, and neglect of the needs of family members (Repetti et al., 2002).

The notion that characteristics of the FEs are impacted by cultural and contextual factors in which the families are embedded (e.g., norms and values of neighbors, communities, cultures, and societal and technological changes) is less disputed (Crosbie-Burnett & Klei, 2009). Nowadays, the positive influence of family has markedly diminished following the loss of the richness and frequency of relations among its members. One of the factors that contributed to the weakening of the family's influence on its members is, according to Hamburg and Hamburg (2004), technological advancements that are characterized by high geographic mobility and the heavy workload of modern times. In addition, family violence, divorce, child abuse, and the challenges of single parenting and extended families led such scholars as Carl Zimmerman of Harvard University (Olson & DeFrain, 2000) to argue that because the moral values of the family are so disintegrating, there is little left to hold the family together. Thus, although the family is expected to provide deep emotional nourishment for its members, this may happen rarely due to myriads of factors. Instead, the influence of media that presents powerful messages that bypass the family has increased more than ever before. The period of adolescence by itself tends

to make family-adolescent interactions conflictual as adolescents need greater independence from their parents (Smith, 2016). These challenges deprive families of the potential to raise children and adolescents desirably.

Ethiopian families are not exception to these challenges. Family violence has been identified as a rampant and serious social problem in Ethiopia (Habtamu, 2005; Shanko et al., 2013; Biniam, 2023; Birye & Netsanet, 2023; Galata & Belay, 2023). It goes without saying that family members including children and adolescents witness or directly experience this violence thereby nurturing inter-generational transmission of violence (World Health Organization [WHO], 2005; Mihret & Heinrichs, 2024; Mekuriyaw, 2018). Indeed, in Ethiopia, due to the amalgamation of traditional patriarchal societal structures, poverty, and illiteracy, domestic violence is an everyday reality for women (Tayechalem, 2009). A review of 15 empirical studies in the Ethiopian context indicated that two-thirds of the studied women did experience domestic violence by their husbands or intimate partners (Agumasie & Bezatu, 2015). Worst of all, Agumasie and Bezatu found that eight out of ten women accept wife-beating if the husband or intimate partner has at least one justifiable reason. The wives held the belief that "he is my husband and he can kick me (p. 9)". One of the consequences of family violence in Ethiopia is divorce, which is increasing at an alarming rate (Yeshiwork et al., 2019; Tilson & Larsen, 2000; Mekonnen et al., 2019). Because family is a system, these experiences of family violence affect members of the entire family thereby characterizing the FE as conflictual (Galata & Belay, 2023).

At least traditionally, the Ethiopian culture has been considered as collectivist and embeddedness oriented as people are viewed as entities embedded in the

collectivity in which maintaining the status quo and restraining actions that might disrupt in-group solidarity or the traditional orders are emphasized (Schwartz, 2006; Kagitcibasi, 2017). As a result, the Ethiopian cultural norms endorse physical punishment as an effective means of child discipline for instilling ethical behavior and preparing children for their future. Consequently, although an authoritative parenting style has been emerging recently, Ethiopia's parenting is characterized predominantly by authoritarian parenting style. This creates a fertile ground for children to model violence as authoritarian parenting features with little warmth, too much control, and a lack of willingness to negotiate (Abraham, 1996 & Habtamu, 1979 cited in Reda, 2014; Dame, 2014; Menelik et al., 2022). Nonetheless, there are some studies (e.g., Abesha, 2012; Yalew, 2004) that indicate that even in a collectivist oriented Ethiopian culture, high value is attached to achievement.

In addition to contextual factors, quality of FEs may vary as a function of demographic variables including gender, educational levels and income of the adolescents' parents. Regarding gender differences in FE, Lopeza et al. (2008) have shown that for girls, there is a strong relationship between quality of FE and the need for social recognition. One possible explanation for this link was, as provided by these researchers, that high-quality FE discourages girls from going outside of the family for meeting their social recognition needs. On the other hand, as the researchers argue, experiences of poor family cohesion may lead these young women to look outside of the family and, in the process, take part in aggressive acts. However, other studies (e.g., Mohanraj & Latha, 2005; Vianna et al., 2007; Ladd, 1988) using the FES as a measure of FE did not find significant sex differences. Some studies (e.g., Boake & Salmon, 1983), on the contrary, reported differences in FE with respect to parents'

level of education and family income. Whether these findings hold true in the Ethiopian context will be examined in the present study.

Overall, given a family's potential for raising well-functioning individuals thereby contributing to the development of strong society and the prevailing cultural and other contextual factors that can stifle this potential, it is mandatory to assess characteristics of adolescents' FEs in order to prepare a fertile ground for subsequent interventions that aim at enhancing quality of these environments. Nonetheless, little attention has been given to the assessment of FE in the Ethiopian context (Kidist & Sandhu, 2020).

Objectives of the Study

This study was intended to:

- Assess characteristics of adolescents' family environment (FE).
- Examine differences in the attributes measured by the 10 subscales of the family environment scale (FES) (as described in Table 1) with respect to demographic characteristics (i.e., sex, family structure, educational and income levels).

Operational Definitions

The major construct examined in this study is FE which refers to perceived social functioning of the family as assessed by items adapted from the Real Form of the FES (Moos & Moos, 2009). Characteristics of the FE denote attributes of the families as represented by the 10 subscales of the FES (see Table 1).

Methods

Study Approach and Site

This study employed a quantitative approach to research. The use of this approach was dictated by the nature of objectives of the study. Addis Ababa city, where the present study was conducted, was founded in 1886 (Bahiru, 2002). This city has been serving as the capital city and cultural hub of Ethiopia for about 130 years. It is, therefore, one of the oldest cities in Africa. Because it is the capital city of a multicultural society, Addis Ababa is also the home of people of diverse ethnicity, languages, and religions. According to the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (2012), of the city's population aged 10 years and above (which are considered to be economically active), 86.42% (Male = 48.95%; Female = 51.05%) were literate while 13.54% (Male = 19.05%; Female = 80.95%) were illiterate.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The present study emerged from an International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD)-sponsored Developing County Fellowship (DCF 2020-2022). As the time of data collection was during the aftermath of COVID-19, owing to restrictions and busy make up classes that resulted from academic calendar interruptions caused by the pandemic, it was difficult to get adequate number of willing schools so as to apply the principles of proportionate random sampling technique to school type (government and private). Thus, it was decided to collect data from two government and one private secondary schools (Grades 9-12) which permitted collection of the data. Data obtained from the record offices of the respective schools show that, at the time of data collection, there were 2905 (Male = 1391; Female =1514)

regular students in Addis Ketema, 2388 (Male = 1023; Female =1365) regular students in Kechene Debere Selam, and 455 (Male =213; Female =242) regular students in Bisrate Gebriel secondary schools. Thus, depending on these data, 5748 (i.e., 2905 + 2388 + 455 =5748) was considered as the accessible population of the study. Whereas the target population is the group to which research results are ideally generalized, generalization to accessible population is more realistic (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

The present study was based on a research project which used a sample size of 500. This size was considered adequate for structural equation modeling in the project, and it was also assumed to be adequate for the analyses conducted in the present study. Because the number of students in the government schools (5293) was significantly higher than the number of students in the private school (455), in order avoid severe underrepresentation of the private school student population, it was decided to sample 74% of the 500 students from government schools and 26% of the 500 students from the private school (see Table 2). These proportions were based on the general observation that a greater number of students attend government schools than private schools in the Addis Ababa city (Addis Ababa Education Bureau, 2018). For a preliminary analysis of the FES items, a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 159 (77 male and 82 female) adolescents attending two secondary schools (one government and one private) in Addis Ababa City.

In order to select participants in accordance with this sample size, a proportionate stratified random sampling method (by considering sex and grade level as strata) was used. To decide the number of participants to be selected from each stratum, the following formula for proportional stratified sampling was used (Brown, 2007).

$$Ks = n\left(\frac{Ns}{N}\right)$$

Where K_s = Number of sampling units selected from stratum S; n = sample size for stratum S; Ns = Number of sampling units in a stratum S; N = Overall population size. This formula allocates sample sizes according to the number of participants in each stratum. For instance, for the sex stratum, to determine the proportion of male participants that would be selected from the private school, we have $N_M = 213$; n = 124 and N = 455. Then, using the formula for proportional stratified sampling,

$K_s = 124\ (213/455) \quad = 58.04835 \approx 58.$

Similar procedures were used to select students from the grade stratum. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the main study participants. Although all of the participants (500) were present, able and willing to participate in the study and therefore filled in and returned the questionnaire (response rate = 100%), data screening indicated that 23 (14 males, 9 females; 17 from government schools, 6 from private school) did not complete the questionnaire appropriately (e.g., some acquiescence response sets and zigzag response patterns were observed). Response sheets of these 23 participants were discarded. As a result, a total of 477 participants remained in the analysis (see Table 2). The majority of these participants were from government schools (n = 353; 74%), female adolescents (n = 255; 53.50%), grade 12 (n = 149; 31.20%), who had been living with their families starting from their birth date (n = 371;

77.80%). Their family structures (i.e., the type of family in which they were living) varied from father and stepmother (n = 9; 1.90%) through parents and grandparents (28 = 5.90%) to father and

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Main Study Participants (N = 477)

Variable		**N**	**%**
School Type	Government	353	74.00
	Private	124	26.00
Sex	Male	214	44.90
	Female	255	53.50
	Missing Values	8	1.70
Grade	9	105	22.00
	10	113	23.70
	11	110	23.10
	12	149	31.20
Duration of Living in the Family	From Birth Date	371	77.80
	From 10-15 Years	27	5.70
	From 6-9 Years	27	5.70
	From 2-5 Years	29	61.60
	From 5-12 Months	8	1.70
	Less than 5 Months	9	1.90
	Missing Values	6	1.30
Family Structure: Living With:	Father and Mother (Nuclear Family)	294	61.6
	Only Mother (Single Parent Family)	74	15.5
	Only Father (Single Parent Family)	15	3.10
	Stepfather and Mother (Blended Family)	10	2.10
	Father and Stepmother (Blended Family)	9	1.90
	Grandparents (Grand Father, Grand Mother or both; Extended Family)	18	3.80
	Parents and Grand Parents (Extended Family)	28	5.90
	Relatives (Uncle, Aunt)	19	4.00
	Others (with brother, sister, etc)	9	1.90
	Missing Values	1	.20

mother (n = 294; 61.60%). While the educational level of fathers or male guardians of the respondents varied from *No Education* (n = 13; 2.70%) through *Grades 11-12* (n = 102; 21.40%) to *PhD and above* (n = 9; 1.90%), the educational level mothers or female guardians ranged from *No Education* (n = 24; 5.00%), through *Grades 11-12* (n = 99; 20.80%) to *PhD and above* (n = 3; .60%). Similarly, the families' overall monthly income varied from *less than 500 Birr* (n = 17; 3.60%) through 10,001-15,000 Birr (n = 69; 14.50%) to greater than 15, 000 Birr (n = 150; 31.40%). (Birr is the currency of Ethiopian). The participants reported that they were living in family sizes that ranged from two to 16 members (Mean = 5.88; SD = 2.18). Likewise, the age of the participants ranged from 13 to 22 (Mean = 16.86; SD = 1.41).

Data Gathering Tools

Data was gathered using a questionnaire composed of Family Environment Scale (FES) and demographic questions. The FES was translated and validated in the Ethiopian context (see Mitiku, 2023). The present study was conducted using the validated 64 items of the FES in their respective 10 subscales. Table 3 indicates the internal consistency of the 10 subscales. In the present main study, seven of the 10 subscales (Cohesion, Conflict, Achievement Orientation, Moral Religious Emphasis, Independence, Active Recreational Orientation and Organization, see Table 3) had Cronbach Alphas greater than .50, a cutoff point above which some FES literatures (e.g., Omar et.al., 2010) regard reliability of a scale as acceptable. Despite its common use in the empirical literature in general and FES literature in particular, according to Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010), Cronbach's alpha tends to understate reliability. Thus, in the present study, following the suggestion of Hoekstra et al.

(2018) to report more alternative measures of reliability besides Cronbach's alpha, index of quality (IoQ) (Schwartz & Butenko, 2014) was used for further examination of the reliability. It is evident from Table 3 that for most of the subscales, IoQ produced relatively higher reliability coefficients than did Cronbach's alpha. This indicates that the lower Cronbach's alphas of the subscales were not only due to the problems inherent in the items but also because of the approach used for estimating the reliabilities.

Data Gathering Procedures

The cooperation request letter that the School of Psychology, Addis Ababa University, provided was given to the administrators of the selected schools. After realizing that the data collection does not harm the instructional time and the students in any way, the administrators allowed to collect the data. From each of the schools, one teacher (data collection assistant) was assigned by the administrators to facilitate data collection. The assistants were introduced about the purposes of the study and procedures of responding to the questionnaire. Then, the name list of the students which served as a sampling frame was obtained from the schools' record offices.

Table 3

Reliabilities (Cronbach Alpha,α and IoQ) of the Subscales of the FES in the Present Study (N=477)

Subscales	Reliability		
	K*	α	IoQ
Cohesion	7	.73	.73
Conflict	7	.54	.62
Expressiveness	4	.42	.63
Achievement Orientation	8	.53	.59
Moral-Religious Emphasis	8	.54	.61
Independence	6	.61	.68
Intellectual Cultural Orientation	5	.33	.58
Active Recreational Orientation	7	.63	.67
Organization	8	.60	.64
Control	4	.48	.67
Total number of Items	*64*		

*Notes: *K = Number Items; IoQ = Index of Quality*

In cooperation with the administrators and the assigned teachers, free periods and a separate hall were arranged in advance. With the assistance of the data collection assistants, the selected students were informed in their respective sections about the time and venue where they were to provide data. In the hall, together with the assistants, the researcher explained to the participants about the purpose of the study, established rapport, assured participants of their confidentiality of their responses, and obtained their oral consent to voluntarily participate in the study. Participants who required further explanations concerning the items, instructions, or how they should respond to the items were assisted throughout the administration process.

Techniques of Data Analysis

In this study, descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) were used to describe the data. One variable chi-square test, independent samples t-test and One-way ANOVA were also used in the present study. To examine the tenability of the assumption of normality for independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA, graphical methods (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013) were employed. Generally, these assumptions were found to be tenable. The analyses were carried out using version 23.0 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). For all inferential tests, test of significance was set at the .05 level.

One Variable Chi-square Test

In the present study, one variable chi-square test (also called goodness-of-fit test) was used to test whether statistically significant differences exist between number of adolescents who reported above average scores in the subscales of the FES (see Figure 1). The major assumption of the chi-square (χ^2) test is concerned with the sample size in the expected frequency cells. When degree of freedom equals one, stringent statisticians recommend that the expected frequency in each cell be at least 10 (Cohen, 2001). In the present study, the minimum expected frequency was 16 (i.e., when equal expected frequency was applied to the total number of adolescents who reported above average scores on the five subscales in the Personal Growth Dimension, 80/5) and the maximum expected frequency was 79.50 (i.e., when equal expected frequency was applied to the total number of adolescents who reported above average scores on both subscales in the System Maintenance Dimension, 159/2) indicating the meeting of the assumption and tenability of the chi-square test. Since, there was no prior

study that examined characteristics of the adolescents' FEs in the Ethiopian context to use as a benchmark (so as to employ the unequal expected frequency option), the equal expected frequency option was used during analysis.

Independent Samples t-test

This test was used to examine differences in the subscales of the FES with respect to sex and school type. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances (Pallant, 2010) was used to test the tenability of the assumption of equality of variances. Except for Active Recreational Orientation Subscale, the variances of government and private schools on all of the subscales were homogeneous as Levene's Test was not significant ($p > .05$). Since the test revealed significant result for Active Recreational Orientation Subscale ($p = .018$) implying that government and private schools' data on this variable came from two different populations with unequal variances, the results under the second alternative in the output provided by the SPSS, *equal variances not assumed* were used leaving those provided under the *equal variances assumed* alternative. In computing the obtained t-values that compensate for violating the assumption of homogeneity of variance, some degrees of freedom (df) were consumed (see Table 6).

One-Way Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA)

In the present study, one-way ANOVA was used to examine the differences in the ten components of the FES with respect to family structure, mothers' educational level, fathers' educational level, and family's income. ANOVA was followed by Tukey's Post Hoc Test to identify the pairs where statistically significant differences were observed.

Results

Characteristics of the Adolescents' FE

The first objective of the study was assessing characteristics of adolescents' FE. Table 4 shows summary of descriptive statistics on the subscales. Because the number of items per subscale differ in which case differences in the scores of the subscales would be due to the differences in the number of items, the obtained total scores on each subscale were divided by the number of items in their respective subscales. As illustrated in Table 4, this procedure produced average scores ranging from 1 to 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Subscales of the FES (N = 477)

Subscale	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	SD
Cohesion	1.29	4	3.36	.57
Conflict	1	3.86	1.97	.54
Expressiveness	1	4	2.81	.64
Achievement Orientation	1.63	4	3.22	.47
Moral Religious Emphasis	1.75	4	3.38	.45
Independence	1.17	4	3.05	.59
Intellectual Cultural Orientation	1	4	2.75	.53
Active Recreational Orientation	1	4	2.60	.62
Organization	1.63	4	3.15	.49
Control	1	4	2.97	.60

In order to examine which of the attributes measured by the 10 subscales of the FES characterized a family, FE orientations were assessed using mean scores presented in Table 4. Accordingly, to identify the exclusive FE propensity/orientation for Cohesion, participants with Cohesion scores greater than the mean of the Cohesion

Subscale and scores less than the mean of the Conflict and Expressiveness Subscales (i.e., Cohesion > 3.36 and Conflict < 1.97 and Expressiveness < 2.81) rule was used. Similar procedures were used for identifying FE orientations in the other subscales within their respective dimensions. Table 5 shows that, for subscales in the Relationship Dimension, the FEs of the adolescents were found to be more oriented towards Conflict (n = 91; 19.10%) followed by Cohesion (n = 73; 15.30%), and least oriented towards Expressiveness (n = 32; 6.71%). Chi-square test indicated that the differences among the frequencies of the three subscales were statistically significant ($\chi 2$ (2) = 27.990, p = .000). Closer examination of the data indicated that only few families may have been experiencing good quality family social relationships as 103 out of 477 (i.e., 21.59%) adolescents reported scores greater than means of Cohesion and Expressiveness and less than the mean of Conflict Subscale simultaneously.

Table 5

Summary of Family Environment Orientations (N = 477)

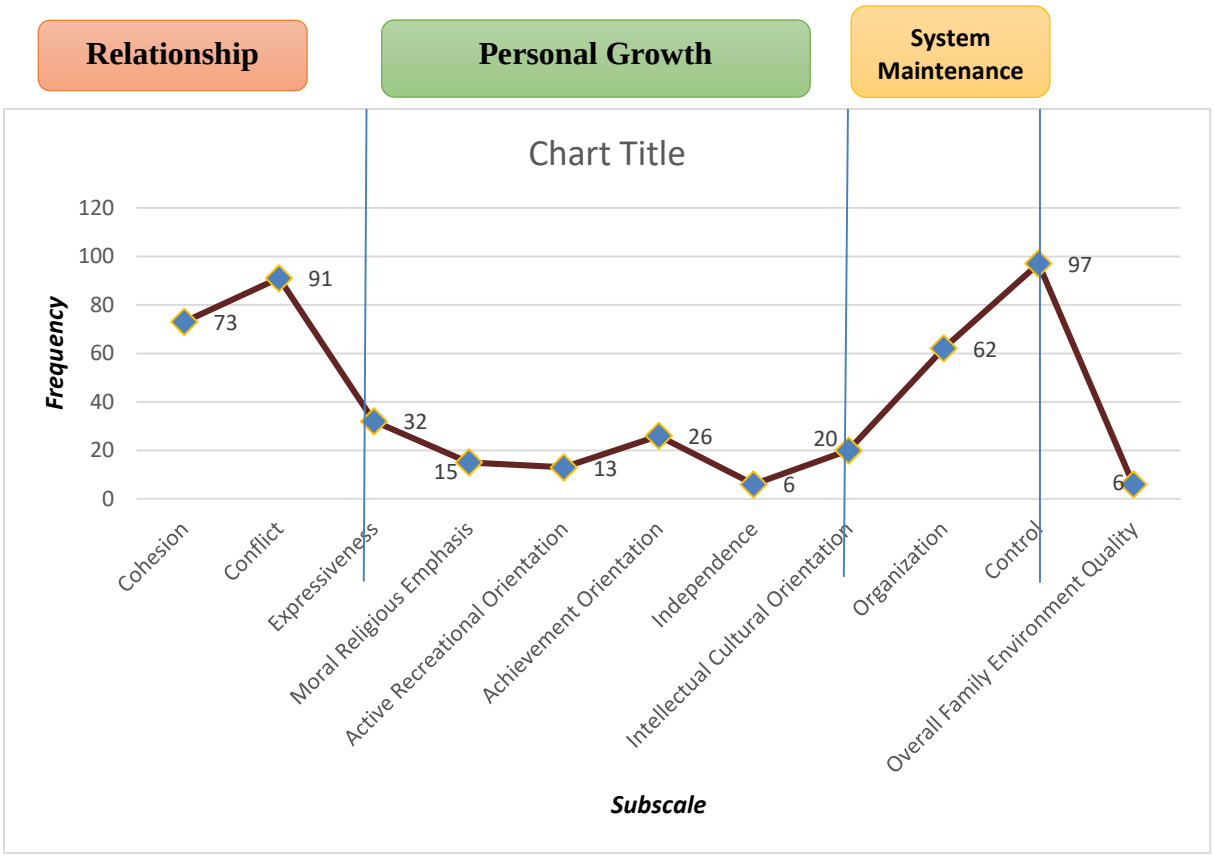
Dimension	Component	Male		Female		Total		Missing Case
		f	%	f	%	f	%	
Relationship	Cohesion	35	47.90	37	50.70	73	15.30	1
	Conflict	42	46.20	47	51.60	91	19.10	2
	Expressiveness	14	43.80	17	53.10	32	6.71	1
Personal Growth	Moral Religious Emphasis	2	13.30	13	86.70	15	3.15	
	Active Recreational Orientation	7	53.80	6	46.20	13	2.73	
	Achievement Orientation	9	34.60	17	65.40	26	5.45	
	Independence	3	50.00	3	50.00	6	1.26	
	Intellectual Cultural Orientation	10	50.00	9	45.00	20	4.19	1
System Maintenance	Organization	27	43.50	34	54.80	62	13.00	1
	Control	45	46.40	49	50.50	97	20.34	3

For components in the Personal Growth Dimension, the FEs appeared to emphasize more on Achievement (n= 26; 5.45%) and least oriented towards Independence (n = 6; 1.26%). Differences among the frequencies of the five subscales of this dimension were tested using Chi-square test and were found to be statistically significant (χ^2 (4) = 14.125, p = .01). On the other hand, relatively few number of adolescents (n =35; 7.34%) reported above average scores on the five subscales of this dimension simultaneously.

Similarly, on the System Maintenance Dimension, FEs oriented more towards Control (n = 97; 20.34%) than Organization (n= 62; 13%). Of course, FEs appeared to be most oriented relatively to Control and Conflict than any other orientations. Difference between the frequencies of the two subscales were tested using Chi-square test and was found to be statistically significant (χ^2 (1) = 7.704, p = .01). Closer scrutiny of the data showed that relatively greater number of the adolescents (n=185; 38.78%) reported more than average scores on Organization and Control Subscales simultaneously. Regarding the overall quality of the FE, a very few number of adolescents (n = 6; 1.26%) reported scores less than the mean of the Conflict and Control Subscales and scores greater than the mean of the other eight subscales simultaneously. Figure 1 depicts FE orientations using the number of adolescents who reported above average scores on the subscales.

Figure 1

Number of Adolescents Who Reported Above Average Scores in the Subscales of the FES



Differences in the Components of the FES as a Function of Demographic Variables

The demographic variables considered in this study were sex, school type, family structure, educational level (both fathers' and mothers'), and monthly family income. While no statistically significant difference was found in the ten components of the FES with respect to sex, the tests revealed differences in some of the components with respect to the other variables. Table 6 shows differences in the components with

respect to school type. Statistically significant differences in Conflict ($t_{(475)} = 2.298$, $p = .022$), Expressiveness ($t_{(475)} = 2.407$, $p = .016$), Active Recreational Orientation ($t_{(248.198)} = -5.039$, $p = .000$), Intellectual Cultural Orientation ($t_{(475)} = -2.922$, $p = .004$), and Organization ($t_{(475)} = -2.291$, $p = .022$) were observed with respect to school type.

Table 6

Results of t-Test for Differences in the Subscales of the FES with Respect to School Type (Government = 353; Private = 124)

Subscale	School Type	Mean (SD)	Df	t	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Cohesion	Government	23.45 (3.75)	475		
	Private	23.73 (3.50)			
Conflict	Government	14.01 (3.88)	475	2.298*	.24
	Private	13.11 (3.50)			
Expressiveness	Government	11.40 (2.53)	475	2.047*	.25
	Private	10.76 (2.59)			
Active Recreational Orientation	Government	17.68 (4.40)	248.198	-5.039***	.49
	Private	19.76 (3.78)			
Achievement Orientation	Government	25.76 (4.04)	475		
	Private	25.94 (2.96)			
Moral Religious Emphasis	Government	27.00 (3.70)	475		
	Private	27.19 (3.35)			
Intellectual Cultural Orientation	Government	13.54 (2.74)	475	-2.922**	.31
	Private	14.35 (2.38)			
Independence	Government	18.20 (3.54)	475		
	Private	18.61(3.55)			
Organization	Government	24.95 (4.00)	475	-2.291*	.24
	Private	25.88 (3.61)			
Control	Government	11.89 (2.43)	475		
	Private	11.82 (2.24)			

While adolescents attending government schools reported significantly greater scores than those attending private schools on Conflict and Expressiveness, adolescents attending private schools rated their FEs significantly greater than those attending

government schools on Active Recreational Orientation, Intellectual Cultural Orientation, and Organization. With respect to the magnitude of the differences, only that of the Active Recreational Orientation reached the level of medium effect size (Cohen's d = .49); the rest had low effect sizes. On the other hand, the analyses did not find statistically significant differences in Cohesion, Achievement Orientation, Moral Religious Emphasis, Independence, and Control components with respect to school type.

For demographic variables with more than two levels, a One-Way ANOVA was used to examine differences in the dependent variables. Statistically significant results were obtained in Moral Religious Emphasis ($F_{(8, 467)} = 3.767$; $p = .000$; $\eta^2 = .061$) with respect to Family Structure. Follow-up analysis using Tukey's Post Hoc Test indicated that, on Moral Religious Emphasis, adolescents who live with their father and stepmother (Mean = 22.51) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents who live with both of their biological fathers and mothers (Mean = 27.49), only their mothers (Mean =26.63), stepfather and mother (Mean = 28.40), grandparents (Mean = 27.11) and parents and grandparents (Mean = 26.64) .

Similarly, statistically significant differences were found among fathers or male guardians of different educational levels with respect to Active Recreational Orientation ($F_{(8, 445)} = 5.651$; $p = .000$; $\eta^2 = .092$). Further analysis with Tukey's Post Hoc Test indicated that adolescents whose fathers or male guardians attained Basic Education (Mean = 15.08) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose fathers or male guardians completed Grades 9-10 (Mean = 18.80), Grades 11-12 (Mean = 18.27), College Diploma (Mean = 20.14), First Degree (Mean = 19.64) or Master of Arts Degree (Mean = 18.53) in Active Recreational Orientation. Moreover, adolescents

whose fathers or male guardians attained Primary Education (i.e., Grades 1-8) (Mean = 17.32) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose fathers or male guardians completed College Diploma (Mean = 20.14) or First Degree (Mean = 19.64). In a similar manner, father's or male guardian's levels of education produced statistically significant differences in the Conflict component of FE ($F_{(8, 445)} = 2.244$; $p = .023$; $\eta^2 = .039$). Tukey's Post Hoc Test showed that adolescents whose fathers or male guardians had No Education (Mean = 17.15) reported significantly higher scores than adolescents whose fathers or male guardians completed Grades 11-12 (Mean = 13.51), College Diploma (Mean = 12.59) or First Degree (Mean = 13.49) in the Conflict component of FE. Likewise, Cohesion differed significantly with respect to father's or male guardian's level of education ($F_{(8, 445)} = 2.416$; $p = .015$; $\eta^2 = .042$) in such a way that, according to Tukey's Post Hoc Test, adolescents whose fathers or male guardians had No Education (Mean = 19.85) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose fathers or male guardians completed Primary Education (i.e., Grades 1-8) (Mean = 23.65), Grades 9-10 (Mean = 23.39), Grades 11-12 (Mean = 23.71), College Diploma (Mean = 24.38), First Degree (Mean = 23.91) or Master of Arts Degree (Mean = 23.46) in Cohesion. Intellectual Cultural Orientation Subscale also differed significantly with respect to father's or male guardian's level of education ($F_{(8, 445)} = 2.386$; $p = .016$; $\eta^2 = .041$) in such a way that adolescents whose fathers or male guardians completed PhD or above (Mean = 15.67) reported significantly higher scores than adolescents whose fathers or male guardians had No Education (Mean = 11.92).

Mother's or female guardian's level of education also produced statistically significant differences in Organization ($F_{(8, 459)} = 2.376$; $p = .016$; $\eta^2 = .040$), Active Recreational Orientation ($_{.05}F_{(8, 459)} = 5.253$; $p = .000$; $\eta^2 = .084$) and Achievement

Orientation ($_{.05}F_{(8, 459)} = 3.057$; $p = .002$; $\eta^2 = .051$) Subscales. Follow-up analysis using Tukey's Post Hoc Test revealed that on Organization component of the FE adolescents whose mothers or female guardians had No Education (Mean = 22.65) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose mothers or female guardians completed Grades 11-12 (Mean = 25.92), College Diploma (Mean = 25.66) or First Degree (Mean = 25.60). Similarly, on Active Recreational Orientation, adolescents whose mothers or female guardians had No Education (Mean = 14.54) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose mothers or female guardians completed Grades 9-10 (Mean = 18.37), Grades 11-12 (Mean = 19.43), College Diploma (Mean = 18.84), First Degree (Mean = 18.80) or Master of Arts Degree (Mean = 19.18). Likewise, on Achievement Orientation, adolescents whose mothers or female guardians had No Education (Mean = 23.38) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose mothers or female guardians completed Grades 11-12 (Mean = 26.94) or First Degree (Mean = 26.18).

In a similar manner, Active Recreational Orientation ($F_{(7, 451)} = 4.122$; $p = .000$; $\eta^2 = .060$), Achievement Orientation ($_{.05}F_{(7, 451)} = 3.214$; $p = .002$; $\eta^2 = .048$), and Independence ($_{.05}F_{(7, 451)} = 2.236$; $p = .030$; $\eta^2 = .034$) components of the FE were found to differ significantly with regard to Family's Overall Monthly Income. Tukey's Post Hoc Test revealed that on Active Recreational Orientation, adolescents whose families earn an overall monthly income of Less than 500 Birr (Mean = 15.18) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose family had monthly income of 10001-15000 Birr (Mean = 19.00) or Greater than 15000 Birr (Mean = 19.30). Adolescents from families of 500-1000 Birr overall monthly income (Mean = 16.61) also reported significantly lower scores than adolescents from families that earn Greater

than 15000 Birr (Mean = 19.30) on Active Recreational Orientation. Similarly, on Achievement Orientation Tukey's Post Hoc Test indicated that adolescents whose families earn an overall monthly income of Less than 500 Birr (Mean = 22.88) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose families earn 2001-4000 Birr (Mean = 26.93), 10001-15000 Birr (Mean = 26.38) or Greater than 15000 Birr (Mean = 26.14). Likewise, on Independence component of the FE, Tukey's Post Hoc Test found that adolescents whose families earn an overall monthly income of Less than 500 Birr (Mean = 15.47) reported significantly lower scores than adolescents whose family earns 6001-10000 Birr (Mean = 18.58), 10001-15000 Birr (Mean = 18.68) or Greater than 15000 Birr (Mean = 18.69).

Discussions

Characteristics of the Adolescents' Family Environments

The first objective of the present study was to assess characteristics of the adolescents' FEs. For the three components in the Relationship Dimension, the FEs of the adolescents were found to be characterized relatively more by Conflict and less by Expressiveness. These findings indicate that a relatively greater number of the sampled adolescents experience aggression and conflict in their families and that only a few of the adolescents express their feelings openly. Indeed, the quality of family social relationships may be in jeopardy as only a few adolescents may have been experiencing optimum levels of Cohesion and Expressiveness and less Conflict in their families. Consistent with the findings of the present study, Galata and Belay (2023) examined FEs of Amharic and Afan Oromo speaking participants using the Conflict Subscale of the FES and found that a considerable number of school-going adolescents experience conflict in their families. FE's orientation towards Conflict found in the present study

may be explained by the prevalence of family violence in Ethiopia. For instance, the WHO (2005) reported that 71% of ever-partnered Ethiopian women experience physical and sexual violence, in one or the other form over their lifetime. Moreover, Agumasie and Bezatu (2015) reviewed 15 empirical studies in the Ethiopian context and concluded that more than 60% of women experience domestic violence. Divorce, the legal dissolution of a marriage, may be considered as a consequence of family violence. Tilson and Larsen (2000) point out that 45% of first marriages in Ethiopia end in divorce within 30 years, 28% within the first 5 years, 34% within 10 years, and 40% within 20 years. More recently, Mekonnen et al. (2019) found that 46.5% of the households they studied were divorced. These high levels of domestic violence and divorce rate may partly be attributed to the low level of emotional expression among the family members. Indeed, Mekonnenet al. indicated that lack of open discussion and misunderstanding between the couple were among the causes of divorce. It is unfortunate for Ethiopian children and adolescents that most of them (WHO reports it to be 67%) witness or directly experience (Mihret & Heinrichs, 2024; Mekuriyaw, 2018) domestic violence in their families.

While Achievement was found to be emphasized in a relatively greater number of families, Independence was found to be the less stressed component within the Personal Growth Dimension. These findings imply that the FEs encourage competition in school and work activities in the adolescents, while relatively few FEs encourage self-sufficiency, assertiveness and making own decisions among the adolescents. These findings appear to be consistent with Abesha's (2012) study which found higher levels of academic motivation among Ethiopian higher education students. Abesha reported that although the Ethiopian culture is collectivistic (which is theoretically expected to

place less importance on competition and achievement), it attaches high importance to academic achievement. Yalew (2004) also found that the Ethiopian society attaches high value to education, and thus, perhaps to achievement or mastery. Due to the increases of human population at an alarming rate from time to time (especially in developing countries like Ethiopia) and the accompanying struggles to meet survival needs in a world where resources are limited, competition seems to be pervasive. People compete in schools, in sports fields, in markets, to get employed, to get promoted and even to get a mate. Thus, it will be less surprising to find families press their adolescent members towards achievement. But whether the achievement that families in this study encourage in the adolescents is the classical competitive individualistic achievement (i.e., n-ach, which focuses on individual striving, agency and competition with others) or the socially oriented achievement motive (Kagitcibasi, 2017) has to be investigated in the future.

Similarly, regarding orientations in the System Maintenance Dimension, Control was found to characterize relatively greater number of families than Organization. This implies that a relatively larger proportion of the families emphasize enforcing and following rules and procedures. One possible explanation for the prevalence of Control is the authoritarian parenting style which has been predominant in Ethiopia (Abraham, 1996 & Habtamu, 1979 cited in Reda, 2014; Dame, 2014). Empirical studies (e.g., Kagitcibasi, 2017) have demonstrated that higher level of control is common whenever childrearing does not stress the development of individualistic independence in the child (i.e., in collectivist cultures). Although research has indicated that authoritarian parenting (which is obedience and control oriented) may not debilitate the development of positive outcomes in collectivist

cultures as it does in individualist cultures, in line with Kagitcibasi, whether the type of Control found to be predominant in the present study is dominating (dysfunctional) or order-keeping and caring (functional) has to be investigated in the future. Nonetheless, it can be argued that a FE with high level of control coupled with a high level of conflict may not provide optimal quality for the development of positive outcomes. Indeed, a very few number of adolescents (1.26%) reported scores less than the mean of the conflict and control orientations and scores greater than the mean of the other eight orientations. This implies that a considerable number of adolescents in the present study may not be experiencing a balanced and overall high-quality FE.

Differences in the Components of the FES as a Function of Demographic Variables

The second objective of the present project was to examine variations in the 10 components of the FE with respect to demographic variables. The present study found no statistically significant sex differences in the components which implies that male and female adolescents perceived their FEs in a similar manner. Other studies using the FES as a measure of FE also did not find significant sex differences. For example, Mohanraj and Latha (2005) found that although Indian girls perceived more conflict in the family and boys perceived more control, the sexes did not show substantial disparities in most of the subscales of the FES. Likewise, women and men did not exhibit remarkable differences in the Portuguese version of the FES (Vianna et al., 2007). Furthermore, gender appeared to have no effect on student ratings of FE in their launching homes (Ladd, 1988).

On the other hand, considerable differences were observed in five of the ten components of the FES with regard to school type. Families that sent their adolescent

children to government schools were found to experience more Conflict and Expressiveness than families which send their adolescents to private schools. On the other hand, families that sent their children to private schools tend to be characterized more by Active Recreational Orientation, Intellectual Cultural Orientation and Organization than those families which send their adolescents to government schools. In Ethiopia, families that sent their children to private schools appear to be better than families which send their children to government schools in terms of, among other things, level of their income. This is probably why they could afford to pay monthly schools fees that private schools require. Of course, there is a general belief among the people that private schools provide more quality education than the government schools do. Generally, these findings appear to be consistent with other studies which found that families with higher incomes are more likely to establish FEs strongly oriented toward personal growth, especially intellectual and recreational activities and organizations (Boake & Salmon, 1983; Moos & Moos, 2009).

Also, Moral Religious Emphasis was found to differ with respect to family structure. More to the point, adolescents who live with their father and stepmother reported lower scores than adolescents who live with both of their biological fathers and mothers, only their mothers, stepfather and mother, grandparents and parents and grandparents. This finding indicates that families that are led by father and stepmother give less emphasis to moral and religious activities than the other family structures. Furthermore, with respect to father's or male guardian's educational level, considerable variations were found in Cohesion, Conflict, Active Recreational Orientation, and Intellectual Cultural Orientation in such a way that the higher the level of education, the higher the Cohesion, Active Recreational Orientation, Intellectual Cultural

Orientation and the lower the level of Conflict. Similar results were found in Active Recreational Orientation, Achievement Orientation and Organization with regard to mother's or female guardian's educational level. These findings imply that educational level may play important roles in increasing Cohesion, Intellectual Cultural Orientations, Achievement Orientation and Organization and in reducing Conflict in a family. Boake and Salmon (1983) also found statistically significant positive relations between father's educational level and Active Recreational Orientation and Intellectual Cultural Orientations.

The present study also found considerable variations in the Active Recreational Orientation, Achievement Orientation and Independence components of the FES with respect to the family's overall monthly income in such a way that the higher the family's income, the higher the scores on these subscales. These findings indicate that family's level of income may help to increase recreational and achievement orientations, and independence that adolescents experience in their families. The difference observed in Active Recreational Orientation in the present study support Boake and Salmon's (1983) study which reported statistically significant and positive relation between income and this component of the FE.

Conclusions and Implications

The present study sought to examine characteristics of adolescents' FE. In light of the findings of the study Conflict, Achievement Orientation, and Control appear to be the salient features of relatively greater number of the adolescents' families. In general, families of the adolescents seem to provide a less balanced overall FE quality. Likewise, adolescents attending government and private schools and those who live

with families of different structures with differing fathers' and mothers' educational levels and family income tend to experience different FEs.

The implications of the findings of the present study are manifold. First, some families (particularly those characterized by Conflict and Control) need interventions to improve FEs. Second, attempts should be made by concerned bodies (e.g., governmental and nongovernmental organisations) to help parents remain intact, increase fathers' and mothers' educational levels, and family income (i.e., family's socio-economic status in general) because these variables appeared to be related to more positive FEs in the present study.

The present study has also important implications for future research. First, although internal consistency (reliability) of the subscales was improved in the present main study due to refinements made based on the results of the pilot study, indices of reliability for Expressiveness, Intellectual Cultural Orientation and Control Subscales were found to be particularly worrisome (see Table 3). Thus, future researchers should pay attention to reliabilities of these subscales in particular and to the other subscales in general. Second, the non-random selection of the schools used in the present study limits generalizability of results of the study implying the need for random and representative schools in future studies. Third, future large-scale studies should be conducted not only on adolescents in the Addis Ababa city but also adolescents living in rural areas. Populations other than adolescents (such as husbands and wives in a family) can also be targeted for study. Third, the link between FEs and proximal and distal outcomes should be examined in future studies. For instance, the relationship between adolescents' FE and academic achievement, wellbeing, emotional intelligence,

social intelligence, bullying, violent behavior, altruistic behavior, nonviolent behavior, peaceful personality and other constructs can be studied.

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Perceptions, Challenges, and Opportunities for University Autonomy: The Experience of Addis Ababa University's Governance Reform Initiative

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Abstract

One of the most critical issues in the 21st-century higher education academic discourse including the discourse in the Ethiopian context is the extent to which African universities enjoy the status of autonomous universities. An autonomous university is set in the best of conditions to exercise independence, total control, and management of itself in its overall functioning, including academic, financial, and institutional freedom of inquiry. However, this statement of autonomy has been threatened by many African countries to an unprecedented degree, as stressed in the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility. Looking at higher education in Ethiopia, it has been influenced by government-favored political ideology (Ashenafi Aboye & Metcalfea, 2021) for at least three regimes (1916-2018). This study has attempted to bring to the forefront the recent Ethiopian experience of reforming its higher education governance into an autonomous status. The objectives of this study were to explore the very drives for higher education autonomy in the Ethiopian context and analyze the enabling factors and associated challenges towards it. Taking Addis Ababa University, the oldest and biggest national university in the country, and employing a descriptive research methodology where quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a survey questionnaire and document review, the study revealed significant challenges and limited progress in introducing autonomous governance in Addis Ababa University at both conceptual and practical levels. The dire need for members of the university community and stakeholders to get all on board for a shared vision, the unwavering commitment of the government to support universities, and the need to develop the infrastructural capacities of universities emerged as critical requirements for successful autonomy. Furthermore, the study asserted that the process, nature, and procedures of granting universities an autonomous status vary from context to context and from time to time, being so complex that the exercise attracts many actors such as the government, public universities, external donors, non-governmental organizations and different professional societies to play.

Keywords: *Autonomy, governance, university reform, context, commitment*

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Introduction

Higher education in developing countries faces serious challenges such as inadequate access, funding, and teacher salaries. Limitations in institutional autonomy, teacher qualifications, pedagogical materials, facility conditions, and quality assurance mechanisms are also on the list (Oliver, 2004). Many universities in developing countries are denied self-administration, face censorship of their academic practices, and encounter serious interference from governments or ruling parties. Academic freedom is not a constitutional right as is the case in most Western countries. Increased government involvement under various pretexts has continued to be the norm jeopardizing universities' right to make decisions over local or internal matters. The Ethiopian case is no better than this in the overall context of the developing world.

Despite its long-lived independence from colonialism, the country has been largely unstable and economically weak for most of its history due to internal ethnic and political conflict and external aggression (Prunier & Ficquet, 2015; Bayeh, 2022). Consequently, general education and higher education in the country did not reach the desired level of expansion until 1991, when the military regime of Ethiopia was overthrown by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF). Before 1991, the Military government negatively influenced higher education by forcing universities to offer courses that reflected the regime's political ideology which was Marxist Leninist ideology. The EPRDF regime in its turn introduced a liberal policy in terms of expanding higher education, but it also attempted to reorient higher education as an instrument of revolutionary democracy which largely proclaimed homogeneity instead of diversity in the higher education sector. For almost the entire 20th century, the country had only two universities (Tekeste, 2006). Modern Western education in the country is only slightly over a century old. Only in the last two decades

have robust and multiple educational reforms taken place in the country. The reforms in the higher education sector were unprecedented in terms of equity and access, with enrolment increasing as fast as 200% (Anteneh, 2016). The post-1991 government designed policies that helped higher education expand faster than ever. But it also introduced several other contradicting policies that negatively impacted the higher education sector and universities. One of these was the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in the design of which universities had very limited participation and in a way, it was a top-down policy that did not reflect what universities wanted. This policy impacted negatively on universities as it promoted curriculum harmonization instead of differentiation among universities. Another policy was the 70/30 % natural sciences and social sciences policy where 70% of university entrants joined natural science studies whereas only 30% joined social science studies. This policy was not transparently discussed by universities in the country; it was imposed top-down. One of these recent reform initiatives is the government's commitment to grant autonomy to public universities (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2023). This initiative has long been awaited by the Ethiopian elite because public universities have been under severe government control of governance for nearly half a century. Key university leaders and managers were, for instance, assigned centrally to universities with minimal participation of university staff. Course curricula were developed centrally by the Ministry of Education, compelling universities to comply with what was designed centrally. Additionally, universities were forced to implement item-line budgets allocated by the government regardless of their specific budgeting needs. Several sources, for instance, (World Bank, 2021; Abdulkadir et al., 2018; Capital Ethiopia 2024) indicate that in addition to the Federal Government, there was evidence that regional governments in Ethiopia had both direct and indirect control of public

universities in the country for the past 30 years. Regional governments assumed a dominant role through regional universities' administrative boards directly by imposing the views, and university faculties were coerced indirectly to be loyal to the region's senior officials.

Universities have had little or no control over almost all aspects of university affairs, such as administrative, financial, academic, and organizational aspects. Public universities became inefficient as they were not allowed to manage their own budget. The morale of the staff working in public universities was eroded due to undesirable interference from the government in affairs such as academic freedom and low pay. Finally, the quality of education suffered as universities could not admit students on their own by administering their entrance examinations and due to the meager resources allocated to them by the government. They have been instructed to implement centrally or nationally developed curricula, modules, policies, and programs, without having the opportunity to express their views meaningfully in a bottom-up manner and make their own professional and academic decisions (Teshome, 2007). Lack of academic autonomy extends to decisions made by external bodies such as the Ministry of Education on academic calendars, curricula, and course contents, course schedules, and the introduction of new programs. In some cases, the Ministry interferes with the process of curriculum development.

University top officials have been directly appointed by government bodies, and large-scale procurements have been made by a national agency for universities. Directives and instructions on how to manage university affairs quite often descended from top officials down to universities. Academic freedom barely existed (Ashenafi & Metcalfe, 2021; Dowden, 1993) as faculty were harassed or even detained and tortured if they violated top-down instructions or made any comment on the regime's political

system and policies. Research agendas were quite often handed down by the government irrespective of consulting universities for meaningful contributions and endorsement by the university faculty and by researchers. Given such a history of academic suppression, the initiative of government to turn universities into autonomous ones has been warmly welcomed.

University autonomy presents both challenges and opportunities for institutions worldwide. While autonomy allows universities to innovate and improve quality (Aithal & Aithal, 2019), transitioning from centralized control to autonomy poses difficulties, especially in post-Soviet countries like Kazakhstan (Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015). Challenges include management issues, financing, meeting educational demands, developing relevant curricula, and maintaining accountability (Kasozi, 2002). Additionally, fostering learner autonomy in classrooms faces obstacles such as a lack of teacher readiness and passive student attitudes (Dwee & Anthony, 2017). The process of university autonomy reforms has created tensions between traditional academic domains and emerging executive structures within flagship universities (Fumasoliet al., 2014). However, opportunities arise from economic development, social need for higher education, and positive government attitudes towards education (Kasozi, 2002). To address these challenges, universities can leverage their autonomy for academic, research, and technological innovations, as well as collaborations and expansions (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Ultimately, the successful implementation of autonomy requires addressing socially and ideologically constructed complexities within transitioning universities (Sagintayeva & Kurakbayev, 2015).

Studies on university autonomy in Ethiopia are scarce and limited. However, even the very few research works critically highlight that public universities have significant challenges due to strong control by both the federal and the regional governments and

their lack of freedom to decide over their own academic matters. Despite patchy policies and legal bills that mention the right of universities in Ethiopia to autonomous governance, public universities have always had undesirable monitoring and manoeuvring of their internal issues by the government, and consequently, their level of institutional autonomy has been quite low when evaluated through the European University Autonomy Scorecard (EUAS) methodology (Solomon et al., 2020).

Mid-2023, however, came as a complete surprise for all stakeholders in the higher education sector of Ethiopia. This was the year when the Ethiopian government took an unprecedented initiative to introduce university governance reform, a move from government-controlled universities to autonomous ones backed by legal frameworks; namely, the Regulation for Establishing Addis Ababa University (2022/23) and Granting of Autonomy University Proclamation (FDRE, 2023) endorsed by the Ethiopian parliament.

The university autonomy reform is a new initiative and the first of its kind in terms of the level of commitment made by the government and the degree of autonomy expected for universities to enjoy as stipulated in the proclamation (FDRE, 2023). Subsequent basic and action research is needed to shape it as it goes all along the way so that an effective autonomy system can be put in place in the Ethiopian public universities. Addis Ababa University, the oldest and biggest university in the nation, was purposely selected by the government to be the first university where autonomy reform would be implemented at the start, before an all-out grant of autonomy to all public universities. A government regulation bill providing for the re-establishment of Addis Ababa University as an autonomous university was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the FDRE (Regulation for Establishing Addis Ababa University (2022/23). The university was then set on implementing autonomy reform.

This study explored the genealogy and overall status of this newly introduced autonomy at Addis Ababa University, which could be taken as a symbol of the commitment of the Ethiopian government to gradually granting autonomy to all public universities in Ethiopia with the intention that the experience might be valuable to other public and private universities in the country. The move could also be seen as a boost for similar continental initiatives as many African countries tend to have more similar socio-economic and political contexts than the differences. Through the literature review and the concluding remarks, implicit comparisons of reform practices in different contexts have been made in this study. The study explored the challenges and opportunities that confronted the preparatory stage of the autonomy governance exercise from the perspective of university community stakeholders and policy experts. It further explored the range of the provisions made in the national autonomy bills endorsed, the preparations that have been made toward the implementation of autonomy on the ground, and the challenges, opportunities, and limitations that may be associated with it. Specifically, focusing on Addis Ababa University, the study sought answers to the following questions.

1. What challenges necessitated the desire for public universities to change their model of governance into an autonomous one?
2. What enabling and constraining factors were observed in the autonomy-granting policy documents and during the process of preparing for the implementation of autonomy in Addis Ababa University? Were there universal characteristics shared by the Ethiopian autonomization process and those in other parts of the world?

Theoretical Framework

A great body of literature attests to the fact that autonomy removes many barriers and challenges that higher education institutions (HEIs) face and paves a smooth way of achieving better student outcomes. University autonomy is a multi-dimensional concept (Orosz, 2018). The European University Association (EUA) argues that institutional autonomy is vital for smooth and effective university operations and a framework for describing efficient university autonomy is extremely important as it stipulates that

> Institutional autonomy is widely considered an important prerequisite for modern universities to develop institutional profiles and deliver efficiently on their missions. Discussions around university governance and autonomy have emerged across Europe in different contexts as a response to new diverse challenges. As a result, it has become imperative to develop a conceptual framework of reference to address such an important topic and meet the increasing demand for comparability and benchmarking across borders. (EUA, 2023)

Due to its comprehensive nature in addressing many aspects of autonomy and its status as the most up-to-date framework, this framework has been chosen to guide the analysis of university autonomy in the context of Addis Ababa University. It is thus essential to examine the framework in detail as follows.

EUA outlines four dimensions of university autonomy: organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, staffing autonomy, and academic autonomy (EUA, 2023). Organizational autonomy centers on the rights for self-decision regarding the

election and dismissal of management, selection of criteria for administration, duration of work of the management, possibility of attracting outside specialists to the governing bodies, opportunity to make decisions regarding the academic structure, and opportunity to create official institutions. Financial autonomy articulates the importance of self-power in deciding the duration and type of financing, opportunity to make a profit, opportunity to receive credit, opportunity to own real estate, ability to determine the level of payment for students, and opportunity to regulate payment for students.

Academic issues such as determining the level of recruitment of students and their total number, as well as their selection at different levels of training, determining the filling of programs at different levels of instruction, deleting or closing the curricula, choosing a language of instruction, developing criteria for quality assessment, and determining the main content of the program fall under the domain of academic autonomy. It is in personnel autonomy that institutions have the power to create opportunities to make personnel decisions, determine the level of wages, and make decisions for the development of a career in administrative and academic personnel.

Each component of the EAU's model resonates with what is happening in Ethiopian public universities. Universities, for instance, do not have the right to determine their top management or leaders (organizational autonomy). They do not have the right to decide on their financial matters. They are not allowed to undertake their own procurements, reallocate budgets as they wish, and secure funds from donors (financial autonomy). Budgets are allocated to them by the government externally and their expenditure is highly controlled by bureaucratic tools. Universities cannot employ staff members without the consent of top officials in most cases (personnel autonomy).

They cannot have the full freedom to decide over their academic matters such as developing their curricula for courses they teach (academic autonomy).

Given the opportunity to exercise autonomy, institutional leaders can have the freedom to freely govern their institutions by themselves as per their vision, missions, and goals. Fallis (2004, p. 33) further elaborates on the significance of university autonomy as follows:

> Institutional autonomy is required for the mission of the university. Autonomy is required for free inquiry—the raison d'etre of the modern university. It is integral to all the responsibilities of the university. Free inquiry is the essence of the tradition of liberal education. The theory of knowledge inherent in the research mission of the university assumes free inquiry: knowledge is best advanced when it is subjected to tests based in free inquiry. Free inquiry encourages a diversity of opinions and allows the university to fulfill its responsibility for preparing future citizens. Free inquiry values knowledge for its own sake, escaping the distortions which can arise when there is a concern with how the knowledge will be applied, or who paid for the inquiry, or what the government wants to hear.

The argument here is that universities should be shielded from bureaucratic control and political interference. University faculty who are busy with their daily routines should be given the freedom to execute their tasks given that these activities can only be performed by professional academics who have mastered a complex body of knowledge through extensive formal training and apprenticeship. Just to borrow Brubacher's words, "The republic of scholars" (Brubacher, 1967) must be respected, and must be sovereign. Clark (2014) asserts that

> The complexity of the work and the high degree of specialization university faculty are engaged in means that their work can be neither directly supervised nor effectively regulated by conventional hierarchical controls; instead, control comes from professional norms and peer controls. Autonomy should then be considered a natural right of universities. Attempts to apply conventional hierarchical administrative techniques can be dysfunctional in that they tend to drive out competent professionals and cause those who remain on campus to become discouraged or to take collective action to vent their frustration.

In the 21st century knowledge economy, universities are not only there for their traditional roles of research and teaching (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995) but also for more important functions that arise with the demands of the 21st century, such as helping nations despite international competition and knowledge and technology transfer and thereby achieving excellence as a goal. The writers mentioned above further argue that universities need to function with full freedom to make decisions. Universities need to be governed by policies that nurture generous provision of capital and unrestricted exercise of autonomy (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1995) so that they can achieve excellence. Existing research literature has already established a strong link between university autonomy and achieving excellence. Quite recently it was remarked that around the world, nationally, regionally, and internationally, institutional autonomy, much has been said about its instrumentality in maximizing the efficiency of universities, is under siege and is an increasingly pressing issue that needs concerted research both nationally and internationally.

Method

Closely examining the lived experiences of Addis Ababa University, the oldest and the biggest Ethiopian university founded in 1950, , as an illustrative case, this study attempts to relate the course of actions taken at this university toward the new initiative of moving from a non-autonomous university to an autonomous one. This study is founded on the view that direct observation of phenomena is a proper way to measure reality and generate truth about the world (Acharyya, 2019). The qualitative-quantitative design was chosen for this study as it implies that the research questions raised in the study can be fully answered from both objective and subjective data. The need for objective and subjective data in turn implies the use of instruments that yield both qualitative and quantitative data. Therefore, a structured questionnaire and a document analysis were used to serve this purpose. The choice of these instruments provides the researcher and the informants with flexibility in the data collection process.

To this end, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected using two data-collecting tools: a semi-structured questionnaire and a document analysis. The semi-structured questionnaire survey intended in this study was chosen to be a descriptive-exploratory survey where only an available set of informants were randomly contacted for data collection irrespective of the demographic variations of the population and irrespective of the size of the number of informants to get possible insights. Moreover, the responses secured from the questionnaire were to complement the data to be secured from the document review. The semi-structured questionnaire was thus administered online to all available and willing academic staff members of the University to complete, and 101 informants were able to complete and return it in time out of a total of nearly 2000 active teaching academic staff. The semi-structured questionnaire aimed to secure largely objective data regarding informants' reaction to the autonomy

initiative proposed by the University while the document analysis sets out to collect largely subjective data from different documents regarding the proposed initiative.

Seeking to consolidate answers to all research questions, it was also essential to undertake a systematic document review and analysis. A document review is a process that entails the collection and interpretation of relevant documents for research (Rice, 2019).

The three documents chosen for the review were: the public university autonomy granting bill issued by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Proclamation: 1294/2023), the regulation for the re-establishment of Addis Ababa University as an autonomous university (The Council of Ministers, Regulation No: 531/ 2015 E.C), and a series of minutes of the Addis Ababa University central autonomy taskforce regular meetings.

The criteria or framework of indicators adopted by this study to guide the entire investigation of the notion of autonomy in the context of this research is that of the European University Association, a framework of indicators comprising four types of autonomy: organizational, academic, staffing, and financial. The framework developed by the Association was also used by the University of Shanghai to rank universities for their autonomy, excellence, funding, and accountability. The quality of the qualitative data collected was generally assessed in terms of validity and relevance criteria (Mays & Pope 2000). Reliability checks such as reflexivity, attention to negative cases, fair dealing with issues discussed from all angels, clear exposition of the methods of data collection, and analysis, respondent validation, and triangulation, and expert opinions were used for assessing the validity and reliability of items used in both data collection instruments. The quantitative and qualitative data collected from the questionnaire were systematically organized on an Excel spreadsheet file, analyzed, and reported using the

established protocols and norms. The reporting of the respective data such as descriptive and inferential statistics for the quantitative data and systematic thematic review for the qualitative data was then made. Means and percentages were used to highlight key trends in the analyzed data. Incomplete questionnaire items were excluded; the collected data were cleaned, and the qualitative data were systematically organized thematically to ensure that the collected data would have a high level of quality. Quantitative data were systematically organized using descriptive statistics and narrative interpretation of those data followed by inter-data set comparisons and reflections made.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the analysis of the instruments used have been presented thematically and signposted by the research questions set. The key themes signaled in the research questions and discussed as follows were the challenges of non-autonomous public universities, enabling and constraining factors towards introducing autonomous governance, and scope of the autonomous provision and the limitations associated with it, among others.

Long-lived Challenges of Non-autonomous Public Universities

Both document review and self-reported open-ended questionnaire data revealed many challenges faced by Ethiopian public universities, especially the Addis Ababa University, during the last three regimes: the military regime, the EPRDF regime, and the current Prosperity Party-led Federal Government of Ethiopia. Political manoeuvring of top university leaders' appointments, lack of academic freedom, lack of ownership of the university by the university community, and lack of control over

the university's budget were some of the challenges reported by the informants. Specific examples include the final appointment of university presidents by the Ministry of Education with minimal participation of university faculty (deprivation of institutional autonomy), the imposition of courses or curricula from the same without the consent of universities to implement (deprivation of academic autonomy), the procurement of resources by external government procurement office, without carefully consulting the concerned universities of their actual needs and scarcities (deprivation of financial autonomy), and limited participation of the university's broader faculty in decision-making process (lack of ownership).

Informants recalled that 42 seasoned professors from Addis Ababa University were, for instance, fired from their jobs immediately after the EPRDF took power in 1991 (Dowden, 1993) without any precondition or notice, which is a stark example of the strong political interference of the ruling government with the university's administration and internal affairs. This is a clear overriding of universities' academic freedom, which creates havoc and insecurity for the staff to undertake their duties and responsibilities professionally. The imposition of a centrally or nationally developed curriculum for implementation in universities despite the latter's resistance to doing so was cited by informants as an indication of a lack of academic freedom in Ethiopian universities in general and in Addis Ababa University in particular.

Two examples can be taken to show the lack of shared vision among the staff and the lack of control over the university's budget. One is the existence of divided opinions as regards the university's future and governance caused by political cadres infiltrated into the university by different political parties with desperately low motivation created among the staff to work. The second issue is the unjust allocation of the budget for the various university units. In other words, there were impositions on

the university as regards its freedom to decide over its organization and financial management.

Informants reported that the cumulative impacts of those long-lived challenges on the university manifested in various forms such as the poor level of competence of graduates of the university compared to what is expected of them in the international labor market, impoverished overall academic infrastructure and services, ever-deterioration of academic quality and poor faculty salary (an average of 400 USD in 2023 per month for a full professor, for instance), perhaps the lowest in Africa given the currently available data on faculty pay rates. Just for an illustration, an academic staff member working in Uganda, a near Ethiopian neighbor, typically earns around 26,280,300 UGX per year (which is nearly 600 USD per month) (World Salaries (https://worldsalaries.com/average-academic-staff-salary-in-uganda/).

An informant remarked "All teaching staff [members] are running for other needs, to satisfy basic life needs, because their monthly salary at AAU is very low. This is a fundamental problem to alleviate academic problems in the university." (Extracted from interview transcripts).

In sum, Ethiopian public universities, with Addis Ababa University at the front, have historically lacked institutional autonomy in terms of academic, financial, organizational, and personnel freedoms to enjoy.

Enabling and Constraint Factors in the Move to Autonomy

The commitment of the Ethiopian government to introduce university autonomy and implement it in public universities has been extremely minimal despite the promotion and advocacy of the importance of the idea of university autonomy by the elite in several research papers and media academic discourses. In 2023, the

government came forward with a strong push for reforming the governance model of universities toward autonomy backed by a proclamation (Proclamation Numbered: 1294/2023) that provided public universities with institutional autonomy. The proclamation set as its objectives or rationales, among other things, enabling HEIs to be free to make decisions on their affairs so that they become efficient in producing trained human capital for national development and become internationally competitive, and the need to re-establish HEIs where their faculty, researchers support staff and students undertake their professional duties with freedom and where rich research and teaching-learning knowledge and practice are available, innovation is nurtured, robust health and other services are provided. It would, therefore, be critical to closely examine the overall context of the autonomy reform process both nationally and at the institutional level, focusing on Addis Ababa University, in terms of factors that serve as fertile conditions on the ground for its implementation and factors that, on the other hand, would impede its speedy preparation and implementation.

Highlighting the challenges side, informants underlined factors such as lack of meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including the leadership of the university at various levels, the faculty, the support staff, the students, and the wider public, and shortage of time for the development and approval of the proclamation as serious limitations with the preparatory stage of the implementation of the autonomy reform. Consistent with this argument, data from the questionnaire analysis revealed that the awareness and knowledge of the support staff, for instance, toward the envisaged autonomy and the potential outcomes it would bring to them was minimal, as depicted in the table below, with 38.6% of the respondents being undecided to respond.

Table 1
Awareness and Knowledge of Support Staff

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	4	4.0
Agree	11	10.9
Undecided	39	38.6
Disagree	30	29.7
Strongly Disagree	17	16.8

Worse was the awareness and knowledge the university students had regarding the reform initiative, as reported by 40.6% of the sample faculty members' disagreement (Table 2). It follows from this that if students' awareness of the reform process and reform objectives is poor, the overall initiative would face obstacles and resistance. The reform initiative had to bring everyone or all potential stakeholders on board for the best effect. Many respondents were also at the point of "undecided" regarding the situation, the implication of which can still be a lack of sufficient promotion and mobilization activities for the student community, the key university stakeholders, regarding the autonomy initiative. The implication here might also be a deliberate and diminished level of engagement on the part of those respondents for various reasons such as dissatisfaction with remunerations, political resentment, and lack of interest in doing so.

Table 2
Awareness and Knowledge of the Student Community

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0.0
Agree	12	11.9
Undecided	32	31.7
Disagree	41	40.6
Strongly Disagree	16	15.8

Findings regarding the public's awareness and knowledge of the potential outcomes that autonomy would bring to them are also perfectly aligned with the above claims, with 38.6% of respondents disagreed, as shown in the following table.

Table 3
Awareness and Knowledge of the Wider Public

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0	0.0
Agree	11	10.9
Undecided	32	31.7
Disagree	39	38.6
Strongly Disagree	19	18.8

The most outstanding finding here was the overall poor preparation status the university was making such as poor staff and students' awareness of the reform benefits and challenges, insufficient infrastructural readiness, and lack of shared strategic planning toward implementing the autonomy reform, as indicated by 32.7% of informants who responded as "undecided" regarding the matter, which could imply more to the negative than the positive one, although 30.7% of informants did respond "agree" to the same issue. The fact that 32.7% of the respondents chose 'undecided' implies that in one way or another, the university was not able to bring all stakeholders

such as students and staff on board for the successful realization of the reform initiative. It should be clear that an explicitly demonstrated commitment on the part of key stakeholders was required to make the reform successful.

Table 4
University's Level of Preparation toward the Autonomy Implementation.

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Strongly Agree	5	5.0
Agree	31	30.7
Undecided	33	32.7
Disagree	26	25.7
Strongly Disagree	6	5.9

In addition to the limitations as far as preparatory works are concerned, informants have also outlined several other negative factors that are likely to impede the progress of the implementation of autonomy, such as illicit political influence that is probably exerted on the process by the government. The illicit influence manifests itself in indirect interferences the government makes into the university's affairs by, for instance, assigning top leadership, restricting academic freedom by way of coercing professional societies such as teachers' association in the university, and by infiltrating the government's cadres into the various academic positions of the university. They further affirmed that those constraints could probably lead to mistrust and lack of confidence in the government by faculty concerning autonomy. Respondent further reiterates in a statement that due to those constraints; the university faculty were to develop concerns regarding autonomy. He states that

> The process was influenced by political considerations, rather than the best interests of the universities, and was rather top-down. This led to concerns that autonomy would be used to benefit certain groups or individuals, rather than to

improve the quality of education. (Taken from the summary text of the qualitative data).

One could further conclude from the detailed narrative responses forwarded by the respondents that the expected autonomy had a weak legal framework, one that neither provides safeguards against abuse of autonomy by politicians nor stipulates legal measures that would make universities in charge of their breaches. Lack of requisite experience for managing self-decision making, poor resources, and poor level of readiness were also spelled out by the informants as additional constraints for the autonomy to go as fast as desired. Informants also identified internal and external challenges the university was likely facing such as political interference. Respondents remarked that if the government continues to interfere with university affairs, which would largely stifle academic freedom, institutional autonomy will be at stake. They expressed their concern that the precarious situation of the country, such as civil war, the dwindling economy, ethnic violence, global inflation, regional war, and global climate change would jeopardize the implementation of autonomy. The lack of public resources is another potential external challenge mentioned. If public universities are not given the resources they need by the government, they may not be able to implement autonomy reform effectively. This could lead to problems such as staff shortages, poor infrastructure, and a lack of teaching materials.

External regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies may also impose strict guidelines and compliance requirements on universities, informants further explained. Adhering to these regulations can add administrative burden and limit the level of autonomy that AAU can exercise. Societal and cultural factors can influence the acceptance and implementation of autonomy initiatives. Resistance to change,

traditional hierarchies, and cultural norms may impede the adoption of new practices or challenge the autonomy reform initiative. Changes in demographics and market demands could also pose challenges to the implementation of autonomy, the informants reported. AAU should stay responsive to the evolving needs of students, employers, and society to ensure the relevance and sustainability of its program. The increasing development of the private sector could challenge the university by draining its seasoned faculty, they explained.

However, there were positive sides that were outlined by the informants as enabling factors. Respondents expressed their hope that there would be a bright future for autonomy to materialize, as it has been long awaited by the faculty. An informant summarized what this means when he remarked that "Expectations from the public are very high." The issuance of legal instruments to protect autonomy by the government, the start of several preparatory works by the university, such as the development of several new policy documents and guidelines for the university in compliance with the new demands of the autonomy proclamation, and the university re-establishment regulation were cited as encouraging moves although they were remarked as not sufficient. Statistical evidence from the questionnaire analysis also disclosed that there was a good level of understanding and awareness of the autonomy initiatives by the top management. The implication of this awareness is better readiness to effectively mobilize the university community towards a speedy and effective implementation of the reform initiative. The highest number of informants, 36.6%, was in favor of reasonable awareness and knowledge of the top management about the autonomy reform initiative at Addis Ababa University, as the Table below illustrates. Moreover, attempts made to engage the university management at various levels in the autonomy preparatory discussions and the broad participation of faculty and senior professors in

developing various autonomy instruments could be taken as very important enablers. The strong desire for reform on the part of the broad university community because of the already decaying academic and work culture in the university was also underlined as a key enabler.

Table 5

University's Top Management Awareness and Knowledge of Autonomy

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	25	24.8
Agree	37	36.6
Undecided	28	27.7
Disagree	7	6.9
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0

Scope of the Autonomy Provision: Limitations

The idea of university autonomy dates back to 1954 in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa University, 2022) when Haile Selassie I University, today's Addis Ababa University, was a chartered university whose chancellor and protector was the King of the Country, Emperor Haile Selassie the First. The university was, however, deprived of its charter when the Military Regime took overpower in 1974, and many expatriate staff were expelled from the university and sent back to their countries. For over three decades in the country, university autonomy has been simply given to the public as a lip service to achieve political goals. It was in 2003 when the first proclamation of higher education (Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003) was issued that the idea of university autonomy emerged. In later versions of the proclamation, such as Proclamation No. 650/2009 Higher Education Proclamation, and Proclamation No. 1152/2019 Higher Education Proclamation, the idea was still there although practically all public universities were under the strong abusive hands of the government.

Proclamation 1152/2019, for instance, states the following under Article 16.

> 1/ Every public institution is hereby granted the necessary autonomy in pursuit of its mission. 2/ Subject to the responsibilities of the Board and the Ministry as stipulated in this Proclamation, autonomy of public institutions shall also include to: a) develop and implement relevant curricula and research programs; create new or close existing programs; set up its organizational structure and enact and implement its internal rules and procedures; b) consistent with other provisions of this Proclamation, select, through a transparent system of competition, academic and other staff to be employed by the institution and designate or determine their responsibilities based on institutional requirements and expectations concerning performance and quality of work; c) administer its personnel based on the provisions of this Proclamation and the principles of other applicable laws; d) nominate the president, vice presidents and select and appoint leaders of academic units and departments as provided for by this Proclamation; e) manage its funds and property on the basis of this Proclamation and other applicable laws and regulations. f) Generate and utilize other incomes to support its mission through this proclamation and other relevant laws and regulations. 3/Every public institution shall exercise its autonomy in ways that, at the same time, ensure lawfulness, efficiency and effectiveness, and transparency.

However, the idea of university autonomy as a critical and the most viable option for reforming the higher education sector in Ethiopia to a better status came along with the issuance of the autonomy proclamation, University Autonomy Granting Proclamation No.1294/2023(Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia,2023), in May

2023. The proclamation was also followed by the issuance of the Addis Ababa University Re-establishment Regulation on 4th August 2023, No: 531/2023).

These legal bills are the mark of the first ever strong move and attempt where high-level commitment has been made by the Ethiopian government to genuinely reform the higher education sector. Intensive preparations have been made toward those bills as of mid-2021, and consultations have been conducted at various levels. One of the milestones taken in the preparation was the establishment by the Ministry of Education of a reform task force in AAU comprising 80 staff members selected from all colleges and institutes of the university. The task force, which was organized into seven teams, was accountable to the AAU board but worked in collaboration with and supported by the AAU management from the top to department levels. Its mission was to conduct a needs assessment, identify gaps, and make short and long-term recommendations (Addis Ababa University, 2022).

It was essential in this study to review the proclamation document in terms of its coverage and limitations to fully appreciate the scope of the intended reform, as discussed in the sections ahead. The University autonomy-granting proclamation has seven parts, 48 major Articles, and several sub-articles and was endorsed by the Council of Ministers of the FDRE on February 27, 2023. Some of the key rationales outlined in the preamble of the proclamation for its importance and realization were enabling HEIs to be free to make decisions on their affairs by themselves so that they become efficient in producing trained human capital for national development and become internationally competitive, the need to re-establish HEIs where their faculty, researchers support staff, and students undertake their professional duties with freedom and where rich research and teaching-learning knowledge and practice are available, innovation is nurtured, and robust health and other services are provided, enabling HEIs

to diversify their revenue generation methods and thereby gradually improve their income so that they can effectively engage in national development initiatives, and the need to make HEIs autonomous financially, economically, and organizationally so that they can achieve their missions effectively (FDRE, 2023). Even though the proclamation states the meaning of university autonomy as follows, "A non-profit legally established public HEI with budgetary support by the government set up to ensure an equal opportunity for all citizens with financial, economic, organizational, and administrative freedom" and articulates the aim of the proclamation as " to establish autonomous universities that promote social, political, economic and cultural development, create a system whereby autonomous universities attain self-sufficiency in terms of income by revenue generation, efficient and cost-effective administrative system." (The researcher's translation from Amharic to English), some articles in the same proclamation appear to contradict these premises, such as Article 8, the roles and responsibilities of autonomous universities, No. 2, which states "The universities develop program based on the national need of the country and the priorities of the development sectors" and, No. 9, which states "Employing, administering and firing staff, based on the Board's regulation which is to be issued in observance of and based on national and international labor rights and standards." From Articles "8 & 9" above, one can infer that universities cannot be fully autonomous as they are required to base their programs on national priorities and cannot dismiss academic staff or employ academic staff without the consent of their boards.

While it is essential for universities to address national priorities in their academic programs, they should also be allowed to develop programs of studies the universities expect to be of regional and international significance or for that of humanity at large. Another limitation of the proclamation appears to be the lengthy

hierarchical governance structure, which has eight layers of governance: Chancellor, Executive Board, President and Vice Presidents, Senate, Autonomous University Council, Managing Council, and an executive committee from top to bottom, along with two additional offices, the quality assurance office and the audit office, to be established and be accountable directly to the Board, making the governance units number ten. This complex structure impedes speedy decision-making as several units of the structure have to take part in a particular operation. Moreover, each unit will be deprived of unit-level autonomy to make its own decisions, and that in turn deprives staff of their ownership of their institution.

The proclamation appears to give almost all key governance responsibilities to the Executive Board, which is set to have 9 to 11 members, to be chosen by the Ministry of Education in consultation with the Federal Government based on merit, gender, representation of stakeholders, and other issues. The president of the University is a non-voting member and a secretary on the Board. From this one can see that all members of this critical unit, the Board, are to be chosen by the Ministry of Education, delegated by the Government. The University plays no role in nominating members to the Board. This appears to seriously jeopardize the degree of autonomy that the university is set to enjoy. Elsewhere in the proclamation, though it is stated that the university community will have the opportunity to choose the university president, the Proclamation, Article 13.6 states that the "Board will finally choose three candidates and submit them for final appointment to the Chancellor". The ultimate decision to choose the university's president is therefore not of the university community but of the government, through the Board and then the Chancellor, who is directly appointed by the Prime Minister of the country.

Regarding academic programs, research, and community service, Part Four of the proclamation, two sub-articles, Articles 28.1 & 28.2, are contradictory. The former states that the university can offer regular programs, continuing education programs, and distance programs using Information Communication Technology (ICT), while the latter states that the details of the types of programs offered and the criteria for offering those programs by the above modalities will be decided by the Ministry of Education. This appears to jeopardize the academic freedom of universities. Similarly, in Part Three, where we find stipulations about academic and organizational freedom, we find two sub-articles contradicting each other, sub-articles 26.1 and 26.3. The former states that an autonomous university has the freedom to run its academic program and its administration, while the latter states that the university in question will still be monitored and controlled in doing so, although it does not say who will monitor and control it. Here, it should be noted that the notion of centralization of the control of universities tends to be strongly opposed to the notion of autonomy.

Another limitation of the proclamation is the existence of overlapping duties and structures in it. Articles 18.6 and 24.2 state that the Senate will issue regulations on the appointment of academic positions below the Vice Presidents, and the procedures of selection and the appointment of officers, directors, and so forth will be issued and approved by the Board, respectively. Moreover, two important structural units introduced in the reform, the university council and the managing council, do not appear to have clearly defined roles and responsibilities in the proclamation.

Another limitation of the proclamation is its stipulation regarding the medium or language of instruction in the university. Excluding language courses, the medium of instruction is stated to be English, unlike many autonomous universities, which have the freedom to choose the language of instruction.

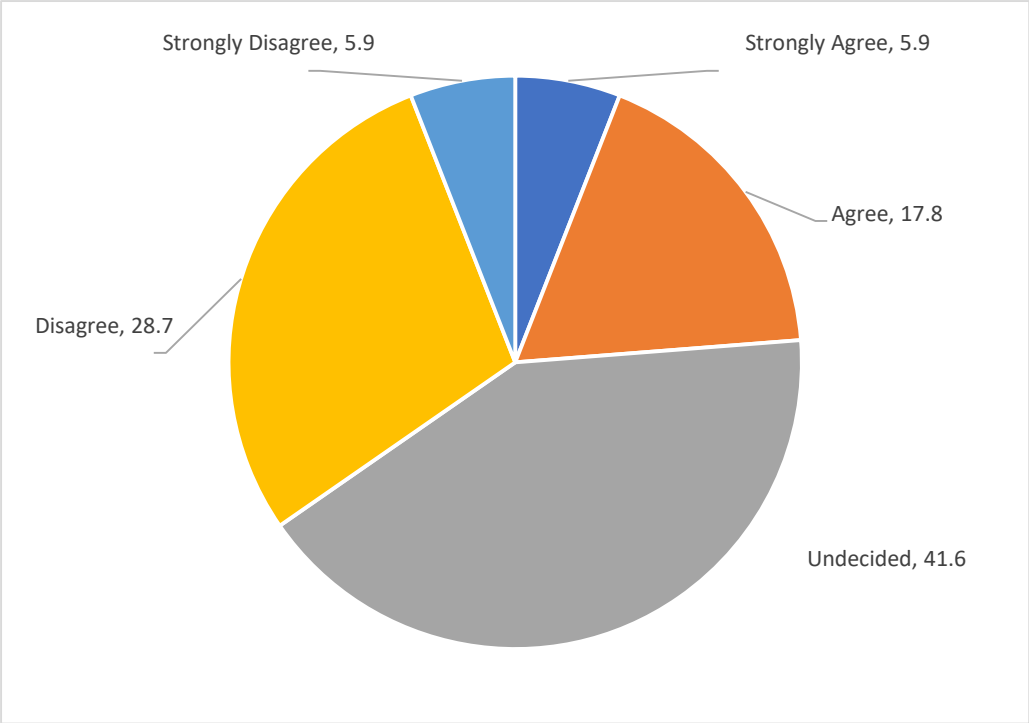
Regarding financial autonomy, Part Five of the Proclamation, Sub-article 38.1 states that the university will enjoy a gradually decreasing budget in the form of block grant until it becomes self-sufficient in addition to other forms of income generation. This gives the impression that the autonomous university is likely to stop receiving any budget from the government at any point in the future, unlike the social and societal responsibilities that governments have always to support public institutions that promote the public's interest.

As regards overall institutional autonomy, the two sub-articles mentioned in the proclamation, Articles 42 and 43, appear to be very dubious as they tend to empower the Ministry of Education and the Ethiopian Education and Training Authority (ETA) to still control the university. The former states that all roles and responsibilities about higher education given to the Ministry of Education may also apply to the autonomous university as deemed necessary. It does not state which is which, while the latter states that the roles and responsibilities of ETA regarding higher education will also apply to the autonomous university as appropriate. It does not specify which powers of the ETA will continue to apply to autonomous universities.

In a further quest to determine whether the newly introduced autonomy has the status of an international stature or not in terms of bench-marking international best practices as regards an ideal university autonomy expounded by international actors such as UNESCO and the European University Association (EUA), informants were asked to give their own opinions. Most of the informants, 41.6%, as the pie chart below shows, had a position that was just "undecided', implying perhaps that there was no sufficient benchmarking made toward the autonomy introduced.

Pie chart

Addis Ababa University's autonomy compared to international practices



In sum, the critical scrutiny of the autonomy-granting proclamation revealed that there were limitations with a significant number of provisions regarding the four major dimensions of university autonomy: academic, organizational, personnel, and financial.

Universal Characteristics

From the overall reactions of informants in this study and the public media outlets, it can be learned that concerns that normally arise during the time of a new reform do also surface in the Ethiopian context. Resistance to change, being skeptical as regards the government's commitment and full faculty engagement, financial constraints given that self-generation of revenue is likely to take quite a long time and a lot of effort and commitment, and poor overall capacity of the university to effectively implement autonomy were some of the serious concerns articulated by the informants.

A social media writer commented, "Universities prepare for the worst as the government grants autonomy" (Ashenafi, 2023). The same source highlighted how MPS, who endorsed the university autonomy granting bill, found it difficult to ensure a smooth political fraternal relationship between the three parties: the government, the ruling party, and public universities. This was another area of suspicion that informants had in this study. More profound concerns have also been voiced in personal email communications to the researcher, as one senior professor commented,

> By the way, providing universities with autonomy is a good idea. However, we have to distinguish between the types of autonomy to which we refer. Is it administrative or governance autonomy, academic autonomy, or both? It could be all of them, but autonomy cannot be 100% because the universities are public. Under any autonomy, even private universities cannot teach only the curricula they want. All universities are made accountable for the needs of society. However, I fear the following: Doing things in haste before the required preparations are done may lead to catastrophic failures" (Extracted from a personal communication email).

Moreover, informants raised fear and reservations if the expected autonomy goes to the extent of ensuring, for instance, the capacity to choose the language of instruction, decisions regarding quality assurance issues, the capacity to select quality assurance agencies, quality assurance mechanisms, the right to keep a surplus, the right to independently borrow money, and the ability of universities to independently enter and decide on international cooperation schemes.

Conclusion and Implications

The following key conclusions and implications emerge from the above findings and discussion.

First, the notion of autonomy, unlike what was proposed in the Ethiopian context, must be seen within a broader context that has a moral and philosophical basis. University autonomy is an empowerment of faculty to develop their own skills and competencies as opposed to a tendency toward heteronomy where individual desires detached from what morality requires of us tend to interfere with. "*Autonomy is the capacity for self-government. Agents are autonomous if their actions are truly their own. So, true autonomy can easily seem to be a myth*" explains, the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (Blackburn, 2008). The same source elaborates that Autonomy is the ability to know what morality requires of us, and functions not as the freedom to pursue our ends, but as the power of an agent to act on objective and universally valid rules of conduct, certified by reason alone as different from heteronomy, which is the condition of acting on desires that are not legislated by reason. On campuses of universities, autonomy is a freedom that the faculty and the university community enjoy without any irrational restrictions on them to make decisions based on their talents, competencies, professional knowledge, and skills. Faculty are not imposed by any external pressure

on their responsible professional and expert decisions. Kenny (2012) and other prominent educators argue that autonomous institutions get the freedom to think, design, analyze, and create a curriculum and syllabus that meet their vision and mission statement. They further clarify that these institutions do not depend on any university or higher organization. They can move in the pursuit of their goals without any hassle! They are not forced to comply with traditional or religious denominations out of their own will and professional judgment. They teach and learn what they believe. However, all levels of freedom of making decisions are attached with commensurate levels of rationality, responsibility, and accountability to protect universities from abuse of power secured because of autonomy. The different forms of indirect restrictions or impositions made upon the four dimensions of university autonomy in the proclamation and discussed above, for instance, critically jeopardize the full essence of university autonomy. One could infer from the provisions in the proclamation that universities may not have a direct role in choosing their president (organizational autonomy), cannot independently develop their programs of study (academic autonomy), cannot fire an employee for ineffectiveness without consulting anyone outside the university (personnel autonomy), and may not borrow money independently from any international source (financial autonomy). From this it follows that concrete steps should be taken both by the government and the University to reach a clear workable, actionable and precise definition of autonomy. That definition should be broader and non-restrictive in the sense that the university community could play its academic and institutional responsibility freely and efficiently without any hindrance. The autonomy should be broader to the extent of empowering academic staff to develop their courses and curricula and should also empower the university to undertake its resource procurement without waiting for approval from senior ministry officials. Universities

should also have the right to secure funds from donors, raise funds from their revenues, and utilize the secured funds fully for their institutional purposes without being forced by external government authorities to meddle with their accounting and finance system.

Second, it should be underlined that the state should not assume the role of tight external legislative regulation but rather the role of external guidance and support. The exercise of academic autonomy could best and fully be managed both at the management and academic staff level by upholding the principles of independent academic inquiry, freedom of thought, and unwavering commitment to professions on behalf of the academic community and by having zero tolerance for meddling with trivial political issues either way, with the institution on one side and the government on the other. The government should have full commitment to this and should reflect the same in clearly stipulated open and accommodating legal provisions, which appear to be lacking at the present stage. This should continue more boldly than ever. Thus, the government should continue revisiting and revising some legislative articles that restrict the full autonomy of institutions, especially towards exercising academic freedom. From this, it follows that both the university and the government should revise restrictive Articles such as Article 8 & 9 in the Granting of University Autonomy Proclamation No. 1294/2023) for universities to enjoy responsible full autonomy.

Third, in a developing country, such as Ethiopia, it may be difficult to address the current problems faced by universities merely by implementing an autonomous governance structure copied from the West. Just like the claim made by some, that Africa needs to have its form of democracy instead of copying the Western mode of democracy (Nkrumah, 1965), other forms of indigenous forms of university governance that challenge the tenets of liberal democracy might be considered as options. Nkrumah (1965) sarcastically demonstrated the danger of such copying, stating:

> … those countries of the Third World which are former colonies of the imperial powers should have accepted the western form of democracy as the ideal form of government is not at all surprising, for these colonies had been taught for generations to believe that the customs of their masters were the best in the world. So thorough has been the brainwashing that there are independent countries even today where the wearing of wigs in a tropical climate is regarded as an indispensable adjunct of the administration of justice.

The only difference here is that Ethiopia was not colonized by the Western powers. The governance structure should be established based on Ethiopia's peculiar situations, culture, indigenous, and anthropological realities.

Fourth, Africa has long been suffering from a lack of freedom and dictatorial political orders; the dream for optimal autonomy for universities to fully enjoy appears to be still far-fetched and needs viable mitigation strategies to come sooner. Even though the need for self-sufficiency via grant securing and internal revenue generation has a critical importance in the governance of autonomous universities, it was found to be equally important for the government to continue to back the University financially, and the support is especially critical during the formative phase of the new autonomy. From this, it follows that the government should continue to provide all the resources and management support the university needs throughout its implementation of the reform process for the latter to become a vibrant, robust autonomous public university that can be taken as an example for other universities in Ethiopia and universities in the horn of Africa.

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Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) System Coherence in Ethiopia: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

Coherence in education refers to alignment among systems as well as a mindset and collective approach that consciously addresses fragmentation among systems, agents and responsibilities. Effective ECDE design and delivery then calls for coherence, within and among its various systems and subsystems, towards children's holistic learning and development. This paper attempts to conduct systemic analysis of these coherences in the ECDE system in Ethiopia employing a blend of four interrelated models: 'the Whole Child Approach', 'the Complexity Theory', 'the Coherence Making Model', and 'the Program Implementation Fidelity Model'. The analysis unveils that the ECDE system in Ethiopia seems incoherent for holistic learning and development. Children's holistic learning and development outcomes appear insufficient mainly because of policy, implementation, and leadership incoherencies. The paper concludes with the need for a system overhaul to address fragmentation and work toward greater coherence.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Development and Education; ECDE System Coherence*

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Introduction

Education has historically been likened with several impactful societal contributions: tool for societal advancement, source of human civilization, game changer of girls/ life, breaker of the vicious cycle of poverty, a means to a healthier, more equitable and prosperous future etc. The purpose of educational establishments is then to enable children develop skills, attitudes, and behaviors that are required for holistic growth (Pink, 2011), lifelong learning, effective citizenry behavior, peace and nation building, and lay solid foundations for strong and sustainable society (Lennert, 2018).

However, there is globally an elite focused education that minimally contributes for sustainable societal development and calls for repurposing education to promote holistic learning (GEEAP, 2023). The increasing dissatisfaction with the narrowness of the purposes and methods of the existing global educational establishments require redefinition to turn them into a more enabling enterprise (Hargreaves and Sahelberg, 2013). Education is engrossed with narrow focus on mere academic learning (Hargreaves and Sahelberg, 2013), ended up producing misguided young people who, for example, engage in ethnic divide, ethnocentric socialization, and multifaceted conflicts and violence, substance abuse, and a lot more social evils (Belay and Getnet, 2022). Unbalanced focus on mere academic thoroughness would lead students' experience *"high levels of social-emotional stress, disconnection to school and the community, and boredom in a culture of rote memorization and repetition, such that they too are unprepared for anything beyond the world of multiple choice exams"* (ASCD, n.d., p.1). In doing so, it disregards such 21st century critical skills as collaboration, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, and living and working in an ever

changing environment (OECD, 2008) that are on high demanded for success in the (ASCD, 2007). The need to re-envision the role of educational institutions calls for a global education movement to widen the myopic academic oriented schooling to a more humanizing, enabling, and holistic education of learners. In developed nations, there is a growing appreciation of the need to promote development of the whole person as opposed to mere academic achievement and test scores (Sahlberg, 2010).The inadequate performance of education systems in developing countries is farfetched from 'academizing' learning; that achieving this academic learning itself has become a constant source of struggle for schools. In more recent years, there has been an emerging "Learning Poverty" where school-aged children were found unable to read and comprehend a simple text by age 10 and this is a disproportionately pervasive problem in developing countries like Ethiopia counting nearly for 90 % of the children (World Bank Group, 2022). An important reason for this serious deficit of learning outcomes in these countries is the focus of the education systems on improving access and enrolment rather than on learning, and the incoherence for learning between elements of the systems (Scur, 2016). There has been a challenge in ensuring education system coherence for learning whereby key elements of the education system operate in tandem for learning outcomes (London, 2023).

Pritchett elucidates how education in a nation disappointingly fails in the face of system incoherence by employing the analogy of a car. Any particular car with a functional mechanical system can obviously drive with more fuel than less fuel. However, if the internal mechanical system fails, pumping more fuel into the car will hardly make a difference (Pritchett, 2015). This would mean then, if the system does not add up to a functional whole, the causal impact of augmenting individual elements

is completely unpredictable. School systems that struggle are riddled with incoherence—mismatched strategies, competing cultures, and illogical initiatives" (Johnson, 2015).

In more substantive terms, addressing this global learning crisis calls for a systemic reform (GEEAP, 2023) that ensures holistic learning and sustainability in the long-term. In fact, many countries have carried out *some* kind of educational reform in the last couple of decades; yet very few succeeding at ensuring genuine improvements (Mourshed et al., 2010). Educational reforms need to take a complex texture of change with agents and elements properly coordinated with one another to be capable to learn and thrive (Trombly, 2014: 48). If the elements and subsystems are incoherent, then it is practically challenging to workout effective strategies for improvement (Looney, 2011). Instead, coherent systems enhance shared goals, meaning, and complementarity of functions that help conserving energy, reducing tensions between internal systems, and improving adaptation (cited in HSDI, 2022).

ECDE system coherence in general helps ensuring focus, collaborative culture, collective accountability, and deepened learning outcomes (Allen and Penuel, 2015). It reduces distractors (Fullan and Quinn, 2016), *address* fragmentation, restores shared purpose to create a better learning experience for all students (diSessa et al 2004). In educational settings, program coherence aids in sustaining school change (Madda, Halverson and Gomez, 2007), enhances common understanding on educational goals, principles and values and pedagogical approaches (Bryk, 2010). It supports school improvement and students' achievement (e.g. Newmann et al., 2001) particularly when coherence of instructional components prevail (Crouch and DeStefano, 2017) as seen in tightly focused interventions with coherent systems of pedagogical practices in

developed countries in genera (Smithson and Collares, 2007; Gamoran et al., 1997; Porter, 2002) and in Keneya (Freudenberger and Davis, 2017; Piper et al., 2018), Brazil, Chile, and Puebla (Crouch, 2020) in particular.

To ensure that all children receive proper education, the systems of education need to become coherent for learning outcomes and this requires a shift from a schooling approach to learning (Pritchett, 2015). However, measuring and diagnosing system coherence and understanding areas of intervention for incoherence in learning has been a challenge (Pritchett, 2015). One such measure that is critically important in ECDE reform requires more systemic ECDE analysis because "coherence is more complex than lining up of systems and requires a redirected focus on overarching issues" (Fullan and Quinn, 2016). Furthermore, contexts also determine the applicability of coherence of one educational system with another. There is a need to understand how the central level designs, organizes and kicks off education systems across different tiers of administrative arrangements. Understandably, how the federal and regional goverance levels communicate one another would affect trust, cooperation and alignments between them, and this ultimately affects the reform outcomes (Lennert, 2018).

Understanding coherence also calls for a macro level analysis; which in fact is rarely noted in sub-Saharan Africa (Twaweza, 2015). An exception could be a work in which curriculum standards, examinations, and teacher instructional content were conducted in Llow and middle income countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Twaweza, 2015). Newmann, Smith, Allensworth and Bryk (2001) developed the concept of instructional program coherence to understand the degree to which the different artifacts "fit together." Studies that examine the content and progression of

curriculum standards and the alignment of examinations and classroom instruction with the standards are in fact very important (e.g. Atuhurra and Kaffenberger, 2022; Crouch and DeStefano, 2017; Freudenberger and Davis, 2017; Piper et al., 2018) [5] but rare (Burdett, 2017) especially in low- and middle-income countries (Atuhurra and Kaffenberger, 2022). Few studies find high levels of incoherence across instructional components. In Uganda, for example, only four of the fourteen topics in the English curriculum standards appear on the primary leaving exam, and two of the highest-priority topics in the standards are completely omitted from the exams (Kaffenberger and Spivack, 2022).

Coming to the Ethiopian case, the first policy direction that initiated ECDE formal systemic action was formulated nearly a decade ago in Ethiopia, to steer up the stagnant early childhood education movement so that it would assist achieving the universal enrolment in primary school; this has led to the introduction of the one year pre-primary O-classes attached to public primary schools that in fact ensured a massive expansion of pre-primary education. This expansion was supposed to compel the MoE systems to prioritize and align, what Pritchett (2015) called large-scale logistical tasks of building preschools, procuring supplies, and training and hiring teachers. But for Ethiopia, this was done by redistributing the resources of primary schools (including teachers) that host the O-classes; which in effect meant undue pressure on quality of education and making the education system of the level to be principally coherent only for schooling.

[5] *interventions focused on certain tightly focused and aligned ("coherent") pedagogical practices can have large effect sizes (Crouch and DeStefano, 2017) in Tusome program implemented by the Kenyan government (Freudenberger and Davis, 2017; Piper et al., 2018).*

There is a need to conduct critical macro-analysis of ECDE system coherence in Ethiopia to understand how well the system enjoys holistic development and learning coherence, coherence among the various systems and subsystems including policy coherence, leadership coherence, and implementation coherence.

Conceptualization

A Coherent Meaning of Coherence in Education Systems

Coherence is a systematic connection, consistency, and (vertical and horizontal) integration of diverse elements (Pritchett, 2015), the reciprocal relationships in the parts and the whole to build resilience or a fit for function/ purpose (HSDI, 2022). In education settings, it is an alignment and continuity within and between the elements of the curriculum (e.g., Newmann et al., 2001) as well as alignment of governance, management, financing mechanisms, human resources, and quality assurance systems around the goal of raising learning outcomes (World Bank, 2013). ECDE system coherence in Ethiopia may then be the extent to which the various systems and subsystems in relevant sectors and actors are aligned among themselves to ultimately expedite children's development, health and learning outcomes.

Some scholars consider the complexities of educational systems (Snyder, 2013; Johnson, 2008) and argue that there is more to coherence than mere lining up of elements, subsystems (Looney, 2011). The social aspect of alignment is often overlooked in discussions regarding standards-based systems. Social alignment refers to the social capital in systems, including shared values, motives and efforts (Gallotti et al., 2017) rather than good results of an education system (London, 2023). A nation may have good education performance but possibly lower coherence among the systems as in the case of, for example, Vietnam where higher assessment results were

achieved compared to other countries yet the education system was found to be weakly coherent around learning and is best understood as a formal process compliant system that, despite its many strengths, is nonetheless underperforming relative to its potential (London, 2023). Coherence in education systems is, then, defined as "the shared depth of understanding about the purpose and nature of the work across governance levels (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Approaches and Theoretical Framework

Education as a sector calls actors at different levels of the system share common goals (Fuhrman, 1993), enhance smooth flow of information throughout the system (O'Day, 2002), engage all the system in educational change (Knapp, 1997), and ensure better alignment among national and state educational instruments and practices (Herman & Webb, 2007; Knapp, 1997) to ultimately impact practice. In lieu of these complexities, our review of the ECDE system coherence in Ethiopia utilizes a blend of relevant theories and models: the 'Complexity Theory', the 'Whole Child Approach', the 'Coherence Making Framework' and the 'Program Implementation Fidelity Model'.

The 'Complexity Theory' holds that education system is complex (O'Day, 2002; Looney, 2011; Lennert, 2018; Johnson, 2008; Snyder, 2013; McQuillan, 2008; Mason, 2008; Trombly, 2014) and offers a mechanism for understanding the dynamics of this complex social system (e.g., Snyder, 2013, Johnson, 2008) to expound how the different elements/ agents of the system are, or are not, fitting together (McQuillan, 2008; Mason, 2008) especially in a multilevel educational governance setting (Trombly, 2014). Drawing on these ideas, the 'Complexity Theory' may be extended to describing ECDE system in terms of encompassing a complex array of interacting

systems and parts that are believed to be coherent to one another and to the whole system (O'Day, 2002; Looney, 2011; Lennert, 2018; Johnson, 2008; Snyder, 2013; McQuillan, 2008; Mason, 2008; Trombly, 2014).

The 'Whole Child Approach' (ASCD, 2007; Sahlberg, 2010)**,** an emerging educational philosophy and practice that upholds development of the whole person (Sahlberg, 2010), takes the ideas of Complexity Theory further and explains it in terms of aligning educational systems towards creating a holistic child learning. It underscores that there is a need to shifting educational systems from one that focuses solely on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long term development and success of children and charts out a roadmap for coherence among policies and resources that allow children get opportunities to succeed in holistic learning (ASCD, 2007).

The 'Coherence Making Framework' (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) underscores that creating such coherences for holistic growth of children goes beyond alignment of systems; it is rather subjective, on the becoming, never perfect, and continuously evolving process of making and remaking meaning in the minds and culture of those involved, resulting in consistency and specificity and clarity of action across schools and across governance levels, as a way to create consistency and alignment (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

The 'Program Implementation Fidelity Model' (Belay, Solomon & Daniel, 2020) positions coherence from the perspective of policy and program enforcement and rollout. It upholds that effective ECDE implementation may mean an internal and external adherence/ alignment of elements with the ordained program intentions and

design as well as the bigger contextual (socio-cultural, economic and political) factors that critically structure program implementations.

In sum, what aspect of coherence of a system needs to be prioritized in a reform process may depend to a greater extent on the specific context. However, alignments toward learning need to target a range of issues including actors, policy matters, curriculum and pedagogical issues, resources and capacity (GEEAP, 2023). When implementing interventions, it particularly demands for complementarities across interventions, dynamic complementarities, and the role of interventions in advancing or inhibiting systemic reform (GEEAP, 2023). However, we may, for our present purpose, gauge ECDE coherence reform for holistic learning in Ethiopian may call for analysis of alignments of the broader array of systems; mainly because ECDE is only in the making and lacks in identity; making coherence analysis impossible based on specific components as foci. ECDE system coherence in Ethiopia may then be taken to refer to the extent to which the various ECDE systems and subsystems in relevant sectors and actors are aligned among themselves to ultimately expedite children's holistic development, health and learning outcomes.

ECDE System Coherences in Ethiopia

System Coherence for Holistic Child Learning and Development

Children in many low-and middle-income countries are exposed to multiple risks including malnutrition, disease, and inadequate stimulation and these deprivations compromise their cognitive, motor, socio-emotional and educational performance. Hence, it is estimated that over 200 million (nearly 43%) children younger than five years are at risk of not achieving their developmental potential (WHO, 2020), 61% are

stunted (World Bank, 2013) and that children living in Sub Saharan Africa are five times less likely to reach the minimum level of proficiency in reading by the end of primary school, than children elsewhere (UNESCO GEMR, 2023) and this would, in the long-term, sustain the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007).

Nationally, about 13 million children live under extreme poverty in Ethiopia and, therefore, nearly 60% of those under five are lagging in their full developmental potential (CSA &UNICEF, 2020) with stunting, underweight, and wasting respectively standing at 38%, 24%, and 10%. On top of poor health or under nutrition, the problem has been compounded by children's lack of inadequate sensitive and responsive care, feeding, stimulation, and safety/security; possibly exposing an estimated 59% of children under five to the risk of suboptimal development (MoH), 2019).

With respect to pre-primary education in particular, Ethiopia had significantly progressed towards realizing the Millennium Development Goals (MoFED & UNDP, 2012). Several attempts were also made to reverse the serious ECDE quality concerns widely reported in Ethiopia (e.g., see Belay et al., 2020, 2022), including, among others, boosting pedagogical competency of teachers through different on the job trainings[6]. Despite these encouraging initiatives to empower school readiness programs to incorporate modern pedagogy as well as their high prospect of scalability (Belay and Belay, 2015) slightly contributing to improved ECDE outcomes (MoE, 2024), there are as yet incongruences of efforts with set objectives. For example, a sample of 265 upper grade preschool children (mean age 6.2 years) were exposed to literacy and health

[6] *The most recent national and comprehensive short-term in-service training included a total of about 17,000 O-class teachers to familiarize them with child-friendly pedagogies and play-based learning in particular (MoE, 2024).*

intervention program in Addis Ababa through various tools and materials and trained teachers using these materials for about a year[7]. School readiness was measured with the locally adapted Measure of Early Learning Quality and Outcomes (MELQO) and findings suggested that large proportion of children (80%) in targeted preschools seemed to have generally exhibited an intermediate to proficient level in almost all components of MELQO, but one; i.e. backward digit span. However, in very pragmatic terms, a substantial level (nearly one in five) was below basic implying that they were still prepared to be left behind in primary school (Belay & Belay, 2020).

Years later, MELQO national assessment for groups without such intervention has shown that the overall mean score performance of O-class children in all the four basic domains (literacy, numeracy, executive functions and fine motor skills) was as substantially low as 48.9% (EAES), 2023a). This would contribute to high rate of learning poverty in Ethiopia in which 90 % of children were found unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of 10 (World Bank Group, 2022b). The overall performance of Grade 2 and 3 students in Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA, 2023) was alarmingly low; though has shown a slight improvement as compared to EGRA 2021. Students who were able to achieve a functional reading level[8] were only 20% (EAES, 2023b).

An often overlooked disabler in ECDE is the presence of behavioral/mental problems in the child (Gleason et al., 2016), caregiver (Honda et al., 2023), and educator (Stein et al., 2022). Studies in Ethiopia have shown that 3% (Ashenafi et al., 2001) to

[7] *The project was implemented by Whizkids Workshop, Addis Ababa, in nine public preschools selected from three sub cities of Addis Ababa.*

[8] *Functional reading level involves reading with increasing fluency and comprehension, and reading fluently with full comprehension.*

17% (Tadesse et al., 1999) of children suffer from behavioral/mental problems. While the majority of the country's population is in the child age range, mental/ behavioral health services for children are extremely scarce in Ethiopia. On the other hand, preschool teachers trained on common behavior/mental disorders were found to be statistically significantly better than untrained controls to identify and support children with problems (Desta et al., 2017). The finding indicates the necessity for task sharing where teachers can be easily trained to identify early children with serious problems and make appropriate referral to nearby health facilities. Higher education planners also need to consider addressing common behavioral/mental disablers and how to tackle them in their preservice teachings.

Policy and Leadership Coherence

Global experiences with ECDE policy making indicate that many policies address only one aspect of the system and disregards the various other systems of educational change (Knapp, 1997). This may be an instance of partial policy alignment; since greater system coherence demands better alignment, for instance, among national and state educational tools[9] and enforcements (Herman & Webb, 2007; Knapp, 1997).

a) Policy Alignment with International Trends: Global Coherence

National ECDE systems are expected to align themselves with emerging global trends that uphold the need for integrated, holistic, and multisectoral ECD programs. In this regard, both the old ECCE (MoE, MoWCYA & MoH), 2010) and the new ECDE (MoE, MoWSA & MoH, 2023) policies promote holistic child development and learning starting from prenatal development till age six/ eight. In both of them, this goal

[9] Educational tools include policies, standards, curriculum, and assessments.

is to be realized through comprehensive and participatory approaches as well as the inter-sectoral and integrated coordination of three relevant ministries working on child care, rights, health, education and development. Both policies promised to offer a coherent admin structure of coordination of services by the three line ministries; with a national task force established from stakeholders to coordinate, review and monitor program delivery. Hence, national goals, approaches and proposed coordination systems seem to broadly align with international trends; but the coordination aspect lacks clarity, adherence to international instruments, and, as shown later, attunes minimally to local realities.

b) Policy Coherence with Local Practices (Ecological Coherence/ Indigenization within Globalization)

Policy making needs to be aligned with admin structures to translate policies into actions, duties and responsibilities of the respective actors, national challenges and opportunities of the educational system, and how partners function for system improvement (Fazekas and Burns, 2012). Hence, policy coherence can be defined as (OECD, 2014b):

> …the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policy actions across government departments and agencies creating synergies towards achieving the agreed objectives. Within national governments, policy coherence issues arise between different types of public policies, between different levels of government, between different stakeholders and at an international level. (p. 7).

In a way, policy coherence is about ecological adherence. Ecological coherence refers to the extent to which ECDE designs and deliveries, approaches and methods, materials and resources, tasks and activities, and roles and responsibilities resonate with

typical real world conditions, situations and contexts to which ECDE systems and programs are to be installed. In this regard, ECDE indigenization can be considered as an approach to ensure harmony and synergy among ECDE systems and sub-systems (goals, contents, methods, resources) with local realities. To begin with programs, ECDE programs in Ethiopia are common practices with a recorded history of attuning to the needs of the children at large. Belay and Belay (2015) have in particular examined the practices, contributions and challenges of the School Readiness Programs (O-class and Child-to-Child Initiatives) in Ethiopia and argued that both approaches have high prospect of scalability and feasibility in the Ethiopian soil; despite some implementation problems. Evidences have also underscored that the traditional and community-based school readiness programs- Priest Schools (Belay & Belay, 2017) and Madrassas (Yigzaw et al., 2022; Zeyadet al., 2022)- contain the viability of delivering Early Childhood Education; though they, too, retain some limitations in implementation.

Despite such program coherence and emerging consciousness about the importance of ensuring indigenization of early childhood services, several evidences suggest that goals and expectations, curriculum and textbooks, materials and resources, and indoor and outdoor games were not found to adequately incorporate local contexts and cultures in Ethiopia (Belay & Belay, 2016; Belay, 2018; Belay, 2020; Belay & Teka, 2015.

c) Intergovernmental Coherence

There are two intergovernmental relations (IGR) that are commonly described as vertical and horizontal levels (Cameron, 1999). Vertical relations are the ones that prevail between the federal and local governments, while horizontal relations refer to

inter-state or inter-local relations (Wright, 1974) that embrace negotiation, non-hierarchical communication and cooperation between the two government levels (Nigussie, 2015). Referring to the Ethiopian case, there are no enough provisions in the Constitution for regulating IGR (Solomon cited in Nigussie, 2015) and this has created gaps in intergovernmental cooperation as well as rifts in the regularity, continuity and effectiveness of communications (Solomon cited in Nigussie, 2015).

ECDE being intersectoral, a range of sectoral offices need to partake in ECDE design and delivery. Hence, from the (horizontal) intersectoral coherence perspective, ECDE policy framework provides government actors to assume a leading role in ensuring coordination among key government and non-government actors in ECDE programing. However, the efforts and initiatives for sustainable multisectoral coordination among stakeholders have generally been ineffective. Ggovernment ECD actors initiate collaboration with specific NGOs or establish coordination mechanisms with various actors when a need arises for technical and financial support from partners in policy and strategy development or revision, and implementation (DDRC, 2022).

However, joint planning and operation, shared plan and understanding, formal channels of information exchange, and alignment and operation of work with others have still a lot to progress; as each of them mind business as an independent entity. Each of them has their own separate strategies, separate national task force, and independent yearly plans and the alignments are seldom checked. In fact, they contracted divisions of responsibilities (MoE on pre-primary education, MoWSA on child protection and MoH on health and nutrition) that call for independent action than collaborative and aligned moves. Thus, the major, consistent and functional

coordination and collaboration opportunities which existed between government ministries and CSOs have been very few (DDRC, 2022).

d) *Leadership Coherence*

Coherence needs to be internalized into the minds and actions of system members. This allows coherence making an ongoing conundrum; it is never-ending (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Keeping this in view, Fullan and Quinn (2016) consider the role of leadership to assume a critically important function as the glue connecting and integrating the components of the coherence framework such that they are meant to ensure internalization of the coherence framework in the minds and actions of system members because people come and go and circumstances change, and yet coherence making is never-ending (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). While the leadership is entrusted with these unwritten mandates in the job description, an area of notable gap that makes ECDE in Ethiopia to be substantially fragile is the absence of any accountable leadership from the top echelon of the three line ministries to the lowest levels. There was time in which ECDE focal persons were appointed at the federal MoE level and following this as an example focal persons were appointed at regional levels and below; but these focal persons were assigned to these responsibilities as a supplement to other responsibilities. At the moment even this structure is now where to be seen. Hence, let alone working to deepen the social alignments by bringing forth to the same platform for envisioning ECDE, the leadership is missing to ensure the ordinary system alignments at large.

Institutional and Organizational Coherence

a) Institutional Coherence

ECDE institutional incoherence appears common in Ethiopia. Home-preschool alignments are minimal as communities and families are less involved in preschool; the child is detached from home the moment he/she joins preschool because curriculum doesn't value home education and care. Families are made irrelevant in the ECDE process because preschools don't value tradition, home background, parental experience etc. In the same way, there is incoherence between pre-primary teacher education and preschool education system in the country. In a study conducted in three colleges in Ethiopia (Belay et al, 2024), it was found that that the general contribution of the training program offered in the three colleges for preparing preschool teachers was minimal as it lacks relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness; in fact, there is a misalignment of pre-primary education and teacher training program for the level.

In fact, a more comprehensive education sector analysis conducted to formulate Ethiopia's fifteen years education roadmap (Tirussew et al., 2018) has indicated that the PP teacher education system retains several challenges. According to this study, there is a new initiative of opening pre-primary teacher education programs at some higher education institutions at certificate, diploma, bachelors and master's degree levels. This is an encouraging step which improves qualification and profile of early childhood education teachers which also boost the quality of pre-primary education on the ground. However, the early childhood education system is restrained by several drawbacks that

include problems related to curriculum content and pedagogy, teachers' profile, governance, setting, resources and finances. With respect to teachers' qualification and benefits, it was found that, despite the fact that preprimary teachers' recruitment, training, professional development and salary and benefits are important elements of preschool education quality, they were not given attention. Many of the early childhood education teachers are not trained or less trained to execute their role.

Organizational coherence

Combined organizational practices have more power to promote coherence than strength in any one area (Bryk et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2017). Holistic and integrated childcare and development requires a social and collaborative exercise in which a number of actors join hands rearing up children. Although it may be difficult and time consuming to create a more enabling and productive program with clear design, structure and content for stakeholders (Zundans-Fraser & Bain, 2016), the participation of important stakeholders is a defining feature of competent and optimal practice, and failure to do so is negligence and malpractice (Lawson, 2004). Stakeholder engagements in designing, implementing, and assessing ECDE programs is critical especially in resource scarce countries; it increases demand for and foster accountability, reduces costs through resource mobilization, provides opportunities to learn from one another and ensures efficiency in ECCE services (Ionescuet al., 2015). It also enhances opportunities to exchange knowledge and improve functionality, problem-solving skills, and diversity and creativity (Camposet al., 2013).

In Ethiopia, there has not been strong networking and partnership among parents, teachers, communities and international partners; despite the fact that this has been stipulated in the ECDE policy. Lack of awareness among implementers and parents were some of the reasons (Mengistu et al, 2020). For instance, CSOs have embarked on community-based ECE pilot programs in different regions of Ethiopia to support the government in improving access, quality and equity of services for children the rural communities but communities didn't own the centers and instead of taking care of the resources, people in the community were found dismantling the resources and take them home (Belay & Teka, 2020). Such initiatives didn't seem to have a good start as they were challenging the community values, practices and resources. This raised concerns about their scalability and sustainability concerns (Belay & Teka, 2020).

The community-based early childhood education programs instituted in rural Ethiopia quite earlier in the 1990s also failed mainly due to the lack of community understanding about the importance of sustaining the programs, administrative problems, and lack of regular follow up during the implementation of the programs (Demissie, 1996). In fact, even currently, community and parental involvement is low in Somali (Beide et al., 2022), Tigray (Mengistu et al., 2020), Gondar (Belay & Teka, 2015), Addis Ababa (Fiseha, 2022), and Harar (Tadesse, 2022). The practice of pre-primary teacher-parent communication is low, there is absence of planned activities to communicate with parents; there is low trust of parents on the schools activities, and unwillingness to participate on their children's learning (Tadesse, 2022).

Goal Misalignment

Systems of education in several LMICs pay attention to the education of the elite, at the cost of most students. This might be exacerbated by international benchmarking against privileged schools in other countries and by ambitious standards. Very ambitious curriculum content, assessment, and teaching learning materials are the practical result of this focus on the elite. However, if there is political will for education systemic change and directly addressing the education standards could be highly cost-effective (GEEAP, 2023). Schooling and massification of higher education has ostensibly been noted (Belay & Getnet, 2022).

Misalignments with International Instruments

ECDE misalignments also pervade other domains including, for example, the realization of the popular UN declaration of "Education for All". The Ethiopian government showed commitment to the MDGs and Education for All by ratifying different international conventions. However, the implementation of education of children with special educational needs was still low. Analysis by Belay et al. (2015) revealed that the proper implementation of inclusive education is less likely to happen even in the years to come. Therefore, it was emphasized that rather than ambitiously planning "education for all", it is better to effectively provide "education for some" through any existing educational mode. Reversing the top-down inclusive approach to a bottom-up initiative of a more innovative, culturally relevant, cost-effective, and community resource-based inclusive model school, which can successively be refined, and then gradually scale up lessons is also an alternative.

Education Policy/ Strategy- Practice Misalignment

The construct of coherence in educational research is often attributed to lack of coherence across the educational system; the failure of policies to impact classroom practices (O'Day, 2002). Many countries globally have well-articulated policies but there is poor implementation[10]. In Ethiopia in particular, policy-practice misalignment and yet accountability failure appears to have come widespread today (Belay et al, 2020). While the past thirty years in Ethiopia seem to be a period of legislative and policy making with a number of documents produced; seemingly making the nation a basket of policies than breads now, the commitment of implementation of policies doesn't seem as solid as that of formulation of these instruments (Belay, Solomon and Daniel, 2020).

A snapshot at Ethiopia's education system shows consistent failures in realizing national goals. In Ethiopia, holistic education has been a slogan, yet the system is academic-focused, student centered-pedagogy has been a strategy in the policy yet teacher-centered classroom is in a strong hold in practice, continuous assessment in policy but testing of students in practice, assessment for learning in policy, but assessment of learning in practice, indigenous education recognized in policy, yet western curriculum and resources taking hold in practice (Belay & Getnet, 2022). According to Belay and Getnet (2022), the Ethiopian education policy and strategy documents incorporated a number of strengths containing the following that in fact didn't materialize:

[10]*For example, the requirements for establishing a preschool center in a country may be very strict. In reality, however, only a minor proportion of operating centers may fulfill these requirements; such a discrepancy could indicate a problem with mechanisms to enforce compliance with standards or a problem with information and monitoring systems.*

- The continuous assessment strategy that would offer thick data and feedback about students that would help planning for the needs of the child.
- The free promotion policy for early grades that values the growth of children than premature initiation of assessment that hampers children's holistic development.
- Self-contained teaching that provides better care, emotional support, and understanding of the children.
- Cooperative learning that would create a platform for building collaborative and team work skills.
- Continuous professional development of teachers that would help improve capabilities for provision of effective service for the holistic development of children.
- School clubs that are to be established to help building the whole child learning.

Local ECDE Policy-Practice Misalignment

Several other more specific misalignments also exist between government decree and practices in the country with particular reference to implementation of ECCE Policy. There are several MoE documents that articulate the need for using play-based learning and also guidelines for implementation; for example, preschool curriculum, 2009; preschool diploma teacher training Program, 2014; teacher guide for O-Class, 2018; in-service teacher training curriculum, 2019; teacher education curriculum, 2022; ECCE policy, 2010 and the revised ECDE Policy, 2022/23 and, more recently, the integrated preschool curriculum, 2021. This being the case, actual

classroom practices were shown to be lecture-based even in colleges of teacher education where play-based pedagogy course was found to be taught through lecture (e.g., see Belay, Fantahun and Fisseha, 2019).

Evidences have also shown that the implementation level of ECDE policy framework in Ethiopia has generally been low, particularly at regional and sub-regional levels (DDRC, 2022). The country has developed a comprehensive preschool curriculum and the materials were well designed. However, evidences have indicated that the national curriculum was not always followed by preschools of the private, or NGO/ faith-based organizations and there were multiple challenges limiting the implementation of the curriculum mainly in private and non-government owned KGs that had different objectives and procedures (Britto et al., 2012).

According to Britto and colleagues (2012), there were no supervisors to ensure delivery and implementation of the preschool curriculum, and also that there were no explicit mechanisms to conduct process evaluations or ways to strengthen the implementation of the curriculum based on prior experiences. Implementation of ECDE programs at regional and district levels faced various other challenges related to lack of appropriate organizational structure for ECDE, shortage of qualified and trained teachers, caregivers and supervisors at health facility, preschool and daycare centers, limited number of institutions that produce qualified teachers in ECCE, facilities and budget constraints to procure and avail supplies, facilities, equipment and inputs that are required to implement play-based early learning programs and provide essential health, nutrition and protection services to children, low level of awareness on importance of ECDE at all levels within the government structure as well as at community levels (DDRC, 2022; Ministry of Health (MoH), 2022). In a study

conducted to assess implementation of the ECCE policy, a small scale research has shown that he ECCE policy was only on the paper. There was no adequate basic facility in the majority of pre-primary schools and the schools are not safe, and indoor and outdoor space is not enough. There is lack of budget, co-operation 'with stakeholders, materials and facilities, skilled human power and parental involvement. Finally, it is recommended that the government needs to focus on rural areas, enough budgets should be allocated at all levels, the woreda education offices (WEO), and regional education bureaus (REB) need to enable the training for all preschool teachers, and stakeholders need to work in partnership. Furthermore, the REB is advised to establish a continuous professional development center that is prepared for the teachers to regularly share their experiences (Shumetu, 2020).

A situational analysis conducted to examine the ECD intervention activities on the health sector (MoH, 2019) revealed that the health sector in the country has addressed only some components of the nurturing care intervention (NCI) for early childhood development. To facilitate the implementation of ECD programs in Ethiopia, there was no strategic plan, program, and guidelines. The limited awareness and understanding on ECD are additional challenges hindering health professionals from delivering nurturing care to young children and their parents/caregivers (MoH, 2019).

Resource Alignment

Many countries globally have well-crafted policies, but they are poorly implemented, due to resource limitations, weak service provision and/or a lack of quality control mechanisms (World Bank, 2013). The effective execution of a centrally designed reform depends on the capability and the resources available to reform the

goals and put them into practice. The amount and quality of connections between system elements likewise impacts a system's ability to adapt (Trombly, 2014). In Sub-Saharan Africa, 61% of all children are living in poverty or stunted, or both and the level of access to pre-primary school is 17% (World Bank, 2013) suggesting the need for budget priority to reverse this problem. Yet, investments are elsewhere than tin this critical sector for reversing poverty. While investing in the early years has the highest return, government investment today is inversely linked to this idea; the upper the education ladder, the higher the budget apportioning. Furthermore, investment on disadvantaged children brings more return compared to the privileged group; but ECCE in Ethiopia is more accessible to those in the urban middle class group than to the urban poor and rural children.

In a recent study by the World Bank Group, it was found that public spending on education in Ethiopia was disproportionally benefiting higher-income households. Students from lower-income groups consistently receive a lower share of public funding than their share of enrolment. The gap between the poor and the rich is widening in Ethiopia, as can be seen by the decreasing share of out-of-pocket expenses on education incurred by the poorest families (World Bank Group, 2022a). Furthermore, the public spending in the education sector heavily favours higher education[11], personnel spending is the key cost driver (for primary, secondary, and TVET education) where wages and salaries account for 78% of all budgeted funds across regions (World Bank Group, 2022b).

[11]*Approximately 23* percent *of public funding is dedicated to primary education (grades 1 through 6), even though this level accounts for 63 percent of all students. In contrast, tertiary education receives 40 percent of all public funding but serves only 3 percent of all students.*

Coherences in other Areas

Social Coherence

Coherence has also a subjective dimension that Looney (2011) calls it "social alignment" to signify that coherence doesn't rely on slick strategic plans; rather, it is a subjective experience that exists in the minds of people, and must be developed across given groups through focused interaction among members of the organization working on a common agenda, identifying and consolidating what works and making meaning over time (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Although alignment is good and misalignment hurts in many ways, there is no system that achieves flawless alignment. Looney suggests that rather than thinking of alignment literally, it may be more suitable to approach it as a matter of balance and coherence. The discussion addresses both the technical and social dimensions of alignment (Looney, 2011).

The social aspect of alignment is often overlooked in discussions regarding standards-based systems. In systems that are socially aligned, institutions and actors work together to define challenges and to consider alternative courses of action. This alignment is vital for system learning and improvement and ensures shared goals, shared meaning, repeated patterns, complementary functions, conserve energy, reduce internal tension, and improve internal and external adaptation (HSDI, 2022). ECDE system in Ethiopia is known to generate these shared goals, shared meaning, and approaches; instead, different actors have different notions, in some forms contradicting, in other forms diverging, yet not complementing or feeding one another.

O'Day (2002) proposes that the structure and norms of many schools, where teachers work in independent and isolated classrooms, buffers individuals and schools against change and prevents mutual learning (p. 8). Sloppy connection throughout the networks and layers of education strengthens this isolation. Systems limit opportunities

for learning and adaptation when they limit interaction and interdependence across layers. Schools and teachers also face a progressively complex set of demands (organization for the economic cooperation and development (OECD), 2005b). The question for national and regional policy makers, then, is how to best balance external, bureaucratic controls, which are vital for ensuring quality, equity and accountability across education systems, and support for internal, professional controls, with schools and teachers taking collective responsibility for student learning (O'Day, 2002).

In Ethiopia, each of the three governments ECD actors have been developing their respective strategic and operational plan to facilitate ECD implementation at national level following the revision of the multi-sectoral policy framework. However, the coordination mechanisms also has limitations with regard to lack of shared vision, inconsistent participation of members, lack of developing and enforcing a clear system for accountability for members involved, low ownership and commitment of coordinating government actors and limited efforts to ensure harmonization and alignment of resources and funds for better ECD outcomes among members, ECD partners and stakeholders. Lack of collective outcomes and lack of shared vision among the ECD actors: Each local and international NGO has its own program interest and priority, which is usually driven by donors, thus generating collective outcomes that enhance ECD outcome at national level may be difficult to achieve through common multisectoral coordination efforts (DDRC, 2022).

Time Coherence (Maintenance and Sustainability of Systems)

The second issue then relates to the defining markers of effective coherence that it is cumulative and ongoing. Things are changing. Some members leave and others come, policies change, the environment shifts, new ideas are floated, and so on.

Coherence makers work to reduce or eliminate unnecessary distractions and achieve about 80 percent coherence, defined as shared depth of understanding (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Time coherence is then about the stability and change in the ECDE system, on the one hand, change is inevitable as ECDE is dynamic and needs to attune to historical artefacts. On the other hand, there is a need to provide continuity and sustainability of good ECDE initiatives. Effective ECDE coherence is the one that ensures balance between continuity and discontinuity, change and stability, rigidity and flexibility.

ECDE is not just inter-sectoral alone. It is also dynamic. Just in ways the fetus, infant, young child and school student experiences multiple transformations during their early years, so, too, policy and programming must be sensitive to changing needs and priorities at different ages and stages. However, until recently policy and programmatic interventions were not dynamically attuned to this intra-individual and intergroup dynamics (Woodhead et al., 2014) and this is more so in Ethiopia where, for example, the government allocates considerable budget for higher education compared to the negligible spending at the pre-primary education level (World Bank Group, 2022a); nursery care has not even been a point of concern until few years ago.

In Ethiopia, intergenerational incoherencies also characterize the system. For instance, although early childhood education and care has a long history, this tradition of care, child rearing methods and time immemorial early education system were gradually set aside mainly with the advent of the European type of education and care introduced in the country. Alike other institutional and ideological discontinuities that occur following regime changes in the country, the same trend characterizes ECDE (Belay, 2018; 2020); discontinuities in interest, focus/ purpose, approach, methods,

resources etc. (Belay, 2018; Belay & Belay, 2017). This has been a barrier to sustain best practices honoured at one historical time into another. Hence, while Ethiopia is historic in many ways, but the ensuing discontinuities had debunked its historical assets.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The ECDE system in the strictest sense of the term is only in the making; it is searching for an identity and, therefore, fragile in many parameters. Coherence is in fact the bottom-line that dynamic and evolving systems need to keep closer to their heart to thrive. This paper attempted to review early trends in the Ethiopian ECDE system so that it is possible to reorient its course before things immensely get off track. Hence, it is more of informing practice than conducting a premature critique on a system that is in its infancy. Accordingly, it is suggested that an independent, integrated and multisectoral unit be established to deliberate, lead and monitor the ECDE system coherence both in its subjective and objective forms.

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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____

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A Glimpse into the Intersectionality of Individual and Collective Trauma and Resilience: The Inner Dialogue of a Reflective Practitioner

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Abstract

This reflection addresses the complex interaction between trauma and resilience based on the experiences of the author who is a researcher and psychotherapist while working with internally displaced people (IDP) in Ethiopia. Using a reflective practitioner framework, the narrative applies biopsychosocial, spiritual, and ecological perspectives to address the multifaceted impact of trauma. The embodiment of trauma and the critical role of culturally responsive holistic care were discussed using 'Hiwot's' case as a focal point. By reconceptualizing trauma as both an individual and collective experience, the paper underscores the profound effect on physical, emotional, and social well-being while advocating for culturally sensitive interventions. This paper emphasizes the importance of a practitioner's humility, active listening, integration of local traditions, and culturally responsive approaches in trauma-informed mental healthcare services.

Keywords: *Trauma and resilience, internally displaced persons, biopsychosocial framework, culturally responsive care, spirituality in trauma healing, collective and individual recovery*

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Introduction

Trauma refers to emotional, physical, relational, and psychological wounds stemming from direct or indirect exposure to adverse events or a series of events such as forced displacement and violence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This construct of trauma is based on the effect of trauma on individual well-being but does not show the phenomena of the context and the intricate ties of trauma to cultural and social realities.

In their phenomenological study of war-related rape survivors in Ethiopia, Wendie, Zeleke, and Melesse (2023) described how such trauma experiences create layers of embodied pain and silence with survivors often navigated by social stigma and isolation along their psychological wounds. The collective dimensions of trauma, shaped by cultural and social realities, extend beyond individual narratives. Hirschberger (2018) highlighted that collective trauma disrupts social cohesion and reshapes communal identities and shared meanings. In settings like IDP centers, trauma becomes a collective experience, deeply interwoven into the social fabric (Chandan et al., 2023). However, such contexts also reveal resilience pathways, as community-based healing practices have emerged as essential coping mechanisms. This article underscores the transformative power of culturally attuned care, particularly when addressing trauma in resource-constrained settings.

Methods

Utilizing a reflective-practitioner model, specifically a reflective-on-action approach, this brief paper aims to integrate lived experiences with theoretical constructs, emphasizing the significance of culturally embedded and holistic

approaches to trauma care. Reflective practice is essential for clinical competency in counseling psychology (Mann et al. 2009).

To design a reflective practice, reflective practitioners would have to evaluate and examine how interactions within the therapeutic relationship affect the overall process. This involves a careful assessment of the impact of one's engagement on therapeutic dynamics. In this reflective process, I followed a reflection-on-action approach (Schon, 1983), which involves the practitioner reviewing, describing, analyzing, and evaluating events to gain insight for future practice.

The following section presents insights that emerge from the reflective process of the therapeutic relationship I established with the IDP community over a four-month period. It provides a context in which the therapeutic relationship occured, the client's issues and background, an analysis of the client's case utilizing bio-psychosocial-spiritual and ecological models of trauma and resilience, the awareness raised through this reflection, and a conclusion with implications for other Ethiopian practitioners in counseling and psychology.

Ethical Statement: This short communication is based on the author's personal reflections and professional experiences while working with internally displaced populations. All identifiable details, including names and locations, were anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the individuals involved. The narrative employs pseudonyms and composite scenarios to preserve the authenticity of shared experiences, while ensuring ethical safeguards against identification. As this work involves deeply sensitive topics, the author has approached storytelling and analysis with the utmost respect for the dignity and lived realities of those represented. Cultural sensitivity and humility were integral to the reflective process, ensuring that the

community's perspectives and practices were honored. The intent of this communication is to amplify the voices and resilience of affected individuals, offering insights into trauma care without compromising their rights or wellbeing. This work complies with ethical standards for professional and scholarly reflection, emphasizing respect, beneficence, and non-maleficence in the dissemination of knowledge.

The Context -Where the Therapeutic Relationship Occurs

In 2023, I embarked on a transformative journey in Ethiopia as a Fulbright Scholar, where I taught and conducted community-based action research at Addis Ababa University and the University of Gondar, respectively. While engaging in academia, my most impactful experience was the four months I spent as a community-based researcher and therapist at one of the Internally Displaced People (IDP)centers. Immersed in this environment, I encountered profound stories of loss, resilience, and survival, which reshaped my understanding of trauma and healing.

Upon entering the IDP center for the first time, I was struck by the palpable weight of the collective trauma. Stories of grief and survival were embedded in the postures, eyes, and voices of the most displaced individuals in the center. A mother clutching her child, an elder trembling while recounting the day of their displacement, and the haunting image of a malnourished child seeking comfort all exemplified how deeply trauma had been internalized within the IDP center. In this context, trauma was not just personal but also collective and intertwined with the social fabric of the community.

One example of this interplay is clealry reflected in a story of a woman I call 'Hiwot's' for this writing purpose. Her journey showcases the intersectionality of individual and

collective trauma and the mechanisms of resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity.

'Hiwot's' Case

When I met Hiwot, a mother of three at the time, her face spoke volumes even before her words. "How are you, Hiwot? Thank you for coming to and being willing to share your stories with me." I asked gently. Her response was brief yet profound: "Yemesgen' [thanks God].

As we began our conversation, her gratitude for God remained unwavering even as the weight of her suffering unfolded. Hiwot was in her thirties, slender, and around 5.4". Her beauty, although diminished by the strain of her experiences, was still visible, like a sky veiled by dark heavy clouds. The depth of what she endured in the past two years was unimaginable. Once happily married, she built a stable life with her husband in a village called Mai Kadra. Together, they ran small businesses and raised three children. Life was good. However, on November 9, 2020, six months into her fourth pregnancy, mass violence erupted against her ethnicity, turning her world upside down. She recounted, with a flat affect, the moment her life shattered: watching her husband brutally killed while holding three young children and carrying another child in her womb. For 48 agonizing hours, she sat beside her husband's lifeless body and was unable to leave. A priest who was their neighbor, a man of Tigrayan ethnicity, risked his life to help her bury her husband in their yard before urging her to flee the village with her children. This marked the beginning of Hiwot's forced displacement. During her escape, Hiwot spent one week hiding in the forest. She was assaulted and raped there, resulting in miscarriage. Eventually, she was rescued by people she could no longer

recall and brought to a temporary shelter. Although she and her three surviving children found themselves relatively safe, their emotional and physical tolls were immense. Her first year at the IDP center was very rough. Struggling with mental instability, she made a painful decision to send her eldest child to live with her in-laws 300 miles away. While visiting him, her brother-in-law, recognizing her fragile state, took her to a nearby church for holy water rituals. "I stayed for two weeks, fasting, praying, drinking, and being baptized in the holy water. I barely remember it all," she recounted. After a month, she returned to the camp, where her two youngest children had been left in the care of another displaced woman in the IDP center.

I continued to see Hiwot for a couple of sessions in a one-to-one setting. As our sessions continued, she began to show slight signs of progress. She engaged more during conversations and reported better interaction with her children more often. However, she still struggled with symptoms, such as nightmares, insomnia, weight loss, bodily pain, seizures, and suicidal thoughts. However, one day, I encountered an unexpected revelation. A local psychologist who assisted me in my work with the IDP center approached me with a puzzling expression. "Hiwot gave birth this morning," she said. "Did you know she was pregnant?" The news stunned me. Hiwot did not mention her pregnancy and it had gone unnoticed during our sessions. I was wrestling with self-doubt, questioning how I could have missed such significant details. How did she choose to keep this hidden and dissipate our therapeutic relationship where her body hides this pregnancy? Many questions with no answer flooded inside of my head. “Did anyone know she was pregnant?” I asked. The psychologist said,’ I do not think she herself knows she was pregnant; she is actually puzzled and left with all questions. She is not doing well psychologically either.” The following day, I visited her in a nearby

rented room, where women from the camp had taken her and her newborn to provide support. The space was crowded but filled with care. Hiwot sat quietly and was surrounded by other women who looked after her. One of the women from the camp took care of the newborn, a beautiful baby boy. I looked at Hiwot with a smile, and she tried to smile back, but there was no energy to shine her face. One of the women whispered to me, "Her body is asleep even though her eyes see you; she is painfully quiet and doesn't seem interested in nursing the baby," and asked me if I could get her any medication that would awaken her. At that moment, I was struck by the duality of her experiences. The trauma she carried was etched into her body and her story, but so too was resilience.

Holistic view of Trauma

Trauma is not solely about what happens to the individual but also about the internalized effects of those experiences; it is the answer we get when we ask the question, 'What happened inside the individual?'. Events such as Hiwot's displacement, loss, assault, and rape, affect a person's entire being, including their physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. The biopsychosocial model emphasizes that trauma is not confined to psychological symptoms, but also entails biological and social dimensions, which can influence long-term health outcomes (Balayan et al., 2023; Yehuda et al., 2015). Hiwot's symptoms—bodily tension, weight loss, and psychological disconnection—highlight the embodied nature of the trauma. Van der Kolk (2014) described how trauma rewires the nervous system, altering the brain's sense of safety and manifesting as physical and emotional dysregulation. If trauma is stored in the body and manifested in individual relationships, healing should occur in the holistic aspect of the individual, necessitating holistic intervention and addressing

the interconnected physical, psychological, and social dimensions of trauma in displaced populations (Sabholk et al., 2020). As demonstrated in Hiwot's case, the role of community and cultural context is essential in shaping the manifestation and recovery pathways of trauma (Chandan et al., 2023).

In Western societies, where emphasis is placed on the pathological aspects of human behavior, these manifestations align with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and associated somatic symptoms (Bogic et al., 2015). However, given the context and culture in which Hiwot's reality manifests, understanding trauma requires a culturally attuned perspective. Western approaches generally emphasize diagnosing and treating symptoms, but this framework does not always work in contexts such as Hiwot. Instead, Ethiopian traditions frequently emphasize healing the individual within their reality, integrating spiritual practices such as holy water rituals alongside psychological support (Fernando, 2012). These practices provide for an all rounded healing environment that addresses psychological, social, and spiritual needs.

Resilience and Coping pathways

Not withstanding her suffering, Hiwot displays impressive resilience. Her gratitude to God, expressed through "Yemesgen," demonstrates the role of spirituality as an indispensable coping mechanism. Spirituality often provides trauma survivors with a sense of meaning and purpose by anchoring them amid despair (Ai et al. 2003). Community support also plays an essential role in this process. The collective care provided by other displaced women in the camp illustrates how social networks mitigate the impact of the trauma. As Schumm et al. (2006) stressed, social support promotes psychological resilience, provides a buffer against the adverse effects of trauma, and enhances a sense of belonging.

Reflections as a Practitioner

As a practitioner trained in both Ethiopian and Western frameworks, I initially approached my role with a helper's mindset, expecting to provide tools and techniques for healing women in the IDP center. However, the experience deeply transformed my conceptualization of trauma and resilience, challenging my assumptions and expanding my perspective in unanticopated ways.

What I learned included the following:

- **The Power of Community in Healing:** One of the most significant lessons learned is that the community is at the center of trauma recovery. In the IDP center, I observed how collective rituals, mutual support, and shared experiences played a critical role in fostering resilience. The women in the IDP center cared for one another, shared food, and collectively tended toward the emotional needs of their children and elderly. Healing, in this context, was not an individual endeavor but a collective one. This reflection reinforces the importance of creating safe spaces in which survivors can gain strength from their shared humanities and cultural practices.
- **The Interconnectedness of Spirituality and Mental Health:** Another key insight is the profound role of spirituality in coping and recovery. Hiwot's reliance on her faith and spiritual practices of holy water rituals illuminates how deeply intertwined spirituality is with mental health in the Ethiopian culture. For many, spirituality provided not only solace but also a sense of meaning and purpose during despair. This taught me that culturally attuned care must embrace spiritual dimensions, recognizing their therapeutic value as part of a holistic approach.

- **Trauma as Embodied and Contextual:** My experiences underscored the embodied nature of trauma and the critical role of context in understanding its impact. Hiwot's unspoken physical and emotional struggles reflect the silent language of trauma that words alone cannot convey. Although trauma lives in the body (Van der Kolk, 2014), it manifests as physical symptoms, disconnection, and altered relationships with oneself and others. This realization prompted me to adopt a more attuned approach, paying attention not only to what clients said but also to how their bodies and behaviors expressed their inner world.
- **Adapting Western Frameworks to Local Realities:** I learned about the limitations of applying Western psychological frameworks in a context like the IDP center. Western approaches often emphasize diagnosing and treating symptoms; however, these frameworks can feel alien and inadequate in a culture in which collective identity and spiritual practices are central to coping. Instead, I realized the need to adapt interventions to align with the cultural and social realities of the individuals I worked with. This meant embracing flexibility, learning from local traditions, and integrating these elements into the therapeutic work.
- **Humility as a Practitioner:** Perhaps the most personal lesson is the importance of humility. Despite my training and expertise, there were moments when I felt helpless, unable to fully grasp the depth of the survivors' pain, or unable to provide immediate solutions. These experiences taught me that being present, listening deeply, and bearing witnesses to someone's suffering is often more

powerful than any other intervention. This reminded me that healing is a collaborative process, and that the practitioner is as much a learner as a guide.

- **Resilience is Multidimensional:** Resilience is not a singular trait, but a multidimensional process shaped by individual, social, and cultural factors. Although Hiwot's spiritual faith and gratitude were central to her resilience, the collective support of the IDP community and her inner strengths also played a vital role. This understanding shifted my focus from solely addressing deficits to recognizing and amplifying the strengths and resources that survivors already possess.

Conclusion and Implication for Practitioners

Hiwot's story is a testament to the complexity of trauma and resilience. Her journey illustrates the profound interconnectedness between the individual and collective healing. This reflection emphasizes the need for culturally attuned and holistic approaches to trauma care for psychologists and practitioners in Ethiopia. Healing, as I learned, is not solely an individual endeavor, but a collective act rooted in the connection, resilience, and silent wisdom of our bodies. This experience underscores the importance of a culturally sensitive, holistic approach—one that honors the body's wisdom, strength of communal ties, and healing power of spirituality–to trauma care in Ethiopia. Practitioners must integrate biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions to recognize the unique coping strategies of displaced populations. Incorporating culturally relevant interventions and communal practices can enhance the effectiveness of trauma-related care.

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