

STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the deterioration of education quality catches on global attention in both policy and practice. The main purpose of this study was to explore the influence of politics on quality management practices in the secondary education of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. This study utilized a multi-case study design with a purposive sampling technique to draw data from experts from the Ministry, regional education bureau, zonal education department, and woreda education offices. To that end, 18 experts were recruited to participate in interviews. The data gathered from interviewees were analyzed using NVivo 8 version combined with thematic data analysis procedures. The study revealed that the political practices of the country have been affecting the internal administration of the education system in three areas: by nominating educational managers at different levels, by forming One-to-Five Networks at different echelons, and by offering the mandates to avoid dropout and repetition. The study concluded that politics influenced the autonomy of educational institutions and their quality management practices in secondary education. Thus, the government should revisit its practices on education and allow educators manage their educational administration and organization business.

INTRODUCTION

The successes of quality management reforms are highly dependent on the will and commitment of the politics of a given country (Bigham & Ray, 2012; Devi, 2017; Kasuga, 2019; Levy, Cameron, Hoadley, & Naidoo, 2018). In supporting this, Bruns and Schneider (2016) stated that education reform is “a highly charged and politicized process; what gets implemented—and its impact—depends as much or more on the politics of the reform process as the technical design of the reform” (p. 5). Furthermore, in low-income countries with inadequate state capacity, the highest demand for knowledgeable and skillful human power comes from the state itself (Das, Biswas, & Roy, 2015; Hickey & Hossain, 2019). Various low-income countries lack the human capital to staff at the state level (Oketch & Rolleston, 2007; Osuji, 2011). In this sense, the provision of education has implications for quality and its management when Harding and Stasavage (2014) stated “in an environment of weak state capacity, democracy may prompt the government to increase education access, but not educational inputs” (p. 230). In one way or another, politics is affecting the attainment of educational goals (Ekpiken & Ifere, 2015; Hickey & Hossain, 2019).

The Ethiopian education management hierarchy follows from the top to the bottom—the federal ministry, the regional governments, the zone administrations, the woreda (district) management, and schools. The country has been engaging in Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that can facilitate the

Ethiopian path towards Middle-Income Countries by 2030 (MoE, 2015) since the date the country adopted these international commitments. Recognizing the value of education in realizing these goals, Ethiopia has given much emphasis to the expansion of the education systems at all levels by establishing the five rolling Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) (Mc Cormac, 2012; Verwimp, 1999; World Bank, 2013). Due to ESDPs implementations, the number of schools, teachers, and students tremendously increased at all levels. From 2005 to 2017, secondary schools were established, 6253 teachers were recruited and 123,535 students were enrolled (MoE, 2010, 2017). Despite such enormous expansion of education at all levels, the quality issue is a point of public outcries and discussions among educational stakeholders in Ethiopia (Amare et al. 2006; Derebssa, 2006; Tekeste, 2006).

As a reaction to public worries and concerns about quality education, the MoE and international development partners (World Bank) endorsed the General Education Quality Improvement Packages (GEQIP I & II) since 2008 (MoE, 2008). Besides, various intervention mechanisms such as student-centered and continuous assessment were established, in-service principals and teachers training was provided, and instructional satellite TV programs were beamed to improve student achievement (MoE, 2015). However, student achievement in these years have not improved as per the goals of GEQIP and educational interventions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ethiopia has been spending about 20 percent of her national budget on education since 2000 (Ministry of Education (MoE) & Education Strategy Center (ESC), 2018; World Bank, 2013, 2016). Furthermore, Ethiopia allocated 145 billion Ethiopian birr for ESDP V (MoE & ESC, 2018). Besides, 25000 principals and supervisors have been given training on how to lead the teaching and learning processes (MoE, 2015). Despite all these backbreaking activities to manage the quality of education, student achievement was still unacceptably low. For instance, in the years 2014-2017, the majority of students who took University Entrance Examinations (UEE) scored below standard (National Education Assessment and Examinations Agency, 2019). Besides, the World Bank (2013) also reported that student achievement at the secondary school level was and also high school graduates lack the necessary skills to join the world of work. Similarly, student result in the 2014 National Learning Assessment (NLA) also echoes the prevalence of students' low academic achievement.

Studies on the reasons for poor student achievement have resulted in different findings. Major reasons for student low achievement were lack of inputs (Amare et al. 2006; Belay & Melaku, 2019; Derebssa, 2006; Fekede & Massimiliano, 2012; Melaku, 2019; MoE, 2015; Mulu, 2012) and ineffectiveness of school leadership (Dawit, 2018; Dimo, 2017; Dimo, Tekaligne, & Wubayehu, 2017; Kemal, 2016). Other reasons include the lack of teacher and student motivation and commitment to the teaching and learning process (Abebe, 2015; Dagne & Beshir, 2019; Engida & Zeytu, 2017; Giertz, 2016; MoE & ESC, 2018; Mulugeta, 2014). However, the influence of politics on quality management practices in Ethiopia has not been studied. Besides, the political analysis of education is scanty (Busemeyer & Trampusch, 2011; Gift & Wibbels, 2014) especially in low-income countries (Bruns & Schneider 2016; Kingdon et al. 2014; Nicolai et al. 2014; Wales, Magee, & Nicolai, 2016). The insufficient findings in this academic gap has prompted the researchers to conduct a study on the political influence on education quality management.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Major Research Question:

How do political practices influence quality management practices in secondary education of Southern, Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region of Ethiopia?

Research Sub-Questions:

1. In what way does a political assignment of educational leaders affect quality management practices of secondary education in Ethiopia?
2. What is the effect of the One-to-Five Networks implementation on quality management practices of secondary education in Ethiopia?
3. What is the effect of the mandate to avoid dropouts and repetitions on quality management practices in secondary education in Ethiopia?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study adds theoretical and practical knowledge to the dearth of literature on how politics influences the quality management of secondary education. From the theoretical instances, this study will bridge the research gap in the area of political practices on quality management in secondary education. Practically, the study will offer pertinent and timely information about political influences on quality management challenges for policymakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politics

Politics is the process by which some people try to influence formally or informally the actions of others (Joseph, 2015). Supporting this, Young, Levin, and Wallin (2007) labelled the term politics as a procedure accepted by a certain society to manipulate how the power, wealth, status, and honor are shared among members of the society. Based on these general definitions of politics, one can contemplate that politics involves the power of people to have more domination in decision-making than others. Furthermore, politics is inevitable. Ramsey (2006) stated, "wherever there is the power to be had, resources to be divided, recognition to be earned, or influence to be brokered, there is politics" (p. 79). The author continued to state there was always politics wherever there were followers and leaders. Thus, the intention of politics can have a positive or negative effect on the quality of education and its management.

The Relationship between Politics and Education

The goals of education are derived from the ruling party. Ozurumba and Ebuara (2014) stated, "In the philosophy of education, the content of education is expressed in curriculum, syllabuses, and textbooks which have tended to reflect the dominant ideologies and policy outcome of government in power" (p. 196). Policy planning and its implementation are determined by political context (Davi, 2017). Moreover, political will and commitment affect political action and its effects on social policy (Michael, 2009). Strengthening the above, Unchendu (2004) stated that the politics of education included multifaceted interactions surrounded by different interest groups, policymakers, politicians, researchers, educationists, and officials. He further added that, at all levels of educational hierarchy, these practitioners need educational organizations to assist in achieving these specific goals.

Education is a powerful tool to create political power, to maintain the consensus on political power, to enhance individuals' potentials, and to introduce and socialize individuals with the system of politics. The effectiveness of the political party system is partly based on the effectiveness of education policy (Bigham & Ray, 2012; Devi, 2017; Kayode, Oluwafemi, & Victor, 2012). This is due to the intentionally planned education system that contributes to the function of the political system. Government policy controls the education system and it is there to serve a function of politics. Hence, politics determines the type of education citizens need and the type of education, in turn, reflects the competency of politicians. Therefore, educational policies are not free of politics (Bigham & Ray, 2012; Devi, 2017).

Furthermore, the system of government in Sub-Saharan African countries grants power and an education ladder that permits and perpetuates inept leadership or management. Due to this, educational reforms have failed and will continue to fail since the following two practices continue. First, incapable leaders and managers are involved in the solution of educational problems in the absence of knowing the real problems, and second, inexperienced and inept managers bring the desired change by using similar solution repeatedly and anticipate unique outcomes (Kayode, Oluwafemi, & Victor, 2012).

Quality Education

Different scholars define the word quality differently. For example, some scholars define quality as multidimensional (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002), relative (Harvey & Green, 1993), dynamic (Adams, 1997), very abstract (Scott, 1994), and slippery (Pfeffer & Coot, 1991) concepts. However, in most countries, two major quality elements underlie their education policies—improving students' cognitive development and enhancing learners' social or emotional development (Sifuna & Sawamura, 2010; UNESCO, 2004). In this study, quality education is defined as practices education systems undergo to ensure every individual's capacity to survive his/her environment (UNICEF, 2006).

Quality Management in Education

Different scholars define the term quality assurance differently. Goetsch and Davis (2005) argued that quality management involved all the "Organization's policies, procedures, plans, resources, processes, and delineation of responsibility and authority, all deliberately aimed at achieving product or service quality levels consistent with customer satisfaction and the organization's objectives" (p. 174). Consistent with the above, Woodhouse (1999) defined quality assurance as "... policies, attitudes, actions, and procedures necessary to ensure that quality is being maintained and enhanced" (p. 30). In quality management literature, terms such as quality assurance, quality management, quality assessment, quality enhancement, quality development, and quality improvement have been used interchangeably (Brennan & Shah, 2000; Hopkin & Lee, 2001). The crux of these meanings is guaranteeing and improving student achievement through institutional efforts (Belwati, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A multiple case study design was employed in this exploration. Since this study investigated issues related to the practitioners' perceptions of political influences on the management of educational quality at different levels of education, the aforementioned design was appropriate.

Moreover, Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) stated that “It is important in case of studies for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves, rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated, or judged by the researcher” (p. 257). A multiple case study was chosen because it is strong in presenting reality (Creswell, 2007), helped depict different opinions on a similar issue (Yin, 2009), and supported researchers to conclude the results and develop a theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Sample and Sampling Technique

In this study, the researchers asked the heads of the Ministry, the SNNPR and the Sheka, Kaffa, and Bench-Maji zones to recommend research participants who were professionally committed with a minimum of five years of working experience in their current positions. As a result, 4 experts from the Ministry, 3 from the SNNPR, and 3 from Sheka, Kaffa, and Bench-Maji zones were recruited by purposive sampling technique as research participants. Moreover, the researchers asked the heads of Woreda Education Offices to locate committed and responsible experts with five years of working experience to be involved in the study. As a result, eight experts from Masha, Andracha, Sheko, Decha, Gimbo, and Chena Woreda Education Offices were selected as research participants. The following table summarizes the background information of the participants. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Background Information of Participants

Management Level	Age	Sex	Education Qualification	Years in Current Position	Total Years of Experience	Assigned Code
Ministry of Education	45	M	First-degree	7	20	MOEE-1
	54	M	Second-degree	5	30	MOEE-2
	41	M	Second-degree	6	18	MOEE-3
	50	M	First-degree	5	26	MOEE-4
Regional Education Bureau	52	M	First-degree	7	28	REBE-1
	46	M	First-degree	12	25	REBE-2
	44	M	Second-degree	6	19	REBE-3
Zone Education Department	37	M	First-degree	8	18	ZEDE-1
	43	M	First-degree	6	22	ZEDE-2
	59	M	Second-degree	7	40	ZEDE-3
Woreda Education Office	39	M	First-degree	6	19	WEOE-1
	32	M	First-degree	8	17	WEOE-2
	30	M	First-degree	5	8	WEOE-3
	42	M	First-degree	8	23	WEOE-4
	48	M	First-degree	6	26	WEOE-5
	36	M	First-degree	10	16	WEOE-6
	42	M	First-degree	5	19	WEOE-7
	49	M	Second-degree	5	30	WEOE-8

Data Collection

Interviews with research participants were employed as the method to collect data in this study. The contents of the interview involve how experts from different hierarchy perceive political influence, in what aspect politics influence them, and the effect of this influence on their roles in performing their duties. Before using the interview instrument, five relevant experts from the field were invited to review the contents of the interviews. Their comments and recommendations for improving the contents, formats, and the language of the interview instrument were incorporated in the final version of the interview guides. An approximately 40 minute interview was conducted with each of the experts from the Ministry to woreda offices. The process of interviewing was audio recorded to help the researchers minimize the loss of information during the interview processes.

Data Analysis Technique

For clarity, an in-depth interview was conducted in Amharic (Ethiopian National language). Initially, the recorded data were transcribed into Amharic in printed copies given to all the interviewees to verify the accuracy of their responses. In this study, for qualitative analysis, the software NVivo 8 was employed. The data analysis procedure followed the six staged approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, the transcribed Amharic version was translated into English by using language experts. In the second stage, the transcribed data were imported into the NVivo 8 program. The process of coding was done on NVivo while the researchers listened to recordings and transcriptions when necessary. In stage three, to identify the themes across data sets, the researchers read and reread the coded nodes on NVivo. Then all nodes with similar ideas were merged to form themes. As a result, 12 themes were noted. In the fourth stage, some primary codes created main themes, while others produced sub-themes. Stage five involved the process of identifying the nature and the essence of each theme and determining what part of the data each theme captured. In the final stage, the resulting themes were aligned with the research questions and direct quotes were cited as supporting evidence.

RESULTS

As a result of data analysis, three major themes emerged: political assignment of educational leaders, One-to-Five Networks, and the mandate to avoid dropouts and repetitions. Under each theme, the responses of experts from the Ministry of education, region education bureau, zone education departments, and woreda education offices were analyzed. Then, the researchers compared and contrasted the participants' responses by level and by theme.

The Assignment of Educational Managers at All Levels

The ministerial-level experts' responses

The researchers asked the participants how educational leaders were placed in their respective positions. Concerning this, one of the experts from the Ministry asserted:

The assignments of educational managers are based on their political participation. While educational institutions need to be managed by those who took educational management courses and graduated with these fields, the politicians assign agricultural and health professional graduates to manage educational institutions (MOEE-2).

The researchers then asked in what way political assignment of educational leaders affected their performance. He continued to state:

Since the nomination is based on political support, the government places incapable people in the management positions. Due to this, the assigned leaders or managers are working simply to keep their positions. They do not accept experts' recommendations on how to improve learning. Hence, such kind of assignment affects experts' morale, motivation, and commitment (MOEE-2).

Another expert also stated the political placement in such a way, "The provision of education management position is purely political. In the Ministry, all directorate positions (e.g., inspection directorate, teacher development directorate, and so forth) require political support" (MOEE-4). Moreover, he argued the influence of the placement practices in the following way:

I can say that it negatively affect our performances. Due to the nominated leaders' lack of expertise, they use their positions as a tool to keep people silent. However, the roles of managers are to facilitate working conditions and to maintain the morale of workers to realize the goals of education. Nevertheless, these roles were not realized (MOEE-4).

On the contrary, one of the experts from the same level agreed with the assignment of educational leaders based on their political support. He stated:

To achieve the objectives of the ruling party, the government assigns educational leaders it trusts. The belief is that people who do not support the existing government might not lead to achieving the aims of the government (MOEE-1).

Regional experts' responses

At this level, several respondents had negative attitudes toward the political assignment of leaders except one who had a positive attitude toward the assignment.

A respondent who believed that the selection of education management based on politics could contribute a lot to the expansion of the education system because those who were nominated could manage the education business. As a result, they improved student learning. He continued to argue that "Because of coordinated efforts of the government through its assigned managers, various students were promoted from the existing grade to the next grade level" (REBE-2).

Contrarily, others perceived the practice of educational leader assignment as overlooking the importance of competence and expertise. One of the experts from the region asserted:

The appointments of heads at the position of Regional Education Bureau and its directorates are based on political involvement. In our region, to be assigned to leadership positions, you must participate in politics and you must be from the Sidama ethnic group (REBE-1).

He further added that "as Ethiopia is following ethnic-based federalism, indigenous people who are residing where the region is situated takes advantage. Due to this, those people who came from other zones do not get top positions" (REBE-1). He continued that the current practice of assigning managers for political consumption affects all other experts' enthusiasm to contribute to their country.

Another participant argued the political placement of educational managers with disappointment. He stated:

I am not happy with what's going on in the assignment of educational directorates. While education management and related graduates are in the market, the politicians place a graduate of accounting to manage educational institutions. Furthermore, even though you have a first or second degree in educational management, no one assigns you unless you are from Sidama ethnic group (REBE-3).

He continued to state that such an ethnic-based assignment affected other experts to think negatively. They felt as they were worthless and could contribute nothing for their country because of not a member of Sidama ethnic. However, in general, the majority of respondents from the region feel that political assignment of educational leaders negatively affected their performances.

Zone experts' responses

The nomination of educational managers at the zonal education department level is also based on political affiliation. An expert from the zonal education departments contended:

I have been working as an expert in this organization since 2000. What I notice is that the provision of the department head position is based on political needs. Currently, our head is a graduate of engineering and the politicians assigned him to manage the education department (ZEDE-2).

One can contemplate that the participant's response towards political assignment seems negative. Based on the above feeling, the respondent was asked whether there was a problem with assigning engineering graduates to manage the education organization. He continued to state that:

Assigning inexpert individuals in educational management position not only ignored educational tasks but also overlooked human aspects in a given organization. The absence of this human factor leads to experts not working hard" (ZEDE-2).

One can infer that it is difficult to expect the effectiveness of such an assignment because those engineering graduates are better at enhancing construction and related issues that are different from managing the education process.

Moreover, another participant contended the existence of politically assigned leaders at all levels and the impact of such an assignment on their roles and responsibilities. He stated:

At any level, the top position is reserved for politically nominated people. The problem is those assigned people do not have the knowledge and skills to manage educational tasks. As a result, they simply work with little interest (ZEDE-1).

From the above excerpt, one can contemplate that experts were disappointed with their roles and responsibilities because their voices and interests were ignored. On the other hand, an expert believed that political assignment based on political awareness contributed to the effectiveness of the education system. He continued to argue that:

Before two decades, the number of schools, teachers, and students was very small compared to the current number of teachers and students. This is a great success because the government attempted to extend education to disadvantaged societies. Without a political assignment of educational management, it is difficult to achieve this (ZEDE-3).

The researchers followed up by asking if education quality could be maintained by opening up more schools. He added that:

As we are living in a poor country, we cannot expand a lot of schools and maintain their qualities at the same time. The government should work on access to education first and quality issues second. It takes time to improve the quality of education (ZEDE-3).

This participant was inferring that the provision of quality education was secondary. However, literature shows that education access and quality could go hand in hand. In general, at the zonal level, many experts had negative attitudes toward political assignments.

Woreda experts' responses

For experts at woreda level, the appointment of political leaders to education is debatable. One of the interviewees claimed that:

When a new political party comes to power, assigning those individuals who are politically nominated is not a new phenomenon. Such kind of assignment boosts the achievement of educational goals. In addition, it shows the government commitment and support to education.

On the other hand, many experts complained about the political placement of educational leaders and its negative effect on experts' motivation and interest. One participant noted:

It is unthinkable to be assigned as a woreda education office head unless the ruling party supports you. I know someone has a second degree in educational management and has long years of management experience but he did not obtain any position (WEOE-4).

From this, one can figure out that having long years of experience does not guarantee one to the head position. Sometimes, people may have a negative attitude toward those people who have competence and participation in politics. Anyway, the respondent contended the prevalence of the strong hands of politics.

For the same reason, one of the experts affirmed the prevalence of biased appointments. He claimed, "In our office, those people who have a close relationship with the political leaders have a position to manage the offices" (WEOE-1).

Another research participant explained the pressure of political affairs on quality management practices:

I do not want to be led by someone who is under-qualified and lacks expertise because it is difficult to communicate with this kind of person. He or she oppositely understands you. For instance, if you ask for something to be improved, he/she will think that you undermine his/her expertise (WEOE-6).

In general, at the woreda level, the majority of respondents were not happy with the trend of political assignment to educational positions.

Cross case analysis of political assignment of educational leaders

Experts at the Ministry, region, zone, and woreda education offices have held opposite positions. Some of the experts supported the existing trend of political assignment and others refuted the trend. Those who supported the trend argued that because of the political assignment of leaders, students' promotion rate increased and education expansion arose. Because of these, it was argued that the political placement of leadership positions contributed positively and supported the education system. On the other hand, those who refuted the current trends of political nomination

argued that the system was placing incapable individuals at all levels of educational management. For instance, agricultural, accounting, and engineering graduates were leading educational top positions. Therefore, it was said that the majority of leaders did not have the competency of leading educational organizations. They use their political power in the absence of workers' motivation and commitment to accomplish educational tasks. However, in summary, more respondents were having a negative attitude of the political assignments since it ignored their voices in the decision-making process.

One-to-Five Networks Implementation

One-to-five Networks is a kind of cooperative learning in Ethiopia that is composed of one high achiever, two medium-hard workers, and two low doers working together to improve their learning. Experts' responses to the One-to-Five Networks Implementation is presented by level of category in the following:

Ministry of Education experts' responses

To improve the quality of education, the government of Ethiopia introduced One-to-Five Networks as one of the intervention mechanisms (MoE & ESC, 2018). It is imperative to see the worth of these networks to enhance student academic achievement. One of the participants from the Ministry stated:

Currently, One-to-Five Networks are prevalent from the Ministry to students' levels. If it is an aspect of cooperative learning, it works only at the school and classroom levels. Because of 1-5 arrangements, rather than focusing on quality assurance, we were emphasizing on evaluating and reporting an individual's attitudes towards the existing politics every week (MOEE-3).

From the above citation, one can deduce that employees in the Ministry did not have an awareness of the importance of the Networks. It is odd to evaluate an individual's perception of the existing politics instead of focusing on learning. What matters most is the commitment and expertise to accomplish teaching-learning related tasks.

In like manner, another participant observed the power of One-to-Five Networks in his roles of work and he argued:

I think One-to-Five classifications affected our practices negatively.These One-to-Five Networks were assigned to control the action and movement of other people secretly. Hence, the employees were working by following directions so they would not be fired. (MOEE-1).

Contrarily, a participant endorsed the importance of One-to-Five arrangements. He argued that because of this categorization, experts acquired knowledge and skills to manage educational institutions. He continued to contend, "When experts from different departments come together and discuss their respective department's problems, we can draw lessons that can boost the performance of employees." (MOEE-2).

To sum up, at the Ministry level, the majority of respondents had negative attitudes towards the One-to-Five Networks implementation.

Region experts' responses

Respondents from the region level believed that the One-to-Five categorization certainly affected their daily practices. One of the experts claimed:

One-to-Five Network is a bottleneck for education quality management. Many times, I made plans to visit zones and schools but I did not apply my plans because of the evaluation of One-to-Five Networks. The politicians' emphasis is more on political marshaling within education institutions (REBE-3).

The above extract shows the political categorizations hampered the regular duties of supervising schools. Rather than emphasizing on improving schools and their personnel, the employees were wasting their time on evaluating one another.

Another interviewee argued the burden of this categorization on quality management practices. He claimed:

One-to-Five Networks affect quality management practices. Because of this program, every expert is expected to participate in the evaluation. Hence, it creates unnecessary workload on educational experts and contributes nothing to the achievement of educational goals. Such kind of practices affects the motivation of experts (REBE-2).

On the other hand, one expert from the region believed that One-to-Five Networks contributed a lot to educational effectiveness. Due to its application, level experts evaluate educational strategies and solutions to problems weekly. Regardless, the majority of the respondents at the regional level had a negative attitude towards the One-to-Five Networks classifications.

Zone experts' responses

One of the participants from the zones level commented on the One-to-Five Networks:

Surprisingly, when supervisors and inspectors come from the region, their first question asked is the extent to which zones arranged political networks. They force us to organize different political classification. If you do little about learning and you are only active in political arrangements, your zone will get incentives (ZEDE-3).

From what was claimed, the different groupings discouraged workers to emphasize on capacity enhancement. Because of this, experts at this level were not fully offering supports expected of them, resulting in negative impact on quality management practices.

Another participant remarked that the One-to-Five orderings negatively affected his practices. He could not attend the meeting of groupings because of school visitation. His supervisor then wrote him a warning letter not to miss this arrangement again. Since then, he did not care to supervise schools. He said he needed to keep his job (ZEDE-1).

On the contrary, a participant claimed that the arrangements positively contributed to work effectively at the level. Because of the implementation of classifications, they could identify underperforming experts and warn them to improve their practices. However, on the whole, the majority of respondents at this level had negative attitudes toward One-to-Five Networks.

Woreda experts' responses

Respondents from the woreda level were also discouraged with the high political control of education. One of the experts stated:

The office head encourages us to focus on 1-5 arrangements. Therefore, on Friday afternoon, no one gives a response to clients because we have been occupied with the troublesome evaluation of the implementation of 1-5 networks that do not add value to student learning (WEOE-5).

The domination of the One-to-Five Networks on quality management practices is obvious. The experts at woreda level were forced to discuss the issue. Similarly, another interviewee stated, “Zone encourages us to focus on 1-5 networks. If inspectors come from the region or zone, they will initially ask you about different political categorizations” (WEOE-1).

A cross-case analysis of One-to-Five Networks implementation

The participants from the different levels of educational management had positive and negative attitudes toward the One-to-Five Networks implementation. Those who support the implementation argued that they acquired knowledge and skill because different experts came together and discussed the issues of education. Moreover, the application helped them evaluate the effective strategies of education and offer solutions to the problems. Furthermore, they secured the chance of capacity building practices through these classifications.

On the other hand, those who refuted the One-to-Five categorizations questioned the importance of classification at Ministry, region, zone, and woreda levels. They argued that because of the high emphasis on these classifications, quality assurance issues were forgotten. As a result, it focused on evaluating individuals’ attitudes toward the existing ruling party while controlling the actions of experts secretly. Hence, they stated that such kind of networks affected their motivation and morale. In general, the majority of respondents at all levels had negative attitudes toward the One-to-Five classifications.

The Influences of the Mandate to Avoid Dropouts and Repeaters

The Ethiopian government’s introduction of the mandate to avoid dropouts and repeaters is intended to enhance internal efficiency of the education system.

Ministerial experts’ responses

One of the experts argued:

The mandate to avoid dropouts and repeaters comes from the top (political context). Then, the Ministry accepts it and turns it to the regions which in turn forward it to the zones. The zones will then give it to the woreda education offices. It will eventually be passed on to the teachers through the schools. Therefore, it is a kind of roll-down direction (MOEE-1).

One can easily figure out that the primary responsible person in avoiding dropouts and repeaters is the teacher. In the same way, another interviewee contended the supremacy of the directive and furthered his argument:

It is difficult to avoid dropouts and repeaters. First, some students and teachers are not interested in the teaching-learning process. They will drop the teaching and learning process. Second, the lack of inputs discourages student class attendance. Therefore, they may have to repeat the class (MOEE-4).

The above citation shows the difficulty of abolishing student dropouts and repetitions. It is obvious that when parents do not value education, they want their children to help them in

agricultural activities and household chores. In this case, it is troublesome to eradicate dropouts and repetitions.

However, another expert believed that the order contributed a lot in minimizing the trend of dropouts and repeaters. He argued that because of the mandate, experts at different levels work hard to minimize educational wastages. However, the majority of experts at this level considered it a political agenda.

Region experts' responses

Interviewees from the region verified that the direction regulated their quality management practices. One of the experts explained:

As an expert, the order to avoid dropouts and repeaters is directly connected to our performance appraisals. When the number of dropouts and repeaters increases, our performance appraisal results will go down. The directive seems to overlook other factors such as social perceptions toward education, student socioeconomic status, and the motivation and qualification of the teachers (REBE-2).

Indeed, experts from the region cannot change student socioeconomic status nor teacher motivation. It is difficult to practice the ordinance with such problems. On the other hand, one interviewee clarified the importance of the mandate as he claimed:

The government's ordinance is timely and crucial. Millions of children enroll each year. However, at the end of the academic year, about 30% of students either drop their schooling or repeat the existing grades. The mandate is put in place to minimize the extent of such an issue.

As a result of the mandate, the dropout and repetition rates have decreased. However, one would wonder what has been done to reduce the dropout and repetition rates. Are the students' academic grades manually adjusted to be higher? In general, the majority of respondents at this level assumed the mandate as a wrong command because preconditions were not met.

Zone experts' responses

The responses of the experts at this level also showed the mandate as a drawback. One of the experts said:

I made a report to zone-education department head about the existing numbers of failures and returns and he saw the report and compared it with the instruction he took and told me to modify the data in line with the zone's mandate. Because of my boss's command, I was forced to report what our zone did not accomplish (ZEDE-3).

As can be seen from the above excerpt, the directive obliged the heads and their subordinates to cook the data. For sure, such practices have an impact on quality management practices. The experts had to report false information under pressure.

Similarly, one of the participants argued, 'Educational stakeholders need to know the triggering factors for the mandate issues and take some measures to combat the problem. However, preconditions were forgotten' (ZEDE-1). The interviewee rightly argued that, before attempting any intervention mechanism, it is better to know the cause of the problem is without proper academic assessment.

Woreda experts' responses

An interviewee at the woreda level commented on the power of this mandate as follows:

The implementation of the mandate did not consider the actual situation of the woredas. As these areas are cash crop areas, various students leave their education to glean coffee. Because of this, students drop their education for two-three months. However, because of the fear of poor performance results, school principals allow them to continue their education (WEOE-1).

As can be seen from the above, students who failed to attend their classes for three months were allowed to continue their school with no makeup classes. For the same reason, one of the respondents contended the influence of the direction affected students' examination results. He stated:

Since schools are signed an agreement to eliminate internal inefficiency, they provide free marks just to obtain high-performance appraisals. Some other schools are working to enhance exam cheating in the National and Regional Examinations (WEOE-5).

Because of the difficulties of avoiding the inefficiency, the experts at different levels try to fool their supervisors by facilitating examination cheating and offering free marks to students. Such practices affect policy planners too.

On the contrary, an interviewee believed that the ordinance helped them minimize the dropout and repetition rates and, as a result, everyone worked hard to score high. He also claimed that the mandate helped avoid educational wastages. However, in general, the majority of respondents at this level refuted the mandate.

A cross-case analysis of the mandate to avoid dropout and repetition

The respondents who supported the ordinance stated that the mandate was timely and crucial. They worked hard to achieve high student performance and reduce the number of dropouts and repetitions.

Those who refuted stated that the mandate overlooked other factors such as student socioeconomic status, societal attitude towards education, motivation, and commitment of both teachers and students. The mandate, intentionally or unintentionally, encouraged false reports, allowed exam cheating, and provided free marks just to avoid repetitions and dropouts. In general, the majority of experts at all levels were not happy with the mandate.

DISCUSSIONS

In this study, it was found that the politicians assign educational managers without clearly set criteria. This finding resonates with the findings of Abebaw (2019), MoE and ESC (2018) and Tesfaye (2019). They found that the process of the assignment of educational managers was based on political affiliation. Our argument is that politics is inevitable. Politicians need to assign capable, experienced, motivated, and committed leaders to the different hierarchy of education. When inept people are assigned as educational leaders, they might apply their political power for their self-interest purposes by being part of the political machinery overlooking public interests.

Besides, this study found the existence of a negative attitude toward the establishment of the One-to-Five Networks on the part of the managers from the Ministry to woreda education

offices. This finding is consistent with those of Belilew (2015), MoE & ESC, (2018) and Yohannes, (2015). They claimed that these arrangements affected the motivation and commitment of experts. It is difficult to attain the goals of education by forgetting human power at different levels. On the other hand, cooperative learning has the idea of supporting one another. It is unusual to find a student who is doing well in all academic subjects. In this situation, cooperative learning could be very effective. Students can cooperatively work together to help one another to improve in their areas of weaknesses. However, in Ethiopia, the so-called one high achiever simply supports the rest of the four students who do not work. This high achiever is expected to do assignments, homework, and projects to share with the rest of the group members.

IMPLICATIONS TO EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Education experts starting from the Ministry of education to woreda education offices were not fulfilling their roles and responsibilities expected of them. They had the challenges of political interferences in the internal administration of education in the form of ordering to avoid internal inefficiency of education, different political arrangements, and assignment of political leaders to manage the education system. The finding of the study shed new light on the provision of autonomy to experts who will work with capable, experienced, and committed educators at all levels.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Though the existing Education and Training Policy states schools have the autonomy to manage their internal administration and organization, in practice, politics dominated the education system by nominating educational managers without clear criteria, forces the schools to establish different arrangements and to use ‘push-push’ approaches. Such practices affect teaching-learning processes and divert the goal of education. Thus, politics influenced the autonomy of educational institutions and their quality management practices. Therefore, the regional and national government need to revisit their practices on education and allow only the educators to manage their education business in terms of internal administration.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

1. How do political practices influence quality management in secondary education of Southern, Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region?
2. In what way does a political assignment of educational leaders affect quality management practices in secondary education?
3. What is the problem with giving a position to Sidama ethnic and why?
4. What is the effect of the One-to-Five Networks implementation on quality management practices?
5. What is the effect of the mandate to avoid dropouts and repetitions on quality management practices?