

# EXPERTS' PERCEPTION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION QUALITY MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN ETHIOPIA

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## ABSTRACT

*Following the intensification of secondary education in the developing world, the attention of Ethiopia has currently shifted to its quality education and its management. This study is aimed to explore experts' perceptions of quality management challenges in secondary education in Ethiopia. The researchers employed a case study design recruiting participating supervisors from the Ministry of Education, region, zone, wereda, and cluster by using a purposeful sampling technique. Twenty-six interviewees took part in this study. The researchers employed NVivo 8 versions together with a thematic analysis process to analyze the data. This study revealed that major problems that affected quality management practices in Ethiopia were: lack of qualified experts at all levels; lack of accountability in every echelon; the changing nature of teacher education; the ineffectiveness of teacher-licensing programs; and lack of educational budget and the problem of utilizing this limited budget. The study concluded that the experts at different levels were not genuinely fulfilling their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, together with the concerned parties, need to reconsider budget allocation for secondary education.*

## INTRODUCTION

Students' high academic achievement in international comparisons such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), regional comparisons such as the South African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), and the national examination are the result of coordinated efforts among the Ministry of Education, district education offices, and school-level management (Reddy, 2007). The roles and responsibilities of managers at different echelons are interrelated and complex (Scheerens, 2011). When one or more management levels do not work properly, it is unlikely to accomplish educational goals (Yukl, 2013). The attainment of these goals requires the support and commitment of top, middle, and lower-level leaders (Yukl, 2013).

Nowadays, scholars understand that a student's high academic achievement is not only the result of the activities performed at the school level but also the effective performance of experts at various levels (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The influences of the district level and above management are indirect to (Leithwood et al., 2008), have a moderate impact on (Water & Marzano, 2006), and have a statistically positive relationship with (Allen, 2017) student achievement. However, there is not enough evidence about effective leadership characteristics and skills on student achievement above the school level (Waters & Marzano, 2006). To achieve education goals, different management levels assume different roles and responsibilities to accomplish similar goals. For instance, planning policy and setting standards (Allen, 2017), creating a conducive working environment (Seashore-Louis, 2015), shaping schools' working culture (Hough, 2014), articulating the mission and setting direction (Allen, 2017), allocating and monitoring resources such as human, material, financial, and time (Anderson & Mundy, 2014), and building followers' autonomy (Waters & Marzano, 2006) are some of them.

Even though educational managers at different levels have tremendous effects on educational goals and students' academic achievement, the research at these levels is lacking (Allen, 2017; Anderson & Mundy, 2014; Hough, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Hence, in this study, the researchers aimed at exploring the educational experts' perceptions of challenges that hinder their practices at the ministry, region, zone, and district levels in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region of Ethiopia.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

To run the education business in Ethiopia, the educational administration structure follows the Federal Ministry of Education—Regional Education Bureau—Zonal Education Department—and the Wereda Education Office. The government intentionally created these levels to ensure the attainment of educational goals by supporting the lower levels in building managers' capacity and providing material resources. However, policy planners often have neglected the important functions of these levels. For instance, to change the country's existing education policy, the Education Road Map theme conducted a desktop review, a field survey, and international experience in Indonesia and Malaysia (Ministry of Education [MoE] & Education Strategic Center [ESC], 2018). The theme did not include experts from the Ministry of Education to Wereda (District) Education Office in their studies during the field survey. However, educational managers at different levels lack the managerial capacity to run the education business (MoE & ESC, 2018). When one of these levels (e.g., the Wereda education office) cannot accomplish the assigned roles and responsibilities, it is not easy to achieve its overall goals. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research on the issues that experts face challenges while carrying out their duties. It is a neglected area that desperately needs research. The researchers attempt to fill this information gap by examining whether the education system of Ethiopia equips practitioners with materials, facilities, and resources to motivate them to commit to education management at different levels. Hence, the quality management challenges the experts at different levels face at the secondary education level can be disclosed.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following four major research questions guided this study:

1. What challenges does the Ministry of Education's experts encounter in managing the quality of secondary education in Ethiopia?
2. What challenges do the Regional Education Bureau experts encounter in managing the quality of secondary education?
3. What challenges do the Zone Education Department experts encounter in managing the quality of secondary education?
4. What challenges do Wereda Education Office experts encounter in managing the quality of secondary education?

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study will provide pertinent information to policy planners about how the different levels of education managers face different challenges while performing their duties. The study will disclose to policymakers the importance of equipping experts at different levels with competence, materials, facilities, and resources to motivate them to achieve the educational goals effectively.

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

**Ministry of Education:** Ministry of Education is a federal ministry that governs the overall education system of the country.

**Regional Education Bureau:** In the Ethiopian educational management hierarchy, the regional education bureau mediates between the federal ministry and the zone education departments and manages the activities of the zones and Weredas education officers.

**Wereda Education Office:** It is equivalent to the district. It manages various schools.

**Zone Education Department:** In the Ethiopian managerial hierarchy, the zone education department mediates between the regional education bureau and Wereda education offices. It applies to most of the regions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptual Clarification of Quality

There is no single definition of quality that satisfies all stakeholders and researchers. There is some consensus on quality among some voluntary international organizations (Allam, 2018). The American Society of Quality defines quality as “a set of elements and features of a product or service related to the satisfaction of people’s needs.” However, because the satisfaction of these needs is a subjective issue, it varies between individuals “ (Brinia, 2008, p. 261). For Juran (2003), the term “quality” involves product features that satisfy the customer needs and the discharge of imperfections. Similarly, Deming (2000) defines quality in terms of customer satisfaction, which requires a change in organizational culture and requires a transformation via the system’s deep expertise. Differently, scholars such as Brinia (2008) and Zavlanos (2003) define quality as a response of the product to the client’s requirements.

Education quality is a broad and argumentative concept because the education system involves various education stakeholders with various conflicting interests, each attempting to define quality from their perspective (Cheng & Tam, 1997). For Bunyi (2013), students’ scores on the national examination and other learning assessment tests define education quality. From this perspective, when most students score highly on the national examination, one might confirm the high quality of education.

Alternatively, some scholars define education quality in terms of the availability of inputs and the proper interaction of these inputs to produce the planned outputs. Scholars such as Adams (1997) and Sifuna and Sawamura (2010) define quality in higher education from input, process, and output perspectives. This view focuses on the availability of well-trained teachers with adequate instructional tools to attain higher levels of student learning, which is crucial for the attainment of higher student learning (Brinia et al., 2020).

Another way to define educational quality is to look at how the education system affects individuals and society (Bunyi, 2013). The author further states that an education system with an excellent quality of education provides good moral attitudes and enables high lifetime earnings. In this view, an education system with an outstanding quality of education affects both individuals and society. Empirical investigations show that to maintain the high quality of education, considering the definitions of external and internal stakeholders is of utmost significance (Abidin, 2015). In this study, quality is defined as the type of education that provides knowledge, skills, and attitudes to every student, irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity, and race.

## **Quality Management in Education**

Scholars perceive quality management as “the aspect of the overall management function that determines and implements the quality policy” (the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) cited in Rath, 2010, p. 26). Hence, concepts, instruments, and techniques used in the field describe quality management (Vught, 1996). Quality management is a means to various ends, and these involve the quality of the teaching-learning process, the curriculum, students’ evaluation, learning materials, and teacher development that enhance learning institutions’ capacity to be more accountable and transparent in increasing students’ learning (Vught, 1996). Similarly, Harvey and Green (1993, p. 19) define the term as “... ensuring that there are mechanisms, procedures, and processes in place to ensure that the desired quality, however, defined and measured, is delivered.” In this study, quality management is the process of continuous monitoring of educational institutions to determine whether they perform in line with educational policy and standards.

## **Education Quality Management Challenges**

### **A shortage of education finance**

African governments’ education financing is not enough because of the poor capacity of various countries in the region to increase taxes to enhance economic and social investment (Languille, 2019; Mamadova et al., 2019; Mbiti, 2016). Most countries must depend on international aid to finance their education systems (Albert-Eneas, 2008; Psacharopoulos et al., 2017). However, since 2010, aggregate aid to education has fallen by 10% (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2015). Besides, ineffective management, poor planning, ineffective evaluation, and lack of incentives entangle the region’s education system (Albert-Eneas, 2008). For lack of capacity in the Ministry of Education, aid-providing agencies controlled the planning position, the process of negotiation, and the drafting and designing of the program (Albert-Eneas, 2008).

African education spending increased to 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the Caribbean, South Asia, and Latin America each spent 5% of GDP (Mbiti, 2016). Educational spending in terms of education level: primary education consumes 33% of the education budget, while secondary education spends 35% of all education expenditures worldwide (World Bank, 2013). The average secondary education expenditure in Sub-Saharan Africa is 28% (UNESCO, 2015). In Ethiopia, the secondary education budget has not exceeded 10% since 2003 (MoE & ESC, 2018; World Bank, 2013). Hence, roughly 20% of secondary education is switching to tertiary education in Ethiopia.

### **Lack of managerial capacity**

Education management functions such as planning, organizing, coordinating, commanding, controlling, and budgeting require knowledge and skills. Organizations cannot attain educational goals when experts cannot set policies, develop implementation strategies, monitor, and evaluate education (Ahmed & Omar, 2019; MoE & ESC, 2018). In Ethiopia, the limited managerial capacity of the Federal Ministry of Education, the Region Education Bureau, the Zone Education Department, the Wereda Education Office, and the school levels affect the education system (MoE & ESC, 2018). For instance, the experts at the ministry level are deficient in managing human resources, have poor linkages in both vertical and horizontal communication, and lack skills in arranging for knowledge sharing (MoE, 2015). The same document also shows that regions lack broad skills to prepare strategic plans, are short on budget analysis skills, have inadequate skills in projecting and planning strategic alternatives. The education system fills key positions in management ladders with selection and appointment without merit (MoE & ESC, 2018).

## **Lack of accountability**

Accountability is the way of holding people, such as educational experts, school leaders, and managers, and school teachers, accountable for their accomplishments in their roles and responsibilities, financial utilization, or learning outcomes (Asian Development Bank, 2015). To Verspoor and Bregman (2008), accountability denotes “holding providers of education services answerable to hierarchical supervisors, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders regarding the process and outcomes of a program” (p. 187). However, educational management’s roles and responsibilities among the ministry, region, zone, Wereda, and schools in Ethiopia require precision. Although the education and training policy, high school standards, and general education inspection framework underline the importance of accountability across all levels of education management, no single liable individual is prevalent at all governance levels (MoE & ESC, 2018).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

The study used a case study design to explore experts’ perceptions at different management levels about quality management challenges. This design offers an opportunity to examine one issue (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), discover comprehensively (Cohen et al., 2000), and “explore processes, activities, and events in detail...” (Creswell, 2009, p. 208).

### **Participants**

Four experts at the Federal Ministry of Education level, each from the inspection directorate, teacher education directorate, school improvement directorate, and teacher and leader licensing directorate, were selected by asking the directorates to allocate the well-experienced and committed experts in their respective directorates. Hence, we recruited one expert from each directorate using purposeful sampling. Using a similar method, the study recruited 3 experts from each general education inspection directorate, general education supervision, institutional capacity assurance directorate, and secondary school improvement program directorate from a region.

Concerning zone selection, since the region has 14 zones and five special weredas, the researchers clustered the zones and weredas into Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern, and Central clusters based on their geographical proximities. A simple random sampling technique selected the western cluster, composed of the Sheka, Kafa, and Bench-Maji zones. Using a purposive sampling technique, the researchers selected three-zone experts from general education supervision and institutional capacity assurance directorates.

The researchers selected six experts from Masha, Andracha, Sheko, Decha, Gimbo, and Chena Wereda education offices through purposeful sampling techniques. Besides, the researchers selected two experts from Mizan-Aman and Bong Town Administrations by using a purposeful sampling technique. Finally, the study incorporated eight secondary school cluster supervisors from each Wereda education office and town administration education office with a purposeful sampling technique. Overall, 4 experts from the ministry, 3 experts from the regional education bureau, 3 experts from zones, 8 experts from woreda education offices and town administration education offices, and 8 cluster supervisors were selected, totaling 26 research participants in this study.

### **Instrumentation**

A semi-structured interview was the principal instrument in this study. The researchers developed the interview instrument and invited five relevant experts from the field to evaluate the content

validity of the instrument. The experts provided comments on how to improve the statements and word choices, and the researchers improved the instrument as per the experts' comments. The researchers applied the instrument to get information about quality management challenges from the ministry, region, zone, wereda, and cluster supervisor experts. This interview method helped the researchers to witness gestures and non-verbal communications. All nonverbal behaviors—one's gestures, posture, tone of voice, and amount of eye contact—send powerful messages. They may either put people at ease, develop trust, and attract others to you, or they can offend, confuse, and detract from what you are attempting to communicate (Newman, 2007).

To ease the interview process, the researchers used the Amharic language (the working language of Ethiopia) because participants could more easily communicate with the researchers in Amharic than in English. The participants were interviewed at their offices. The interview process took 50 minutes on average. After defining the objectives of recording and obtaining the participants' permission, the researchers recorded the participants' responses. The recording of the data helped the researchers from losing information. The researchers transcribed the recorded responses in Amharic in hard copy and gave a copy to experts at the ministry and regions for a "member check." The researchers had to wait for ten days for their confirmation. Finally, they agreed with the transcriptions.

### **Data analysis**

The researchers used the NVivo 8 version for data analysis. The six steps analysis technique suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. It starts with data familiarization and ends with the write-up processes. First, two English-language experts were asked to translate the transcribed Amharic hard copy of the data into the English language. The researchers ended up receiving 150 pages of English transcriptions. Second, the transcriptions were entered into the NVivo software. A total of 370 codes were derived. Third, the researchers attempted to develop themes after rereading and listening to the transcriptions, and 10 themes were detected. Fourth, themes and sub-themes emerged. Besides, other themes with similar ideas also emerged. In stage five, the process involves identifying each theme's nature, identifying the overall essence of themes, and determining what part of the data each theme is captured. As per Braun and Clarke (2006), at this phase, diverse themes are investigated to discover the story that each informs and is called a further refining stage. During refining, the researchers examined how each theme was suited to the study's overall objectives and how the data explained the research questions. The refinement process was designed to minimize too many overlaps between themes. As a result, five major themes were found: lack of qualified experts at all levels, lack of accountability, frequent change in teacher education, teacher licensing programs' ineffectiveness, and lack of educational budget. Finally, direct quotations of the participants were selected to support the themes.

## **RESULTS**

The study found major problems that affected the quality of management practices at different echelons of education: a lack of qualified experts, a lack of accountability, frequent changes in teacher education, teacher licensing programs' ineffectiveness, and a lack of educational budget at all levels. These problems are presented in the following sections.

### **Lack of Qualified Experts**

To achieve the goals of education, it is necessary to place the right man in the right position. Every position requires not only qualified but also motivated and committed individuals. Shortages of qualified personnel were reported by one professional from the Ministry:

Let alone at the lower level of education (zone or wereda), the Ministry lacks data analysis experts. Currently, it is hard to find graduates who have strong statistical backgrounds. Hence, to fill this position, the organization has been recruiting mathematics graduates (Ministerial expert 2).

The lack of statistician experts at the ministry level might be because the salary at the ministerial level is lower than in other sectors. When the ministry lacks statisticians, it is difficult to find the same experts at other levels. Consistently, another interviewee from the same level also affirms the lack of experts. He explains,

In every department, there is a lack of qualified experts. Our immediate supervisors command us to accomplish tasks irrelevant to our qualifications. Because of the improper assignment, we ask him/her to change the assignments, but he/she replies to us that we are better than those assigned to the positions (Ministerial expert 4).

It is clear that there is a deficiency of qualified experts at the ministry level. Experts at this level are expected to have a higher level of expertise and experience than university staff because they develop rules and guidelines that govern the universities' practices. One expert from the Ministry reasons for the cause of personnel shortage:

When compared to other sectors' positions, the allocated salary is low for the positions. Even within the same organization, an inspector's salary at the regional and zonal levels is lower than the salary of principals and supervisors at the school level. Because of this, experienced experts do not want to join the Ministry (Ministerial expert 2).

The low salary scale might affect the inspectors' performance, morale, motivation, and commitment. The responses of regional experts also echoed a high turnover of the experts. As an expert from the region argues, "Because of the high turnover of the inspectors, it forces us to inspect various schools that are difficult to manage" (Regional expert 1). In a similar vein, another expert from the same level claims that experts have quit their careers to get another job with a good salary and fringe benefits.

The shortage of qualified experts at a zonal level is also evident. A participant from the zone education department explains:

There is a shortage of experts at each level (Wereda, cluster, and school) because the salary in education is lower than in other sectors such as finance, law, health, and so forth. As a result, experienced education experts quit their careers to search for well-paid salaries (Zonal expert 3).

The problem is also similar at the wereda level. Because of the shortage of qualified experts, a single individual often assumes the work of two people. As claimed by one of the wereda education officers, "I am working two positions at the same time—I am an exam administration expert, and concurrently, I am a general education supervision and institutional capacity assurance expert because of the shortage of qualified experts" (Wereda expert 4).

Another wereda interviewee also complains, "During supervision training in the region, the trainers told us that a cluster supervisor has to supervise 3-5 secondary schools, but because of the lack of qualified cluster supervisors, we were forced to supervise up to 9 secondary schools" (Wereda expert 1).

Evidence of a shortage of qualified experts from the ministry to the cluster level is clear. When the ministry lacks qualified experts, the achievement of educational goals seems impractical. Experts at the ministry level design policies, strategies, standards, manuals, guidelines, and procedures that the lower level must govern. This situation leads the Ministry to use unqualified experts to design rules, regulations, and standards that govern the practices of education at different levels. In this sense, implementing those rules and standards is questionable.

### **Lack of Accountability**

When well-qualified workers exert their effort with accountability and ownership, they will produce better results. Concerning this, one interviewee from the Ministry contends:

The accountability problem is a serious issue nowadays. For example, some regions report the wrong information to us. Some of them add the numbers of students to get more block grants and school grants since the MoE pays these grants based on the number of students a particular school has (Ministerial expert 3).

It indicates that some regions are reporting false information to the Ministry to optimize the shortage of budgets in their authority. Whatever the case is, reporting wrong information is wrong. Another informant also states, “Some regions are reluctant to send reports on time, and even some reports lack quality” (Ministerial expert 4).

Confirming the above, another authority from the regional level shows:

Some zones do not send their educational accomplishment reports on time, and even their reports lack clarity and trustworthiness. Thus, we send such reports back to the zone education department to get genuine information (Regional expert 3).

We can realize that some zones were sending inaccurate information to the regions. Such practices have strong implications for quality management. Likewise, ZED and WEO office experts agree with the lack of accountabilities of experts. For instance, one of the zone education department experts argues, “Some supervisors go to the school level to give support to the school and come back with an exaggerated report. For example, while schools’ accomplishments are low, they report them as highly accomplished schools” (Zonal expert 2).

Lack of accountability is also shown as follows: “To provide a teacher licensing exam, the directorate intended to prepare the exam as per the specification given to those exam experts, but they picked up contents from the same area to secure their convenience” (Ministerial expert 1). Exam experts were not serving as per their professional code of conduct. This might be because they were busy with their second job to make more money.

Similarly, one respondent from the region also accuses staff at the lower levels of a lack of accountability. For instance, he contends, “Inspectors provide comments, but school principals do not incorporate the comments into the school plans” (Regional expert 1).

In the wereda education office and town-administration education office, the accountability problem is also prevalent. One of the wereda education office experts argues:

Supervisors and inspectors give direction to schools on improving students’ achievement, but some principals and cluster supervisors do not incorporate the



comments and make the same mistakes repeatedly. They lack motivation and commitment to accomplish their tasks (Wereda expert 5).

This is a verification that staff at lower levels do not follow the supervisors' orders because of a lack of motivation and commitment.

Differently, cluster supervisors blame their immediate supervisors for not correctly doing their jobs. One of the cluster supervisors informs us, "Teachers get career development in two-year intervals. However, once teachers are promoted to the next career, the higher officials force them to wait two to three years without obtaining benefits "(Cluster supervisor 3). The prolonged payment pattern might be due to a shortage of budget and/or zone and wereda finances withholding education finance.

### **The Frequent Change of Teacher Education**

The way teacher education prepares teachers to teach students can affect students' growth. When education quality gets a high priority, the intention to change teachers' education modalities also rises. It is better to read the responses of the experts about the changes in preparing educators. One interviewee from the ministry claims:

Intentionally or unintentionally, teacher-training modalities have been changing from time to time. Because of this, it confuses even the experts from the Ministry. When there is a change, we expect the experts to take training on how to apply the new program, but this did not happen (Ministerial expert 4).

When change agents do not follow up with training to achieve the new intention, there may be invisible hands (politics) that regulate the changes (Aklilu et al. (2021).

Similarly, one expert argues that the training of educators has a serious problem. He continues, "Apart from the frequent change of teacher education modalities, those students who have no chance to attend other professions are entering the teaching profession. That means students with low academic achievement are entering the profession "(Ministerial expert 2). This respondent tries to show the competency of teacher candidates. Incompetent candidates were entering the workforce and earning degrees from colleges and universities. Similarly, another informant from the same level explains:

Teacher education in Ethiopia is a kind of trying-out place. The commonalities of teacher education modalities (Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) and Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT)) are that they are neither based on need assessment nor do they adjust to the socioeconomic, cultural, or infrastructural issues of the country. It is a kind of copying and pasting as it is (Ministerial expert 3).

From the above, one can figure out that the changing agent borrowed both the TESO and PGDT programs from somewhere without adjusting them, and the political authorities ordered the lower levels to implement them. In this sense, political intentions drive changes.

The key informants' views on the REB, ZED, WEO, and TAEO all agree with the changing nature of teacher education modalities. One interviewee from the region mentioned:

A very challenging thing I noticed is that teacher education is a kind of tasting borrowed experiences without adapting them. For example, some years back, the MoE launched a TESO program, major/minor programs, and 3 major programs,

and all of them failed to continue, and currently, the Ministry runs a program such as PGDT (Regional expert 3).

Similarly, one expert from the zone education department states, “In Ethiopia, teacher education is unstable. I do not know what encourages these frequent changes. Before changing the existing modality, one has to think about its practicality “(Zonal expert 1).

One of the weredas education officers also explains it in this fashion:

Because of the changes in teacher education modalities, the current PGDT modality compromises the policy statement on teacher qualification. The existing Education and Training Policy (ETP) states that every teacher at any level should qualify (including pedagogical courses) before he/she takes the teaching position, but currently, teachers have been teaching students without taking pedagogy courses. This might have contributed to poor education quality (Wereda expert 6).

As a result, teacher education is in constant change. Before proposing a change of the current system, it is important to evaluate the impact or the result of the existing teacher education. An effectively implemented educational policy in other countries might not apply in Ethiopia’s context because of the difference in culture, educational objectives, and priorities. This constant changing of teacher education modalities has negative effects on managing the quality of secondary education.

### **Ineffectiveness of the Teacher Licensing Program**

The existing teacher-license program seems to have problems in its implementation. Experts from the Ministry and regional education bureau argue about its practicality. One interviewee from the ministry claims:

The practices of the teacher-licensing program contribute to the students’ academic achievement. However, because of the absence of any connected incentives (except certificates), about half of the primary and secondary school teachers participated in the licensing program involuntarily. For me, the licensing program could have some salary increments (Ministerial expert 2).

Another Ministry expert also says, “Offering a teaching license seems like a delightful idea, but it requires a kind of reward. Why do other teachers voluntarily participate in the program when the MoE only gives teachers a license certificate with no salary increment? “ (Ministerial expert 3).

Since the licensing exam provision was voluntary, almost half of the primary and secondary school teachers did not take part in the program for lack of monetary rewards connected to the exam. In contrast, one expert from the Ministry states that teachers perceive it as a political agenda. He argues, “Most of the teachers believe that the teacher licensure program is a purely political agenda because of the lack of awareness creation about the program” (Ministerial expert 1). The same expert continues to argue, “There is also a problem of providing teacher licensing certificates to those teachers who scored in line with the cut point (70%) of the exam because of teachers’ high turnover. Hence, it is difficult to get their photos and give them a licensing certificate “(ibid). He continues his argument in the following way: “It is illogical to take teachers’ photos before knowing who passed the exam. Besides, it is difficult to manage about three hundred thousand teachers’ photos” (ibid). These reasons were not convincing because there was no problem with taking anyone’s photo while registering for the examination and the computer can manage more photos than mentioned above.

One expert from the region complains that the provision of a licensing exam is a wastage of resources due to the lack of any measure that follows up on not passing the examination. He explains, “Are we

ready to offer teacher licensing programs to teachers? Can the ministry dismiss most of the teachers? If nothing is happening because of the examination, the Ministry has been wasting resources offering the examination “ (Reginal expert 1). In support of the above, another informant from the same level contends:

In Ethiopia, I doubt the program’s effectiveness because of the PGDT program implementation, i.e., teachers have been entering the profession with no pedagogical knowledge. When the examiners include pedagogy aspects in the examination, PGDT teachers are disadvantageous (Regional expert 2).

He continues to claim the problem of teacher licensing implementation:

The teacher-licensing program incorporates 20 percent of the teachers’ portfolios, and principals manage them. However, most school principals have no awareness of or knowledge about managing teachers’ portfolios. Because of such problems, it is difficult to measure the capacity of teachers (ibid).

From this, one can understand that the principals’ practices of managing and organizing teachers’ portfolios can affect teachers’ licensing results. Without giving awareness to principals on managing portfolios, rushing to order them to manage might lead to producing the wrong information on teachers’ working history.

The researchers asked experts from the zones, weredas, and town administrations about the practicality of the teacher-licensing program. One of the zone education department’s offices experts argues, “Currently, principals are not able to manage teachers’ portfolios in their respective schools. The absence of any obligation to take teacher-licensing examinations and the attached non-monetary incentives makes the program unsuccessful “ (Zonal expert 3). Experts from the weredas have a similar understanding of teacher-license programs.

### **Lack of An Educational Budget**

Although the availability of an education budget by itself does not guarantee quality education, it is still a crucial resource that manipulates the rest of the resources (human, physical, and material). One can see the budget issues from two angles. First, the adequacy of education finance to run the education system. The second is the period of this limited budget distribution. One expert from the Ministry contends:

After inspecting sample schools throughout the country, we found problems that short-term training could fix. However, there is a shortage of budgets to offer training. As a result, we might offer training once every two or three years (Ministerial expert 2).

From this, one can infer that there was a shortage of funds to offer training services.

Likewise, another expert from the same level claims:

Because the teacher-licensing program is new, and the issue related to managing, organizing, and controlling teachers’ portfolios would have been supported by training. However, it is not easy to provide training for principals because of the shortage of budgets (Ministerial expert 1).

Similarly, one expert from the region argues, “As per the supervision manual, one supervisor could have supervised 32 schools within a year, but because of the shortage of budgets, we offer support to 14 schools only” (Regional expert 2). He also complains, “We do not have a vehicle. We often use public transportation” (ibid).

At the zone level, budget shortages are prevalent. One expert from the zone education department claims:

There is a severe shortage of budgets for supervisors at the zonal level. The supervision manual states that a supervisor at the zonal level should offer continuous support to schools. However, because of the shortage in the budget, we sometimes support schools (Zonal expert 2).

Correspondingly, another expert from the same level explains that zone finance does not release the already assigned education budget on time apart from budget limitations. Supporting this, one expert from the zone education department articulates, “A budget limitation is common in our zone. Even the wereda finance department did not release this limited budget on time. Zone and wereda finances occasionally postpone budget disbursements until May “ (Zonal expert 3). The same respondent states that because of the shortage of budget, secondary school cluster supervisors have no budget to buy stationery materials and pay for transportation expenses.

Coming to WEO and TAE0, experts remark on the taxing system. They are particularly adamant that a 15% tax hurts the already meager education budget. One expert from the wereda education office explains, “When schools buy any educational materials (pens, pencils, exercise books), they have to pay a 15 percent tax. However, 15% of the budget can go a long way toward helping schools”(Wereda expert 6).

Likewise, one expert from the wereda education office claims, “In our wereda, there is a lack of finance to train supervisors, principals, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and Kebele (the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia and like a ward, a neighborhood, or a localized and delimited group of people (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kebele>)) Education and Training Boards (KETB). For no obvious reasons, the disbursement of the budget withholds up to April/May “(Wereda expert 1). He continues that withholding the education budget limits the capacity of the organizations to achieve their plans. Because of such a delay, public money is unlikely to be used to purchase unplanned materials such as soap and softeners. Most of the time, authorities at different levels offer training to lower levels in June to take advantage of the unused education budget. When an organization returns its budget to the National Treasury, the Ethiopian trend shows that the Ministry of Finance will reduce the next year’s budget. Likewise, one expert from the town administration education office is also in agreement with the above excerpts. He asserts:

The taxation system in education exacerbates the shortage of budgets in education. Of the recurrent education budget, 90 percent of the budget goes to teachers’ salaries. Educational managers use the remaining 10% of the budget to purchase educational materials. Again, out of this 10 percent of the education budget, the taxing system takes 15 percent (Town administration expert1).

From this, one can contemplate that schools were suffering from a budget shortage, given the delay in this limited budget and tax system. The responses of cluster supervisors are also like experts’ responses at other levels. For instance, one expert from secondary school cluster supervisors’ claims, “There is no budget for cluster supervisors, but we have to supervise 7-8 secondary schools. Because of the absence of budgets for cluster supervisors, there are no transportation costs, no stationery materials, and no per diem; we even have no offices”(Cluster supervisor 2).

Similarly, another cluster supervisor from another wereda asserts, “There is a budget shortage in our wereda. The Wereda finances do not release even the allocated block grant and school grant on time. For example, for years, the Sheko Wereda Education Office did not release block grants because of

a shortage of budgets at the office level “(Cluster supervisor 3). Scholars such as Ibrahim, Arshad, & Salleh (2017) and Sfakianaki (2019) argue that the availability of educational resources, including education budgets, enhances quality education and its management.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

This study found a lack of qualified experts at all levels because the attached salaries in the MoE are inferior to those in other sectors. This finding resonates with Aklilu et al.’s (2021) findings. They found that the politics of the country affected the quality of education management by nominating inept educational managers at every position. Thus, those experts who have a high caliber do not want to enter the education profession, and those in the sector, plan to quit the job. This implies that inept people who lack motivation and commitment manage the education sector. However, they want highly paid jobs. Because of this, they did not act as change agents for students’ development.

As the study shows, one of the serious problems was a shortage of funds for education. As stated in the literature, Ethiopia has been switching about 20% of the secondary education budget to tertiary education. Concerning the shortage of finance, this study resonates with the World Bank’s findings (2013) and the MoE and ESC (2018). They found out that since 2003, the secondary education budget has not exceeded 10% of the total country’s budget. The government has no educational reason to allocate 50% of the education budget to higher education institutions, which enroll about 2% of the overall students. Even this limited budget often runs into withholding problems. This withholding of the budget causes wastage of scarce resources by purchasing unplanned materials to maintain a high budget for the next year. Besides, the country currently holds a 15% tax on all education expenses. In this budget shortage, it is not easy to expect every manager to operate his/her organization effectively.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, participants revealed a lack of accountability both from top-down and bottom-up approaches. For example, in the study, the top experts blamed the lower-level managers for not accepting their orders and reporting false information to their supervisors. Conversely, the lower-level experts were accusing their supervisors of a lack of transparency on promotion-related issues and budget withholding matters. Therefore, a lack of accountability greatly affected the management of secondary education quality.

As indicated in the literature and participants’ responses, the education budget is a serious bottleneck for the management of secondary quality management for compelling reasons: First, the government switched about 20% of the secondary education budget to higher education. Second, the zone and wereda finance officers withheld this meager budget and forced schools and organizations to buy unplanned materials because when organizations return the remaining budget to the national treasury, those organizations’ budgets will be lower for the coming year. Therefore, this meager budget was spent on unplanned materials because of the fear of budget reduction.

As revealed in this study, the shortage of qualified experts at all levels, teacher licensure programs’ ineffectiveness, frequent changes in teacher education, lack of accountability at all levels, and shortage of education finances were serious problems that affected the management of secondary education quality in Ethiopia. Therefore, the experts at different levels were not accomplishing their assigned roles and responsibilities as expected of them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of higher education institutions could be based on the effectiveness of primary and secondary education. However, the current trend shows that about 50% of the education budget goes to higher education institutions. The government has no good educational reason to allocate 50% of the budget to 2% of the overall students. Therefore, together with the concerned body, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development needs to reconsider budget allocation for secondary education.

The Ethiopian path to becoming a middle-income country could be supported by an efficient and effective education system that equips knowledge, skills, and attitudes for every student, irrespective of gender, race, and religion. This requires proactive thinking and having well-qualified experts working together with highly motivated, committed, and accountable individuals at every level. In the absence of qualified, motivated, committed, and accountable experts, the investment in education is meaningless. Therefore, the Ministry of Education needs to reconsider the staffing of management at different levels.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide

1. What challenges does the Ministry of Education, regional education bureau, zone education department, wereda education office, and cluster supervisors encounter in managing the quality of secondary education in Ethiopia?
2. What factors contribute to the shortage of experts at the ministry level?
3. What causes frequent changes in teacher education?
4. If there is no punishment based on the failure of a licensure exam, what is the importance of the examination?
5. Why do zones and wereda finance withhold education budgets?
6. Why do organizations buy unplanned materials for their organizations?