

## Exploring the instructional leadership development practices in Ethiopia

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is twofold: to examine the curriculum structure for instructional leaders' training and development against the desired competences; and to evaluate the career development framework of instructional leaders. With these ends in view, the study examined the instructional leadership framework, the curriculum document, and the instructional leaders' recruitment, selection and retention strategies. The perspectives of instructional leadership trainers, instructional leaders, zone education department heads, and national level education experts who were selected using a purposive sampling technique were explored through one-on-one interviews. In the light of these, the qualitative data analysis discloses the absence of national instructional leadership framework from which instructional leadership curriculum should have emerged. It was also understood that the loosened curriculum development culture ultimately resulted in the curriculum's lack of relevance to the desired competences for instructional leadership development. It was further learnt that there existed an absence of context specific recruitment, selection and retention strategies for instructional leaders. It is, therefore, concluded that the instructional leadership development practices of Ethiopia, seemed to have been deviating from expectations. Hence, it is recommended that there is a need to design a national instructional leadership development framework based on which the instructional leadership curriculum development and implementation practices could be managed. The recruitment, selection, and retention strategies should also involve incentive packages that could attract competent candidates to the profession. It is further recommended that there is a need to promote positive mindset exercises for instructional leaders to take their own professional development initiatives.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994), from the outset, assumes that education is an instrument to development. It clearly stipulates "Education, as a very important factor to human development, is of high priority in the overall development endeavour of the government. It requires an appropriate direction to set a new process in motion and change the alarming situation" [1]. It continues stating;

The Education and Training policy envisages bringing-up citizens, endowed with human outlook, country-wide responsibility, and democratic values, having developed the necessary predictive, creative and appreciative capacity in order to participate fruitfully in development and the utilization of resources and the environment at large.” (p.6)

With such overall organization and scope, the policy document (see sub-articles 3.8.1-3.8.5.) presents about educational organization and management. The educational management strategies were identified as part of the policy change and set to alleviate those limitations. That is, following the introduction of the federal structure, the 1994 education policy transformed management of education from centralization into decentralization; the policy also ensured that the management of education would be democratic (ensuring the participation of all stakeholders), professional (be led by leaders having the necessary expertise of educational leadership), coordinated (operations meaningfully organised and monitored), effective (focused to achieving the targets set for quality and access) , and educational institutions would be autonomous and be provided with democratic leadership.

With the Ethiopian governance structure that has been assumed to pave the way for responsive decentralization of the education system, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is given powers and duties to initiate policies and laws; the Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) are expected to devise respective regional policies including granting autonomy and accountability to the respective localities; and the Woreda Education Offices (WEOs) are assumed to support and enhance the autonomous operations of schools. In strengthening the focus given to leading educational institutions or schools, Article 3.8 of the 1994 Education and Training Policy specifically promised that educational management will be professional, and educational institutions will be autonomous in their internal administration. Moreover, it has been indicated in the policy that institutional autonomy should include designing and implementing of education and training programs with the necessary involvement of concerned stakeholders who are expected to take part at the different levels of the decentralized educational management system. One rationale stated for decentralization was to bring about accountability and decision-making close to the schools [2]. This has paved the way to formally recognize the professionalism, expertise and competence of those who work in individual schools, particularly principals, to make decisions in improving the quality of teaching and learning. In general, all the assertions specified in the respective sub articles of article 3.8 seem to demonstrate the commitment of the Ethiopian government in indicating that educational institutions should be led by professionals who have the necessary orientations in how to deal with issues of quality teaching and learning.

Besides, a directive that clearly delineates the management and organization of education, strategies for community participation, and financial management was produced in 2002. The directive states the roles and responsibilities of the different parties from the Ministry down to the schools for each of the above functional areas. Included in the document were roles and responsibilities of the executive bodies such as the Ministry, Regional Education Bureaus, Zonal Education Offices, Woreda Education Offices, and schools. Also included in the same document were the roles and responsibilities of supervisors, principals, teachers and students in promoting the quality of teaching and learning in their respective schools (MOE, 2002)[3].

Five Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) running from 1997 to 2020 were also set as strategies for facilitating the implementation of the education policy. All the five ESDPs have identified educational leadership/management as one strategy for implementing the policy. ESDP IV, particularly, focuses on improving quality at all levels, and it seems to attach this call for quality to educational leadership effectiveness which in fact has also been given due emphasis in the recently designed and introduced ESDP V.

More importantly, with an informed interest in promoting the quality of general education, the Ethiopian Government also devised a General Education Quality Improvement Program I (GEQIP I) in 2007 which was being effected in the years 2008/9 to 2012/13 [4]. GEQIP II is also under implementation with similar scope and emphasis. This effort of the Ethiopian government is consistent with Kruger’s (1996) concern that quality teaching and learning is a schools’ primary task, and the excellence of a school should be measured against the quality of the teaching and learning that the students experience in the schools. The GEQIP documents, hence, infuses a strong commitment that a school organization should be geared mainly to make quality teaching and learning possible.

Taking all those policy initiatives and strategic focuses on instructional leadership, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education have further been devising and implementing different recruitment and training modalities for principals. One modality is in the form of in-service programs in that teachers having some years of teaching and school leadership experiences are selected to be candidates for principal training in first degree (Bachelor of Education just for a three year to four year training program after completion of secondary education) or second degree (a two year training program at Master of education level after having a first degree), which is arranged to be offered during the months of July and August where schools are closed (the Ethiopian school calendars are from September to June). The selected candidates are required to

take the training for three to four rounds during those two months, and they are also required to do some work placement activities in their work environments with some supervision from their respective trainers. The other training modality is the pre-service program where students completing their secondary education directly join the first degree program for principal. The candidates in this modality take the training program for three to four years in regular calendars (from September to June). Hence, the recruitment, selection, and placement of the graduates in both modalities are based on the guideline developed depending on the specific circumstances of the respective localities of Ethiopia.

All these focuses given to strengthening principals' professional competencies within the Ethiopian education system are congruent with the wide spread advocacy for the view that the most significant factor pertaining to the success of the school is the quality of leadership provided by the principal with regard to the teaching and learning [5]. This implies that the main function of the principal, as instructional leader, is making effective teaching and learning possible both inside and outside the class room [6, 7]. Similarly, other writers noted that the success of a school depends largely, if not totally, on the effective instruction the learners receive, and hence, leading the instructional program of the school is the most important of the principal's tasks [6, 8-12]. This is to mean that instructional leadership emphasizes the significance of the principals' focus more on the central functions of schools-teaching and learning- than to managerial or administrative activities like maintaining discipline, ordering equipment, scheduling activities, financial management, physical plant management etc. Principals as instructional leaders, hence, play an important role in the achievement of educational quality and they should try to improve the teaching and learning in their schools [13-16].

In clear terms, principals can and do make a difference in schools [17-19]. Recognizing all these advocations from a growing body of literature on the role of principals, the conceptual framework for this study, therefore, contends that principals can and do make a difference both to students and to teachers, through their skills as instructional leaders. To strengthen this contention, it seems logical to quote an argument by Lipman et al cited in Lahui-Ako [18]:

"...if one had to select the single factor that spells the difference between success or failure of the school, it would be the availability of a principal to lead the staff in planning, implementing, and evaluating improvements in the schools' curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities."

In clarifying how principals can affect the instructional environment of schools, Weber in Lahui-Ako [18] also argued that principals', through improved school climate and effective instructional organization, promote the quality of teaching and learning, which leads to improved student achievement. Weber further points out that one must first examine the contexts in which the principal must function in that principals work with multi- dimensional influences both within and outside of the school. Personal characteristics and beliefs, as Weber argued, also affect principals' decision-making processes and their styles of instructional leadership. So, the principals' instructional leadership influence, as per Weber's argument cited in Lahui-Ako, is subjected to three interactive factors: external, institutional, and personal.

That is, based on Weber's argument, a principals' instructional leadership behaviour is influenced by the external environment, institutional influence and his/her own personal qualities, and seems to affect two fundamental aspects of the schools' social organization- learning climate and instructional organization- both of which jointly lead to improved quality teaching and learning, and thereby, improved student achievements. The instructional organization dimension includes six main functions of the instructional leadership role as identified by Maryland State Board of Education [20] :facilitating the development of a school vision; monitoring the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; improving instructional practices through the purposeful observation and evaluation of teachers; ensuring the regular integration of appropriate assessments into daily classroom instruction; using technology and multiple sources of data to improve classroom instruction; and providing staff with focused, sustained, research-based professional development. This framework is important as it focuses on the content knowledge needed for school principals to be the leader of teaching-learning (the instructional organization aspects) in the school; and the framework, according to the [20], represents the most commonly accepted instructional organization responsibilities identified by respected practitioners, researchers, and theorists in the field of instructional leadership and continuous development.

Despite the fact that principals' instructional leadership would make a difference in school success, controversy over the role of the principal is not a new phenomenon as numerous studies have noted that most principals in their actual practice emphasize the administrative or the managerial functions of the job over those of instructional leadership [21-26] on their part indicated that the inadequacy of principals' preparation presents a major problem for policy and practice in light of the critical role principals play in school improvement [27, 28] on the other hand stated that many of today's school principals seem to lack the knowledge or expertise necessary to promote students' achievements, which is more likely to be possible through sound teaching and learning processes. Worst of all, they emphasized, many of today's school

principals are fearful of change and do not know how to cope with the new requirements required of them in promoting quality teaching and learning [29].

Congruent to the above idea, the challenges facing the Ethiopian education system in promoting both educational quality as well as access, seem an indication of a growing structural discrepancy between national supply of educational provisions, and the national demand for education. The structural nature of the discrepancy hinges on the visible reality that on the demand side, pressures are coming from a still- fast growing school age population especially in the rural areas, while on the supply side limitations are increasingly visible in the shrinking available stock of educational resources [30-33]. So, one promising strategy could be having instructional leaders who have the necessary competence in accommodating or contextualizing educational changes to promote the quality of teaching and learning. Hence, this study aims at examining the curriculum structure for instructional leaders' training and development against the desired competences and evaluating how the career development framework for instructional leaders addresses issues pertaining to recruitment, selection, and retention of instructional leaders.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study was aimed at exploring the instructional leadership development practices in Ethiopia by specifically looking into the curriculum development culture, relevance, implementation; it also examines the instructional leaders' recruitment, selection, and retention practices. Qualitative approach was chosen as it helps the researcher to go deeper in analysing the issues raised for investigation through document analysis and unstructured interviews.

Document analysis was employed to explore instructional leadership curriculums and see whether they are designed and implemented in a way to produce competent instructional leaders. Further, an analysis of the first degree and second degree school leadership curriculums was made to see if they were designed based on identified national instructional leadership framework or competences. The national, regional, and local level instructional leaders' recruitment, selection, and retention strategies were analysed to check whether the system is committed to promote instructional leadership culture of schools.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with instructional leaders, instructional leadership trainers in the university, Zonal education office heads, and experts at the Ministry of Education who were selected using purposive sampling technique as they were the ones in charge of instructional leadership development programs. The interview, conducted on a one-on-one basis for the purpose of collecting detailed data from the participants, focused on examining the participants' views on the relevance of the curriculum to the instructional leaders' professional development. The unstructured interview was also used to understand the participants' views on the responsiveness of the recruitment, selection, and retention strategies at national, regional, and local levels. Necessary efforts were exerted, in this regard, to examining how instructional leaders felt about their instructional leadership duties and responsibilities, what supportive strategies are in place to promote their instructional leadership competencies, and what challenges they are facing with during their training as instructional leaders and even after their assignment as instructional leaders.

The interviews were conducted after clarifying the research purposes to the participants so as to secure their informed consent. Selection of appropriate places and timing was made so as to increase the quality of the study. All data from the interview were tape-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was made thematically by way of addressing the research purposes. Accordingly, the results and discussions are presented in the section below.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is devoted to analysis and discussion of the results. The data analysis and presentation was made based on the major themes identified as purposes of the study. Accordingly, data presentations, analysis, and discussions were made in the following sub- sections.

### 3.1. Structure and relevance of the instructional leadership curriculum in Ethiopia

Designed in congruence with the national or regional professional frameworks or competencies, a curriculum is the main instrument for the all-round developments of an individual -social, physical, emotional, and intellectual aspect. It is a set of courses, including their content, offered at a school or university where effective curriculum provides teachers, students, leaders and community stakeholders with a measurable plan and structure for delivering quality education. That is, it identifies the learning outcomes, standards and core competencies that students or trainees must demonstrate before advancing to the next level.

In light of this, the Ethiopian instructional leadership curriculums need to emerge from the national instructional leadership competencies. In this regard, an attempt was made to look into the contents and frameworks of the national competencies though the result showed no document produced on this aspect. It is too sad that the country has no national instructional leadership framework from which all relevant issues regarding instructional leadership training and practices were to develop.

The absence of the national instructional leadership framework instigated the next concerns to be raised, the how of the curriculum preparation. The interview results conducted with experts at the ministry of education and instructional leadership trainers at universities consistently disclosed that there was no uniform procedure to be followed while developing curriculums. What they noted was they simply conducted needs assessments, local or national and started developing the curriculums from their intuition. When it is said intuition, it seems exaggerated but this is how it was done. As was noted by almost all of the interviewees of instructional leadership trainers, a group of instructional leadership trainers sit together and decide which contents to be included in the curriculum just like any political decisions. One principal trainer in particular said:

We usually conduct fictitious need assessment locally, and then produce a curriculum in a way we like it. No one follows the procedure and accuracy, and validity of the need assessment report so that we do it just for formality. Sometimes, we do it by copying it from some other universities, and in other cases we develop it the way we like. Therefore, most of the curriculums we have on school leadership do not seem to guarantee our expectations, and I feel sorry for that

Unless there is a national identified and agreed instructional leadership framework, it would be seriously difficult to determine the contents of curriculums to be offered at different levels on the area of instructional leadership [20]. For example, many Ethiopian universities are certifying educational leaders at first degree (Bachelor of Education just for a three year to four year training program after completion of secondary education), second degree (a two year training program at Master of education level after having a first degree), and third degree (a three to five year training program for doctor of philosophy in Education after having a second degree) levels, but with no common framework to be used as a base. In this regard, according to the data obtained from the interviews conducted with instructional leadership trainers and experts at the ministry of education, the Ethiopian instructional leadership curriculum development seemed to show a haphazard experience where individual trainers determined what to include into the curriculum and excluded contents from curriculum just based on personal readings and experiences. As one of the interviewees noted:

The curriculums in the first and second degree are almost similar except the addition and subtraction of very few courses. The depth and scope of course contents at both levels are usually determined by the course teachers. In most cases, it is not unusual to see similar course outlines to be offered at second and first degrees. Sometimes, students especially at second degrees complain about the repetitiveness of the course contents though the response depends on the character of the particular course teacher. Worst of all, we have come to have a similar curriculum for first and second degrees for summer school leadership program. These two curriculums (the post graduate degree in school leadership or PGDSL, and Master of Education in school leadership) were designed and sent by ministry of education centrally, and we took both of the two curriculums with all complains. That is, second degree students like me at second degree level were being forced to take a course two times without their consent no matter how they took it in their PGDSL training. Ohh...there are lots of discrepancies in our curriculums

The researcher also instigated another issue regarding the relevance of the curriculum contents to instructional leadership development. An attempt was made to examine whether there is an effort to develop the instructional leadership competencies of instructional leaders or principals through both document analysis and interview. According to the document analysis conducted, it was found that the course focuses were made to include financial and physical resource management, human resource management, school resource management, economics and planning of education, strategic planning, theory of management, leadership and school improvement, project management, education policy, and supervision.

As can be seen from the courses mentioned above, the courses coverage seemed to lack key instructional leadership competencies identified by [20] like monitoring the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment; improving instructional practices through the purposeful observation and evaluation of teachers; ensuring the regular integration of appropriate assessments into daily classroom instruction; using technology and multiple sources of data to improve classroom instruction; and providing staff with focused, sustained, research-based professional development.

The perspectives of instructional leaders about the match between their preparation and actual work practices were also examined. Consequently, all the interviewees consistently noted that there existed mismatches between what they received through the formal education systems and the actual workplace

realities. They underscored that they not leading schools, nor did they have the interest to lead because they were not trained to be principals or instructional leaders. One principal, in this regard, specifically noted that:

I had no intention to be trained as a principal though joined the profession. The training also increased my dislike to the profession as there were no any practical attachments and meaningful relationships to the actual work context. So, I am now studying instructional leadership in the actual work place just from learning by doing though I am even not sure whether I am doing right or not as there is no professional coach or mentor around me. In general, instructional leadership is a marginalized profession in our education system and no one even seems to care about it

To sum up, the curriculum development experiences, and the curriculum contents in the Ethiopian experiences are deviating from the national and international expectations of instructional leadership. The international literature so far consistently noted that the majority of the school principals' time should be devoted to instructional leadership, and other issues are secondary or instrumental to it. Because principals as instructional leaders are they key to school success, scholars on the field seriously reflected that principals should be trained adequately in a way to effectively and efficiently lead the core operations of schools, teaching-learning or instruction [23, 24, 32] which is missing in the Ethiopian context. That is, if the curriculum were to be made relevant to school contexts, the courses designed should have had a reasonable focus on issues including the pedagogy of student learning, measurement and evaluation, school psychology, special needs and inclusive education, curriculum and course design, instructional technology, professional development, practicum or school placement, and similar others which have a practical relevance to leading the schools' teaching-learning business [8, 18, 24].

### **3.2. Recruitment, selection, and retention of instructional leaders**

Recruitment and selection refer to the overall process of attracting, shortlisting, selecting and appointing suitable candidates for jobs within an organization [34]. As to Gomez, an effective recruitment and selection process clearly identifies a company's needs and matches them with the right candidate who will fit into the organization in terms of qualification as well as in practice. This means when a company fills out the right positions with the right employees with strong caliber, then it would be easier for the company to put milestones of success through its functioning.

Experiences of principals' recruitment and selection process in the Ethiopian context were examined in this regard through both document analysis and interview. The first action was to look at the guidelines for recruitment and selection, and the guidelines were found to be almost similar in all localities except minor differences in some context specific formalities. As stated in the guidelines, the first procedure is making open advertisement on noticeboards, and the advertising institution makes sure that the advertisement is communicated to all schools. According to the guidelines, the advertisements encompass requirements like educational preparation, age, teaching and leadership experience, and discipline. After collecting the applicants' lists, the guidelines also require the zone education department to make pre-selection evaluations where they make sure that the applicants with disciplinary problems are not included if happens to be rejected. Once the recruitment is done, the guidelines further notes that the applicants will sit for written exams, and final appointments are to be made based on total scores.

The recruitment and selection procedures as reported above seem to address the linear administrative formalities. The problem here is the qualities of the applicants applying for instructional leadership positions. As was understood from both the document analysis and interviews conducted with educational leaders at zonal levels and principals, there existed no incentive package designed for attracting and retaining competent school leaders. In the absence of an incentive package which enables best leaders to be motivated, it is unlikely to expect an applicant pool which satisfies one's expectations [34]. That is, experienced and competent candidates will be unlikely to join the instructional leadership positions which lack psychological, social, and monetary rewards in the Ethiopian context. Instead they could be looking for better positions than instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is a very tiresome job in every context where instructional leaders are daily confronted with expectations from the government, parents, students, and the community [18, 23]. Despite of these multidimensional expectations from the profession, the Ethiopian education system had offered no motivational package for professionals in the field. One instructional leader in this regard said:

I have become a principal just to wait for a short time, and am looking for other jobs. There is nothing put in place to support and attract principals. We have no any different package from teachers though we have different complex and overlapping roles. The experienced teachers in particular had no any reason to become a principal as their salary is the same with principals. In this case, unless one has no any better alternative, he/she will not have a reason to choose to be a principal or instructional leader. Consequently, instructional leadership is becoming a position getting occupied by lazy teachers who dislike teaching and the ones who had no other better options. It is unfortunate to have such a system.

Another head of a zone education office strengthening the above interviewee also reflected that: principals' turnover has become a serious challenge of the education system. The offices in charge of the recruitment and selection are becoming busy doing the same business with no substantive results. Reports were communicated to the government many times indicating the need for redesigning the career development of principals in a way that becomes relatively attractive. However, the issues have not been given adequate attention no matter how schools are not being led. In this regard, both the quantity and quality of instructional leaders are becoming a persist problem of our school systems. Hence, we don't even have the courage to talk about principals' instructional leadership qualities with such unresponsive educational environments.

Investment at schools in the form of quality teaching –learning is the foundation for ensuring a country's sustainable and comprehensive development. This is what the experiences of developed countries clearly inform us. The investment they made on their education system for informed human capital development made them what they are [35-37]. However, the instructional leadership development practices of Ethiopia, as can be read from the interview data presented above, seemed to have been a futile exercise where there were no research-based and meaningful platforms to promote the success of the practice and to make interventions as per the situational requirements.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The qualitative data analysis conducted in this study reveals the absence of national instructional leadership framework from which instructional leadership curriculum should have emerged. It was also understood that the loosened curriculum development culture ultimately resulted in the curriculum's lack of relevance to the desired competences for instructional leadership development. It was further learnt that there existed an absence of context specific recruitment, selection and retention strategies for instructional leaders. It seems sound, therefore, to conclude that instructional leadership development is a missing agenda in the Ethiopian education system. If one has to care about the development of his/her country, he/she has to invest much on the school setup and operations because it is the human development investment which in return will ensure the nation's overall development.

In this globalized world, one does not require the use of atomic bombs or sophisticated missiles to destroy a nation; it will rather only be enough to agree on reluctantly lowering the quality of education. That is, unless a nation sets quick and responsive strategies to continuously reform and improve its instructional leadership development culture, it will be unlikely to expect quality teaching-learning in schools which ultimately may also result in destroying a nation through lowering the quality of education because instructional leadership is the first priority as far as quality teaching-learning is concerned. In this regard, though Ethiopia as a growing nation seemed to have given considerable attention to education and educational leadership at policy and strategy levels, the operational levels seemed to have deviated from the expectations of the policies and strategic documents which perhaps necessitate the urgency for national level instructional leadership development reform and rethinking.

Hence, it seems sound to recommend that the Ethiopian Ministry of Education need to prepare a national framework for instructional leadership based on which curriculums can be developed; higher education institutions offering instructional leadership programs shall reform their curriculum development cultures in a way that can result in the development of practical and relevant curriculum and training modalities; the regional and zonal education offices ought to revise their recruitment, selection and placement modalities in a way that can attract and retain competent instructional leaders in the system; and systematic mindset reform exercises shall be designed so as to enable instructional leaders to make their own mindset reforms that instructional leadership is a respected profession which has a huge impact in making a difference on the human capital development of the nation in general, and the quality of teaching-learning in particular so that they can take their own personal professional development initiatives despite the institutional and systemic challenges they may face with.

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