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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Investigating factors that affect the implementation of school improvement program in Gambeltu Cluster

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Abstract:

This study investigates the challenges of school improvement program at Gambeltu cluster, Ethiopia in 2013/2014. Twenty-two teachers were involved in the study selected through simple random sampling technique, and eight principals and two supervisors were selected using availability sampling. Moreover, eight parent- teacher association members were participated in the study. The study revealed that the participation of different stakeholders in the school improvement program is weak. This means teachers, students, parents, principals and supervisors' coordination towards a common goal is not strong enough. The study, therefore, suggested that school management should take the responsibility to organize the efforts of different stakeholders for the effective implementation of the school improvement program.

Key Words: School Improvement Program, Quality Education

Introduction

Education is an important instrument for development and many nations are exerting their efforts on quality to get the best out of it. However, quality of education cannot be achieved at ease and has been a great challenge to many countries. Nowadays quality of education is a top agenda across the world and countries are employing different quality improvement strategies.

In the Ethiopian education system, success has been shown in access since the current Education and Training Policy put in to effect. For instance, as indicated in the MoE annual statistical abstract (2010/11), the total enrolment for primary level education reached 16,718,111 in 2010/11 which was 153,280 in 2004/05. This demonstrates improvement in the rate of access to all citizens of the country. However, this success has not been accompanied by reasonable improvement in quality of education.

To curb the problem, the government has given due attention to quality and designed various strategies through school Improvement Program (SIP). The most promising statements, among others, of the current Education and Training Policy are increasing access to education and in parallel working on quality of education. Recently, the Ministry of Education has commenced General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) which encompasses six programs among which School Improvement Program (SIP) is one. The launching of GEQIP shows the determination of the government to move forward for quality. However, there are challenges against the fulfillment of the intended changes.

Therefore, to get the best out of the program (SIP), it is very important to investigate the challenges facing the implementation through systematic ways which is the major objective of the study and the following basic research questions were targeted.

1. What are the major challenges of the school improvement program?
2. What are the main causes of the challenges?
3. How the school management respond to the problems?

School improvement program and its essential domains

The School Improvement Program (SIP) is one of the major important programs among the six General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) set by Ministry of Education of Ethiopia (MOE, 2007). The program involves school stakeholders evaluating and planning for school improvement in the areas of: Teaching and learning, school environment, leadership and management, community involvement. (Tadesse Melesse, 2012). The teaching learning- process focuses on approaches and techniques to improve teacher quality, providing instructional leaders with proven strategies and perspectives to serve students equitably. Schools where teachers teach out of field or where they are poorly prepared in their subjects, where teacher morale and engagement are low, where teachers are unable to teach well to diverse student needs, and where incompetent teaching is tolerated are severely handicapped in the pursuit of excellence (Bliss, J. R., Firestone, W. A., & Richards, C. E., 1991).

The school environment, another important component of the program, matters a lot in promoting learning, enhancing academic achievement, and facilitating appropriate behavior in and between students. The ways in which students perceive their surroundings highly affects how they perform; thus, it is imperative to create hospitable environment where students feel secure and comfortable. (Rosenholtz, S. J., 1991)

Effective leadership can also do a lot to ensure the quality of a school's teaching staff. Some important decisions remain in the hands of officials at the region and woreda level, but principals can do much to build teacher excellence. Principals, therefore, should first model a commitment to learning. They should create a climate that values collaboration and constructive sharing of best classroom practices. Formal professional development has its place, and prospects to attend on workshops, trainings, and conferences that are related to the teachers' practice are highly important, but there are many other ways to inculcate learning into a teacher's in-school routine (Anderson, C. S., 1982).

Therefore, principals and teachers must work together to make sure that all teaching staff involve in collaborative inquiry and discussion of student work, review student achievement data and deliberate over their implications for good teaching practice, hold staff meetings that make time for substantive instructional discussions as well as administrative matter. Moreover, the leadership quality helps to empower teachers by enhancing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the areas of teaching, and research (Carpenter, T. P., & Fennema, E., 1992).

In addition, schools need to seek ways to enhance student learning and wellbeing by collaborating with parents and families, other education and training institutions, local businesses and community organizations. Parents and families are considered as integral members of the school community and partners in their students' learning (Fullan, M. G., 1985). Thus, the participation of the community in order to implement effectively and efficiently school improvement program has a paramount importance.

Material and Methods

Twenty-two primary school teachers participated in the research along with eight principals, two supervisors and eight PTA members. Out of ninety eight teachers from Gambeltu cluster (having four schools), twenty-two were selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. Besides this, all principals (8) and both supervisors (2) were taken as their number is manageable. Eight PTA members were also selected from thirty-two using simple random sampling.

Instruments of data collection

Two methods of data collection instruments were used to gather information namely PTA members' and teachers' questionnaire, and principals', and supervisors' interview. The primary instrument of data collection was questionnaire for the PTA members and teachers. The questions were prepared in open-ended and closed-ended form and all copies of the questionnaire distributed to both the PTA members and teachers were returned.

The second instrument used to collect data for this study was Interview with the supervisors and principals at the center. Semi-structured interview guide was used to substantiate data secured through questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

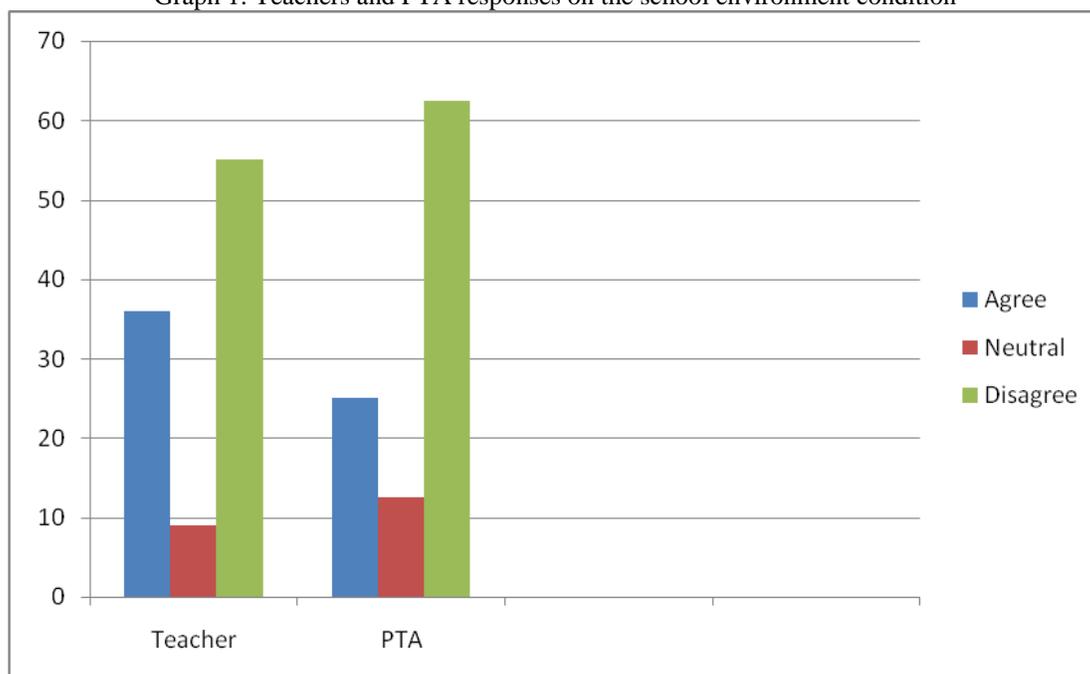
Analysis of the results on teaching- learning

For an effective school improvement, the teaching learning component is very crucial and teachers are core role players in the area. The result revealed that out of 22 teachers only 2 of them are degree holders and the majority (18) earned diploma. This shows that further education and training is imperative to improve quality of education. Questions were also raised on their participation level in planning and evaluation of the implementation of the program, and only 36.7% confirmed their full participation. Interview responses from principals and supervisors also corroborate with the questionnaire result. That is teachers participation in annual and strategic planning is very minimal.

Analysis of the results on school environment

Teachers and PTA members were asked whether the schools are peaceful, safe, hospitable and friendly or not, and their response is presented in graph as follows.

Graph 1: Teachers and PTA responses on the school environment condition



As can be seen from the graph (1), 55% of the teachers disagreed with the statement and 36% of them agreed that the school environment is peaceful and friendly for the student learning while (9%) of them couldn't decide. In similar fashion 62.5% of the PTA members disagreed that the environment is safe and inviting for students. However, 25% of the respondents agreed with the statement.

All of the principals recognized that because of lack of facilities, the school, specifically, classroom environment is not conducive for the teaching learning process. Nonetheless, there is a difference among the schools in terms of human and material resources.

Analysis of the results on school leadership and management

Teachers and PTA members were asked the role of leadership in introducing priority issues for the stakeholders, engaging different stakeholders in decision making on school related affairs, organizing resources, evaluating plans and the results are presented as follows.

Table 1: Teachers and PTA members' response on school management practices

Items	Respondents		Responses			Total
			Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
1.Introducing priority issues for the stakeholders	Teachers	No	5	6	11	22
		%	23	27	50	100
	PTA	No	2	2	4	8
		%	25	25	50	100
2.Engaging stakeholders in decision making	Teachers	No	2	3	17	22
		%	9	14	77	100
	PTA	No	2	0	6	8
		%	25	0	75	100
3.Organizing resources	Teachers	No	17	3	2	22
		%	77	14	9	100
	PTA	No	4	2	2	8
		%	50	25	25	100
4.Evaluating programs	Teachers	No	14	2	6	22
		%	64	9	27	100
	PTA	No	4	2	2	8
		%	50	25	25	100

As it can be seen from the table (1) 50% of the teachers disagreed with the first item i.e. introducing priority issues for the different stakeholders. Only 23% of them confirmed that school management involve in such practices. Similarly, half of the PTA respondents marked under the 'disagree' column and one-fourth of them couldn't decide.

Regarding the engagement of different stakeholders on school affairs, about three-fourth of the teacher respondents preferred to disagree. Only 9% of them recognized the practice.PTA members response also corroborate with teachers response where 75% of them disagreed with such practice by school management.

School management, however, shown a positive result on organizing resources where 77% of teacher respondents and 50% of PTA respondents recognized the practice.

The practice of evaluating school programs is also positive that about two-third (64%) of the teacher respondents and half of PTA respondents agreed with the statement. However, one-fourth of PTA respondents were undecided.

Principals and Supervisors were also asked their responses on the aforementioned issues through interview and the result shows that school management practices on resource organization and evaluating programs is slightly better than prioritizing important issues and engaging various stakeholders. However, all school principals underlined that they are working at good level with limitation of resources.

Analysis of the results on community participation

Table 2: Teachers and PTA members' response on community participation

Items	Respondents		Responses			Total
			Agree	Neutral	Disagree	
1.Community participation in school affairs	Teachers	No	7	6	9	22
		%	32	27	41	100
	PTA	No	3	0	5	8
		%	37.5	0	62.5	100
2.parents discussion with teachers on students performance	Teachers	No	6	3	13	22
		%	27	14	59	100
	PTA	No	3	0	5	8
		%	37.5	-	62.5	100

Community participation in the school affairs is also one of the pillars in SIP program and results secured through questionnaire presented in table (2). The table indicates 41% of teacher respondents didn't agree with the idea that there is a relationship between the school and community. Concerning parent- teacher partnership 59% of the teacher respondents marked under the 'disagree' column. PTA respondents on both issues i.e. community participation and teacher- parent relationship disagreed with similar result 62.5% which accounts two-third of the total figure.

Interview results obtained from principals and supervisors support the questionnaire result. However, supervisors confirmed that parent –teacher relationship is not a culture of the schools unless students are obliged to call their parents for disciplinary problems.

Discussion

As the results of the questionnaire and interview indicate, the major stakeholders of the school: teachers, principals, supervisors and PTA members reflected on the main components of school improvement program; teaching-learning, school environment, school management and community participation (MoE, 2007).

Regarding the teaching learning process teachers' role to bring the education quality as literature suggests, is enormous (Wasley, P. A., 1991; Little, J. W., & McLaughlin, M. W., 1992). However, the study shows they are not playing their pivotal role. Some of the reasons behind are the school culture i.e teachers are not aware of updating themselves and the tradition in this aspect is at the beginning stage. Moreover, school management practices are not encouraging in this aspect.

The other component of the school improvement program is school environment. The features of a good learning environment include adequate resources that are appropriate, identifiable, accessible and relevant to students' learning interests (Aschbacher, P. R. (1993). The results, however, clearly show that the school situation and classroom context is not inviting for students and teachers to bring the intended quality education. All informants recognized the existence of the problem attributing to limitation of resources.

School management practice is also another major school improvement program where leadership issues in areas of prioritizing challenging areas of school affairs, organizing resources and engaging different stakeholders in school improvement program (Thomson, S. D. (Ed.),1992).The results indicate that there are serious problems in prioritizing issues and engaging stakeholders. However, there is an agreement among the respondents that the school management is better in organizing resources evaluation of school based plans.

Education as a social phenomenon does not take place in a vacuum or isolation; it takes place in the society and this normally begins from the family, which is one of the social institutions responsible for the education of the students (Bryk, A. S., & Driscoll, M. E., 1988). Thus, community participation in school improvement as the data demonstrates is not strong to come up with the quality the country is striving for. Of course, there are areas where the surrounding community built extra classrooms. But, the attachment between teachers and parents for the betterment of the students is uncommon.

Conclusion

Based on the general objectives of the study, the researcher investigated the challenges of school improvement program (SIP) and suggested ways to alleviate the problem. Thus, after thorough discussion of the results obtained from the principals and teachers, supervisors and PTA members, the following conclusions are drawn.

- Teachers are not really aware of their pivotal role for the success of the school
- Because of lack of facilities and organization problems schools are not as such attractive and conducive for learning
- School management culture is not encouraging for the involvement of different stakeholders
- Community school relationship is not strong enough to bring change

Recommendation

The objective of this study is to find out School improvement Program problems. In addition to this, it has also tried to suggest some remedies that can help to solve the problems. The following recommendations are made based on the findings.

- Teachers should be aware of their immense role in putting in to effect school programs
- As much as possible school environment has to be attractive and inviting to students
- School management should engage various stakeholders including students to achieve what is intended through discussion, advocacy and reward.
- School community relationship should be strengthened.

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