

Urban Education in Ethiopia: Insights from Selected Schools in Addis Ababa

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Abstract

This article is designed to examine the current situation of urban education in the selected schools in Addis Ababa with the view of establishing specific challenges that confront the schools, as well as, to explore the perception of stakeholders such as school leaders, teachers, students and the parents. To elicit the perceptions of the educational environment, surveys questioning the quantitative data were used in conjunction with interviews collecting the qualitative data. Structural questionnaires were filled by 400 participants who responded to the study purposively; 100 school directors, 100 teachers, 100 students, and 100 parents. Purposeful sampling technique used in the study involved achieving a balance of males and females and representation of 50 schools in Addis Ababa, across the following stakeholders: Further, 10 interview respondents were used to provide qualitative data feedback to enhance the collected data. The sources used for developing this approach include Bronfenbrenner and the Ecological Systems Theory; Levin's Social Justice Theory; Jonassen's Constructivist Learning Theory; and Critical Education Theory. The result depicts moderate perception towards the teaching effectiveness and moderate parental involvement. However, vital concerns were noted with regard to the adequacy of educational material and policy clarity, whereby low mean scores were obtained, pointing out that the current and prospective policies fail to cater for various students' needs. Based on the assessment, the following pivotal steps are suggested for improved resource distribution, class size reduction, effective involvement of key actors in formulation of policies, and better dissemination of the education policies. Applying these recommendations makes it feasible for students to enjoy a better educational climate, with stronger results as well as engagement at the community level. This research advances the study of educational dynamics in so far as it considers stakeholder perceptions as central to the formation and implementation of educational policies and practice. Therefore, closing the stated gaps, this study can be useful for educators, policymakers, and heads of schools who want to enhance students' experiences within educational institutions.

Keywords: Challenges, Education, Perceptions, Urban

I. Background of the study

Till the mid 1980's the education system was strongly country based and concentration was only on the conventional curriculums (Gershberg, et al., 2023). This type of education started in early 20th century and it was as a result of influence from foreign missionaries and later Italian occupation (Negash, 1996). However, it was only in the middle of the 20th century that urban

education became an important area of concern as the industrial cities began to require skilled labors (Joshi, & Verspoor, 2012).

Over the recent past Ethiopia has had one of the highest rates of urbanization in the African region (Mezgebo, 2020). The nation's capital city Addis Ababa for instance, the population has grown tremendously through the recent years in turn due to the movement from rural areas to urban areas in search of a better life and better returns to their investments (Tadele, 2009). This demographic shift has posed a lot of pressure in the education sector in urban areas and this has led to; overcrowded classroom, poor teacher, inefficient teachers etc. (Mahammoda, 2022).

Today, Ethiopia's education system comprises three tiers: primary, secondary, and at university level (Saint, 2004). Since 2012, primary schooling has been free and compulsory, but enrollment in good secondary and higher education is still patchy, especially in large cities (Darvas, et al., 2014). At present many schools in Addis Ababa differ dramatically with regard to the financial support and equipment provisions they avail than other institutions (Joshi, & Verspoor, 2012).

This paper identifies key challenges that define urban education in Ethiopia. However, most of the urban school faces common challenges such as large class sizes, inadequate instructional resources and teachers' professional development, which compromises quality and performance (Tuli, & Tynjala, 2015). This means that students from poor background mostly attend poorly endowed school hence their performance is compromised and future prospects limited (Tuli, & Fiorucci, 2012). Also, owing to the cultural and linguistic settings when children learn in urban centers, it is hard to manage unequal settings, limiting learning opportunities (Ahmed, et al., 2019).

The government has responded to these challenges through School-Based Expenditure policies meant to improve on the schools' physical facilities, teacher education and curriculum enhancement (Berhanu, 2023). Proposals on community participation in education delivery as an important measure in addressing educational inequalities have also been considered (Swift-Morgan, 2006). Education has been a noble aim of NGO's and international agencies who continue to supplement the efforts of governments in the provision of resources, training manpower and lobby for better results on the part of urban education (Pillay, 2011).

To be specific, it is felt that, the study of education in Ethiopia, especially in urban context such as in Addis Ababa is useful for the policy makers in the sense that, it is the best way through which the gaps of the school's existent in the urban area can be corrected to ensure that education is equally available to all in urban settings without compromising the quality (Ridley, 2011). It is therefore very useful for educators and school administrators to gain insights on future practices and ideas about teaching and learning (Blase, & Blase, 2000). Furthermore, it augments the existing literature on the topic of urban education in the developing world, promote understanding of the relationship between urbanization and education (Andersson, et al., 2009). Through bringing out awareness of the experiences, the study can further connect the dots on behalf of communities and parents to participate in the educational process (Kozak, & Elliot, 2014). In addition, such views can inform international development organizations and NGOs on how to fashion ideal and workable interventions particular to urban education in Ethiopia (Zikargae, et al., 2022). In conclusion, this study is important for enhancing students' learning performance as well as for combating the specific issues of students and schools in urban settings.

Although a lot has been written on urban education in Ethiopia, there is comparatively limited empirical research on the experiences and issues of schools in Addis Ababa. A lot of prior work is generalized at the national level or targeted on rural education neglecting the specifics of an urban environment and the relationships within. Furthermore, there is little scholarly research that uses surveys and interviews to combine findings concerning urban education with subjective perceptions of school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. This gap hampers the knowledge of the effect of urbanization on educational quality, access and equity hence necessitating further research with particular to various contextual factors that can shape urban education in Ethiopia. Filling this gap is crucial to identify approaches that will help learners who live in urban areas given that there is limited information concerning this area.

Objectives of the Article

This study intends to find out the status of urban education in selected schools in Addis Ababa to determine the specific difficulties which those schools face, and to get the view of the principal, teachers, students, and parents. It also aims at evaluating the impact of existing educational policies, making practical recommendations to enhancing the quality and availability of urban education, and offering new knowledge to the academic literature on the status of the urban education in Ethiopia.

Research Questions

The following two research questions inform this study on urban education in Addis Ababa. Therefore, by answering these questions, the research meant to identify the specific challenges that occurred in urban education environment and learn more about the views of stakeholders engaged.

- 1. What challenges do urban schools in Addis Ababa face in delivering quality education?*
- 2. How do school leaders, teachers, students, and parents perceive the effectiveness of current educational policies in urban settings?*

II. Theoretical framework of the study

The following educational theories are employed as theoretical frameworks of this study on urban education in Ethiopia, as they offer significant values in understanding the context and nature of teaching and learning in Addis Ababa setting.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory: emphasizes the complex factors that affect a child's education, starting from the proximate setting such as family and school and extending to large social structures (Crawford, 2020). Relevant to this framework is the fact that students in urban environments cope with diverse, density and intricate ecological context that can be cultural, social as well as economical (Krasny, et al., 2009). For instance, students who attend schools in Addis Ababa and who originate from low-income families may be hindered by lack of resources, or parental encouragement (Devonald, et al., 2021). However, unlike other theories developed in Europe and North America, this theory pays proper attention to the social context of the community, but may fall short of capturing all the contextual features of Ethiopian society and the change that has occurred following the new waves of urbanization (Ryan, 2001).

Social Justice Theory; emphasizes on fairness of distribution, it important for studying inequities in urban schooling (Sabbagh, & Schmitt, 2016). Systemic prejudice in Addis Ababa raise the theory about the social justice needs to be included into educational policies not only the question of the inequality of opportunities for the marginalized groups' members (Molla, & Gale, 2015). This brought to the fore important problems like equity of resources in the schools provided in less affluent areas (Darling-Hammond, 2015). But even here, one often faces difficulty since social justice initiatives apply pressure on stakeholders, who stand to lose their share of power (Marshall, & Ward, 2004). Equally, some of the theory could lead to strategies that are irrelevant to the culture of people in the region (Sampson, 2013).

Constructivist Learning Theory: based on investigations of Vygotsky owes branding an accent on the social interactions and cultural context for knowledge gaining (Bada, & Olusegun, 2015). This approach is useful in teaching practices in our urban schools to enhance the cultural diversity of students (Suhendi, 2018). In the context of Addis Ababa, the constructivism can ensure the engagement via interaction (Tadesse, et al., 2022). But it may reinforce these inequities when teachers themselves are not trained enough to deploy such tactics properly (Tsehay, et al., 2024). In addition, constructivism does not seem to provide fundamental approaches to apprehend the material existence that student from poor background owing to which they cannot learn from empty stomachs (Shapiro, 2011).

Critical Education Theory: supports the voiceless and equality by fighting oppression in education institutions (Giroux, 2023). This theory is necessary for starting talks and awareness in learners in the urban areas (Tobin, et al., 2001). However, its usage can be problematic, and some of the challenges are: organizational and technical barriers to change and a propensity to identify issues and fail to come up with solutions (Brown, & Campione, 2013).

In overall, every of these theories offer good understanding of urban education in Ethiopia but all of them also show some degree of drawbacks which require overarching consideration. Combing these perspectives, therefore, this study has the intention to map the complexity of urban education in Addis Ababa for policy and practice improvement.

III. Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape in Addis Ababa. This design allowed for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The quantitative aspect provided measurable data through surveys, while the qualitative component offered deeper insights through semi-structured interviews. This combination enabled a more holistic exploration of the research questions.

Sample Selection

A total of 400 respondents were purposefully selected for participation in the study, ensuring diverse representation from key stakeholders in the educational system. The sample included school leaders, teachers, students, and parents, with 100 individuals from each group. This stratified sampling approach ensured that each perspective was adequately represented.

The selection criteria for the schools included geographic location, socioeconomic characteristics, and the diversity of educational offerings. Respondents were drawn from 50 schools across Addis Ababa, ensuring a balanced representation of 50 males and 50 females in each category (school leaders, teachers, students, and parents). This gender balance aimed to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences, providing a nuanced understanding of the educational environment.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection involved two primary methods: surveys and semi-structured interviews.

1. Surveys: Structured surveys were administered to all 400 respondents. The surveys included questions designed to measure various aspects of the educational experience, such as academic performance, engagement levels, and perceptions of the school environment. These surveys utilized a combination of closed-ended questions for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions to allow for some qualitative insights. This dual approach facilitated the collection of both numerical data and contextual information.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews: In addition to surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 respondents, including school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. These interviews aimed to explore their experiences, challenges, and perceptions regarding the educational system in greater depth. The semi-structured format provided a framework of key questions while allowing participants the flexibility to express their thoughts and elaborate on their responses. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was designed to cover topics such as academic support, school policies, and community involvement.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of collected data involved distinct techniques for both the quantitative and qualitative components.

1. Quantitative Analysis: The survey data were analyzed using statistical software called SPSS. Descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, were employed to summarize the data effectively. The mean provides a clear indication of the central tendency of respondents' answers, while the standard deviation offers insights into the variability of those responses. This combination allows for a better understanding of the overall trends and consistency within the data.

2. Qualitative Analysis: The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews underwent thematic analysis. The analysis began with transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by coding the responses to identify recurring themes and patterns. This iterative process involved multiple reviews of the data to ensure that the identified themes accurately reflected the participants' perspectives. The resulting themes provided valuable insights into the qualitative dimensions of the educational experience, complementing the quantitative findings.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability were verified in the survey instrument utilized for the investigation. This study's instrument employed a 5-point Likert scale with an unrestricted answer format.

Through the use of content validity, which ensures that the questions in the survey are relevant and that the measure is most directly indicative and representational of the construct being assessed, the validity of the survey was established. The survey instrument's dependability was also examined. The four suggested internationalization measures' internal consistency reliability methods were used to achieve this.

<i>Instrument</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>	<i>Acceptability</i>
Urban Education Challenges	0.83	6	Acceptable
Urban Education Perception	0.79	6	Acceptable

Table 1: *The Reliability of the Scales*

Both variables have Cronbach's Alpha values over 0.7 (i.e., 0.83 and 0.79), as seen in Table 1 above. These numbers show that the instrument's internal consistency is satisfactory.

Ethical Considerations

Issues of etiquette were integral to the research exercise, since participants and their rights were respected through a stringently ethical undertaking of the study. All the respondents were read their options and all signed consent forms with the information regarding the study, its processes and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also ensured of their anonymity and identification details were also not taken in the study; instead, participants were assigned code numbers. The interview questions were answered on a voluntary basis and the respondent was free to decline to answer the questions that he or she found inappropriate. The authors used respect and professionalism when interviewing the participants which created an appropriate ambience for sharing of experience. The participants were debriefed after the interviews, so they could seek clarification on any issues they had understood or receive any form of assistance if they required it. All data collected in this study were archived properly; only those persons with permission to do so had access to any of the participant information. Thus, by following these ethical standards the study strived to preserve the dignity of all participants and also provided important information concerning the educational context of Addis Ababa.

IV. Findings and Discussion

Findings

RQ1. What challenges do urban schools in Addis Ababa face in delivering quality education?

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	The school lacks sufficient educational resources (e.g., textbooks, technology, teaching materials) to support quality education.	400	3.33	0.62
2	Teachers at this school are effective in delivering lessons that engage students and enhance learning.	400	3.51	0.81
3	Students at this school are actively engaged in their learning process, demonstrating motivation and interest in their studies.	400	3.13	0.78

4	The class sizes at this school are too large, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention to students.	400	3.35	0.68
5	Parents are not actively involved in their children's education, supporting their learning and school activities.	400	3.61	0.77
6	The physical infrastructure of the school (e.g., classrooms, sanitation facilities, safety) is not adequate for delivering quality education	400	3.52	0.66
Overall Average		400	3.41	0.72

Table 2: Challenges in Delivering Quality Education in Urban Addis Ababa

Resource Availability

The finding in Table 2, Item 1, which states: “*The school lacks sufficient educational resources (e.g., textbooks, technology, teaching materials) to support quality education.*”, Mean = 3.33 and SD = 0.62 reveals a major current issue affecting most urban schools in Addis Ababa. Inadequate provision of these necessities greatly limits teachers in terms of quality teaching and interaction with the students respectively. When a teacher never has access to a hopefully updated textbook and other important learning materials, he or she is always driven to use outdated materials, as a result, learners lose interest in certain lessons and concepts in those text for a long time which is very bad for their learning ability. The qualitative data from interviewee number 3 is also identical:

As a result, our school has a big problem of inadequate educational materials, including text books and teaching aids like computers. This shortage causes us to lack adequate stock of up-to-date learning material and other interactive teaching aids used in the teaching learning process. This translates into their performance in class work and their readiness for other pursuits or callings. Closing of these resource deficits is crucial for proper implementation of education in order to enhance learning for all child students.

(Interviewee 3, December 2023)

The scarcity of educational materials in regions of high population density raises issues of equity, best seen through the framework of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, which defines how context affects schools in impoverished neighborhoods. According to Social Justice Theory, education should be made available to everyone hence call for reform this is because education discriminates against the less privileged in many ways. According to Constructivist Learning Theory, students require ample teaching materials with which they learn better hence improving their performance. Further, Critical Education Theory encourages theorization of power relations and educational structures and collective work of policymakers, community, and school leaders. These resource deficits are necessary to resolve in order to establish an inclusive as well as balanced learning environment for every student.

Teacher Effectiveness

The result of the survey in Table 2, Item 2 shows that the school teachers are efficient in presenting lessons that captures the students’ attentions and brings improvement in learning as

computed for mean 3.51 and standard deviation 0.81. Teaching is important element in enhancing learners' participation, since it determines the ability of the learners to acquire knowledge as intended. With the use of effective instructional behaviors, teachers also change the level of performance of learners and encourage them to take an active part in the learning process. This perception provides an indication that educators are using approaches that will engage learners effectively leading to good grades and general satisfaction with the learning experience as it was support by one of the interviewees in the qualitative studies. The increased tremendously as seen and explained by Interviewee 8 from the year December, 2023

That is why I think teachers at this school are very good at giving lessons and making them appealing in order to capture students' attention and improve the learning outcome. They adopt a number of teaching methods that addresses different categories of learners as far as teaching is concerned so is full of activities to ensure that what is taught is well understood by the learners. This approach works towards capturing the students' interest and associates them with the process of learning which is very important for acquisition of deeper content knowledges. I believe efforts and innovations of our educators play a major role in enhancing the learning climate which, in turn, inspires learners and pushes them towards success.

The implication therefore is that the construct of teacher effectiveness cannot be captured devoid of reference to resource availability and this relates directly to Bronfenbrenner, Ecological Systems Theory. Perceptions of teaching as being positive are indicators of professionalism that educators bring to practice besides Social Justice Theory that advocates equal allocation of resources. Constructivist Learning Theory connotes the significance of materials and professional development for the longevity of effectiveness, and Critical Education Theory underscore that there is the need for broad reforms to enable enlighten all educators. Therefore, despite these promising results, there is corroborating evidence that calls for the further establishment of cohesive support mechanisms that would promote 'better teachers and learners.

Student Engagement

The finding in Table 2, Item 3, "*Students at this school are actively engaged in their learning process, demonstrating motivation and interest in their studies,*" with the mean 3.13 and the standard deviation 0.78 indicates a positive level of student engagement within the school environment. Active engagement is a crucial factor in academic success, as motivated students are more likely to participate in class, complete assignments, and pursue deeper understanding of the material. This perception suggests that the educational strategies employed whether through interactive teaching methods, relevant curriculum, or supportive classroom environments are effectively stimulating students' interest and investment in their learning. One of the interviewees shared a comparable viewpoint to the quantitative data:

It is my finding that learners in this school are fairly active in the classroom and this coupled by an acceptable level of motivation towards what they are learned. Many classrooms encourage class participation, but there is still space for improvement. One way to achieve higher student motivation and participation is to try and adapt the method by which the teaching is done and make the content more familiar to the students.

(Interviewee 1, December 2023)

While the finding is encouraging, it is important to consider the factors influencing student engagement through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which highlights the impact of various

environments. Engagement is shaped by the quality of teaching, relevant content, and supportive resources, reflecting Social Justice Theory's emphasis on equitable access. Constructivist Learning Theory stresses the need for engaging experiences that cater to diverse learners, while Critical Education Theory recognizes the importance of external influences like parental involvement and community support. To sustain and enhance engagement, schools should implement strategies that meet all learners' needs, regularly assess engagement levels, and incorporate student feedback, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive academically.

Classroom Size

The finding with mean value 3.35 and standard deviation 0.68 in Table 2, Item 4, "*The class sizes at this school are too large, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized attention to students,*" highlights a significant challenge in the educational environment. Large class sizes can impede effective teaching and learning, as they limit the ability of educators to tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of each student. When teachers are faced with overcrowded classrooms, it becomes increasingly difficult to engage students on a personal level, identify specific learning challenges, and provide the necessary support for diverse learners. This situation can lead to a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, which may not adequately address the varying abilities and learning styles present in the classroom. One of the individuals interviewed expressed a perspective that aligned closely with the findings derived from the quantitative data:

I think that the problem is that class sizes in this school are too big, that is why the teacher cannot pay proper attention to every learner. So, it becomes very challenging to attend to needs that the learners may have in a classroom setting since there are many students. This might to keep all students on the track and help them understand the information, individual academic attention is a must-have. This is because it is well understood that reducing the number of learners per group would definitely boost the chances of achieving goal specific to each student as well as overall learning achievements.

(Interviewee 5, December 2023)

Large class sizes have significant implications beyond instructional challenges, affecting student behavior and classroom management, as indicated by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Maintaining order in larger classes can lead to increased disruptions and lower engagement, which aligns with Social Justice Theory's concern for equitable educational experiences. Constructivist Learning Theory highlights the need for individualized attention, difficult to achieve in overcrowded settings. Critical Education Theory advocates for systemic changes, such as hiring more teachers or adopting alternative instructional models, to reduce class sizes. By ensuring manageable class sizes, schools can improve educational quality and provide the personalized support needed for all students to succeed academically.

Parental Involvement

The finding with mean 3.61 and standard deviation 0.77 in Table 2, Item 5, "*Parents are not actively involved in their children's education, supporting their learning and school activities,*" indicates a concerning gap in parental engagement within the educational process. Lack of involvement from parents can significantly hinder students' academic success and overall development. Research consistently shows that when parents participate in their children's education, students tend to achieve higher grades, demonstrate improved behavior, and exhibit greater motivation. Therefore, the absence of parental support may contribute to lower student performance and a diminished sense of accountability regarding their education. The viewpoint shared by one of the interviewees closely mirrored the findings obtained from the quantitative data:

I have realized that parents pay less attention to their children schooling hence their encouragement for learning and other school related activities. This disengagement means that the students are some of the biggest losers when it comes to partnerships of home and school. Some the reasons may include; work commitments, time constraints or mere ignorance of the right channels and platforms to engage in volunteering. Parental participation should be raised to the next level, and that is why I think that parents should be given more chances to be involved in school life and be encouraged to join our community to make it a powerful tool to improve students' results.

(Interviewee 7, December 2023)

Several factors contribute to the lack of parental involvement, including socioeconomic challenges, work commitments, and a perceived disconnect with the school, as noted in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Many parents may feel intimidated or unaware of engagement opportunities, reflecting Social Justice Theory's concerns about equitable participation. Constructivist Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of collaborative relationships for student success, while Critical Education Theory advocates for systemic changes to empower parents. To overcome these barriers, schools should create a welcoming environment by organizing workshops, offering flexible meeting times, and fostering open communication. By promoting a collaborative school culture, schools can enhance parental engagement, benefiting student learning and achievement.

Infrastructure Conditions

The finding in Table 2, Item 6, indicating that "The physical infrastructure of the school (e.g., classrooms, sanitation facilities, safety) is not adequate for delivering quality education," with a mean of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 0.66, highlights a critical issue impacting the overall educational experience. Inadequate infrastructure, as analyzed through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, illustrates how physical environments affect learning processes, influencing both student comfort and safety. Poorly maintained classrooms and insufficient sanitation can lead to distractions and health issues, aligning with Social Justice Theory's emphasis on equitable access to safe and conducive learning environments. Constructivist Learning Theory supports that effective learning requires a supportive physical space, while Critical Education Theory advocates for systemic change to address these infrastructural deficiencies. The implications of inadequate facilities can also affect student attendance and retention, as students may disengage if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This finding underscores the urgent need for investment in school infrastructure to enhance the learning environment, improve academic outcomes, and promote student well-being. Policymakers and school administrators must prioritize these improvements to deliver quality education and create supportive learning environments for all students.

RQ2. *How do school leaders, teachers, students, and parents perceive the effectiveness of current educational policies in urban settings?*

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	I am aware of the current educational policies that affect our school.	400	3.66	0.72
2	Current educational policies positively influence the overall educational experience for students at this school.	400	2.01	0.63
3	The educational policies in place effectively address the diverse needs of students in our school.	400	2.00	0.78
4	The school provides opportunities for stakeholders (students, parents, teachers) to give feedback on educational policies.	400	1.21	0.88

5	The school communicates educational policies clearly to all stakeholders, including parents, students, and staff.	400	2.21	0.74
6	I believe that the current educational policies are effective in promoting a positive learning environment in our school.	400	2.02	0.77
Overall Average		400	2.19	0.75

Table 3: Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Educational Policies in Urban Settings

Policy Awareness

The finding in Table 3, Item 1, stating "I am aware of the current educational policies that affect our school," with a mean of 3.66 and a standard deviation of 0.72, highlights the level of stakeholder awareness regarding educational policies. This awareness is vital for effective participation in the educational process, empowering school leaders, teachers, students, and parents to engage meaningfully in discussions about practices and improvements, as emphasized by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which illustrates how interactions within educational systems influence engagement. Social Justice Theory underscores the importance of equitable access to information, suggesting that informed stakeholders can better advocate for their needs and contribute to decision-making processes.

Conversely, a lack of awareness can lead to disengagement and disconnection from the educational community, resulting in missed opportunities for collaboration, aligning with Critical Education Theory's focus on the need for systemic inclusivity. To enhance awareness, schools should prioritize transparent communication about educational policies through meetings, newsletters, and workshops. This proactive approach fosters a culture of inclusivity and engagement, ensuring all stakeholders are informed and involved in shaping the educational landscape. Ultimately, increasing awareness of educational policies can lead to a more informed and engaged community, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the educational system.

Impact on Student Experience

The finding in Table 3, Item 2, stating "*Current educational policies positively influence the overall educational experience for students at this school,*" reveals a mean score of 2.01 and a standard deviation of 0.63. This low mean indicates that, on average, respondents perceive the current educational policies as having a negative impact on the educational experience. A score below the midpoint of a typical Likert scale suggests that many stakeholders school leaders, teachers, students, and parents feel that existing policies are inadequate or ineffective in enhancing student experiences. The relatively low standard deviation of 0.63 indicates a consensus among participants, reflecting widespread concerns about the policies' ability to meet students' needs, as illustrated by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in shaping educational experiences.

This negative perception may stem from issues related to Social Justice Theory, such as a lack of inclusivity and insufficient resources that fail to address the specific challenges faced by the school community. Constructivist Learning Theory also highlights the importance of relevant and supportive policies for effective learning, suggesting that the current policies may not facilitate meaningful engagement. Furthermore, Critical Education Theory underscores the necessity for

policies that empower students and educators, pointing to a potential disconnect between policy intentions and actual outcomes. Overall, the findings suggest urgent consideration of how educational policies are designed and implemented to ensure they effectively enhance the educational experience for all students. The following perspective articulated by one of the interview participants closely resembled the results obtained from the quantitative data.

With these current educational policies, I do not believe that all round education for the students in this school is well facilitated. Several collaborators complain that these policies do not consider difficulties and needs we confront in our learning context. In this case they do not get the kind of support that would ensure they develop both academically and otherwise. It is high time that we reconsider these policies, and engage the school community to come up with better policies that will benefit and improve the experiences of learner.

(Interviewee 2, December 2023)

To address this issue, it is crucial for policymakers and school administrators to seek feedback from stakeholders regarding the educational policies in place. Engaging in discussions, conducting surveys, and holding focus groups can provide valuable insights into how policies can be improved. By actively involving the school community in the policy-making process, schools can work towards creating a more supportive and effective educational framework that genuinely enhances the student experience.

Support for Student Needs

The finding in Table 3, Item 3, stating "*The educational policies in place effectively address the diverse needs of students in our school*," reveals a mean score of 2.00 and a standard deviation of 0.78. This low mean indicates that respondents generally perceive the current educational policies as ineffective in meeting the diverse needs of students. A mean of 2.00 suggests that stakeholders including school leaders, teachers, students, and parents believe the policies fail to accommodate the varying backgrounds, learning styles, and challenges faced by the student population.

The standard deviation of 0.78 reflects a moderate level of agreement among participants, indicating a shared concern regarding the policies' effectiveness. This consensus points to a recognized gap between the policies as formulated and the actual needs of students, as highlighted by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which stresses the importance of understanding the various environmental contexts that affect student learning.

Factors contributing to this negative perception may align with Social Justice Theory, which emphasizes the need for equitable policies that truly serve all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. Constructivist Learning Theory underscores the importance of addressing diverse learning styles and needs to create meaningful educational experiences. Additionally, Critical Education Theory points to the necessity for policies that engage with the community and are responsive to the specific challenges faced by students. Overall, these findings suggest an urgent need for revising educational policies to better reflect and address the diverse needs of the student population. The viewpoint expressed below by one of the interview participants closely paralleled the findings derived from the quantitative data

In my opinion, the educational policies established hinder other educational policies that could meet the differentiated learner needs of the school. Several parties have agreed that these current policies fail to meet the needs of students with multiple learning capacities and diverse learning needs. This appears not to be the case hence acting a major frontier on achieving our set goals within the classroom setup among students. Such policies should be revisited with an aim of getting cooperation from other stakeholders in the school in order to come up with policies that are favorable to all learners.

(Interviewee 5, December 2023)

To enhance the effectiveness of educational policies, it is essential for school administrators and policymakers to actively seek input from all stakeholders. Conducting needs assessments, facilitating open forums, and encouraging feedback can help identify specific areas for improvement. By prioritizing the diverse needs of students in the policy-making process, schools can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that promotes equity and success for all learners.

Opportunities for Feedback

The finding in Table 3, Item 4, stating "*The school provides opportunities for stakeholders (students, parents, teachers) to give feedback on educational policies,*" reveals a mean score of 1.21 and a standard deviation of 0.88. This very low mean indicates that respondents generally perceive minimal to no opportunities for feedback, highlighting significant shortcomings in the school's engagement practices. Such a perception suggests that students, parents, and teachers may feel excluded from the decision-making processes that directly affect their educational environment.

The standard deviation of 0.88 reflects a consistent sentiment among respondents, emphasizing a collective concern about the lack of feedback mechanisms. This consensus points to a broader issue of communication and collaboration within the school community, aligning with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes the importance of interconnected systems in shaping educational experiences. When stakeholders are not given a voice in policy discussions, it can lead to feelings of disenfranchisement and a disconnect between enacted policies and the actual needs of the school community, resonating with Social Justice Theory's focus on equitable participation.

Moreover, Constructivist Learning Theory underscores the necessity of stakeholder input in creating meaningful learning experiences, while Critical Education Theory advocates for inclusive practices that empower all community members. To address this gap, it is crucial for school leaders to establish structured opportunities for feedback, such as surveys, focus groups, and regular meetings that promote open dialogue. Creating a culture of collaboration not only enhances stakeholder engagement but also ensures that educational policies more accurately reflect the community's needs and concerns. By actively seeking and valuing input from all members of the school community, schools can foster a more inclusive and responsive educational environment that supports student success.

Communication of Policies

The finding in Table 3, Item 5, stating "*The school communicates educational policies clearly to all stakeholders, including parents, students, and staff,*" reveals a mean score of 2.21 and a standard deviation of 0.74. This score reflects a perception that communication regarding educational policies is inadequate, indicating that stakeholders do not feel well-informed about the policies governing their educational environment. Although 2.21 is above the lowest possible score, it still highlights significant room for improvement in the clarity and effectiveness of communication.

The standard deviation of 0.74 suggests a moderate level of agreement among respondents, indicating a shared concern about communication within the school community. This lack of clear communication can lead to misunderstandings and a sense of disconnection among stakeholders, which aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, emphasizing how interconnected systems affect individuals' educational experiences. Furthermore, Social Justice Theory underscores the need for equitable access to information, as unclear communication can disproportionately affect marginalized groups, hindering their ability to engage meaningfully with educational policies.

Constructivist Learning Theory highlights the importance of clear communication for fostering collaborative learning environments, while Critical Education Theory advocates for transparency and inclusivity in educational practices. Without clear communication, collaboration between parents and educators may suffer, as unclear policies can create barriers to understanding expectations and responsibilities. To address these issues, schools must prioritize improving communication strategies, ensuring that all stakeholders are well-informed and able to actively engage with and support educational policies, thereby enhancing overall collaboration and promoting a more effective educational environment. The viewpoint expressed below by one of the interview participants closely paralleled the findings derived from the quantitative data:

Another is that the school lacks make the necessary educational policies to all the parties involved such as parents, students and the staff. I have also observed that the polices are not very clear to many individuals and how they influence our learning setting. This lack of clarity aversion creates confusion and disconnection in our school environment. I feel that in organization we need to enhance our communication methods to guarantee that I and others are knowledgeable concerning the policies. Which will go a long way towards improving the educational climate by making things more supportive and communal.

(Interviewee 2, December 2023)

To improve this situation, the school should prioritize enhancing communication strategies. This could involve regular updates through newsletters, informational meetings, and digital platforms that ensure all stakeholders are informed about policy changes and their implications. Additionally, soliciting feedback on communication effectiveness can help identify specific areas for improvement. By fostering transparent and accessible communication, the school can enhance stakeholder engagement and create a more cohesive educational community.

Overall Effectiveness

The finding in Table 3, Item 6, stating "*I believe that the current educational policies are effective in promoting a positive learning environment in our school,*" reveals a mean score of 2.02 and a standard deviation of 0.77. This low mean indicates that respondents generally do not perceive the current educational policies as effective in fostering a positive learning environment. A score of 2.02 suggests a widespread belief among stakeholders—school leaders, teachers, students, and parents—that the policies are inadequate in addressing the factors essential for a supportive and conducive educational atmosphere.

The standard deviation of 0.77 reflects a moderate level of agreement among participants, indicating a shared concern about the effectiveness of these policies. This perception may arise from factors such as insufficient resources, lack of stakeholder engagement, or policies that do not align with the specific needs of the school community. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the interplay of various environmental factors significantly influences educational outcomes, highlighting the importance of a supportive atmosphere for student success.

From the perspective of Social Justice Theory, the ineffectiveness of policies in creating a positive environment may reflect systemic inequities that fail to consider the diverse needs of the student population. Constructivist Learning Theory emphasizes that a positive learning environment is crucial for meaningful engagement, while Critical Education Theory advocates for the involvement of stakeholders in evaluating and shaping educational policies. When policies do not promote a positive environment, it can lead to decreased student engagement, poor academic performance, and a negative school culture.

To address these concerns, school leaders and policymakers must critically evaluate current policies and their impacts on the learning environment. Engaging stakeholders in discussions about policy effectiveness, conducting surveys for feedback, and implementing changes based on community input can help create a more positive and effective educational framework. By prioritizing the development of responsive policies that foster a supportive learning environment, schools can enhance student well-being and academic success.

V. Discussion

The findings present a many-sided view of the educational environment at the school, highlighting significant disparities in resource availability, stakeholder engagement, and the effectiveness of educational policies. While relatively high mean scores for teaching effectiveness and parental involvement suggest some strengths, they contrast sharply with low perceptions regarding educational policies and resource adequacy.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the multiple layers of influence on a child's education, from immediate environments like family and school to broader societal contexts. In the context of Addis Ababa, students from low-income families face barriers such as inadequate resources and limited parental support. The moderate score of 3.33 for resource adequacy aligns with research indicating that schools with sufficient resources tend to achieve better student outcomes (Archibald, 2006). This underscores the need for schools to assess resource distribution and identify gaps that hinder student engagement, as reflected in the lower mean score of 3.13.

Social Justice Theory focuses on equity and access, making it crucial for examining disparities in urban education. The stark contrast between high scores for teacher effectiveness and low scores for educational policies raises questions about systemic inequalities. Effective teaching often thrives in supportive environments, yet the low mean scores for policy effectiveness (2.01) and stakeholder feedback opportunities (1.21) point to a disconnect between teaching practices and policy frameworks. Literature suggests that educational policies must be responsive to classroom realities to foster effective learning (Bergeron, 2008). The lack of clarity and engagement in policy communication may undermine teachers' positive contributions, reflecting the systemic injustices that persist within the educational landscape.

Constructivist Learning Theory rooted in Vygotsky's work, emphasizes the significance of social interaction and cultural context in learning. The findings regarding parental involvement, with a mean score of 3.61, suggest some level of engagement; however, active parental involvement is often linked to better student outcomes (Qasem, 2018). Schools must explore barriers to engagement, especially considering the low perceptions of feedback opportunities. This disconnect echoes the need for effective communication and collaboration between schools and families, essential for enhancing educational experiences.

Critical Education Theory advocates for empowerment and social change by challenging oppressive structures within education. The findings suggest a need for dialogue and critical consciousness among stakeholders to address the systemic issues highlighted in the data. However, the implementation of this theory can encounter resistance, particularly when existing power structures are threatened.

Overall, the findings indicate a pressing need for the school to adopt a more integrated approach that aligns resource allocation, teaching practices, and policy frameworks. By actively involving stakeholders in the policy development process and ensuring clear communication, the school can create a more cohesive educational environment that effectively meets the diverse needs of its students. Addressing these areas is essential for fostering a positive learning atmosphere and improving overall educational outcomes, particularly in the context of the rich theoretical frameworks that inform our understanding of education in urban settings.

VI. Conclusion

This paper explores the challenges of urban education along with the school variables in the selected schools in Addis Ababa, and views of key stakeholders, beginning with the principals and extending to students and parents. Results emerged indicating that there is still some consistency in aspects of teaching practices, parents' engagement and effectiveness in teaching while other areas give a worrying signal on student resource provision and educational policies.

The gap between positive perception of teaching and negative perception of policy for improvement implies a system that frustrates instructional enhancement. There is a dire call for the review of resources as they form the basic needs of boosting the capacity of a learning institution. Also, high level of teaching effectiveness and low magnitudes of policy clarity suggest that the existing policies may not adequately address students' individual needs or increase meaningful involvement of stakeholders.

Some measures of parental participation exist, however, there are still some existing obstacles to their increased participation therefore, there is need for increased and improved communication and feedback so as to foster a more central and participatory supportive school involvement. The knowledge of interacting policies and resources as well as the experiences and expectations of the stakeholder in the education system was enhanced using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Social Justice Theory, Constructivist Learning Theory, and Critical Education Theory.

If more studies are done in this area, then it will be potential to establish what kind of intervention through time may have a better result on the utilization of resources and policy consciousness of urban environments in educational institutions. Further, the research about the factors that hindered increased parental participation could bear useful information that could be used in the formulation of useful interventions to increase the level of practice among parents. There is also a need for research to establish which of the communication channels used by the schools are most effective in strengthening school-stakeholder relations and which for the provision of feedback. Additionally, research could explore how such community institutions as charitable organizations can supplement schools and other institutions in order to ensure that students receive what they require as well as participation. In relation to these areas, subsequent studies can advance knowledge about improvement of educational climates that foster successful experiences of students.

VII. Recommendations

In light of the findings made in this study, some recommendations could be helpful in improving the environment of learning at the school. First, it is critical to enhance resource availability by preparing a methodological analysis of the current educational resources including textbooks and technology, and then to prepare a model plan of augmenting money and resources by seeking local business support or through donations. Second, assessing the possibilities of decreasing class sizes will enable the teachers to focus on each learner more, since they will be hiring more of the faculty or starting with the co-teaching model to ensure small group deliveries are made hence improving on the students' achievements. Third, the need to involve different stakeholders in the formulation of the policies in education; this can be done through periodical students, parents and teachers' forum, where they can discuss any formulated educational policy and through formulation of a stakeholder's advisory committee where people from different backgrounds can air their opinion on any formulated or proposed policy. Fourth, increasing the policy communication through the implementation of clear strategy will assist in informing practice across the school; the use of different forms of communication; newsletters and online platforms will aid in the dissemination of information across the school community. Last but not least, encouraging the parent involvement through practice such as workshops to enhance parents' awareness in supporting children's learning and encouragement of flexible arrangements for parents' participation in school activities, will enhance the school community of all stake holders. These recommendations are very relevant, and if the school follows them, the academic outcomes can improve to result in an uplifting and encouraging ambiance of learning for all learners.

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