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DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF EAST SHEWA ZONE: POLICY, PRACTICES, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

The principal objective of this study was to explore distributed leadership in government secondary schools of the East Shewa Zone. A pragmatic worldview guided the study with qualitative approach. Population of the study includes secondary schools working in East Shewa Zone. 7 secondary schools were chosen as a sample using purposive sampling technique. Sample respondents include: 7 principals, 5 Woreda Education Office heads, 2 City Education Office heads, and 1 official each from the REB and the MoE, all of whom were purposively chosen and included in the sample. Data gathering tools include interviews and documents. Data analysis follows a qualitative approach where inductive analysis under which categories, themes, and patterns are obtained from the data. Study results indicated that the opportunities and enabling conditions provided medium to high support for the secondary schools; the secondary schools under study were found working under many challenges. To alleviate the problems, recommendations provided: secondary school principals to provide teachers with benefits; Woreda and City Education Offices to revisit their selection and placement of principals; the Regional Education Bureau revisits its budget allocation; and the Ministry works to include curriculum for fields of study that require special attention in higher learning institutions.

KEYWORDS: distributed leadership, principals, leadership practices, education policy, and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The results of studies conducted on leadership for a long time revealed that while leadership has been a topic of interest since the origin of humankind, leadership studies were taken seriously from the early 20th century onwards (Coggins, 2011). As such, the study of leadership, which began with the Great Man and

Trait theories, reached distributed leadership theory in the 21st century. Based on their areas of concern, theories of leadership are categorized into two: while the earlier theories of leadership focus on the character and personality of successful leaders, the recent theories concentrate on what leaders do (Hiebert&Klatt, 2001).

Distributed leadership has emerged as a result of the research works that different authorities (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003; and Spillane, Harris, Jones, & Mertz, 2015) have been through to search for a solution to the challenges that organizations face while practicing other theories of leadership (Gronn, 2002). As such, staying mentioned in those earlier leadership theories in different forms, distributed leadership theory came to being independent, originating in the field of organizational theory in the mid-1960s (Williams, 2011). Later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it gained more emphasis as organizational development reached the level at which it requires sharing leadership practices among organizational constituents. As a result, the value given to leadership has grown in almost all sectors, and education has no exception (Harris, 2004).

Since its emergence, scholars had defined distributed leadership differently before it came to take its current form (Bolden, 2011). These include shared, collective, collaborative, co-leadership, inclusive, and emergent leadership. In these definitions, it is familiar to all that leadership is not the responsibility of a single individual and requires a more collective and systemic understanding of leadership as a social process.

Like other leadership theories, distributed leadership has also been questioned for the complexities that it brings to organizations. In this regard, while practicing distributed leadership, schools may face considerable challenges related to internal conditions like distance, culture, and structure (Harris, 2008). In addition, a school could also come across three fundamental barriers while implementing distributed leadership: teachers may develop a fear of lacking acceptance from their colleagues; time concern, as teachers add leadership activities onto their already total teaching workloads; and principals may become reluctant to devolve their authority and power to teacher leaders (Grenda&Hackmann, 2014; Miller, n.d.; Tahir et al., 2016).

Therefore, to combat the challenges it entails and implement distributed leadership in schools, three variables need consideration: interdependency, accountability, and interaction (Harris, 2003). These variables are assumed to be mutually established for leaders and followers. For instance, with regards to accountability, if the role of school principals requires that they hold teachers accountable for the outcomes, this role also charges the principals with a responsibility to ensure that their teachers can do what they are required to do (Barker, 2016). From an institutional perspective, organizational complexity

is critical to general education and schools. School complexity is intertwined with many variables: a large number of students and teachers that a school principal is expected to deal with; upward and horizontal task relationships; systemic thinking, which assumes the interaction and interrelationship of the school community; and policy directives that propose decentralization and community participation in leading schools (Da'as, Schechter, & Qadach, 2020).

In this regard, when indicating solution that helps school leaders to cope with school situations, distributed leadership theory advocates that schools have to decentralize their leadership and create a possibility for a collective form of leadership (Liljenberg, 2015) since, in a school where distributed leadership is practiced, its leadership is assumed to be accomplished through the interactions of multiple leaders (Moos et al., 2005).

So far, through the efforts made to study and define distributed leadership, authorities have come up with different forms. For instance, Spillane (2005) defines distributed leadership with three dimensions: the leader, followers, and their situation. Likewise, Gronn (2002) defines distributed leadership by four dimensions: teaching-learning, school culture, collaboration, and motivation of those within the organization. Further, Davis (2009) defines distributed leadership with a seven-dimensional model: school organization, school vision, school culture, instructional program, artifacts, teacher leadership, and principal leadership, and this implies that distributed leadership has been defined inconsistently. To this end, this study was designed to explore stakeholders' perceptions towards policy provision on practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone.

Statement of the Problem

Following the current complexity of schools and the demand it places on principals, the idea that school principals can independently lead schools to effectiveness is questionable (Spillane, 2005). In search of a solution to this problem, distributed leadership is becoming a preferred school leadership model in the 21st century (Baiza, 2011; Harris, 2008; Moos, Krejsler, Kofod, & Jensen, 2005; Spillane & Diamond, 2007; and Silins & Mulford, 2004). In schools, distributed leadership is preferred with the assumption that it assists school principals in at least three ways: making a school a community where the interaction and interrelationship of all members are realized, enhancing effective teaching-learning in the classroom, and improving students' outcomes.

With the emergence and development of distributed leadership, school principals' attention is shifting from the former one-person leadership to shared leadership, where school leadership is defined as a function of the interaction between and among the principal, followers, and their situation (Asrat, 2017), and this, in turn, necessitates two conditions to be fulfilled. First, leadership must be distributed to those with the

knowledge required to carry out leadership tasks. Second, leadership distribution needs to be planned (Leithwood et al., 2007), which assumes that distributed leadership could play a critical role in school goal achievement by ensuring teaching-learning quality in the classroom' (Chen, 2007).

To this end, distributed leadership theory framed this study and informed the practice problem: how do policy provisions influence school practices so that all students learn and school effectiveness is realized. More specifically, distributed cognition frames the study. Distributed cognition is applied in systems design and implementation in specific work environments, such as a secondary school (Sutton, 2006).

Concerning the practice of distributed leadership, the experience of different countries is almost similar. For instance, in Sweden, the government started giving value for it since the half of the 1970s, making it part of state reforms. As a result, teacher teams with a cross-disciplinary structure are an institutionalized practice in most Swedish schools (Liljenberg, 2015). Similarly, in Ireland, the implementation of distributed leadership has legal ground in schools following policy documents that advocate a 'whole school approach,' which refers to the involvement of all members of staff, parents, board of management, and partners in school management activities with the intention to make a school effective (Humphreys, 2010). Like Sweden and Ireland, the implementation of distributed leadership in schools has legal provisions in Botswana. This is realized following the decision that the Ministry of Education and Skills Development of the country made encourages schools to establish cluster school management teams, Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs), and Student Representative Councils (Mphale, 2015).

In this regard, the current practice in Ethiopia indicates that the philosophy behind educational leadership in general and school leadership in particular is shifting from one-man leads to distributed form. This has gotten more emphasis since the first half of the 1990s, with the Education and Training Policy by which the government planned to decentralize educational management (MoE, 1994) and the strategies issued after that for its implementation like Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) and General Education Quality Improvement Packages (GEQIP), to mention few.

Nevertheless, when one looks at the current practice of the government secondary schools of Ethiopia concerning distributed leadership practices, it is not to the expectation. To this end, the data obtained from the output of research conducted about distributed leadership in different parts of the country at different levels of educational provision indicates that in public schools in general and in public secondary schools in particular, the practice of distributed leadership is not to the expectation (Asrat, 2017; Bayisa, Mulugeta, & Guyasa, 2020; Dejene, 2014; Mesfin, 2019; Misgana, 2017; Shimelis, 2018). In addition, the information obtained from archival sources also supports what is indicated by the research outputs. For instance, the analysis results of the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap indicated that leadership is not

practiced to the expectation, indicating that leadership challenge is one of the challenges faced by the government in implementing the Policy. To this end, this study was designed to explore stakeholders' perceptions towards policy provision on practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone.

In doing so, the study was planned to look at the opportunities and enabling conditions in place for practicing distributed leadership in the secondary schools, as perceived by stakeholders working at different levels of educational leadership (from secondary schools up to the Ministry).

The current study is methodologically different. Compared to the earlier research conducted in the country and abroad with the topic, this study was designed to follow a different approach. The study used a qualitative approach, assuming it enables the researcher to get stakeholders' perceptions and, thereby, more insight into the problem under study. Moreover, as different from the earlier research conducted in the country on the topic that utilized principals and teachers as the only data sources, the current study included principals, woreda and city education officials, a Regional Education Bureau official, and an official from the Ministry as data sources to widen the scope and obtain information from all levels of educational leadership and thereby get more insight into the research topic.

To this end, this study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What opportunities and enabling conditions exist for practicing distributed leadership in secondary schools?
 - 1.1 To what extent the policy provision supports the practice of distributed leadership?
 - 1.2 To what degree school organization supports the practice of distributed leadership?
 - 1.3 To what extent school culture supports the practice of distributed leadership?

2. What are the significant challenges affecting distributed leadership practices and their effectiveness?

Significance of the Study

This study is assumed to extend the current research on distributed leadership in the Ethiopian education system in general and secondary schools in particular by bringing attention to how the Policy's opportunities and enabling conditions and situations contribute to school effectiveness. Policy provisions and school situation are assumed to contribute to school effectiveness by realizing at least three primary school conditions: securing staff members' full participation in decision-making, promoting meaningful collaboration and harmonious work relations, and generating passion for accomplishing tasks (Natsiopoulou & Giouroukakis, 2010). For this to happen, school leadership is expected to act as one of the significant factors contributing to the success of schools (Tekleselassie, 2002). In this regard, the output of the study is expected to have the following importance:

1. It may help school principals to understand their current status of effectiveness in practicing distributed leadership and in gaining some insights on how to become more successful in this regard.
2. It may also help policymakers, education managers working at different levels, and other stakeholders to see the current level of policy provisions and school-level situations in supporting the practice of distributed leadership and work on the gaps identified by the study.
3. Further, it may also serve as a source of information for those interested in further Studies in the same area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The primary objective of this study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the opportunities and enabling conditions in place for practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone. The study was guided by a pragmatic world view, which is problem-centered and oriented to real-world practice to meet this purpose (Graff, 2016). A pragmatic worldview also provides the researcher with a way of thinking about the relationship between theory and practice and educational research and practice (Biesta & William, 2003). For the study, a phenomenological research design was used. As a scientific research methodology, phenomenological research focuses on the meanings of human experiences in situations that spontaneously occur in daily life. Understanding the lived experience marks phenomenology as a philosophy and a method. In addition, phenomenology helps to put aside experience to understand the participants in the study (Creswell et al., 2007).

Sample and Sampling Technique

According to the data obtained from Zonal Education Department, there were ten woredas and 3 City Administrations in the study area. Accordingly, 5 of the ten woredas were selected as a sample using purposive sampling, considering the number of secondary schools and teaching staff they have (Manion, & Morrison, 2000 in Rahi, 2017). Similarly, two of the three city administrations were purposively selected and included in the sample (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). After selecting the sample woredas and the city administrations, the sample secondary schools were selected following two different mechanisms: the secondary schools that are working in the sample woredas were directly taken for the very reason that each sample woreda has only one secondary school (Grades 9-12). From those secondary schools working in the sample city administrations, the sample secondary schools were chosen using the purposive sampling technique considering their teaching staff (taking the secondary school with the highest number of the teaching staff). Accordingly, out of the five government secondary schools found in the sample city administrations, 2 of them were selected and included in the sample. Together, seven government secondary schools were taken as a sample. Accordingly, the study's target population includes

7 secondary school principals, 5 Woreda Education Office heads, 2 City Administration Education Office heads, 1 official from Regional Education Bureau, and 1 from the Ministry, making 16 respondents.

Data Collection

Following the research design and the qualitative approach chosen to conduct the study, The interview was chosen as a data collection tool. In research works, using interviews as a data collection instrument makes a move from seeing human subjects as manipulated to considering knowledge as generated between humans (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2002). The interview is an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. It considers the centrality of human interaction for knowledge creation and emphasizes the idea that 'data is socially situated.' Interviews also enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they look at situations from their point of view.

Accordingly, semi-structured interview guides prepared in the English Language were used to collect the data needed for the study. For this study, interviewees include 7 secondary school principals, 5 Woreda Education Office heads, 2 City Administration Education Department Heads, 1 official from Regional Education Bureau, and 1 from the Ministry. Accordingly, a total of 16 interviews were conducted for the study. On average, the interviews took 50 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were conducted at places the secondary school principals, education bureau heads, and officials facilitated. During the interview, the researcher and the interviewees held a discussion, where the discussion was possible in English, Amharic, and Afan Oromo languages as necessary. During the interviews, the discussions were recorded using an electronic medium with the interviewees pre-asking and gaining consent.

Data Analysis Technique

The principal objective of this study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the opportunities and enabling conditions in place for practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone. The phenomenological research design with a qualitative approach was used to conduct the study. Then, qualitative data were collected for the study and followed by qualitative analysis. Qualitative data analysis involves an inductive process through which a researcher works to answer research questions by explaining phenomena. Accordingly, the qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed using inductive analysis under which categories, themes, and patterns were obtained from the data. Finally, the results obtained from the data analysis were organized and analyzed in such a way that it answers the research questions of the study (Brannen, 2017).

RESULTS

The principal objective of this study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the opportunities and

enabling conditions in place for practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone. As a result of data analysis, three major themes emerged: policy provisions support the practice of distributed leadership, school organization supports practicing distributed leadership, and school culture support to practice of distributed leadership. Under each theme, experts' responses from the Ministry of Education, Regional Education Bureau, Woreda and City Education Offices, and secondary schools were analyzed. Finally, a cross-case analysis of the responses provided by education officials working at different levels was made for each theme.

Theme One: Policy Support to Practice Distributed Leadership

1.1 The responsible body for the selection and assignment of secondary school principals

Responses obtained from Ministerial and Regional level educational officials about the responsible body for selection and assignment of secondary school principals and whether there is a criterion in place to do so indicated that there is a responsible body for selection and assignment of secondary school principals. As to their responses, it is done by woreda and city education offices. They also confirmed that there are set criteria based on which the offices select and assign secondary school principals. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented as follows to have a better understanding of the issue:

Yilikal: A criterion is used to select and assign secondary school principals. It includes having an MA degree in leadership or any one of the subjects taught at secondary schools. For those who have MA in subjects, it requires them to take short-term training like following Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) during summer time (**HOI01**).

Responses of officials from woreda and city education offices

According to the responses of interview participant officials (from woreda and city education offices) with whom the interview was conducted to collect the data needed for the study, concerning the responsible body for selection and assignment of secondary school principals and whether there is a criterion in place to do so, it is their offices that are responsible for the selection and placement. For this, all of the seven interview participant officials agreed that there are criteria for selecting and assigning secondary school principals. Two of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented hereunder to get a better understanding of the issue:

Zemedie: Yes, there is a criterion in place to be used to select and assign secondary school principals. It is processed based on an officially announced vacancy. One of its essential requirements is having an MA degree in leadership or any of those subjects taught at secondary schools (**EOI01**).

Megersa: Yes, secondary school principals are selected with a vacancy our department announces based on pre-set criteria. The criteria include having MA, work experience, serving as a department head or unit leader, and reaching a higher level in teachers' careers (EOI02).

Responses of secondary school principals

According to the responses of secondary school principals who were interview participants, the results of the data collected concerning the responsible body for the selection and assignment of secondary school principals and whether there exist criteria to be used in the selection of secondary school principals indicated that Woreda and City Education Offices do the selection and placement of the secondary school principals. There are officially provided criteria jointly from the Regional Education Bureau and the Ministry for the selection. To better understand this issue, two of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented as follows:

Yonas: The City Education Office is responsible for selecting and placing secondary school principals. It is done through competition, for which the department announces the position based on the criteria set by REB. Some of these include having an MA degree in school leadership or any subjects taught at secondary schools, sitting for the written exam, and giving an interview (PI01).

Temam: The Woreda Education Office is responsible for selecting and placing secondary school principals. For the selection, there are criteria in place. These include: having an MA degree in educational leadership or other subjects with better performance at work, to mention a few (PI03).

A cross-case analysis of policy provisions support to the practice of distributed leadership

The cross-case analysis results of the responses obtained from interview participants indicated that a responsible body exists for selecting and assigning secondary school principals, and there are criteria in place to do so. Nevertheless, the actual situation indicated otherwise. Most of the secondary school principals (six out of seven) were found working, having an MA degree in subjects other than educational leadership. In addition, these principals have not taken the training that the guideline requires them to take after being selected and assigned to the positions. Further, out of those seven woreda and city education office heads who participated in the study, only two of them were found having educational leadership backgrounds. From this, it is possible to conclude that from this, it is possible to deduce that even though there is policy provisions, the value given to the field of educational leadership both at woreda and city education offices is minimal.

Theme Two: School Organization Supports Practice Distributed Leadership

2.1 Secondary school organizational structure and participation of teams in decision making

Responses of officials from the Ministry and Regional Education Bureau

The respondents were asked whether the current secondary school organizational structure allows teams to participate in decision-making. The respondents from the region and the Ministry agreed that at current secondary schools are structured in a way that teams can participate in decision-making. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented hereunder to get a better understanding of the issue:

Yilikal: I think the current secondary school organizational structure has no problem in practicing distributed leadership. It allows teams to participate in decision-making. For example, while we are currently developing a Job Evaluation Grade (JEG) system for schools, one of the criteria we are considering is distributing decision-making (**HOI01**).

Responses of officials from woreda and city education offices

Responses of the respondents who were woreda and city education officials for the question raised to them about whether the current secondary school organizational structure allows teams to participate in decision making indicated that at current, secondary schools are structured in a way that they could participate teams on decision-making activities. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented as follows to help have better understanding of the issue:

Megersa: the current structure of the education system follows a decentralized leadership approach. It is structured from the Ministry up to woreda and even to the school level since what is planned at a higher level is implemented in schools (**EOHI02**).

Responses of secondary school principals

The responses from principal interview participants for the question raised to them to understand whether the current secondary school organizational structure allows teams to participate in decision-making indicated that the structure has space for teams to participate in their secondary school decision-making. For instance, out of the seven interview participants of the sample secondary school principals, all assured that the secondary school structure has space for team participation. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented hereunder to have a clear understanding of this issue:

Yonas: Yes, the current secondary school organizational structure allows teams to participate in decision-making. At our school, almost all the work is done by participating teams. I think a school principal could not be effective without teams (**PI01**).

Cross case analysis of school organization support to practice distributed leadership

The cross-case analysis results of the responses obtained from all the respondents regarding the degree to which school organization supports the practice of distributed leadership and participation of teams in decision-making indicated uniformly that at current secondary schools are structured in such a way that they could participate teams on decision-making activities.

Theme three: School Culture Supports Practice Distributed Leadership

3.1 Support provided to teachers who provide coaching to their colleagues

Responses of officials from the Ministry

The respondents were asked whether there is a mechanism by which teachers who provide coaching to their colleagues are supported indicated that secondary schools have a mechanism by which teachers who provide coaching are supported. They justified it with examples indicating that it is one of the requirements for continued professional development (CPD) of teachers since those teachers with better performance at CPD get priority for different benefits. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented as follows to help further understand the issue:

Yilikal: The current secondary school organization has a mechanism by which teachers who provide coaching to their colleagues are supported. For instance, providing induction training for newcomer teachers is one of the criteria for fulfilling what is expected from a teacher for CPD. It is also an element in teachers' performance evaluation, which is essential for their promotion. In this regard, teachers are benefitted in different ways, like getting priority for short and long-term training (HOI01).

Responses of secondary school principals

The responses that principal interview participants provided for the question raised to them to understand whether there is a mechanism by which teachers who provide coaching to their colleagues are supported indicated that secondary schools have different experiences in this regard. There are secondary schools where teachers that provide coaching and take on additional responsibilities are encouraged. Contrary to this, however, there found secondary schools in which such experience is non-existent. For instance, out of the seven secondary school principals who participated in the interview, two confirmed that they have no mechanism by which teachers are encouraged for taking additional responsibilities and serve as coaches. Two of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented hereunder to help better show this issue:

Temam: Yes, at the end of the year, at the ceremony for Parents' Day, at least a 'thank you' certificate is provided for those teachers with better performance (**PI03**).

Samson: Not at all. There is no mechanism by which teachers are supported for performing additional works. Ofcourse, there is a request from teachers, but because the school cannot do so, we could not practice it (**PI 04**).

3.2 Mutual respect and trust among secondary school staff and between the staff and school administration

Responses of secondary school principals

The responses obtained from the sample secondary school principals who participated in the interview conducted to collect the data needed for the study concerning secondary school staff practice of mutual respect and trust among themselves and between the staff and school administration revealed two types of results. At some secondary schools, there is observable mutual respect and trust among teachers, the staff, and the school administration. However, there are secondary schools where mutual respect and trust are not a culture. For instance, out of the seven secondary school principals who participated in the interview, five confirmed the existence of mutual respect and trust among teachers and between the staff and the administration. In contrast, two confirmed otherwise. Two of the direct responses of the respondents are presented as follows to help have a better understanding of the issue:

Yonas: Our school has no problem concerning mutual respect and trust among teachers, and this is partly because most of the teachers are those who stayed long together (**PI01**).

Samson: There is a problem concerning mutual respect and trust among teachers. They suspect each other. Our experience with mutual respect and trust between the staff and school administration could be moderate. Few staff members have a problem in this regard (**PI04**).

3.3 The experience of planning to improve individual student's achievement

Responses of secondary school principals

The results of the data collected from principal interview participants concerning whether there is an experience of planning to improve individual student's achievement and if there exists exemplary practice indicated that the secondary schools have experience in this regard. For instance, all seven secondary school principals who were interview participants confirmed that their schools have experience planning to improve individual students' academic achievement. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents is presented hereunder to help have a better understanding of the issue:

Lidetu: Earlier, we had the experience of planning to improve individual students' achievements. It is done so that students plan their performance for each subject and teachers check and approve. At the end of each semester, teachers compare students' plans and actual performance. Nevertheless, the case of this year is different. Because of COVID-19, which forced us to divide each of the sections into two and multiply the number of sections, as a result of which teachers are forced to take more than their regular workloads. As a result, this year, it is not that much practiced though some students have plan (**PI02**).

A cross-case analysis of the extent to which school culture supports the practice of distributed leadership

The support that school culture provides to the practice of distributed leadership in the secondary schools working in the study area was seen based on three indicators: support provided for those teachers who coach their colleagues, mutual respect and trust between teachers and teachers, and school management, and planning to improve individual student's academic achievement. Under the three issues, the analysis results indicated varied results. With the support provided to teachers who participate in coaching, secondary schools have a different experience. There are secondary schools in which teachers who provide coaching and take on additional responsibilities are supported and of course, there found secondary schools in which such experience is absent. Similarly, regarding mutual respect and trust, the analysis result also indicated varied results. However, concerning planning to improve individual students' results, the analysis indicated a similar experience.

Theme four: Major challenges that are affecting the practice of DL

4.1 The significant challenges to practicing distributed leadership in the secondary schools

Responses of the official from REB and the Ministry

Higher officials' responses at the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureau about the significant challenges that negatively affect the distributed leadership practices in secondary schools indicated that most in-school and out-of-school factors are the major ones. One of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented hereunder to get a better understanding of the issue:

Yilikal: The significant challenges that negatively affect secondary school leadership include: the skill and knowledge gap that school principals have, lack of support provided by Woreda Education Offices, lack of cooperation from teachers and students, and lack of follow-up from the parents' side (**HOI01**).

Responses of woreda and city education officials

The responses of woreda and city education officials who took part in the interview conducted to collect the data needed for the study with the significant challenges that are negatively affecting the practices and effectiveness of distributed leadership in the secondary schools indicated that the challenges are system-wide, which include: the challenge to get the needed teachers, both in number and in the required field of study; lack of textbooks; lack of budget; lack of professionals like laboratory technicians, librarian, and psychiatry; situational factors like COVID-19 related challenges; lack of school facilities like laboratory and library; and difficulty to get the required principals following the newly issued directive concerning selection and assignment of secondary school principals. One of the direct verbatim respondents presented hereunder to help have a better understanding of the issue:

Megersa: The significant challenges include: the challenge we are facing in getting the needed teachers to the standard, both in number and in the required qualification types. According to the current experience, cities like ours (Bishoftu) get new teachers only through transfer. Most teachers who come to the city through transfer have medical problems. As a result, we face challenges in two ways: first, getting young and energetic teachers is difficult. Second, it is challenging to place newcomer teachers where we want for, they have difficulty teaching at our secondary schools with buildings up to 4 stairs. The other challenges include a lack of students' textbooks, a lack of budget, and a lack of administrative staff like lab technicians, librarians, and psychiatrists, all of whom are necessary for the work of secondary schools (**EOHI02**).

Responses of secondary school principals

According to the responses of the sample secondary school principals who participated in the interview conducted to collect the data needed for the study, the question raised to them to understand the significant challenges that are negatively affecting the practice of distributed leadership at the secondary schools indicated that the challenges are much fold which includes: political interference, lack of budget, lack of educational facilities like science laboratories and library, lack of professionals like laboratory technicians and librarians, lack of interest both from teachers and students, challenge related to COVID-19 protocol, and lack of on-the-job training provided for secondary school principals. Two of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented as follows to get a better understanding of the issue:

Yonas: different challenges could negatively affect the works of secondary schools of which political challenge is the major. Sometimes it happens when almost all parties like kebele administrators, sub-city administrators, and political organization leaders want to give the order to school principals, when a principal is expected to deal with school matters. They all lack school situation information and experience. Generally speaking, I can say what is written on government documents and what is actually implemented are totally different. Due to this, sometimes it happens when I return to the school accepting what I am not convinced myself

and give orders for my staff to do accordingly, and this is one of the practices that could negatively affect the trust between my staff and me.

Temam: The lack of budget needed to run school activities is the major challenge at the school. The government's support for secondary schools is minimal except for teachers' salaries. As a result of the budget shortage, we are forced to collect more money from parents (PI03).

4.2 The solutions recommended for overcoming the challenges

Responses of officials from the Ministry and REB

To combat the challenges presented earlier, the responses of higher officials who participated in the study from the Ministry and REB indicated the solution categorizing it into four: selecting the secondary school principals following the criteria set strictly, providing secondary school principals with on-the-job training that have continuity, organizing a forum where the secondary school principals discuss with higher officials coming from WEO, ZED, and REB, and follow up and evaluation of the works of the secondary schools by different parties which include supervisor, Cluster Resource Center (CRC), and woreda education office, all of which provide the secondary school principals with advisory services and of course corrective measures where necessary.

Responses of woreda and city education officials

The responses of woreda and city education official respondents who took part in the interview were conducted to collect the data needed for the study concerning solutions that could help to alleviate the challenges that are negatively affecting the practice of distributed leadership in the sample secondary schools indicated that solutions are many which include: allowing cities for 50/50 level of teachers' employment and transfer by REB; creating a system by which universities train professionals like laboratory technician, librarian, and psychiatry by the Ministry; working with stakeholders like NGOs to facilitate the income generation of the secondary schools; revisiting the budget that is provided for secondary schools, and providing educational leadership training for educational leaders. Two of the direct verbatim of the respondents are presented as follows to have a better understanding of the solutions provided by the respondents:

Megersa: As a solution, it is recommended that the REB allows cities at least a 50/50 level of teachers' employment and transfer. It is also recommended that the MoE facilitates the system by which universities train professionals in fields like laboratory technician, librarian, and psychiatry, all of which are very important for the work of secondary schools. It is also good if the REB provides us with enough students' textbooks, and last but not least, it is also good if the REB provides us with enough budget (**EOI02**).

Ahmed: The solutions include providing education leadership training for educational leaders, coordinating with the Regional Education Bureau, evaluating work performance, and reporting to the REB on a timely base (EOI05).

Responses of secondary school principals

The responses of principal respondents who participated in the interview conducted to collect the data needed for the study concerning the solutions for the challenges raised indicated various solutions, which include: avoiding political interference, developing community and parents' understanding concerning having an understanding about the fact that schools are human development agents, improving the current financial support provides to secondary schools, fulfilling the secondary schools with the necessary facilities like laboratories and libraries, and providing on-the-job training for secondary school principals.

Cross-case analysis results of the significant challenges that are affecting the practice of distributed leadership

The cross-case analysis results of the responses obtained from study participants who took part in the study from all echelons of the education system (from the Ministry up to secondary schools) indicated that the challenges are system-wide and many-fold, which encompass in-school and out-of-school factors. Similarly, the solutions recommended are related to all educational management levels.

DISCUSSION

Policy provisions support the practice of distributed leadership

In the Ethiopian education system, distributed leadership has been more emphasized since the 1990s. With the education and training policy under its sub-article 3.8.2, the government indicated its plan to decentralize educational management, which intends to expand, enrich and improve the relevance, quality, accessibility, and equity of education and training (MoE, 1994). In addition, the decentralization program by which the country committed itself to devolve power and service delivery functions from the national and regional levels to woreda and sub-woreda level institutions also supports the distribution of leadership practices (GebreEgziabher&Berhanu, 2007). Further, with those policy implementation strategy documents like GEQIP and ESDPs, it is also indicated that school leadership is distributed in such a way that school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and the community participate in schools' decision-making, even though not explicitly mentioned using the phrase 'distributed leadership.'

In this connection, the cross-case analysis results of the responses from the interview indicated that concerning the responsible body for selection and assignment of secondary school principals and whether there exist criteria that assist in this regard indicated similar results. All the participants participating in the study from the four levels confirmed that a responsible body exists for selecting and assigning

secondary school principals, with criteria in place. From this, it is possible to deduce that a policy provision supports woreda and city education management in selecting and assigning secondary school principals.

Nevertheless, the actual situation indicated that most of the secondary school principals (six out of seven) were working taking secondary school leadership positions with MA degrees in subjects other than educational leadership. In addition, these secondary school principals have not taken the necessary training that the guideline requires them to take after being selected and assigned to the position. Furthermore, this may negatively affect their educational leadership since they work without the necessary qualifications. In addition, out of those seven woreda and city education office heads who participated in the study, only two of them were found to have educational leadership backgrounds. From this, it is possible to conclude that even though there is a policy provision that supports the practice of distributed leadership, the actual practice indicated that most of the secondary school principals and the education officials working at lower levels of education management were working at their positions without having the necessary education and training needed for their positions. This implies that the value given to the field of educational leadership both at woreda and city education management levels is minimal. Moreover, this may negatively affect the implementation of distributed leadership in secondary schools, as a result of which secondary school goal achievement could be negatively affected.

School organizations support the practice of distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is a form of power sharing that extends authority and influence to groups and individuals contrary to hierarchical arrangements (Arrowsmith, 2007). In education in general and schools in particular, distributed leadership is considered to expand leadership roles beyond formal leadership positions (Harris, 2011), and this, in turn, could bring the complexity of practices resulting from working with various stakeholders and the numerous day-to-day activities that characterize educational leadership (Cunningham, 2014; Despres, 2004). In schools, distributed leadership could also be defined as a leadership role whereby a principal develops leadership skills throughout the organization (Gronn, 2002). In this connection, the directive of the Ministry of Education also supposes the organization of educational leadership to follow the principle of professionalism, democratization, decentralization, working in coordination, and openness and accountability (MoE, 2009).

According to the directive, a secondary school principal, being accountable to the woreda education office, has the responsibility to organize school-level teams like curriculum committee, female students' academic advisory committee, discipline committee, and clubs. He/She is also responsible for organizing work units like libraries, pedagogical centers, and laboratories. Parallel to their organization, he/she is also expected to ensure that these work units are filled with the necessary resources (MoE, 2009). This is with the assumption that providing individuals and teams the opportunity to demonstrate leadership could enable

them to meet the increasing demands of education enforced through policy mandates. In this regard, the data analysis results of the study indicated that the secondary schools working in the study area are organized so that teams could participate in decision-making activities, which implies that school organization is designed to support the practice of distributed leadership in secondary schools.

The extent to which school culture supports the practice of distributed leadership
In schools, staff and stakeholders move in and out of the leadership role depending on situations, implying that distributed leadership is situation-dependent (Spillane, 2015). In this regard, schools in general and secondary schools in particular, are expected to realize the culture of helping each other and respect between and among teachers and students (MoE, 2009). According to this directive, a secondary school principal, being accountable to the woreda education office, is expected to facilitate a school culture under which teachers, administration workers, or students who have exemplary work performance are awarded or recognized at a meeting where parents and teacher association (PTA) members and the community take part.

To this end, the support that school culture provides to practice distributed leadership in the secondary schools under study was evaluated based on three indicators: provision of support for those teachers who coach their colleagues, existence of mutual respect and trust between and among teachers and between teachers and school administration, and practice of planning to improve individual student's academic achievement. In this regard, the analysis results of the study showed varied results. Regarding the support provided to teachers who participate in coaching, secondary schools have different experiences. There are secondary schools in which teachers are supported by providing coaching and taking on additional responsibilities. Contrary to this, however, secondary schools found that the support provided to teachers for coaching and taking on additional responsibilities is absent.

Regarding mutual respect and trust, the analysis result also indicated varied results. At some secondary schools, there is observable mutual respect and trust between teachers, the staff, and the school administration. Contrary to this, however, there are secondary schools where it is difficult to find mutual respect. Different from the two indicators concerning planning to improve individual students' academic achievement, the analysis result indicated that the secondary schools under study had a similar experience. The significant challenges that are affecting the practice of distributed leadership

Following the government change of 1991 and the analysis made concerning the practices of the earlier education system, the idea that 'schools have to be secular' got constitutional recognition in the Ethiopian education system. In this regard, the Ethiopian constitution states that education shall be provided free from any religious influence, political preconception, or cultural prejudices (MoE, 1994). Even though

there is policy provision for the decentralization of education management at all levels, in the country's education system in general and in secondary schools in particular, leadership is among the significant challenges facing the system (MoE, 2018).

Concerning the challenges that negatively affect secondary schools working in the study area, the analysis results of the responses obtained from study participants who take part in the study from all echelons of the education system (which include the Ministry, REB, woredas and cities, and secondary schools) indicated that the challenges are system-wide and many-fold which encompasses in-school and out-of-school factors that include: political interference ;lack of budget; the challenge to get the needed teachers, both in number and in the required fields of study; lack of professionals like laboratory technicians, librarian, and psychiatry; lack of school facilities like science laboratory and library; lack of interest both from the teachers and the students; lack of on-the-job training provided for secondary school principals; and situational factors like COVID-19 related challenges.

Similar to the challenges, the cross-case analysis results of the responses obtained from study participants who take part in the study from all echelons of the education system with regards to the solutions needed to alleviate those challenges indicated that the solutions could be obtained from all educational management level, beginning from the secondary schools up to the Ministry, which includes: avoiding political interference; revisiting the budget that is allocated for secondary schools; providing on-the-job training for secondary school principals; allowing cities for 50/50 level of teachers' employment and transfer; facilitating the system by which universities train professionals in fields like laboratory technicians, librarians, and psychiatry; working in coordination with stakeholders like NGOs to facilitate income generation of the secondary schools, and fulfilling the secondary schools with the necessary facilities like laboratories and libraries.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the opportunities and enabling conditions in place for practicing distributed leadership in government secondary schools in the East Shewa Zone. Accordingly, based on the study findings, the following conclusions were drawn. The value given to educational leadership is low, school culture was found not entirely to support the principals' distributed leadership practice, and the secondary schools under study were found to work under challenging situations. From this, it is possible to conclude that even though policy provisions support the practice of distributed leadership in the secondary schools under study, the actual practice indicates otherwise. Furthermore, this may negatively affect the secondary schools' goal achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations are forwarded: the secondary school principals to develop a culture of providing teachers with benefits; Woreda and City Education Offices to revisit their experience concerning the selection and placement of secondary school principals; Woreda and City Administrations consider policy directives for selection and appointment of education office heads and reduce political interference on secondary schools; the Regional Education Bureau revisits its budget allocation for secondary schools and fulfills the HR that secondary schools need; and the Ministry of Education works on the inclusion of the curriculum for school laboratory technicians, librarians, and psychiatry training in academic programs of higher learning institutions.

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