

Addis Ababa University
College of Education and Behavioral Studies
Department of Educational Planning and
Management

Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger
City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and
Manifestation of Practices

By: Tesfaye Gemechu Gurmu

June, 2025

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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and Management, Addis Ababa University, in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education
Policy and Leadership**

**June, 2025
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

DECLARATION

I, Tesfaye Gemechu Gurmu, declare that this dissertation entitled “Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices” is my original work and has been written in accordance with the dissertation writing requirements of Addis Ababa University.

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APPROVAL

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We hereby approve that the dissertation entitled "Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices" submitted by Tesfaye Gemechu Gurmu conforms to acceptable standards and, as such, is fully adequate in scope and quality to be accepted in fulfillment of the partial requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy and Leadership.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Its description
ANFE	Adult And Non-Formal Education
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EPRDF	The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
ESDP	Education Sector Development Program
ETP	Education and Training Policy
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GEQIP	General Educational Quality Improvement Package
HoD	Head of Department
HoF	House of Federation
MoE	Mistry of Education
NLA	National Learning Assessments
OEB	Oromia Education Bureau
ORS	Oromia Regional State
PC	Potential Candidate
PDO	Planning and Development Office
PGDSL	Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership
PSTA	Parent Student Teacher Association
REB	Regional Education Bureau

Abbreviation	Its description
SCEO	Sheger City Education Office
ScL	School Leadership
SNNP	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples
SSL	Sustainable School Leadership
TALIS	Teaching and Learning International Survey
UL	Unit Leader
WEO	Woreda Education Office

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ABSTRACT

I employed a qualitative case study design to explore sustainable school leadership (SSL) in primary schools in Sheger City, Ethiopia with emphasis on the anatomy of policies and manifestations of practices. I addressed these issues as related to principal succession, collective capacity, and school culture, which are elements of SSL. I collected data primarily from 10 relevant official documents and 24 purposively selected key informants: principals, potential candidates, and education officers. I used semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and, to a lesser extent, observation and field notes to collect data for the study. I analyzed the data using a combination of content and thematic analysis. The data indicated that policies both supported and undermined the materialization of SSL. However, policies that undermined SSL were more powerful than supportive policies, and the way policies were structured also reinforced the same effect. These factors made the overall influence of policies lean towards undermining SSL. In terms of the practice of SSL, potential candidates were disinterested in becoming principals, and incumbent principals were unwilling to stay long. There was a scarcity of staff, deficiencies in school principals' qualifications, and the school staff was less motivated and committed to their jobs, which made the collective capacity of the schools ineffective. The strong culture of schools in the studied area was also largely lacking, and participants had difficulties understanding what school culture is, let alone reporting its practices. Therefore, the study concluded that one could not generate adequate guarantee for the materialization of SSL from the way policies were structured and practice prevailed in the study context. The implications of the study's findings are for the federal government, the Ministry of Education, the Oromia Education Bureau, Woreda/subcity education offices, and other educational stakeholders to restructure and refine policies and take steps to shape practices to enable the materialization of SSL.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the background of the study, the context of the study; the problem statement, and the basic questions. It also deals with the significance of the study, the scope of the study, and limitation of the study.

Background of the Study

Sustainable school leadership (SSL) is critical because of the positive and strong relationship between competent, stable leadership and student learning gains (Leithwood et al., 2020; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). Including SSL, one can see sustainable leadership from two distinct but interrelated perspectives. In the business and nonprofit sectors, where it is mostly popular (McCann & Holt, 2010; Yue et al., 2021), sustainable leadership is about ensuring the well-being of human society and preserving the planet in the process of ensuring organizational productivity (Burns et al., 2015; Grooms & Reid-Martinez, 2011). It is about the necessity for leaders to have a focus on societal and environmental well-being beyond the achievement of organizational goals. This is the perspective from which most of the literature conceptualizes sustainable leadership. However, I would argue that the term “sustainability leadership” rather than “sustainable leadership” might be more appropriate to represent such a notion of SSL. This is because the description is about achieving sustainability, not sustaining the leadership agency itself. Burns et al. (2015, p. 132) had referred to this as “leadership for sustainability”.

The pursuit of environmental and social sustainability is at the heart of every leadership endeavor. However, for environmental and social outcomes to materialize the leadership agency itself must first be enduring and stable in all of its sound practices, strategies, and capabilities (Burns et al., 2015; Davies, 2007; Yue et al., 2021). This is the second perspective from which to

view sustainable leadership. As Grooms and Reid-Martinez (2011, p. 412) noted, this is about “reinforcing the importance of leaders” and, more broadly, the importance of the leadership agency in achieving sustainability. I believe that such a designation perfectly capture the concept of sustainable leadership since the term refers to leadership that is sustained with all its capabilities to achieve the required organizational, environmental, or societal outcomes. It was from this perspective that I approached SSL in this study.

Sustainable leadership and SSL in particular, as a field of study, is young and hence has only a few descriptions. Therefore, it is unlikely to have a universally accepted definition, specifically from the perspective the current study looked at it (Carpenter et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015; Yue et al., 2021). The few available definitions identified it as leveraging leadership stability and capacity (Davies, 2007), integrating planned action (Miller et al., 2019), maintaining rigorous academic practice, and/or manifesting a culture of achievement (Cook, 2014). However, I would argue that these definitions focus on specific issues and they also attempted to tackle the issue from distinct angles and therefore are largely noncurrent. Synthesizing the literature helped to conceptualize SSL as the stability of the leadership system and its continued capability to sustain student learning gains while adapting to the broader environment and taking responsibility for creating lasting positive educational effects for society.

Beyond defining SSL, various scholars had also typified it in terms of distinct elements or components. For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) characterized sustainable leadership in terms of seven principles, emphasizing its importance, durability, diffusion, social justice, resourcefulness, promotion of diversity, and activism. Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019) also proposed eight elements, including public service with a moral purpose, contextual change, capacity building, accountability, deep learning, commitment to results, cyclical energizing, and

leveraging leadership. Davies (2007), on his side, suggested nine key factors, such as measuring results, balancing goals, continuous improvement, strategic timing, capacity building, and sustainability. I provided the authors' more comprehensive list in chapter two. A close look at the lists might provide some space for comparison, as one can compare Davies's (2007) notion of capacity building, to some extent, to Hargreaves and Fink's (2004) notion of resourcefulness. However, the differences in terminology, perspectives, and the number of variables included in the lists presented more challenges than opportunities for comparison, I would argue. This poses a challenge to researchers seeking to understand aspects of SSL. And it presented difficulties in determining which model to consider and, thus, which factors, elements, or components to include in or exclude from a study.

To overcome such a challenge, researchers can consider only certain elements in particular models or even combine constructs proposed by different scholars (Miller et al., 2019). One might ask whether this is acceptable scientific practice. My answer to such a question as a researcher in this study is “yes”, and I can cite a showcase for this. For example, Miller et al. (2019) combined components of sustainable leadership, drawing on Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019), and Strandberg (2015). Following a similar approach, I combined the notions of leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture, drawing on Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Cook (2014), Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019), and Davies (2007). Perhaps one should base the effort of selecting and combining the elements on the ground of serving the purpose of the study and the relevance to the educational context (Bush, 2018a).

Leadership succession provides a mechanism to ensure competent and impactful leaders consistently fill school leadership positions, creating capable and sustainable school leadership.

Collective capacity is about leveraging the collective capacity and resolution of the institution's human power (Šimanskienė & Župerkienė, 2014), and school culture is about positively influencing the way the school community feels, thinks, and behaves so that school leadership becomes stable and the school becomes productive (Ridho et al., 2017; Schein, 2010). By focusing on these elements of SSL, I examined the anatomy of policies and the manifestation of practices. While anatomy of policies focused on the status of policies in supporting or undermining SSL and the likely variation of these effects according to policies structure (organization), the manifestation of SSL practices explored if practices of SSL on the ground supported or undermined SSL (Cardno, 2018; Jie, 2016).

It remains to be explained how the elements I targeted fit into the analytical models. One could connect Hargreaves and Fink's (2004) notion of leadership that lasts with leadership succession (selection and retention) the current study considered, since it ensures continuity of school leadership. One could also connect this with Fullan's (2005, as cited in Miller et al., 2019) notion of leadership long lever and Davies's (2007) notion of developing long-term leadership capacity. Also, one could relate Hargreaves and Fink's (2004) notion of leadership that spreads to collective capacity the study considered. This is because leadership that spreads is leadership that distributes. "Distributed leadership implies a model of shared, collective, [emphasis added] and expanded leadership practice," according to Harris et al. (2022, p. 439). Fullan's (2005, as cited in Miller et al., 2019) and Davies's (2007) notions of capacity building, dual commitment, and commitment creation also enable one to consider the capacity, motivation, and commitment of collective primary school staff. Cook (2014) defines sustainable leadership as sustainable school culture, which also makes targeting school culture as an element of SSL permissible.

In the Ethiopian educational environment where the current study was located, official documents did not directly address SSL. The documents, however, indirectly addressed it. For example, the general education reform package included a school improvement program that takes place over time and therefore required sustained school leadership (MoE, 2008). Policies also required many stakeholders to practice educational leadership (MoE, 2007, 2013a). Such collective leadership could contribute to collective capacity, which could sustain school leadership (MoE, 2021). ESDP VI (MoE, 2021) also integrated sustainable development goals (SDG) (Assembly, 2015), which unavoidably required sustainable leadership. These are signs that official documents in the Ethiopian education system had indirectly referenced SSL. However, the lack of sustainable educational outcomes in the system (Abay, 2013; Ambo et al., 2021; MoE, 2021) casts doubt on the practical sustainability of educational leadership.

To the best of my knowledge, there had been no studies of SSL in the Ethiopian educational context. Some previous studies (Demozie & Dessie, 2023; Gurmu, 2020; Tekleselassie, 2023; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021; Tekleselassie & DeCuir, 202) had definitely considered certain SSL components separately, such as leadership selection, training, empowerment, and work experience. However, this educational setting had yet to see an integrated treatment of SSL and its key components. Therefore, the study explored the anatomy of the policy and practice of sustainability in primary school leadership in Sheger City, Oromia Region, Ethiopia, considering the proposed components together.

The Context of the Study

Sheger City in the Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia was the site of the study. Prior to the establishment of the city, the current study was in progress in one of the 21 zones in the region, namely the Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfine, and five of the 19 towns in the

region, namely Sululta, Laga-Tafo, Laga-Dadi, Burayu, Galan, and Sabata. I gathered background information, did preliminary research, and the major study was ongoing. However, the Oromia Region combined the administration of the special zone and the five towns and established Sheger City in their place during the study, and even after I collected some data while collecting others. Despite the establishment of the city on October 20, 2022, with Ordinance No. 233/2015 on the Establishment of Sheger City, 2022 (ORS, 2022), it, however, took a year and beyond for the region to put the administrative jurisdiction into practice. During this time, I submitted the data I collected and published while I was still collecting other data for the study. The change left me with no choice but to rename the study context as “Sheger City” and continue the study.

Given the newness of the city and the framework of the study to examine sustainable school leadership, the concern might be whether the data I collected during the transition and toward the start of the new administration of Sheger City remained essential and hence the continuation of the study was relevant. As a researcher, I commuted twice to five of the sub-cities that were established under Sheger City and attempted to gather information on the matter and decide on whether it was appropriate to continue the study or drop it. The data revealed that the restructuring did not directly affect the school-level structure, the focus of this study. Restructuring, according to the same data, placed education officers from the former town offices in positions directly related to their previous responsibilities. The placement of most of them was also in the same cluster of sub-city education offices of Sheger City, which traditionally represented the five towns I mentioned earlier. The five major roads that connect Addis Ababa to the regions define the clusters of sub-cities in Sheger City. This means that the officials were supporting and monitoring the same schools and principals as before. Therefore, I

found no significant obstacles that could prevent the continuation of the study. However, I integrated data that emerged from the restructuring and updated the previously collected data while also collecting the remaining data according to the new administrative structure.

Ordinance No. 233/2015, issued to establish Sheger City (ORS, 2022), estimated the area of the city at 160,892.8 hectares. According to the ordinance, the city comprised 12 sub-cities (comprising 36 districts): Eka-Tafo, Kura-Jida, Furi, Gelan-Guda, Sebeta, Burayu, Gefersa-Guje, Melka-Nono, Gelan, Koye, Mana Abichu, and Sululta (Sheger City PDO, 2024). From the interior, according to the same source, the city encircled Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, and also the Oromia Regional State. Except for three of the sub-cities, namely Sululta, Sebeta, and Gefersa Guje, the remaining sub-cities shared a border with Addis Ababa City. From the outside, North Shewa of Oromia Regional State bordered the city to the north, East Shewa to the east, West Shewa and Holeta City Administration to the west, East Shewa and Dukam Subcity of Bishoftu City to the south, and South West Shewa to the southwest.

Information I got from Sheger city and each of the sub-cities PDO (2024) showed that the city was between 7°12'00" and 10°23'30" North and 37° 56'00" and 39° 32'00" East. The data from the same sources also showed that the altitude, annual temperature, and annual rainfall of the city ranged from 1,500 meters to 3,230 meters above sea level, from 6°C to 26°C, and from 783.6 mm to 1800 mm, respectively, with an annual average temperature of about 18°C and an annual average rainfall of 1050 mm. According to a 2024 Sheger City PDO estimate, the city's population was around 3,037,159, comprising 1,543,267 males and 1,493,892 females. The office also reported an annual population growth rate of about 4%, but the rate I got from some sub-cities, such as Burayu, was as large as 12.5%. Burayu's percentage could be an exception, but the news aired by the Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, a national television, in its

midday news on November 16, 2024, showed that the average growth rate of cities in Ethiopia was 5.4. Sheger City was one of the fastest-growing cities in Ethiopia, and its growth rate could definitely be much higher than 5.4%. This had significant implications for the kinds of preparations the city needed to make to serve the city's population, especially the school-age population, possibly by providing adequate educational infrastructure and strengthening educational leadership capacity.

The city's population depended on agriculture (including livestock), small-scale commercial activities, and employment in government and non-government institutions (PDO, 2024). A significant number of people commuted from the city of Sheger to Addis Ababa for work, demonstrating the economic interdependence of the two cities (HoF, 2017). Of course, commuters included students who regularly traveled to Addis Ababa from the city for better education and other reasons. And it included people who travel for better health care, which the existing two hospitals (one of which was private), 25 public health centers, 345 private clinics, and 54 public health posts could not provide (PDO, 2024). However, there were only 150.33 km of asphalt roads and only five major routes to support commuting, so long traffic jams were not uncommon (Sheger City PDO, 2024). The commute and traffic jams strained the transportation system and could shorten road lifespan and waste people's productive time, thus wasting national resources (HoF, 2017).

Data from the Sheger City Education Office showed that there were 588 pre-primary schools in the city in the 2023/2024 academic year, excluding those affiliated with regular public schools, with 66,131 children attending these institutions. Data from the same source also showed that there were 417 primary and middle schools and 53 secondary schools in the city in

the same academic year, with 39,289 and 20,470 students, respectively, in both the public and private wings.

Table 1.1: Gender Disaggregated Data of School Population

SN	Category	Sex	Preprimary	Primary Schools	Secondary Schools	Total
1	Students	Male	33,620	18,279	8,935	60,834
		Female	32,511	21,010	11,535	65,056
		Total	66,131	39,289	20,470	125,890
2	Teachers	Male	490	3459	1200	5,149
		Female	2618	3402	360	6,380
		Total	3108	6861	1522	11,491
3	Principals	Male	49	442	85	576
		Female	483	185	10	678
		Total	532	627	95	1,254

The number of pre-primary school teachers was 3,108 in 2023/2024, while the numbers of primary and middle school teachers together and the number of secondary school teachers were 6,861 and 1,522, respectively. The numbers of principals of preprimary and primary and middle schools together (including deputy principals) in the same academic year were 532 and 627, respectively, and the number of secondary school principals, including deputy principals, was 95. Table 1.1 showed the gender breakdown of the school population.

Statement of the Problem

Educational leadership in Ethiopia, including school leaders, deserves commendation for significantly improving educational coverage and reducing educational disparities, despite recent setbacks from conflict in the north and elsewhere in the country. However, sustainably improving the quality of education, particularly student learning gains, faced difficulties in the education system (Ambo et al., 2021; Tekleselassie & DeCuir, 2021). For example, scores on the EGRA for Grade 2 students were 60.1 percent in 2016 and then dropped to 53.3 percent in 2018, despite the expectation that 70 percent should reach basic or “higher levels of proficiency in

reading and comprehension by language” (MoE, 2021, p. 18). Compared to the target of 50%, the aggregate results for grades 4 and 8 on the 2015-16 National Learning Assessments were 33.6% and 25.2%, respectively, according to similar data. More recently, a report showed that students at all levels, including primary school students, fell short of the 50 percent target recommended by the education policy (FDRE, 2023). While more similar data were available, the data revealed that students’ learning progress was not improving and was even declining (Abay, 2013). This seemed to lead Telila (2010) to conclude that Ethiopia’s education system was in dire straits. Sustainable school leadership is among the issues described. Constant student learning gains (Bartanen et al., 2019). And the inadequate quality of education and student learning gains raised questions about the sustainability of school leadership, among other things. Specifically, it raised questions if successive school leaders were capable enough, the collective capacity was in good shape, and the cultural context that defined academic practice was appropriate to help change such a negative trajectory. This made the effort of studying sustainability in school leadership a reasonable effort.

The education system was also increasingly neglecting the training of primary school principals, with a steady decline from the previous BA-level offerings in educational leadership to the recent state of PGDSL short-term training (Gurmu, 2018; MoE, 2013b). This might limit the professional capacity of principals. There were also reports of high principal turnover in the system (Abay, 2013), which could disrupt school culture (Fuller & Young, 2009) and negatively affect student learning (MoE, 2006). There were also reports of unnecessary interference in the selection and functioning of principals, which could limit their professional credibility and undermine their confidence in leading schools (Gurmu, 2020; MoE, 2006). This could cause them to hold back from doing the job to their fullest ability and eventually leave the profession

(MoE, 2012a), which could waste their knowledge and experience (Gurmu, 2018, 2020) and negatively affect the ongoing capacity of school leadership. This could be counterproductive to student learning gains (Gurmu, 2018; Tekleselassie, 2002), that make appealing to focus on SSL.

As a former education officer, my personal observations also showed that schools identified as effective in one school year failed in the next, especially after a change in school principals. This urges one to question whether the education offices had identified the right replacement and whether the successors were competent compared to the previous principal. The decline in school performance and student academic attainment following a principal's departure (Fuller & Young, 2009) also prompted questions about whether the school effectively built collective capacity and fostered a productive culture to support student learning. This too made the study of SSL a topic of considerable interest.

Again, as I argued earlier, studies on the SSL were lacking internationally (Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015; Yue et al., 2021) and were nonexistent in Ethiopian educational settings. This was about the need to conduct a study and expand the literature in this area (Carpenter et al. 2022), which could justify the need for studying the subject matter in this educational setting too.

Basic Questions

The overall aim of the study was to explore the anatomy of policies and the manifestation of practices of sustainable primary school leadership in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Thus, the study addressed two major basic questions with their own sub-questions.

Major Question 1: How does the anatomy of policies of sustainable primary school leadership reveal itself in the Ethiopian education system?

Sub-questions

- How do existing policies (if any) support/undermine sustainability in primary school leadership in the Ethiopian educational context?
- How do policies of sustainable primary school leadership structured or patterned in accordance with whether policies support or undermine SSL adoption?

Major Question 2: How do practices of SSL manifest in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

Sub-questions

- How is the succession of primary school principals being dealt with in this study context?
- What characterizes the practice of collective capacity for primary school leadership in this city?
 - How does the manifestation of a culture in primary school leadership described in this study setting?

Significance of the Study

The current study that targeted the anatomy of policies and manifestation of practice can have several significances. First, there is a problem of proper understanding of SSL (Cook, 2014; McCann, 2010; Yue et al., 2021). Therefore, this study is significant in raising awareness of SSL among educational practitioners, planners, policymakers, academics, and other stakeholders about the subject matter. Pernecky (2015) and Yue et al. (2021) also revealed a lack of scientific literature on SSL. Therefore, the study can contribute to filling such a gap by providing credible sources of evidence on SSL in the Ethiopian education system. By targeting SSL, the study can further contribute to the theoretical clarity of the subject matter.

The study can also improve SSL practices. By shedding light on its various elements, it can help educational leadership practitioners and officials improve its implementation. Besides, the study helps the policy of SSL get better. Policymakers and educational planners will probably find this study interesting. This can influence their legislative behavior, which can affect policies and action plans to support SSL. Finally, the study is significant in inspiring scholars and students of educational leadership to further explore the subject, especially in relation to the Ethiopian education system. They can do this by broadening the scope, addressing more variables, and considering wider sources of data.

Scope of the Study

I delimited the study geographically, conceptually, and subsector-wise to make it manageable. Geographically, I delimited the study to Sheger City, Ethiopia. I specifically targeted this study context because of its uniqueness, which I explained in the method section in detail.

Conceptually, I delimited the study to addressing SSL. Researchers can approach school leadership from several perspectives, such as transformational, authentic, servant, and adaptive leadership (Northouse, 2016). However, I delimited addressing it from the perspective of SSL due to SSL's strong association with student learning gains. SSL itself could comprise several elements such as intellectual accountability, moral purpose, leadership succession, collective capacity, school culture, etc. (Cook, 2014; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Miller et al., 2019). However, I delimited the study to exploring leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture, for they are core. Among four building blocks of school leadership (SSL)—namely, theory, research, policy, and practice (Bush & Glover, 2014)—I also focused on the policy and practice because they largely determine the status of the materialization of SSL.

I also delimited the study to primary school leadership, excluding secondary, tertiary, or technical and vocational education and training. Shibeshi (2009) noted that primary education “may contain the most serious problems” (p. 145), which might include problems of educational leadership. This required a separate study of SSL in primary schools. There were also additional factors that made targeting primary principalship interesting. Primary education comprised grades 1-6, and middle education consisted of grades 7-8 (FDRE, 2023), but the principals responsible for primary education were also responsible for middle education. This combined organizational structure added another layer of complexity to the incumbents. For example, the arrangement entails implementing policy mandates according to the requirements of two instead of one education level and preparing students for the national exam at the end of both levels instead of just one (FDRE, 2023). This was an expansion of responsibilities and complexity that placed primary school leadership in a unique context and that made its separate study noteworthy and reasonable.

In addition, I restricted the study to addressing SSL in public institutions, excluding private schools. The reason for this was that the recruitment and deployment of leadership in private institutions followed a different logic. For example, business, which was not the focus of the current study, largely influences school leaders’ recruitment in private institutions. This caused the exclusion of private institutions from the current study. I also delimited the study to school principals, teachers, and education officers, excluding stakeholders, such as the PSTA. I assumed I could handle in-depth exploration of such novel subjects as SSL and abstract issues like school culture by best involving these groups of participants.

Limitation of the Study

I used purposive sampling techniques to select participants. This may have limitations in terms of the representativeness of the sample. I also had only one female participant in the study. Although the percentage was about 16%, which was greater than the 6.7% female primary (middle) school principal workforce (MoE, 2023), one could consider this few. The selection process could not take me to where female school principals were. This made it difficult for me to recruit women for my study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The chapter is concerned with a review of the related literature on SSL. It first describes educational leadership, conceptualizes SSL, and elaborates the essence of policy and practice. Then, it deals with components (dimensions) of SSL, presents literature on the targeted elements of SSL, and reviews empirical studies on SSL. Lastly, it presents the Ethiopian educational context and provides a conceptual framework for the study.

Educational (School) Leadership

An attempt to conceptualize SSL can begin by looking at educational (school) leadership, as it provides the basis for its conceptualization. One way to do this is to look at constituent terms. The terms “educational leadership” or “school leadership” include the terms “leadership” and “school” (at least implicitly in the latter case), which are worth considering in understanding educational (school) leadership. Leadership is a subject that has generated tremendous enthusiasm in human societies since the earliest times in history. Historically, it “connotes images of powerful, dynamic individuals commanding victorious armies, directing corporate empires from gleaming skyscrapers, or shaping the course of nations” (Yukl & Gardner, 2020, n. d.). However, conceptualizations of leadership have diverged and continue to diverge, resulting in hundreds of definitions (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Gardner, 2020).

For example, Jacobs and Jaques (1990) in Yukl and Gardner (2020, n. p.) defined it as “a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose”. But Kouzes & Posner’s (2003, p. 2) definition was that “leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow”.

In his part, Northouse (2019) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 43). “[T]he process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” was the definition of the term provided by Yukl and Gardner (2020, n. p.). All these definitions emphasized, either implicitly or explicitly, that leadership is a process of persuasion toward achieving shared goals. However, the definitions varied in their focus on the leader-follower relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 2003), individual influence (Northouse, 2019), facilitation of group activities (Yukl & Gardner, 2020), and providing followers with a sense of direction (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990 in Yukl & Gardner, 2020). The variation in the definition allows us to better capture the essence of leadership from different perspectives, which I think is essential. However, such variation can also pose a challenge to a common understanding of the term.

Similarly, many understand the term “school,” another constituent term of educational (school) leadership, in different ways. One way to understand it is as an institution where education takes place in a particular society (Alemu, 2018; Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Karpov, 2016). This view of schools as a special social institution requires recognizing that learning occurs everywhere, throughout human life, and in many modalities. Chua (2006) also concluded that “the central case of a school should embody an ethos of openness towards the basic goods” (p. 234). This may involve establishing basic tenets that can foster an environment that values and encourages discussion, reasoning, and the examination of different points of view regarding ideas and products related to the advancement of humanity and the well-being of the environment. While there are more ways to understand the term school, too, these conceptualizations show diverse ways people understand the term.

So far, I have explained the term "educational leadership" by elaborating on the constituent terms. However, it is also necessary to look at the direct elaboration of educational leadership to understand it beyond making inferences from its constituent terms. The problem is that the educational leadership literature seems to be shy about directly defining educational (school) leadership, as there are only a few definitions available. A few available definitions discuss the caring behavior a school principal must display and the responsibilities they must assume in educational endeavors. For example, for Novak (2002), "educational leadership is about the caring and ethical relationships between and among people, institutions, and the larger society" (p. viii). This can be about fostering positive and ethical relationships among individuals, educational and other institutions, and the broader community to facilitate educational provision. Bush (2008) also defined educational leadership as "concerned with the operation of schools and other educational organizations" (p. 1). The idea is that educational leadership is concerned with helping educational institutions achieve their designated goals. Seeing it from the point of view of Finnish, Ahtiainen et al. (2024) also defined it as "studying, developing, and educating the phenomenon of leadership in education" (p. 3). In-depth exploration and comprehension of multiple educational components, ongoing personal and professional development, and engagement in education-related scholarship seemed to be points of emphasis. Even though it was not formally a definition, Bogotch (2015) also noted that "[r]he role of educational leadership is to inform neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation as a whole that the education of children is the best financial investment anyone can make in the future of the country" (p. 12). It emphasizes the importance of raising awareness among educational stakeholders about the fact that educating children is the best investment one can make in the future of the country.

I would say that the information I provided on the two central terms that make up the term educational (school) leadership and the definitions of the term can contribute to the understanding of educational (school) leadership in a certain way. Such resources can provide a framework in which one can specify the functionality of educational (school) leadership and evaluate the associated actions. For instance, looking at schools as centers of excellence requires a shift in educational leadership “from institutional improvement to community regeneration” (West-Burnham, 2003, p. 1). Also, considering schools as spaces valuing openness to benefit both environmental and human well-being (Chua, 2006) requires us to consider the broad educational goals that can be integrated into the sustainability framework.

However, despite attempts to define and understand educational leadership in terms of its constituent terms, scholars (Ballo, 2020; Hallinger et al., 2015; Munna, 2023) still find it difficult to grasp. For instance, Ballo (2020, p. 2) stated that "understanding what educational leadership means remains a challenge for researchers and practitioners, despite an existing body of literature focused on it." Leithwood (2005) has also criticized definitions as being too narrow, arguing that they are "more likely to trivialize than to help bring greater clarity to its meaning" (p. 2). Others have accused definitions of failing to focus on the core business of the sector (Hallinger et al., 2015; Munna, 2023).

There may be many reasons for this manifestation. But scholars who have looked into the matter claim that the application of theories rooted in business and industry to education provides a primary explanation (Bush, 2011b; Bush & Glover, 2014). True that, attempts have been made to adapt management and business principles and theories to the needs of education (Akram et al., 2017; Munna, 2023). But, many found such adaptation to be inadequate (Bush, 2011b; Callahan, 1964; Robinson & Gray, 2019), and hence, “abstract theories of leadership that are not

closely aligned with the specific work of educational leaders” still dominate the field of educational leadership (Robinson & Gray, 2019). This is not without causing any problems.

For example, Callahan (1964) asserted that the “cult of efficiency,” the firm belief in the application of performance standards and normalization to education and educational administration, created several problems. While schooling is associated with the promotion of critical thinking and imagination, the efficiency faction, according to the author, stifled critical thinking and innovation. The author further asserted that the promotion of one-size-fits-all standards overemphasized quantifiable outcomes at the expense of a rich educational experience. Casting educational practice in the paradigm of uniformity, the author argued, also ignored the needs and backgrounds of students, leading to the perpetuation rather than a reduction of educational inequality. This makes educational leadership face “increasing questions of... relevance” (Niesche & Gowlett, 2019, p. vi).

A final point I want to make in this section is that the scholars whose work I presented often used “educational leadership” (see, for example, Bush, 2011a; Bush & Glover, 2014) rather than “school leadership”. However, in Ethiopia, leadership at the educational institution level is usually referred to as school leadership, while educational leadership encompasses leadership from the Ministry of Education to the school level. For example, the nomenclature of school leadership training programs in Ethiopia, such as Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) (MoE, 2013a) and MA in School Leadership (ScL) (MoE, 2014), included the term "school leadership". This indicates that the programs specifically targeted the development of educational leadership within educational institutions. It was this type of educational leadership that I focused on in this study.

Conceptualizing SSL

It has only been three and a half decades since sustainable leadership first appeared in the literature (Burns et al., 2015; Yue et al., 2021), and only in the last two decades have education and educational leadership scholars studied it (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2004; Miller et al., 2019). This shows the novelty of the subject in the scholarly arena. The practice of sustainable leadership might not be objectively new to human society (Grooms & Reid-Martinez, 2011). For example, the Oromo Gada system in Ethiopia, an intangible cultural heritage inscribed by UNESCO in 2016, has developed, among other things, a way of democratically succeeding leaders every eight years that has been in existence for over 1,800 years (Jima, 2022). This was a practice of sustaining the leadership system that can work productively for the society. However, the scholarship of sustainable leadership, including SSL, is a recent phenomenon. Because of this, there is a lack of established empirical studies and therefore a lack of sufficiently developed literature in this area (Grooms & Reid-Martinez, 2011; Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015).

This resulted in multiple descriptions to characterize it, which only led to its divergent understanding (Miller et al., 2019). Hargreaves and Fink (2004) wrote extensively on the subject and helped to establish the field of scholarship in education. For them, “sustainable educational leadership and improvement preserves and develops deep learning for all that spreads and lasts, in ways that do no harm to and indeed create positive benefit for others around us, now and in the future” (p. 224).

The definition contained several highly interesting points, such as deep learning. “Deep learning,” according to Fullan et al. (2018), is about gaining global competencies needed to function effectively not only in the dynamic globe but also in the complex universe. As one could see, deep learning is not just about acquiring skills sufficient to function on the planet but

also about enabling competencies that are needed to effectively function in a complex universe. The authors claimed “Deep Learning” is “different in nature and scope than any other education innovation ever tried” (n. p.), and I think that this differed from the way we usually define learning. This might imply the pervasive leadership responsibility that school leaders need to assume to enable students to acquire such extraordinary skills. The definition also included ideas like learning for everyone, harm reduction, and benefit generation at present and in the future, which themselves can expand the breadth of school leadership responsibility and extend such duty over a period of time.

However, the definition emphasized achieving sustainable results rather than concentrating on the sustainability of the leadership agency itself, which was not directly the focus of the current study. As I argued elsewhere in this paper, achieving a sustainable result is undoubtedly the focus of leadership agency. But it is equally important to know whether the leadership can continually accomplish, which is about the sustainability and continuous capacity of the leadership agency. Therefore, it was essential to consider definitions by other scholars, who approached SSL from the perspective from which the study considered it.

For instance, Miller et al. (2019) defined SSL as “a combination of planned actions aimed at developing and/or multiplying the likely social, economic, and environmental benefits of resources available today for use in the future” (p. 134). One can associate this with a set of deliberate actions designed to maximize the benefits that one might obtain from resources, both now and in the future. The author’s assertion could be that it is a mix of deliberate actions that gives the leadership system the chance to leverage the positive effects for society in the long run. According to Davies (2007), sustainability of school leadership is “the ability of individuals (leaders) and schools to continue to adapt and improve to meet new challenges and complexities

and to thrive in new and challenging contexts” (p. 2). This is about the ability of individuals and schools to consider the existing context in order to achieve the desired results. It is important to note that this is not the same as defining sustainable leadership as planned actions but as the ability of leaders and/or educational institutions to embrace complexity and changing situations. Cook (2014) also defined SSL as “the continuation over time of a strong, positive school culture and the consistent implementation of rigorous, high-quality instructional practices” (n. d.). Building a productive culture and sustaining rich academic practices are central to this definition. Dimmock and Tan (2013, p. 325) also referred to “leadership sustainability” as “leadership practices that [endure] over time,” which may refer to the continuation of productive leadership practices. In general, the researchers whose work I presented conceptualize SSL in terms of issues such as deliberate action, practice, ability, and persistence in order to achieve long-term educational outcomes.

Regardless of how literature sources define it, studies emphasize the necessity of sustained school leadership for consistent improvement in school results. For example, Parfitt (2017) stated that “sustainability in leadership is essential for the continued success of schools,” (p. 22). For Miller et al. (2019), “school leadership is... about achieving outcomes and affects associated with long-term goals” (p. 131). This means that in order to achieve continued educational success and long-term educational goals, we need to achieve sustainability in educational leadership first. This heightens the necessity of giving attention to SSL.

Policies and Practice of SSL

One can examine educational leadership, and more specifically, SSL, in terms of four building blocks: theory, research, policy, and practice (Bush & Glover, 2014; Wilkinson, 2021). Research helps develop new theories and perspectives. Theories provide a lens through which to

understand and explain leadership practices. Policies guide the implementation of school leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014). Practice implements policies and theories (Bush & Glover, 2014; Wilkinson, 2021). Although I researched SSL and used theories to inform my study, I focused in this study on uncovering the policies and practices of SSL as related to school leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture, which are elements of SSL.

One can define policies in several ways, like any social science phenomenon. For example, Heffron (2018) defined policies as “a preferred future and the things one does to bring it about” (p. xxvi). This means that policies indicate a desirable future state one wants to achieve as well as a path of action for achieving that desired future. Bascia et al. (2005, p. xii) also provided the following explanation in an attempt to define policy.

At its most basic level, educational policy has been understood as a rational plan, *consciously articulated by an authoritative body, usually a government or governmental agency, codified in text such as law or regulation* which articulates clear expectations for behaviour and explicitly or implicitly reasserts the formal authority of government in requiring that behavior.

Their definition comprises several important issues. First, they defined policies as a rational plan that are intentionally articulated rather than provided haphazardly. This asserts that policymakers intentionally provide policies to change the course of actions. Second, governments provide policies such as regional or federal governments, or by government agencies, such as the Ministry of Education. This is especially true about education policies, although other agencies and even institutions can provide other policies. Third, they asserted that policy makers codify policies as texts that articulate clear expectations of behavior or action. This means that policy makes provide policies as text that either enforces or prohibits certain

behaviors or actions. Fourth, policies overtly or covertly reassert the government's formal authority by requiring certain behaviors. From this, one can understand how powerful policies are.

Bascia et al.'s (2005) notion that policies articulate precise expectations is also important to examine. Schools are sites where "decisions made at all levels of leadership, from the local school to the federal government, [have] to be interpreted and enacted" (Grootenboer, 2018, p. 4). While this portrayal gives schools and school leaders a unique position in relation to the education policies' implementation, it also elevates the necessity of clearly articulating policies' expectations. This is because school communities have policies right next to them, not educational authorities who articulated them, so educational authorities must articulate their policy intents clearly if they want school communities to understand and translate policies' intent to practice more effectively. This can lessen the complexity, ambiguity, and controversy that school leaders and more broadly school community face when translating policy intents into practice (Miller et al., 2019).

Heffron (2018) asserted that "[s]tructural change is at the heart of what education policy, for good or ill, is all about" (p. xxvi). I understand this to mean that bringing basic change is the basic intent of policies. Of course, authorities can offer education policies to achieve something important, but the public may not perceive such policy as good. Also, policies that the public considered good need to be translated into practice in order to help the community to benefit from it. In a nutshell, the literature evidence I presented so far stressed the need to concentrate on educational policies and educational leadership policies, such as SSL, in order to affect their actual manifestation.

However, the policy phrasing in the paper may not complete the SSL materialization. When investigating sustainable school leadership and fine-tuning its practical manifestation, researchers should also consider leadership practice. Wilkinson (2021) stated that “practices matter... both in terms of their constitutive impact on human life and how we come to know how to go on in the world” (p. 4). This may mean that practice is significant since it influences human life, including educational and educational leadership life, and it informs the course of action that we take in life. Nicolini (2012) also affirmed that “the social world... as a vast array or assemblage of performances made durable by being inscribed in human bodies and minds, objects and texts” (p. 2). This may convey the idea that the social world, including the educational world, is a collection of practices embedded in the bodies and minds of human societies, as well as the objects and texts they use.

Wilkinson (2021) even disclosed the opportunity that we can glean in view practice in this way. To “apprehend social phenomena such as schooling, educating or leading as practices”, she stated “afford us opportunities to re-view the world in which we live” (p. 5). This meant that viewing social phenomena like leadership as practice gave us the opportunity to evaluate and grasp our surroundings, even if we had previously seen them but not paid attention to them. When I read such texts, I understand the extreme importance of focusing on practice as a way of understanding school leadership sustainability, besides focusing on other blocks of leadership (Bush & Glover, 2014; Wilkinson, 2021). It also reminds me of how ignorant we are in focusing on this aspect to improve school leadership, including SSL, when the focus on other aspects, especially policies, is so pronounced.

When I come to leadership and, more specifically to SSL practice, Bolam (1999, as cited in Bush, 2011b) defined educational management as “an executive function for carrying out

agreed policy” (p. 1). This meant that educational leadership and school leadership are basically an act of translating agreed up on policy into practice. Yukl (2010, p. 3) asserted that leadership is “important for the effectiveness of organizations”. There is no exception with educational/school leadership in this regard. Experts frequently view educational/school leadership as one of the most crucial variables in students’ learning accomplishment and school success (Leithwood et al., 2020). But school leadership is about the processes, relationships, strategies, and influences that school leaders used to achieve the goals of schooling (DiPaola & Hoy, 2015; Coleman & Glover, 2010). This may point to the necessity of considering leadership practice as a central avenue to measure school leadership effectiveness. Similarly, Abrahamsen et al. (2015) asserted that “growing body of research has emphasised the importance of school leadership practice for quality improvement in schools” (p. 62). This is also about the necessity of focusing on practice improvement as a way of improving educational quality. This could be why Wilkinson (2021) asserted that “practice/s matters in our attempts to understand educating and educational leading” (p. 5).

Of course, practice offers a basic way to sustain school leadership. For example, Dimmock and Tan (2013) defined sustainable leadership as leadership practices that are sustained over time. It is the sustainability of practice that makes school leadership sustainable. This places educational and school leadership sustainability largely in the dimension of leadership practice. This is about the long-term viability and soundness of practices, including the appropriateness of methods and procedures for achieving desired organizational, environmental, and social goals, which are central to the notion of sustainable school leadership. For example, Cook (2014) describes sustainable leadership as “rigorous academic practice” (n.p.), and Miller et al. (2019) describe it as “planned action aimed at producing the likely social,

economic, and environmental benefits” (p. 134). As seen, practice is central to the conceptualization of sustainable school leadership.

Wermke and Forsberg (2023) also stated that “[p]rofessional expertise applies to describe individuals who exert a particular occupational practice, for which, in order to successfully solve various problems, long educational and practical experience is necessary” (p. 67). This may communicate the idea that practice is also the way to describe occupational exertions. The implication of such a description can be about the need to focus on SSL practice to understand the actual materialization of SSL besides focusing on policies. Overall, the discussions in this section demonstrate the central role of policies and practices in conceptualizing and materializing SSL.

Components of SSL

Scholars not only elaborate on SSL directly but also describe it in terms of different components. For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2004), who pioneered the study of SSL in education, characterized it in terms of seven principles. In their words, sustainable leadership: 1) matters, 2) lasts, 3) spreads, 4) is socially just, 5) is resourceful, 6) promotes diversity, and 7) is activist. Fullan (2005, as cited in Miller et al., 2019) also proposed eight elements of sustainable leadership: a) public service with a moral purpose; b) commitment to contextual change at all levels; c) lateral capacity building through networks; d) intelligent accountability and vertical relationships; e) deep learning; f) dual commitment to short-term and long-term outcomes; g) cyclical energizing; and h) the long lever of leadership. Davies (2007) offered nine key factors of sustainable leadership: (1) measuring outcomes, not just outputs; (2) balancing short-term and long-term goals; (3) thinking in processes, not plans; (4) having a passion for continuous improvement and development; (5) developing personal humility and professional will to build

long-term leadership capacity; (6) practicing strategic timing and strategic abandonment; (7) building capacity and creating commitment; (8) developing strategic measures of success; and (9) building in sustainability.

One could pinpoint at least three major issues based on the provided lists of principles, factors, and elements of SSL. First, although all the variables can be essential, the authors present their lists using different terminologies. For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) used the term “principles,” while Fullan (2005, in Miller et al., 2019) and Davies (2007) used the terms “elements” and “factors,” respectively, which seemed to stand for different things. A principle could be a rule of thumb, an element could be a component, and a factor could be a cause of influence. Second, the items in their lists are not compatible, and they might look at those entities from different perspectives, regardless of their having certain commonalities. For example, one can relate Davies’s (2007) notion of capacity building, to some extent, to Hargreaves and Fink’s (2004) notion of resourcefulness. But Hargreaves and Fink (2004) seemed to focus on what leadership should be or what one should do about leadership at the system level, whereas Fullan (2005) (in Miller et al. 2019) focused on what one should achieve about leadership at the “individual leader level” (Davies, 2007, p. 2). This makes comparison difficult. Third, there are too many elements in a list itself, let alone the combination of elements in all the lists. The analysis in one particular list alone might make up an entire paper, let alone the consideration of elements or components in all lists. This made models imprecise and presented researchers with a quandary about what to consider as an analytical model in a study.

One way around these challenges might be to consider only some variables or even selectively combine certain constructs based on their relevance. One might question whether this is an acceptable scientific practice. Of course, such a practice is not only permissible but also

valuable, especially in the “absence of a sufficiently developed academic or empirical literature and associated definitions”, as Miller et al. (2019, p. 134) asserted. The context and purpose of some original theoretical models might also not apply to the context and purpose of a particular study (Bush, 2008; Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). This needs one to make the selection and combination based on relevance to a context. Perhaps faced with a similar challenge, Miller et al. (2019, p. 134) combined the concepts of “deep learning,” “capacity development,” and “resourcefulness” as an analytical framework in their study, drawing on Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019), and Strandberg (2015). Following the same footsteps, this study combined the notions of leadership that lasts (leadership succession), collective capacity (Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004), and school culture (Cook, 2014). The three groups of authors whose work I presented used terms such as “principles,” “factors,” or “elements” to represent their lists. Without opposing the terms other scholars used to designate their proposed features, I preferred to refer to the features I target as “elements” of SSL, as suggested by Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019). This is because SSL was more or less considered from a systems perspective in this study, so it is appropriate to represent these features as “elements”.

Shaked and Schechter (2017) defined a system as “a functionally related assemblage of interacting, interrelated, or interdependent elements forming a complex whole” (p. 9), which can be applicable to SSL. Hargreaves & Fink (2003), for example, referred to a “sustainable leadership system” (n. p.), which made it appropriate to consider SSL from a system perspective. Likewise, Coleman and Glover (2010, p. 88) discussed “creating a closer linkage between school and management systems,” which also allows us to view school leadership (SSL) from a system viewpoint. This can be the reason Hargreaves and Fink (2003) proclaimed that “school

leadership is a system”. By extension, in Ethiopia, the mention of an “effective education management and administration system” (MoE, 2021, p. 33) made it permissible to consider SSL from a systems perspective.

Targeted Elements of SSL

It is challenging to elaborate on all suggested elements of SSL, as this would require an enormous amount of time and space. However, it is appropriate to elaborate on elements of SSL the study targeted, namely leadership succession, collective capacity (Davies, 2007; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004), and school culture (Cook, 2014).

Leadership Succession

Literature sources describe leadership succession from the perspective of transferring a leadership role to another person by replacing leaders (Cieminski, 2018) and retaining the already recruited and selected principals. To begin the discussion about replacing leaders, the education system can use different mechanisms to replace principals, two of which are major: the planned approach and the probabilistic approach (Bush, 2008).

The planned approach, usually referred to as succession planning, involves, among other things, creating a pool of leaders who are prepared to step into critical roles in school leadership. It is a systematic and deliberate process that helps to ensure a smooth leadership transition (Cieminski, 2018; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). Decentralized educational systems frequently use this process, but critics argue it reduces chance and introduces bias in selecting leadership candidates.

The probabilistic approach, which is largely in use in the Ethiopian education system, is the process in which the education system advertises a vacant school leadership position and potential candidates apply to staff the posts. Then the system selects the best for school leadership, usually competitively (Bush, 2008; Gurm, 2020). It is probabilistic in the sense that

it depends solely on the probability that the advertisement for the vacancy attracts appropriate potential candidates. Critics have cited this approach's inability to attract enough applicants (Bush, 2008; Lee & Mao, 2023). Certified candidates who submit themselves to the selection criteria may not also be qualified since some preparation programs lack the rigor and relevance to develop the readiness and professional socialization the role requires (Gurmu, 2020; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Appropriately qualified potential candidates may not also be interested in assuming school leadership roles (Lee & Mao, 2023; Mahfouz, 2020; Russell & Sabina, 2014; Walker & Qian, 2006).

Studies from the global educational arena provide several explanations for the disinterest of potential candidates and the declining applicant pool for principalship positions. Such factors include (a) complexity of the job; (b) expanded time spent on the job; (c) slight differences in pay between top teacher salaries and principal salaries; (d) feeling overwhelmed with high expectations from stakeholders; (e) high volume of paperwork; (f) inability to help teachers become more collaborative (Muñoz & Barber, 2011); and increased accountability pressure (Cieminski, 2018). I would argue that the complexity associated with the principalship, which made potential candidates disinterested, seems to be prevalent around the world and even intense in developing countries like Ethiopia (Bush, 2008; Gurmu, 2018). I believe that some of the stated explanations may also describe incumbent principals' lack of interest in staying and, therefore, intent to leave in the Ethiopian educational context. Specific to Ethiopia, Tekleselassie (2023), of course, reported that working in an urban area makes the position more attractive, but having a degree in a subject other than educational leadership reduces the desire to become a principal.

The suggested mechanisms for tackling the problem of staffing school leadership included making school leadership a more attractive career; offering incentives; recognizing outstanding performance with material and nonmaterial incentives; revamping preparation programs; devising alternative licensure programs; and providing specialized training for current and future leaders. Redesigning the structure of the job, making the position more doable by hiring other leaders, and limiting the number and pace of initiatives are also among mechanisms for tackling the problem (Cieminski, 2018).

The system cannot constantly replace leaders. Hence, keeping competent principals is also a beneficial mechanism for sustaining school leadership (Cieminski, 2018; Liu & Bellibas, 2018; Siambi, 2022). Hargreaves (2005, p. 171) stated that “[t]he quest for future leadership must be defined less by how to rotate principals between schools and more by how to retain them when schools are doing well”. While future leadership might be about sustainable leadership, the author’s argument might be that leadership succession (and hence sustainability) is better explained by keeping competent principals in the same school rather than rotating them from school to school. While keeping principals in the same school helps SSL a lot, I would say that moving principals to other schools can also help SSL in some ways. For example, their accumulated experience can help create a collective SSL effect in the system. Even the author’s argument is a matter of degree. He did not completely ignore the contribution to SSL made by principals who have moved to other schools. Liu and Bellibas (2018) also pointed out that the retention of experienced school leaders is fundamental to the success of schools. While experienced school leaders might be those who can sustain student learning, it is important to recognize that sustainable school success and student achievement are at the core of SSL. This assertion allowed the retention of school leaders to be seen as one means of ensuring leadership

succession and, therefore, the sustainability of school leadership. Although Cook (2014, n. p.) wrote that “sustainable school leadership can be misinterpreted or perceived as the continuation of a principal in a leadership position”, the assertions of the authors made leadership retention an unavoidable plan in the effort of principal succession (Cieminski, 2018; Hargreaves, 2005).

Principals’ retention is a sought-after issue partly because of the negative effect of principals’ turnover (Béteille et al., 2012; Liu & Bellibas, 2018) and partly because of the benefit of principals’ retention. Principal turnover wastes the experience of principals and results in significant costs associated with recruiting and training new leaders (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Liu & Bellibas, 2018). It also leads to teacher turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022; Liu & Bellibas, 2018), which can create instability in the school system. More importantly, it disrupts school culture (Ridho et al., 2017; Schein, 2010), which can hinder school improvement and affect student learning outcomes (Béteille et al., 2012). This might suggest the need to keep principals as long as possible to counteract the negative effects of principal turnover and to advance the positive effect of principals’ retention.

One issue that affects the retention of school leaders is their intention to stay or leave the school leadership position. However, researchers have conducted limited studies on this issue, and those studies focused on Western educational settings, particularly the United States. These studies revealed a declining interest among school leaders to remain in their positions (Liu & Bellibas, 2018). For example, researchers reported that “[t]he desire to lead and stay in a leadership position is not a position of choice; instead, it has become a position of challenge” (Zellner et al., 2002, p. 3) and that “principal turnover intention was at a historical high” (Liu & Bellibas, 2018, p. 1), which does not bode well for SSL and student learning outcomes in particular.

One may argue that intentions to stay or leave are not about their practical manifestation and are therefore not relevant to the discussion of school leadership retention and, by extension, leadership succession and the sustainability of school leadership. However, “given that career transitional intentions typically occur prior to actual departure behaviors,... it can serve as a proxy to understand the antecedents of the actual act” (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011, p. 259). As Nguyen et al. (2022) noted, “intention may be distinct from, but strongly related to, turnover” (p. i). This suggested the importance of considering principals’ intentions to leave or stay to understand trends in principal retention/turnover. I would argue that understanding intentions allows time to address the antecedents of intentions before principals actually leave.

Studies report factors such as differentiated and individualized support (Cieminski, 2018), fair labor contracts and higher salaries (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011), a favorable disciplinary environment, more autonomy in school management (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011), and job satisfaction (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011) to be associated with lower intentions to leave and therefore lower turnover. However, Heffernan (2021) reported that “negative effects on families of highly visible leaders in small communities... lure of home, family, and support networks” (p. 1) to encourage seeking to leave (move). Tekleselassie and Choi (2021) report on their behalf that “older principals stay more likely than younger, experienced are... less likely to leave or move,” while those “with a doctoral degree are more likely to move than principals with a master’s degree” (p. 1116). This might also link principals’ intentions to stay or move with their age, experience, and level of qualification. Such findings suggested that there are complex factors explaining principals’ intentions to leave or stay, and hence, their retention. Studies such as those by Tekleselassie and Choi (2021) and Tekleselassie and Villarreal III (2011) reported that the factors explaining intentions to leave or

move were distinctive and hence suggest a variety of policy levers to address each. This might signify seeing factors associated with these issues separately.

Collective Capacity

School principals are critical to materialize school improvement (Fuller et al., 2015; Bush, 2008). However, the productivity and sustainability of school leadership “does not merely depend on the... ability and resolution” of one or a group of principals (Šimanskienė & Župerkienė, 2014, p. 86). Rather, efforts to make school leadership sustainable need, among other things, to harness the collective capacity of educational institutions (Cook, 2014; Spillane et al., 2004; Yue et al., 2021).

The collective capacity of an educational institution includes material, financial, and human resources, including intangible human capacities such as skills and knowledge (Dinham & Crowther, 2011). However, I would argue that, in SSL, collective leadership capacity is primarily concerned with the role that human capacity plays in the process of revitalizing school leadership. This is because of the contention that ‘leadership resources are social’ (Hanselman et al., 2016, p. 53). This study considered collective capacity in terms of availability, skills, capabilities, motivation, and commitment of human resources in educational institutions, such as principals (including deputy principals), teachers, and non-teaching staff.

Foremost, principals, teachers, and support staff must be available in the required numbers. Principals and deputy principals available in needed numbers facilitate the timely completion of tasks, facilitating the smooth running of school leadership (Grootenboer, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2019). The availability of teachers in the required number is also important, for it helps the materialization of the instructional influence of principals on student learning gains (Conway, 2015; Deri'c et al., 2022). Support staff also handles school and

school leadership responsibilities, which their absence prevents (Davis-Singaravelu, 2022; FDRE, 2017). This makes the availability of school human resources crucial. Lambert (2002) said that “the days of the lone instructional leader are over” (p. 37), possibly because of the difficulty that school principals face in carrying out school leadership obligations in the absence of these employees. It is also important to note that the author made the assertion over two decades ago, but the school system has added many reform activities since then, implying the need for more school personnel to handle those added activities and thus keep schools running smoothly.

But it is not just availability that matters, but also quality and capability. For example, school principals must have superior professional skills and outstanding qualities (Liou & Daly, 2020; Ochonogor & Amah, 2021). This can be about having the intellectual and cognitive capacity to expect problems, act proactively, and provide adaptive solutions to complex and dynamic educational situations to sustain leadership influence and run the school smoothly (Ochonogor & Amah, 2021). Other school personnel must also have such capability to help SSL. For example, Lambert (2002) pointed to the “need to develop leadership capacity in all members of the school community” (p. 37) to sustain school leadership. The institution’s human resources team, including principals, must be willing and motivated to engage in leadership activities (Harris, 2011; Yukl, 2010), without this, one cannot be sure of their genuine commitment to SSL. The human resources of educational institutions must have the talents, qualities, and internal resources that can help them contribute to powerful leadership influence and, hence, SSL.

The education system can help principals and others in schools gain such capacity and motivation through a variety of means (Heffernan, 2018; Honig & Rainey, 2012). Professional

development, technical support and recognition, and information provision are among such mechanisms (Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Conway, 2015; Qaralleh, 2020). Such resources are critical as they build capacity, including leadership capacity, empower to do the job (Mestry, 2017), and encourage proactive action (Sugrue, 2015), all of which are important for the realization of SSL. In relation to school leaders, Eacott and Asuga (2014) even claimed that even claimed that "[g]overnment initiatives aimed at building [functioning]... education systems are unlikely to succeed without significant attention to the preparation and development of school leaders" (p. 919). This suggested that it is impossible to achieve a vibrant (sustainable) education system without attention to the professional development of school leaders. The provision of such resources can also help to raise informational capacity that can help to take control of one's situation, which can increase motivation and commitment to sustain leadership influence (Cardno, 2018; UNESCO, 2009).

Studies (e.g., Cieminski, 2018; Walker & Riordan, 2010) showed that leadership systems that rely on a collective of adequate numbers, appropriate quality, and enhanced motivation and commitment have a greater impact on the sustainability of student learning gains, which is the primary aim of SSL (Harris, 2011). By utilizing the combined efforts, skills, and experiences (Davis-Singaravelu, 2022), members working in unison stand out as more vibrant (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018) and help to complete activities in less time with the best outcome (Harris, 2011; Šimanskienė & Župerkienė, 2014; Spillane et al., 2004; Yue et al., 2021). It also avoids exhaustion of human resources (Yue et al., 2021) and makes the leadership system stable and sustainable regardless of whether individual leaders come and go (Cieminski, 2018). This may point to the necessity of working towards its realization.

However, studies report that the human resources of the educational institution are not in a good condition to support the materialization of SSL (Harris, 2011). For example, despite the rhetoric about building the capacity of school leaders through initial training, ongoing professional development, and the provision of technical and informational support, school leaders did not appear to have sufficient capacity (Heffernan, 2018; Honig & Rainey, 2012). Studies also indicate that the availability, quality, motivation, and commitment of school personnel are also not enough to sustain school leadership (Marwiani et al., 2018; Lynchapri, 2023; Ochonogor & Amah, 2021). For example, Davies (2007) argued that the “key challenge for sustainable leadership is getting the right team and building leadership capacity” (p. 20). This can have a negative impact on the materialization of collective capacity and, therefore, the sustainability of school leadership.

School Culture

The other important element of SSL is the school culture. Scholars have defined culture as a “set of shared values, beliefs, and norms” (Doğan, 2017, p. 253) that influence the functioning of school leadership and as a “system of shared meanings held by members” (Robbins et al., 2017, p. 2). While the term “shared” in the description of the authors may convey the necessity of a social system for cultural objects to manifest and function, the term “set” may imply that what school communities share is not a single cultural object, but a collection of values, beliefs, and practices. Scholars also describe school culture in terms of its content. For example, Schein (2010) stated that school culture is describe in terms of “the content of culture- what an observer would consider to be the actual rules, norms, values, and basic assumptions of a given culture” (p. 69). Scholars identified the content of culture such as results orientation (Robbins et al., 2017), collaborative spirit, high expectations (Ismail et al., 2022; Melesse &

Molla, 2018), willingness to confront underperformance, putting positive pressure on each other (Lewis et al., 2016), team orientation (Lewis et al., 2016; Robbins et al., 2017), and personal mastery (Lewis et al., 2016). While some of this content emphasizes individual-level resources (e.g., personal mastery), most of them focuses on group-level dynamics that enhance collective outcomes. This study considered cultural elements, such as shared values, collaborative spirit in schools and effort to create and sustain school culture (Cook, 2014; Fullan, 2016).

However, the school culture that serves as a tool for the materialization of SSL is not just any culture. Rather, it is a strong culture that facilitates leadership influence and ensures the proper functioning of SSL. Schein (2010) noted that school cultures “vary in strength and stability” (p. 3), with some school cultures being strong and others weak (Cook, 2014). It is a strong, positive school culture (Ismail et al., 20-22; Schein, 2017) that “stabilizes and provides structure and meaning for group members” (Schein, 2010, p. 3). This might be the reason Robbins et al. (2017) stated that a positive, strong culture is a “more important predictor of sustainable business performance” (p. 462), including sustainable educational business performance.

A positive or strong school culture does not come from nowhere, but the school community, particularly school leaders, develops and sustains it (Bottomley, 2018; Cook, 2014; Davies, 2007; Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Popović et al., 2019; Schein, 2010). Lewis et al. (2016) emphasized that “school leadership is one of the most influential factors in the development of school quality and character” (p. 61). This assertion shows the powerful role that school leaders, particularly principals, play in building a positive or strong school culture. Cook (2014, n. p.) also stated that “principals, faculty, school boards, and stakeholders must be involved in the development of school culture” to “seek sustainable instructional leadership”.

The author emphasizes the need for principals to be involved in the development of school culture if they and the education system seek sustainability in school leadership. Schein (2010) even described that “the dynamic processes of creating and managing culture are the essence of leadership” (p. 3). When affirming that “the concept of sustainable leadership includes the implementation of processes and systems that support culture” (p. 3), Bottomley (2018) also suggested the development and implementation of processes and systems that support culture as a hallmark of sustainable school leadership. Such statements imply that one can achieve SSL through the creation of a productive or strong culture.

Once schools create a productive or strong culture, it is important to sustain it. This requires school leaders and the rest of the school community to maintain productive cultural norms. For example, principals must address those with performance caveats, and the school community must positively pressure each other to perform at their best and positively shape each other’s performance (Lewis et al., 2016). Sustaining school culture may also require ensuring that the manifestation of the culture “continues after the principal or other key position holders have left” (Lambert, 2011, p. 132), as long as the culture remains strong and positive. If the culture is no longer supportive of the school’s productivity, the school’s leadership should seek to change and thus reform the culture. “If elements of a given culture become dysfunctional,” as Schein (2010) put it, “leaders have to surmount their own culture and speed up the normal evolution processes with forced-managed culture change programs” (p. 3). This underlines the critical role that school leadership plays not only in creating and sustaining the school culture but also in changing it when necessary.

Of course, school culture is a key way to exercise school leadership, including SSL. Yukl and Gardner (2020, n. p.) claimed that leadership is about driving influence. However, Schein

(2010) proclaimed that “when we are influential in shaping the behavior and values of others, we think of that as ‘leadership’” (p. 3). Doğan (2017) also stated that culture “influence[s] the way educators and administrators think, feel, and behave in [the] school” (p. 253) space. Shaping or influencing the way people think, feel, and behave is the material of leadership. This shows the close connection between leadership and culture, casting culture as an “integral component of effective school leadership” (Hanselman et al., 2016, p. 53), including effective SSL. Hence, Schein (2010) stated that “leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin” (p. 3), and Cook (2014) affirmed that SSL is, among other things, “the continuation of a strong, positive school culture over time” (n. p.). This inextricably links school culture and school leadership to each other and makes culture the primary avenue of leadership praxis.

It is important to clarify the distinction and relationship between school culture and collective capacity as related to SSL, as people usually conflate the two. True, the margins of school culture and collective capacity overlap. However, this does not mean they are one and the same. I used collective capacity to relate to the collective potential of a school—its ability to carry out the work of school leadership (Cieminski, 2018; Conway, 2015; Davies, 2007). Nonetheless, the existence of such capacity or potential does not guarantee that schools would achieve the needed result. For example, Browne-Ferrigno (2016, p. 152) suggested that “the creation of professional communities within schools does not automatically produce the desired... learning” outcome. Rather, for such collective capacity to be productive, cultural conditions must support collaboration and result orientation (Cook, 2014; Fullan, 2016). Thus, I would argue that a productive, strong school culture is necessary for collective capacity to bring about needed change, as the absence of a productive or strong school culture can easily waste collective capacity (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2018; Davis-Singaravelu, 2022; Harris, 2011).

Empirical Studies on SSL

Another way to understand SSL is to look at what is known about it from empirical studies beyond its theoretical representation. Unfortunately, empirical studies on SSL are scarce (Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015; Yue et al., 2021). When I conducted a literature search for this study, I found a few relevant empirical studies on the topic. This is an area of leadership in general, and school leadership in particular, that has received the least attention for study.

Without contradicting this, however, one can consider a few available empirical studies for what they can offer. For example, key findings and conclusions from a study by Grooms and Reid-Martinez (2011) in the US showed that a strong leadership program that promotes sustainable leadership through sustainable learning communities model the path of individual empowerment and development rather than depleting human resources. According to their findings, the initiative immersed students in a blended/virtual learning environment with a focus on personal transformation, enabling them to improve their communities and organizations.

The dynamics of a small school system that allowed for close coordination and effective implementation of policy initiatives, as well as personnel policies that ensured teachers and leaders adhere to educational goals, were detailed in a study by Dimmock and Tan (2013) (Singapore). They reported this to provide stability and consistency in the leadership system. The study also reported a cultural component that promotes harmony in relationships and group accountability, which helped the school community share the same goal and commitment. They reported this to contribute to the sustainability of school leadership.

Burns et al. (2015) also reported that being a leader means developing attitudes and behaviors rooted in the principles of sustainability. According to the authors, leaders for sustainability are change makers who seek to promote a new consciousness based on

relationships, connection, and awareness. In addition, they noted that leadership is based on the living processes paradigm, which describes how all life functions, and that leadership is an inclusive, collaborative, and reflective process that challenges the adequacy of conventional wisdom that views school leaders as lone individuals performing specific tasks. I would say that this is one of the few studies that look at leadership in a broader sense of sustainability.

However, their work is more of a theoretical investigation than an empirical one, although it used a literature synthesis, which is empirical data.

A couple of other studies also emphasize the possibility of achieving sustainable leadership through ongoing capacity building (Conway, 2015) (Australia) and the need to foster professional learning communities as one of its components (Cook, 2014) (UK). There were also studies that report a lack of a concerted effort among leaders as one of the main barriers to sustainable innovation (Browne-Ferrigno et al., 2006) (US) and a lack of training and formal support for principals that reduces the standing of principals to achieve SSL (Granados & Gámez, 2010) (Spain).

However, all the above studies are from the context of the developed world and advanced education systems. Rather, the study from a different context is that of Miller et al. (2019). They examined “Leadership as Sustainability: Context and Primary School Principals in Jamaica.” This is the context of a developing country, unlike the context of the other studies mentioned so far. The key finding of the study was the continued capacity of the leadership system despite the manifestations of impoverishment and fiscal problems. This provides hope for the flourishing of SSL elsewhere, regardless of the complexity of the context.

Practically, there are no empirical studies on SSL in the African context. However, one can extrapolate some sense of the status of school leadership sustainability from other studies in

this context that did not specifically address SSL (Bush & Fadare et al., 2022; Bush & Kirezi et al., 2022). For example, a couple of studies (Bush, 2008; Mpungose & Ngwenya, 2017) reported that school leaders in Africa had to deal with unique, challenging, and complex contextual factors that required extra capabilities when there is a perceived lack of capacity among school leaders to manage the complexity (Bush & Fadare et al., 2022; MoE, 2021). This can make leading schools in this context a demanding endeavor. Scholars also explain school leadership policies in this context based on imported ideas and one-off solutions that leave little room for consideration of African uniqueness (Bush, 2014; Bush & Glover, 2014; Eacott & Asuga, 2014). This prevents school leadership from being contextually grounded, which can prevent, or at least challenge, its sustainability.

A synthesis of the findings of such empirical studies provides several valuable insights, such as the need to focus on the leadership program (Grooms & Reid-Martinez, 2011), the consideration of the structure of the school system and the cultural components (Dimmock & Tan, 2013), leadership based on the paradigm of living processes and linking it to the function of real life (Burns et al., 2015), and the need to view leadership in a broader sense than focusing on the solitary leaders (Burns et al., 2015; Cook, 2014). However, three major concerns remain. First, these studies, like other areas of school leadership, are limited to the context of the developed world. This prevents other contexts from benefiting from the results. The second is that the studies mostly focused on the training and development of school leaders, especially principals. Although it is important, focusing only on the skills of school leaders can lead to a narrow understanding of school leadership sustainability. The third one is that there was not enough focus on leadership sustainability and most studies focused on the sustainability of leadership outcomes. As I have stated elsewhere, I did not oppose this effort. Rather, I would

argue for ways to make it more prevalent by focusing on the sustainability of school leadership. It is difficult to ensure leadership outcomes such as environmental and social sustainability without addressing the sustainability of the leadership system itself.

The Ethiopian Education System

The study was conducted in the Ethiopian education system, which may require an overview of the system. This education system consists of three sub-sectors: general education, higher education, and technical and vocational training. The issue considered in the study, primary SSL, lies within the general education subsector, and therefore, this contextual review will largely focus on this subsector. However, it is important to provide some highlights of the higher education and technical and vocational training contexts. While technical and vocational training aims to produce human resources at the intermediate level, it comprises eight levels (from level 1 to level 8). Higher education provides education and training at the undergraduate (minimum 4 years), master's (2 years), and doctoral (4 years) levels. The state largely funds both higher education and technical and vocational training, with students sharing some costs. Perhaps to cope with the large budget that such financing implies, the government intends to establish a national fund for education and vocational and technical training (FDRE, 2023).

The general education subsector encompasses pre-primary, primary (1-6), middle (7-8), and secondary (9–12), which is known as the 6-2-4 structure. It also comprises adult and non-formal education (ANFE), special needs education, and colleges of teachers' education. One of the distinguishing factors of the 6-2-4 structure is that students sit for regional exams at the end of grades 6 and 8 and for national examinations at the end of grade 12. While education up to Grade 8 is free and compulsory, education from grades 9 to 12 is free. This means that financing education from 1 to 12 grades is the responsibility of the government (FDRE, 2023).

The overall number of primary and middle schools (grades 1–8) for the 2022–2023 school years was 37,051. While government schools accounted for 91.7% of primary schools across the country, the number of non-government primary schools exceeds the number of government schools in Addis Ababa. The total number of secondary schools for the same year was 3,733. In terms of ownership, government institutions had the largest stake, at 89.1%, except in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, where non-government schools outnumber government schools (MoE, 2023).

The official ages of primary and middle education and of secondary education are 7 to 14 years and 15 to 18 years, respectively (FDRE, 2023; MoE, 2022). The project population aged 4 to 6 years was about 8,487,951 (male 4,298,434 and female 4,189,516) in 2021/2022, with an annual average growth rate of 1.83% (male 1.79% and female 1.86%) for five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023. This age group is in the pre-primary school age range. The projection of the population aged 7–10 and 11–14 was about 10,854,213 (male 5,487,531, female 5,366,682) and 10,141,770 (male 5,115,926, female 5,025,844), respectively, in 2021/2022, with annual average growth rates of 2.12 (male 2.09, female 2.14) and 2.53 (male 2.46, female 2.60), respectively, for five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023. Both these groups are within the official school-age population for primary school.

The estimation of populations of age groups 15-16 and 17-18 was about 4,646,595 (male 2,341,278, female 2,305,317) and 4,444,274 (male 2,237,251, female 2,207,023), respectively, in 2021/2022, with annual average growth rates of 0.82% (male 0.72% female 0.91%) and 0.78% (0.57% female 1.00%), respectively, for five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023. The overall annual average growth rate of the Ethiopian population was about 2.01% (male 1.99%, female 2.03%) over five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023, with a higher percentage for females.

The gross enrollment for preprimary education is 4,041,915 (male 2,102,019, female 1,939,896) in 2022/2023, with a growth rate of 48.6% for females and 51.4% for males. The overall growth rate is unavailable, in the same way such data for various levels of schooling are unavailable. Gross enrollment for primary and middle education is 19,180,410 (male 10,064,213, female 9,116,197) in the 2022–23 academic year. The gross enrolment rate in 2022/2023 for grades 1–6, including ABE, is 100.6 for females and 110.0 for males, while it is 65.1 for females and 66.6 for males, for grades 7–8. The average annual growth rate for the Amhara (-3.12), Benishangul Gumuz (-1.5), and SNNP (-10.63) regions over the stated period is negative. Explanations of such a negative trajectory include issues such as ongoing conflict (Amhara) and the establishment of new regions that decrease the number of SNNP students. Tigray data were not available starting in 2020/2021, and the data for 2019/20 was 1,093,565 (male 554,156, female 539,409). The national average annual growth rate over five years, from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023 is -1.1. This figure included both the over- and under-aged.

Gross enrollment for secondary education is 3,769,187 (male 1,889,487, female 1,879,700) in the 2022/23 academic year, with an average annual growth rate of 7.52 nationally over five years from 2018/2019 to 2022/2023. Again, data for the Tigray region is not available starting in 2020/2021, and the data in 2019/20 was 217,197 (male 109,378, female 107,819). Grades 9–12 GER for 2022/23 is 44.0% for females and 43.6% for males. This enrollment number is significant, which may show the grave responsibility that the education system bears in shaping the future of the nation.

The total teacher population at this level was 726,307 (males 429,309 and females 296,998) over the same period, with secondary teachers being 141,571 (male 113,125, female 28,446). The numbers of preprimary and primary and middle education teachers were 71,971

(males 9,266 and females 62,705) and 512,765 (males 306,918 and females 205,847). Again, Tigray data was unavailable, starting in 2018/2020.

In 2022/23, the number of school leaders (principals and deputy principals) at the primary and middle levels was 43,658, of which only 6.7% were female. Of the approximately 6,875 principals and deputy principals in secondary schools across the country, females account for about 8%. The percentage of appropriately qualified primary and middle school principals was approximately 64.5% for men and 4.8% for women. The figure for secondary school principals was 52.6% for males and 3.7% for females. The figures show that the percentage of qualified females was far less than that of their male counterparts. While the ratio of females is quite low, these data showed that those in positions are also not sufficiently qualified (MoE, 2023).

Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that a conceptual framework “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18). This means it clarifies the concepts to be examined, as well as the expected connections between them. However, Maxwell (2013, p. 49) asserted that it is “a conception or model of what is out there that [one] plans to study and of what is going on with these things and why—a tentative theory of the phenomena that [one] is investigating”. This describes a conceptual framework as an internal mental image of the subject being studied, including its characteristics, dynamics, and underlying causes. This, I argue, provides an expanded conception of the conceptual framework that goes beyond seeing it as a mere material of key factors and their relationships. However, central to both definitions may be the notion that the conceptual framework describes the issues to be studied (the gap, which is the beginning) and its presumed relationships that inform the problem the study wishes

to address. This “can shape the purpose statement and research questions,” as Leavy (2017, p. 128) affirmed. Hence, I argue that a conceptual framework explains the path of the research and grounds it in theoretical constructs.

The next question one might ask is where to find the conceptual framework for a particular study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued that researchers build their own conceptual frameworks for their studies, drawing on established knowledge and expected results. Researchers can achieve this, as Durdella (2019) argued, by linking the components of the basic questions to the research problem and what is still unclear about the subject that they can infer from the literature. Therefore, I move on to the construction of the conceptual framework for the study.

I begin this by clarifying the primary pillars of the study. As the structure of the basic questions and the review of related literature show, the study examined the nature of SSL policies and practices. Specifically, it investigated policies and practices related to leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture. The pillars of the study and the elements involved must work independently and together to fulfill their purpose. The background and review of related literature sections discussed how these elements work and relate to SSL and hence clarified how they independently work. Therefore, I will not repeat that information in this section, as it would be redundant and waste the readers’ time.

However, the components and elements need to interact to achieve the intended purpose of SSL, and hence it is important to clarify how the elements and the basic pillars relate to each other. This policy analysis investigates how policies support or undermine SSL implementation and whether policy structure influences this support or undermining. However, the policies determine the manifestation of SSL practice, which is shown with a large arrow that connects

policies and practice in Figure 2.1. However, since leadership is art and science, the art part of leadership makes it some leadership practice extends outside the circle of policy provision. And a long arrow that extends from the top to the rectangle of SSL practice in Figure 2.1 represents this.

Beyond the relation between basic pillars, it is also worthwhile to describe the relationship between elements within each pillars specially, in the practice arena. The succession of leaders creates a pool of potential leaders. This can provide fertile ground for enhancing the collective capacity. Leadership succession also enables the identification, development, and retention of competent leaders, which can enhance collective capacities and productive cultures (Hargreaves, 2005; Mistry & Sood, 2017; Ritchie, 2020). However, leadership succession negatively affects staff morale and performance as they try to adjust to the changing focus of school leadership (Juwono & Harly, 2017; Fuller & Young, 2009). This affects the sustainability of school leadership, either positively or negatively. Collective capacity enables institutionalizing educational excellence, which is the essence of productive culture and hence sustainable school leadership (Cook, 2014; Camarero-Figuerola et al., 2022; Davies, 2007; Duignan & Cannon, 2011). By building collective capacity, leaders can foster an atmosphere in which employees feel empowered and work together to accomplish tasks. This can positively affect the development of school culture (Harris and Kemp-Graham, 2017). Collective effort requires collaboration, which can provide the basis for creating a shared understanding within the school community that can facilitate the development of a productive culture (Cook, 2014; Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Robbins et al., 2017).

A school culture produces synergies that enhance what collective capacities can produce (Cook, 2014) and enable exerting pressure on each other, which can enable aching at a high level

(Fullan, 2016). Positive school culture fosters leadership development, increasing influence and productivity (Cook, 2014); A school culture fosters growth and development, increases engagement and satisfaction, and hence facilitates succession because of an attractive environment and increased human potential (Schein, 2010. 2017). Overall, the descriptions offered place the elements of sustainable leadership in a complex web of relationships, allowing them to function both alone and in tandem to achieve sustainable school leadership.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the relationship between the major elements and their sub-constructs I just described in the previous paragraphs. When a relationship is mostly unidirectional, I represented with a line with a single arrow showing the influence toward the arrow. When the influence is bidirectional, I used a line containing arrows on both sides. The thickness of the line is also meaningful. Thicker lines show connections between major elements, or connect one SSL pillar (like policy) to elements under another (like leadership succession, school culture, and collective capacity within SSL practice). The thinner lines connect the subcomponents of an element to other subcomponents in the same or a different pillar. The color I use in the conceptual framework has no meaning other than visual appeal.

Once constructed, a conceptual framework needs to be placed in a specific section of the paper. Unfortunately, there is disagreement about where to place it in the paper. For example, Creswell and Creswell (2018), who discussed this issue from a mixed design perspective, recommended “placing the theory (model or conceptual framework) at the beginning of the article as an a priori framework to guide the questions/hypotheses of the study” (n. p.). Leavy (2011) presented six steps in a literature review, of which “synthesizing the literature to build a conceptual framework” (p. 64) is the last step. When stating that “the conceptual framework is derived from the review of theory and research” (p. 140), Marshall and Rossman (2016) also

seemed to agree with Leavy's (2011) claim that the conceptual framework should come after the literature review. The difference in authors' claims about where to place the conceptual framework in a study may be because of different assumptions about the novelty of the topic or even the authors' familiarity with it. A well-established subject and the authors' familiarity with it may dictate placing the conceptual framework before the literature review. The opposite may be true if the subject is new, and the author is not familiar with it. The subject is new and lacks an established corpus of empirical literature (Miller et al., 2019). This made its prior understanding problematic and, therefore, dictated the placement of a conceptual framework after the literature review in its current location.

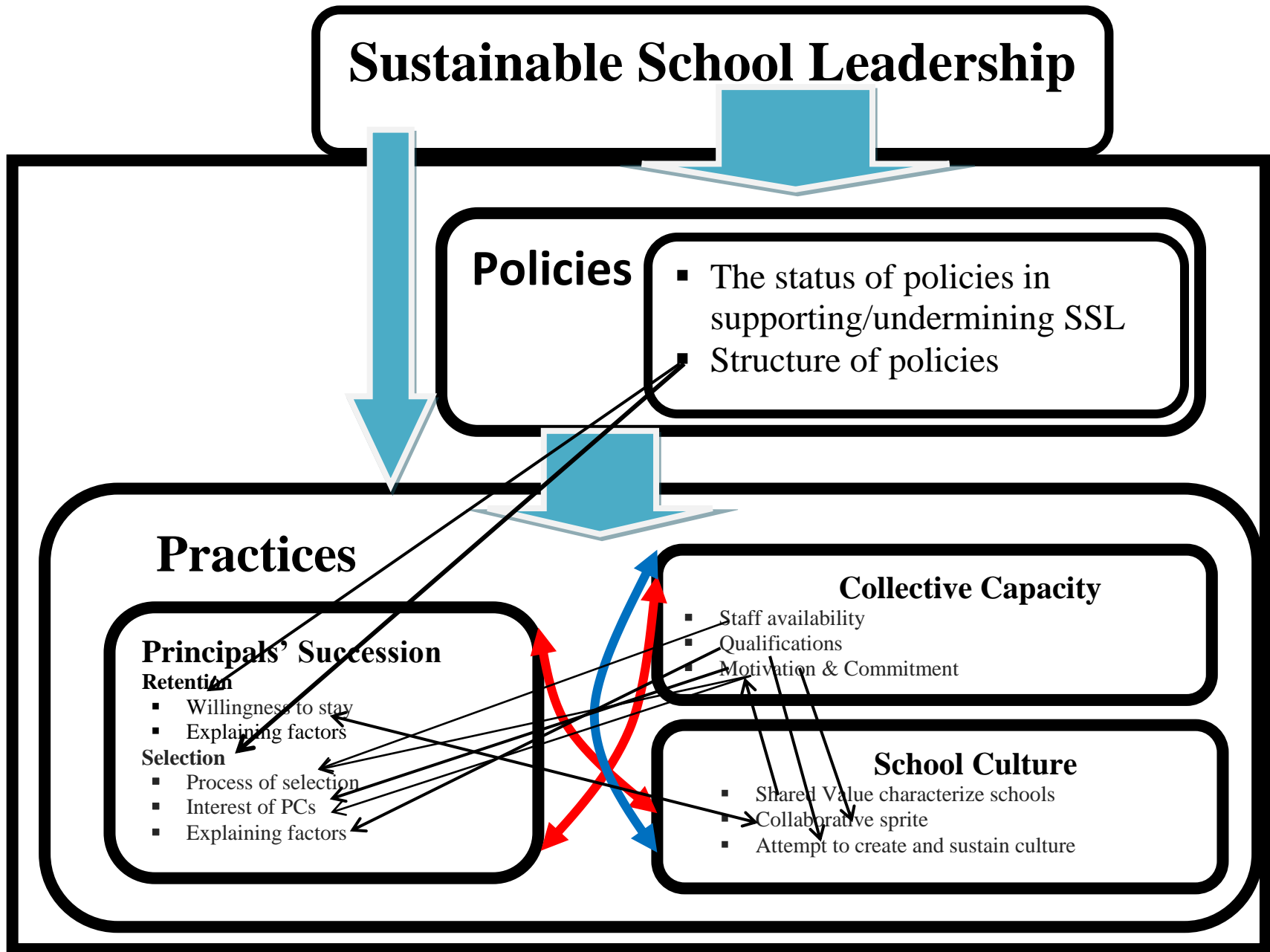


Figure 2 1 Conceptual Framework showing the relationship between the major and sub-constructs

CHAPTER THREE

THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research design, the study unit, the study participants (data sources), and the sampling technique. It also covers data collection instruments, trustworthiness, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

Design of the Study

I approached the study from a constructivist perspective. I chose this philosophical perspective because of its compatibility with the approach to the study and my beliefs about what it can offer. Constructivism views the world and knowledge about it, including policy knowledge and action, as socially constructed through actions and interactions, and therefore differing depending on the social context (Akpan et al., 2020). This is the worldview that the qualitative approach I adopted in this study embraces when it suggests that people and groups derive different meanings from experiencing social or human phenomena such as school leadership sustainability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The constructivist philosophical perspective is relevant because this study aimed to understand how participants derived meaning from experiencing sustainable school leadership in this setting and how policy documents reflected these contextual differences.

A researcher's philosophical stance or belief is "what one believes about the nature of reality (also called ontology) and the nature of knowledge (epistemology)" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 8). I believe that human societies have different ways of living, experiencing the world, and making sense of those experiences, regardless of their sharing aspects of life. I have observed this through working in academia and talking to students who come from different

parts of the country, and I have seen that they make different meanings of the same event happening around them. As a person who has been working in various capacities in the Ethiopian education system, I have also seen several times teachers and principals making different meanings of the same event happening around them. This is actually what constructivism suggests, which made its adoption in this study relevant. I understood that there are critiques of constructivism, some of which are quite legitimate, just as there are critiques of other philosophical stances (see, for example, Alanazi, 2016; Liu & Matthews, 2005). Without undermining this, I adopted this philosophical lens because I believe it could at least help explain the topic under study from the unique perspective of the study participants and context of the current study and the education system.

One distinct issue that must be addressed is my taking a constructive approach and examining policy provisions. Policies are typically formed via negotiation. As a result, mutual understanding more accurately expresses policy aspirations than individualist understanding and knowledge creation, which are promoted by the constructivist approach. This is typically accurate, and I have no objections to an argument that policy ideals and constructive conceptions are less compatible. In this study, I focused on implicit policies that are not explicitly specified in official documents. As a result, they are open to interpretation and different understandings for educational stakeholders. Hence, I would suggest that adopting a constructive approach when exploring such measures is relevant. Even when clear policies are published in official documents, they are subject to varied understandings and interpretations when practitioners seek to execute them. As a result, I would suggest that adopting a constructive view to explore policies is still relevant, particularly given the current study's emphasis on implicit policy provisions.

Qualitative research was an approach used to address the subject. Hoy and Adams (2016) stated that “qualitative research is inquiry based on the reported experiences of individuals through...case studies...in a particular context” (p. 194). This makes it pertinent to elicit the meanings that participants attach to their experiences with the objects of SSL, including how they experience implicit policy provisions of SSL. Hoy and Adams (2016) further affirmed that qualitative research “focuses on an in-depth understanding of social and human behavior and the reasons behind such behavior” (p. 21). This enabled in-depth investigation into participants’ experimentation with SSL elements and their explanations, as well as the behaviors (action and inaction) and reasoning the policy documents provided. Even the subject of the study was developing and had unclear elements, components, or dimensions and hence was novel and complex (Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015; Yue et al., 2021). This made its understanding problematic, which a qualitative approach was appropriate to uncover (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Carpenter et al., 2022; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Miller et al., 2019; Pernecky, 2015).

The case study was the design of the study, except that I used an interpretive phenomenological design to treat minor parts of the data. A case study is the study of a bounded system, case, or phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mourlam et al., 2019) and is “a versatile form of qualitative inquiry most suitable for a comprehensive, holistic, and in-depth investigation of a complex issue” (Harrison et al., 2017, n. p.). This helps in-depth exploration of policy and practice of SSL, the case I was addressing in this study, by eliciting information from study participants and deriving data from policy documents. Qualitative case studies such as those by Aydin and Kaya (2020), Aydin and Tonbuluğlu (2014), Hu and Lei (2014), Lee and Brett (2015), and Saeed and Zyngier (2012) informed the use of design in this study.

The Study Unit, Data Sources and Sampling Technique

The Study Unit

I stated in chapter one that the study location was Sheger City in Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. I targeted this study unit through the purposive sampling technique based on its unique characteristics that distinguish it from other educational jurisdictions in the Oromia Region or even Ethiopia. For example, the city is in the central part of the country and region, next to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, and Oromia Regional State (ORS, 2022). This might provide an opportunity for the city to have better-quality education personnel than remote zones and woredas, as the Ministry of Education also affirmed (MoE, 2006). This might allow education offices to better support schools and principals, which could improve the capacity of principals and hence the sustainability of school leadership (Bush, 2008; Gurmu, 2020).

The Oromia Education Bureau also rated the city as the most favorable for teacher and principal transfer based on factors such as distance from Addis Ababa, climate, and level of infrastructure development like roads, electricity, clean water, health services, and so on (OEB, 2022b). As a result, it is the place to which principals and teachers most often request transfers and want to settle permanently, and hence they consider getting a transfer to such a context a make-or-break matter in their lives. For example, in the academic year 2023-2024, over 45,000 teachers and principals applied for transfer to this study context, of which about 1,310 were successful, with a success rate of less than 3% (Sheger City Education Office, 2024). This showed the fierce competition that teachers and principals go through to get transferred to this study context.

Competition is largely based on an individual's years of experience (OEB, 2022b), so transfers to the city used to bring in mostly more experienced teachers and principals. This

provides a better pool of potential candidates from which to select competent principals. This might lead to the availability of better-quality instructional leaders who could contribute to the sustainability of school leadership (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Ochonogor & Amah, 2021). An additional factor is that teachers and principals with less than 70% performance points may not apply for transfer (OEB, 2022b), which might also contribute to transferring better teachers and principals. This can increase collective capacity and the pool of competent individuals who could take over school leadership.

Actually, the city can also attract veteran teachers who are approaching retirement age and have little or no motivation to serve as principals. Even if they are willing, retirement can limit their retention as incumbent principals and potential candidates, which may not be beneficial to sustaining school leadership. Of course, the Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2022b) recently assigned a 30% quota of transfers to teachers with 8 years of service or fewer, which looked to mitigate a problem with the concentration of veteran teachers. However, 70% of the transfers are still based on seniority, and hence the transfers inevitably largely bring in long-serving teachers and principals. The 30% allocation for transfers of teachers with 8 years of service or fewer itself is interesting in the eyes of the SSL since these individuals cannot assume principalship because of the year of service restriction (OEB, 2022b), which means exclusion from the PC's pool.

Not only do teachers and principals enter the study setting, but they also leave it; two main scenarios explain this. The first is that a government arrangement can transfer teachers and principals to Addis Ababa. For example, during the 2023/2024 academic year, a government arrangement transferred over 800 teachers from this study setting to Addis Ababa (SCEO, 2024). This demonstrates the probability that this scenario would play out. The transfer of a high

number of teachers, unusually high compared to the typical number of annual transfers, was largely because of the reassignment of areas from Addis Ababa to Oromia, from where teachers were transferred back to Addis Ababa. Even with a few transfers, those who succeed may be experienced teachers and principals who could best serve Sheger City (OEB, 2022b). There are also conditions that can encourage an active search for this. For example, there are provisions for housing or housing allowances and free public transportation for public school teachers and principals in the city of Addis Ababa (Capital Newspapers, 2019). Principals and teachers in Sheger City are aware of these opportunities because of its proximity to Addis Ababa, and they would move to take advantage of them. Such a move can deprive the city of qualified teachers and principals and might jeopardize its school leadership sustainability.

The second scenario is that private schools in Addis Ababa direly need qualified teachers and principals. And this might further exacerbate the outflow of teachers and principals from Sheger City. For example, the Addis Ababa Education Bureau closed about 59 private schools in 2018 because of a lack of qualified teachers, among other reasons (Capital Newspapers, 2019). As a result, private schools in Addis Ababa might scramble to find qualified teachers and fill teaching positions with competent teachers in order to stay afloat for those that were operating and to reopen for those that were closed. In addition, according to news broadcasted on Oromia Broadcasting Network Radio on April 11, 2023, 25% of teachers in Addis Ababa were teaching without relevant training in the subjects they were teaching, which largely describes the situation in private schools. This also meant that the schools needed qualified teachers and principals. As an immediate neighbor, this can deprive Sheger City of more experienced teachers, limiting the sustainability of school leadership in the city. Teachers and principals might also move to Addis

Ababa to work in private schools, taking advantage of the many higher education institutions there to further their own education.

In this way, the visible inflow and outflow of teachers and principals, which can enhance or disrupt the stability and sustainability of its school leadership, explain Sheger City. Therefore, it was interesting to study the sustainable school leadership in Sheger City, where all these situations manifested to either positively or negatively influence SSL.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

Key informants in the study were potential candidates for school principalship, primary school principals, and education officers in Sheger City. The study addressed the interest of potential candidates. Therefore, potential candidates are among the groups that should take part in the study, as they can best explain their interest in becoming principals. They can also competently provide information on other facets of school leadership sustainability, such as collective capacity and institutional culture, since they are essential parts of the school system. Principals can also provide first-hand data on manifestations of institutional culture and the collective capacity and retention of incumbent principals since they can talk about it after experiencing it for themselves. Education officers are in charge of filling school leadership positions with competent educational cadres and supporting, monitoring, and evaluating schools and school leaders (MoE, 2002, 2013a, 2021). This put them in a strategic position to provide reliable information on the state of institutional culture, the collective capacity for school leadership, the interest of potential candidates in becoming principals, the retention of incumbent principals in particular, and the sustainability of school leadership. Although additional stakeholders, such as PSTA members, should be included in the study, the qualitative nature of

the study does not allow for the inclusion of a diverse variety of participants, therefore I chose to include those with full-time roles and direct responsibility for the materialization of SSL.

In order to select key informants from each of these categories, I first selected the sub-cities from which I would select participants. The Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfine, and the other five towns were in place before the establishment of Sheger City (ORS, 2022). Teachers used to be transferred from the special zone and other zones of the Oromia region to these towns (OEB, 2022b; SCEO, 2024). Within each town, teachers also used to transfer from schools in the periphery of the towns (which I referred to as departure schools in this study) to schools in the central part of the towns (which I referred to as destination schools). When Sheger City was founded, five sub-cities (Eka-Tafo, Galan, Sebeta, Burayu, and Sululta), by default, contained many destination schools, and I called such sub-cities destination school sub-cities. Four (Kura-Jida, Koye, Furi, and Mana Abichu) contained largely departure schools, and I called such sub-cities departure school sub-cities. The remaining three sub-cities (Gelan-Guda, Melka-Nonno, and Gefersa-Guje) contained such schools in closer proportions, placing their status between destination and departure school sub-cities. I used the term 'by default' to describe how sub-cities became sub-cities of departure or destination schools. This is because the creation of sub-cities was not based on the purposive criteria of creating destination or departure schools in sub-cities; rather, it was by default based on other criteria the Oromia region used to establish them, such as ease of administration (ORS, 2022).

I then selected sub-cities using the extreme case purposive sampling technique, which involves the "purposive selection of cases that are special" (Emmel, 2013, n.p.). With this technique, "an outlying case or one that possesses one or more extreme characteristics is studied" (Omona, 2013, p. 180). Therefore, I selected three sub-cities from the two extremes: sub-cities of

destination schools and sub-cities of departure schools. This resulted in a selection of six sub-cities.

It remains to clarify how being sub-cities of departure or destination schools related to the study. Destination school sub-cities had the potential to have a concentration of more experienced potential candidates because schools in such a context used to receive teachers and principals through transfers constantly (OEB, 2022b). This provides a pool from which to select more competent principals with relatively better leadership skills. Also, because such schools are inner-city schools, principals and potential candidates have no alternative schools to which they could apply for a transfer. This can provide stability for principals and potential candidates, which is beneficial to the stability and sustainability of school leadership. One can also relate this to a stable school culture and an enhanced collective capacity.

Teacher transfers are usually from outlying schools under a previous administrative unit, currently in the departure school sub-cities, to the destination schools, currently in sub-cities of the destination schools, at least previously. The frequent departure of teachers and school leaders from departure school sub-cities can undermine the development of a strong institutional culture, dilute collective capacity, and negatively affect school leadership sustainability. These situations made it interesting to target sub-cities with such extreme behaviors to explore SSL.

I selected all participants from the selected sub-cities using the purposive sampling technique, targeting key informants. I began the selection of participants with the selection of education officers. I selected eight education officers from the targeted six sub-city education officers. I selected one education officer from each of the sub-cities except for two sub-cities, from where I targeted two officers to clarify data of their respective sub-cities. I made the selection from teachers', principals', and supervisors' development and deployment core

processes; except for in the case I targeted an additional officer from a specific sub-city. This is because the officers in the core process are responsible for selecting and placing principals and teachers and had frequent contact and close working relationships with them and the schools. This allows them to have a great deal of information about principals, potential candidates, and the situation of school leadership sustainability. Of the officers in the targeted core processes, I selected the process coordinators since the coordinating role allows them to have more information than other officers in the core process who handle a single aspect of the job. However, I targeted additional key informant offices from two education offices to achieve data saturation in relation to their respective offices and overall as Sheger City.

The competing idea can be for selecting educational supervisors, over which I selected education officers. To explain this, the education bureau abolished the previous structure of cluster supervisors. Then, it assigned incumbents who passed exams as education office-based educational supervisors and assigned them to support schools and school principals on daily school (OEB, 2023a). This can definitely enable such personnel to have tremendous information about school principals. However, this was the most recent development, and at the time of data collection, the supervisors had not yet stabilized. Thus, it was better to target officers in the work section I targeted to get rich information than to target the supervisors.

I then moved on to selecting key informant principals. First, I established eligibility criteria: at least three years of experience as a principal to be able to speak competently about the experience of being a principal and permanent principalship (not temporary assignment or delegation), which could be helpful in issues such as building school culture. I then selected key informant principals from those who met the eligibility criteria. Being a key informant required having knowledge, rich information on the subject, strong communication skills, and the ability

to elaborate. It was difficult for me as a researcher to assess principals against the criteria and select the most appropriate one without the help of education offices. Therefore, education officers helped select six (one from each sub-city) key informant principals among those fulfilling the eligibility criteria.

I selected eight PCs from the six sub-cities by specifically targeting ULs and HoDs, selecting one from each, except that I selected two PCs from each of two education offices to elaborate on the data and help achieve data saturation. The education system used to select principals for school leadership positions from among teachers to whom ULs and HoDs belong. However, ULs and HoDs had leadership merit, which makes targeting them specifically among existing PCs reasonable. This is because serving in such roles provides an advantage in obtaining a principalship (MoE, 2002). Although there are other positions that can lead to such an advantage, official documents listed unit leadership and department headship only next to the positions of principal and deputy principal (see, for example, MoE, 2002). This might show a higher order of importance for the positions and hence a greater likelihood of those serving in such positions being selected as principals. They are also more involved in school leadership than other PCs who can potentially become principals. Another reason is that the lack of incentives in their current positions might encourage them to serve as principal and deputy principal, which are positions with incentives.

I selected PCs from the same school from which I selected school principals in order to facilitate triangulation of data from different participants (Durdella, 2019; Guest, 2012). Basically, the sampling process needed to select PC participants from schools where there was a high concentration of them. Fortunately, the selection process of the principals took the selection site to such schools. Because the selected principals needed to be knowledgeable, information-

rich, and experienced, this likely led to their appointments at schools with high concentrations of PCs. I used the deputy principals' accompaniment of the principals to select key informant ULs and to avoid bias. In selecting ULs and HoDs, I gave preference to being a better key informant rather than their role, resulting in the selection of six ULs and two HoDs.

I also interviewed two individuals from the Ministry of Education and the Oromia Education Bureau to get further information that would allow me to clarify certain aspects of the study, especially the data I got from documents. Although they were not part of my original plan, I contacted them about aspects of the content of the official document I was struggling with. I selected them from the relevant departments of the ministry and the bureau.

This brought the total number of participants in the study to 24. I prioritized data saturation, the point at which "observing more data does not lead to the discovery of more information" (Lowe et al., 2018, p. 191), over the number of participants (Neuman, 2014). I already reached data saturation around the 14th, 15th, and 16th participants, but I continued the interviews hoping new information could emerge as the sub-cities and categories of participants changed. However, no new information emerged from such a situation. Therefore, there is no need to continue interviewing further participants, and hence I stopped the interview process.

Document Sources

Documents were another source of data for the study. Freeman and Maybin (2011) proclaimed that "[g]overnment is unthinkable, impractical, [and] infeasible without documents" (p. 155). While government includes entities such as the Ministry of Education and Education Bureaus, one reason that government becomes impractical and unworkable without documents is because of the policies in those documents that help government exercise power and citizens experience productive social lives, including lives of education and educational leadership.

Karppinen and Moe (2012) actually stated that “documents are born and may have consequences in certain institutional contexts and real-world situations, and thus do not exist only in the sphere of ideas” (p. 189). Because of this, one cannot ignore documents but explore them for what they can offer, including what they can provide in connection with the materialization of SSL.

Table 3. 1: Linkage of data with their source documents

Aspect	Source document
SSL (All sources)	1) Education and Training Policy (FDRE, 2023) 2) Education Sector Development Programme VI (ESDP VI) (MoE, 2021)
Principals Succession (All sources)	3) Ethiopian Teacher Development Program Guidelines (MoE, 2007) 4) Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 (FDRE, 2017) 5) Guidelines for the Placement of Teachers, Principals and Supervisors No. 2/2012 (Civil Service Commission, 2019)
Collective Capacity 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10	6) National General Education Inspection Framework (MoE, 2013b) 7) National Professional Standard for School Principals (MoE, 2012a) 8) School principals Selection and Placement directive, Oromia Education Bureau (2022)
School Culture 2, 4, 6, 9, 10	9) Standard for primary schools (OEB, 2009) 10) The Framework for Continuous Development for Primary and Secondary School Teachers, Leaders, and Supervisors (MoE, 2009)

I used three criteria to select the documents. First, the documents studied should be official documents such as education and training policy, ESDP, standards, frameworks, guidelines, etc., that are published at the national or regional level. These do not include, for example, reference manuals, published research reports, or policy analyses, unless I used such sources for reference purposes. Second, the documents to be included should be those that contained regulations related to SSL or the element of SSL that the study was targeting or those that were supposed to provide such regulations. Third, the documents the study should consider should be those in effect at the time of the study (approximately 2023 to 2025). Of course, I ran

into a problem applying this last criterion. I was gathering information on whether some of the previously provided policies were functional and therefore deserved inclusion or exclusion. But the information I received on this issue from different sources was contradictory, leaving me in a state of confusion. The way forward was to critically consider the information I received from these sources and decide for myself whether to include or exclude the documents.

Bøyum (2014) argued that “a full analysis of a complete policy document would be extremely time-consuming” (p. 860). While the author’s argument is about the difficulty of analyzing a single policy document in its entirety and the necessity of being selective, one could derive a message from such an assertion about the necessity of limiting the number of documents one would analyze when targeting multiple documents. As a result, I reduced the number of documents I analyzed in the study, prioritizing the most relevant and those that have either explicit or implicit references to SSL or its elements. Table 3.1 lists the documents I considered. In order to link the source document to the aspects I used, I listed the serial number of the documents in parentheses in the aspect column.

I used data I got from the official documents to explore the status of policies in supporting or undermining the materialization of SSL and the structure of the policies. I explored policies for what they could offer or deny for the materialization of SSL and if their supporting or underlying effect varied according to structure (organization), which I explored in terms of policy nature, policy distribution, and the policy timeline.

Data Collection Instruments

Since the study was qualitative, it required the use of instruments that are sensitive to eliciting the underlying meaning of the subject (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saldaña, 2016).

Hence, I used semi-structured interviews, document analysis, observation, and field notes as data collection instruments.

Semi-Structure Interview

The semi-structured interview was one of two major tools used to gather data for this study. Qualitative studies widely use semi-structured interviews because they allow for the flexible collection of rich qualitative data by modifying questions, changing order, and eliciting further responses as the interview unfolds (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Delamont, 2012; Saldaña, 2016). Hence, I used semi-structured interviews in this study to tap into the benefits they offer.

I have used three sets of self-developed semi-structured interviews: one for potential candidates, one for principals, and another for education offices. This was to tailor items to the characteristics of each group. The interview items had focused on three main points. The first major point of focus was the principals' succession. This included potential candidates' interest in becoming primary school principals, which explored PCs perceptions of principalship, the processes for selecting PCs (how they apply and are selected as school principals), their availability and aspirations to become principals, and explanations for their interest or lack of interest in school leadership positions. Under principals' succession, I also explored retention of school principals, under which I investigated incumbent principals' intention to continue as principals and factors that explained their intention. The collective human capacity of primary schools was the second major consideration in the interview. The key issues of focus were the availability, qualifications, motivation, and commitment of school staff. By targeting school culture as the third major focus of the interview, I explored issues such as the values held by staff that shapes the school's cultural nuance, the collaborative spirit that explains primary schools in this study setting, and the attempt of principals and school communities to build strong culture.

I developed the interview items based on the literature review and the basic questions of the study (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). I designed the items to help participants explain the issue in a broader sense. I refined and revised the items through several rounds of revisions. I also tried to keep the items short, clear, and simple in pattern and language and arranged in a logical sequence. Peers, the study advisors, and two other experts with sufficient experience in instrument evaluation evaluate the items. I then incorporated their suggestions and the feedback and made it ready for last use. I originally developed the interview items in English. I then translated them into Afan Oromo, the working language of the study context, in which I also conducted the interview.

Document Analysis

One of the basic questions this study sought to answer was a question about the anatomy of SSL-related policies. Since I must get the data needed to answer this basic question from relevant official documents, document analysis was another major data collection tool for my study. To get the data, I developed a list of items for which I need to generate data. I then solicited suggestions (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018; Delamont, 2012; O’Leary, 2017). After incorporating the suggestions, I created the final checklist of three major items and used it for the actual document analysis.

The items on which I generated data from official documents included the indirect mention and the implicit message in policy documents that I could link to SSL. I have also generated data from these sources on elements of sustainable school leadership, namely school leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture. This involved looking for evidence in official documents of the standards and provisions envisaged and the processes and

mechanisms recommended for selecting and keeping school leaders, building collective capacity, and manifesting strong school culture.

I understand that there is some overlap between document analysis as a data collection tool, document analysis as a data collection procedure or process, and document analysis as a data analysis technique (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Leavy, 2017). Without claiming to make a perfect distinction, I have attempted to place issues that were more instrumental in this section and those that were more of a data collection process in the Data Collection Procedures section, while including issues relevant to actual data analysis in the Data Analysis Technique section.

Observation and Field notes

Observations and field notes were other data collection tools used in this study, but to a lesser extent. Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018) noted that “field notes are widely recommended in qualitative research as a means of documenting needed contextual information” (p. 381). This is, according to Patton (2015), the documentation of “activities, behaviors, actions... interpersonal interactions...or any other aspect of observable human experience” (p. 87) related to the subject of interest, which was SSL in the study.

However, I captured some of this data, such as those related to interpersonal interactions or other aspects of observable human experience, through observation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Durdella, 2019). This showed the complementarities of the two instruments. Hence, I captured messages conveyed through tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal cues that emerge during the interview, as well as behaviors and actions displayed (Saldaña, 2016; Silverman, 2017). However, I had no separate arrangement for conducting a full-fledged observation. I simply observed and documented what causally emerged about SSL from the contextual richness of the context of the study when I was collecting data through interviews.

Trustworthiness

It is an expected scientific standard that the data generated and results reported in a study must be trustworthy in order to be accepted as useful scientific input (Delamont, 2012; Suter, 2012). I ensured trustworthiness in the study through several mechanisms. Foremost, I kept the interview protocols strictly topic-focused, as comprehensive as possible, and as open-ended as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Suter, 2012) to shed sufficient light on the phenomenon of SSL under study. I also pilot tested the items on a small scale with three participants who were not part of the actual study to ensure that the items could indeed elicit the required data. This helped shape the items and, more importantly, provided me with a message to strengthen my negotiation skills to get the involvement of the participants.

I also made the interview sessions long enough (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2016) to provide an in-depth understanding of the events that helped establish the trustworthiness of the data generated. However, I made the interview process flexible depending on how the interview session unfolded (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The shortest session was 35 minutes, and the longest was an hour and a quarter.

I also audio recorded the interview sessions and carefully transcribed the audio data (Bowen, 2009; Suter, 2012). These helped me maintain data accuracy, lessen distortion, and avoid bias. This can increase the trustworthiness of the data and the findings that derived from it. I also conducted follow-up telephone interviews to clear up confusion I experienced during data analysis, which helped to grasp dependable data. Finally, I collected data from different categories of participants and a variety of document sources, which have helped triangulation that helped trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Durdella, 2019).

Procedures for Data Collection

I began the data collection process by obtaining a letter of support from Addis Ababa University, Department of Educational Planning and Management. I then submitted the letter to the Sheger City Mayor's Office and got a letter of support to conduct the study in the city. Then, I submitted this letter, along with the letter I got from the department at Addis Ababa University, to the Sheger City Education Office, the Sheger City Planning and Development Office, and the six sub-city education offices to gain access to the study site and participants and got data from their respective offices, including socioeconomic data. I also submitted a letter from the department at Addis Ababa University to the Ministry of Education and the Oromia Education Bureau to request access to the relevant records held by their respective offices and contact officers. These records included those that helped change the background data and provided critical insight on the subject under consideration.

After I got access to the study site and participants, I scheduled the interview date and time with each participant based on their suggestions. To establish a sense of a natural work environment and to ensure that the location did not interfere with the provision of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; O'Leary, 2017), I conducted the interviews at the participants' respective workplaces. On the interview day, I asked participants to respond to one question at a time and record their responses subsequently. Initially, I asked participants general questions. But I asked probing questions to gain a deeper understanding, especially if participants did not address the needed subject in the required detail. I tried my best to make the interview session smooth by skipping items, altering their order, and considering additional items based on how each interview session progressed. I also gave participants a chance to add any issues they felt were important at the end. I myself, a researcher in the study, handled the whole interview to reach

each participant similarly. I conducted the interview in Afan Oromo, the working language of the study area.

I also followed certain procedures to collect data through document analysis. First, I produced a list of the documents and locations from which I could get them. Next, I went to each office, contacted the division, and secured the documents. I got some of the stated documents online. However, since parties who issued them might improve and replace them without changing what they made accessible online, I consulted each respective office to see if the documents were appropriate and still in operation. Occasionally, the required documents were missing from a particular office, so I secured those documents from other offices. In order to generate data from each document through document analysis, I asked relevant questions and looked for information in the documents. This means I treated the documents like participants, as per O’Leary’s (2017) recommendation. Then, I recorded the actual data either by paraphrasing the contents or directly extracting relevant contents (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018; Delamont, 2012; Saldaa, 2016).

I also captured data on the contextual situation through field notes and observation before, during, and/or after the interview. I did this mostly when I was in the field for data collection (i.e., at educational institutions). This was because much of the contextual data emerges from this context. Therefore, I attempted to remain vigilant and captured relevant data that emerged from the contextual manifestation during my stay at educational institutions. To facilitate this process, I always had my notebook with me.

Data Analysis Techniques

The overall data analysis technique for the study was an amalgamation of content analysis and thematic analysis, which someone could rightfully use for qualitative data analysis,

especially in a situation like this one that involves different data collection techniques for different parts of the study (Bowen, 2009; Creswell, 2006). I used content analysis within thematic analysis, in which the content analysis helps “organises information into categories”, as Cardno (2018) states, while “thematic analysis requires patterns within the data to be recognised and these become emerging themes” (p. 634). A study by Wise (2015) that used such “a concurrent embedded strategy” to analyze “[w]ritten responses from a representative sample... for content and themes” (p. 103) on emerging challenges facing school principals could inform the utilization of such a strategy in the current and similar studies.

To describe the detail process, I began the data analysis and continued concurrently with the data collection process, especially with the interview process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Durdella, 2019; O’Leary, 2017; Patton, 2015; Suter, 2012). After I finished each interview session, I made the audio data available for transcription by two transcribers. I kept each interview’s audio data and transcription in a separate file with the participant’s designated code as the file name. I kept transcripts from various participant groups in distinct folders together, which helped me avoid data loss and misplacement. Then, I, the researcher in this study, the transcribers themselves, and two additional individuals compared the transcript against audio data to verify conformity. I checked the accuracy of the data I derived from observation, field notes, and documents and made it ready for analysis.

Through many readings and re-readings, I carefully studied the contents of transcriptions of the interview and the data from document analysis, observation, and field notes. This gave me, as a researcher, a better understanding of the data generated (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Then, I reduced the data in several steps. This was because the interview and document data are so rich

that some couldn't use it in its entirety (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I translated the data into English after it reached a manageable level for inclusion.

I then developed a qualitative codebook based on the understanding I gained from the literature review, reading and rereading of the data, and the basic questions the study sought to answer. I then applied the codes to the data set. I segmented the data and identified each segment with a code (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I have also considered emergent codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015; Saldana, 2016), collapsed some previously considered codes, and even rejected others, depending on the situations that unfold during data analysis. The inherent flexibility of qualitative research enabled me to do so without violating the scientific method for qualitative data analysis (Suter, 2012). I continued this process until I coded all the data similarly. I also applied the same content analysis procedure to data I got from official documents. I used the data generated from the field notes and observations to support evidence for the interview data and, therefore, coded them together with the data from the interview and document analysis.

I then discovered and merged groups of identically coded data segments for both interview and document data. To do this, I imported the segmented and coded data into Excel, along with the codes and data sources, once the coding was stable. I then filtered and aggregated the data marked with a particular code. I categorized and re-categorized the codes according to their applicability and relationship to the questions until I organized the data into just a handful of broad categories. I then explained and discussed the finding from a variety of perspectives (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and compared it with findings of similar studies to establish similarity and difference and to pinpoint the reasons (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2016).

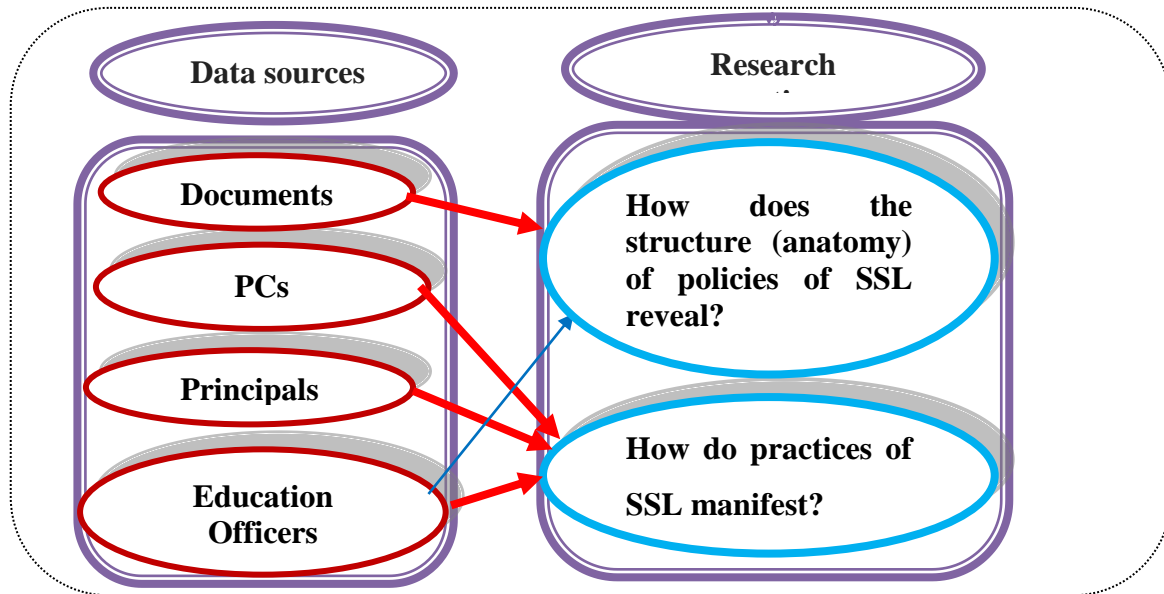


Figure 3. 2: **Graphic organizer linking data sources with research questions**

I addressed each of the basic questions using data from a single or multiple sources. In Figure 3.1, I linked the basic questions to the data sources used to answer them. The thickness and thinness of the connecting lines in the figure reflect how much information from a particular source is used to answer the basic questions. This means that the sources associated with the research question in the thicker line were the primary sources of data for that basic question. However, the different colors have no meaning other than as a visual attraction.

Ethical Consideration

I adopted and followed appropriate ethical guidelines during the entire study process. First of all, I conducted the study with the knowledge and full approval of the relevant authorities at different levels of the educational structure by obtaining support letters from each office. Conducting the study with the full recognition, awareness, and permission of the relevant parties is the component of research ethics (Holloway & Brown, 2012; Jason & Glenwick, 2016; Leavy, 2017). In addition, I informed participants of the purpose and procedure of the study and got their informed consent first to take part in the study and second to be recorded during the

interview. Their participation was completely voluntary, and I informed them they could withdraw from the study if they wished (Durdella, 2019; Neuman, 2014). During the data collection process, I was alert to potential ways in which the study might affect participants and took steps to minimize any such impact on participants.

I also properly acknowledged all sources used in the study, including literature sources. I coded the data anonymously so that anyone couldn't identify the individuals who provided the data. In addition, I used non-judgmental, respectful, and non-sensitive language in the instrument and interview process, as well as in the report of the findings. Overall, I consistently grounded the work in acceptable behaviors and the scientific processes of a qualitative study in order to maintain acceptable ethical standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents demographic information of participants, findings of the study, and discussion of findings. In the title of the chapter, I used the term "finding" rather than "result" because of the qualitative nature of the study. Qualitative studies often use the term "finding," whereas quantitative studies tend to use the term "result" more frequently (McGregor, 2018). This dictates the use of the term “finding” rather than “result” in the title of the chapter.

Demographic Information

The study included eight potential candidates, six school principals, and eight sub-city education officers. I also interviewed two education officers, one from the Ministry of Education and one from the Oromia Education Bureau. I normally took one PC, one school principal, and one education officer from each of the six sub-city education offices targeted in the study. However, I added two education officers from two of the sub-cities and two potential candidates from the other two sub-cities to clarify the data from their respective sub-cities and reach overall data saturation. This resulted in a total of 24 participants.

All eight officers were male, of whom three of them were MA holders, with their qualifications being in the areas of school leadership, MBA, and geography. The remaining five were first-degree holders, with their qualifications in mathematics (2), Afan Oromo, chemistry, and geography. The officers' years of service ranged from three to 13 years in the current or similar position, but all have over 15 years of combined work experience in various capacities. Education officers at the Ministry of Education and the Oromia Education Bureau were both

male, with a service year of over 20 years. Having MA degrees in biology and curriculum and instruction, both have a teaching background at the high school level.

Of the six participating school principals, five of them were male, while one was female. Two of them were qualified in EDPM, and the remaining four were qualified in mathematics, chemistry, geography, and biology. Two of them have additional qualifications in economics. Their years of service as school principals ranged from as little as three years to 10 years. However, all of them have over 14 years of total service. None of the principals, whose area of qualification was in areas other than educational leadership, received training, except for short one- or half-day training sessions offered by the education offices, which the principals did not see as useful in helping their leadership performance. All eight PCs were male, with a service year of 14 years or more. Three of them had previous experience as principals or deputy principals, which could make them wonderful PCs. Their areas of qualification were mathematics (2), physics, English, Afan Oromo (2), geography, and biology.

Findings of the Study

This study sought to explore the anatomy of policies and the manifestation of practices of SSL in primary school in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. I considered these issues in terms of school leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture, which are elements of SSL. I collected the data for the study primarily through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, with some data collected through observation and field notes. I used the data from official documents mostly to uncover the anatomy of policies of SSL by complementing it with certain data I got from education officers to clarify the content. I used the data from PCs, school principals, education officers, observations, and field notes to address the detailed manifestation of SSL practices. I analyzed the collected data with a combination of

content analysis and thematic analysis. I presented the findings of the study in two broad themes: the anatomy of SSL policies and the manifestation of SSL practices.

I used data from official documents in the study by directly referencing each one. However, I employed pseudonyms to represent participants in the study in order to report the data according to the source while maintaining anonymity. I gave the pseudonyms Derara, Merga, Ulfata, Bona, Ebisa, Abdi, Gemechu, and Feyisa to PCs who took part in this study, while the pseudonyms for school principals are Dabale, Olana, Ganamo, Firaol, Jitu, and Biranu. Pseudonyms for education officers from sub-city education offices are Kalid, Galgalo, Tufa, Tilahun, Bekan, Chala Galata, and Bekele. I also represent education offices from the Ministry of Education and the Oromia Education Bureau with the pseudonyms Mikias and Borana. Although the names I gave to participants may feel real, they are simply pseudonyms—the labels that do not reveal the actual names of the participants in the study.

Theme One: The anatomy of SSL Policies

Under this theme, I considered findings about the structure of SSL policies. I addressed this issue through two sub-themes: the status of policies that promote or undermine SSL materialization and the structure or configuration of SSL policies based on their supporting or undermining influence. I used evidence from policy documents to address these issues. However, before discussing the anatomy of policies that support or undermine the materialization of SSL, it is useful to clarify the type of policy documents I examined in this study.

I found no policy provisions in the official documents in the Ethiopian educational landscape that the education system provided in the name of SSL. Even I found no mention of the term "SSL" in such documents, at least in the official documents I reviewed for this study. By policies “in the name of SSL,” I mean that policy provisions described SSL by mentioning

the term “sustainable school leadership” word for word and directly provision how it should work, which I did not find in any of the official documents I explored for this study. The official documents I considered for this study were key documents related to the issue under consideration. These included those documents that deal with educational (school) leadership, including principal succession (the selection, assignment, deployment, development, and dismissal of principals), which was one element of SSL that the study focused on. Documents related to collective capacity and school culture, which were other elements of SSL the study targeted, were also among those documents I considered for the study. If the education system stipulated policies under the rubric of SSL, one would expect such documents to mention the term "sustainable school leadership" and include provisions about how it is supposed to work. However, as far as my exploration of the official documents is concerned, I found no mention of the term "SSL" or stipulations related to how SSL was supposed to work in such documents.

Given this situation, one might argue that I should abandon, or at least postpone, studying the anatomy of SSL policies until official documents expressly specify policies under the rubric of SSL. However, I would argue that such a study is relevant because there were policies in official documents in this educational context that influenced the adoption of SSL in certain ways, and SSL was thus worth studying. First, there were policies that the education system provided by identifying one of the elements of SSL that was the target of the study, such as those related to school leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture. As the elements are part of SSL, policies related to these elements are also part of SSL policies. Therefore, it was appropriate to include them in the study. Second, even policies that do not name any of the SSL elements that were the subject of the study prescribe procedures that either supported or hindered the continuance or stability of school leadership, which can affect the materialization of SSL.

This made these policies worthy of study in connection with the status of policies in supporting or undermining SSL consolidation. Third, one can scrutinize policies not only for their direct provisions but also for what they might hint at (Mundy et al., 2016; Papa & Armfield, 2018)—what they may “implicitly [assert and] reassert” (Bascia et al., 2005, p. xii). This made it appropriate to examine the policies for what they could offer to support or undermine the materialization of SSL, regardless of whether or not the documents provided them under the umbrella of SSL. I have referred to such policies as “SSL-related policies” or “policies” in general, where specific mention of the term “SSL-related policies” was unnecessary or not mandatory.

It is worth remembering that I conceptualized SSL as the ongoing capability and stability of the school leadership system and examined it in terms of principal succession, collective capacity, and school culture. Therefore, I explored the status of policies in supporting or undermining SSL adoption and whether the status of policies in supporting or undermining policies varied based on policy structure. Now, I will report on the status of policies that support or undermine the implementation of SSL.

Subtheme One: The Status of Policies in Supporting/Undermining SSL. The finding of the study suggested that some SSL-related policies supported the materialization of SSL, while others undermined its adoption. In this section, I will present my findings on the status of policies in two parts: policies that support the implementation of SSL and policies that undermine it.

Policies Supporting the Materialization of SSL. The current study found that policies related to school leadership succession, collective capacity, and school culture supported the

implementation of SSL. Therefore, I will present the findings on policies that support SSL in three subsections related to these three elements.

Policies of Succession (Selection) Supporting SSL. As I have explained throughout this paper, principal succession policies are among the key policies that influence the implementation of SSL. One can view policies of principal succession through the lens of policies of principal retention and selection. In this section, however, I will focus on policies of principal selection. I found policies linked to principal retention primarily to impede school leadership continuity and therefore will address these policies in the section dealing with policies that undermine the realization of SSL.

School Principals' Selection Criteria- This subsection addresses the selection criteria for principals. Before embarking on addressing each of them one by one, I will provide an overview of the primary school principals' selection criteria. The major criteria for selecting school principals in the Ethiopian education system and in the Oromia region included having a Bachelor of Arts Degree in one of the school subjects and being trained in the teaching profession, having three consecutive years of participation in CPD, being at the level of at least senior teacher in the teachers' career ladder, holding certain leadership positions, and having been in the teaching profession for the last two years with a performance evaluation score of 80% or higher (OEB, 2022a). I addressed each of these criteria in this section, with the exception of the educational qualification criterion, which I identified to be an inhibitor to SSL adoption and so addressed in the section on undermining policies. I want to recall that the study's goal was not to investigate the criteria just for the sake of doing so, but to discover if they supported or undermined SSL materialization. As a result, addressing policies based on whether they

supported or undermined the materialization of SSL was sensible. Next, I will address each of the selection criteria.

CPD Participation- Continuous professional development (CPD) is a development program in the Ethiopian education system that required teachers and school principals to devote at least 60 hours per academic year to advancing their profession and improving their professional capabilities. The selection criteria needed potential candidates to “follow a continuous professional development (CPD) program appropriately and have a three-year, continuously compiled personal portfolio on file” (OEB, 2022a, p. 11). This policy emphasizes that participation in CPD is a prerequisite for competing to become a school principal. Participation in CPD that can be counted toward eligibility must be continuous for at least three years, rather than intermittent, according to this policy provision. This mean individual who had no participation in CPD could not compete to assume principalship. The policy also implied that those who have taken part in the program discreetly, even if they have completed the specified modules or studied continuous professional development for a combined time of three years, were not eligible to compete.

This criterion that required continued participation in CPD prior to becoming a principal seemed to measure participants’ commitment to completing professional development, perhaps in the expectation that this would translate into their commitment to delivering school leadership or commitment to remaining in school leadership positions when they became principals. The extent to which CPD has prepared PCs might directly influence individuals’ later commitment to school leadership. For example, CPD in this educational setting focused on strengthening teachers’ capacity (Geletu, 2024; Melesse & Gulie, 2019; MoE, 2009), including developing PCs who would take over school leadership. Individuals who passed through CPD can commit

themselves to staying and delivering school leadership more than individuals who lack the skill and knowledge. Commitment to ongoing CPD participation also indirectly predicts commitment to delivering or remaining in school leadership. For example, Colquitt et al. (2017, p. 61) proposed an integrative model of organizational behavior (Rohim et al., 2023) in which individual characteristics such as ability (leadership capacity) (that the CPD could provide) contribute to individual mechanisms such as learning and decision-making, motivation, and job satisfaction, which itself leads to organizational commitment.

The criterion also appeared to bring the capacity created by participation in CPD to increase principals' capacity. The Ministry of Education required documented and evidence-substantiated participation when it prescribed that the CPD participation must be available on the file. Although it is not clear from the text of the policy, the file in question is a teacher's professional development portfolio, in which they compile each of their professional development activities, including CPD plan and activities (MoE, 2009). However, the policy text does not specify how the selection and placement committee would access and evaluate the portfolio file, given that the files are in the schools and the committee is in the woreda/Subcity education offices. The alternatives available are having the school principals record everything and send it to the woreda/subcity education office, physically bringing the file to the woreda/subcity education office, or sending a committee representative to the schools to review the file. However, none of these are clarified in the policy wording.

The term "appropriately" in the policy text seemed to capture a level of quality at which participants should go through the program. However, the guideline does not again offer measurable criteria. This may lead the committee to rely on subjective judgments rather than objective measures of the quality of candidates' participation in CPD. Or it may lead them to

simply quantify participation (e.g., determine a percentage of participation based on three years of participation or a minimum of 60 hours) rather than measuring quality. CPD in the Ethiopian education system is also judged to be insufficient to assist in achieving the stated purpose. I addressed this in greater detail in the discussion section, citing previous study findings as proof.

Teachers' Career Ladder Requirement- This criterion determines the minimum level on the teacher career ladder at which the candidate should be in order to be eligible to apply for a school leadership position. The criterion required candidates to be "at least at the level of a senior teacher in the teacher career ladder and at the level of a teacher for the pastoralist woredas" (OEB, 2022a, p. 11) in order to compete for a primary school principalship. To clarify this a bit, according to the national Teachers', Principals', and Supervisors' Job Level Placement Implementation Directive No. 2/2012 (Civil Service Commission, 2019), there are seven career ladders for teachers in Ethiopia: beginner teacher, junior teacher, teacher, senior teacher, associate lead teacher, lead teacher, and senior lead teacher. The policy stipulated that candidates for primary school principalship must be at least at a "Senior Teacher".

It is not clear from the policy prescriptions why the system required candidates to be at least a "senior teacher" in order to apply for the principalship. Nonetheless, the implementation of such a requirement appeared to be a hunt for experienced teachers to select them for school leadership roles. The Ethiopian education system expects teachers to grow in professional maturity and take on increasing responsibilities as they progress from the beginner to the senior lead teacher level (MoE, 2007). Therefore, the selection criteria seemed to aim for mature and thoroughly embedded teachers who could contribute to the stability and productivity of the school leadership system and thus the SSL (Khanal & Regmi, 2023; Lee & Mao, 2023; MoE, 2007). Clearly, associate lead teachers, lead teachers, and senior lead teachers have more years of

experience and therefore are at a higher maturity level. However, requiring candidates to be at least senior teachers appeared to be an attempt to strike a balance between selecting experienced teachers for school leadership positions and finding an adequate number of candidates.

Of course, the criterion did not rule out that associate lead teachers, lead teachers, or senior lead teachers cannot compete for a school leadership position. Since the criterion of “at least a senior teacher” is a minimum requirement, those at higher levels on the career ladder could also compete. This expanded the pool of PCs, allowing the education system to choose from a wider range of individuals than if the system select only from teachers who are at senior teacher career ladders. Even, the system provided a policy to facilitate selecting such individuals. The insignificant difference between the salaries of senior teachers and principals used to prevent such individuals from assuming school leadership positions in Ethiopian education system (Gurmu, 2020; Gurmu & Oumer, 2023). However, the education system also provided policies that could help overcome such a problem. For example, the Oromia Education Bureau provisioned that:

Individual who passed the salary of principalship can come to the position by having an increase of three horizontal [one scale or three horizontal step increment] to his/her salary. Teacher candidates with great experience and leadership interest who come to compete for the leadership of the school and win the competition for the position with a salary equal to or higher than the base salary for the leadership position should not be constrained in salary. (OEB, 2022a, p. 24)

The policy provision is that teachers with significant experience who were being paid more than or equal to the base salary of the principalship can assume the role by adding three horizontal steps or one scale to their salary. This policy provision offered a solid foundation for

individuals of significant experience to become principals, as they can acquire school leadership by adding one scale or three horizontal increments to their salaries. The purpose of such a provision might be to encourage senior teachers with significant experience to take up school leadership by removing the salary barrier. This can benefit school leadership capacity and sustainability by bringing comparatively more experienced individuals into leadership positions.

The policy lowered the criterion of career ladder of being a “senior teacher”, which was an overarching criterion, to being a “teacher” for pastoralist woredas. Such reduction of career ladder requirement could be made on the assumption that it may be difficult to find sufficient numbers of individuals who have reached the senior teacher level or above in such an educational context. However, there is a risk that this might be utilized as a substitute for selecting candidates with proper school or educational leadership training, which is not desirable. Even if the system chose senior lead teachers at the top of the teacher career ladder, one can never compare them with persons who have received educational leadership training. This is because school leadership and teaching require different competencies and professional orientations, although teaching experience could greatly contribute to school leadership skills, especially enriched technical skills (Bush, 2008; Gurmu, 2020; Vaillant, 2015).

Requirement for Women- This criterion is concerned with the career ladder women candidates should fulfill in order to compete for the position of primary school principal in pastoralist woredas and elsewhere. It should be noted that this requirement was not provided separately but rather included as an integral part of teachers’ career ladder criterion. However, I chose to address them separately for clarity purposes.

The criterion stated that women PCs who have reached “teacher level for non-pastoralist woredas and junior teacher level for pastoralist woredas” (OEB, 2022a, p. 11) can compete to

assume primary school principalship. This improves the possibility of female principals being selected as school principals in those educational contexts, as well as in the educational system as a whole. Of course, the education system implemented policies to address the gender imbalance in the school leadership workforce. The policy statement was that “in schools with two principals, at least one must be a woman” and “in a school with two deputies, whether the principal is a woman or a man, one deputy must be a woman” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19). This means that in a school with three principals, at least one must be a woman, with the possibility that all might be women but not men. This can help deploy more women as school leaders.

I would argue that even there was an opportunity that could result in a skewed selection equation towards women. The policy required that “women teachers apply alone for 50% of the vacant principalship” and together with men teachers for the remaining 50% of the vacancies (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This can result in at least 50% of the advertised positions being filled by women principals, with a higher percentage likelihood. The policy also prescribed that the women compete with men for the remaining 50% of the positions, and this competition occurs before the women compete for the 50% of vacancies reserved for them. This can increase the likelihood of women being selected as school principals. The provision for education offices was also to “cover at least 35% of schools with women principals” (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). But it is unclear whether this meant covering at least one principal or the entire principal workforce of the 35% of schools with women principals. The policy also stated that “women who are interested and meet the selection criteria can be given short-term training and assigned to school leadership” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19). This is a proactive policy mechanism of identifying women PCs, training them as principals, and deploying them as school leaders without requiring them to compete with their male counterparts.

The issues that used to prevent women from becoming school principals are related not only to selection conditions but also to deployment circumstances. However, the system has taken decisive measures to combat this problem too. The policy prescription was that their "assignment should be made in a way that does not affect their family life" (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This policy aimed to deploy selected women school principals in a way that did not interfere with their family affairs. Although the policy statement was still general and did not contain much detail, it allowed the system to place them directly as principals, perhaps, in a school convenient for their family life.

Experience in Quasi Leadership Positions- This criterion required candidates to have some leadership experience by serving in positions in schools in addition to their teaching responsibilities to be eligible to apply for school leadership. There is a policy provision in the Ethiopian education system that requires teachers to "participate in various school committees as members and advisors in order to strengthen the educational activities carried out in the school" (MoE, 2002, p. 41). Within such a policy framework, the current criterion required candidates to provide evidence of their service in positions such as "in teachers' associations at various levels, as a department head, unit leader, or coordinator of pedagogical centers or clubs" in order to apply for the principalship.

Among other things, serving as a unit leader entails managing shifts, creating and overseeing the implementation of weekly schedules, supervising daily instruction delivery, serving on school management committees, and participating in teacher evaluations. Heads of department are responsible for planning and implementing daily and annual subject plans, facilitating subject instruction, accompanying principals on classroom observations, and participating in teacher performance evaluations. Club coordinators handle responsibilities such

as planning annual activities for specific clubs, recruiting and engaging members, generating revenue, and implementing activities. The teachers' association ensures that transfers, promotions, selection for educational opportunities, and disciplinary matters are fair and transparent (MoE, 2002; UNESCO, 2024a). This indicates that serving in those positions can rightfully provide leadership skills and experience. For example, Lee and Mao (2023) noted that individuals are “better equipped to assume” (p. 14) school leadership by working in positions such as the one the current criterion specified.

However, the policy does not define how long individuals must serve in such roles to meet this criterion. Hence, in principle, individuals who had been in those positions for, say, 15 days to one month and those who had been in the positions for, say, 3 to 5 years could compete on equal footing, although the two categories of service involve different levels of experience. As a result, one can accuse the criterion of being unfair to individuals who had been in the positions for a long time. The criterion also makes no distinction between serving in various types of leadership positions, which entails varied leadership experiences and capabilities. For example, unit leadership is the responsibility that is delivered almost on a daily basis, which suggests strong leadership experience. On the other hand, department heads and club coordinators have occasional leadership responsibilities, which means they have limited leadership experience compared to, for example, unit leaders. This can limit the selection of competent candidates and, consequently, the sustainability of school leadership.

Score of Performance Appraisal- This criterion deals with the outcome-based performance appraisal score that PCs should have in order to compete for school leadership in Ethiopian educational context. The notion of outcome-based performance appraisal in Ethiopia is an appraisal score obtained from the application of Management by Objectives (MBO) as a

performance appraisal tool (Ntanos & Boulouta, 2012). The employee and the employee's supervisor enter a mutual contract by defining job responsibilities and jointly agreeing on job objectives to be achieved within six months. At the end of six months, the supervisor collects performance data, evaluates the employee's performance against mutually agreed-upon objectives, and determines the performance score.

The specific criterion required “serving in a teaching career for the recent two years with an average score of 80% or above on the Outcome-Oriented Performance Assessment” (OEB, 2022a, p. 11). According to this policy provision, the score must be a measure of teaching performance, not a score obtained in performing other duties. This blocks individuals who were not in teaching from competing to assume principalship. The criterion also required that the performance measure be that of performance over the last two years or most recent two years. This means that performance scores going back beyond two years are not accepted. Individual performance can change over time (Day et al., 2004). And therefore, by requiring that candidates' evaluation scores cover the last two years, the education system wants to measure the current or recent performance of individuals. A performance score of 80% or more is also considered a high performance level, which can be an attempt to target folks who perform exceptionally well on the job. The education system might assume that such individuals would also perform exceptionally well in a school leadership position.

The criteria I addressed so far were the key measures used for selecting primary school principals in the Ethiopian educational context at the time of the study. However, the selection committee used to evaluate individuals who met these criteria based on other measures such as written exams, interviews, strategic planning preparation and presentation, etc., and calculate their scores and select those with high scores. However, I found that such selection measures

largely hindered the materialization of SSL, and I will present them in the section dealing with policies that undermine the materialization of SSL.

Selection Committee- The selection committee deals with the arrangement of the committee responsible for selecting school principals. The school principals' selection and placement committee under question was comprised of the following bodies (OBE, 2022):

- Coordinator of teacher, principal, and supervisor development core process (chairperson)
- Two individuals from the teacher, principal, and supervisor development core process (members)
- An officer from the teacher, principal, and supervisor development core process
- Coordinator of school improvement core process (committee secretary)
- Two individuals from the teachers' association (member)
- Team leader of general education inspection (member)
- A woreda gender mainstreaming expert (member)

As one can see from the data I provided, most of the members of the selection and placement committees were from either the education office or the respective teachers' association, except for the gender mainstreaming expert, who was based in the Women and Social Affairs office. Such a committee formation might be designed to include both employer and employee representatives on the committee.

Previous studies (Quraishi & Aziz, 2016; Walker & Kwan, 2012) showed that the composition of school principals' selection committees either facilitated or prevented the appointment of qualified individuals to school leadership positions. In Ethiopia, for example, party officials on the selection committee used to prevent qualified, non-party-affiliated individuals from becoming school principals (Gurmu, 2020). Being a party official means being

a member of a political party in the government apparatus with a lot of power to influence the selection decision of the principals. The current committee arrangement indicates omission of the official representation of party officials on the selection committee that helps the committee stick to official criteria rather than be influenced by the decision of other bodies. This can potentially increase the pool of candidates for principalship without distinguishing between party-affiliated and unaffiliated candidates.

However, the committee members might still have a subjectivity problem and a recruitment skills gap because of their lack of professional training in human resource management and recruitment techniques (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Polymeropoulou & Sorkos, 2024). This can constrain the selection of competent candidates and hence can affect the adoption of SSL. Despite the strength of having most of the members from the education sector, the makeup of the selection committee itself may draw considerable criticism, especially its lack of diversity. Schools serve a wider range of community, and hence the argument is that the principal selection committee should comprise a varied composition of stakeholders and community members, including teachers, parents, staff, principals, local community, local administration, and others. Principals are buffers and bridges between the school and the community, and their jobs extend beyond instructional leadership and go outside of the confinement of the school compound. When seen from such a perspective, one can criticize the make-up of the selection committee.

Announcing the Vacancies- This is concerned with how the education offices advertize the available vacancies and invite PCs to compete for principalship. According to the existing policy, the selection and placement committee had to publicly advertise the vacancies with provision of information such as the following (OEB, 2022a):

- School names and addresses

- Selection criteria
- Application deadlines
- Submission locations

Publicly advertising the vacancies can clarify everything and give the impression that the selection process is open, which can invite more applicants and widen education offices opportunity to select appropriate individuals. Public advertisement of the positions usually involves putting the advertisement on the notice board of the education offices, but with functioning social media such as Telegram and Facebook in place, the education offices had more options to reach potential applicants and even to address them on a one-to-one basis that can enhance the effectiveness of the selection process.

The information that advertising is required to contain alleviates some of the challenges that previously hindered the selection process. For example, previously, potential candidates used to hesitate to apply if the schools they were supposed to be applying to remained unspecified; for example, if the advertisement sought principals for three or four schools. Qualified principals used to avoid applying for principalship in such situations because the selection process could take them to the school that they did not want to be placed in, including schools that are located in remote places. This used to challenge the ability of the education offices to select capable candidates. However, the current policy provision helps clarify everything and facilitate the smooth running of the selection process. This in turn promotes the selection of competent educational cadres and thus contributes to the stability of school leadership, productivity, and hence, sustainability of school leadership.

Policies of Collective Capacity Supporting SSL. It is worth recalling that I explored the notion of primary school collective capacity in terms of the availability, qualification,

motivation, and commitment of principals, teachers, and support staff. This required me to do an examination of the support, or lack thereof, of collective capacity policies for the adoption of SSL in terms of these issues.

School Staff Availability- I started the exploration of the availability of primary school human resources with an investigation of the availability of school principals. The policy required that the number of principals in primary school be determined by the number of students it served. For example, the policy stated that “a primary school with a student population of 500 or less shall have only one principal” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19) [emphasis added]. This means that the principal is the only person in a leadership position in such a school without the deputy principal. The policy also required that “[a] primary school shall have a principal and deputy principal if the number of students is between 501 and 1,000” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19). That is, such a school would have a principal and deputy principal, resulting in two people in the school leadership role with the title of “principal”. This shows an increase in the number of principals to be assigned to each primary school as the number of students surpasses 500 but does not exceed 1,000.

The policy further stated that a school with an enrollment of “between 1,001 and 3,000 students shall have one principal and two deputy principals” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19). This provision allows a school with a population of 1,001 to 3,000 students to have three principals. The previous quote shows that an increase of up to 500 students causes the addition of a first deputy principal. But the addition of the second deputy principal is effective for an increase in the number of pupils up to 2,000. The policy might assume that some leadership activities remain constant even if the student population exceeds 1,000 and the existing principals can handle them; therefore, the addition of a second deputy principal can compensate for the additional

activities resulting from a student population increase up to 2,000. However, the importance of principals' connection with students—a critical factor in building a positive school climate—was not strictly part of the equation. Even if some tasks do not change with the number of students, the connections that principals build with students would suffer in such a situation. Students' sense of school identification increases when principals know them by name, a critical factor for student engagement and learning. However, such a sense of connection would be compromised in case policies permit the addition of only one deputy principal for an enrollment increase of up to 2,000 students, as this can significantly increase the student-to-principal ratio.

The policies required the number of primary school principals to consider additional factors, such as workload, other than the student population when the number of students exceeded 3,000. “If the number of students in a primary school is over 3,000”, as the Oromia Education Bureau prescribed (OEB, 2022a), “it shall have, on *the basis of workload* [emphasis added], one principal and three deputy principals” (p. 19). This policy statement highlights the potential for adding a third deputy principal if a primary school has over 3,000 students and meets the workload requirement. Although the context could provide a general notion, it is unclear what the expression “workload” specifically means in the policy text.

I could not find a policy in the Ethiopian education system that directly specifies the number of teachers to be deployed to each primary school. Each school is different in terms of student population and number of sections, which might have made it difficult to provide a number that works for all institutions. Rather, policies specified the concept of workload while determining the number of teachers needed in each primary school. Here, I was not interested in investigating teachers' workloads for their own sake. Rather, I explored it as a way of determining the number of teachers required in each primary school as part of exploring primary

school staff availability. Saratian et al. (2019) defined workloads as “responsibilities that must be carried out by an employee in an organization... in a certain [amount of] time” (p. 172). In the Ethiopian education system, the number of hours per week each teacher has to work relates to this (FDRE, 2017). The Oromia regional primary school standard stated that “the regular working hours of a teacher shall be 40 hours per week” (OEB, 2009, p. 40). This means a teacher works a workload that he/she can complete within 40 hours per week. The term “normal working hours” in the policy statement implies the exclusion of overtime or additional hours worked outside the normal day or time. Thus, the total number of teachers to be assigned to each primary school is equal to the total weekly workload divided by 40 hours per week.

Of course, there was a change to the 40-hour workweek policy provision. Article 33 of the Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 (FDRE, 2017) declared that the “[r]egular working hours of civil servants shall be determined on the basis of the conditions of work and may not exceed 39 hours a week.” The Proclamation suggested the upper limit “shall not exceed 39 hours per week” and left the lower limit to be determined “on the basis of the conditions of work” (FDRE, 2017). This makes teacher workloads vary, which can impact the number of teachers assigned to each school. However, it is unclear what the conditions of work referred to in the proclamation specifically entail. I should note that the provision of weekly working hours applied to teachers in public primary schools. The teaching workload for private school teachers might be different.

Whatever the total weekly work would be, one has to consider several factors when determining the teacher workload, such as the number of sections and therefore the total number of periods, the type of subject to be taught, whether the school operates a full or half shift, etc. (OEB, 2009). For example, schools operating on two shifts can have “two groups [taught] by the

same teachers” (UNESCO-IIEP, 2022, p. 1), while such a possibility is not available or at least reduced with schools operating on a full-day basis. The Oromia Region Primary School Standard (OEB, 2009) also identified jobs for which the 40-hour workweek should be applied, which can alter the way one looks at teachers' workload and, as a result, the number of teachers assigned to each school. Of 40 working hours each week, the standard recommended that the teachers spend roughly 22.5 and 11.5 hours on teaching and preparing and evaluating and marking students' work, respectively. The standard required three hours per week for co-curricular activities and three hours per week for other activities (OEB, 2009). Splitting hours according to activities offers certain advantages. For example, it can facilitate workplace communication between teachers and principals by offering common ground for discussion, so contributing to school stability and leadership. At the very least, it avoids confusion that may occur in determining which task is within the scope of teachers' responsibilities.

It is also vital to consider the availability of support personnel while attempting to explore staff availability. The Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2022a) required a total of 23 support staff to be available in primary school. This included those assigned to roles such as record officer, accountant, cashier, janitor, security guard, secretary, etc. Prior to the provision of this and related policies, principals were responsible for most of the school activities for which the system now provided policy to hire staff. In those situations, principals often used to find themselves chasing nine to catch none. Hence, regardless of their actual availability, the provision of such policies would serve to move part of the school leadership job away from principals and onto the shoulders of support personnel. As the decentralization effort to shift more educational responsibilities to the school site intensified (Gurmu, 2018; Tekleselassie, 2002), more support staff might be required at the school front. However, the current policies

provision helps in the delivery of school leadership and hence in making school leadership stable and sustainable.

In general, policy measures governing the availability of primary school staff allow job obligations to be distributed among several parties. This could boost school leadership's ability to accomplish work within the required timeframe and quality level (Ochonogor & Amah, 2021), potentially contributing to school leadership's sustainability.

School Staff Qualification- Availability of staff is not the only factor to consider in the examination of policies of school leadership collective capacity. The policies I examined required the available institutional human resources to be qualified to fulfill responsibilities entrusted to them, which can promote school leadership capacity and sustainability. Regarding qualification of school staff, Article 4.6 of Education and Training Policy stated that “the educational level of teachers, trainers and educational leaders employed in each sector and at each level will range from certificate to doctorate” (FDRE, 2023). This is a broad proposal for the system as a whole, with no specific differentiation between levels and subsectors. However, other policies needed the primary school principals and deputy principals to hold a minimum of a first degree (OEB, 2022a). The mandated qualification of primary teachers in this education system was to have a minimum qualification of a diploma of two-year study from the College of Teachers Education” (OEB, 2023b), with higher-level qualifications accepted. According to the Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2023b), “the qualification level of teachers is an important aspect of improving the quality of education” (p. 74). I believe that this is an excellent recognition of the impact of teacher qualifications, and that such an assertion may encourage educational structure to do its utmost to meet the mandated teacher qualifications. The

OEB (2009) recommended that support staff qualifications vary from a diploma to a technical and vocational training to completion of the 8th, 10th or 12th grades.

It is important to disclose how staff qualifications contribute to school productivity, leadership stability, continued capacity, and sustainability. Qualifications demonstrate readiness for a job and provide the foundational knowledge and skills that can result in superior performance and ease the need for intensive coaching from the school principal (Bedi et al., 2024; Gümüş et al., 2024). Qualifications also provide critical thinking and problem-solving abilities that contribute to school productivity. Additionally, qualifications expose the school community to diverse ideas and equip them with the necessary tools to adapt to changing work situations. These factors can contribute to school capabilities, ensuring the stability and sustainability of school leadership. For instance, Gümüş et al. (2024) reported that principal training and participation in professional development have a "statistically significant association with student achievement" (p. 28) that can contribute to stability and sustainability in school leadership.

School Staff Motivation and Commitment- Aside from demanding enough numbers and qualifications, the education system also required primary staff to be motivated and committed to their jobs. Previously, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2015) declared that "for any organization to be effective, it is not enough that it has an appropriate structure and staff with the right profile," emphasizing the importance of position holders demonstrating increased motivation and commitment. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) continued to emphasize the need to strengthen "staff motivation" (p. 69) and commitment. For instance, the ministry provisioned that "education reform will be managed and led by professionals with the required skills, knowledge, abilities, and commitment at all levels" (MoE, 2021, p. 46). While one can relate the stipulation

regarding staff talent, knowledge, and ability to the staff qualification, the policy provision is also about the importance of staff commitment to manifest in implementing education reform, including those to be implemented at the primary school level (MoE, 2007, 2010). It is critical to understand that programs such as school improvement and teacher development, among others, are reform initiatives that school communities must adopt. As a result, the policy provision about the need for staff to demonstrate commitment in implementing educational reform is relevant to the school community.

The education system has not only emphasized the importance of staff motivation and commitment to manifest, but also provided ways to make it available. According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021):

[I]t has become imperative to examine the incentives in the teaching profession and capacity building to serve as a scientific explanation of the factors that affect teachers' motivation to work, and then to discover the areas in which teachers have needs and how to meet those needs. (p.68)

This is about the need to assess incentive and capacity development systems in order to explain the elements that drive teacher (implicitly principal) motivation, identify potential areas for improvement, and develop ways to address emerging demands. Incentives are clearly motivators, and the education system's attempt to focus on them is acceptable. Staff motivation and commitment largely also determine the extent to which school staff can perform their jobs (Sariakin et al., 2025; Shepherd-Jones et al., 2019). Thus, offering a capacity development system may be predicated on the premise that those with the necessary ability may be motivated to undertake and complete a task. Considering the influence of staff enthusiasm and commitment

on student academic success, school productivity, leadership stability, and SSL, I believe this is an appropriate policy initiative.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) aimed to “strengthen... staff motivation... through the development of rewarding career paths and more robust constructive performance assessment, which will ensure that the right person is in the right post and will be linked to incentives for good performance” (p. 47). This policy statement also addresses at least two major issues, the first of which is the development of fulfilling career paths that would motivate school employees and help them stay dedicated to their jobs. This entails investigating and identifying issues of concern and improving the incentive system to motivate and commit teachers and principals, as I addressed in the previous quotation. The second issue is that the education system wants to create stronger performance assessments to connect the right people to the right jobs and to tie incentives to excellent performance. This needs the ministry to reward good work, incentivize outstanding performance, and assign the right people to the proper roles. However, it is not clear how the ministry can change assignments and connect the right people with the proper roles, especially in the case of primary school teachers and even principals.

The ministry also wanted the motivation and commitment to be ongoing so they can have a consistent impact. For example, it called for the “institutionaliz[ation] of an incentive system” (MoE, 2021, p. 68) that would generate institutionalized motivation and commitment among school staff. The idea is to have a continuous system that helps to generate continuous motivation and commitment of staff. But the policy provision was also that “a continuous incentive mechanism requires teachers and leaders to regularly demonstrate their dedication and commitment to their work” (MoE, 2021, p. 68). To take advantage of the continuous incentive system, teachers and principals have to display constant motivation and commitment to their

work. This makes the incentive mechanism operate both ways. Moving forward, the incentive system stimulates and generates commitment among teachers and principals. To profit from the incentive system, teachers and principals have to exhibit motivation and dedication, allowing the system to work backwards. This indicates that the ministry aimed to establish a cycle of employee motivation and commitment.

The Ministry of Education also identified school leadership as a motivational, demotivational, or job satisfaction factor or mechanism for school staff when it stated that "school leadership influences teachers' motivation and job satisfaction" (MoE, 2021, p. 68). Clearly, school leaders are among the critical factors in motivating, developing, and retaining teachers and other school staff. But its materialization requires principals to play a strong motivational role and help school staff achieve job satisfaction. Perhaps the question in this regard can be what resources, skills, and respective supportive policies the system provides to help principals to motivate school staff and help them to achieve satisfaction. The education system can still hold school principals accountable for the performance of the task. But the irony is that in an environment where principals have no or limited resources or supervisory influence (Abebe, 2012), holding principals accountable for teacher motivation may be asking too much from them.

By harnessing the motivation and commitment of staff, the education system appeared to be achieving other outcomes as well. For example, the system wanted to "foster a greater sense of ownership [by] improving teacher motivation" (MoE, 2021, p. 34). This might be based on the assumption that a greater sense of ownership improves professional performance. The education system also sought to "ensure the quality and productivity of education" (p. 68) and "improve [educational] quality by maintaining teacher motivation" (MoE, 2021, p. 142). The intention is to use teacher motivation to improve the quality and productivity of education. The overall idea of

the policy appears to be to get more work done by keeping teachers and principals motivated and engaged.

Policies of School Culture Supporting SSL. One could also find proactive policy provisions in vetted documents that could support the development of positive school culture, which in turn could support the adoption of SSL. For example, there was a policy provision in the official document to "promote a positive school culture and ethos" (MoE, 2021, p. 49). Promoting positive school culture means creating and sustaining a school environment in which everyone feels appreciated, respected, encouraged, and motivated. This would allow everyone to put out effort, so contributing to enhanced school productivity. The policy provisions also required maintaining the principle of inclusiveness and creating a feeling of belonging for all members of the school, including students, regardless of their "economic, social, and cultural differences or backgrounds" (MoE, 2021, p. 50). This requires adopting principles that allow school community to treat everyone equally, provide them with equitable opportunities, and include them in all aspects of school life. This provides circumstances for everyone to engage in and contribute to school reform, so helping to build collective capacity and, as a consequence, long-term productivity. "Strengthen[ing] students' positive values" (MoE, 2021, p. 49) regarding diversity, representation, and inclusion was also among the policies the Ministry of Education provided. This necessitates supporting and encouraging students to embrace plurality, representation, and inclusion, all of which contributes to a positive school culture. Although the policy statement's focus was on promoting diversity, representation, and inclusion, fostering virtues such as honesty, compassion, persistence, fairness, self-discipline, collaboration, and teamwork might be more generally applied. Fulfilling them can help not only to build a school culture but also to achieve crucial instructional objectives such as building citizens of appropriate

attributes. This is because the goal of education is not just to provide individuals with vital information but also to develop generations with the appropriate character.

The policy document also provided tools and methods for promoting an excellent school culture and emphasized the necessity of achieving one. For example, the policy advocated establishing "fertile platforms and mechanisms to foster a non-violent school culture" (MoE, 2021, p. 54). This is about setting up systems, providing tools, and generating opportunities for the school community to promote peace, safety, and respect and make constructive connections. The Ministry of Education (2021) also mandated establishing "professional networks, peer interaction, and cooperation schemes to cultivate a culture of professional excellence for teachers" (p. 70). This is concerned with creating a culture of expert competency among teachers through professional connection, collegial exchange, and collaborative procedure. In essence, the connections, exchanges, and cooperation schemes would serve as procedures and methods for developing a culture of outstanding professionalism among teachers. Dinsdale (2017) asserted that "[s]chools that have high levels of collaboration among staff tend to promote higher behavioural and academic standards" (p. 42). Hence, the Ministry of Education has appropriately focused on collaboration as a mechanism for creating a positive school culture. Of course, a culture cannot exist as a shared item without relationships, exchanges, and collaboration. This brought those mentioned issues to the forefront of cultural creation and upkeep activities.

Similarly, the Ministry of Education recommended fostering positive school culture by promoting "good communication and interaction among teachers, school principals, and support staff" (MoE, 2013b, p. 5). This involves fostering a culture of listening to one another and promoting reciprocity within the school community in order to cultivate a favorable environment. Good communication and engagement, among other things, create a common

vision, foster trust, stimulate cooperation, and aid in conflict resolution (Salamondra, 2021; Sulaiman et al., 2023), all of which are foundational to collaboration, reciprocity, stability, and sustainability. Hence, the ministry's decision to prioritize effective communication and interaction as a means of fostering a positive school environment was logical.

The Ministry of Education also called for improving younger generations' awareness in order to promote a robust and healthy school culture. For example, a policy provisioned to make “students aware that cheating on tests/assessments is obscene” (MoE, 2013b, p. 5). This is about raising students' knowledge of the immorality of cheating on examinations. Educating students about the immorality of cheating can improve the process of teaching and administering tests, boosting the stability of the academic environment and sustaining school productivity. Likewise, the policy prescribed “raise[sing] awareness in a new generation to commit to boosting a culture of peace and tolerance” (MoE, 2021, p. 50). This policy statement also highlight awareness-raising as one of the tools for promoting a culture of peace and tolerance. Awareness encourages students to maintain healthy relationships and helps them maintain a stable school environment, which can benefit the productivity, stability, and sustainability of school leadership. The Ministry of Education also stipulates transforming educational institutions “so that school communities see themselves as learning communities where the values and ethos of unity in diversity, citizenship, fraternity, and peace are promoted” (MoE, 2021, p. 52). The policy provision aimed to create a strong social environment by transforming the school into a learning community that respects, includes, values, and nurtures everyone, thereby enhancing school productivity and student academic achievement.

The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) recommended cultivating positive school culture, among other things, to “foster cohesion” (p. 49), promote “safety and security” (p. 54),

create quality school life, enhance “educational development” (p. 44), and augment student fruitfulness and educational productivity. This is something more significant than the creation of healthy school culture itself. These contribute to the development of well-rounded, self-confident citizens who are capable of solving problems, contributing to societal development, and leading successful lives. The effect of school culture is needed to extend beyond the boundaries of schools to have societal-level outcomes. An example is a policy provision that:

Although there has been a positive and long-standing cultural practice in Ethiopia, recent studies reveal that the education system has to further deepen it aggressively to curb signs of negative and unwanted behaviours and practices that endanger the life and long-term peace, prosperity and happiness of societies and the country at large. (MoE. 2021, p. 49)

The provision aimed to sharpen good and long-standing national cultural practices in schools in order to prevent symptoms of undesirable behavior and practices that endanger the lives and long-term peace, prosperity, and happiness of societies and the nation as a whole. This is an attempt to use school culture to solve societal and national problems, rather than using it simply in the confinement of the school compound to promote academic advancement, professional quality, school stability, and productivity. This shows the level of hope placed in school culture to solve the problems that society and the nation as a whole are confronting.

Policies Undermining the Materialization of SSL. In the previous subsection, I presented policies that supported the school leadership's stability, capability, and sustainability. However, in this educational setting, policies not only supported but also undermined the realization of SSL. I will discuss this issue in this section of the paper. I will present policies that promote the adoption of SSL by categorizing data into three parts based on the three elements of SSL considered in the current study. However, this section will have only two subsections. This

is because I found no policies related to school culture that undermined SSL adoption, and therefore, this section does not cover policies related to school culture. Consequently, I will only address policies related to principal succession and collective capacity.

Succession Policies Undermining SSL. This section considers principals succession policies that undermined the materialization of SSL as related to both principal retention and selection policies.

Retention Policies that Undermined SSL- Principal retention enhances the materialization of SSL, while turnover disrupts school improvement goals, causing confusion and creating a leadership vacuum, undermining the adoption of SSL (Buckman, 2021; Essel, 2022; Liu & Bellibas, 2018). Unfortunately, policies of principal retention are among the policies that I found to undermine principal succession when they were supposed to support it. For example, “the term of office of the principal has been limited to two cycles or terms,” with one term having “duration of 5 years” (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This means that principals can only hold school leadership positions for a maximum of ten years, regardless of whether they are performing competently or productively or whether they have the potential to serve more terms. The Oromia Regional Education Bureau also stipulated that “a reform is to be carried out every five years, and the assignment of school leaders will be handled afresh” (OEB 2022a, p. 20). This policy statement contained two major issues. The first is that the education system would redesign the strategy for filling the position of principal every five years. This, as I interpret it, means that the system would change the way it fills the position of the school principal every five years, although it is not clear why the system needed to implement such a strategy. The Education Bureau and the Ministry of Education may implement such a strategy to keep up with the constant changes happening around the globe that are penetrating the educational sphere

(Kavanagh et al., 2021; Rabinovitch, 2023). The change can lead to new methods of filling positions, new insights on principal selection strategies, or new selection criteria, which appears the system wanted to tape. The second point in the text is that the system would fill positions of the principal every five years according to the newly established method of filling. In other words, the system needed to fill all school leadership positions, regardless of whether the existing principals were likely to stay for ten years or whether the schools had principals and deputy principals.

The ten-year term itself was only for a few, for those who could win the second term. The policy provision in this regard was this:

Principals who have performed well, who have made practical changes in schools during their tenure, who have performed tasks that can be used as best practices in the local community and schools or cluster resource centers, for example, who have improved school standards and student achievement, can run for a second term in the place where they are currently working. (OEB, 2022a, p. 20)

This statement discusses the possibility of an incumbent principal running for a second term at the school where they were working. However, the education system mandated this to reflect the exceptional performance of incumbent principals during their first term. Therefore, such a plan limited the ten-year term to only certain principals, which means that many other principals would leave the principalship during their first term. This is sure to create instability in the system. This is because principals' turnover, whether competent or underperforming, invariably leads to instability (Bartanen et al., 2019; Carpenter et al., 2022; Hanselman et al., 2016; Lemoine et al., 2018), regardless of the importance of removing incompetent principals. The policy provision described great principal performance as related to achieving “good

performance,” making “practical changes” in the school, and performing “tasks that can be best practices” for the school, cluster resource center, or community during their first term. However, the policy statement does not describe things that can be counted as outstanding performance and/or improvement with examples, regardless of its defining best practice as raising school standards or ensuring student academic achievement. This may lead to multiple interpretations, hence its inconsistent applications. For example, the education offices can remove some principals while allowing others to remain because of differing interpretations of comparable performance. This can lead to questions of equity. Of course, the phrase “may run for a second term” itself is a possibility rather than a certainty, implying that they might not run for the principalship a second time. This raises doubts about whether outstanding principals would continue, let alone the continuation of underperforming principals. This creates further uncertainty about the stability of school leadership and, therefore, SSL.

In fact, it is likely that principals would be removed from their positions in even less time, let alone at the end of five years, adding further instability to the school leadership system. The policy provision under consideration was that:

If a school run by a particular school leader is assessed according to the general education inspection standards, which are limited to the criteria that the school leader can change by coordinating only school community, and is found to be at levels I and II in a two-round assessment, the school leader will be removed from his leadership position because he hasn't been able to improve the school. (OEB, 2022a, p.21)

The policy provision shows that the education system inevitably dismisses principals if two rounds of general education inspection evidence that principals have failed to achieve the needed standard (MoE, 2013b). The policy statement stipulates that the inspection assessment

must only consider the inspection standard principals could improve by engaging the school community and using resources at their disposal. Restricting the evaluation to accessible resources prevents principals from complaining that they cannot bring about change because of a lack of resources. The system introduces inspection to ensure accountability (MoE, 2013b, 2021); therefore, using inspection results for accountability is permissible. However, this adds more agenda items to the already hectic school inspection timetable. School inspectors are busy and struggle with their regular workload (MoE, 2021) when the policy requires them to make two kinds of assessments, which entails additional work: an assessment to be made according to overall inspection standards and an assessment to be made according to the standards the school principals can change by mobilizing the school community and the school resources.

The specific provision was that if a school remained below level three during the first round of school inspection, "it will be re-inspected after one year" (MoE, 2013b, p. 16), and principals were subject to dismissal if their school was found to be at level I or II once again. The system can inspect schools at any time, including during the first year of a principal's tenure. If the system inspects the school in the first year of the principal's appointment and finds it to be below level three, the policy provision is that principals have to bring about change by next year or will be dismissed. However, such a time frame may not be sufficient for principals to become familiar with the school system and understand associated problems, let alone make the necessary changes. Hence, such a scheme decreases principals' tenure, causing instability in the school leadership structure in an unforeseen manner. While the removal of ineffective principals is appropriate, new principals need time to learn and adapt to the new culture before they are counseled out (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012).

The provision was also that “school leaders who complete their first or second term with high discipline would be awarded letters of honor” (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This is about presenting outstanding former principals with a letter of recognition upon their departure. The statement or subsequent description does not clarify what the term “high discipline” means. According to the information I got from Ministry and Bureau officials (Borana, Mikias), it refers to issues such as the proper implementation of accountability and high achievement or good performance. This policy provision seems to encourage serving principals to perform at a high level, even if they are about to leave. It can also motivate competent PCs to enter school leadership positions in order to receive a letter recognizing their achievements, which they can then show to their children.

However, the approach actually worked against SSL adoption by advising that competent principals would leave and then taking letters of honor rather than remaining in leadership posts. The subtle message of such an arrangement might be that “it is sure you will be removed regardless of how well you continue to work, although you will be given a letter of honor for your superior outcome”. This wastes competent principals, undermines school leadership capability and stability, and SSL. Such an arrangement also prevents exceptional principals from putting up their best effort near the end of their tenure, since they are sure about their leaving whether or not they make an effort.

Selection Policies that Undermined SSL- According to Khanal & Regmi (2024), selecting the right people for school leadership positions can influence school leadership capacity, stability, and hence sustainability. As a result, it is appropriate to analyze if the selection policies are in a position to enhance leadership sustainability. Unfortunately, several of the selection criteria for primary school leaders in this educational context impeded SSL

adoption. For example, the selection criteria required candidates to have "a first degree in one of the subjects offered at the primary school level and training in teaching or a first degree in educational administration" (OEB, 2022a, p. 11) to be selected as a school principal. As one can see from the text, it is compulsory to have a degree-level qualification to apply for the post of primary school principal. This I think is acceptable.

However, the Education Bureau recommended the qualification to be either in one of the subjects taught at the primary schools or in educational administration. The policy statement links the two possibilities with the conjunction "or," which appears to give equal opportunity to individuals qualified in either subject or educational administration to become principals. I would argue that this looks unjust, which I will further elaborate on in the discussion. Because the dominant group is trained in one of the school subjects as opposed to educational administration, leadership is placed in the hands of individuals who have not been trained in the proper subject that can help the adoption of SSL.

According to education officers from the Ministry of Education and the Education Bureau (Mikias, Borana), this can provide an alternative way to look at school principals' qualifications, which one can also find in official documents (MoE, 2021). It is wonderful to explore different ways in which school principals can be capacitated. For example, many states in the USA initiated their own programs to address deficiencies in university-based preparation programs (Cheney & Davis, 2011; Williams & Burgess, 2025), which is acceptable. However, it is essential to critically evaluate whether this can genuinely help school principals gain the capability and competence to deliver school leadership and help SSL. Programs initiated by the state in the USA to combat deficiencies of university-based programs themselves have been criticized for exacerbating rather than improving the situation. This can serve as a warning signal

for Ethiopia. Even the situation in Ethiopia is about getting teachers to lead with their teaching qualifications rather than making them attend different programs, which is more worrisome.

The policy also stipulated that priority be “given to those who have served as deputy principals in case they have scored the same as the other candidates during the competition” (OEB, 2022a, p. 11), which I also found undermining for SSL adoption. The deputy principalship is a key position in school leadership (Tahir et al., 2023). From a leadership succession perspective (Jeffers et al., 2024; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017), effective deputy principals bring a wealth of technical and cultural knowledge when applying for the principalship. This avoids the learning curve that new principals would otherwise experience. However, the policy gave less value to the service provided as a deputy principal in the principalship competition by limiting its benefit to the situation where the candidate performs similarly to other candidates. Although it is important to count anticipatory socialization experiences toward earning a principalship by serving in such a role, the lack of recognition for the position discourages PCs from becoming deputy principals. It can also prevent deputy principals from applying to become principals. This can impede qualified individuals from becoming principals and deputy principals, which can have a negative impact on job distribution, school leaders' competency, school leadership job delivery, and SSL at large. These are the two specific selection criteria that I found to undermine the materialization of SSL. It is worth remembering that I have already addressed selection criteria of a supportive nature in the section dealing with the issue.

Once PCs fulfill these and other selection criteria, as I highlighted elsewhere in this paper, the committee assesses them on the basis of their performance score, the preparation and presentation of a strategic plan, the quality of their file, the written examination, and the interview, and selects those with the highest score, which accounted for 15%, 30% (preparation

10% & presentation 20%), 5%, 40%, and 10% of the total points, respectively. Hence, the question is also if these measures were in a position of supporting or undermining the materialization of SSL. It might be essential to assess all these measures for what they can offer in connection with the issue under consideration, but for me, the written exam and the strategic plan preparation and presentation have higher importance to assess. This is because the committee allows the candidates to progress to the next stage of assessment only if they pass the written exam. For example, the policy stated that “candidates [will be] selected for the next competition level only if they receive half or higher on the written examination” (OEB, 2022a, p. 17). This qualifies a written exam as the gateway for being selected as school principals and deputy principals. Also, the written exam and the strategic plan together account for around 70% of the total mark. This is about the strong impact these two measures had on principals’ selection.

The further concern is regarding the application of the written exam and strategic plan preparation. A written exam can evaluate understanding, the capacity to create ordered prose, or the ability to express ideas, which can aid leadership in certain ways. However, there are a number of leadership skills that the exam cannot adequately address, making it ineffective as a selection tool for school leadership. Again, the candidates were needed to prepare a strategic plan "based on the overall conditions of the school for which they are competing" (OEB, 2022a, p. 17) (emphasis added). This is to say that all candidates, including those from the particular school for which a principal is needed and who are familiar with the situation, are required to write a strategic plan for that same school. I would say that it is partial.

The other issue that does not provide plausible resources for strong SSL is the way selected principals are supposed to be trained. The provision was that candidates "who have not

received training would be trained by education officers before they start work to strengthen their leadership skills in school leadership" (OEB, 2022a, p. 18). It is a good plan to provide principals with the training before they start their school leadership. However, the policy mandated the education office provide the training, which means the training cannot be long-term and therefore has a lesser capacity-building and sustainability effect. Being a short-term training means it cannot cover a wide range of subject matters that can capacitate school principals, and hence the training becomes a matter of scratching the surface. As a result, the contribution of such training to the sustainability of school leadership is minimal, if not none. I addressed this issue in greater detail in the discussion section.

Collective Capacity Policies Undermining SSL. Under the subtheme addressing policies that support the implementation of SSL, I reported that various collective capacity policies helped implement SSL. However, collective capacity policies not only fostered, but also impeded, the realization of SSL. I discuss these policies in this section. In this framework, one can see policies governing the deployment of former principals as teachers among collective capacity policies. The argument is that policies requiring former principals to return to teaching had a negative impact on collective capacity and, consequently, the sustainability of school leadership.

To get into the detail, when people "with a bachelor's or master's degree in school subjects offered in schools" leave the principalship, it was prescribed that they would be "placed as teachers where their peers have reached on the basis of their academic readiness and experience" (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This places former principals on the same career ladder as their peers, allowing them to earn a comparable salary while teaching the subject in which they graduated. This can contribute to their motivation and commitment to the teaching work to

which they are assigned. In turn, this can improve the collective capacity of the schools. However, such criteria may lure subject graduates to school leadership who lack appropriate leadership training, who then leave the roles and benefit in the same way. This can undermine collective capacity, school leadership capability, and sustainability by drawing people of inappropriate qualification to school leadership.

Whenever former principals with master's-level educational leadership degrees leave principalship, their assignment conditions appear to work against their motivation and commitment to teaching. When individuals with a master's degree in educational administration and a first degree in the subject leave the principalship, the Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2022a) stipulated that individuals with such qualifications "will be assigned to the level that their colleagues have reached, based on their academic readiness and experience" (p. 20). This is to say that these individuals would enjoy a similar career ladder and salary as their colleagues, which I think is a wonderful plan. However, they teach with their first degree while holding a master's degree. It is a situation in which their master's degree in educational administration or leadership was undervalued. This is not without constraining such individuals from working to their fullest potential, as well as blocking the appetite of other individuals from being qualified in this subject area. The lack of drive of such individuals harms the working environment in schools and diminishes collective potential. This is detrimental to the capacity and sustainability of school leadership.

Worst of all, the policy recommended that former principals who were qualified in educational administration "from diploma to postgraduate level" should have the condition of their assignment determined by considering "their academic readiness and experience to teach the subject matter they can most likely teach in the way it becomes consistent with the

experience of their peers" (OEB, 2022a, p. 21). This policy also permitted such persons to be assigned to teaching positions, even if they possess credentials in educational/school leadership fields. However, the situation of their redeployment includes conditions of uncertainty. For instance, the policy requirement was to get them to teach the subject they were "most likely to teach." Also, whereas in the previous two cases the policy provision was to place them "where their peers have reached," in the case of such individuals the provision was to place them "in a way that is consistent with the experience of their peers," which is less clear and less direct.

Assigning people to teach under such conditions may demoralize them, since no one likes to be in such an uncertain scenario. This could harm the collective capacity of school leadership in some way. It might also make existing principals who are qualified in this area feel apprehensive about their future when they leave the principalship, which can affect their ability to deliver the job. It may also make qualified PCs less eager to become principals, reducing systems' capacity to pick competent principals. And it might restrict teachers' motivation to acquire certifications in school administration or leadership. This might be harmful to collective capacity, the development of a healthy school culture, and the creation of stable, capable, and sustainable school leadership.

As one can observe from policy quotations I provided in the previous paragraphs, former principals whom the system wanted to deploy as teachers upon their leaving the principalship are those who were qualified in three areas: those qualified with a bachelor's or master's degree in school subjects, those qualified with a master's degree in educational administration and a first degree in the subject, and those qualified in the educational administration area starting from diploma to postgraduate degree levels. A policy provision that places departing principals who were qualified in one of the school subjects was relatively clear and provided certain placement

conditions and valued the qualifications of the principals. Conversely, policy provisions that place principals who are qualified in educational administration were less clear. It also involved conditions of uncertainty, such as getting departing principals to teach the subjects they were most likely to teach. The policies also placed less value on the qualifications of leaving principals by assigning them to teach other subjects, despite their qualifications in educational administration. This is helpful in building collective capacity and adoption of SSL.

Subtheme Two: Structure/Organization of Policies. The previous subtheme addressed the status of SSL-related policies in supporting or underlining the materialization of SSL. This subtheme explores whether the status of policies in supporting or undermining the materialization of SSL varied based on the structure (organization) of the policies. Specifically, it explores whether the tendency of policies to support or undermine the materialization of SSL varied by policy nature (general vs. specific), distribution (clustered vs. dispersed), and timeline (recent vs. past).

Policy Nature - Specific vs. General. This subsection investigated if policy specificity or generality is related to whether policies support or impede the materialization of SSL. However, it is first necessary to establish the relevance of examining the current policies for elements of policy specificity and generality. The study examined national and regional SSL-related policies. And “[p]olicies at the national [regional] level make broad [general] statements that define a particular stance,” as Cardno (2018) noted. Given this situation, one may argue that bringing the generality/specificity debate into the current policy investigation is at least less relevant, or at worst, inappropriate. However, regardless of whether the policies are national or regional, the policies I targeted are at different levels in the hierarchy of education policy (Peters, 2014; Wu, 2013), so it would be appropriate to bring the generality/specificity debate to the current policy

investigation. Wu (2013) defined hierarchy simply to mean “a system structured in layers or levels that have asymmetric relationships” (p. 285), which works for the policy system as well. The term “asymmetric” in the author’s statement means “parts that do not correspond in shape, size, or arrangement,” according to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary. Therefore, an asymmetric relationship might refer to the interrelatedness of policies of different foci at the same policy level (Nordsieck, 2012; Peters, 2014), but it is also appropriate for the compatibility of policies of the same foci, which are at different levels in the policy hierarchy. This makes examining the generality/specificity of the policies a pertinent endeavor.

I saw policy specificity or generality from the perspective of whether policies can initiate specific actions or merely provide general direction. Berkovich (2021) described that “concrete [specific] ... [policies] are quite focused” (p. 41). This means that specific policies focus a great deal of attention on particular issues rather than attempting to address a range of issues. The term “concert” in the author’s statement shows the practical nature of specific policies, as opposed to the abstract and intangible nature of general policies, in which also a range of issues are addressed. Bell and Stevenson (2006) also noted that “specific education policies are more clearly defined and success criteria are established” (p. 23), which I think is helpful for measuring success level. On the other hand, general policies are “no more than a symbolic statement by the state about its aspirations,” according to Berkovich (2021, p. 41). That is, it reflects ideal ambitions rather than practical manifestations. Therefore, the distinction between specific and general policies lies in whether the policy is merely figurative and provides a frame of reference or is practically focused and initiates specific actions (Bøyum, 2014).

As a close examination of the policies demonstrates, some of the policies I considered in the study were specific. For example, policies governing the selection of principals were specific

(OEB, 2022a). This is because the selection policies detailed the needed educational level and subject area qualification, the position on the teacher's career ladder at which candidates should be, and the number of years of CPD participation they should fulfill to compete for the principalship. The selection criteria also outlined the competition process from application to selection, the composition of the selection committee, and the selection procedure (OEB, 2022a), all of which are specific rather than general. Such policies specifies the criteria candidates should fulfill, the procedure they should follow to compete as principals, and the composition of the selection committee. Other specific policies the current study considered are those that limited the terms of principals to five years and required successful completion of the first term as a condition for reappointment (OEB, 2022a). Collective capacity policies, such as those that required the number of deputy principals to be based on student enrollment and workload, as well as those that specified the number and qualifications of support staff (OEB, 2009, 2022a), are also specific policies. Policies I listed so far are practically focused and can initiate specific actions as per the criteria of policy specificity (Berkovich, 2021; Bøyum, 2014).

However, not all the policies I considered in the study fall into the category of specific policies, and in fact, some policies are general. One could find examples of policies with a relatively high generality, mainly in the area of school culture (MoE, 2021). Policies promoting a culture of peace and tolerance, those prescribing striving to uphold the principle of inclusion and creating a sense of inclusiveness, those reinforcing positive values among students, and those prescribing the manifestation of good communication and interaction among staff are all kinds of general policies (MoE, 2021). Besides cultural policies, collective capacity policies, such as those aimed at strengthening staff motivation through the development of rewarding career paths and more robust constructive performance assessment, also largely fall in the category of general

policies. These policies lack detail on the precise career paths and robust, constructive performance assessments to be implemented, and do not explain how one can generate teachers' and principals' motivation and commitment. Although not exhaustive, the policy provisions I have described thus far show that the current study considered both specific and general policies.

According to some scholars, policy specificity and generality are to be expected in a tiered education system. Brooks & Brooks (2024), for example, affirmed that “documents move through levels of the school system—say, from Education Minister to Division Leaders to School Networks and finally to school principals, guidance typically becomes increasingly narrow and actionable” (p. 1611). This shows that as policies progressed down the educational structure, they became more specific, resulting in broad policies at the top and specific policies at the bottom. I would argue, however, that the specificity or generality of policies I considered did not necessarily result from the movement of policy documents through different levels of education. Relating the current policies to the level from which they originated can give some information on this. The House of Representatives and the Council of Ministries, the two highest legislative bodies in the Ethiopian government system (FDRE, 1995), issued the Federal Civil Service Proclamation (FDRE, 2017) and the ETP (FDRE, 2023), respectively, the two general documents the study considered. The generality of the policies these two documents provide matched the high level from which the policy documents originated. Policies in documents such as Education Sector Development Program VI (ESDP VI) (MoE, 2021), Ethiopian Teachers Development Program Guidelines (MoE, 2007), General Educational Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) (MoE, 2008), National General Education Inspection Framework (MoE, 2013b), National Professional Standard for School Principals (MoE, 2012a), Framework for Continuous Development for Primary and Secondary School Teachers, Leaders, and Supervisors

(MoE, 2009), and Primary School Standards (OEB, 2009) are also largely general, although they existed at different levels of generality. The Ministry of Education, the highest executive government body and the apex of the educational structure, issued these documents, so the policies' generality and high-level origin are well-aligned.

However, the Civil Service Commission and the Oromia Education Bureau issued the Guidelines for the Placement of Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors No. 2/2012 (Civil Service Commission, 2019) and the Selection and Placement Guideline for School Principals (OEB, 2022a), respectively. These policies are largely specific, but high-level government structures issued them. This demonstrates that the specificity of the policies is not necessarily the result of documents moving down the governmental or educational structures, at least in this case. The specific policies belong to such a high level in the government and the education structure that it can be because of the power that the government has not yet released to the lower structure in the Ethiopian education system. A school district or even schools can provide such policies in other education systems such as the US (Berkovich, 2021; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). However, in Ethiopia, the highest bodies in the government and education structure issued them, leaving only the responsibility of implementing them to lower levels of the educational structure, such as the *woreda* (subcity) education office—the equivalent structure of the school district in other education systems.

This study was not specifically interested in whether policies are specific or general. Rather, it is interested in whether one could link policy specificity or generality to the tendency of policies to support or undermine the materialization of SSL. As often as I described, specific policies address a particular issue, prescribe specific actions, require specific arrangements, and possibly directly sanction failure, usually identifying responsible parties for their maneuvers

(Berkovich, 2021; Bell & Stevenson, 2006). As a result, such policies have a more direct and immediate effect on the adoption of SSL than general policies do. Although such policies exist on both sides of the spectrum—supporting or undermining SSL adoption—policies that provide the support did not provide adequate resources for the materialization of SSL, and this makes the undermining effect dominant. Such an assertion is not based solely on the numerical preponderance of undermining policies. Instead, it is also with the consideration of policies with far-reaching undermining effects on SSL materialization, such as policies of principal selection and retention. Such policies not only determine the availability and retention of principals but also significantly impact the implementation of other policies, and this might negatively affect SSL materialization. General policies primarily supported the implementation of SSL. However, these policies only provide general support for the materialization of SSL. They do not identify responsible parties, specify the process or procedure to be followed, or detail the activities to be performed. The policies are not prescriptive and hence cannot actively influence SSL adoption.

Such an assertion is not meant to dismiss the need for or influence of general policies. General policies are inevitable. First, general policies provide a foundation for the organization and functioning of schools and school leadership systems (Brooks & Brooks, 2024; Cardno, 2018; Pons, 2016). Second, general policies provide a frame of reference from which one can derive details of specific policies (Bøyum, 2014; Jones & McBeth, 2010; Schalock & Verdugo, 2012). As a case in point, ETP (FDRE, 2023) stated that “the level of education of teachers, trainers, and educational leaders in each sub-sector and at each level will vary from certificate to doctorate” while also prescribing that “guidelines will determine the details” (p. 12). This policy statement leaves detail for guidelines to determine—the specific policies—while providing a general frame of reference for teachers, trainers, and educational leaders’ qualifications.

Third, general policies inform professionals, such as school principals, about the general direction of education in the country, allowing them to shape their decisions and actions in that direction (Cardno, 2018). This can be the reason the education system needed to furnish schools with such documents. For example, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2013b) required that “national education and training policies, blueprints, national and regional programs and frameworks, the constitution, etc., as well as relevant guidelines and school rules and regulations, are made available in a school” (p. 6) regardless of what the practical reality of the availability of these documents at the school level can be.

However, this does not change the argument that specific policies tend to weaken the materialization of SSL, and general policies lack sufficient resources to counteract this influence, so the specificity-generality structure undermines rather than supports the materialization of SSL.

Policy Distribution - Clustered vs. Dispersed. The distribution of policies is the second perspective from which I examined the structure or organization of policies. This is an examination of policies in terms of their distribution within official documents and across official documents and how this relates to the tendency of policies to support or undermine the materialization of SSL.

When considering policy distribution, I primarily aimed to analyze how policies are distributed or structured within a document and/or across official documents. My examination of policy distribution and organization within an official document focuses on whether the main or preliminary sections presented the policies, including the implications of this for SSL adoption. The preliminary section(s) in this study referred to sections such as Introduction, Significance, Purpose, and other sections that are unlikely to present major policy provisions, while the main

section(s) referred to the section that presented key policy messages for which the system primarily offered the documents.

One can observe three trends of policy distribution in the official documents. The first kind of trend was that the policies in the key section appeared to be supportive, while the policies in the preliminary section were supportive or neutral. This made the different sections of the document consistent in promoting SSL. The Oromia regional primary school standards (OEB, 2009), the ESDP (MoE, 2021), the national professional standards for school principals (MoE, 2012a), the national general education inspection framework (MoE, 2013b), and the Ethiopian Teachers Development Program guidelines (MoE, 2007) are some examples that describe such policy structure. Such a trend describes the structure of policies in most of the documents examined in the study. Such a policy structure makes the document supportive of the materialization of SSL. However, since some more influential policies undermine the materialization of SSL, the overall structure would not change the overall effect.

The second trend was that the preliminary sections of some documents contain policy provisions that promote the adoption of SSL, while the body of the document actually contains policies that work against the materialization of SSL. For example, the “importance” of the Guidelines for the Selection of School Principals (OEB, 2022a) prescribed the production of “school principals who are equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, straightforward views, and good ethics that the job requires, and who are determined to ensure educational quality” (OEB, 2022a, p. 3). Also, the “objective” section of the same policy spoke of creating “a leadership system whose capacity is assured and which can carry out its responsibilities in a stable manner” and “new forces who have the skills and capacity and who can transform schools” (OEB, 2022a, p. 3). However, the main section emphasized criteria, procedures, and

processes that negatively affect SSL adoption. For example, the main section recommended subject-matter credentials for school principals and placed less emphasis on qualifications in education that are not beneficial for adoption of SSL (Jeffers et al., 2024; Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Tahir et al., 2019). It also presented fixed tenure for principalship, which can prevent competent principals from continuing as principals, which is not supportive of dynamic selection, stability, and thus SSL.

Such differential policy provision in the preliminary section and main section made the section of the document not contemporaneous in providing force for the materialization of SSL. And this can prevent the materialization of SSL. As an Oromo proverb goes, “horuudhaf wal-arraabdi, baduudhaf wal jifatti”, which I can literally translate to mean, “it agrees to survive and disagrees to perish” , disagreement between the policy provisions of the two sections can make the effect of the policy provisions cancel out each other. This can make the cumulative policy effect for the materialization of SSL neutral, which means that the documents do not either promote SSL or even undermine its materialization.

The third trend explored whether many documents or only specific documents contained SSL-related policies and how this affected SSL implementation. An examination of the policies revealed that policies that hindered the implementation of SSL concentrated in a few documents, while policies that supported the implementation of SSL scattered. For example, a single document contained policies on principal selection, retention, and conditions for principal reassignment and deployment, which the current study reported to undermine the capacity and stability of school leadership and thus SSL (OEB, 2022a). However, different documents provided provisions that required deputy principals to be deployed according to the number of students (OEB, 2022a) and the number of support staff needed in the primary school (OEB,

2009). The regulations on school culture (MoE, 2021) and teacher workload and deployment (FDRE, 2017; OEB, 2009) that supported the materialization of SSL are also in varied documents. From this, it is possible to witness that a few documents contained policies hindering SSL materialization, while various official documents contained policies supporting it.

The scattering or concentration of policies across official documents could either enable or undermine the policies' support for the materialization of SSL. This is because it can either increase or decrease user interaction with policies, which can either facilitate or constrain the internalization of policy messages, which in turn can lead to the adoption or rejection of SSL adoption. For example, from a communication perspective, one of the effective tools of management or leadership (DiPaola & Hoy, 2015; Heffernan, 2018), “[t]he receiver may learn to receive and respond to consistent messages ... more readily than to fluctuating messages” and “[r]epeat of messages may be helpful in conveying the intended thoughts” (Harris & Hartman, 2002, p. 320). The availability of the same policy message in various documents could facilitate this. Policies reserved for specific documents work in the opposite direction.

However, simply looking at policy distribution without considering other factors can lead to an implausible conclusion. One such factor, which I have repeatedly explained, is the practical effect of a particular policy for or against the materialization of SSL. For example, the undermining effect of policies governing primary school principals selection and retention that were concentrated in a single document is so powerful that it may counterbalance the supportive effect of policies scattered among official documents. This is because the selection policy could affect the availability or absence of suitable school principals, who can affect the implementation of other policies. Although repeating the policy message in different documents would strengthen its effect, policies that undermine the materialization of SSL offset this effect. One

must also recognize that different policies of similar effect, provided in varied documents, provide their own policy messages rather than repeating a single policy message in its entirety, which can reduce the supportive effect of the repeated policy. The concentration of policies with an undermining effect in a few documents can lead to a strong undermining effect because of the synergy their presence together can create. As a result, it is possible that concentrated undermining policies function more effectively than dispersed supporting policies.

Policy Time line- Recent vs. Past. The last lens through which I examined the structure or organization of policies was whether the tendency of policies to promote or undermine the materialization of SSL varies according to their timeline. As Fan and Popkewitz (2020) noted, “educational policy carries the feature of timeliness” (p. xii). This legitimizes the integration of the timeline into the exploration of the anatomy (structure) of SSL-related policies.

The study of policy timelines was interested in whether the tendency of policies to promote or undermine the materialization of SSL varied according to the timeline of the policies. A policy timeline can comprise, among others, policy initiation and termination times and the policy process that took place across these timelines, which necessitates determining the timelines of the policies themselves first. However, the multitude of policies, each with its own deployment and operational period, some of which overlap and others do not, made it difficult to identify a single, coherent time frame. One can cross over such a challenge by using the provision time of key policies, for example, the provision or amendment date of national education and training policy, as a frame of reference. This is because the ETP can influence all policies within the policy structure (Bøyum, 2014; Brooks & Brooks, 2024; Cardno, 2018). Various scholars have used this time to study the curriculum and education policies in Ethiopia

(see, for example, Animaw et al., 2022; Tarekegn & Mihiretie, 2024), which may add legitimacy to such an endeavor.

The problem was that it is difficult to indicate the start date of the recent ETP itself for many reasons. The Council of Ministers of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia approved the policy on February 27, 2023, and the Ministry of Education officially communicated it to the educational structure with the letter Ref 1/256/1516/15 dated March 9, 2023 (FDRE, 2023). This can lead to the conclusion that implementing the New ETP began on February 27, 2023, its approval date. But the practical starting date of the policy implementation might not be on February 27, 2023. This is because the education system put into practice the recommendation of the ETP before the actual release date of the policy. There is a great deal of evidence to support such a claim, but for the sake of this paper's length, I will mention only a few of them. For example, the ETP of 2023 recommended, among other things, a change in the curriculum that was in practice in the education system. However, the curriculum change was already in effect at the time of the official release of the policy, as evidenced by a review of a random sample of primary school curriculum materials. For instance, the Oromia Education Bureau published, in 2022, the Grade 2 Health and Physical Education textbook that Nekemte Teachers' Education College prepared and the Grade 5 Afan Oromo textbook that Jimma Teachers' Education College prepared, while the release year of the policy was 2023. In fact, the Ministry of Education released the General Education Curriculum Framework in 2020 (MoE, 2020b), much earlier than the year the Oromia Education Bureau released the curriculum materials and three years before the Council of Ministries approved the policy. Similarly, in 2022, the Oromia Education Bureau issued the Principal Selection and Placement Guidelines that I examined in this study (OEB, 2022a). This was before the actual enactment of the ETP. In this guideline, the

Bureau cited the need to revise the selection and placement guidelines in line with the spirit of the "functioning new ETP" (OEB, 2022a, p. 4) in stating the reason for issuing the guidelines. As one can see, the guidelines referenced the policy, even though the bureau issued the guidelines before the actual release year of the policy. Technically, this can mean that the start date of the policy was at least as dated as the release date of the guidelines themselves, given the guidelines' referencing to the policy.

One likely reason for this expedited policy implementation can be a desire to quickly implement policy recommendations. The dissemination of the policy idea long before the formal approval and publication of the policy document may cause its quick implementation. The policy was based on a large-scale national study called the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2017-30) (Teferra et al., 2017). Although I could not get information on the specific timeframe of the study, the "integrated executive summary" of the study stated that an "international benchmarking visit took place between October 7 and October 22, 2017," and gives December 2017 as the actual release date of the document. Based on this, one might conclude that the research on which the policy is based was underway before and around 2017. If so, officials may have accessed the research findings through the platform created for frequent communication and consultation during the research period, before the policy's official release, and hence they might have gotten knowledge about policy direction beforehand. This can explain the release of policy documents that were based on the idea of the ETP before the actual release of the policy. Of course, the Ministry of Education also circulated the documents and held a series of public discussions on the research findings and recommendations prior to the actual policy release, which can also explain the situation. These extended the practical initiation of policy well beyond February 27, 2023, but it still becomes difficult to determine the exact start date.

Regardless of the challenges in determining the exact start time of the recent ETP, one can examine the policy to see how it supported or undermined the implementation of SSL, being located in the current ETP timeline. One way to do so is to compare the resources the recent ETP provided for SSL adoption with those of previous ETPs. This study was not interested in examining past ETP. However, it was important to touch on some of its elements to show the direction in which the education system was moving with regard to providing policies that supported or undermined the implementation of SSL. For example, the previous ETP (1994) defined educational management (including school leadership) as a professional endeavor. Subsequent sector-specific documents, such as the 2007 Blueprint (MoE, 2007), also characterized it as a distinct profession with its own scientific theories and practical guidelines. The blueprint also required that those responsible for educational leadership receive training in the discipline.

However, such a strong emphasis on the professionalization of educational leadership appeared to be waning in the current ETP (FDRE, 2023). The policy document, which is available only in Amharic, shows no inclusion of the concept of professionalizing educational leadership. The policy also lacks a strong text on the training of educational personnel, which was given special attention and priority for action in the previous policy (FDRE, 1994). Policy makers intensely negotiate policy terms and carefully craft and cautiously word policy statements (Edelman, 2013). Thus, the lack of influential policy language on these important issues in the policy document may not be a coincidence but a lack of attention or interest by the education system in school leadership professionalization and hence SSL. This can have a negative impact on the capacity of school leadership and thus on the materialization of SSL. Given this situation, one moved from a context that provides space for the professionalization

and capacity of school leadership, and thus SSL, to a context that paid little attention to these issues as one moved from the implementation period of the previous ETP to the most recent one.

The next task is to determine the timeframe of the other policies the study considered, especially if they fell within the previous or most recent ETP period, and see if they provided or denied resources for the materialization of SSL according to their timeframe. When I conducted this study, the most recent ETP was only a few years old, so few policies were based on it. Therefore, although most of the policies I considered fell into the previous policy period, they were also in effect during the early stage of the most recent ETP period. I have already reported that the effect of such policies on the realization of SSL in the previous subtheme, but such an effect was equally distributed over both the previous and the most recent policy periods. Therefore, the policy analysis couldn't show different policy resources over different policy periods. However, I have already reported that the policies of principal selection and retention, which were provided based on the recent policy only, were mostly working against the materialization of SSL. This made policies largely lack resources for the materialization of SSL.

Another concern that one might rise in the study of policy timeline was whether the proposed policies fit the need and complexity of the education system. Policies related to collective capacity and school culture can help address such complexity, but they are general policies that are of little practical importance. Regarding capacity of school principals, studies asserted that the school leadership is “facing emerging challenges never before seen in education” (Wise, 2015, p. 103) needing “exceptional leaders within educational institutions” (Khanal & Regmi, 2024, p. 874) and “radically rethink[ing]... preparation programs for school administrators” (Wise, 2015, p. 103). However, the Ethiopian education system foresaw qualification in one of the school disciplines and recommended short-term training. This shows

that the qualification of principals and the training they are supposed to receive did not fit into the complexity in the education system. Job incumbent, who are less prepared, are less likely to persist, to be resilient or to have a commitment and devotion required to stay in the position, working against SSL.

The examination of policy structure can also include an assessment of whether policies are proactive or reactive, as well as their effect on SSL materialization. Proactive policies are forward-looking and require acting ahead of time to avoid problems that can prevent school leadership from being sustainable (Fazli et al., 2023). Such policies are analogous to vaccinations, which help the body acquire immunity and thereby prevent illness. Collective capacity and school culture policies, which the current study considered, were largely proactive. This is because such policies called for the introduction of capability into the school leadership system, as well as the construction of favorable cultural conditions that may stabilize and aid in the sustainability of school leadership before the problem that prevents it from being sustainable arises. Among principal succession policies, those related to principal retention are also largely proactive since they work to keep principals in their positions before school leadership vacancies occur.

In contrast, reactive policies necessitate intervention to address issues after an SSL-affecting anomaly occurs (Fazli et al., 2023). This is similar to treating a disease after the body becomes ill. Among the policies the current study considered, principal selection policies are reactive, regardless of how they function in practice. They make the education system react to vacant school leadership positions by filling them after incumbent principals leave.

These two types of policies entail different things from the perspective of SSL adoption in particular and school leadership in general. Proactive policies enable the education system to

prepare in advance. For example, they provide enough time to locate resources and organize the human resources necessary for sustainable school leadership. In general, these policies enable the education system to take control of the situation rather than react to it, making the system more confident about SSL. On the other hand, reactive policies force the education system to react to situations as they occur, rather than taking control of the situation. These policies are less effective than proactive policies for dealing with SSL situations because the education system may lack the readiness, resources, and time to respond to unexpected SSL problems. However, the proactive/reactive effect must be seen in combination with other policy structures that this section addressed and with the status of policies the previous section addressed.

Theme Two: The Manifestation of SSL Practices. The previous theme explored the anatomy of SSL policies in the Ethiopian educational context in terms of policy status in supporting or undermining the materialization of SSL and the variation in the supporting or undermining influence of policies according to policy structure: policy type, distribution, and timing. However, the materialization of SSL in a given educational system does not merely depend on the policy prescriptions in official documents. It also depends on policies practical implementation. Therefore, to make the study more complete, this theme explored the manifestation of SSL practices in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. In the same way that I explored the anatomy of SSL policies in relation to the three elements of SSL that were the targets of the study (principal succession, collective capacity, and school culture), I also explored the manifestation of SSL practices in relation to these three elements.

Principals Succession Practices. I examined the anatomy of policies of principal succession in terms of principals' selection and retention. However, the exploration of practical manifestation of SSL focused on the intention of principals to stay or leave school leadership

positions and the interest of PCs in assuming school principalship. These two issues strongly influence school leadership succession and SSL, which was the reason I focused on them.

The PCs' Interest in Assuming the Principalship. This subsection first addresses the interest or disinterest of PCs in assuming a principalship position in this study setting. Then, it addresses factors that explain the interest or disinterest of PCs.

Interest or disinterest of PCs. The data from the current study indicated that PCs in the study context were disinterested in assuming principalship. All of the PCs in the current study posited that school leadership is critical in raising student achievement and ensuring school success (e.g., Derara, Ebisa, Fayisa, Abdi). Ebisa, for instance, asserted that "teachers' accomplishment to an ideal level is difficult in the absence of competent school principals". Though he did not rule out the possibility of ideal achievement, he emphasized the difficulties of teachers' accomplishments in the absence of capable principals. Abdi concurred. "School principals", he said, "push the school community to perform at the highest possible level". Some participants even pointed out the great contribution principals make to the success of schools. In relation to that, Feyisa had this to say:

Our school was ranked first from the back, not the front. It was a living nightmare, with frequent clashes between teachers and students. Nobody would care about the students' achievements. However, the situation began to change once a specific principal was appointed to the school's leadership post. No one dared hope for such a thing to happen. He was able to shift the momentum of the school's accomplishment. Then, our school was ranked first among all the schools in the district. Though the whole school community had some role to play in changing the situation, the dramatic change would not have been possible without the presence of the principal.

Interestingly, though, the optimistic outlook and recognition of the contribution of the principalship did not translate into a willingness to take over as principal. When asked if they intended to become primary school principals, all PCs expressed their unwillingness with an emphatic “no”. Derara, for instance, said this:

I worked as a principal in a school that is far from where I am now. I had both good and terrible experiences as a principal. However, after nine years as a school principal, I am no longer interested in taking on the post of principal. It is now time for others to step forward and play their parts.

Likewise, Feyisa stated, "You will not see me in another school principalship position." As evidenced by their responses, both candidates had previously served as principals. Their experience as school principals could allow the education system to put their accumulated knowledge and expertise to good use in school leadership. Unfortunately, neither candidate was interested in becoming a principal. Specifically, what appeared to be echoed in Derara's account was the inclination to put a limit on one's commitment and contribution to the community and school. Nonetheless, this may not be significant because professional ethics require them to sustain their commitment. Retaining school leaders is about sustaining their efforts and helping the school and students achieve goals that cannot be achieved in a short period of time and that require long-term commitment. What is certain, however, is that their lack of enthusiasm squandered the opportunity to utilize their leadership experience for the benefit of the school system. This was actually the misfortune of the system, particularly the children.

On his part, Bona asserted, "I don't need to think about assuming a school principalship with my current service years [the candidates have about 16 total service years]". Similarly, Merga wanted to continue as a teacher. Though his reason was slightly different, this

participant's indifference to principalship was also evident in his narrative. While Bona's disinterest in the principalship had to do with the advantage to be gained by not taking on the principalship, Merga's narrative was about his preference to remain in the teaching profession without linking it to any obvious cause. When taken together, the responses of the participants indicated their disinterest in becoming principals, despite having different reasons.

I have also made an attempt to investigate the issue further from the perspective of education officers, in the hope that their perspectives would shed new light on the prevalent development. Chala, an education officer, stated that "the town education office has four vacant positions in the primary school principalship due to its failure to fill them". According to him, "the office can't find individuals to fill... [especially] deputy principalship positions because of the elevation of the service year requirement to 14 years", which is a person at a senior teacher level according to the teacher career ladder in Ethiopia. His account painted a clear picture of the PCs' apathy. The specifics also addressed the rise in the minimum number of service years or teacher career ladder requirement necessary to assume the principalship, from three to fourteen, or from junior teacher to senior teacher, which he saw as the beginning of the trouble.

Bekan, another education officer, explained that the increase in service year requirements happened because of the Job Evaluation and Grading (JEG) initiative (FDRE, 2017). And that warrants the need to examine the proclamation in order to grasp a clearer picture. The proclamation mandated equal job grades for all positions of equal value. It was that effort to make jobs comparable that defined the job grades of school principals and deputy principals and provided 14-years or senior teacher level requirement to get the principalship. But the argument is that the job classification failed to reflect the principals' duties and responsibilities and ignored the unique characteristics of the principalship that might justify its higher job grade status

(Merga, Gemechu, Ulfata). For example, principals face an enormous amount of emotional labor in carrying out their responsibilities. Their role also extends beyond regular working hours. In addition, the professionalization of the staff requires them to have a specific professional disposition that is uncommon in other professions (Campbell, 1959). The JEG needed to consider these and other special scenarios of principalship, but it did not accommodate them in practice. Therefore, I would argue that such ignorance denied the principals the opportunity to be assigned to a higher job grade. Comparing jobs based on their status can be useful for several reasons, such as assessing the relative contribution of jobs to the national economy. However, if one makes jobs comparable without taking into account the specific situations of individual jobs, it may pose challenges to the operation of the system, as one can see in the case of the service year or career ladder requirement for school principals.

Job evaluation and grading are supposed to be done with the collaboration of relevant organizations, according to the Proclamation of Job Evaluation and Grading (JEG), which can avoid the occurrence of such problems. However, because the Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development would make the ultimate decision, the other parties might have negligible influence despite the policy prescription. The supporting evidence for this was the increase in the service year or career ladder requirement to 14 years or senior teacher level, whereas the Ministry of Education had previously reduced it to a minimum of three years owing to a shortage of PCs (Gurmu, 2020; MoE, 2013b). This might show that the increase in the service year required to take the principalship was not in the will of the ministry.

Factors Explaining PCs Disinterest- As the previous section explored, PCs were disinterested in becoming principals. However, PCs' disinterest in premiership was not without explanation. Factors some participants cited to explain PCs' lack of interest in school leadership

included personal problems and a preference for further study rather than becoming a principal. However, these could not explain the lack of interest of most of the PCs. Rather, the most important factors almost all participants cited for PCs lack of interest in principalship included the burdens and challenges associated with the principalship, the salary paid to principals, and the inadequate support and encouragement principals receive from education officials.

Burdens and Challenges Associated with the Task: The burdens and challenges of school principalship (partly related to the large volume of activities to be accomplished within school days) were among the key reasons for PCs' (Feyisa, Derara, Gemechu, Ulfata) lack of enthusiasm for adopting primary school principalship. In the words of Ulfata,

Proper school leadership occasionally puts you at odds with teachers, especially those who only view things from their own perspective... It is the principal's responsibility to greet everyone who comes to the offices, spends time there, and solves problems. The issue is that no one needs to hear the rejection of their appeal. They require cases to be settled in order to benefit their side.

The disagreement with teachers that Ulfata recounted might be related to a difference in perspectives on how things should be handled, which can be resolved via dialogue. It is necessary for school principals to be resilient in the area of human resource management (Robbins & Judge, 2013) since schools are naturally human-intensive and the intimacy of relationships characterizes them (Campbell, 1959). This can unavoidably pose problems for principals' leadership. However, it is debatable if leadership was entitled to be labeled "appropriate" when it was unable to foster a healthy relationship between leaders and followers.

Gemechu's explanation of the overwhelming burdens and challenges associated with principalship as factors discouraging PCs from aspiring to be principals was equally informative.

For him,

There is no work that school principals are not expected to handle. Being a school principal is like choosing to sit in the center of a pile of tasks on your desk... Meeting reporting obligations, let alone other standards, is a big issue in and of itself. It requires a full-time employee to address it on its own. When you are a school principal, you are juggling a variety of duties throughout the day and night, which might make it difficult for you to perform the task itself.

Notwithstanding the burdens and challenges associated with the principalship that participants cited as explaining PCs' disinterest in becoming principals, some of their observations warrant closer scrutiny. For instance, the pile of tasks on the desks of principals and the reporting requirements participants emphasized were more relevant to administrative requirements. But the participants did not emphasize more challenging but still highly relevant tasks, such as instructional leadership. The participant might emphasize the areas of tasks education officials usually focused on through their supervisory efforts. This relates to a development called "perspective-taking," which means "being sensitive to other people's perspectives" (Northouse, 2016, p. 49), because it helps them avoid conflict or because it enables them to be rewarded. Tekleselassie (2002) had the following to say in this connection:

Most principals have learned that routine administrative tasks (such as budgets), in comparison to academic tasks, are more visible to influence the district supervisors in performance assessment decisions. Principals can avoid conflict with district supervisors

by prioritizing administrative tasks over the academic and instructional aspects of their jobs (p. 62).

One cannot discredit challenges that participants raised as factors explaining PCs' disinterest in assuming principalship. However, this trend of focusing on administrative tasks as an explanatory factor for disinterest in principalship might indicate the need for a shift in the attention of educational officials and supervisors in their supervision behavior to shift the attention of principals and PCs toward the core business of the school, i.e., instructional leadership and the teaching-learning process (Tadesse & Kenea, 2017; Tekleselassie, 2002).

There were also developments in the system that could further complicate things. On the one hand, the complexity of the school's leadership shows no signs of abating. On the other hand, the JEG endeavor reduced the grade of deputy principalship from its previous equal status with the grade of principalship (Civil Service Commission, 2019). The deputy principalship is the most important position in school leadership—a task with huge responsibilities—and is known for greatly sharing the load of the principalship (Jeffers et al., 2024; Tahir et al., 2019). The downgrading of the job level of deputy principalship was likely to dissuade PCs from assuming the position, which in turn made it difficult for education offices to fill the positions. When PCs were unmotivated to take on the principalship, which is of a higher grade, it was unlikely to be in their interest to assume the deputy principalship, which is of a lower job grade.

Salary of School Principals- As conventional wisdom tells us, PCs are supposed to benefit by taking on the school principalship in such a way that the benefit of the principalship outweighs the benefit they gain from the teaching profession. However, this did not appear to be the case in the current study setting. The participants' argument followed three lines of reasoning. One line was the incommensurability of remunerations offered to principals when compared with

the burden of responsibility associated with school leadership. In Gemechu's view, "the duty of the post significantly surpasses the amount of remuneration paid to principals." Abdi also asserted that the responsibility "does not balance the weight of the work." Some other participants (Ebisa, Feyisa, Ulfata) also concurred. Such an argument is unsurprising since potential candidates do not accept the job without first evaluating, among other things, the amount to be paid against the energy to be incurred (Lemoine et al., 2018). However, participants described the situation with a detached sense. Their answers were hazy, which could be attributed to their knowledge of its unlikely occurrence in light of the nation's economic situation and other circumstances.

The second line of argument compared principal pay to what teachers might be paid for having service years of 14 years or more or for being a senior teacher or more, which is required for applying for the position of principal. The voices of the participants along this line, particularly those of PCs (Derara, Merga, Ulfata, Chala, Bekan) were loud and clear. "As it is instituted now [at the time of the study]", said Bekan, "the compensation of principals is just a minor difference from the income of teachers". The participant appeared to claim that the compensation differential was insufficient to entice PCs to pursue principalship. Such criteria required senior teachers, associate lead teachers, lead teachers, and senior lead teachers to take on the role of principal. These levels are among the highest stages in the career ladder for primary school teachers in the Ethiopian education system. That means a potential candidate's salary ranged from Birr 10,150.00 to Birr 11,305.00 (Civil Service Commission, 2019). On June 14, 2025, around the time this work was to be submitted, one US dollar was equivalent to around 134.8100 Ethiopian birr. According to the evidence obtained from the same sources, the salaries of the deputy principal and principal were Birr 11,305.00 and Birr 12,579.00, respectively. As

one can see from the figures, the wages of deputy principals coincide with those of certain PCs. This illustrates that there was no noticeable variation in pay, even to the extent that Bekan claims. However, all PCs are paid at least one level less than a principal's pay, which is a difference of about Birr 2,429. In a place where teachers have very limited options to augment their pay, the difference can be beneficial. However, in places like the current study setting, avoiding principalship might allow people to have "more time to do sideline jobs to enhance... income" (Tekleselassie & DeCuir, 2021, p. 14), which the wage variations may not compensate for.

The other factor that one must see along this line of argument is the fact that the six career stages of principalship and deputy principalship, which were formerly in operation, have been shortened to just one stage (Civil Service Commission, 2019). This means that principals would not see their pay rise during their principalship. This might not interest PCs in taking on the role. Change is always inevitable, and it brings with it certain alterations (Brough et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2014). However, the elimination of the principal career structure through JEG efforts might not give PCs the strength to seek school leadership positions. This might make the change itself disruptive. The education officials argued that principals were paid the salary they could otherwise achieve at the end of the highest career ladder; hence, the abolishment benefits principals. Previously, principals progressed from one career ladder to another according to their performance. However, assigning all principals the same top salary would allow them to acquire it without effort. This can de-motivate them from performing at the highest level consistently to advance in their careers.

The final line of reasoning concerned the stability of the principals' salaries (Bona, Ebisa). Principals are paid for their positions while they are there. This implies that anyone departing the

principalship, particularly those with a few years of service, will see their pay reduced. And that appeared to be part of the explanation for PCs' disinterest in assuming the primary school principalship. In the words of Bona,

The post of school principal needs you to serve while being burned by fire from below and above. After serving in such a position, resigning with full pay should not be regarded as some kind of favor. People change if they are not engaged with the principalship... But the action of salary reduction is like sending a message that says, "Whoever sees me being affected doesn't claim principalship." This is equivalent to saying that the year you spent as a principal is useless.

As one can witness from the excerpt, the participant elucidated the situation of salary removal for principals upon departing principalship with a sense of bitterness. Of course, one can link whether or not the salary cut for departing principals was reasonable to the ongoing dispute about whether or not the assignment of school principals is merit-based. Practices such as filling the school principalship through the announcement of vacancies and the availability of a school principalship career structure before its current removal (Gurmu, 2020) predispose the principalship to being deemed merit-based. Nonetheless, the principalship is seen as a temporary post. Authorities dismiss principals without disciplinary procedures, a practice infeasible in other merit-based public service sectors. This practice likens the principalship to that of political appointees, replaceable at will.

Educational officials frequently define the principalship as both appointment- and merit-based, which seems to strategically avoid the confrontation by confirming it as one of the two. This is because calling it an appointment would cause the system to lose many competent individuals who do not want a principalship position previously associated with political

affiliation (Gurmu, 2020). If the system takes it as merit-based, it forces the system to fulfill the requirements of merit-based positions, such as the right not to have a salary reduction without recourse to disciplinary measures. Based on pay deductions and the placement of departing principals into teaching positions with teacher salaries, it appears to be an appointment rather than merit-based. If this were the case, the pay cut may be considered reasonable. However, the loss in pay certainly has significant consequences for the morale and courage of incumbent principals and PCs to assume the principalship.

Measures to be taken by way of redressing problems related to salary, however, appear to be very unlikely. The Ministry of Education cannot immediately raise the salaries of school principals. In theory, it can suggest and then get its recommendation approved by the Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development, which is given full rights on the matter (Civil Service Commission, 2019). This normally needs a strong justification on the part of the Ministry of Education. However, article two of the Wage Structure Execution Directive 1/2012 E.C./2019 for Job Evaluation and Grading prohibits the issuance of an atypical salary structure (Civil Service Commission, 2019), which shows minimal opportunity for the Ministry of Education to influence the situation.

It appears that the Ministry of Education had minimal opportunity to influence the situation during its inception too. Article seven of the JEG proclamation stated, “The Ministry [Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development] shall, in collaboration with the concerned government institutions, upon undertaking studies, prepare a salary scale and submit the same to the Council of Ministers” (FDRE, 2017). While the proclamation gave other parties the right to be consulted, which is about their limited influence to affect the situation, it gave the Ministry of Public Service and Human Resource Development the right to make the ultimate

decision on the salary scale. Providing suggestions and making the final decision are two distinct things that may have quite different effects on the pay scale decision.

Insufficient Support and Encouragement- The job of principalship is getting increasingly difficult (Day et al., 2011; Gurmu, 2020). Moreover, in the Ethiopian education system, educational responsibilities are being devolved to the school site, implying a greater volume and sophistication of tasks for school leadership (Tekleselassie, 2002). As a result, if principals are to lead their schools effectively, they need to get significant support and encouragement from cluster supervisors and education authorities. Despite this, the insufficient support and encouragement provided to principals appears to be one of the factors that explained the PCs' disinterest in obtaining principalship in the current study's context.

"Town education authorities", Feyisa said, "come to school not to assist and relieve the principals' burden, but to add to it". This means that the support complicated rather than assisted school leadership delivery. The implication is that school principals wanted the assistance omitted because they do not want to add to their load, even though the logical demand is for strong support to manifest. Ebisa agreed:

When you see the way you are being treated by people from the education office, it will not encourage you to think about assuming a school leadership position. All what the district education authorities want is only to speak. They refuse to listen to your concerns.... A lot of progress could be made if people were able to understand and listen to one another.

When the participant said that they wanted "only to speak," he might have overstated the case. This is due to the fact that supervision support that does not require input from the supervisee cannot exist. However, one can argue that a lack of motivation to listen to followers

makes the right kind of encouragement and support less likely. Understanding and listening to one another are the core manifestations of productive support. After all, supervisors are there to encourage and capacitate principals, not just to tell them and enforce their will. Hence, participants' complaints that supervisors did not listen to them, did not give them a chance to speak, and did not involve them enough required serious attention. Bona, on his side, noted:

Where do you find the courage and morality to accept the position of principalship if those in the system are unable to adequately support and understand you? The burden of being a principal is overwhelming. On top of that, people who are supposed to encourage and support you always dismiss the whole good points of your effort.

His argument can, in fact, be reflective of supervisors' dissatisfaction with the accomplishments of principals, perhaps without recognizing their effort and encouraging them. The supervisor might act like that to encourage principals to achieve more and at the highest level, which might result from the pressure on education offices to achieve more. But such an urge can produce the needed result only if it is compounded with proper support and encouragement. Otherwise, it results in frustration among principals (Tekleselassie, 2002) and disinterest among PCs in assuming the principalship. The lack of proper support by principals is also likely to transfer to the lack of support by teachers from principals, which harms the instructional process (Gurmu & Oumer, 2022; Noor & Nawab, 2022).

In addition to reporting that they were not receiving adequate support, some participants claimed that some of the support they were receiving was inappropriate. This is, in fact, connected with the incapacity of the individuals who were responsible for providing the support and their intentional distortion of the existing directives and guidelines. "Individuals who come to the school to provide support sometimes," Abdi complained, "have no acquaintance with the

directives for which they are required to check their implementation. They provide direction that sometimes clashes with official guidelines". As far as one can establish, the occurrence of such an incident appeared to be unintentional and rather related to the incompetence of educational supervisors and their lack of familiarity with the applicable standards and directions.

The other case the participants cited was connected with the purposeful distortion of guidelines. The Educational Management Organization, Community Participation, and Finance Directive (MoE, 2002) asserted that school principals can gain from the amount of financial resources they attract. Nevertheless, the data provided indicated a scenario in which the town education offices interfered under the guise of assistance to channel such benefit to the town education office in order to misdirect the advantages to their side. As Derara put it, "they [town education officials] intend to deposit money in the town education office's account. Even though they were ultimately unsuccessful in doing so as a result of my efforts, it constrained relationship I had with them, eventually caused me to consider leaving". The implication of his remark can be that principals who leave the position with such an impaired relationship may not wish to return to the position, and individuals with whom they find themselves in such a situation may not allow them to return, even if they were willing to reassume principalship.

Again, there is an issue related to the JEG's development in connection with the provision of supervision to school principals. Cluster supervisors support primary school principals and evaluate their performance (MoE, 2012a). Previously, school principals and cluster supervisors held equal job grades, but this arrangement drew criticism because equals supervised each other. To make matters worse, authorities demoted the cluster supervisor's grade to the level of deputy principalship from the school principalship grade. The logic for the decision might be that the task weight of a cluster supervisor was equal to the deputy principalship, but not the

principalship. The question, however, is how the psychological and professional consequences of having people of lower job grades regulate those of higher job grades can be mitigated. One may consider this argument unimportant, but it is a practical problem. It is about getting less competent individuals to monitor more competent ones. This is because more skilled and better qualified people usually gravitated to the high-grade job of school principalship, leaving the lower-grade job of cluster supervision to less competent individuals. Hence, there is likely disagreement and even conflict between individuals at the two levels, as the level of competence may entail differential maturity and hence a differential understanding of how things should be (Northouse, 2016). Given such conditions, the support of a cluster supervisor might not be as beneficial to the principal as it should be, and the supervision process might not be productive. The support can be productive if supervisors are as competent as or more competent than principals.

Again, the question can be, “Who holds the most accountability?” Although both are responsible for the work of their horizons, the role of the cluster supervisor is to provide support when the principals are directly responsible for the work. Therefore, the greatest accountability appeared to reside with the principals. However, this does not diminish the need for cluster supervisors to support principals or make them free of accountability for the work they do.

Intention of Incumbent Principals to Stay or Leave. The intention of incumbent principals explored principals' intentions to stay or leave their school leadership positions and the factors that influenced their intention to stay or leave.

Intention of Incumbent Principals. It is first necessary to define what I mean by "intention to stay" or "intention to leave." As the section that explored the anatomy of SSL policies showed, the Ethiopian education system allows principals to remain in their positions for only two terms

of five years each (OEB, 2022a). Given this policy provision, there is no way for principals to remain in a school leadership position beyond the two terms, except for the possibility of reapplying for the principalship after a two-year absence. Therefore, in this study, I considered principals to have intended to stay in principalship if they intended to complete their second term. These are predicated on the notion that principals have a potential to remain in their jobs for longer periods of time than Ethiopian education system policies allow, as long as they remain productive (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Fisher, 2014; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Nilsson et al., 2022).

The current study found three types of intentions of incumbent principals in this educational setting to stay or leave the principalship. The first kind of intents was to quit the principalship in fewer than five years, which encompasses a principalship term in the Ethiopian school system (OEB, 2022a), as well as a wish to leave immediately. For example, Biranu stated:

I am happy if I am told to hand over the responsibility of being the principal and leave the principal's office now...I don't want to stay in principalship for single day. I want to leave and return to teaching in which I can leave peacefully.

As one can see from the participant's description, he had no intention of staying in the principalship for one day and wanted to leave it starting at the time the interview was conducted. Likewise, Firaol declared, "I want to leave from this time on". The description of this participant too was about leaving the principalship straightaway. As one can see from the verbatim of their interview I provided, these participants had a similar firm intention to leave the principalship, and they wanted to do so immediately. Words or phrases in their descriptions, such as "from now on", "for a single day," and "now" convey the idea that they were ready to leave the principalship soon. And phrases such as "I am happy to leave" or "I want to leave" also express a similar

intention on the part of the principals to leave the principalship, which is not good for the education system.

However, despite both participants describing a desire to leave instantly, there were certain differences in their descriptions that reflect differences in their determination to leave. For instance, Birhanu's description included phrases such as "if I am told." This implies that he wanted a prescription or an order to leave. However, Firaol's description was not about waiting for such an order to quit his position. Therefore, Firaol's intention seems to be more self-directed, not based on conditions, and more likely to happen in its own time. However, Birhanu's intention is not to be ignored either. Principals typically interact with education officials one-on-one or in groups during meetings. During those interactions, education officials are likely to order principals to quit if they are unable to run the school, regardless of whether the principals have managed the schools effectively. This satisfies Birhanu's condition of being asked to leave, which may also make his departure likely. However, the fact that he waited until today, when he was likely to receive such a request, might make his departure also improbable.

The short time frame they gave for their departure also deserves elaboration. After learning of their intention to depart immediately, I asked them when they started to intend to leave. I asked this question on the assumption that if their intention came before the data collection time, they would have already left given their description of the intention to leave immediately. Birhanu stated that "the existing situation makes you think about leaving rather than staying," some of which I have included under explanatory factors. Firaol also remarked that "this is not what I felt today". As one can see from their descriptions, the factors Birhanu mentioned were not what was happening at the time of data collection but what had been happening in the education system long ago and continued to happen, and it was what he tolerated in order to stay,

perhaps for three or four years. Although Firaol had intended to leave long before the data collection, he was also a principal when I collected data for the study. Therefore, even though they described their intention to leave the principalship immediately, they stayed for some time in the principalship after they had intended to leave.

Olana on his behalf said that:

I am not intending to stay long as the principal. I may leave the principalship at the end of the current school year. ... I have no energy to stay beyond that time. I am not doing what I want to do, and I am not happy with what is happening; hence, it is better to leave.

This participant also described his intention to leave the principalship at the end of the school year rather than staying indefinitely. Although the time frame he provided was longer than the immediate departure other participants described, as I presented in previous paragraphs, this participant was also intending to leave. His description contains three major issues: his lack of energy to become more involved in school leadership, his inability to achieve his goals, and the constraints that made him unhappy as a school principal. Although most of these factors did not emerge as explaining factors of PCs' disinterest, his description about lack of energy might be about lacking the courage and determination to continue as a principal, which can be about facing burnout (DeMatthews et al., 2023; Karakose et al., 2016). This endangers the principal's personal well-being beyond constraining the materialization of SSL unless the system addresses it in certain ways. Further probing into the matter revealed that his descriptions of not doing what he wanted and being unhappy about what was happening were connected to his inability to provide school leadership due to situational factors and the inadequate support he received from authorities, as detailed in the "explaining factors".

The purpose of staying until the end of the academic year can be to finish planning for the next year or to avoid causing disruption midyear. Despite his plan to quit, I view this favorably because he wanted to leave in a way that would not disrupt the educational process or destabilize the school system. However, the participant appeared less determined to leave than those mentioned in the previous paragraph when he said, "I may leave the principalship at the end of the current academic year." This makes his exit questionable. However, his uncertainty about whether to stay or leave itself does not ensure the stability and sustainability of the school leadership.

Jitu likewise stated that:

I plan to depart the principalship within a maximum of three years. Principalship is not the type of job where you serve for an extended amount of time, and therefore I want to depart. I do not think that my staying more than this time is beneficial for me as a principal or for the education system as well.

According to the quotation, this participant also intended to stay for no more than three years and did not consider principalship to be a long-term employment. The statement "I plan" in her explanation indicates that her intention to depart was a deliberate decision to relinquish the principalship, rather than an impulsive response she gave when asked during data collection. She stated that she would leave the principalship within three years. I interpret this as an attempt to synchronize her departure with the three-year cycle of the school improvement program (MoE, 2010). However, her subsequent description revealed that this was not the case; rather, it was tied to something else. She described:

In theory, leaving the principalship could be so easy. You can push for your resignation and leave the principalship. But this may cause, sometimes, a confrontation with the

education office, which can affect you in the future. ...I have served as long as I can, and I want to leave from principalship in a way that will not affect my education or career prospects. I want to leave with no negative tag attached to me, either from the educational establishment or from friends or enemies that may affect my name or professional reputation. I want also leave from the position with no detrimental impact on the smooth running of the school I am currently leading. Otherwise, I have no desire to remain in a principal's role.

The participant acknowledged principals can leave their positions at any time. However, she mentioned three main issues that appeared to lead her to believe that taking time to leave the position was necessary. First, she wanted to leave the principalship without confrontation with the education office so that her future training or career prospects would not be affected. The focus was on maintaining a positive relationship with the office despite her intention to leave the school leadership position. This means professionally communicating and justifying her concerns, giving them time to appreciate and understand the problem, and following the resignation process to leave the principalship. This is about taking a diplomatic approach to quitting the principalship rather than pushing for its immediate materialization. Her worry has an element of truth since an unhealthy relationship can affect her future. Second, she wanted to depart without being associated with anything terrible. She wanted to go without establishing a negative image of her abilities to lead and perform on the job. This is a matter of quitting the principalship while still displaying her capacity to lead and keep the school productive. And the maximum three years she offered buys her time, allowing her to succeed as principal and attain her aim. It is wonderful for a principal to demonstrate the ability to deliver until the end of his or

her term. However, the education office wants such a person to remain in the position, which complicates her intention to depart.

Third, she wanted her departure to be handled in such a way that it does not disrupt the school's continuous productivity. This is about giving time and helping ensure a seamless transition of school leadership, which she appeared to believe is achievable within three years. Despite her three-year estimate, the work might finish earlier. The time frame she specified might increase the time available to complete the goal. The maximum three years she provided encompassed accomplishments to be achieved in less time, which can expedite her departure.

As seen in the text I provided in the preceding paragraphs, all four principals wished to resign from their positions in less than five years, representing the first type of intention. They intended to resign before completing their first term, including immediately resigning regardless of the availability of the possibility for them to finish the term and seeking re-selection for a second term. I interpret this as an intention to leave the principal's post since it does not fulfill the criterion I established to determine their intention as an intention to remain in a school leadership position. This has an impact on the school leadership's long-term productivity. This type of intention does not help to retain experienced principals or ensure the continuity and sustainability of school leadership.

The second type of intention of principal participants in the current study to stay or leave the principalship was to stay until the end of their current term. Ganamo shared:

I don't want to stay beyond the five-year term for which I was appointed. The education system has appointed me, and I have accepted it, so I am committing myself to staying

until the end of my term. But I will definitely leave the principalship at the end of the current term.

The participant's intention was to fulfill his then tenure as a principal. This is a positively skewed intention since it shields educational institutions from leadership disruptions produced by principals leaving in the middle of their terms. The fact that the participant felt responsibility and commitment for accepting the principalship when he expressed it as "I have accepted it, so I am committing myself to staying until the end of my term" also provides a potential for the educational system. This is because it presents a chance for the education system to retain principals to serve more by leveraging their feeling of obligation to complete their terms, if the system so desires.

However, the participant did not want to stay beyond five years and was set on leaving the principalship at the end of his term. This can pose a challenge to the continuity and sustainability of school leadership. Besides, there is a probability this would happen sooner than five years. The participant was assigned to principalship with the implementation of the 2022 policy (OEB, 2022a). He served for about one and a half years when I collected data. And he left with less than three years of his term, despite having discussed a five-year term. This was shorter than the three-year timeframe that Jitu provided, indicating the probability of his leaving in a shorter time.

The third type of intention that incumbent principals expressed was to stay until the end of the second term of principalship. Dabale expressed that "I intend to stay till the end of the second term if the situation allows me to stay". The participant wanted to remain in the principalship until the end of the second term, despite the fact that his first term had not yet expired by that time. This is brilliant and essential since it can provide an opportunity to create stability in the school leadership system, so ensuring SSL.

He did, however, condition his stay on improvement of the support system and availability of school resources, as data from further probing showed. The further problem is that such conditions were less likely to be improved within the timeframe the participant mentioned. For example, Endale et al. (2023) found that GEQIP significantly improved the availability of school resources, but the program ended currently. This can cause severe regression, not improvement, in primary school resource availability, thereby shortening principals' tenure in school leadership. As a result, basing one's intention to stay in the principalship on such uncertain conditions implies leaving in a shorter amount of time, possibly in less than the five years that was provided by the other participants. This is consistent with the intentions of other participants to leave the principalship quickly. Therefore, the most common tendency among principal participants in the current study was the desire to resign from school leadership positions in less than five years, including leaving right away.

The data I have shared so far on principals' intentions to depart the principalship came from the principals themselves, which I think could largely describe the situation since it's about hearing directly from the horse's mouth. However, it would be interesting to know what data from education officers had to say about this issue, which can serve as a cross-check. Some education officers, such as Chala, have stated that they were unable to provide a clear response to this issue. He stated:

I'm not sure if they intend to remain or go. Some principals discuss changing their school in five to ten years, which might show a desire to stay, but I also see some of them losing enthusiasm for remaining as principals, which could be a precursor to leaving.

As can be seen from the quotation, the participant received conflicting indications, making him halfhearted to determine whether the principals intended to stay or leave. However,

the data that the participant provided was about some principals lacking enthusiasm to stay in school leadership, while also providing data that some had long-term plans, which made him, predict their intention to stay. Nonetheless, the data I obtained from other education officers corroborated the data I obtained from principals. For example, Kalid, one of the education officers who took part in the study, expressed the following:

It looks that many principals are prepared to depart. It is natural for someone to leave if he cannot execute the task to the expected quality or if conditions become challenging. However, both strong and weak principals appear to want to depart.

According to the participant, many school principals, both strong and underperforming, were planning to depart when the expectation was for them to stay. It would be unfair to argue that only underperformers intend to leave. This is because people can leave school leadership positions even while performing at a top level. But the effects of underperformers and top performers leaving would not be the same. The departure of ineffective principals may have little influence on the system because they were ineffective even while in the position. The system can also remove them regardless of their intentions. However, the intended departure of top performers can be particularly dangerous because it deprives the education system of competent professionals who can contribute to school productivity and thus the sustainability of school leadership.

Tufa even mentioned that “I heard some of them talking about their intention to leave the principalship.” This is about hearing the school principals' expression of their intention to leave. Taking the issues a step further, Galgalo stated, "I see that principals are facilitating things to leave the principalship, even if they are not officially talking about it". His narrative is about watching principals facilitate conditions for leaving, which I believe is a significant indicator of

their plan to leave beyond a description of intention to leave. And Tilahun expressed a similar sentiment. The participants' accounts indicated that the principals in the study setting were taking steps to facilitate their departure, in addition to intending to leave school leadership positions. Even PCs like Ebisa serendipitously provided information about the principal's intention to leave, even if I did not have a question to ask them on this subject. He stated that "the principal of our school keeps talking about leaving".

In general, the study's findings revealed that primary school principals in this setting planned to leave their position before finishing their first term. This statement was based not only on the number of participants who expressed intention to leave but also on how frequently and strongly this concept was mentioned by the participants. The principals who expressed their intention to quit described it in an extremely intense manner, using high-pitched voices and powerful emotions. They expressed their intention to leave, moving their hands emphatically to convey their powerful feelings. The intensity with which some of them expressed their intention to leave made me believe that they would leave the principalship offices before I finished interviewing them. However, I did not witness such emotion from the participant who intended to stay. Rather, his description was soft, making it difficult to convey confidence in his continuation in the school leadership position.

Factors Explaining Principals' Intention to Leave. As I outlined in the previous section, the principals in this study context intended to leave their positions within five years and some of them even immediately. As a result, it was intriguing to learn why the primary school principals in the study setting wanted to quit their positions as principals. The most significant factors that explained principals' intention to leave were unappealing benefits, a heavy workload and job-

related challenges, a lack of support, and limited opportunities for educational advancement. This section will address each of these issues individually.

Unappealing Benefits- One of the issues participants highlighted as explaining principals intending to leave was the unsatisfactory benefits package they used to receive, particularly their salary. Participants, especially school principals, revealed that the benefits package for principals was not appealing enough to remain in the position. For example, Jitu, a school principal, stated that:

I have already reached the ceiling. My salary is more in line with the salary range for school principals. As a result, I am serving for no monetary compensation. I did my best to serve the community and the children. However, everything has its own limit, and when it crosses that limit, everything smells of soil.

The participant intended to leave the principalship due to a lack of compensation for assuming the position, as one can understand from her explanation. It appeared from her explanation that she had reached a point of intolerance for serving without financial gain, which she described prompted her to decide to resign from the position. This piqued my curiosity because the relevant guideline indicated that principals with salaries equal to or greater than the principalship base wage could accept principals by adding one scale to their salary (OEB, 2022a). Further digging into the matter revealed that her salary did not reach the level of a school principal's salary but was roughly equal to it; thus, the difference between her salary and the principal's salary was minimal, which could not profit her from the policy provision of adding one scale to principals' salaries. I discussed the disparity in salary between such teachers and school principals in the section explaining why PCs were disinterested in becoming principals, and therefore, I will not discuss this factor again to avoid redundancy.

Olana, the other principal, also stated that:

Why should I suffer when there is no benefit? I believe that school principalship is a job of unique characteristics which need considering the salary of school principals differently. However, no one, particularly the education office, wants to recognize this. School principalship is a position with three No's: no benefits, no time, and no rest! You have no time; you work with no rest, but you gain nothing.

As the participant's account shows, principals work relentlessly, spending the entire day on the job, yet receive no equivalent pay. In fact, he saw recompense as nothing more than a pittance. Other principals in the study had similar sentiments (Dabale, Olana, Ganamo, and Firaol). The participants also accused the education office for failing to acknowledge the unique situation of school principalship (Olana, Firaol), despite the fact that the office lacked the authority to change the wage structure.

Overall, the current study found that an unappealing benefits package was one factor impacting principals' willingness to stay in school leadership position. While it is incorrect to argue that principals cannot serve as principals for reasons other than financial gain, the data revealed that an unsatisfactory remuneration package was one of the most common reasons school principals wished to leave their leadership positions.

Workload and Job-related Challenges: The study participants also identified one or more issues relating to workload and job-related challenges that they argued explained why principals wanted to leave their jobs. For example, Ganamo mentioned the "voluminous activities for which school principals are accountable" (Ganamo) as factors explaining the incumbent principals' lack of interest in remaining in leadership positions. And Biranu claimed that "report writing tasks are

monotonous and boring, and data is requested multiple times" and he explained that this has made him to intend to leave.

As evidenced by their responses, the participants cited issues such as the high volume of job-related activities, the repetitive nature of the work, and the frequency with which they were required to provide specific data as reasons for principals' lack of interest in remaining in school leadership positions. Many scholars (Klocko & Wells, 2015; Oplatka, 2017; Türkoğlu & Cansoy, 2020) asserted that the workload of school principals is becoming unprecedented, and the condition in the Ethiopian education system in this connection could not be an exception. Therefore, it is not unusual to view the participants' mention of these factors as a justification for principals' intention to leave their positions. However, as one might understand, these factors are related to the nature of the task itself, which the incumbent principals were aware of when they took on the role of principal. When the study's participants explained this as a factor, they may have found differences between how they understood it when they took on the role and how it affected their operations when they actually experienced it.

Others stated that "the task of school principalship is difficult to manage since it is based on the effort of many individuals" (Olana) and "school leadership is like pushing the mountain alone, which you can't manage to do" (Ganamo). These participants explained that school leadership is becoming challenging due to the large number of people involved, which they argue makes it a question of attempting the impossible. Dabale also stated that:

Teachers aren't engaged in their work. They arrive at school, sign in, attend the classroom, and leave without putting out their best effort. It is your obligation to push them to perform at their best. However, some of the reaction you receive in these scenarios is annoying.

As the participant explained, teachers are having difficulty doing their job at the expected level. They only sign in, attend class, and go home, which makes it difficult for him to lead. He also said that when he tried to change this situation, the teachers reacted negatively. This revealed the unsuitable conditions he faced as a leader and the unproductive situations he experienced. School leadership, and leadership of any kind, cannot happen without leading people. Leadership is a process of influencing people toward a common goal, which occurs in a group setting (Northouse, 2019; Yukl & Gardner, 2020). Therefore, it is legitimate to include the issue of human resources as a school leadership issue and as an explanation of why principals intend to stay or leave. However, it is concerning that participants mentioned that leading various individuals was a challenge that prevented principals from staying. This is because there is no way to lead without involving people in the process.

Others discussed the challenge of mobilizing resources for school, as well as the additional management responsibilities that come with it. Dabale, for instance, stated:

The school must handle the school feeding program.... We are providing teachers with lunch. While it is essential to support and motivate [students] and teachers, it does, however, need mobilizing resources, which is an additional burden and headache for school principals. Previously, the program used to be supported with the allocation of some budget. But now the community is responsible for supporting this through contribution, the coordination of which is the responsibility of principals.

The participant described the challenging task of mobilizing resources, particularly for the school feeding program. He said that it increased the activity and management responsibility of the school to the point that he considered leaving. In the study context, schools were needed to mobilize resources not only for regular programs but also for the school feeding and teacher

support program. The school feeding program is an arrangement in which the schools provide students with breakfast and lunch by mobilizing resources from different sources (MoE, 2021). And some schools made teachers benefit from such programs by providing them lunch service. Unfortunately, this increased the responsibility of school leadership, which current participants cited as a factor in serving principals' decision to depart.

During data collection, I discovered differences in the availability of resources between schools. While some schools were relatively well-equipped, others faced challenges that may overwhelm school leadership. However, almost all schools experienced resource shortages, forcing them to mobilize resources to supplement their resources and support programs such as school feeding programs. Because this results in increased job volume, longer working hours, or greater accountability (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018), its explaining the principal's intention to quit principalship could not come as a surprise.

Another factor that participants mentioned as causing principals to intend to leave was the difficulty of ensuring students timely arrival (Ganamo and Firaol), preventing lateness (Abdi, Feyisa, and Temesgen), and managing associated disciplinary problems (Biranu, Kalid). For example, Feyisa complained that “students do not arrive on time, and they come to class late”, causing school disorganization and disciplinary problems, especially in connection with respecting the flag ceremony. Biranu stated that "many students work as house servants while pursuing their education", and Olana explained that “they come to school after they take the children of the house in which they serve to their schools”, which was the cause of the lateness. The Education and Training Policy (MoE, 2023) provisioned that children are entitled to free and compulsory education up to grade 8. However, it seems that some children in this study context were deprived of that right. The meaning of free education can be controversial (Kretzer, 2020;

Valeev & Valeeva, 2014), but these students lacked the opportunity, at least, to be supported by their parents to receive education, and instead they were forced to support themselves and perhaps their parents and siblings. This entailed less educational and life success (Illøkken et al., 2022; Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2017). It would be wonderful for those students to continue their education even under such conditions rather than giving up on it altogether. But the situation in which they were receiving education did not empower them to succeed to their best capacity.

The school community sympathizes with the situation these students are in, but also complains that it is causing further problems. For example, Abdi stated that:

We understand the struggles these students face, and their fate will be doomed if we prevent them from entering school when they are delayed for such reasons. However, they compromise the quality of education and destabilize the school order. We are caught between these two issues. However, nobody is willing to help us; they just blame us for the unstable situation created.

The participant explained that he understood the situation these students were in, but he complained that it was causing school disorganization, instability, and even disciplinary problems. He described how they were dealing with the problem alone, even though it was beyond their management capabilities. Participants, especially principals, described being caught between preventing late-arriving students from entering the classroom and encouraging them to continue their education by tolerating their tardiness (Bona, Ebisa). I understand the moral dilemma that the school was facing, which had no simple solution. However, the students' courage and motivation to continue their education are admirable. I addressed the lack of student motivation as an explanation for the lack of staff motivation and commitment when discussing

the practice of collective capacity. However, the courage of these students to continue their education while serving as house servants painted a different picture.

Lack of appropriate support- Another factor that emerged from the study explaining why incumbent principals intend to leave their leadership positions was the lack of adequate and appropriate support from various parties, including sub-city education officers, and cluster supervisors. This was related to the support that school principals need in order to provide quality leadership and meet leadership expectations (MoE, 2013b). For example, Ganamo, a school principal, stated, "We are working without receiving adequate support from the school supervisors or the education offices." They argued that they were challenged to the extent that they were intending to quit their positions.

The lack of support that caused PCs to lose interest in becoming principals and the lack of support that caused incumbent principals to want to resign were nearly identical. I addressed the issue of a lack of support in relation to the issues that justified the PCs' reluctance to assume principalship. As a result, I would not discuss those issues again. However, I would raise a few issues that were not well addressed there. Specifically, I would address the informational support that principals reported to be challenging and motivating them to quit, as well as school supervision, which participants discovered to be a source of problematic support.

To start with, informational support is one of the dimensions of the support system, and the exchange and flow of information between the education office and educational institutions largely affect this. In the past, Gurmu & Oumar (2023) reported that educational institutions did not receive information in a timely manner to the extent that principals lacked information about the existence or abolishment of their own career structure. Since the establishment of Sheger City, educational offices have been extensively using technologies such as Telegram, a social

media platform primarily used for connection purposes in a study context. This appeared to facilitate the flow of information, enabling the education system to communicate quickly, all at a reduced cost (especially for education offices) and without filtering out information as it moved down the educational hierarchy.

However, implementing such technologies placed a significant financial burden on schools, causing school principals to worry and become irritated and even consider leaving (Firaol, Ganamo). For example, using such technology required schools to have internet access and connectivity devices. Although these could be moderately expensive, many schools with limited resources could not afford to buy such services and fulfill the facilities (Bona, Ulfata). The major problem was, however, that education offices frequently sent schools guidelines, directives, and work manuals in soft copy, which were often several pages long. Previously, the education office was responsible for printing and copying materials and providing schools with hard copies, which required significant resources. However, the schools became responsible for this with the introduction of technologies (Olana, Ganamo, and Firaol). According to the participants, they cannot print all the materials sent by the education office due to resource constraints. The way the principals described the issue showed me how badly it affected them and how much it bothered them, beyond just “making them want to leave” (Dabale). I undertook from this that technology brings not only benefits but also financial burdens to schools.

Participants, especially principals, also complained that the support they were receiving from supervisors was not adequate (Ganamo), and it was not the one that encouraged them to continue as principals (Olana, Biranu). Of course, both the Education Bureaus and the Ministry of Education criticized the cluster supervisors for their lack of knowledge regarding educational supervision (MoE, 2021; OEB, 2022a). Against this backdrop, the bureau changed the

supervisory structure and organization, pulling supervisors from their previous place at the cluster resource center school, the center of a cluster of 3–8 schools (MoE, 2006), and placing them in the education office. Moreover, the bureau evaluated more than 3,000 supervisors operating in the region through a written exam and placed only about 1,000 supervisors who scored 50 or above on the exam, the passing score, renaming them as "educational supervisors" (OEB, 2023a).

However, there were several related problems. First, supervisory skills encompass a variety of important abilities that an exam cannot assess, such as practical skills and experience. Second, those who passed the exam were hired at their existing salaries, which they used to complain about, so there was no incentive for them other than securing their positions, and this may not motivate them to deliver at the highest level. Third, the number of educational supervisors was reduced by two-thirds, which can result in a reduction of supervision coverage by the same proportion. Fourth, placing a supervisor in the education office was a reverse decentralization. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) aimed to "set... up... a system that will solidify decentralization... at all levels" (p. 37). However, this arrangement brought back to the office the service that was already decentralized. While decentralization brings services closer to where they are provided, which can help sustainability, the arrangement actually distanced the place of supervisors from the point of service delivery, constraining continuity.

Limited Opportunities For Professional Advancement- Participants also highlighted that being a school principal does not provide a suitable environment for professional advancement. And participants, specifically principals (Ganamo, Firaol, Jitu, Biranu) claimed that this made them intend to leave the principalship. Ganamo asserted that:

The principalship is constraining my professional growth since it does not offer educational opportunities for improving my professional qualifications. Even when I asked for further education in the summer, aligned with my teaching subject, the education office seemed unhappy. Perhaps they did not want my service interrupted during the summer months when I was in training.

The participant stated that there were no educational opportunities related to school leadership that would allow him to advance professionally. He added that the education office refused to positively respond to his plea to continue his studies and suspected that they did not want him to pursue his education. Hence, the participants' explanation is that he wanted to distance himself from the role of school leadership in order to advance professionally by quitting the principalship. Firaol also mentioned that “I want to return to my profession,” and Olana stated that “I want to continue my education in line with my profession” by leaving school leadership. As one can understand from their descriptions, Firaol wanted to leave school leadership and return to teaching. Olana wished to continue his study in line with his subject qualifications, which he seems to believe he can't achieve without leaving his position.

Principals were subject matter specialists looking to grow in their careers. They did, however, express concern about the restricted chances for advancement in educational leadership. And the education officer was hesitant to send them to take advantage of the situation. While the first argument is valid, I don't see why the education office denied them the opportunity. Of course, the education office can't do anything unless it obtains a training quota from the higher education structure, and there could be misunderstanding in this connection.

Overall, the data presented in this section revealed that factors such as unappealing benefits, heavy workloads, job-related challenges, lack of support, and limited opportunities for

educational advancement were the main reasons principals intended to quit. This suggests that no single factor explains principals' intention to leave their positions, and that these factors work together—perhaps reinforcing one another—to explain principals' lack of intention to remain in their positions. For instance, a lack of support can exacerbate the difficulty of coping with heavy workloads and leadership challenges. A large volume of job-related activities and challenges may lead to dissatisfaction with the benefits package and the intention to leave. Therefore, these factors must be considered in combination rather than individually.

Practices of Collective Capacity- I examined collective capacity policies in terms of the availability, qualifications, motivation, and commitment of school staff. Thus, I also examined collective capacity practices that fall into these domains.

Practice of Availability of Staff- I began addressing the practical availability of school staff by considering the availability of principals in the study context. According to the data I obtained from the study, principals were largely available in the required number except for the existence of two problems. First, about three deputy principal positions remained vacant due to a lack of candidates who could staff them (Kalid, Galgalo, Tufa, and Tilahun). I have already addressed the disinterest of potential candidates in assuming principalship, and that caused some deputy principalship posts to remain vacant.

Second, even the staffed principalship positions were not being filled quickly, during which the participants asserted caused disruption to school leadership sustainability (Bona, Ebisa, Ulfata). For example, Ulfata, a PC participant in the study, stated that "principalship positions sometimes remained unstaffed for extended periods of time before being finally filled, often up to four months", and argued that it caused instability in the school system. The

description of the participant was that principal posts went unfilled for extended periods of time, often up to four months, before the education system filled them.

The argument that principalship positions were vacant for four months may be unusual. However, education officers (Tufa, Bekan, and Galgalo) admitted the event, citing the length of the staffing procedure. For instance, Galgalo noted that:

We occasionally have trouble promptly filling school leadership positions. For example, we advertised a vacant principalship position at a school more than a month ago... We couldn't get the minimum required number [three] during the initial round of advertisement, so we re-announced it. Unfortunately, all three candidates failed to achieve a minimum requirement of 50% in the written exam in the second round. So we are posting the position for the third time. This cost us time and kept us from filling vacancies on schedule.

Galgalo recognized that the Education Office could not fill some principal positions in a timely manner; hence, they stayed vacant for more than a month. Although this was a timescale shorter than the four months the PC participants reported, a stay of a month was the one that one could not undermine. However, he attributed the longer staffing period to the policy requirement of at least three candidates being available, which the education office could not achieve during the first round selection. He also noted that candidates could not achieve at least 50% on the written exam in the second round, as required by the selection criteria (OEB, 2022a), which extended time. As one can observe from what the participants provided, the problem with the delayed principalship staffing was the lack of candidates in adequate numbers during the initial round of announcement and the lower quality of those who applied during the second round.

These circumstances made the selection process more complicated and challenging and extended the staffing period.

Of course, the PCs themselves recognized the challenges that the education office was facing in this regard. However, they still felt that the education office could fill the position more quickly without compromising the policy requirements than was evident. For example, Temesgen, the PC, stated that:

To fill school leadership positions, education officials must follow a number of steps, which may take some time. However, the education office's actions might either reduce or prolong this time. Even with the existing selection mechanism in place, the Education Office can do a lot to improve and speed up the process.

While acknowledging the importance of going through several steps when selecting school principals, which could take its own time, the participant also contended that the education system could influence the selection time and speed up the selection process in order to fill the position in less time, which I believe makes sense. Others contended that collaboration and discussion between the education office and the local administration (party office) could prevent some vacancies and avoid staffing problems, including avoiding the time the selection process used to take. The idea was to proactively address the issue before the vacancies arose and complicated the staffing process. For example, Ebisa, a PC participant, stated that:

The party office promoted the previous principal to another position, leaving the school's principalship vacant. After some time, the education office promoted the deputy principal to the school leadership position. As if the party office had been waiting for the position to be filled, they took the person whom the education office had promoted from deputy principal to principal. This left the position vacant again. The school has experienced ups

and downs of school leadership for about three months, which negatively impacted its operations. I don't believe the party office and the education office were in sync regarding the issue.

According to the participant, a school became vacant because the party office promoted great principals twice to other sectors. Through this example, the participant seemed to suggest that closer coordination between the party and education offices could have prevented the vacancies, eliminating the subsequent hurdles. Successful educational efforts, including the appointment of a school principal, require cooperation between the education sector and other parties (Ambo et al., 2021), including the party office—an office of a political party within the government apparatus (Gurmu, 2020). This made the participant's argument about the necessity of cooperation understandable. Although the government can promote principals to other sectors, or principals themselves can leave on their own initiative, the number involved at a time cannot usually be large, and the incident may not be frequent. However, the party office used to promote the best principals, who can improve school productivity and ensure school leadership sustainability and hence serve as models of superior performance in the education system. This gives credence to the participants' argument.

Two of the six sub-cities I targeted reported no shortage of teachers. However, the remaining sub-cities appeared to experience a shortage of teachers, which was a dominant trend. Bekan, an education officer, stated that “teacher availability is not that much of a problem in our sub-city” and Tilahun, another education officer, agreed that “there is no school that reported a serious shortage of teachers”. While this group of participants seemed to agree on the existence of a certain shortage of teachers, Bekan didn't consider teacher availability a problem, and Tilahun reported receiving no data on a major teacher shortage. Although the terms “serious

shortage” and “major problem” were not clear from the context, probing revealed that they were referencing the shortage that could not be covered by any means.

However, the data I collected from school principals told a different story. For instance, Dabale, a school principal, said, "We have a shortage of teachers for newly introduced subjects like Gada and Safu," which were introduced in accordance with the recent Education and Training Policy (FDRE, 2023). Another principal, Jitu, explained that there is a shortage of teachers in subjects like Amharic, as well as in mathematics and English to some extent. Olana, also a principal, noted that "there are not enough qualified Amharic and mathematics teachers." As the principals mentioned, there was a shortage of teachers for subjects such as Gada, Safu, Amharic, English, and mathematics, although the data did not provide evidence of its widespread occurrence.

Although all participants recognized the existence of the teachers’ shortage, as one can understand from the data presented, educational officers seemed to understate its seriousness. While the education officers argued that it was not a cause for concern, the principals stated that it was causing a leadership problem and should be readdressed (Firaol, Olana, Biranu). I would argue that the principals' concern is legitimate, as the absence of a teacher can jeopardize the delivery of a subject and, consequently, the school's productivity.

Despite not recognizing the severity of the problem, education officers themselves disclosed the cause of the problem and complained that the education bureau did not solve them quickly. For example, Chala, an education officer, cited "unavailability of trained teachers, not lack of budget" as the cause of the shortage of teachers in areas such as English, mathematics, and Amharic, and Tufa, another education officer, affirmed that "the system has not yet trained teachers in Gada and Safu". The argument of the participants was that the education offices were

ready to hire teachers, but the teachers were not available either because the training was not in place due to the newness of the subject or because the teachers were not available on the market. This requires the education system to work on the shortage of teachers, including starting training in newly introduced subjects.

Some education offices didn't believe that the education system was taking timely action to solve the problem. For example, Tilahun, an education officer, stated:

It has been three or four years since the shortage started, especially the scarcity of Amharic, English, and Mathematic teachers. There has been enough time to solve the problem. But I do not think that the upper educational structures have taken adequate action to solve it.

The participant's argument was that the upper education structure has not taken decisive action to address the problem, even though the problem was three to four years old. By mentioning the "upper education structure," the participant seemed to be referring to the Education Bureau, as primary education is under its jurisdiction (MoE, 2006). This could mean avoiding a shortage by transferring teachers from areas where there was a teachers' surplus, or it could mean training more teachers in subjects such as Mathematics, English, and Amharic. It could also mean initiating training in newly added subjects, such as Gada and Safu that were started as a result of the recent Education and Training Policy (FDRE, 2023). This entailed developing a curriculum and training teacher educators to train subject teachers. The Education Bureau has the means and infrastructure to train teachers in subjects such as mathematics, English, and Amharic more easily and quickly. However, the education system needed to exert more effort to train teachers in subjects such as Gada and Safu, as it needed the system to develop a new training program.

Although participants blamed the education system and higher-level educational structures for the teacher shortage that was not solved in a timely manner, it was questionable whether lower-level educational structures itself sensed the problem and attempted to address to higher educational structure. For instance, education officials stated they would “make the best use of the teachers we have” (Kalid) and “rely on the available workforce” (Tufa) to address the issue. Once the education system began offering these subjects, it was to be expected that the school assigned some teachers to them, and hence the education office’s decision to rely on available teachers to address the issue make sense. It was also important to make the best use of the system's available resources, including human resources, which their argument could help optimize. We should credit schools for their efforts to solve the problem and acknowledge teachers' contributions. However, the tendency to not view it as serious might prevent the education system from communicating it strictly to higher educational structures and making an attempt to obtain teachers to solve the problem.

But there were practical problems that needed the education system to give attention to this issue. For example, Firaol, a school principal, noted that “teachers complain about teaching subjects that are not their specialty, especially teaching newly introduced subjects”. While this account implicitly showed that the method Kalid and Tufa mentioned about using available teachers was already in use, it also highlighted the problem that the strategy was causing. Teacher shortages may require teachers to teach more than their official load, overburdening them and compromising their proper preparation to deliver instruction. Assigning teachers to teach subjects outside of their area of expertise can be harmful to students’ growth since teachers may lack the essential subject knowledge, reducing school productivity and leadership sustainability.

Participants stated that sub-cities education offices also employed support workers for schools during the current school year, arguing that this would relieve the challenges of support staff availability that schools had previously faced. For example, Bekan stated this:

This academic year, we employed around 26 support workers for schools in our sub-city. This has resolved some of the issues that our schools used to confront. For example, several schools struggled to hire unavoidable support personnel such as campus guards and janitors owing to financial restrictions, and the current staff can help ease some of these problems.

According to the participant, the sub-city education office hired 26 support staff, possibly assigning some to primary schools to address their staffing shortages. It is very difficult for principals to maintain their leadership without the support staff's availability. As a result, the education office's action of hiring the support personnel to staff the schools was undoubtedly essential. Ganamo, a school principal, noted that his school also "hired some of the support staff, such as campus guards and janitors, from... internal budget".

However, this could not characterize the availability of support workers in the study setting. For one thing, the hiring trend was not uniform across the sub-cities; some had hired none (Chala), others had hired five (Tilahun), and others had hired 26 (Bekan). Still others were preparing to hire (Kalid), although the school year was nearing its end at the time of data collection. This made the cumulative effect negligible. Furthermore, even in a sub-city that recruited 26 support personnel, which was the largest compared to the number that other sub-cities hired, a share of a school might be one or two persons, making it have little impact. The school budget could not afford to recruit many such employees. Hence, most of the support staff positions remained vacant. An education official at the Sheger City Education Office, who did

not participate in the study, estimated that the total proportion of fulfilled support staff could not be higher than 3% or 4% of what the structure allowed. This can limit the school's collective capacity by limiting the number of necessary support staff, which can affect the school's productivity and continuity of leadership.

Practice of Staff Qualification: The data from the current study showed that primary school principals had training in a primary school subject, with some of them in the area of educational leadership (Firaol, Ganamo, Jitu, Olana). Hence, the area of qualification of the primary school principals in the study setting was commensurate with the policy standard in the Ethiopian education system. However, there looked to be certain gaps in practical qualification levels of primary school principals. Education officers (Tilahun, Bekan, Tufa) mentioned the existence of few principals in their sub-cities who were qualified at the certificate level, which some of them affirmed, "Most of them are on the way to completing degree-level qualification" (Tufa). The data from SCEO (2024) revealed that the percentage of qualified primary school principals and deputy principals was about 97% and 100%, respectively, with an overall percentage of about 94% achievement and a 6% caveat. This uncovered that certain principals in this study setting were under-qualified, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2006) regarded educational settings like the current one as more favorable in terms of school human resource availability and qualifications.

The qualification level and areas of teachers and other school personnel working in primary schools in the study context were also compatible with the requirements of the Ethiopian education policy (Galgalo, Tufa, Tilahun, Olana, Jitu, Biranu). Education offices only employ teachers and support staff with relevant qualification areas (FDRE, 2017), and thus there is minimal opportunity for their qualification area to be irrelevant. Perhaps a different scenario can

be that education offices can use less qualified teachers in primary schools, such as certificate holders, when there is a shortage of teachers. However, according to the data I received from the study participants (Tufa, Chala, Tilahun, Bekan; Jitu), almost all of the primary school teachers who were teaching in the study context had the required diploma qualification.

While some were overqualified, the percentage of underqualified teachers was very low. The actual percentage of teachers who were qualified at the required level (diploma) and overqualified (first and second degree) was over 56.3% and 43.4%, respectively, while those who were under-qualified was less than 0.4% (SCEO, 2024). This resulted in an overall proportion of adequately qualified and overqualified primary school teachers of over 99%. Without undermining the need to reach 100%, this can be considered excellent, which can aid in providing quality education, preserving collective capacity, and ensuring the stability and sustainability of school leadership.

Practice of Motivation and Commitment- This subsection discusses the practical motivation and commitment of school professionals in the study setting. Some participants, especially PCs, stated that school staff were motivated and committed to finishing their tasks and used to complete their work within the time frame. For example, Temesgen noted that:

From Monday to Friday, we have arranged for each department to monitor the students at the entrance and departure times, as well as during the rest period, which includes holding the flag ceremony and regulating the students' usage of water outlets. There are no issues with teachers doing their duties in accordance with the schedule.

This was the assertion that the school leadership had arranged school activities according to a specific schedule and that school staff and teachers followed the given schedules to get the job done. The statements of the participants seemed to assert that school staff were motivated

and committed to doing their jobs. Other participants also described the superior motivation and commitment of some teachers and staff members in their schools (Merga, Temesgen, Biranu).

Despite the possibility that a few highly qualified and dedicated individuals were available in each school, the major findings of the study did not support this. Rather, the study's data either directly showed a lack of excitement and devotion among most primary school staff or provided indirect evidence of such a lack. For example, Jitu stated, "If staff were motivated and committed to their jobs, the job of school leadership would be very easy. It is the lack of motivation and commitment that makes leadership challenging." From her statements, one can understand that she tacitly acknowledged the lack of drive and commitment among staff and claimed that it made school leadership difficult. Her argument makes sense, as it is difficult for school principals to lead a school without the proper motivation and commitment of the staff.

Firaol, a school principal, also affirmed that "when I do not follow up closely, only a few will work on their own initiative and complete the job to the required quality level. Therefore, I worry about the execution of work without close follow-up", with which other participants also agreed (Tufa, Olana, Ganamo, Firaol). Such data made it apparent that just a few persons begin their tasks on time and complete them to required quality level without his close supervision. This was not an indication of having motivation and commitment.

Of course, Ganamo, a school principal, presented more evidence of a lack of enthusiasm and commitment among primary school teachers in the study context:

Employees' job performance depends on situations, including whether or not they are under tight supervision. When there is acute monitoring, everyone strives to be smart by beginning and finishing on time and performing the task correctly. However, when the monitoring ceases, this will fade away.

This means that employees' initiative to accomplish their duties and dedication to job performance changed depending on the scenario, such as whether a supervisor or school principal was present. This supported the evidence reported in the preceding paragraph on a lack of motivation and commitment to complete tasks in the absence of a supervisor. Since motivation and commitment entail the exertion of effort and self-initiation, the scenario the participants presented largely explained the lack of motivation and commitment among school staff.

Biranu, a school principal, also stated that "the majority of teachers continue by attaining the minimal threshold which does not need much energy, and cause the punishment of not accomplishing the task". This was about employees continuing to work at minimum required level in order to preserve energy while at the same time avoid penalties for not meeting targets. Similarly, Chala stated that:

A significant number of teachers just report problems to the office without making any effort to solve them. Therefore, I do not feel good when people come to my office because I know this. Sometimes I feel as if teachers think that handling everything, including handling routine students' disciplinary cases, is the mere responsibility of principals.

The participant identified a practice of just reporting problems without attempting to fix them as an indicative of a lack of motivation and commitment. This trend of disengaging and not committing oneself to a resolution may serve as a precursor to diminished drive and commitment to their work. But he also admitted that this issue gave him the idea that everyone who came to his office was there to report a problem, and that he understood that people assumed that everything was the school principal's responsibility. While it was not ideal to consider everyone

who came to office to report a problem, it was also enraging to consider school leadership to be solely the job of school principals.

Most of the data I have provided so far regarding the low motivation and commitment of school staff came from principals and PCs. However, education officers also provided data that was largely consistent with what I obtained from the principals and PCs (Tilahun, Bekan, Chala, Galata). Galata, an education officer, for example, supplied data indicating a lack of desire and dedication among school workers, even for jobs that fall within the scope of regular teaching time. He affirmed that:

Aside from being willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them, teachers lack commitment to completing assignments that lie with regular teaching hours to quality level. Some teachers, for example, approach continuous assessment irresponsibly and ineffectively. Few have a true capacity deficiency. However, others act carelessly.

This participant also described a lack of motivation and commitment to define the subpar performance of the masses. While he attributed this to a lack of responsibility for achieving the highest quality level, he also mentioned a capacity gap to explain the subpar performance of a few. While it might be the role of school leadership to address capacity issues, his confirmation of the masses as not having problems with capacity was also acceptable given that over 99% of teachers in the system were either overqualified or suitably qualified (OEB, 2023b).

In summary, the findings reported thus far indicate a lack of desire and commitment among primary school workers in the study environment. While it would be unreasonable to claim that school personnel were completely unmotivated and uncommitted to their jobs, as evidenced by the data from this study, the data I presented overwhelmingly indicated that staff motivation and

commitment were not properly shaped and were not at a level that would improve collective capacity, school productivity, school leadership stability, and SSL.

Factors Explaining Less Motivation and Commitment: The current study found a complex picture of factors that explain the low motivation and commitment of school staff in the study context. In a nutshell, study participants identified the rising cost of living, students' low motivation to learn, lack of access to authorized services, and the inadequacy and inequity of the services provided, as well as efforts directed elsewhere, in order of importance, to explain low motivation and commitment among school staff.

Rising Cost of Living. Almost every study participant mentioned rising living cost as affecting the motivation and commitment of teachers and school principals to do job. Participants, even PCs who claimed school staff were motivated and committed, mentioned that “the rising cost of living makes us unhappy” (Bona), and “made us worry about our self and lives of our children's survival, denying us energy to think about our work” (Jitu). They stated that “it affects our motivation and committed to work” (Bekan). I noticed such a description in all of the participants' comments. The participants reported that growing living costs made them sad, worried about their own and their children's prospects, and harmed their drive and dedication to their jobs.

One could argue that rising living costs affect everyone, including employees in the private and public sectors and ordinary citizens. In this respect, there is nothing unique about teachers and principals. However, this commonality does not eliminate it as a factor that explains teachers' and principals' motivation and commitment and the description of participants indicated its negative effect. For example, Feyisa, a principal, reported that:

As school principals, it is impossible to collaborate with people without exchanging ideas; thus, we must communicate with teachers. However, teachers are furious and unpleasant, and even little incidents might disrupt the social atmosphere. They become upset if you say something to them.

The participant's argument was that you must be careful about how to communicate with teachers and complete the task in an environment when the teachers were furious and dissatisfied, indicating its negative effect on stability and sustainability.

Students' Low Motivation to Learn- Student factors was other condition that participants provided to explain less motivation and commitment of school staff. However, I explained much of these in relation to principals' intentions to remain/leave, and all of those descriptions applied to teachers' less motivation and commitment. I just skipped over most of them to avoid boring readers with the same material in different parts. Hence, in this section, I just gave material that were not largely repetition and might help to illustrate the prevailing situation.

One of the issues that participants in the study mentioned as affecting their motivation and commitemenet was students' lack of motivation to learning. Temesgen stated that:

I sometimes feel like I am there in the classroom for no reason, without having strong motivation to teach. Students lose their zeal for learning. I try to prioritize the community and nation and provide them with the essential education. But what happens in the classroom upsets you. Students do not work on their assignments or make an attempt to learn. I am troubled to figure out what to do in such a situation. They just come to school, perhaps in fear of their parent, and then just go home. I fear that an aimless generation is being created.

Although shocking, Temesgen explained how students were losing interest in learning, and working at home and in class, which in turn was harming teachers' motivation and dedication to teaching. The reasoning seemed to be that "I am there to change students when they are not ready to change". This was a dangerous situation that might not only undermine teacher motivation and commitment, but also deprive the community and nation of a bright future.

Aside from a lack of enthusiasm to learn, study participants reported an increase in student disciplinary issues. Feyisa stated, "It's like spending the entire learning period managing student discipline." Unnecessary conduct in class and at school today is not surprising. You dare to find students who are properly disciplined." Although the claim that it was impossible to find students with appropriate discipline appeared to be slightly exaggerated, a number of participants mentioned the widespread prevalence of student discipline problems in schools. And participants agreed that it was influencing teacher motivation and engagement.

Lack of Access to Authorized Land - Another factor explaining low motivation and commitment among school staff was a lack of access to benefit that were already granted to them. One of the issues of hot debate in this regard was the lack of access by some teachers to the house construction land that guidelines allowed them to get. Tufa explained that:

Ten years ago, land was given to government employees. Teachers in the study context also organized themselves into a house-building association and were given land. However, teachers were constantly transferring to this context, and some teachers who were here in this context couldn't fulfill the criteria and couldn't own the land at that time. Due to such reasons, there are still teachers and school principals who could not acquire the land. These teachers constantly ask questions, and they feel bad to the extent that it affected their motivation and commitment to their jobs.

The idea was that teachers who could not acquire the lands were less motivated and committed to the task, and it would affect. Perhaps recognizing the severity of the problem, the Oromia Regional Government reissued a circular letter, Ref. No. 02/Dh-19/152, dated March 5, 2024 (26/06/2016 E.C.), that such provisions should be made for teachers who had not previously acquired it. Similarly, the Oromia Regional Land Bureau sent a letter, Ref. No. OLO/L-01/2612, dated May 15, 2024 (July 9, 2016 E.C.), to 23 town and 21 zonal land management offices under its jurisdiction, instructing them to address the issue based on existing regulations.

However, it had not been solved by the time of the data collection. Hence it was on “the agenda of teachers' formal and informal discussions and hence affected the working atmosphere of the educational institutions and, consequently, the motivation and commitment to do the job” (Bekele). Galgalo also stated that “teachers frequently discuss this issue in a number of informal groups, including times those previously used for professional dialogue, becoming a source of complaint” (Bekan). This means that it was squandering teachers’ time that could have been spent on professional development, as well as impacting their motivation and dedication. The factor in question appeared to be connected to certain teachers, despite the fact that it was one of the factors mentioned by research participants, elevating the importance of it. However, the number of teachers who did not have such provisions was not the one that could be undermined.

Unfairness in Land Provision- This addresses the unfairness that the study participants identified in the provision of land for house construction to teachers. They stated that this affected teachers’ morale and resulted in less motivation and commitment. This was notably connected to several criteria employed in the land provision. The participants claimed that these criteria benefited some while unfairly denying advantages to others. This issue is related to the

situation I discussed in the section titled “Lack of Access to Authorized Services.” To provide some background, the government gave teachers in Sheger City access to land to build houses, as it did for other teachers and civil servants across the country (Yigezu, 2021). However, participants stated that the provision of such services was unfair, which, they asserted, resulted in teachers having less motivation and commitment and lowered morale (Ebisa, Abdi, Ganamo, Firaol, Jitu), which could affect the sustainability of school leadership.

Participants approached the issue from three different perspectives, the first of which was concerned with the service provided to couple teachers. If both spouses were teachers, only one would be allowed to receive the land, which participants described as unfair. A number of participants in the study (Dabale, Olana, Kalid, Galgalo) expressed the concern. For example, Jitu stated that

We are not given such a right because we are a couple, but because we are teachers. We provide service individually, are on the payroll individually, and pay taxes individually, yet being in a couple is considered when benefits are offered. Such a practice discourages couples from serving the public together. It undermines your morals. Since the right is given and the provision is made because we are teachers, the land provision should not be denied to one of us because we are a couple. Family institutions are the foundation of the community and nation that should not be discouraged.

The participant argued that the right was granted because they were teachers and they provide all the services individually, and they argued they deserve to be given the land too individually. Even he felt that the government was discouraging the family institution, which he argued is the foundation of society and the nation and hence must be encouraged. And he claimed that this affected teachers moral and motivation and commitment. This was one of the

issues I discovered that had a major negative impact on teacher motivation and commitment, potentially affecting their motivation and commitment, which could affect SSL. As a person who was in the system, I, the current researcher, knew that even some teachers were divorced in order to independently benefit from such situation, which might show how seriously teachers were taking the issue.

The second perspective from which the participants approached the issues was from the perspective of teachers who had previously purchased land or built a house on their own initiative. Therefore, the policy did not allow such individuals to be given land for house construction since they already owned it through their own means. However, this appeared generated complaints that participants argued produce less motivation and commitment of teachers (Bekan, Bona, Ebisa, Ganamo, Firaol, Tilahun, Ulfata). Ganamo, for instance, stated that “because we have own house, we do not get money for house rent and not given land to build houses is unfair”. Biranu, a school principal, also stated that:

We have been paid the same wage as the other teachers who are now receiving the land.

However, the government is penalizing us for saving our own money and using it to build the house, maybe putting aside all we need in our family life. When our efforts deserved to be rewarded, we are penalized by being refused access to land. Why are we getting punished?

As one could see, the participant complained that the government's denial of land to individuals who had previously built houses while others who had not constructed houses benefited from the guideline's provision was unjust, and they mentioned that such an act discouraged and penalized those who saved and built their own homes. This was one of the explanatory components that participants expressed with strong negative emotions.

The third perspective from which participants observed what they said was injustice was that of individuals who benefited from the circumstance for the second time while others, such as couples and those who owned a house, were refused access to the asset. In the few periods before the establishment of Sheger City, there were demarcations between Addis Ababa and Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Finfine, the area that Sheger City currently covers. As a result, some areas that were in the special zone previously were demarcated to Addis Ababa. Other areas that were previously in Addis Ababa were demarcated to the Special Zone, now Sheger City. Those areas that were demarcated to Addis Ababa included the areas where teachers in Sheger City were previously given land to build houses. Although it did not affect ownership, such individuals requested to benefit for the second time using the opening in the guideline, prompting raw from other teachers. Chala, an education officer, for example, described that:

Teachers in Sheger City who do not own a home or property in their name or the name of their spouse are granted land or get house rent payments. Because those teachers' land or houses are not in the city, they are receiving rent payments and land for the second time. This encourages others to benefit in the same manner and influences the work environment in schools, affecting their motivation and dedication.

The participant argued that some teachers profited twice while others did not profit at all. He said this disappointed many teachers, harming their morale, motivation, and commitment to the task. According to Olana, "Such individuals took advantage of the guidelines' caveat to benefit twice and considered themselves winners, while the other teachers and principals felt a sense of loss." Participants in the study described the situation angrily and with strong emotion, which clearly indicated its effect on their motivation and commitment. The odd side of the story was that this development created two groups who viewed each other negatively, affecting their

relationships and the working atmosphere of the schools. This had the potential to affect collective capacity and school productivity. Such a situation occurred in a certain part of Sheger City and that only a few teachers benefited in such a way. However, it had a strong ripple effect throughout the city.

Inadequacy of House Rent Payment- This component examined the payment offered to teachers for house rent, which participants complained was inadequate and confirmed as resulting in reduced teachers motivation and commitment. To provide some background information, the regional government recently decided to pay teachers working in Sheger City 3,000 Birr to be used for house rent. However, participants seemed to argue that this was not adequate as a house rent payment. Instead, they argued that it was just a name, and this made them feel that their problem was not recognized, and therefore they did not feel good and even felt de-motivated. For example, Dabale stated that:

Each teacher in Sheger City who does not have a house or land to build a house receives 3,000 Birr per month. While the start of such payments is a positive development, as it was not in place previously, the amount is not in line with the current market. Although it was intended to motivate us, it makes us feel as if the government does not understand our problem, which affects our morale and motivation.

As evidenced by the quotation I provided, the participant appreciated the start of such payments, but he also stated that the amount did not cover the intended expenses, claiming this negatively affected their morale and motivation to work, which could affect SSL. Similarly, Ganamo affirmed that:

The cost of renting a house, even for an ordinary single room, is more than 6,000 to 7,000 Birr. So the money that is paid is not enough to cover even half of the cost, let alone all

the expenses. I do not think that Sheger City is unaware of this situation. Rather, it is a matter of leaving us with the problem. But this does not give energy to work to our fullest potential.

The participant explained that the amount paid was insufficient to cover half the cost of the intended expense, and he felt that the city government left them in such a problem rather than helping them to withstand it. He argued that this in turn affected their morale and motivation to do the job to the best of their ability. It was really good to start such payment for teachers in the City. Although Addis Ababa had started such payment long ago, it was only the recent incident in Sheger city that helped to meet the longstanding demand of the teachers. However, the argument that the money did not cover the intended expenses and that this had affected the motivation and morale of the teachers appeared acceptable (Putra & Maat Pono, 2023). It is also a fact that this situation could cause teachers to be stressed, which could affect their motivation and performance (Hidayat & Heryanto 2019). Ulfata, a PC, even asserted that:

This is happening in a situation where we can't supplement the cost due to the threat of increasing cost of living in other dimensions of our lives. This makes us not to have good feeling and to look for houses far away from the location of our school to find the less expensive one. However, this leads to our late arrival at the school due to traffic jam which is wasting our energy and students' period.

The account was that the inadequacy of the payment forced them to rent a house far from their schools, which overwhelmed them with long travel times. This, in turn, he argued, resulted in late arrivals, wasting teaching time and making them feel bad about their jobs. Furthermore, traveling long distances, even by bus, could exhaust them and prevent them from teaching effectively. It could also cause conflict between teachers and the school management, as

ensuring the timely arrival of teachers was one of the school management's responsibilities. Overall, the data I provided showed that inadequate housing payments caused teachers to be less motivated and committed to their work, which could affect the collective capacity and, consequently, the SSL.

Effort Directed Elsewhere: This factor explored the effort of teachers and principals directed at another issue that might otherwise generate motivation and commitment of teachers and principals. Tilahun stated that “nearly all teachers, including principals, are learning business degrees and largely spend their effort there”, with which many study participants also agreed (Tilahun, Olana, Biranu; Tufa, Bona, Ebisa). “Some already had qualifications in areas such as economics, and others were studying to get the same or similar business degrees”, Chala, an education officer, added. This could enhance the capacity and productivity of school leadership, for example, by providing an understanding of the economics of education.

However, the participants appeared to believe that it deprived principals and teachers of committing themselves to the teaching job and delivering it to a quality level (Ebisa, Abdi; Olana, Ganamo). This means it redirected their efforts to gaining additional qualifications rather than pointing towards changing the momentum of student achievement. This was compounded by the fact that “teachers and principals use such a qualification as a stepping stone to other jobs and leave teaching and the education system altogether” (Kalid), which could create instability in the system. Some described this as a matter of “playing with two cards, holding a business degree on the one hand and a teaching qualification on the other” (Biranu). This was a tendency to use teaching as a bridge to study other fields and use this to get out of the education system. Perhaps, observing this, Tilahun argued that “I’m not sure who will take over the teaching responsibilities if everyone is leaving”. This could affect school culture and leadership capability

and sustainability as well. All of them might not leave. But those who were trying to leave could be among those most active, who wanted to change themselves, who, if kept, could also change the education system.

Practices of School Culture. The explored school culture in terms of the values shared and held by staff, the collaborative spirit that prevailed, and the attempts made by principals and school communities to build a strong culture. However, dealing with the practical expressions of school culture was one of the toughest tasks I experienced during the study.

When I asked participants to describe the culture of their schools or schools of their sub-cities, several did not quickly elaborate (Kalid, Dabale, Olana, Ganamo, Bekan, Chala). Most were hesitant about what to say (Ganamo, Abdi, Firaol), and others mumbled as if to ask, “What is it all about?” (Temesgen). Such a reaction made me worry if I could truly get them to grasp my question and provide me with the necessary information. Such a worry sprung from the ground that I didn’t face a similar situation when I dealt with other questions. There was a moment of silence during this time, which I intervened to give them an idea to encourage them to get involved in the discussion.

I explained to them that school culture refers to the values, beliefs, behaviors, and actions that are shared among the school community and guide the school community’s everyday operations. At that point, no one hesitated to respond. Some of them started to explain it even before I finished the explanation of the question. Perhaps this was because my question included the phrase “values,” which most of them seemed familiar with, and along which those who responded quickly also provided explanations.

However, the so-called 12 values caught everyone’s attention. These were the values that the public sector and other organizations and their employees, including schools and school

communities, were required to adopt and expected to adhere to in their work as part of Ethiopia's civil service reform (Tadesse, 2019). Participants listed values such as "Arriving on Time [Punctuality], Transparency, Responsiveness, Treating Students Equally [Fairness]" (Dabale) and "Delivering on Time [Punctuality], giving proper answer [Fair Treatment], Accountability, Participation, Transparency" (Biranu), and "Attending to Student Needs [Responsiveness], Integrity, Motherhood [Servanthood] [the participant used the term "motherhood", perhaps because she was female]" (Jitu). Although I knew that the list of values that could define school culture could go beyond the confines of the 12 values, I was excited to hear their explanations and therefore did not interrupt them. This was because I believed that the 12 values, if effectively adopted, could, at least in part, define the daily experience of the school community and hence provide the framework for a school culture that would contribute to improving the collective capacity and sustainability of school leadership.

From the participant's explanation, one could notice two major issues. First, participants could not go beyond listing three, four, or five items, although they began to list the 12 values. They provided the list they provided themselves after repeatedly attempting to remember and adding the items one after another, asking, "Which one am I forgetting?" (e.g., Ganamo) and "How many of these have I given so far?" (e.g., Dabale). This could happen because of an inability to remember the exact word or combination of terms used as part of the Twelve Values. Even those who have provided the list did not use the exact terminology, as the data I provided in parentheses, where I quoted their verbatim, shows.

One thing to note in this connection was that I did not force the participants to provide a complete list. They began the explanation, intending to list all twelve values in mind. And I did not interrupt or discourage them from listing the values once they started, hoping that this would

reveal something important. However, they could not provide a complete list, as the list I provided in the previous paragraph demonstrated.

However, beyond the indirect understanding I gained, I asked the participants directly about the practical functionality of the values and their contribution to building a strong school culture, especially if the school community strongly shared and adopted the values and if those values defined the school's culture. Some hesitantly reported that "I can't say that they are strongly shared among the school community" (Biranu), and others stated that "nobody even asks about their functionality, as it used to be previously asked" (Ulfata), with which Firaol also concurred. Other participants also provided similar accounts (Merga, Derara, Jitu, Olana). As one could observe from the words of participants, some of them explained that they were unsure whether the school community shared them. And they asserted that the era when the authorities used to check their internalization has ended. The participants' assertion that the school community did not widely share or internalize the values was actually in line with the indirect understanding I got from the way the participants listed the twelve values.

The data I collected through observation also provided evidence that concurred with the data from the participants' explanations. I, the current researcher, as an individual who has been involved in the educational system in various capacities, remember when the 12 values were posted at or near the front gate of educational institutions on a metal board to help teachers and other school communities better remember and internalize them. People, especially those from the upper educational or administrative structures, occasionally used to ask principals and teachers, especially during their school visit time, if they really remembered and put them into practice. Even the school community's explanation of the 12 values could affect their performance appraisal, either positively or negatively, depending on how well they explained the

values. Hence, principals and school communities also used to make efforts to internalize and adopt these values. However, I did not see any values posted in the schools I visited during data collection, and the school community's explanation of the values was weak, as I demonstrated in the previous paragraph. There was no sign in the school compound demonstrating the values posted there. In the schools that had them, the lists had faded so much that only parts of one or two values were visible. Other schools even repurposed the boards used to display the values as bulletin boards. I understood from this situation that the values were not being actively promoted and used, so they could not define the daily functioning of the school community well or provide a basis for a strong school culture.

However, I did not want to stop my quest there. Rather, I continued struggling to generate more data on the practical manifestations of school culture. This was based on the assumption that every educational institution has a school culture that defines how things are and should be within that institution (Doğan, 2017; Ismail et al., 2022; Kaplan & Owings, 2013). As a result, I invited participants to report, by stretching outside the circle of 12 values, on the values, beliefs, attitudes, and actions that the school community shared that held them together and guided their daily work. I also asked them about the collaborative spirit that defines school life and the attempts school leaders and the community have made to create and sustain school culture. I provided the data that I collected from the participants in the study along these dimensions.

Values- In explaining major values of their schools, participants mentioned issues such as academic excellence (Biranu), wastage prevention (Merga) impartiality and care (Olana), pride in teaching (Ganamo) and other mentioned issues such as self-reliance (Firaol) and tolerance (Jitu). I was very much interested in the participants' explanation because these are

vital issues that can establish strong school values and serve as the foundation of school culture if their practical manifestation was in proper shape.

As I continued to listen to their explanations, some of them went on to describe how these values applied to their educational institutions. For example, Jitu, who stated tolerance as the value that defined her school, stated that:

We have students from displaced families who are learning in our school. We often hear from other schools in the area about clashes between these students and other students. But our school is very peaceful even though we have a higher proportion of such students in our school than other schools in the vicinity. I think this is a unique value of our school.

The participant explained that there was a culture of tolerance among the students at her school, even though the students came from different family backgrounds, including displaced and non-displaced families. She also mentioned how her school excelled in this respect while other schools in the neighborhood struggled. Tolerance could define the school value that can serve as its unique identity, and hence her explanation was relevant. It was also related to the education system's policy of appreciating diversity and promoting tolerance (MoE, 2021).

Firaol, a school principal, also mentioned something connected with the value of self-reliance. He stated that:

Educational institutions usually struggle with a lack of resources and often wait for resources to be allocated to them from outside, especially from the education office. However, we have been successful in mobilizing resources. For example, we have feeding programs for students, and we are trying to provide the same service to teachers. So far, we have mobilized sufficient resources for this purpose to last the whole year.

While other schools used to lobby education offices for resources, we simply call them to our school to inaugurate our service. This is the identity of our school.

The participant explained that they mobilized ample resources for the school feeding program, which was sufficient throughout the school year, in which teachers also received lunch service, while other schools were overburdened with a shortage of resources. The school feeding program is a program that provides students with breakfast and meals to encourage attendance (MoE, 2021). While it was primarily intended for students from low-income households, it is now available to all students, maybe to counteract the psychological challenge of separately providing such support to students from low-income homes. The principal considered this self-reliance, defined it as their school's distinct identity, and felt proud of their accomplishment and of their inviting the education office to inaugurate the service when other schools lacked and had to lobby education offices for resources.

Jitu and Firaol highlighted their status as the best among other schools in creating tolerance and mobilizing school resources to the needed level. They could stand out among other schools regarding the development and inculcation of certain values, and one should appreciate this, as achieving it was only possible after extensive deliberation and effort. But the problem was that these issues could not fulfill the necessary cultural conditions and represent the school community to qualify as school cultural values. For instance, the data from the current study demonstrated that they were not strongly shared among the school community. I addressed this in greater detail in the discussion section.

Collaborative Spirit- Some PC participants (Merga, Ulfata, Abdi) provided data that appeared to show the existence of a cooperative spirit among the school community. For example, Abdi stated that “the school staff works the school job by cooperating with one

another”. The statement of the participant was that schoolwork was being done in cooperation with the school staff, which seemed to demonstrate that there was a prevalence of cooperative spirit among the school community.

However, wider data showed a lack of cooperative spirit among the school community in the context of the study. Dabale, a school principal, for example stated that:

We sometimes face resistance when we need teachers outside the teaching period. I am usually afraid to call teachers to come in the opposite shift. Some make us excuses for their absence so that we do not hold them accountable, and others provide false evidence to convince us that their absence was due to reasons beyond their control. The fact is that people usually want to keep themselves away from tasks that fall outside the classroom teaching. There is always a struggle between us and the teachers.

Dabale's argument concerned the resistance to getting teachers to work beyond their class hours. Although policies required them to work significant hours beyond classroom teaching (FDRE, 2017; OEB, 2009), the participant described the problems he encountered in this regard. He stated that some teachers requested permission, while others submitted false evidence to avoid punishment rather than committing to such an assignment. The participants' description indicates not only a lack of a culture of cooperation but also a lack of a culture of open communication and mutual trust (Curado et al., 2022; Iddrisu, 2025), which itself could constrain the development of a positive school culture.

Bekele, another education officer, also stated that:

School naturally needs strong cooperation and teamwork and willingly contributing effort to schoolwork. But I do not think that this does exist in our schools. School staff used to complain to the maximum level possible to justify minimum achievement. Teachers and

even school principals are largely unhappy, less motivated, less satisfied, and feel like they are working for the education office.

The participant underlined the need for demonstrating cooperation, team spirit, teamwork, and a willingness to contribute to the maximum performance in schools. However, he did not appear to believe that these were prevalent in the educational system in practice, particularly in the study setting. He revealed that the school staff complained instead of committing to completing their work and performing well. Even more worrisome was his portrayal of staff discontent, dissatisfaction, and lack of accountability. These issues have the potential to hurt staff motivation and commitment, as well as derail much of the school's work, particularly students' academic progress. The data I generated on cooperative spirit among the school community also communicated its absence or, at least, its absence in its ideal form.

I obtained similar responses from the other participants in the study, regardless of their position (PCs, school principals, or educational officers). Some PCs agreed that cooperation among the school community did exist (Dabale, Jitu, Olana, and Ganamo). Therefore, the data from the interviews seem to confirm that the cooperative spirit of the school community is inadequate.

The data I obtained through observation was also largely consistent with the image the interview data provided. At one school, I saw three principals addressing students' disciplinary cases while several teachers were relaxing in the shade of a tree. It could be the responsibility of principals to address serious disciplinary cases, but this would require cooperation from the rest of the school community. What I saw did not demonstrate a strong cooperative spirit among the school community. At another school, the deputy principal was struggling to manage the overcrowded school compound while some teachers were observing from the sidelines instead of

helping. Unit leaders at other schools were trying to get students back to their classrooms at the end of the break. Meanwhile, teachers walked among the scattered students without taking action toward them and even without communicating with them. These situations made me realize that there was something problematic about the cooperative spirit of schools, or at least that the cooperative spirit of educational institutions was not ideal.

Creating and Maintaining school Culture- This section dealt with the school community's attempt, specifically that of the school principals, to create a school culture that could support productivity and sustain school leadership; rather, the school community must create and sustain it. So it was interesting to ask the participants about the school community's attempts to create and maintain a kind of culture that could support productive teaching and learning (Lambert, 2011; Lewis et al., 2016; Schein, 2010).

Participants mentioned mechanisms such as organizing school staff into social committees (Olana), providing orientation (Abdi), promoting cooperation in different ways (Ganamo), and organizing nearly all school community members into different school organizations (Feyisa) to create and sustain school culture. The participants described using organizations such as the social committee to strengthen and sustain school culture. Others provided orientation, while still others organized school community members into one or more organizations in school to strengthen school culture. Their argument seemed to be that they put in place mechanisms that would help create cohesion and increase interaction to strengthen school culture.

These strategies could really help build interaction among the school community and improve the delivery of school business. For example, uniting the school community within the same organization can strengthen connections. If this is supported with a positive attitude, it

could result in synergy among the school community and help build a positive school culture. Providing orientation and promoting cooperation could also help build and maintain a positive school culture.

However, these were not strong mechanisms that would help the development of a strong school culture. And they were also not what every school delivered in the study context to change the course of cultural creation. For example, some had no issues to describe to me in this connection. For example, Biranu said, "I have no issue to mention in this regard." I understood this to mean that the participant was not involved in the process of creating and maintaining the culture despite the fact that he was a school principal, who was responsible for installing one.

Others were hesitating if they would be able to achieve it. Olana, a school principal, stated that:

Everyone has responsibilities as a teacher or member of the school staff, and my role is to guarantee that they fulfill their responsibilities... But I can't claim to create a school where strong culture does exist ... Even if I strive, I have a fear that people may perceive it as extra work I placed on them to complete beyond their formal responsibilities.

The participant's description included many issues. First, he acknowledged that each member of the school community has a defined role and set of responsibilities and that his responsibility was to ensure that they fulfilled theirs, which was reasonable. Second, he admitted that he did not create an environment conducive to productive schoolwork, implying that he did not try to create one, which was not good work. However, admitting the failure can lead to a better outcome in the future. Third, he seemed afraid that the school community would not accept his efforts to create a culture. He feared that the school community might consider the task of creating and maintaining school culture an extra task, and hence they might not cooperate

with his effort. Such a description could stem from a lack of understanding of school culture and the role of principals in its creation and maintenance. However, this assumption might prevent him from attempting to create and maintain a culture that would promote the success of the school and its students.

Not to mention the principals, who received no extensive training on the subject; the educational officer responsible for their training stated that "our development level does not allow for the growth of strong school cultures that motivate individuals to achieve more than is required of them" (Bekele). This could mean that our school situation did not allow for the development of a strong school culture. The message could be that we should avoid or at least delay developing a positive school culture until our school's development level changes. This could be based on the assumption that the school community lacks understanding, that school principals lack training, and that the school community lacks motivation and commitment to implement it. While the current study confirmed the truth of these elements, I would argue that creating and maintaining a school culture is one way to address such problems. Regardless of a school's developmental stage, the establishment and preservation of school culture proved to be of significance. This and the data I provided in the previous paragraph indicate an absence of concerted efforts by principals to create and maintain strong school culture. Overall, the data I presented on school culture showed that there was a lack of strongly shared values, cooperation, and concerted efforts by principals to create and maintain a strong school culture in this study context.

Discussion of Findings of the Study

I examined the anatomy of policies and the manifestation of practices of primary school SSL in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, using a qualitative case study design. I

examined these aspects in connection with principal succession, collective capacity, and school culture, which are elements of SSL. I collected data from ten key official documents and twenty-four key informants, including school principals, potential candidates, and education officials. I collected data primarily through semi-structured interviews with the study participants and document analysis from official documents. To a lesser extent, I also collected data through observations and field notes. I structurally coded the data and analyzed it using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis.

I organized the findings of the study into two primary themes: the anatomy of SSL-related policies and the manifestation of SSL practices. The findings regarding the anatomy of policies were that some policies in this educational context supported the materialization of SSL, while others undermined it, with the general tendency favoring policies that undermined the adoption of SSL. While policies that appeared to support SSL had deficiencies in providing support for a stable and sustainable school leadership system, policies that undermined the realization of SSL worked aggressively against its realization, which made the overall tendency inclined towards policies that undermined the realization of SSL. In terms of policy structure (organization), policies that supported the materialization of SSL were general, scattered throughout official documents, and were issued in the past. However, policies that undermined the materialization of SSL were specific, mostly issued recently, and concentrated in particular documents. This policy structure caused policies to undermine or, at least, not support the implementation of SSL rather than support it.

Regarding the manifestation of the practice of SSL, PCs were uninterested in becoming principals. They cited the challenges and burdens of becoming a principal, the indifference of principals' salaries to the salaries they would otherwise receive as teachers, and the lack of

support from local education officials as reasons for their lack of interest. Incumbent principals also intended to leave the principalship in less than five years. Unappealing benefits, a heavy workload, job-related challenges, a lack of support, and limited opportunities for educational advancement explained their intention to leave. Regarding the practice of collective capability, the study revealed issues with school staff availability, such as the unavailability of support staff and the scarcity of teachers. The study also revealed significant shortcomings in the qualifications of school principals and a lack of enthusiasm and commitment among school staff. The rising cost of living, students' low motivation to learn, lack of access to authorized land, unfair land provisions, inadequate house rent payments, and teachers' and principals' efforts directed elsewhere explained the staff's lack of motivation and commitment. The study also found that school culture was unavailable and could not provide the materialization of SSL. Ultimately, the study participants struggled to explain the practice of school culture and even to understand it, which speaks to its absence in primary schools in the study context.

To make research findings of the study truly understandable, one should discuss and illuminate them with additional insights rather than just presenting and summarizing them. This is what I did in this section of the paper. I organized the findings of the study into two main sections, or themes: the anatomy of SSL-related policies and the manifestation of SSL practices, the way I also organized findings of the study into two themes. I also organized the discussion of the findings around these themes. To encourage reading and facilitate cross-checking of findings and discussion, I discussed the findings in the order in which they appeared in the findings section.

Discussion of Structure (Anatomy) of SSL Policies

Discussion of structure (anatomy) of SSL policies addresses discussion of policies status and structure.

Discussion of Status of Policies. The extent to which policies support or undermine the adoption of SSL determines its likelihood of materializing in a given educational setting. The current study found that some SSL-related policies in Ethiopian educational setting, supported SSL adoption, while others undermined it. This section will discuss policies with such different effects separately.

Discussion of Policies Supporting SSL- The section will start with a discussion of leadership succession policies, which support the materialization of SSL. Then, it moves on to policies related to collective capacity and school culture. This is the order in which I presented the study's findings.

Discussion of Leadership Succession Policies Supporting SSL. This subsection will discuss principal succession policies that the study found to support the materialization of SSL. Policies that the study found to support the materialization of SSL were those related to principals' selection and retention.

Selection Policies: A variety of principals' selection policies, including selection criteria such as CPD, appeared to favor the materialization of SSL. CPD can improve the overall knowledge of teachers and the technical skills of PCs (Gurmu, 2020; Valliant, 2015) if properly applied. For example, Melesse and Gulie (2019) reported that, in a study focusing on the implementation of CPD in the Ethiopian education system, teachers experienced significant "access to new ideas," "state of experience sharing," and "opportunity for professional interaction" (p. 81). These can contribute to the creation of a competent pool of PCs. Requiring

PCs to participate in professional development prior to taking the principalship can also enable them to lead by example as they assume school leadership roles (Eisenkopf & Kölpin, 2024; Eldor, 2021). This can increase teachers' willingness to participate in professional development. This in turn can reduce the time principals need to spend facilitating CPD and free them up for other school leadership activities, which can improve the stability and productivity of school leadership. It could be due to such potential benefits of CPD that the Ethiopian education system has been pushing for its implementation at the school level for the last two decades (FDRE, 1994; MoE, 2007, 2009).

However, CPD in the Ethiopian education system is not in perfect condition to provide a strong basis for selecting competent cadres of educational leaders. One can identify at least three major problems. First, the available professional development did not provide specific leadership skills, nor was there separate professional development for aspiring principals. While there is much more to the profession that warranted CPD uniquely tailored to the principalship, PCs in the Ethiopian education system, who were supposed to take over the principalship, had access only to CPD that capacitated them as school teachers. It is true that great principals need to ground their practice in the classroom, especially as leaders of teaching and learning, and existing CPD could help in this in certain ways. Also, activities such as those aimed at improving classroom management, which one can relate, in some way, to school leadership, or those that provide general conceptual or technical skills, can help PCs develop some leadership skills. However, those CPD activities cannot provide leadership skills that match the unique demands and complexity of school leadership. Principalship has historically and recently been denied professional status in Ethiopia (Gurmu 2020; Tekleselassie 2002). This could provide the ground for the denial of unique leadership programs to PCs.

Second, the existing CPD was too general to serve as a tool for teacher development itself. For example, Dalelo et al. (2017) reported that “all teachers go through a similar type of content and CPD plan” (p. 42). This means that the program had no room to accommodate individual unique conditions. As a result, PCs who met the CPD criterion might enter school leadership without their needs being addressed and their gaps being filled, which could make them deficient. Geletu (2024), therefore, argued for the need to provide a differentiated program for new and experienced teachers “rather than focusing on the generic policy document” (p. 84). The author’s argument might focus on differentiation based on experience. But from the perspective of school leadership, one can also take this to mean differentiation for leadership development.

Third, apart from the policy issue, studies have also reported that the practice of CPD is hectic (Dalelo et al., 2017; Dejene & Mamo, 2022; Melesse & Gulie, 2019). For example, Geletu (2024) asserted that teachers “do not learn... competently” (p. 84) from professional development activities. Similarly, Dejene and Mamo's (2022) critical analysis and reflection on the program noted that program participants “tend to rush through the course” (p. 6). This might be the reason why Geletu (2024) branded the program as “powerless” (p. 84). This could be a reference to the inadequacy of CPD in providing resources not only for the selection of principals but also for the competence of teachers. In Ethiopia, the existing regulation required teachers to spend 60 hours per year in CPD activities (MoE, 2009). Teachers used to use evidence of CPD participation to secure career advancement, to win principal selection, etc. As a result, teachers including PCs might focus on getting the required evidence on their file rather than engaging deeply in the activities and truly improving their skills and knowledge and advancing organizational goals. This means that CPD as selection criteria for principals did not have much benefit beyond

broadening the criteria. Given this, the CPD was at best not fully fit for purpose and at worst may not have provided the resources to make SSL a reality.

The adoption of the regulation of service year or career ladder might also not be in line with the practical reality of the system. As the finding section presented, the system jumped from a three-year requirement to senior teachers' level or 14 years of service or more. In fact, it was anomalous to jump from the requirement of three years of service to a senior/teacher level in the teacher career ladder when the conditions for the selection of principals, for which the education system adopted the three-year requirement, had not shown improvement. As teachers' years of service or career ladder requirements became higher and higher, it brought the salary of PCs closer to the salary of principals.

This might cause PCs to lose interest in the position since compensation in general, and salary in particular, are among the factors that attract individuals to the principalship and motivate them to remain in a leadership position (Fuller et al., 2015; Lee & Mao, 2023; Pendola, 2022; Pijanowski & Brady, 2009). For example, Fuller et al. (2015) noted that "compensation affects attachment and commitment to the organization" (p. 50). Of course, the education system recommended that senior teachers with significant experience whose salaries are equal to or higher than the principal's base salary could become principals by adding one scale or three horizontals to their salaries (OEB, 2022a). I think such a policy provision is commendable because it can help the education system cope with salary limitations in certain ways and select school principals.

However, the question remained: Would adding a salary scale that surpassed the base salary for principalship attract PCs to the position? Living costs were skyrocketing, so experienced individuals might choose other jobs in their spare time that could earn them more

money instead of taking on the principalship. For example, during the 2024 summer training program, I met a supervisor from the study context who said that it was difficult to find teachers in their schools during the opposite shift. This was because they had additional work at private schools and other places. This could deter PCs from becoming principals, even with the policy provision of an additional salary scale. Therefore, it was unlikely that such a plan would significantly change the course of staffing school leadership positions.

The criterion that required serving in roles such as department head, unit leader, or coordinator of a pedagogic center or club to take on the role of principal could be to bring in candidates with some leadership experience. It is true that serving in such positions helps build leadership skills to some extent (Montecinos et al., 2022; Lee & Mao, 2023). For example, by serving in such positions as heads of department, individuals might take on responsibilities such as maintaining positive working relationships, assisting teachers to deliver instruction effectively, and coordinating instructional responsibilities under the department besides handling regular teaching duties (Jaca, 2013; du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018). This helps holders of such positions to gain leadership skills and become familiar with leadership responsibilities “through exposure to [leadership]...work assignments” (Gurmu, 2020, p. 656). Lee and Mao (2023) also asserted that teachers with such “experience are more likely to apply for principal positions” (p. 14), which is an added value for selecting principals. This, in turn, may encourage individuals to take on leadership responsibilities that the policy designated as a criterion for principal selection. Thus, the criterion is acceptable to select competent principals.

Even I would argue that it is one of the most relevant criteria for selecting principals since it is about having leadership experience that individuals apply when taking on school leadership. This contributes to the sustainability of school leadership by creating and expanding

the pool of potential candidates (PCs) from which the system can select qualified individuals for leadership positions. It can also facilitate principals' efforts to place qualified individuals in those positions themselves, which helps distribute leadership and extend the productivity of the leadership system (du Plessis & Eberlein, 2018).

The requirement of a two-year stay in teaching during the immediate years before taking on principalship demonstrated that the educational system sought individuals with recent teaching experience and a commitment to the profession to take on principalship. This was essential since those who were in the profession recently stay up to date on the newest teaching advancements, which helps them make informed decisions when taking on principalship (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Myers, 2013). However, it was not the perfect criterion for selecting school leaders because it measures time spent teaching, not time spent in a leadership position. Of course, such a criterion appeared to be designed to mainly address the problem that the education system has faced. As a person who has been working in the education system in various capacities, I, the current researcher, remembered some years back when certain education officers recruited themselves or their relatives for school principalship, including selecting people who had left the teaching profession. They did this partly to benefit themselves or others with the salary of a principal's position when those individuals had lower salaries. And partly to bring teachers they recruited close to the town under the pretext of selecting them as principals. Recruiters knew that the education system would assign these individuals to the same or a comparable school after they left their principalship (OEB, 2022a) and that their actions could potentially place those individuals in nearby schools. Sometimes, parties who recruited principals this way did it by removing competent leaders who were in school leadership positions to clear the space for individuals whom they were going to appoint.

Such a move introduced an element of injustice, contributed to the frequent dismissal of principals, and created instability in the education system. Hence, the Oromia Education Bureau attempted to prohibit the dismissal of principals without the bureau's consent due to the severity of the problem. However, that attempt did not come to fruition because some parties saw it as a violation of the lower educational structures' right to appoint principals as they see fit. Hence, the Oromia Education Bureau dropped the plan by then but provided the current criterion that would help close the policy gap. Addressing the problem would raise the level of the selection process and, in certain cases, contribute to school leadership competency and sustainability. But the criterion would still evaluate loyalty to teaching rather than to school leadership, which made it imperfect to help select principals.

By requiring a performance score of 80% or higher, the intention seemed to be to promote outstanding teachers to leadership positions, which could improve leadership capabilities in certain ways. But such a criterion was not without receiving blame. The candidates scored high in teaching, not in leadership. Therefore, their superiority in teaching does not show their superiority in leadership. Good teachers don't automatically and necessarily lead to excellent principals (Bush, 2008). Rather, such a criterion could deprive children of the best teachers. For example, Tekleselassie (2002) asserted that "the best teachers are better off teaching, rather than assuming positions in school leadership" (p. 59). Even such a move could cause a shortage of teachers in the education system for certain subjects. For example, Gurmu and Oumer (2023) reported the challenge of teacher shortage, among which the shortage of science and mathematics teachers was significant, while this study witnessed that some of such individuals were in school leadership positions. This can be detrimental to school productivity and thus to SSL.

Selection Committee and Process: The composition of the school principals' selection committee can help or hinder the appointment of suitable persons to school leadership roles (Quraishi & Aziz, 2016; Walker & Kwan, 2012). Therefore, the makeup of the committee is a vital factor to examine. In the Ethiopian education system, party officials in the selection committee prevented qualified, non-party-affiliated individuals from becoming school principals (Gurmu, 2020). Therefore, excluding party members from the selection committee and ensuring that the committee is composed of educational officers and teacher representatives could help the committee understand the concerns of the education system and select appropriate educational leaders who can sustain school leadership.

Nevertheless, the selection committee contained a flaw, as I previously stated in the "Finding" section. First, the selection committee needs to reflect the stakeholders that the schools and principals serve to consider the diverse needs of those stakeholders when selecting school principals (Khanal & Regmi, 2024; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Walker & Kwan, 2012). Also, committee members might have a subjectivity problem and a recruitment skills gap because of a lack of professional training in human resource management and recruitment techniques (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Polymeropoulou & Sorkos, 2024).

Regarding publicly advertising vacant positions, some candidates used to hold themselves back from competing to assume principalship for fear of being placed in schools in remote areas when the school was not specific (Gurmu & Oumer, 2023). Therefore, providing full information about the recruitment and selection process and specifying the particular school for which principals were needed can encourage more brilliant potential leaders to apply. This would help ensure a smooth succession of principals and the adoption of SSL. Although the transparency itself might challenge selecting principals for schools such as those located in

remote areas, this, by itself, could improve SSL by inviting only committed individuals who wanted to work and remain at such schools, thus ensuring stability and sustainability (Burns et al., 2015; Williams & Tabernik, 2011).

Policy provisions such as lowering the requirements of the career ladder for women, reserving 50% of vacant school leadership positions for women, and covering at least 35% of schools with women principals (OEB, 2022a) could increase the number of women school principals or deputy principals. I would say that these were expanded policies to get more women into school leadership positions. And it showed the determination of the Ethiopian education system to increase the number of women school leaders. This could improve primary school leadership sustainability. This is because it is a fair system that does not leave anyone behind, including women, which can be sustainable (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). The Oromia Education Bureau also justified the need to select women for school leadership by citing research findings that “women are more effective than men in school leadership (OEB, 2022a, p. 20). This is also about providing school leadership capability, which can make school leadership sustainable.

However, the logic of some of the policy provisions is not clear, including the policy of covering 35% of schools with women. The education system probably set this figure to approximate the proportion of female primary school teachers. In 2020/2021, the percentage of female primary school teachers was about 40.6% at both the national and Oromia regional levels (MoE, 2022; OEB, 2020), so the intention could be to set the figure around that percentage. But the participation of women in school leadership in the education system was about 6.7% in 2022/2023 (MoE, 2023), which could make the target of 35% too ambitious. Even what could make reaching 35% more challenging is the fact that the percentage of female primary principals

was steadily declining, falling from 12.4% in 2020 (MoE, 2020a) to 12% in 2021 (MoE, 2021), then to 11.8% in 2022 (MoE, 2022), and to 6.7% in 2023 (MoE, 2023), which was nearly half of the 2020 figure.

It was a wonderful thing to also use women as principals in a way that did not interfere with their family lives, which could help the effort of appointing them as school leaders. However, the policy did not specify what assigning them in a way that did not interfere with their family life entailed. From the information I get from education officers at the Ministry of Education and the Oromia Education Bureau (Mikias, Borana), this includes placing them in a school closer to where their families are located and/or in a central school that is close to transportation so that they do not have to walk long distances and/or making it easy to get their children to school so that they can arrive at their assigned school on time. But it could also mean placing them in a school close to health facilities so that their families have access to health services and/or placing them in a school with better infrastructure that contributes to their work performance, among other things.

While these were good intentions, such an arrangement could, however, place women in challenging schools. Fortunately or unfortunately, schools where women were supposed to be placed are schools where teachers transferred frequently, had many students, and employed more experienced teachers, including many former principals, who can readily test the principal's abilities. This could make the leadership of such schools challenging. Actually, assigning women principals to such schools could be akin to putting them on the hot seat.

Some of the findings that the current study reported are consistent with findings of previous studies, while others are not. For instance, numerous studies conducted in different educational settings have addressed the necessity of individuals' receiving training in a specific

field, obtaining leadership certification, and holding a license to be appointed to or remain in a school leadership position (Lee & Mao, 2023; Okoko, 2020; Owen et al., 2017). All of these could be considered forms of CPD, and hence the criteria are partially consistent with the CPD participation criterion for selecting principals that the current study reported.

A study by Montecinos et al. (2022) have also reported that education systems needed individuals to serve in the teaching profession in order to assume the principalship. This is consistent with the criterion reported in the current study that requires candidates to serve in the teaching profession for at least two years before applying for the principalship. However, the criterion that the current study reported, which required PCs to be at the senior/teacher level, was inconsistent with what those studies reported. One exception was the finding by Stone-Johnson (2014), who reported from the USA context that “school leadership has relied on experienced teachers [of]... at least 7 years of experience” (p. 607). This criterion for experienced teachers was consistent with the career ladder criterion the current study presented. However, the minimum threshold of seven years the author reported is significantly lower than the service year requirement the proposed career ladder in the current study suggested. Policy standards in the education system might explain the difference.

Relevant studies did not directly address the composition of principal selection panels, committees, or boards (Blackmore et al., 2006; Polymeropoulou & Sorkos, 2024; Walker & Kwan, 2012). However, one can make certain inferences about the composition of the selection committee from the available study contents and compare it with the findings of the current study. For example, Blackmore et al. (2006) reported that “local school selection panels in most education systems were largely constituted of various combinations of parent, employer (education authority), union, and teacher representation and, in the case of Victoria and South

Australia, formally nominated and trained equal opportunity representatives” (p. 300). Education authorities and unions on the panel, the authors reported, are consistent with education officers’ and teachers’ association representatives on the committee the current study reported. One can also compare equal opportunity representatives on the panel the author reported to gender mainstreaming experts on the committee in the current study. However, the representation of parents on the panel the author presented is inconsistent with committee membership the current study reported. Reporting from the Hong Kong context, Walker and Kwan (2012) also mentioned that SSBs (school sponsoring bodies) are “responsible for appointing a supervisor” (p. 193), who they reported taking part in the selection of principals. Since educational or school supervisors were not part of the current selection committee, the findings of the two studies were inconsistent with the finding of the current study. The location of the principal selection committee could be among the factors that describe the variation. In Ethiopia, the selection committee is located at the woreda level, which one could compare to the school district in other education systems. The committee used to select principals for schools under the woreda’s jurisdiction. However, in other education systems, the selection committee might be at the school level. Being at the school or woreda level might require a different committee composition, which might be the reason for the difference in the committee composition between the current study and other studies.

Discussion of Policies of Collective Capacity Supporting SSL. It seems to be an accepted axiom that "the availability or scarcity of administrative, instructional, and support staff can take away or give principals control over the provision of school leadership" (Gurmu & Oumer, 2023, p. 56), which in turn can either support or undermine the adoption of SSL. For example, having the necessary staff in place helps to spread the workload across many parties

(Conway, 2015), builds and maintains trust with students (Packard, 2011), and prevents leadership team exhaustion (Pollock et al., 2015; Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). These can improve quality completion and timely delivery and help school productivity, which can facilitate school leadership stability and sustainability. As a result, one must credit the education system for the policy prescriptions of assigning principals/deputy principals based on student enrollment and workload and prescribing a supply of an appropriate number of teachers and support personnel and provision for a high level of staff motivation and commitment. This is because such policy prescription is the first important step toward equipping schools, increasing collection capacity, and facilitating the implementation of SSL.

However, one could also mention several deficiencies that could prevent collective capacity policies from working optimally to support the materialization of SSL. For example, the current policies prescribed support staff that were required to perform administrative tasks at the school level when international literature discusses them in terms of classroom personnel who are freeing teachers from routine activities and allowing them to focus on legitimate instructional activities (Blatchford et al., 2011; Chambers, 2015). Despite using such individuals to improve student academic achievement, school productivity, and thus SSL in other education systems like the USA, the Ethiopian education system does not appear ready to view support staff in these terms. It was true that policy in the Ethiopian education system too allowed the availability of special needs teachers (MoE, 2012b). However, the allowed number per school was limited. Furthermore, teachers who did not have students with special needs in their classes couldn't access such teachers. In the Ethiopian education system, people traditionally use the term "special needs students" to refer to students with learning difficulties, although it practically includes gifted students, and my term "students without special needs" indicates this.

Furthermore, Eacott and Asuga (2014) claimed that the education system is less likely to succeed in providing quality education in the absence of well-prepared school leaders. This is about the critical need to qualify school principals to the level required to maintain quality and build a system that constantly strives to maintain sustainability and excellence, which can strictly work for the teachers as well. However, requiring principals to be trained in one of the school subjects might leave them without the skills to do the job adequately, which might undermine their ability to sustain their efforts and achieve sustainable results (Geletu, 2024; Gurmu & Oumer, 2023). This might also lead them to identify with the teaching profession rather than the education/school leadership profession, which is not helpful for the collective capacity of schools and the sustainability of school leadership. For example, Ritacco and Bolivar (2019) state that “[s]uccessful leadership practices depend to a large degree on strong principals’ identities” (p. 806). But such strong principals’ identity is lacking among the principals the current policy deployed, as they were subject teachers. Since a "sense of identity...is a critical antecedent and co-requisite of their [principals'] capacity for effective practice" (p. 265), as Crow et al. (2017) affirm, the identity of the principals cannot guarantee capacity of the principals that could lead to superior performance (Crow et al., 2017; Cruz-González et al., 2021). This could be seen as a major blow to building collective capacity and thus to the adoption of SSL, given the critical role of principals in school leadership.

The system might also need to elevate the qualifications of primary school teachers. For example, the fact that teachers lack confidence to teach at higher grades of primary school or middle school grades (Gurmu & Oumer, 2023) could compromise their quality teaching, which could negatively affect collective capacity. The lack of confidence may indicate a lack of ability, resulting in a lack of stability, which was not conducive to maintaining sustainability. While this

could necessitate upgrading teachers' qualifications beyond diplomas, one must also recognize that there were teachers in the system that had not fulfilled the minimum requirements (MoE, 2021). In addition, the fact that teaching is becoming more complex and challenging (Gavin & McGrath-Champ, 2024), and content that used to be taught in the upper grades was being transferred to the lower grades in the Ethiopian education system (MoE, 2020b), also called for upgrading teacher qualification.

The principal's qualification that the policy prescribes was similar to the finding reported by Bush (2018b) in a study of the African context that "a teaching qualification and teaching experience are often considered to be sufficient attributes for new principals" (p. 66), which I believe still holds true. But the finding of the study seems incompatible with the additional qualification requirement for principals and principals being trained on their initiative in fields such as business administration that Okoko (2020) reported from the Kenyan context. The finding about the principal's identity seems to be consistent with Ritacco and Bolivar's (2019) assertion from the Spanish context those principals' "[r]oles and identities do not coincide" (p. 810). The support staff policy enacted in terms of administrative personnel was different from what scholars such as Blatchford et al. (2011) and Chambers (2015) discussed about support staff.

The Nigerian National Teacher Education Policy prescribed primary school teachers to achieve Teacher Certificate Grade II (TCGDII), which was not consistent with the recommendation of diploma qualification for primary school teachers (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2014). The policy standard in each education system could explain the difference. However, such an assertion should be taken with caution, as it was unclear what Certificate Grade II (TCGDII) means in the Nigerian education system and how it compares to a

teacher diploma qualification in the Ethiopian education system. And it was not consistent with the recommendations of bachelor-level qualification for primary school teachers in Africa to help teacher quality, comparability, and international mobility (African Union Commission, 2019). The policy prescription for the presence of teacher motivation and commitment was also in line with the assertion of scholars (Ma, 2022; Olurotimi et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2019) about the need for manifestation of staff, especially teacher motivation and commitment, to sustain school productivity and hence sustainability.

Discussion of Policies of School Culture Supporting SSL. Literature sources asserted the high importance of school culture for the proper functioning of a school and the realization of its productivity. For example, Robbins et al. (2017) asserted that strong culture is a “more important predictor of sustainable business performance” (p. 461), and school culture “stabilizes and provides structure and meaning for group members” (Schein, 2010, p. 3). This basically means that culture predicts student achievement and success in school. The assertion of the authors was that school culture stabilizes the school atmosphere and provides structure and resources to school staff so they can deliver schoolwork of the highest quality in a timely manner (Hanselman et al., 2016). In line with this literature assertion, the current culture policies also emphasized the importance of the manifestation of a strong culture to make schools and school leaders more productive, which I think is remarkable. Besides shaping practical activities, such policy provisions could raise awareness and generate debate about school culture that could lead to proper cultural materialization in the education system in certain ways. The provisions might also encourage the educational community to consider school culture to achieve school effectiveness (Hanselman et al., 2016). Therefore, I viewed the educational system’s efforts to provide cultural policy provisions as a positive development.

However, cultural policies were also not without involving caveats that could prevent them from adequately supporting school stability, productivity, and thus SSL. The literature treated school culture and school leadership as two sides of the same coin (Hanselman et al., 2016; Schein, 2010), but the current policy did not make such a close connection. The large volume of cultural policy provisions mandated either the school leadership system or the education system to create positive values, connections, and cooperation among the school community. However, I did not find any mention of culture being used to provide school leadership or exercise leadership influence in the official documents I reviewed. Current policies also mandated adherence to prescribed guidelines, while creating and sustaining school culture requires establishing values and changing beliefs by tapping into the psyche (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015) of school communities. For example, Hinde (2004) stated that “school culture develops as staff members interact with each other, students, and the community” (p. 2). Although this does not prevent intentional efforts to create school culture, the author’s assertion, however, revealed that the staff interaction realizes school culture. This needed the creation of cultural objects at the school level rather than imposing them from above. The term “shared” in the culture definitions (Doğan, 2017; Robbins et al., 2017; Schein, 2010) also emphasizes the shared characteristics of cultural content or elements. Sharing may not just be simply sharing what comes from above but also a collaborative effort to build and communicate ideals that define the schools. Moreover, culture is supposed to provide educational institutions with a unique identity by helping them to develop their own “quality and character” (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 61), while the current cultural provisions encouraged the creation of a comparable identity.

The counter-argument might be that the intention behind the ministry’s providing those policy provisions was to guide leaders and encourage schools to plan their own cultural

provisions rather than to implement those provided from above. One can appreciate such a counter-argument since there is nothing wrong with providing pillars and guiding principles from above to guide the cultural creation and maintenance. Even there must be direction from above to create a unified effort towards achieving educational goals in the system. But three major concerns remained. First, the regulations lack the detail needed to guide principals through the process of cultural creation, maintenance, and change. The cultural provisions were vague and lacked specificity for guiding school principals through the process. Second, principals' educational backgrounds might not allow them to go through the complex processes of creating, sustaining, and changing a culture to create one. They were graduate students who might not have encountered the concept of school culture and who might lack the training background necessary to engage in a deep cultural process. Third, there was no plan, document, or program that could directly implement the culture provision. For example, documents such as Framework for Continuous Professional Development (MoE, 2009) and the School Improvement Program Guidelines (MoE, 2010) supported the implementation of continuous professional development and school improvement programs, respectively. However, there was no such document or resource to embed the current cultural provisions in the school.

The policies the current study considered prescribed the development of a strong school culture to improve the school situation, and this was consistent with the advocacy of many scholars for the presence of a strong culture to achieve school productivity (Bottomley, 2018; Colquitt et al., 2011; Cook, 2014; Plaku & Leka, 2025; Robbins et al., 2017). However, the policies were those provided from higher education structures when the scholars advocated school culture to be created and maintained at the school level through school principals' and school communities' engagement in the process (Lewis et al., 2016; Schein, 2010). The

influence of the cultural policies the current study considered was also not consistent with the finding that “the level of school culture was high” (Ismail et al., 2022, p. 272). The authors’ assertion might mean the influence of the culture was strong, whereas the influence of policies the current study considered was weak. Of course, the two studies also differed from each other despite both addressing school culture. While Ismail et al.’s study examined the practice of cultural manifestations, the current study analyzed policies. Of course, I did not encounter any studies examining policies for their supporting or undermining effects, especially those targeted high-level policies, as the current study did.

Discussion of Policies Undermining SSL. As I reported in the Findings of the Study section, policies related to SSL in the Ethiopian education system both supported and undermined its implementation. I addressed the discussion of policies that supported the implementation of SSL in a previous section. This section will discuss policies that support the materialization of SSL.

Discussion of Succession Policies Undermining SSL. This subsection will discuss policies of principals’ succession that the study found to undermine the materialization of SSL under two subsections: retention and selection.

Retention: The current study identified policies that put restrictions on principals’ stay as one of the policies that was impeding SSL adoption. For example, a limited principal term could lead to principal turnover, which could result in teacher turnover (Bétille et al., 2012). It could also disrupt a productive school culture (Hanselman et al., 2016) and incur significant costs for training principals (Bartanen et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). It could exacerbate the problem of identifying and selecting new principals for school leadership positions (Lemoine et al., 2018). These undermine improvement efforts (Bétille et al., 2012; Carpenter et al., 2022;

Snodgrass Rangel, 2018), create instability, and thus work against the sustainability of school leadership.

It was not clear why the policy that the current study investigated limited primary school principals to specific terms. The system might enact such a policy to create accountability for achieving certain results within a specified timeframe and to prepare for principal succession on a known timetable. New principals can also bring new ideas into the school system, which can change the school productivity (Bartanen et al., 2019; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010), and the system might also plan to change principals for such a reason. However, accountability mechanisms, such as inspections, operate on their own schedule within the education system (MoE, 2013b) that does not need setting principalship terms. PCs and principals in the education system were also subject graduates who did not receive extensive training in change management, and therefore, a new principal was less likely to promote change. Instead, the principal's fixed term could restrict the principal's productive skill and knowledge to a certain time to be used for school productivity. It creates numerous vacancies at once, which could make filling the school leadership position difficult (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Nilsson et al., 2022). For example, it increases the ratio of PCs per position, which reduces the likelihood of selecting quality candidates, which can negatively impact school leadership capability and sustainability.

In Ethiopia's education system, principals were previously subject to an age limit rather than a definite term. While principals in other education systems, such as in Sweden, have the option to work until age 65 and beyond (which appears to be the official retirement age there) (Nilsson et al., 2022), the previous policy in Ethiopia stipulated that principals should be no older than 48 years (MoE, 2013a). With a retirement age of 60 in Ethiopia (FDRE, 2017), this meant that individuals could not become principals during the last 12 years of their working lives,

regardless of their ability to be productive. This contradicted the claim that there is little empirical evidence to support the notion that persons cannot attain principalship or must be removed from their posts after reaching a particular age (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). The Ethiopian education system itself abandoned the policy of age restrictions, maybe because of destructive implications and put in place a policy that limited the tenure of school principals.

Nonetheless, a variety of factors render the restriction on principals' terms also erroneous. Studies (Buckman, 2021; Essel, 2022; Liu & Bellibas, 2018) emphasized the importance of retaining productive school leaders for as long as possible, which would benefit the education system immensely. For example, Buckman (2021) stated that principal retention makes “a school focused on achieving its goals and fulfilling its mission” (p. 3), with which other scholars also agreed (Liu & Bellibas, 2018). Fuller et al. (2015) also affirmed that “school improvement tends to require multiple years of effort with consistent leadership in order to enact the range of policies and procedures necessary to transform a school” (p. 42). Such an assertion also pointed to the necessity of retaining school principals in order to help the productivity of the schools and the stability and sustainability of the school leadership. Although it is not the only factor that positively impacts school productivity and leadership stability, as Essel (2022) noted, “the longer a principal serves..., the greater the positive impact on student success” (p. 22) would be. This would make policies that limit principals' stays unworthy.

Aside from making such broad claims, other researchers specifically addressed why it is vital to provide principals more time in school leadership roles. For example, Spillane and Lee (2014) neatly outlined the challenges that a new principal experiences, which might provide evidence for why principals should be given additional time. These included dealing with feelings of professional isolation, addressing the previous principal's legacy, balancing multiple

tasks, managing resistance to cultural change, and confronting ineffective and resentful employees. These are tough tasks that the education system expects novice principals to perform, which require more time than the current guidelines recommend. Mascall and Leithwood (2010) also stated that "sustainable improvement requires several years of effort to work through complex cultural issues, such as resistance to change and acculturation of the new leader" (p. 371). While the phrase "several years" does not specify an exact timeframe, the authors' statement suggested the necessity of retaining principals for an extended period to sustain improvement.

While such literature underscored that the education system should retain principals longer, the question remains: How long should they be retained? Snodgrass Rangel (2018) cited time studies to claim that "improvement can take five to seven years" (p. 87). Mentioning the prediction of stage models, Mascall and Leithwood (2010) also contended that "at least five to seven years [are needed] to build relationships of trust" (p. 371). And Guthery and Bailes (2022) asserted a stay of "at least five consecutive years [for principals]... [to] counteract previous instability" (p. 439). At first look, these three groups of authors appeared to be proposing that principals serve for five to seven years in school leadership. However, the researchers urged for lengthier tenures for principals. For example, the phrase "at least" in two of the three citations I supplied (Guthery & Bailes, 2022; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010) implied a minimum threshold of five to seven years rather than a maximum.

Studying principals' self-efficacy in the Israeli educational context, which is related to their "judgment regarding their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action" (p. 58), Fisher (2014) reported a peak in PSES [Principal Self-Efficacy Scale] during their first year of leadership, followed by a significant decline during the second through fifth years of work

experience, followed by an increase after five years and stabilization reached after 10 years. The documented stability of principals' self-efficacy after ten years might show that the education system should keep principals for more than ten years and possibly for an extended length of time so that they can maintain a steady self-efficacy level, lead confidently, and help school leadership stability and sustainability.

Even other scholars offered data to support the notion that principals' stays should be determined based on their capacity to work rather than a predetermined term of principalship, for which the policy in the Ethiopian education system had no room. As Nilsson et al. (2022) stated, one can determine principals' productivity based on factors such as physical strength, health status, mental well-being, and ability to withstand the physical and mental demands of a job. This might need determining principals' stay based on the consideration of factors at the individual level rather than adopting "a one-size-fits-all approach to principal succession" (Mascall & Leithwood 2010, p. 371), which includes retention. This is because, as Mascall and Leithwood (2010) themselves noted, "there is bound to be enormous variation among individual principals" (p. 371) that enables or prevents them from working until their retirement age or beyond.

Apart from individuals' factors, the support principals receive from educational structures also determines their ability to work and willingness to stay (Nilsson et al., 2022). Thus, the question is also whether the Ethiopian education system had policies and resources in place that enable, and therefore compel, education officials to provide incumbent principals with sufficient informational, technical, professional, and emotional support to enable them to sustain their leadership efforts and remain productive (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012) rather than restricting

principals' stay to a certain time. I will return to the issue of principals' support in connection with principals' intention to stay and PCs' interest in assuming principalship.

Another issue that the present research identified as harming leadership stability and sustainability, or at least not supporting it, was the system's issuance of letters of honor to school principals. Authorities sanction principals, including those in Ethiopia, rather than honoring them, perhaps because sanction is less costly than reward. For example, policies push them out of their principalship instead of encouraging them to stay (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Thus, one could view the policy of awarding letters of honor to outstanding former principals positively. However, I have some concerns regarding its practical effect, especially regarding its connection to school leadership capability, stability, and SSL. I believe the concerns I will present are equally pertinent to principals who leave after completing their first or second term. However, individuals who complete their first term may or may not continue. Therefore, I center my argument on principals who finish their second term, whose leaving is sure.

The first point of contention in connection with the provision of the letter of honor is that the policy did not specify what benefit former principals would derive from receiving the letter. Thus, many principals might count the letter among other ordinary papers given to them with no apparent benefit. Receiving such a letter might give former principals a sense of satisfaction or pride in contributing to the success of the school system and its students, which one cannot undermine. But the policies did not explicitly state this. Even if they did, it is doubtful that this would work for everyone. For example, the satisfaction the letter would generate might be effective for principals with an internal locus of control, but this might not satisfy principals with an external locus of control (see, for example, Northouse, 2016). Hence, at the very least, it may

require some external component coupled with the letter to work for such persons, which the policy of a letter of honor could not supply.

It is also more reasonable to acknowledge individuals for significant accomplishments throughout their employment while they are still working in the position in order to motivate them to do more, something that the letter of honor could not do. The central goal of providing recognition, such as a letter of honor, to employees in an organizational setting is to improve and sustain institutional performance by “propel[ing employees]... to aim more and do more” (Mando et al., 2024, p. 170). However, the letter could not serve this purpose since it is antecedent, not precedent, to their leadership position. And hence has little or no impact on improving the leadership practice of the individual to whom the system provides the letter. The provision of a letter might provide the impression that the system did not just dismiss outgoing principals but also recognized them. And this can send a message to future or current principals that if you are successful in the principalship, the system will recognize you when you leave. However, its impact is not immediate.

It is also more beneficial to retain principals than to reward their departure. According to the policy, outgoing principals who have completed their tenure with "high discipline" should receive a letter of honor (OEB, 2022a, p. 22). Although the policies do not explicitly state this, the term "high discipline" referred to adherence to principles of productivity, ethics, and performance. This signifies that such individuals possess the ability and capability to continue to work as capable school leaders. If such persons depart the education system, the long-term viability of school leadership is jeopardized significantly. If they remain in the system, they can significantly contribute to the stability and sustainability of school leadership (Bartanen et al., 2019; Buckman, 2021; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Principals could leave at any time and under

any circumstances if they wished (Buckman, 2021; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). However, creating an environment that encourages and supports the retention of excellent principals and providing favorable policies that extend tenure is more beneficial to the system than rewarding the departure of principals who had shown competence.

Studies reported that it is more workable, relevant, and in use around the globe to keep principals as long as they can work, be effective, and be willing to stay in the position (Mascall and Leithwood, 2010; Nilsson et al., 2022), which is incompatible with the notion of limited-term policies the current study reported. Specifically, the current findings regarding policies limiting the term of principals are inconsistent with the finding that principals can and have the ability to work until age 65 and beyond (Nilsson et al., 2022). Although the expectation was that the Ethiopian education system would use experienced principals for longer rather than spending resources on training new principals recurrently, the Swedish education system appeared to retain principals until the end of their working lives. The current study's finding about limited principalship terms also contradicts the assertion that little evidence exists that prevents principals from working beyond a certain age (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010).

Selection- When I come to the discussion of selection criteria, Khanal and Regmi (2024) stated that “[p]olicies for the selection of school principals... [is] crucial for quality education.”. This calls for sensitivity to the policy of selecting school leaders, including the criteria, strategy, and process of selection, in order to ensure the quality of education and thus the productivity of the schools. However, the current criterion requires teachers to become principals when they are best suited to serve as subject teachers rather than principals. The education system has a long history of recruiting teachers with specific teaching experience, providing them with leadership training, and deploying them as principals (Gurmu, 2018; Tekleselassie, 2002). However, the

current policy required the appointment of teachers without leadership training, which cannot provide school leadership capacity and sustainability. Training and preparation are the primary resources that principals rely on to be competent and effective (Ng & Szeto, 2016; Young et al., 2017). Hence, one can consider principals' lack of such resources a major deficiency.

The education system mandated training for principals who were lacking educational leadership training before school placement (OEB, 2022a). However, the policy required education offices to provide the training. Education offices play a valid role in training school leaders, for example, through arrangement of institution-industry linkage (MoE, 2008; Tegegne et al., 2024). They are also best positioned to induct and orient principals and provide them training on issues such as job mechanisms, reporting procedures, and timing, among others. However, principals' training must extend beyond what education offices can offer, and it must be more comprehensive. For instance, Ng Foo Seong (2019) wrote that "school leaders must challenge current paradigms of inquiry in leadership, management, teaching, and learning practices" (p. 166). However, it is unlikely that the training the education offices provide would prepare school leaders for such an undertaking.

Three major concerns arise in this connection. First, most education officers are subject experts with little or no professional experience in educational leadership. Second, the education system is experiencing high staff turnover (MoE, 2021). This can deprive the education system of experienced officers who can provide the training competently. Third, the training the office provides cannot span several days to cover several essential topics (Gurmu, 2020; OEB, 2022a). Hence, while the education offices' training can introduce school leaders to their roles, it is unlikely to develop them into grounded, adaptive educational leaders (Özen & Yavuz, 2024; Yokuş, 2022) who can stabilize and sustain school leadership.

Of course, I observed positive development of presenting qualification in educational administration as a viable alternative in the selection of school principals. This made it possible to attract individuals with relevant training to school leadership positions. This was a positive step forward given that the system previously did not consider this qualification an option at all (Gurmu, 2020; MoE, 2013b). However, I would argue that this is still insufficient recognition for such suitable qualification for the job. It is appropriate, legitimate, and desirable to allow individuals with an educational leadership qualification to become principals rather than requiring them to compete with individuals who lack such training. This approach aligns with the Ministry of Education's principle that "the right person is in the right post" (MoE, 2022, p. 47). Rather, requiring such experts to compete with school subject teachers would be like requiring economists and physicians to compete on equal footing for health-related employment regardless of their expertise. This would be unfair, uneconomical, and, at worst, chaotic, which cannot heal school leadership stability and sustainability. The challenge could be that there might not be enough educational leadership professionals available in the system to fill open school leadership positions. Furthermore, the system does not allow the selection of individuals with degrees from private universities, including those qualified in educational leadership, for public school positions, perhaps due to concerns about quality (OEB, 2022a). This further reduced the pool of qualified candidates in this area. However, it is necessary to give preference to individuals who are accessible and deemed suitable.

The goal of the principal selection process is to place competent and talented educational cadres in school leadership positions (Cardno, 2018; Khanal & Regmi, 2024; Romanowski et al., 2020). However, making incumbent principals go through a selection process for a second term, along with new candidates, may not help the selection of competent leaders and the stability and

sustainability of the school leadership system. Those leaders whom the policy requires to go through the selection process for the second term are leaders “who have made practical changes in schools during their tenure” (OEB, 2022a, p. 19). This means that such individuals have proven to be competent and recognized by the educational system since practical change means that change the education system can witness. So the question is, why did the education system require them to compete again and go through the selection process when they had already proven themselves to be outstanding?

I would argue that implementing such a method could negatively impact school leadership succession and, consequently, SSL, resulting in an unintended consequence. Reapplying for the principalship requires navigating the entire selection process again (OEB, 2022a), including taking the written exam and developing and presenting a strategic plan. This tedious process may discourage competent principals from applying for a second term. One can see evidence of this in the current study itself, which reported that serving principals lost the intention to continue as principals. This could lead to the departure of experienced principals and threaten the continuity and stability of the school leadership system. The process could also waste not only the time and energy of the principals but also that of those responsible for managing the selection process (Walker & Kwan, 2012; Romanowski et al., 2020) when the process lacks meaningful value to add.

Service as a deputy principal that receives preference for individuals who provided the service only when they scored the same as the other candidates in the principal competition means that the year of service as a deputy principal, whether for a long or short period, was of no value unless the candidate scored the same as the other candidates. However, Leaf and Odhiambo (2017) stated that deputy principals “perform... a huge range of tasks” (p. 33), which

may entail huge sacrifices. However, the current criterion did not identify much of this burden and scarification, rendering it unjust to those persons. Such a criterion also can result in the unfortunate likelihood of schools being led by less equipped individuals when more equipped leaders are available. Serving in the position of deputy principalship, according to Tahir et al. (2023), was about “being informally prepared for principalship” (p. 1). But making such persons compete with those who had not gone through such preparation might deprive schools and children of the opportunity to have such experienced leaders in their school. In effect, the criterion didn’t recognize “A Hidden Asset in Schools” (Jeffers et al., 2024, p. 1), the deputy principals, who may have a significant impact on school leadership productivity, student achievement, and hence school leadership sustainability.

Even the level to which the system valued service given as the deputy principalship was less than the value given to service as HoD, UL, Club, and Pedagogical Center Coordinator. This is because the document listed serving in the positions of HoD, UL, and Club or Pedagogical Center Coordinator as separate, optional, and mandatory items in the criterion that listed them. However, serving as deputy principal was not on the list, and the criterion was close to adding another option. This might show the less value placed on serving as a deputy principal. Taken together, this only reinforced Cranston et al.’s (2004, p. 225) notion of “forgotten leaders”. Writing from the South African context, Jansen and du Plessis (2023) stated that there seems to be “a lack of understanding regarding the complexities and difficulties within the role of the deputy principal” (p. 158), which could be the case in the Ethiopian education system too.

Requiring candidates to write a strategic plan can be helpful because it is a task they would do in school. For example, this makes the candidate get a sense of the strategic planning process. However, the requirement to write and present a strategic plan means measuring a skill that the

education system does not provide. The education system is eligible to use talents individuals got in any way. But requiring individual who have no any training about the issues to write strategic planning becomes a matter of measuring natural talent or accidental acquisition, which does not guarantee its continued existence and therefore does not support sustainability. While leadership is a practical exercise, the written exam as a selection tool also most likely measures academic performance, which may not support SSL well. Rather, this brings in academicians (Tekleselassie, 2002) who might not be perfectly capable educational leadership cadres.

The policy of not requiring leadership training to become a principal is in line with the finding of no training requirements in many countries and the decline of headship qualifications in England since 2013 (Bush, 2018a). This finding also appears to be largely consistent with the situation in South Africa, where there was no formal training for PCs or serving principals, as reported by Mestry (2017).

The finding of the current study that indicated less emphasis on deputy principalship may be consistent with Jansen and du Plessis's (2023) finding when they reported from the South African context that some key documents in the system "make more reference to the HoD than to the deputy principal, despite the fact that the deputy principal holds a more senior position than the HoD" (p. 158). The discrepancy might be that their study focused on the level of attention given to a role such as the HoD rather than the assistant principal position in the official documents, whereas the current study focuses on the selection criteria that placed a higher value on positions such as the HoD than on the deputy principal position. This finding of the current study is also consistent with the notion of "forgotten leaders" that Cranston et al. (2004) reported.

Discussion of Collective Capacity Policies Undermining SSL. Regarding the policy of deploying former school principals as teachers, policies in the Ethiopian education system stipulated that principals leaving their leadership positions be placed as teachers either at their former school or at a school of comparable or better status (OEB, 2022a). The system used to send principals to remote areas, especially those removed from their position for the reason of malpractice. That action created unfavorable conditions by demoting departing principals, who could have been placed in nearby schools based on their service. That action discouraged others from pursuing the role of principalship, which hindered the sustainability of school leadership in some way. Therefore, the policy of placing outgoing principals in their current school or a similar or better one is a good plan to encourage individuals to take on school leadership positions, thereby promoting school leadership stability and sustainability. At the very least, such a strategy did not dissuade individuals from becoming principals for fear of being assigned to schools in remote locations.

However, one can still raise concerns regarding the deployment of leaving school principals that can undermine SSL in certain ways. For instance, the current study reported that conditions of principals' redeployment to the teaching profession involve uncertainty rather than certainty, especially if their qualification is mainly in areas of educational administration. This could not provide motivation and energy to work as a teacher (Alexander et al., 2020). In general, such deployment conditions can deter the motivation and commitment of incumbent principals, discourage PCs from becoming principals, and de-motivate departing principals from working to their fullest potential.

Sustainable leadership also necessitates confronting individuals with performance problems and exerting positive pressure on one another to perform at the highest possible level,

including pressure the principals must exert on teachers to get them to do the job at the highest quality level (Lewis et al., 2016). However, assigning principals to the same school after leaving might cause them to hold back themselves during their leadership from putting pressure on teachers in order to protect their future social atmosphere. It is also questionable whether it is appropriate to deploy someone trained in educational leadership to teach school subjects. There was similar earlier development in the system in which subject teachers led schools while professional principals taught subjects in which they were not trained (Gurmu, 2020), which is not favorable for school leadership capability and sustainability.

Leaving school principals' assignment as teachers after working as school principals for many years also does not send a positive message, especially about the teaching profession. The existing policy in the Ethiopian education system officially recommended deploying former principals as teachers. In other education systems, such as those in the USA and Malaysia, principals have many options after leaving their positions, including working as teachers, moving to better schools, working in central or district offices, or serving as consultants to novice principals (Bétéille et al., 2012; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Tahir et al., 2019). It's true that in Ethiopia, too, departing principals can look for jobs in the private sector, including teaching, school leadership, and positions as school supervisors. But the observation is that the capacity of the private sector is limited (MoE, 2021). There are job types in the public sector that can invite school principals who are trained in a school subject area or educational leadership. However, taking on such a job can be challenging for them since it requires direct experience, which departing principals might lack. Therefore, teaching appears to be the most likely landing ground for principals who leave the principalship in the Ethiopian education system. However, this does

not portray teaching in a positive light, as it suggests that teaching is a job that principals take on when they lack other options.

The current study's finding about the policy of deploying leaving school principals as teachers largely agrees with previous studies that reported teaching as an option for leaving principals (Béteille et al., 2012; Boyce & Bowers, 2016). However, the finding regarding the policy of deploying departing principals as teachers is inconsistent with the findings of previous studies that offered alternatives such as transferring to better schools, working in central or district offices, or serving as consultants to novice principals (Béteille et al., 2012; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Tahir et al., 2019). Unlike policies in the Ethiopian education system that do not provide the option, Tahir et al.'s (2019) findings emphasized serving as consultants. Of course, the difference between the present study and the previous studies I am citing here is that the current policy focused on policy provision, while those previous studies reported on practical occurrences.

Discussion of Structure of Policies. Policies are a means of solving social problems, including those related to education and educational leadership (Liebman, 2013). Therefore, it is interesting to study whether the policies in the current educational system could support or undermine the realization of SSL, helping avoid problems of discontinuity and instability in school leadership, which the previous section addressed. The exploration of policy generality/specificity helps see whether policies are explicit, understandable, and easily translated into practical action (Brooks and Brooks, 2024; Viennet & Pont, 2017), and thus can positively affect SSL materialization. Brooks and Brooks (2024) noted that “[w]hen national policies are released, the guidance for educators working in the school system is explained through primary policy documents...that... set expectations for people, units, and processes in the

system” (p. 1611). This means that generic policies are accompanied by specific policy details, which might be useful for adopting SSL because specific policies can clearly direct implementers through the implementation process.

However, the current study reported that some policies the study investigated, such as those on school culture and even those on staff motivation and commitment, were national policies that lacked much detail. Even with those policies of apparently higher specificity, I repeatedly observed that policy provisions lacked the needed detail. This might prevent the full understanding and hence implementation of the policies that could hinder the realization of SSL. This is because "policy texts emerge with greater clarity", as Bell and Stevenson (2006) noted, "ultimately shape the operational practices that shape the experience of policy at the institutional level" (p. 23). However, policies that emerge with vagueness make implementation challenging, such as those the current study investigated.

Another issue that makes the consideration of policy specificity/generality interesting is the fact that policies are subject to sense-making and interpretation in the process of “translating policy requirements into practical action” (Cardno, 2018, p. 624). Brooks and Brooks (2024) asserted that “the way a principal interprets [and] implements...an educational policy is critical if the initiative is to bring about meaningful change in the school” (p. 1611). When policies are broad in scope, there is a substantial potential that school communities may misunderstand and misapply them. Some of the general policies considered in the current study were unavoidable, exhibited such limitation, and obviously constrained SSL materialization. Although the specific policies I examined in the study may help sense-making and aid in the flawless translation of ideas into reality, their lack of specificity to the needed level also could prevent them from

providing adequate clarity and hence warranted implementation, regardless of their specific nature.

In terms of policy structure across and within official documents, specifically distribution within a given document, a particular finding was that policies in both the body and preliminary section of a document aided in the materialization of SSL. This type of policy structuring is supportive of the adoption of SSL because it would help the documents to have a coordinated and thus unambiguous message about the policy direction, which can facilitate implementation. The second type of policy distribution structure was that policies in the preliminary sections were supportive or neutral, while the regulations in the main section of a document were supportive of the materialization of SSL. Such a policy structure could also make the supportive effect more evident. This is because the negative effect of the preliminary section might not change the overall effect of the policy on the materialization of SSL from positive to negative, since the policy in the main body was on the positive side and also more impactful than policy provision in the preliminary sections.

However, policies structured in such a way that the preliminary section supports the materialization of SSL, while policy provisions in the main section undermine it, could be worrisome. One may argue the negating provisions in two different sections of the documents might cancel each other out so that the communicative effect might be natural. The neutrality effect is not the one needed since the need for the guidelines is to help the materialization of SSL. But I would argue that there would be no chance for the materialization of SSL if the body of the document contained policies that undermined the materialization of SSL regardless of whether the preliminary section had or lacked support for its materialization of SSL. The preliminary sections provide only introductory remarks; however, the body of the policy delivers

the key messages of the document, making policy action more likely. Thus, the very structure of the policy in this way made the overall effect of the policy more undermining than supportive. Codd (1988) long ago observed that the document serves “as a vehicle for communication between... agents within the process” (p. 237). Since it is in the main body of a document that parties who provided the documents convey key policy messages, this leaves little or no room for the overall policy effect to be positive.

Regarding the distribution of policies across different documents, policies that promote the adoption of SSL are distributed across documents. It results in the message being repeated, and this repetition of the message can aid in the establishment of policies and, consequently, garner support for the implementation of SSL. Conversely, concentrating policies that inhibit SSL adoption in certain documents and key parts of documents can make those policies more visible and understandable. This can negatively impact SSL adoption (Harris & Hartman, 2002). Overall, I believe the concentrated policies of negative effect are more powerful than the repeated policies of positive effect. This could cause the overall structure to work against the implementation of SSL or, at the very least, hinder its adoption.

The distribution of policies can also consider the synchronization or discrepancy between the policies of federal agencies, such as the Ministry of Education, and the policies of regional agencies, such as Education Bureaus. In Ethiopia's federal system, regional states have the right to formulate their own policies within the framework of national policies (FDRE, 1995), which can result in different policy provisions for certain aspects considered in the current study. For instance, the Guidelines for the Placement of Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors No. 2/2012 recommended being a minimum of "lead teacher" (Civil Service Commission, 2019) to qualify for a principalship. Although Oromia was considered one of the regions with the resources to

adopt such a regulation in its original form, it lowered the requirement to "senior teacher" (OEB, 2022a) and made further amendments for women and pastoralist areas. While such variation might prevent a uniform understanding and practice, it allows for policy adoption according to regional realities. This reminds us to consider the actual effects of policy synchronization rather than judging it in a nutshell. In fact, the current study revealed little discrepancy between federal and regional policies beyond the few policies described herein.

According to Fan and Popkewitz (2020), an inextricable link exists between policy and time. Therefore, it is interesting to explore the effects of policies according to their timeline. The current exploration of policies actually revealed that the most recent ETP period had fewer resources for SSL implementation than the previous one. On the one hand, policies with an undermining effect primarily occurred within the most recent ETP period, and this caused the recent policies to have a more cumulative negative impact on SSL adoption than previous policy periods. On the other hand, policies from the previous ETP period, which spanned both policy periods, had an equally supportive or undermining effect on the implementation of SSL.

Policies that span two policy periods are interesting in and of themselves. Aside from past policies that overlapped with the implementation period of recent policies, there were initiatives from the recent policy period whose implementation began during a previous policy period. This obliterated the implementation boundary between the two policy periods, making it difficult to ascribe supporting or undermining effects on SSL materialization to specific policy periods. When Kiros (1990) wrote that "it is indeed sometimes difficult to ascertain which policies are in force at any given time... policies and plans... are not always systematically followed or implemented, making it difficult to link specific educational outcomes to specific policies" (p. 2), he appeared to note similar development. Such a claim could refer to

the difficulty of determining which policy was in effect at any given moment, as well as the difficulty of attributing specific policy outcomes to specific policies or, more broadly, to distinct policy periods. Gurm (2018) also noted a similar situation when he reported on the plan that deprofessionalized school leadership (Tekleselassie, 2002) that was implemented in the system starting from around 2001/2002, during which he asserted that the plan was "neither rigorously enforced nor officially dropped" (p. 355).

Such overlap of policy periods could result from hasty implementation of the latest policy recommendation before its formal launch. Areaya (2008) noted from the same educational context that "there has been ... a hasty paradigm shift, perhaps incompatible with the grassroots context, which in turn has led to repeated short-lived reforms in the education system" (p. 55). The author mentioned the inconsistency of policy changes with the practical realities of the system, which might also apply to current policies. For example, school principals' subject area qualifications did not match the complexity of the education system, potentially leaving principals incapable of solving the school system's problems. However, the government changed the last ETP after about 30 years of existence, so frequent education and training policy changes couldn't explain the development. Rather, it could be the hasty implementation of the latest policy recommendation that merged the time boundary of the previous policy into the latest one that could explain it.

One can argue that the early implementation of the recent policy recommendations showed the high level of readiness of the system, as officials implemented the policy recommendations immediately. However, studies (Moullin et al., 2019; Viennet & Pont, 2017) recommended making adequate preparations, including building consensus, creating readiness, and mobilizing resources to implement policies. The hasty implementation of policies appeared

to overlook this, for which I can cite evidence. For example, the Ministry of Education widely circulated the document of the study that underlay the policy, and stakeholders were providing feedback on it. However, the study group released the executive summary of the study before stakeholders' feedback reached the center and even before the planned consultative meetings meant to gather such feedback concluded. A stakeholder in one meeting that I, the present researcher, attended asked the purpose of the meeting of gathering feedback, given that the ministry had already released the executive summary of the study. One could argue the ETP was not issued at the time, although the study group did not release the executive summary, and hence this could allow for the incorporation of additional inputs. This can be a valid argument. But the fact that the study group released the executive summary before the feedback meant to enrich the study might make stakeholders feel unheard and undervalued. For instance, Areaya (2016) argued that "if the policy is to be implemented, teachers need to participate meaningfully and contribute to the policy decision and formulation" (p. 23), a recommendation that the policy consultation appeared not to take seriously.

Another example of the early implementation that was initiated without adequate preparation was the implementation of the curriculum. The findings of the current show that the Ministry of Education provided the curriculum framework in 2020, and the Oromia Education Bureau published the textbooks, at least some of them, in 2022. However, by 2024/2025, many schools lacked textbooks, and many other curriculum materials were not available. In fact, the bureau distributed textbooks in soft copy, perhaps to provide quick access to the books that students and student families could access on mobile devices. But a significant number of families might lack a device that could provide access to books in such a format. The distribution of mobile devices in the country could be in a better situation than before, but it was still

questionable whether all or even the majority of the families could afford to provide smart devices to their children that would allow them to access soft copy textbooks. Even most people who had access to smart mobile devices might live in cities and towns, and only a small proportion of smartphones might be in the hands of people living in rural areas, and only a handful of devices might be in the hands of primary school students. This could create inequalities between urban and rural and between poor and rich. The lack of access to books in such a format by many students from disadvantaged groups, when others could afford access not only to soft copies but also to hard copies, including those printed on high-resolution printers, actually raised an equity question. And this could not fit into adequate preparation to implement curriculum and the arrangement of materializing sustainability, as I already argued.

Viennet & Pont (2017) stated that “policy makers often do not give priority to implementation... decision makers tend to focus their efforts on formulating the policy, with little or no follow-up on how to make the policy *take effect in education*” (p. 11) (emphasis added). This could also apply to recent ETP implementation. This is because the system raced to implement the policy without appropriate preparatory time, even before the Council of Ministers ratified it.

Kiros (1990) reported from the same educational context that “educational ideals and goals so often eloquently expressed are rarely translated into action” (p. 2), which is connected with the finding of the current study. While the author’s argument that policies are often eloquently related to policy vagueness in the current study reported, his assertion was also about the impracticability of policies, which can strengthen the current study’s assertion that the policy structure can undermine the materialization of SSL. Similarly, Tekleselassie (2002), citing Ayalew and Osterling (1994), reported that “some of the guidelines are so incomprehensible that

most principals couldn't explain their purposes, let alone make use of them" (p. 63). This finding was about principals' inability to interpret and implement policy provisions because of the incomprehensibility of policies, and this is in line with the finding of the current study about policy vagueness the study considered. Of course, the author's assertion is also about the principals' lack of capacity to understand and utilize the policies, which can largely describe the subject area qualification of the principals that the current study reported. The irony was that the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) itself reported principals' inability to change the trajectory of student achievement and "translate additional resources into improved student learning outcomes" (p. 68) but promoted subject area qualification that could not provide them capability.

Therefore, the overall trend was that SSL policies in official Ethiopian educational documents were structured in a way that did not support the implementation of SSL. Specific undermining policies were more aggressive than general supportive policies, concentrated undermining policies were more powerful than scattered supporting policies, and policies with a recent ETP timeframe were less supportive than policies with a previous ETP.

Discussion of SSL Practices

This section will address discussion of practices of principals' succession, collective capacity and school culture.

Discussion of Succession Practice. This subsection will address leadership succession from the perspectives of PCs interested in assuming principalship and incumbent principals' intention to stay or leave school leadership positions.

Discussion of PCs Interest. Principal replacement is one of the basic ways to ensure continuity and sustainability of school leadership (Bush, 2008; Cieminski, 2018). Because of

this, many educational jurisdictions around the globe are "committed to recruiting and hiring highly qualified school leaders" (Lee & Mao, 2023, p. 6). However, the effort by education systems to replace school principals cannot be fruitful without PCs' interest in becoming principals (Lee & Mao, 202; Lemoine et al., 2018; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Unfortunately, the current study found that PCs in Sheger City were largely uninterested in becoming principals, which is not good for staffing school leadership positions or ensuring the sustainability of school leadership.

Studies (Lee & Mao, 2023; Mahfouz, 2020; Russell & Sabina, 2014) showed that the number of individuals with leadership qualifications outnumbers the number of empty school leadership posts in other educational systems, such as the United States. For instance, Lee and Mao (2023) reported that there are more "individuals with principal certification than open positions for them to fill; nonetheless, school districts still experience challenges in terms of recruiting suitable candidates" (p. 7). But two issues do exist. First, certified candidates who match the selection requirements may not be eligible because some preparation programs lack the rigor and relevance required to build the skills and professional socialization needed for the post (Palmer & Mullooly, 2015). Furthermore, adequately competent people may be unwilling to take on school leadership responsibilities (Lee & Mao, 2023; Mahfouz, 2020; Russell & Sabina, 2014; Walker & Qian, 2006).

This demonstrates that staffing school leadership positions has been challenging other, more established education systems too (Lee & Mao, 2020; Lemoine et al., 2018). However, the problem has a different version in this education system. Potential candidates in the Ethiopian education system were not required to undergo leadership training before assuming a school leadership position (OEB, 2022a). The pool of candidates consists of senior teachers and those of

above level who can meet the selection criteria. Such a policy standard makes the pool of candidates widely available, providing the education system with an opportunity to easily fill school leadership positions, at least when seen from the perspective of numbers. This is because teachers are widely available, which expands the opportunity for the education system to find candidates for school leadership positions. However, the lack of required leadership training among PCs could weaken the pool of potential school leaders compared to other education systems where PCs are required to undergo leadership training prior to assuming a school leadership position. However, the current study revealed not a simple lack of PCs, but rather their lack of interest in assuming principalship. Since interest cannot be predicted as easily as availability or possession of the necessary training, this puts the education system at a disadvantage.

The education system inevitably must have individuals in school leadership positions because the system must be operational, and the system can influence this through delegation or by encouraging individuals to assume a leadership position even if they do not have interest in assuming a school leadership position. However, such an arrangement can have its own drawbacks. For instance, individuals who are delegated may lack a sense of ownership, and individuals who are pressured into taking on a school leadership role may lack the motivation to do the job and sustain their efforts (Crow et al., 2017; Cruz-González et al., 2021; Ritacco & Bolivar, 2019). They may think that they will remain in the position until the education system finds a replacement, which could cast a shadow on their performance as school principals. These can challenge the productivity and sustainability of school leadership.

As one may imagine, PCs in the current study ascribed their lack of interest in assuming principalship to certain factors that can help the education system to explain the situation. The

burden and challenge of the job, the inadequacy of the salary, and the lack of adequate support and encouragement that principals receive explain the lack of interest among PCs in becoming principals. Teacher and principal compensation is a constant source of contention in the Ethiopian education system (Tefera, 1996), so its emergence as a factor in PC disinterest was to be expected. However, this did not imply that the financial incentive was the only factor explaining PCs' disinterest in becoming principals, as data from this same study demonstrated, nor did it imply that principals do not work for intrinsic reasons (Blaum & Tobin, 2019). Even participants in the current study praised the contributions principals made to school and student progress, despite the fact that the study could not observe this in action, by being translated to their desire to become principals. This provides evidence on the financial issue as one of the explanatory factors for PCs' disinterest in becoming principals.

Similar to the current study, other previous studies (Cieminski, 2018; Muñoz & Barber, 2011) have also identified issues such as the complexity of the job, the time it takes, and the high volume of paperwork as factors that affect principals' retention and PCs' interest in assuming school leadership positions. This suggests that the challenges that are pushing school leadership out of their positions and those keeping potential candidates away are taking global shape. And similarly, the current study's participants reported that lack of support constrained their interest in becoming principals, while studies have also reported that school principals must receive support from many educational stakeholders in order to work effectively and sustain their efforts (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Nilsson et al., 2022). The special situation of the current participants was that they complained about school principals' lack of adequate encouragement and support, which made them restrict themselves from becoming principals. This means that they did not want to become one of those incumbents who became ineffective as a result of a

lack of support and encouragement from different educational stakeholders, including education offices and educational supervisors.

Gurmu and Oumer (2023) reported from the same educational setting that the location of a school affects the interest of PCs in assuming the role of principal in Ethiopia. They asserted that PCs are more likely to take on the role of principal in a school located in a town, while a school's location in a remote area was known to deter their interest. Similarly, I initially thought that PCs' interest in becoming principals would depend on whether the sub-cities were departure or destination school sub-cities or their proximity to Addis Ababa. Data collected from one of the education offices in the research setting showed that 72 teachers applied for transfer to the Addis Ababa city administration in 2022/2023, of which 11 were successful. The Sheger City Education Office also transferred over 800 teachers from the current study context to Addis Ababa in 2023/2024 (SCEO, 2024). This pattern supported the basic notion of the possibility of teachers and principals moving to the city, and these would affect PCs' interest in assuming principalship. However, the study found no evidence that PCs were disinterested in accepting the principalship for the sake of such opportunities or for the reason of being in departure or destination school sub-cities. One reason for this condition might be that most individuals seeking urban transfers have relatively fewer years of experience and were not in the pool of PCs. Their significant experience might make relocation more difficult for those with many years of service.

One final issue is that practicing principals faced problems that turned PCs off from adopting the principalship. But PCs that were not in a position claimed that it influenced their desire to become principals. So, where did the PCs find them, and how did they feel about it? PCs could learn about the issues from personal experience, as some have already served as

school principals. Furthermore, ULs and HoDs might get valuable information about these issues from their involvement in school administration. They could also learn from their observations of individuals working as principals while they themselves were working as school teachers (Walker & Qian, 2006).

The present study's finding concerning PCs' disinterest in becoming principals is consistent with findings of earlier studies such as those by Walker & Qian (2006) which showed teachers were reluctant to embrace the daunting role of school principals. However, the finding of the current study contradicted the finding Gurmu (2020) reported, despite both studies sharing the same context. Unlike Gurmu's study, which found that the system was uninterested in certain eligible principals by denying them school principalship, the current study found that PCs were uninterested in taking on the role of school leadership. Shifting political landscapes and their influence on principal selection might partly explain the difference. Gurmu's (2020) study that revealed that political connections, more than professional qualifications, directly determined the selection of principals, was conducted during the EPRDF's tenure. Participants in Gurmu's study identified political ties as a significant factor affecting principal selection. Participants in the current study, however, did not report the interference of political influence in the selection of principals.

The other attribution for the difference between the findings of the two studies was the number of service years required to achieve principalship. The minimum service year required during Gurmu's (2020) study was three years. However, Public Service and Human Resource Development Bureau (2020) increased the service-year requirement to 14 years or senior teacher level. This had an implication for the differential benefits of becoming a principal and might translate into a differential interest in becoming a principal. The greater the difference between

the salary of teacher candidates and the base salary of principals, as has been the trend in the past, the more it could encourage a wider range of competition by attracting PCs to the competition. If such a difference is minimal, PCs might not be interested in becoming principals.

The findings of the current study also contradicted those of Khumalo and Serpo (2021) either. Their study, conducted in South Africa, reported school principalship posts' endemic buying and selling. As opposed to the scenario reported in the present study, PCs in the Khumalo and Serpo (2021) study exhibited a keen interest in posts of principalship. I attributed the differing findings between the two studies to the varying attractiveness of principalship in each setting.

The current study's findings on explaining factors are partly consistent with previous studies that reported a small pay gap between principals and teachers (Lemoine et al., 2018), as well as insufficient compensation for the increased workload and extended time required to perform a variety of duties (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Lemoine et al., 2018). It is also consistent with an Afework's (2015) study from the same context, which found that principals receive less support from educational authorities at different levels. After reviewing empirical studies, Lee and Mao (2023) attributed PCs' lack of interest in becoming principals to the school's location, student characteristics, financial incentives, working conditions, and hiring processes. Their findings are consistent with the current study's findings on issues such as financial incentives and working conditions. However, the current study did not find other factors, such as student characteristics and recruiting practices, to explain PC disinterest.

Studies by Palmer and Mullooly (2015) revealed an unreliable selection process that prevented brilliant candidates from being selected, while data from the current study did not clearly show the existence of this problem in the study context. However, since it is a developing

education system, capacity problems may exist, and the authors' argument may also apply to the Ethiopian education system. Some studies have also reported that principals use low-achieving schools as a stepping stone to acquire principalship in higher-achieving schools (Béteille et al., 2012; Boyce & Bowers, 2016). However, there were no data in the current study showing how school achievement affects PCs' interest in assuming principalship.

Discussion of Principals Intention. Maintaining competent school leaders is important for school effectiveness and student academic progress (Liu & Bellibas, 2018; Romanowski et al., 2020). However, the current study found that primary school principals planned to resign in fewer than five years. Some were waiting to be asked to leave, while others expected to remain as principals if conditions improved. Unfortunately, principals are often told to leave, which may indicate that those who base their resignation on such conditions could leave their leadership positions at any time. Principals who attributed their stay to an improvement in conditions could also leave. This was because the conditions they wished to improve were not the ones that could be easily improved or realized in a short period of time. Hence, their suggestion only indicates that they were likely to leave their leadership position.

Others were waiting for the right time to step away from their leadership roles. But they wanted to do so without causing instability in the school system or being associated with negative outcomes. I found this to be more interesting. Despite the potential instability and disruption that their final departure could cause, the way they intend to leave, however, could contribute to ensuring stable and sustainable school leadership. For example, departing without disagreement and producing instability can help to keep school leadership stable and hence sustainable. But the bold takeaway from such an assertion is the fact that individuals are concerned not just with their admittance into the principalship but also with their withdrawal

from it. I found this to be interesting, and it was what was rarely emphasized. This is because it speaks to the fact that not all principals want to turn the school leadership table upside down when they leave the position, making it uncomfortable for the next leader. Rather, some principals take care so that their departure does not cause instability and disrupt the functionality of the education system. I would argue that this is the kind of attitude the education system needs to encourage in its principals' workforce.

Some principals have been in their positions for some time, while others were appointed during their present term, yet both planned to depart school principalship. Either there was no difference in intention to leave or stay according to qualification area. Although principals who participated in the study were mainly subject graduates, there were also principals who graduated in the area of educational leadership. But there was no difference in their intention to stay or leave according to their qualification. Some of them even had the necessary readiness to leave, and this could increase the likelihood that they would quit leadership positions as per their intention. This suggested a looming shortage of experienced school leaders in the study context in certain future times, meaning the education system would be staffed with less experienced principals any time soon. However, this would have a negative impact on the educational system's functionality. For example, Wermke and Forsberg (2023) stated that "long educational and practical experience is necessary...in order to successfully solve various problems" (p. 67). However, the principal's intention in quitting the principalship can deprive them of extensive practical experience, implying principals lack the ability to manage educational problems.

The principal's intention to quit leadership is also likely to result in "principal turnover" (p. 87), which is concerning, as Snodgrass Rangel (2018) stated. This is because it carries with it many negative effects. For example, Buckman (2021) stated that "school's culture, climate, and

procedural organization are governed and developed by the principal, [and hence] the loss of a principal can rapidly disrupt these guiding philosophies” (p. 6). This lack of such principles can cause fragmentation and disorganization, which is not good for outstanding performance, especially students’ academic achievement. For example, Bartanen et al. (2019) reported that "principal turnover lowers school achievement by 0.03 SD in the next year, on average" (p. 350), which I think is a significant regression that must be avoided if possible.

Principal turnover can have a negative impact on student academic progress because it causes instability in the school system. For example, Béteille et al. (2012) affirmed that “frequently replacing principals may create instability in schools that can potentially undermine improvement efforts” (p. 904). And Carpenter et al. (2022) stated that “[n]egative results could accrue from a feeling of instability within a school after principal turnover” (p. 57). Instability that can occur following a principal change can be explained by factors such as a shift in school vision, a leadership style, and a change in school culture. Of course, the principal changes not only affect student factors but also teachers’ factors.

Of course, the principal changes not only affect students but also teachers. For example, Buckman (2021) reported that “the revolving door of the principalship begins the turnover sequence that trickles down to teachers,” which establishes a clear “relationship between teacher retention and principal retention” (p. 19). This shows that school principal retention is important for the school system and that principal turnover, caused by principals' intention to leave, can have a damaging effect on the proper functioning of the school system.

It is true that “principal longevity is not the only factor, by and large,” but “the longer a principal serves in a specific school building, the greater the positive impact on student success will be” (Essel, 2022, p. 22), which their intention to quit the school leadership position could

not serve. And it is an important factor to consider when trying to make school leadership stable and sustainable. Although intention to leave and its practical manifestation could be different, they are also closely connected, and hence intention is likely to cause disruption. As Nguyen et al. (2022) noted, “intention may be distinct from, but strongly related to, turnover” (p. 1). As a result, understanding why school principals intend to stay or leave their leadership roles is crucial to understanding why they stay and to understanding the stability and sustainability of school leadership.

The current study reported factors such as unappealing benefits, a heavy workload, job-related challenges, a lack of support, and limited opportunities for educational advancement as making incumbent principals intend to leave. Browne-Ferrigno (2016) noted that "leading contemporary schools requires careful attention to myriad and often complex tasks" (p. 151), and therefore the elements mentioned by the participants point to the complexity of the school leadership tasks that the author disclosed. Some of these factors, such as a heavy workload, job-related challenges, limited opportunities for educational advancement, and unappealing benefits, require policy intervention and may take longer to resolve. Others, such as a lack of support, can be more readily resolved if the education system, and specifically woreda/sub-city education offices seriously address them. However, such assertion must consider the resource and capacity problems that education offices might face in their attempts to do so.

Financial issues are always among the primary considerations in the selection and retention of school principals and used to explain their intention to stay or leave (Blackmore et al., 2024; Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011; UNESCO, 2024b). For example, UNESCO (2024b) stated that "financial compensation is an important motivating factor for attracting and retaining talented individuals in school principal positions" (p. 281). As a result, an

unsatisfactory wage package as an explanation for principals' unwillingness to remain in school leadership positions was not a baseless assertion. The problem is that the education system is less likely to resolve it given the moderate capacity of the national economy.

The educational opportunities associated with school principal positions used to attract individuals to school leadership positions (Gurmu, 2018; Tekleselassie, 2002). To provide background information, school principals in Ethiopia used to be given in-service training that would enable them to upgrade their educational qualifications, and this used to attract individuals to school leadership positions. However, this arrangement was replaced by the PGDSL training program in 2013, which was not a training that could change principals' qualifications. But PGDSL itself has a certain effect on principals' qualifications. The policy provided that principals who attended the PGDSL would be eligible to complete a master's degree in a shorter period of time, and the system recommended that the PGDSL have an interface with master's degree education (MoE, 2013a). However, the PGDSL arrangement has been dropped, and no other training that could help principals advance their qualification level has been instituted in its place. And this seemed to have dissuaded principals from staying in school leadership positions.

Other factors that explained incumbent principals' intervention to quit principalship were heavy workload, job-related challenges, and a lack of support (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Lee & Mao, 2023; Lemoine et al., 2018). I have mentioned this in relation to PC's disinterest in accepting the principalship. Rather, it is interesting to compare the factors that explained principals' intentions to leave principalship, those factors that explained PCs' interest in becoming principals, and the factors that made school staff less motivated and committed to their jobs. The burdens and challenges of the principalship that caused prospective candidates (PCs) to lose interest in the position also prevented current principals from staying in their roles. One

could also connect the low salary paid to principals, which discouraged PCs from assuming the position, with the rising cost of living, which participants explained as causing less motivation and commitment among staff. Again, one could associate the efforts directed elsewhere that caused staff to be less motivated and committed with the limited educational advancement opportunities that incumbent principals mentioned. Due to limited educational opportunities in the principalship, they directed their efforts toward learning business degrees, which explains their decreased motivation and commitment to schoolwork.

Such an analysis might reveal that the factors preventing school staff from being motivated and committed, the factors that disinterest PCs from assuming the principalship, and the factors causing school principals to intend to leave are connected by a complex web of relationships that operate in a multifaceted manner to affect the selection of PCs, the retention of principals, and the motivation and commitment of school staff. However, different weights may apply to the features different groups of participants described, regardless of the consistency of the factors. For example, the principal's assertion about the factor that caused them to leave has more credibility than the assertion of PCs about the factors that caused them disinterest in assuming principalship. This is because they explained it based on practical experience in school leadership, whereas PCs explain it based on perception, and even if they base the explanation on experience, their experiences with the factor may not be as direct as those of school principals.

The current study's finding that incumbent principals largely desire to depart principalship was consistent with the findings of some of the previous studies. For example, studies reported that “[t]he desire to lead and stay in a leadership position is not a position of choice; instead, it has become a position of challenge” (Zellner et al., 2002, p. 3) and that “principal turnover intention was at a historical high” (Liu & Bellibas, 2018, p. 1). These reports

were in line with the findings of the current study. However, the finding of the current study also contradicted the finding of some previous studies. For example, Nilsson et al. (2022) reported from a Swedish educational context that “83.5% of the school principals stated that they were able to work until 65 years of age and beyond” and “51.0% wanted to keep working until 65 years of age and beyond” (p. 12). However, the difference lies in the fact that the description of the authors participants appears to focus on physical strength or mental ability to work, whereas the participants in the current study emphasized the constraints posed by situational factors to prevent them from continuing to work as school principals. The context could explain the difference. Principals in Sweden might have a more comfortable working environment and benefits package than their counterparts in Ethiopia, so they might prefer to stay in their positions rather than to leave. Tekleselassie & Choi (2021, p. 1141) also reported from the USA context that “older principals tend to stay longer until terminal age necessitates retirement”. However, the principals in the current study expressed their desire to leave without variation according to their service year.

The factors that explained principals’ intention to quit principalship positions in the current study are consistent with those reported in previous studies. For example, Alexander et al. (2020) reported attrition factors including school-related factors (e.g., social relations and professional support), work-related factors (e.g., salary), and teacher- and student-related factors (e.g., commitment and engagement). One can connect heavy workloads and work-related challenges that the current study reported to factors such as commitment and engagement, maintenance of social relationships, and student management issues the author reported. The authors’ findings about professional support are consistent with the lack of support that

principals reported in the current study. One can also associate the authors' findings of the salary issue with the unappealing benefit packages that participants reported in the study.

Discussion of Practice of Collective Capacity. International literature suggests that the era of isolated school principals is over (Lambert, 2002) and that school success is now a collaborative effort (Davis-Singaravelu, 2022; Harris, 2011; Šimanskienė & Župerkienė, 2014; Spillane et al., 2004; Yue et al., 2021). As a result, it was appropriate to see school leadership as a collaborative endeavor (Eckert et al., 2024), which the current study investigated in terms of staff availability, qualifications, and motivation and commitment. The finding of the study revealed that school staff was largely available in needed numbers except for a serious lack of support staff, a lack of teachers in some subject areas, and some vacant deputy principalship positions. It was a wonderful thing that school staff was available in the needed number, or at least it was not serious enough to cause disruption, as some participants in the study described. In light of the Ministry of Education's acknowledgment that "educational institutions need to be equipped and empowered to perform their functions at the highest level and utilize available material, human, and financial resources" (p. 78), this achievement demonstrates the education system's commitment to fulfilling its human resource needs. And this could help the school system to deliver on its job.

However, this should not mask a lack of support personnel, a teacher deficit in specific subject areas, and an unfilled deputy principalship position, all of which might have a considerable detrimental impact on school productivity, school leadership stability, and sustainability. When evaluating staff availability, one should examine not only the fewness of school staff that are lacking but also the consequences that the lack would have on school productivity and school leadership sustainability. For example, the lack of one teacher can

impede the learning of hundreds of students (Hafeez, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Policy standards also specify the availability of support workers due to their contribution to school capacity, ability to supply appropriate services, and the extreme amount of jobs that can be left undone in their absence (Gurmu and Oumer, 2023; Johnson et al., 2016; Miller, 2018). This can affect school capability and sustainability.

Regarding the lack of school principals, the data from the current study suggested that one reason for vacant school leadership positions was the transfer of principals to other sectors. This has the potential to disturb the school's production and the sustainability of its leadership; thus, it should be a cause for concern. This also suggests that the educational system is struggling not only with its typical problems but also with conditions arising from other sectors, such as vacancies occurring as a result of principals' transfer to other sectors. During data collection, I constantly heard participants describe the effectiveness of the Transformation Committee, a committee comprised of heads from several sectors at the subcity level that was directing the development of subcities, in assisting with the fulfillment of education resources. However, it appeared that the committee could not help preventing principals from transferring to other sectors. True, the available human resources can be used to benefit communities wherever possible, including the deployment of educational personnel outside the education sector. This fact could explain why the committee remained silent on the issue. Nevertheless, the committee, the education office, and other stakeholders need to remain sensitive so that such a transfer of principals would not disrupt the stability of the school or the sustainability of school leadership.

Regarding the time it took to fill the school leadership position, education officials claimed that adherence to policy requirements prevented expedited filling. In contrast, PC participants suggested that the education office could speed up the staffing process despite the

existing policy. I believe it is essential to consider both ideas on their merits. Adherence to policy requirements may cost the education office time. For example, three rounds of advertising could take up to 30 consecutive days (OEB, 2022a). However, the education office can also speed up the selection process by announcing the vacancy immediately, screening candidates quickly, promptly grading exams, and generally swiftly moving from one stage of selection to the next.

In terms of staff qualification, teachers were sufficiently qualified at the current policy norm of having a diploma level, with a significant percentage being overqualified, which was an outstanding performance. However, the issue is not only whether teachers are qualified to the needed policy standard but also whether they are competent and feel confident teaching with their current qualifications. For example, Gurmu and Oumer (2023) reported that some teachers feel insecure teaching at the highest grade of primary or middle school. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) also stated that "teachers' current pedagogical skills are largely insufficient for effective teaching" (p. 118). This demonstrated teachers having problems teaching regardless of their fulfilling the required standard. Reis (2025) stated that "promoting teacher qualification appears to be an effective tool for improving the quality of education" (p. 1). Therefore, helping teachers to be qualified at the upper level is a matter of helping uplift the education system, beyond helping them to gain capability.

The biggest break in the school system's collective capacity was, however, the subject certification of principals while leading schools. A principal influences the work of hundreds of teachers and the learning of thousands of children, and hence even a single principal's lack of appropriate qualification has a significant impact. Their qualification in an area of one of the school subjects cannot provide the capacity and competency necessary for principals to sustainably lead their schools and sustain school leadership. Bush (2008) stated that "if principals

are expected to operate ethically, there is an equally strong moral case for them to receive specific preparation for their leadership and management roles” (p. 30). The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2021) itself asserted that “school leaders... face a lack of expertise in improving school quality and in identifying the inputs and actions that will lead to the results they seek” (p. 68). But their qualification changed from an area of school educational leadership to one of school subjects (Gurmu, 2018, 2020), which was not an expected action. The ministry also changed taking training in the area of educational leadership at the university level from a mandatory requirement to an optional endeavor (OEB, 2022a), which is not beneficial for SSL adoption.

Having the necessary number of school staff who are qualified at the needed level is a necessary but not sufficient condition for superior school performance. In addition to being available and qualified, the staff must also be motivated and committed to completing their work. Motivated and committed school staff help alleviate difficulties, stay focused, devote themselves to completion, and become more productive (Ma, 2022; Zhang et al., 2019). However, the most unfortunate finding of the current study was that school staff were not motivated or committed to school jobs. The study revealed that school staff was unwilling to handle jobs outside of classroom teaching, and they were unhappy with their performance quality. This could affect student academic performance, school productivity, and the stability and sustainability of school leadership.

Rising cost of living, students’ low motivation to learn, lack of access to services allowed, and the inadequacy and inequity of the services provided, as well as efforts directed elsewhere, explained low motivation and commitment. It is proper to first recognize the effort the region and specifically Sheger City have made to help teachers and school staff stay

motivated. The Oromia Region, specifically Sheger City, attempted to pay teachers' house rent and provide them with land on which to build houses. This could be one example of the way the system can value its employees. However, one can also understand the legitimacy of the complaints from teachers and principals about the inadequacy of the payment compared to existing living conditions. One can also sense the participants' frustration with the lack of access to the land service provision. However, the directive did not support requests for plots of land for each part of couples, so lower-level government and educational structures could not address their request, which means the problem cannot be resolved, at least in a shorter period of time. The teachers were even aware of this situation. But their struggle was not only about provisions within the existing directive but also about questioning the directive itself. More important than whether their requests fell within the existing directive or whether lower education and administrative levels could solve them was whether those situations were affecting the working atmosphere and leadership of the school. It practically affected their motivation and commitment, preventing them from performing at their highest level. Therefore, the responsible parties needed to address the issue. Overall, improving staff motivation and commitment is extremely important, but this description communicates the heavy task that the education system must undertake to achieve it.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of some previous studies. For example, Abebe (2012) reported on the same educational context, stating that "teacher shortages, poor motivation... and lack of appropriate facilities for teachers, especially in rural areas, are the major challenges around teacher management" (p. 14). While the current study did not identify a lack of appropriate facilities for teachers, as Abebe's study did, the author's findings about teacher shortages and poor motivation concurred with those of the current study. Abebe (2012)

also asserted that there is "low teacher morale, high levels of teacher absenteeism and loss of desire to continue in the profession" (p. 14). While the author's report of a loss of desire to continue in the profession concurred with the finding that teachers and principals were being prepared to leave teaching, as reported in the current study, the current study did not identify teacher absenteeism. The author's finding about low teacher morale was also in line with the current study's finding about teachers' decreased motivation and commitment. The shortage of staff could also connect with the projection of "a shortage of educational personnel over the next 10 to 15 years" (Cordeiro & Cunningham, 2014, p. 144).

Student less motivation as a factor of staff less motivation and commitment is also in line with Alexander et al.'s (2020) report of less commitment and engagement of students as a fact that explains attrition. Although the author's report was about teacher attrition, it can largely be applied to principals' attrition as well. From the same education setting, Abebe (2012) also reported some principals "do not have the skills to take on this challenge" (p. 15), which is in line with the report of the current study about the necessity of qualifying principals at a high level. The finding of the current study is also not in line with the recommendation of a bachelor's degree qualification for primary school teachers that the African teacher quality, comparability, and international mobility framework recommended (African Union Commission, 2019).

Discussion of Practice of School Culture. When discussing the values that defined school life, participants typically alluded to what were known as the 12 values. I attempted to access the Civil Service Commission's website to see if they were still in promotion and if the types and numbers of items included were the same. I chose the Civil Service Commission because the 12 values associated with civil service reform originated there. But I was unable to visit their website.

Of course, the Ministry of Education reduced the number of core values from 12 to only three about four years ago and provided “good governance, expressed in terms of accountability and shared responsibility, reliance on standards and other measures of quality and productivity,” equity, and excellence as “values of the education and training system (policies, instructions, plans)” (MoE, 2021, p. 28). The list was small compared to the previous list of 12 values and included only three items: good governance, equity, and excellence. Of course, the argument about the reduction of the list should consider the fact that the ministry expressed values such as “good governance” in terms of other values such as accountability, shared responsibility, and standardized practice, which were previously more or less stand-alone values. According to the ministry, the values guide education-related policies, instructions, and plans. This might require educational institutions to embrace these values. But the schools still kept talking about twelve values at the time of the study. This appeared to be a lack of up-to-date information.

Reduction of the number of items may have been based on the assumption that 12 values would be too many and would be difficult for schools and other substructures not only to implement but also to remember. However, the list of three items could be very general to inform the functioning of schools. This could be the reason the most recent education and training policy has identified six values to guide education and training policy: quality and relevance, decentralization, transparency and responsiveness, secularism, management by results, and use of modern technology and competitiveness (FDRE, 2023). While this expanded the three values that were provided in 2021 to six, perhaps in place of the 12 values, it also included secularism and the use of modern technology and competitiveness afresh as part of the education and training values, which were not part of the twelve values that had been promoted by the Civil Service Commission and the then Ministry of Civil Service and Human Resources Development.

Regardless of the difference in individual items, the number of values the Ministry of Education promoted was the same as the number of values the Ministry of Planning and Development (<https://www.mopd.gov.et/en/>, 2025) promoted: “Communication, Professionalism, Integrity, Drive, Innovation (Not Imitation), and Excellence.” Although these can serve as school values and provide the foundation of school culture, the current study revealed that they were not being used to define school culture. What I understood from all those situations was the fact that the so-called 12 values were not at work.

After acquiring this knowledge, I delved deeper into the issue, uncovering more values. The values supplied by participants, including self-reliance, academic achievement, diversity, pride in teaching, and tolerance, are consistent with the Ministry of Education's (MoE, 2021) cultural policy recommendations. When paired with other cultural techniques, these ideals can help schools become more productive. Kaplan and Owings (2013) indicated that “school improvement occurs when multiple elements are in place, including strong school leadership, a safe and stimulating learning climate, strong ethical and trusting relationships, [and] increased teachers’ professional capacity” but they argued that “these features cannot occur without supportive, shared school culture norms” (p. 25). This suggested the centrality of school values in this endeavor.

However, what mattered was not the number or type of values mentioned, but whether the values were actually at work. Hoy and Miskel (2013) stated that "the most important thing about events in organizations is... what the events mean" (p. 178) and whether they could define organizational life. The interview and observation data revealed that the school community did not share the values, let alone their defining school life. For example, the data indicated that success in generating resources was solely due to the principals' efforts. While it is excellent that

the school has such a principal, the value the principal highlighted did not mirror the school's shared value. Similarly, the issue of tolerance that the participants raised could not present credible proof that it was the result of school shared effort. The same study presented evidence to the contrary to pride in teaching that participant mention as value that define the schools. Staff motivation and commitment were poor, and there were indications that teachers were fostering conditions that would allow them to quit the teaching profession. As a result, the values the participant indicated were hollow words of desire or success on the part of a single individual, rather than ideals shared by the school community.

Studies (Dinham & Crowther, 2011; Hanselman et al., 2016; Šimanskienė & Župerkienė, 2014) suggested that effective school leadership requires a collaborative spirit within the school community. However, a lack of cooperation within the school community in the study setting might imperil such an attempt. It was the values that may generate such a cooperative spirit, but schools lacked shared value. While one also expects school principals and school communities to strongly engage in school culture creation and maintenance, there were two fundamental questions in this respect that one must ask, one of which was whether the school community, particularly principals, had resources at their disposal to engage in such an endeavor. The second was that the examination of cultural policies revealed a lack of clear rules to lead principals through the process. This indicates that principals were not in a position to establish and preserve school culture, which data from the current study also clearly established.

Failure to create an appropriate school culture is essentially a failure to plan how to do the job of running a school, which could deprive the school of many benefits. Stambach (2016, p. 490), for example, "conceptual[izes] culture as a way of doing things, as a relational social space of action... [and] as people's more or less planned social arrangements". However, the lack of a

concerted effort by the school community, particularly the principals, to create school culture means that the school lacks a planned way of doing things and lacks planned social arrangements. The lack of planned social arrangements also means that the teaching and learning processes, and specifically the leadership, were happening haphazardly. This cannot guarantee academic success for students, productivity for the school, or sustainability for the leadership. Hoy and Miskel (2013) stated, “Organizational cultures enhance stability in the social system by providing the social glue that binds the organization together” (p. 178). This means that a school without an appropriate school culture is fragmented and could pose a challenge to leadership. The implication is that school principals themselves would be victims of their failure to create and maintain a school culture, although study participants took it as an extra task.

Basically, “the relationship between leadership and school culture is central” (Plaku & Leka, 2025, p. 1) to leadership influence and that “effective school leaders play a significant, deliberate, and conscious role in building school culture” (Teng & Zhang, 2019, p. 169). Hence, the lack of effort to create and maintain school culture in the study context could prevent culture from taking such a central role. The most unfortunate thing was that leaders cannot be effective in moving the school community without the instrumentation of school culture. As Sulistiono and Winingsih (2020) stated, “A leader who does not have the ability to move his subordinates tends to lead to passivity, stagnation, and underdevelopment towards progress” (p. 134), as school culture serves as the “software of the mind” (Hofstede et al., 2010, as cited in McChesney & Cross, 2023, p. 789), “shaping people’s behaviors” (McChesney & Cross, 2023, p. 789).

This finding of school culture of the current study is consistent with Plaku and Leak’s (2025) assertion of “schools with a negative culture” that “exhibit manifestations such as indifference [and] fragmentation” (p. 1). However, it is also not consistent with factors Taajamo

et al. (2023) reported in TALIS 2018 data, such as “[c]ollaboration and sharing in relationships” (p. 18), and it was also inconsistent with Plaku and Leak’s (2025) report that “schools characterized by a positive culture cultivate a benevolent and productive environment, fostering satisfaction among staff” (p. 1). This disparity might be explained by disparities in principal training, skills, and competencies, as well as variances in the resources available to school principals.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter summarizes the key findings, draws conclusions, and provides implications.

Summary of Major Findings

This study looked into the anatomy of policies and manifestation of practices of SSL in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia, using a case study design. It examined the policies and practices in terms of school leadership succession, collective capability, and school culture.

The study sought to answer the following two broad basic questions:

- How the anatomy of policies of sustainable primary school leadership does reveal itself in the Ethiopia education system?
- How do practices of SSL manifest in Sheger City, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia?

I used about 10 major official documents and twenty four key informants, including PCs, school principals, and educational officers, as data sources. I selected key informants using the purposive sampling technique based on their having extensive information and capability to provide relevant data. But I selected the official documents based on the criteria that they were official documents, had relevant contents, and were functional at the time of the study. The data collection tools included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observation and field notes to a lesser extent. I coded the acquired data structurally and analyzed it using a combination of content and thematic analysis. I summarized the findings of the study as follows.

Status of Policies in Supporting or Undermining SSL

The study found that policies of SSL in this educational setting both supported and undermined the implementation of SSL, which I summarize separately.

Finding Related to Policies Supporting SSL

- In general, some principal succession policies, collective capacity and all school culture policies supported the materialization of SSL.
- The principals' succession policies that supported the materialization of SSL included selection criteria that required participation in CPD, serving in a quasi-leadership position such as HoD and UL, and requiring teachers with high performance appraisal scores to become principals. Such policies could help develop a pool of potential candidates to a certain extent from which competent school leaders could be selected, thereby helping to ensure the sustainability of school leadership.
- The policies also sought to attract more experienced teachers to school leadership by requiring senior teachers and those above senior teachers to take on school principalship. Such policies helped select principals who could provide effective school leadership, thereby improving stability and sustainability. The policies also promoted gender equity in school leadership, which could make the school leadership system more equitable and sustainable.
- The collective capacity policies recommended staff availability in needed numbers and quality and provision to deploy more school principals (deputy principals) according to the number of students and workload. It also provided a structure that could help deploy more support staff to the school site. Besides, the policies required the staff to demonstrate higher levels of motivation and commitment. These can contribute to the timely completion and quality delivery of school leadership, which can help sustainability in schools.
- Policies of school culture also provided prescriptions to foster a sharing of values, such as appreciation of diversity, representation, inclusion, and plurality. Such values could provide a foundation for a healthy school culture to develop that would sustain school leadership.

Policies also supported the development of a culture of professional connections, excellence, good communication, and engagement among school staff. The development of these assets could boost the school community's cooperative spirit and encourage stability in the schools and sustainability of the school leadership.

- However, these policies contained several characteristics that might prevent them from fully supporting the materialization of SSL. For instance, CPD, when used as part of the selection criteria for principals, had incapacitating problems. Policies that recruit and deploy women as school principals exposed them to challenges that might prevent others from becoming principals. These could prevent the policies from providing ideal resources or power for the stability and capacity of school leadership. Collective capacity policies, such as those concerning motivation and commitment, were overly broad, which could hinder their implementation. The top-down implementation of cultural policies also prevents them from functioning optimally, and there was no specific guideline that would help turn it into action.

Finding Related to Policies Undermining SSL

- The study also found that some policies related to principal succession and collective capacity undermined the implementation of SSL.
- The principals' selection criteria undervalued experience as a deputy principal by systematically limiting candidates with such experience to using it only if their score was equal to that of other candidates in the competition.
- The policies prescribed subject area qualifications for principals when the qualification that could provide high capability was in educational administration or leadership. The qualification of principals basically determines whether they have or lack the capability and

competency to assume a school leadership position and is therefore a critical factor to consider and a major collapse in school leadership sustainability.

- The policy limited individuals' service as principals to two terms, even when they could serve longer, which had an undermining effect on the realization of SSL. This could result in the waste of resources invested in their training and the loss of their cumulative experience and knowledge, which limits individuals' contributions to SSL and could create instability in school leadership that, could undermine SSL.
- These policies also removed incumbent principals from their positions without giving them adequate time to improve, which could create instability in the school leadership system, and this had an undermining effect on the realization of SSL.
- The policy provision on the way of deploying departing principals also could influence the motivation and commitment of incumbent principals and discourage PCs from becoming principals. This could disrupt school leadership sustainability by constantly weeding out school leaders, including competent ones, creating instability in the education system and affecting school leadership sustainability.
- Collective capacity policies rewarded outstanding principals who were leaving the school leadership system when it was supposed to encourage their stay.

Finding Related to Policies Structure

- The study found that policies that supported the realization of SSL were general, scattered through documents, and issued in the past. However, policies that undermined the realization of SSL were specific, issued recently, and concentrated in particular documents.
- Although the past policies considered in the study were still functional, policies issued more recently than in the past largely determined the outcome. Specific policies that largely

undermined SSL were more powerful than general supportive policies, and a concentrated policy structure may provide more force than a scattered one. This made the overall effect to lean towards policies undermining the materialization of SSL.

Finding Related to Manifestation of SSL Practices

- Potential candidates were largely uninterested in becoming principals, working against school leadership sustainability. The most significant factors that explained PCs' disinterest in becoming principals were unappealing benefits, workloads and job-related challenges, lack of support, and limited opportunities for educational advancement.
- Incumbent principals were unwilling to stay long; most of them intended to quit in less than five years, meaning they intended to leave without completing their first term as principals. This could immensely disrupt SSL. The most significant factors that explained their unwillingness to stay were unappealing benefits, a heavy workload, job-related challenges, a lack of support, and limited opportunities for educational advancement.
- Regarding collective capacity, the study found that there was a scarcity of teachers in certain subjects, and support staff was largely lacking, which otherwise could provide school leadership capacity and, hence, sustainability. Although the existing qualification levels conform to the policy standard, evidence also showed that the qualifications of primary school teachers and principals were inadequate.
- Also, there was a serious problem of staff motivation and commitment to their jobs. Teachers and principals were doing their best to leave the system by pursuing degrees in subjects such as business, misguiding their efforts rather than being motivated to pursue teaching and committed to school and school leadership business. The rising cost of living, students' low motivation to learn, lack of access to authorized services, inadequacy and inequity of services

being provided, and efforts directed elsewhere were factors that explained the low motivation and commitment of the staff.

- The manifestation of proper culture in the schools in the study context was largely lacking. Participants in the study, including principals, had difficulty understanding school culture to an ideal level, let alone exercising it and reporting its practice. This clearly communicated the unfavorable state of school culture in primary schools in the study context.

Conclusion

The findings of the current study demonstrated that policies ensured the necessary number and quality of school staff, as well as the deployment of more school principals according to the number of students. It also recommended that the school staff maintain a high level of motivation and commitment, share appropriate values, and develop a cooperative spirit. Principals' selection policies also required three years of CPD participation, having certain leadership experience, receiving high performance appraisal scores, and reaching a high level on the teacher career ladder to assume principalship. Such policy provisions made policies in this educational context appear to support the implementation of SSL. However, SSL-related policies actually undermine the materialization of SSL or at least lack the capacity or force that would enable the realization of SSL when seen in a nutshell.

On the one hand, other policies, such as policies of subject area qualifications for principals, those that limited individuals' service as principals to two terms, those that rewarded the departure of competent principals rather than encouraging their stay, and policies that undervalued serving as a deputy principal, aggressively undermined the materialization of SSL. On the other hand, those policies that appeared to support SSL themselves did not provide ideal support for SSL manifestation. For example, principals' selection included less relevant criteria,

such as career ladder and teaching experience; policies of school motivation and commitment were general, which had far less practical value; and school culture policies were those provided from above that could challenge their practical implementation. This kind of policy influence caused policies to lean toward undermining the implementation of SSL, or at least not supporting it. This left the process of sustaining school leadership in a suspicious atmosphere.

Of course, the fact that the Ethiopian education system had no explicit policy provision regarding SSL and remained silent about it also suggested a lack of interest in it, although it is such a critical subject that one cannot imagine student academic progress, school productivity, or school stability without it. The structure of related policies also did not inspire optimism for the realization of SSL. The fact that more recent rather than past policies largely determine the outcome, specific policies that were more powerful than general ones to influence SSL, and concentrated policies that gained more force than scattered ones to negatively influence SSL reinforced the assertion that policies undermine or at least did not provide resources or force for the implementation of SSL.

The study also revealed that incumbent principals were ready to step down when the PCs, who were supposed to accept responsibility and replace the principals, were not ready to step in. This suggests a high likelihood of a leadership vacuum in the school. While the subject area qualifications of the principals did not provide a base for school leadership capacity, there was evidence that justifies that teachers should be qualified at the highest level. To make the matter worse, they lacked motivation and commitment, were unwilling to complete assignments outside the regular classroom, and wanted to continue working by achieving the minimum threshold while putting forth every effort to learn business degrees and change jobs. The school community struggled to understand school culture, let alone ideal exercising. This situation

demonstrated a high probability that school leadership would become mechanical and devoid of the soul and spirit of leadership that enables leaders to attend to the internal sense of school community. These findings of practical manifestation of SSL also demonstrated that the practical manifestation of SSL was in serious jeopardy.

Implications

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, I present the implications of findings of the study. I classified these as implications for SSL practice, policies, and research.

Implication for Practice

- Many school principals intend to leave their positions. Therefore, woreda education offices should encourage them to stay in their jobs by trying to understand their concerns and closely supporting them.
- PCs were not interested in school leadership positions. Thus, woreda education offices should design strategies to attract PCs to school leadership positions. For example, the office should assign qualified PCs to various leadership positions in schools so that they get familiar with and prepared to take on the role of school principal. This can introduce them to school leadership roles and pique their interest in becoming principals.
- The study also revealed that the school community was largely unmotivated and uncommitted to their jobs that require closer attention. The implications for woreda education offices include collaborating with various stakeholders to address de-motivational factors and improve staff motivation.
- The study found that female teachers are increasingly underrepresented in the profession of school principals. As a result, the woreda education office should promote more women to

take up school leadership roles, which can be accomplished through training and consultation.

- The implication is also for increasing the collective capacity of schools through different avenues, including short-term training and strengthening the existing CPD program.

Implication for Policies

- There were no policies in the Ethiopian educational setting that were provided in the name of SSL. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureaus should be attentive to the issue and provide policies that directly deal with it.
- The finding of the study also indicated that policies did not recommend proper professional qualification and identity of school principals. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should revisit the area of qualification of school principals so that they can be qualified in the appropriate subject of educational leadership to make school leadership sustainable.
- There are also implications for providing policies that extend the tenure of school principals and possibly remove it to enable principals to remain in school leadership for a longer time as long as they continue to be productive.
- There is also an implication to be drawn from the findings of the study for the provision of more relevant selection criteria for principals. Specifically, the value of serving as a deputy principal should be increased in the selection process for school principals.
- The Ministry of Education and Education Bureau should improve the organization of the selection committee so that it reflects the community and stakeholders that the schools and specifically the school principal serve. At least it should included PSTA representative.
- The implication is also for the Ministry of Education to provide a manual that will guide school principals through the complex processes of cultural creation, maintenance, and

transformation. This is critical because principals are subject graduates who lack the skills and resources necessary for cultural creation.

- The study findings also imply the need to reconsider motivation and commitment policies and provide mechanisms to ensure high staff motivation and commitment.

Implication for Research

- There is limited literature on SSL when it is a novel subject with an imprecise definition and unclear dimensions. As a result, scholars should do theoretical and empirical research on the subject matter, thus aiding theoretical clarity and practical implementation.
- The current study revealed several SSL issues, including staff apathy, the intention of principals to leave, the lack of interest among potential candidates to step in, problems in school culture, and the improper qualifications of school principals. This paves the way for future studies to target these issues to help the development and implementation of SSL.
- As an unusual attempt, the current study exposed several SSL issues. However, further research is also necessary to determine why SSL problems occurred, how they happened, and how to solve them. As a result, the findings of the current study have implications for future studies that address issues of SSL and expose SSL problems to promote their understanding and help their resolution.
- The Ministry of Education, Oromia Education Bureau, Woreda Education Offices, PhD students in educational policy and leadership, and other researchers can address this by targeting more variables, widening the study context, and using different methodological approaches. There is also an implication to be drawn from the underdeveloped research landscape of SSL that education development partners and other educational stakeholders would assist this initiative.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Consent Form

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Educational Planning and Management

Interview Consent Form

The purpose of this consent form is to obtain your permission to take part in the study entitled “Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices”. You have been selected for this interview because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal of information about the issue under study.

Investigator: Tesfaye Gemechu Gurmu, Addis Ababa University

1. You are kindly asked to participate in the study.
2. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer interview questions at your school. This will normally take about an hour.
3. You will also be asked for your permission to record the interview. For your information, there are two ways I can record our conversation. One is by tape and the other is by handwriting. If you are willing, I would like to tape our conversations in order to use our time efficiently and increase the accuracy of the recording. Otherwise, I will have to do it manually. The information recorded, either on tape or manually, will be used for academic purposes only and will be transcribed using codes to ensure anonymity.
4. The likelihood of harm from participating in this study is no greater than the emotional discomfort you may experience from answering the interview questions.
5. There is no alternative procedure.
6. You may withdraw at any time if you so choose and have right not to respond to item.
7. There will be no compensation for your participation.

I expect that you will be willing to take part in the study. If you are willing to take as per my request please sign this form and return. Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this interview!

Participant's Name Signature..... Date

Appendix II: Interview Protocol for Potential Candidates (English)

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Educational Planning and Management

Interview Protocol for Potential Candidates

Dear Participants!

The purpose of this interview is to collect data for the study entitled " Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices ". In order to collect the data, individuals like you who are believed to have significant information on the subject matter have been selected for interviews. Therefore, you are kindly requested to respond honestly to the interview items. Thank you in advance for your time.

Background Information

1. What is your highest education level?
2. What is your field of study?
3. How long have you been a primary school teacher?

Main Items

1. Please tell me a little about your life as a primary school teacher.
2. Provide me with details about the kind of school culture that characterize your school. Can you provide examples?
3. Provide me with details on your perceptions of school leadership. How would you understand the merits and demerits of being a school principal? What describe this?
4. Please tell me about your interest in becoming a primary school principal. What explain your interest or lack of interest?
5. Those were the questions I wanted to ask. But before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding the issues under consideration?

Thank you again for your kind cooperation!

Appendix III: Interview Protocol for Principals (English)

**Addis Ababa University
College of Education and Behavioral Studies
Department of Educational Planning and Management
Interview protocol for School Principals**

Dear Participants!

The purpose of this interview is to collect data for the study entitled " Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices ". In order to collect the data, individuals like you who are believed to have significant information on the subject matter have been selected for interviews. Therefore, you are kindly requested to respond honestly to the interview items. Thank you in advance for your time and willingness to take part in this study.

Background Information

1. What is your highest education level?
2. What is your field of study?
3. What training have you received related to school leadership?
4. How long have you been a primary school principal?

Main Items

1. Please give me details of how you are living a primary school principalship.
2. Can provided me with the detail of the kind of support you receive from education office?
3. Provide me with details on the state of the human resources of your school. What describes their motivation (willingness) and commitment (dedication) to do the job?
4. Please tell me about the kind of shared values that characterize your staff. What are the indicators?
5. Please give me a broader view of the kind of collaborative spirit that describes your school. What are the facilitators and barriers?
6. Provided me with the detail of interest of potential candidates to assume primary school principalship?
7. Can you provide me with the details of how long you would like to stay in school leadership? What situations or factors make you think you will stay this long?
8. Those were all the questions I wanted to ask. But before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share about the issues under consideration?

Appendix IV: Interview Protocol for Educational Officers (English)

Addis Ababa University

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Educational Planning and Management

Interview Protocol for Education Officers

Dear Participants!

The purpose of this interview is to collect data for the study entitled " Sustainable Primary School Leadership in Sheger City, Ethiopia: the Anatomy of Policies and Manifestation of Practices ". In order to collect the data, individuals like you who are believed to have significant information on the subject matter have been selected for interviews. Therefore, you are kindly requested to respond honestly to the interview items. Thank you in advance for your time and willingness to take part in this study.

Background Information

1. What is your highest educational qualification?
2. What is your area of specialization?
3. How long have you been an education officer?

Main Items

1. Please provide details about the capacity of primary school principals of your Subcity.
2. Tell me about the way the education office supports primary schools and principals.
3. Please share with me the availability of primary school staff in your sub-city. What is the reason for this level of availability?
4. Please tell me about the kind culture that characterizes primary schools of this sub-city.
6. Share with me the interest of potential candidates in the sub-city in becoming primary school principals. What are the conditions that explain their interest or lack of interest?
7. How do you explain the intention of incumbent to remain in school leadership? What are the explaining factors?
8. These were all the questions I wanted to ask. But before we finish, is there anything else you would like to share about the issues under consideration regarding their prevalence in your sub-city?

Thank you again for your cooperation!

Appendix V: Checklist for Documents Analysis (English)

College of Education and Behavioral Studies

Department of Educational Planning and Management

Checklist for Documents Analysis

The document analysis will examine how issues related to the sustainability of school leadership are represented in official documents. The analysis will be guided by the following questions.

1. What do official documents say, directly or indirectly, about the sustainability in school leadership?
2. What standards does the policy document provide regarding the processes of school leadership succession (selection, deployments, retention etc.)?
3. What kind of collective capacities is portrayed in official documents?
4. What level of support is recommended to strengthen primary school leadership?
5. What kind of collaborative climate does the official document envision?
6. How policies are configured in line with promoting and promoting SSL?
7. How consistent or inconsistent are the policy statements on these aspects from document to document?

Appendix VI: Interview Protocol for Potential Candidates (Afan Oromo)

Yuunivarsiitii Addis Ababaa Kolleejjii Barnootaa fi Qorannoo Amala Muummee Karooraa fi Hoggansa Barnootaa

Af-gaaffii Warra Kaadhimamtoota Ta'uu Danda'aniif Dhiyaatee

Kabajamtoota Hirmaattota!

Kaayyoon af-gaaffii kanaa qorannoo mata dureen isaa "Itti Fufiinsa Hooggansa Manneen Barnootaa Sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} Magaala Sheger, Itiyooophiyaa: Caasaa (Dhaabbannaa) Sirna fi Argama Dalagaa" jedhuuf ragaa walitti qabuu dha. Ragaa kana walitti qabuuf namoonni akka keessanii dhimma kana irratti odeeffannoo gahaa qaban jedhamanii amanaman af-gaaffiidhaaf filatamanii jiru. Kanaafuu af-gaaffii gaafatamantiif deebii haqa-qabeessa kennun dhugooma qorannoo kanaa akka deggartanan kabajaan isin gaafadha. Yeroo fi hirmaachuuf fedhii horachuu keessaniif dursee galatoomaa!

Odeeffannoo Duraa

1. Sadarkaan barnootaa keessan inni ol'anaan maal?
2. Gosni barnootaa ittiin eebbifamtan maal?
3. Barsiisaa sadarkaa tokkoffaa taatanii bara hammamii hojjettanii jirtu?

Gaaffilee Wiirtuu

1. Mee waa'ee jireenya isin akka barsiisaa mana barumsaa sadarkaa tokkoffaati jiraachaa jirtan xiqqoo natti himaa?
2. Mee amma immoo waa'ee aadaa mana barumsa keessanii ibsuu danada'uu natty himaa. Fakkeenya kennuu dandessuu?
3. Mee hubannoo /perception/ waa'ee hoggansa mana barumsaa qabdan bal'inaan naaf qoodaa. Kana maaltu ibsa?
4. Mee isin dura bu'aa mana barumsaa sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} ta'uuf fedhii qabdan natti himaa. Fedhii qabaachuu ykn dhabuu keessan maaltu ibsa?
5. Gaaffiileen ani gaafachuu barbaade isaanuma kana turan. Garuu osoo af-gaaffii kana hin xumurin dura dhimmoota irratti wal dubbachaa turree waliin walqabatee wantoonni biroo naaf qooduu barbaaddan jiruu?

Tumsa nuuf gootaniif irra deebiin baay'ee galatoomaa!

Appendix VII: Interview Protocol for Principals (Afan Oromo)

Yuunivarsiitii Addis Ababaa

Koleejjii Barnootaa fi Qorannoo Amala

Muummee Karooraa fi Hoggansa Barnootaa

Af-gaaffii Dura Bu'oota Manneen Barnootaa Sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} Dhiyaate

Kabajamtoota Hirmaattota!

Kaayyoon af-gaaffii kanaa qorannoo mata dureen isaa " Itti Fufiinsa Hooggansa Manneen Barnootaa Sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} Magaala Sheger, Itiyooophiyaa: Caasaa (Dhaabbannaa) Sirna fi Argama Dalagaa" jedhuuf ragaa walitti qabuu dha. Ragaa kana walitti qabuuf namoonni akka keessanii dhimma kana irratti odeeffannoo gahaa qaban jedhamanii amanaman af-gaaffiidhaaf filatamanii jiru. Kanaafuu af-gaaffii gaafatamtaniiif deebii haqa-qabeessa kennun dhugooma qorannoo kanaa akka deggartanan kabajaan isin gaafadha. Yeroo fi hirmaachuuf fedhii horachuu keessaniif dursee galatoomaa!

Odeeffannoo Duraa

4. Sadarkaan barnootaa keessan inni ol'anaan maal?
5. Gosni barnootaa barattan maal?
6. Leenjii hoggansa mana barumsaa wajjin walqabate akkamii argattanii jirtu?
7. Dura bu'aa mana barumsaa taatanii bara hammamii hojjettanii jirtu?

Gaaffilee Wiirtuu

1. Mee akkamitti dura bu'ummaa mana barumsaa jiraachaa akka jirtan gadi fageenyaan natti himaa.
2. Waajjira barnootaa irraa deeggarsa akkamii akka argattan bal'inaan natty himuu dandessuu?
3. Mee waa'ee haala humna namaa mana barumsaa keessanii gadi fageenyaan natti himaa. Kaka'umsaa fi kutannoo humana nama mana abumsa kessanii maaltu ibsa?
4. Mee waa'ee gosota duudhaalee waloo /shared value/ mana barumsa keessan ibsanii natti himaa. Agarsissftun kanaa maali?
5. Mee waa'ee miira walta'iinsaa /collaboration spirit/ mana barumsa keessan ibsuu dnada'uu yaada bal'aa naaf kennaa.
6. Mee hoggansa mana barumsaa keessa hammam turuu akka barbaaddan gadi fageenyaan naaf ibsaa. Wantoonni hamma kana turuuf akka yaaddan isin taasise maali?
7. Gaaffiileen ani gaafachuu barbaade isaanuma kana turan. Garuu osoo af-gaaffii kana hin xumurin dura dhimmoota irratti wal dubbachaa turree waliin walqabatee wantoonni biroo naaf qooduu barbaaddan jiruu?

Tumsa nuuf gootaniif irraa deebiin baay'ee galatoomaa!

Appendix VIII: Interview Protocol for Educational Officers (Afan Oromo)

Yuunivarsiitii Addis Ababa

Kolleejjii Barnootaa fi Qorannoo Amala

Mummee Karooraa fi Hoggansa Barnootaa

Af-gaaffii Ogeessota Barnootaaf Dhiyaate

Kabajamtoota Hirmaattota!

Kaayyoon af-gaaffii kanaa qorannoo mata dureen isaa " Itti Fufiinsa Hooggansa Manneen Barnootaa Sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} Magaala Sheger, Itiyooophiyaa: Caasaa (Dhaabbannaa) Sirna fi Argama Dalagaa” jedhuuf ragaa walitti qabuu dha. Ragaa kana walitti qabuuf namoonni akka keessanii dhimma kana irratti odeeffannoo gahaa qaban jedhamanii amanaman af-gaaffiidhaaf filatamanii jiru. Kanaafuu af-gaaffii gaafatamantiif deebii haqa-qabeessa kennun dhugooma qorannoo kanaa akka deggartanan kabajaan isin gaafadha. Yeroo fi hirmaachuuf fedhii horachuu keessaniif dursee galatoomaa!

Odeeffannoo Duraa

8. Sadarkaan barnootaa keessan inni ol’anaan maal?
9. Gosti barnootaa isin qorattan maal?
10. Ogeessa barnootaa taatanii bara hammii hojjettanii jirtu?

Gaaffiilee Wiirtuu

1. Mee waa'ee gahumsa dura bu'oota manneen barnootaa sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} kutaa magalaa keessanii gadi fageenyan naaf ibsaa.
2. Mee akkaataa itti wajjirri barnootaa kutaa magalaa keessanii manneen barnootaa fi dura bu'oota deeggaru natti himaa.
3. Mee argamni /availability/ hojjettoota manneen barnoota sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} kutaa magala keessanii maal akka fakkaatu naaf qoodaa. Sababni aragam sadarkaa kkaasiis maali?
4. Mee waa'ee gosa aadaa manneen barnootaa sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} kutaa magaalaa keessan ibsuu natti himaa.
5. Kutaa magaalaa keessan keessatti fedhii warri dura bu'oota manneen barnootaa sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} ta'uu dandaan isaan dura bu'oota ta'uuf qabanii naaf qoodaa. Maaltu fedhii akka qabaatan yookin dhaban taasise?
6. Fedhii dura bo'oonni manneen barnoota sadarkaa 1^{ffaa} dura bu'ummaa irra turuuf qaban akkamitti ibsitu? Fedhii akkasii kana maaltu ibsa?
7. Gaaffiileen ani gaafachuu barbaade isaanuma kana turan. Garuu osoo af-gaaffii kana hin xumuriin dura dhimmoota irratti wal dubbachaa turree waliin walqabatee wantoonni biroo naaf qooduu barbaaddan jiruu?

Irraa deebiin tumsa keessaniif baay'ee galatoomaa!