Sustainable primary school leadership in Ethiopia: The support or hindrance of policies of collective capacity and school culture

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Abstract

The study adopts a case study design to explore whether collective capacity and school culture policies support or impede the adoption of sustainable school leadership (SSL) in the Ethiopian educational system. Sources of data are policy documents such as education and training policy, education sector development programs, primary school standards, and policies of selection and placement of school principals. We select these sources based on the criteria that they are official documents, have relevant content, and are functional at the time of the study. We analyze data with a combination of thematic and content analysis. The finding of the study indicates that some collective capacity and school culture policies support the materialization of SSL, whilst others undermine, or at least do not support, its implementation. Although policies appear to support SSL adoption, in practice, certain key collective capacity and school culture policies have a substantial undermining influence, and others lack mechanisms for practical implementation. We conclude that collective capacity and school culture policies largely undermine rather than support the materialization of SSL. We recommend to the Ministry of Education, among other things, the improvement of the policy of qualification level of teachers and the field of qualification of principals, and the provision of a manual to support the creation and maintenance of school culture.

Introduction

Sustainable school leadership (SSL) is of paramount importance due to the positive and strong relationship between capable and stable school leadership and student learning gains (Bush, 2018; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). Including SSL, sustainable leadership is usually viewed from the perspective of ensuring the well-being of human society and preserving the planet in the process of ensuring organizational productivity (Grooms & Reid-

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Martinez, 2011). But it can also rightly be viewed from the perspective of an enduring and stable leadership agency capable of achieving needed organizational or societal outcomes (Davies, 2007; Miller et al., 2019). As Grooms and Reid-Martinez (2011, p. 412) note, this is about "reinforcing the importance of leaders" and, more broadly, the importance of leadership agency. It is from this perspective that the current study approaches SSL.

Different scholars describe SSL in terms of different dimensions or components. For example, Hargreaves and Fink (2004) characterize it in terms of seven principles. According to them, sustainable leadership: 1) matters, 2) lasts, 3) spreads, 4) is socially just, 5) is resourceful, 6) promotes diversity, and 7) is an activist. Fullan (2005, as cited in Miller et al., 2019) also proposes 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) also offers 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. While not providing a list, Cook (2014) also defines sustainable school leadership as "the continuation over time of a strong, positive school culture and the consistent implementation of rigorous, high quality instructional practices".

However, the lists are not exactly the same to consider one and drop the other, and items in a list themselves are too many and far beyond, leaving researchers with a challenge of what to consider as an analytical model in a study. One way around such a challenge may be to consider only some items from a list or even selectively combine certain constructs from different models based on their relevance. 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) assert. Perhaps faced with a similar challenge, Miller et al. (2019, p. 134) themselves combine the notions 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 combines collective capacity and school culture, drawing on Hargreaves and Fink (2004), Fullan (2005, as cited in Miller et al., 2019), Davies (2007), and Cook (2014). We refer to the features we target as "elements" of SSL, as suggested by Fullan (2005 in Miller et al., 2019). This is because it is the combined, rather than the individual functioning of the elements, that contributes to the materialization of SSL.

Increasingly, scholars (Conway, 2015; Harris et al., 2022) view effective school leadership as unimaginable without the combined efforts of the school staff. And this is in line with the division of labor among school community in the Ethiopian education system (MoE, 2002). This makes the specific consideration of collective capacity in the current study reasonable. Schein (2010) also views school culture and (sustainable) school leadership as two sides of the same coin, making school culture unavoidable element in SSL study.

Collective capacity can include material, financial, and human resources, including intangible human capacities such as skills and knowledge (Dinham & Crowther, 2011). In this study, however, we consider it only in terms of human collective capacity. We study human collective capacity in terms of the availability, qualification, motivation, and commitment of school human resources. This is because we accept the premises that "leadership resources are social" (Hanselman et al., 2016, p. 53). We look at school culture in terms of the values that staff needs to build, the collaborative spirit that needs to manifest, and the mechanism for building it.

It remains to explain how our elements fit into the analytical models. We consider Hargreaves and Fink's (2004) notion of leadership is related to collective capacity. 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 us to consider capability, motivation, and commitment of collective primary school staff. Cook's (2014) definition of sustainable leadership as sustainable school culture also makes targeting school culture as an element of SSL permissible. We particularly explore whether policies of collective capacity and school culture support or undermine the materialization of SSL. We prefer targeting policies over practice. This is because the materialization of SSL is based on policy as much as it is based on practice. Even policy also serves as a foundation for practice, making its priority for study relevant.

Sustainable leadership, and in particular sustainable educational (school) leadership, is a young field of study, so it is unlikely that many scholars have studied it (Carpenter et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2021). However, one can scrutinize available empirical studies for what they can offer. Studies such as those by Conway (2015) from the Australian context and Cook (2014) from the UK context emphasize the possibility of achieving sustainable leadership through continuous capacity building and the need to foster professional learning communities as one of the components of SSL, respectively. Other scholars such as Browne-Ferrigno et al. (2006), who study the issue in the US context, and Granados and Gámez (2010), who study the subject matter in the Spanish context, report a lack of concerted effort as the barrier to sustainable innovation and lack of training and formal support for school leaders that reduces the standing of school leaders to achieve SSL, respectively. However, the studies approach the issue from an environmental sustainability perspective. In addition, they are largely limited to developed countries, which are less likely to help an understanding and practice of SSL in developing nations like Ethiopia. The exception is that of Miller et al.'s (2019) study conducted SSL in a Jamaican context and report a different finding that shows the leadership system's continued capacity despite contextual challenges; offering hope for SSL's flourishing in educational contexts like Ethiopia.

In the Ethiopian education setting, SSL is not directly addressed in official documents. However, according to the Ministry of Education (MoE) the education system implements school improvements that occur over time (MoE, 2010). Improvement does not happen overnight. Indeed, school leadership needs to be sustained before school improvement actually happens (Bush, 2018; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018). The education system also embedded Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Assembly, 2015) in the

education sector development program (ESDPs) including ESPD VI (MoE, 2021), and sustainable development is unthinkable without sustainable leadership (Burns et al., 2015; Leal Filho et al., 2020). ESDP VI also repeatedly mentions issues connected with collective capacity and school culture (MoE, 2021). Even more directly, the system aims to "establish ... an effective and sustainable system to promote education" (MoE, 2021, p. 95). This may suggest that the educational system is becoming increasingly sensitized to SSL.

Studies on SSL are lacking internationally (Miller et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2021), as we previously argue, and there are no studies on SSL in the Ethiopian educational context to the best of our knowledge. This shows a gap in the literature and justifies a study on SSL, including its study in the Ethiopian educational system. Additionally, the poor academic performance of students in the Ethiopian education system (FDRE, 2023), which needs the adoption of SSL to change, also requires targeting the subject. For example, the EGRA score for students in Grade 2 was 60.1 percent in 2016 and then it dropped to 53.3 percent in 2018, despite the expectation that 70 percent should achieve basic or "higher levels of proficiency in reading and comprehension …" (MoE, 2021, p. 18). The aggregate score of students in grades 4 and 8 in the National Learning Assessments is also well below the 50 percent target (MoE, 2021), and students at all levels, including primary schools, have fallen short of the 50 percent target (FDRE, 2023). This raises the question, among other things, whether collective capacity is in good shape and whether the cultural context that defines instructional leadership and academic practice is appropriate to help change such a negative trajectory. And this makes it interesting to examine whether the policies of collective capacity and school culture support or hinder such an endeavor and hence the realization of SSL at primary school level. Although the most recent Education and Training Policy (FDRE, 2023) refers to grades 7 and 8 as middle schools, most of the policy documents we considered do not make such a distinction, and we consider these levels as part of the primary school framework for the purposes of this study.

The study is structured around the the following major research question: what is the current status of policies in the Ethiopian education system to support or undermine primary school leadership sustainability? To explore this, the study also examines the following sub-questions: (1) how do policies of collective capacity work to support or undermine sustainable primary school leadership in the Ethiopian educational context? (2) What is the supportive or undermining role of school culture policies for the materialization of primary school leadership sustainability in this educational setting?

Methods

Case study is the design of the study, which is "a versatile form of qualitative inquiry most suitable for… in-depth investigation of a complex issue" (Harrison et al., 2017, n. p.) such as SSL. The case in point is SSL. We obtain data from official (policy) documents which we select based on three inclusion (exclusion) criteria: being official (policy) documents, having relevant contents, and being functional at the time of the study. We first agree on the type of data we need to realize the study, locate the documents from which we can obtain the data, and then secure the documents. The key documents we use for the study are six. These are Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 (FDRE, 2017),

Education Sector Development Program VI (MoE, 2021), National General Education Inspection Framework (MoE, 2013), Framework for Continuous Development for Primary and Secondary School Teachers, Leaders, and Supervisors (MoE, 2009), Guideline for Selection and Assignment of School Leaders No. 4/2014 (OEB, 2022), and Standard of Primary School (OEB, 2009). However, we use Education and Training Policy (FDRE, 2023), Educational Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012 (2019/20 G.C), Oromia Region (OEB, 2019) as data sources to a lesser extent and we use other official documents as literature sources. In Ethiopia, the federal state is responsible for formulating policies for all education levels, including primary education, while regions are responsible for primary education planning and implementation, as well as amending policies based on practical realities. As a result, we looked at Oromia region policies to show case the influence of regional policies.

After carefully reading and rereading the documents, we extract the data. We save the data with caution, separating it into files from several sources, which enable us to avoid data distortion that we believe increase trustworthiness. Then we analyze data with a combination of content and thematic analysis. As Creswell (2006) states, this is "concurrent embedded model" (p. 215) which use content analysis with in thematic analysis. According to Cardno (2018), "the purpose of content analysis in document research is to organise information into categories whilst thematic analysis requires patterns within the data to be recognised and these become emerging themes" (p. 634) which can serve the purpose of the current study. Regarding the specific procedure of data analysis, we check the data against the source documents before proceeding to the coding process. Then we reduce the data to a manageable level by removing less relevant data while keeping more relevant ones. Then, based on the basic question and the impressions we gain from reading and rereading the collected data, we create codes and apply them to the dataset. We then collapse some codes and added others as we progress with the coding process, coding the data using both pre-prepared and emerging codes. This is where we mostly apply content analysis. Then, we group and regroup the codes based on their relevance, yielding the theme we report. We consistently ground the data collection, analysis and report in the acceptable behaviors and scientific processes to maintain appropriate research ethics, which we believe also, enhance trustworthiness. The fact that the majority of data sources are publicly available to everyone, which allows for data checks, we feel, can help increase trustworthiness.

Results

The study examines collective capacity and school culture policies in the Ethiopian education landscape to determine whether they support or undermine the materialization of SSL. Using official documents as data sources, the study examines the data through a combination of content and thematic analysis. This section presents the findings of the study in two parts, in line with the two sub-questions that the study seeks to address.

The Way Policies of Collective Capacity Work to Support or Undermine SSL

We begin presenting the finding of the study on collectivity capacity of institutional human resources by considering policy prescriptions for human resource availability, particularly principal availability. Policies on school principals' availability prescribe that the

number of students of the schools determines the number of principals. For example, guideline for selecting and placing school principals No. 4/2014 (2022) of Oromia Education Bureau (OEB) states that "a primary school with a student population of 500 or less shall have *only one principal*" (OEB, 2022, p. 19) [emphasis added]. This means that the principal is the only person in a leadership position in such a school without having a deputy principal. The policy also prescribes, "A primary school shall have a principal and a deputy principal if the number of students is between 501 and 1,000" (OEB, 2022, p. 19). That is, such a school will have a principal and a deputy principal, resulting in two people in formal school leadership role. There is further policy which states that a school with an enrolment of "between 1,001 and 3,000 students shall have one principal and two deputy principals" (OEB, 2022, p. 19). This requires a school with a student population of 1,001 or more and equal to or less than 3,000 to have one principal and two deputy principals, with 3 individuals in formal school leadership role.

The number of principals sent to primary schools starts to imply additional factors such as workload other than student population, when the number of students exceeded 3,000. "If the number of students in a primary school is more than 3,000, it shall have, *on the basis of workload* [emphasis added], one principal and three deputy principals" (OEB, 2022, p. 19). This is about the potential of adding a third deputy principal if the number of students in a primary school exceed 3,000 and the workload requirement is met. Unlike other policy prescriptions that we present so far that determine the number of principals and deputy principals on the mere factor of student population, this prescription recommends that an addition of a third deputy principal is determined by considering workload besides the number of students which exceeds 3,000. However, it is unclear from the policy prescription what the expression "workload" specifically means.

The notion of workload dictates the number of teachers required in each primary school in the Ethiopian education system. This can be related to the concept that Saratian et al. (2019) define as "responsibilities that must be carried out by an employee in an organization... in a certain [amount of] time" (p. 172). This is related to the number of hours per week that the policy requires each teacher to work (FDRE, 2017; OEB, 2009). The Oromia region's Primary School Standard states that "the regular working hours of a teacher shall be 40 hours per week" (OEB, 2009, p. 40). This means that a teacher is dealing with a workload that can be completed in 40 hours of per week. Hence, the total number of teachers to be assigned to each primary school equals the total hours the weekly workload of the school needs divided by 40 hours. The workload itself is determined by taking a number of factors such as the number of sections and therefore the total number of periods, the type of subject to be taught, whether the school operates on a full or half shift, etc. in to consideration (OEB, 2009).

Article 33 of the Federal Civil Servants Proclamation No. 1064/2017 (FDRE, 2017) recently declares that the "[r]regular 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 policy statement provides a maximum of 39 work hours per week, leaving the lower limit to be determined "on the basis of the conditions of work" (FDRE, 2017). Of course, the phrase "may not exceed 39 hours per week" about upper weekly working hour itself is a possibility rather than an absolute requirement that allows the workload to remain flexible. This may

change the workload of each institution and thus affect the number of teachers assigned to each school.

Schools cannot operate without an adequate number of support staff, so it is important to also consider the availability of support staff. A letter, whose reference number is not clearly visible in the document we have access to, dated April 28, 2023 (20/8/2015 Ethiopian calendars), and written after the Civil Service Proclamation (FDRE, 2017) came into effect, states that a total of 23 support staff are required to be available in a primary school in Oromia Region, excluding the principal and assistant principals. This includes those assigned to roles such as record officer, accountant, cashier, janitor, security guard and secretary. This means that schools are able to hire more staff to handle some of the tasks that were previously left to the principals.

Policies on school human resource availability, which we have looked at so far, can help develop collective capacity and, as a result, sustain school leadership. For example, deploying multiple school principals can distribute leadership responsibilities and prevent the fatigue of leaders that otherwise can deter school leadership from being sustained (Ochonogor& Amah, 2021). The availability of teachers based on workload can also raise principals' instructional leadership productivity, improve stability, and hence create a suitable environment for school leadership to thrive. The availability of support workers in sufficient numbers can, on the other hand, allow principals to move some of the workload away from themselves in order to focus on their authentic concerns and thereby sustain their leadership effort.

Regarding qualification of school staff, Article 4.6 of Education and Training Policy states 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 differentiation between levels. The Ethiopian education system actually requires primary school principals and deputy principals to hold a minimum of a First degree (OEB, 2022). Although the situation on the ground may differ, the policy requires them to hold at least a Bachelor of Arts degree. While there is opportunity for improvement in principals' qualifications, as we state in the discussion section, the recommended qualification level cannot be regarded inferior and hence can help the adoption of SSL.

But the policy mandates that primary school principals possess qualifications in either one of the primary school subjects or educational administration (OEB, 2022). Clearly, principals trained in educational administration are likely to lead schools competently and help schools become more productive, which can contribute to achieving SSL. However, the number of individuals trained in this area may not be sufficient to fill all available positions of primary school principals and deputy principals. Therefore, the policy mandate of a qualification in one of the school subjects is most likely to be applied. Nonetheless, teachers are educated to teach and the qualification of subject area does not provide potenetial candidates (PCs) and incumbent principals with the knowledge, talents, and attitudes required to lead schools and sustain their leadership over time.

Primary school teachers in Ethiopian education system are required to have "a minimum qualification of a diploma [a two-year study] from the College of Teachers Education" (OEB, 2019, p. 115). While persons with higher-level degrees are welcomed, the

policy only deems individuals to be suitably qualified to teach in primary schools if they hold a minimum diploma qualification. However, this may not provide the confidence or competency the teachers need to teach and help sustain school leadership. For example, Gurmu and Oumer (2023) report that teachers are unwilling to teach even relevant subjects, for instance, in case of shortage of teachers', because they are worried "about their competence" and this is particularly true when they are asked to teach grades 7 and 8. This may indicate that teachers lack the confidence to teach with their current qualifications across the full range of grades for which primary school leadership is responsible. This in turn can create instability and work against SSL. Areas of qualifications for teachers are one or a cluster of subjects taught at the primary school (MoE, 2020; OEB, 2009). Having teachers in the relevant field of qualification eases instructional delivery, boosts instructional leadership productivity, and encourages school principals to sustain leadership. The policy also recommends that support personnel have qualifications ranging from diplomas to technical and vocational training certificates to completion of 8th/10th/12th grades, with the field of expertise varying based on the job post for which the employees are needed (OEB, 2009). One cannot criticize this for its contribution to SSL adoption.

The MoE also articulates 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). This is about the need for different professionals in the system, including those who work at the primary school level, to have the necessary commitment and perhaps motivation to do the job, in addition to having the ability, knowledge, and skill. Of course, the MoE (2021) not only recommends but also plans to strengthen "motivation and job satisfaction" among school staff (p. 68). While this is about boosting the job initiation of the staff; it is also about enhancing the satisfaction they drive from doing the job.

Beyond establishing its necessity and planning to strengthen it, the MoE also provides some of the means to make motivation and commitment available. One can witness this from the following prescription:

> [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. (MoE, 2002, p. 68).

This is about the need to examine incentive and capacity development systems to provide an explanation of the factors that influence teacher motivation, identify possible areas for consideration, and devise strategies to address the needs that emerge. The other strategy that one can see in the same framework of mechanisms of motivation and commitment is the MoE's (2021) plan to develop "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 is about establishing fulfilling career paths, placing the right person in the right place, and tying this to rewards for good performance, which can boost staff enthusiasm and commitment to work completion.

In addition to implementing motivating mechanisms, the MoE appears to want them to be ongoing so that they can have a consistent impact. An example of this can be a policy prescription to "institutionalize an incentive system" (MoE, 2021, p. 68) so that it can help

institutionalize staff motivation and commitment. In this regard, the MoE also states that "a continuous incentive mechanism requires teachers and leaders to regularly demonstrate their dedication and commitment to their work" (MoE, 2021, p. 68). This is about needs for school staff to demonstrate constant motivation and commitment in order to benefit from institutionalized incentives system. This can make the system work cyclically generating cyclical incentives and enabling cyclical staff motivation and commitment. By establishing the strategies and enhancing motivation and commitment, the MoE appears to attempt to attain additional results. For instance, the system wants to "foster a greater sense of ownership [by] improving teacher motivation" (MoE, 2021, p. 34). This is about fostering a better feeling of ownership by increasing teacher motivation, which can boost productivity. The MoE (2021), in fact, directly prescribe the necessity to "ensure… productivity of education" (p. 68) and "improve [educational] quality by maintaining teacher motivation" (p. 142). This is about keeping teacher motivation to help improve educational quality and hence productivity.

Literature sources (Bonau, 2019; Hemakumara, 2020; Robbins & Judge, 2018) emphasize the crucial importance of staff motivation and commitment for increased collective capability and sustainable organizational productivity and hence SSL. Thus, the policy prescriptions examined thus far in relation to staff motivation and commitment, which are stated to achieve ownership and improve the quality and productivity of education by providing motivational mechanisms and making them sustainable, can enhance collective capacity and school leadership sustainability.

However, two concerns remain: one related to the implementation of prescribed policies and another related to other policies that work against their implementation. First, principals may lack the necessary resources, power, and control to implement the recommendations to increase staff motivation and commitment. The MoE (2021) states that "school leaders influence teacher motivation and job satisfaction" (p. 68). This is true because the way principals communicate, support, and encourage staff can affect their motivation and commitment. At the same time, it is worth noting that principals do not have the resources or complete control or authority to implement provisions such as providing rewarding career paths and a more robust, constructive performance evaluation system, placing the right person in the right position, and instituting an incentive system.

Second, policies that require leaving principals to be placed as teachers undermine motivation and commitment, as well as collective capacity and SSL. Policy prescribes placing individuals "with a bachelor's or master's degree in school subjects offered in schools" who leave the principalship "where their peers have reached based on their academic readiness and experience" (OEB, 2022, p. 20). This places departing 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 is fair to such folks, since it benefits or, at least, does not hurt them because it enables them to secure the gains their peers have achieved. However, this may not help achieve SSL. The fact that such individuals do not hurt from leaving the principalship may stimulate and push additional subject teachers to school leadership posts. This is not advantageous to collective capacity building or SSL adoption since they lack the necessary skills and expertise to help such an endeavor. We don't argue that the policy should harm the departure of such an individual. Rather, we are arguing that

the appointment of subject specialists to school leadership, which this policy mechanism encourages, may have a negative ramification on school leadership capacity and sustainability.When individuals with a Master's degree in Educational Administration and a first degree in the subject area leave the principalship, they are "assigned to the level that their colleagues have reached, based on their academic readiness and experience" (OEB, 2022, p. 20). This means that such individuals also enjoy a similar career ladder and salary as their colleagues, which is again a wonderful plan. However, they cannot work with their master's degree in educational administration or leadership, and as a result their highest credential is undervalued. Although their qualification is a non-teaching degree, this arrangement is not without negative psychological consequences for such individuals and unfavorable implications for the qualification in educational leadership, which is detrimental to the (collective) capacity and sustainability of school leadership.

Worst of all, it is recommended that departing principals who are 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, 2022, p. 21). True, the regulation does not deny departing principals the right to return to teaching despite having anon-teaching education/school leadership degree. And the condition of reinstatement can secure them similar career ladders and benefits as their peers, which is beneficial.

However, the situation of their redeployment to teaching includes conditions of uncertainty, such as the requirement to teach the subject they are "most likely to teach". Whereas in the cases of two previous policies of redeploying departing principals, the prescription is to place them "where their peers have reached," but this time the prescription is to place them "in a way that is consistent with the experience of their peers," which is less clear and less direct. This can cause existing principals who are qualified in this area to feel anxious about their future, making them less motivated and committed to their jobs. This can also reduce the motivation of eligible PCs to become principals, neither of which is conducive to collective capacity and the adoption of SSL. It may also reduce teachers' motivation to pursue qualifications in school administration or leadership and de-motivate leaving principals themselves since no individuals want to find their departure in such uncertain situations. This is not supportive of collective capacity and the materialization of SSL.

As can be seen from the data presented in the preceding paragraphs, departing principals with qualifications in school administration or leadership face the most uncertainty. Policy requirements that place principals who have left their positions but are qualified in one of the school disciplines are relatively explicit and give specific placement conditions while also valuing these principals' qualifications. Conversely, policy provisions that place principals who are qualified in educational administration are less clear. It also involves conditions of uncertainty, such as getting them to teach the subjects they are most likely to teach. The policies also place less value on the qualifications of leaving principals by assigning them to teach other subjects despite their qualifications in educational administration. This may not be helpful in building collective capacity and adoption of SSL.

The Supportive or Undermining Influence of Policies of School Culture

One can also find policy prescriptions in vetted documents that can support the development of positive school culture and the adoption of SSL. For example, the prescription about "boosting positive school culture and ethos" (MoE, 2021, p. 49) is about creating a relatively stable school environment that can support social health and productivity of school community. Schools are also required to uphold the principle and create a sense of inclusion for every member of the school including students regardless of their "economic, social, and cultural differences or backgrounds" (MoE, 2021, p. 50). This is a matter of creating a culture that is inclusive of everyone, without distinction of any kind. The prescription about "strengthen[ing] students' positive values" (MoE, 2021, p. 49) in connection with issues such as diversity, representation, and inclusion is about building positive culture.

The documents not only advocate for the development of a healthy school culture, but also provide tools for attaining it. In the first place, the MoE (2021) recommends provision of "fertile platforms and mechanisms to foster a non-violent school culture and climate" (p. 54). Although general, this is about creating favorable conditions for the emergence of a productive school culture and climate. This is acceptable since a positive culture cannot materialize without such fertile conditions.

One of the mechanisms that the MoE (2021) recommends for putting in place strong culture is creation of "professional networks, peer interaction, and cooperation schemes to cultivate a culture of professional excellence for teachers" (p. 70). All this has to do with developing a culture of expert competency among teachers through professional connections, colleague exchanges, and collaborative mechanisms, and it can encourage teachers to strive for excellence on a continuous basis, which can greatly assist school leadership durability. The other mechanism of cultural creation is leveraging "good communication and interaction among teachers, administrators, and support staff in the school" (MoE, 2013, p. 5). This includes increasing interaction and engagement among school staff, improving communication that can help develop a culture of listening to one another, which can lead to more collaboration and reciprocity, stability and sustainability.

The other strategy is to raise awareness among students, particularly the younger generation. The specific example for this can be the prescription about making "students aware that cheating on tests/assessments is obscene" (MoE, 2013, p. 5), which is about raising students' knowledge of the immorality of cheating on examinations. Educating students about the immorality of cheating may help improve stability and sustainability by creating a productive academic environment. The MoE (2021) also recommends "raising awareness in a new generation to commit to boosting a culture of peace and tolerance" (p. 50), which is another example where awareness creation is used as a mechanism. This is about engaging a young generation to get involved in the advancement of a culture of peace and tolerance. While other agencies, such as youth organizations need to work along these lines, this is definitely one of the responsibilities of the educational institutions. Awareness can encourage students to maintain healthy relationships and help keep the school

environment stable, which can benefit school leadership productivity, stability, and sustainability.

As one can understand from the policy prescription we present so far, the purpose of creating positive school culture is not for its own sake. Rather the purpose, for example, is to transform educational institutions "so that school communities see themselves as learning communities where the values and ethos of unity in diversity, citizenship, fraternity, peace, are promoted" (MoE, 2021, p. 52). This refers to the Ministry's goal of transforming schools into school communities that promote the values and ethos of diversity, citizenship, brotherhood and peace. In general, the purpose is to create a school social environment where everyone is valued, included, appreciated, nurtured, and contributes to school productivity and student academic growth that can create stability which in turn can sustain productive school leadership.

However, school culture seems to be entrusted with more tasks that go beyond the school's confinement. Here is an example of such a policy prescription:

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).

This prescription is about severely deepening positive and long-standing cultural practices in a nation as well as at schools to combat symptoms of undesirable behaviors and practices that threaten the lives and long-term peace, prosperity, and happiness of societies and the country as a whole. This seems to be an attempt to use school culture as a means of solving societal and national problems in addition to using it to create stable and productive schools. By helping to minimize signals of negative behaviors in schools that could disrupt school operations, reinforcing socially beneficial and long-standing cultural norms can also enhance school productivity and the stability and sustainability of school leadership.

However, there are issues that can impede cultural policy prescriptions, or at least not strongly support the materialization of SSL. For example, the literature treats school culture and school leadership as two sides of the same coin (Hanselman et al., 2016; Schein, 2010), but the current policies don't imply such close connection. It is true that prescriptions such as "training teachers and school leaders to create a positive and inclusive school culture that celebrates diversity" (MoE, 2021, p. 89) may be about providing principals with the know-how to implement school culture which can support the implementation of cultural prescriptions to some extent. But we do not find any prescription that treats school culture as a way of exerting leadership influence.

The policy prescriptions are also those provided from above and mandate compliance when schools need to create and remake culture (Lewis et al., 2016; Schein, 2010) through establishing values and changing beliefs by tapping into the "psyche" (Gruenert& Whitaker, 2015) of the school community to define their own "quality and character" (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 61).This can obstruct the appropriateness of cultural prescriptions, preventing them from being executed in accordance with the actual reality of schools, which may in turn impede collective capability and hence school leadership sustainability.

The counter-argument might be that these provisions are intended to guide school leaders in formulating their own school culture, not to implement top-down prescriptions as they are. Such an argument can be accepted, but three major concerns remain. First, the policies are general and lack the detail needed to guide principals through the process. Second, school principals' qualification, which is in one of school subjects, may not allow them to go through the complex processes of creating, sustaining, and changing school culture. Third, there is no plan, document, or program that directly implements the cultural prescription. For example, the Professional Development Plan and Activities and the School Improvement Plan support the implementation of teacher development programs and school improvement programs, respectively (MoE, 2009, 2010). However, we do not find a similar document to help implement the cultural prescriptions at the school level, and this can undermine their metallization.

Discussion

The study examines whether policies connected to collective capacity and school culture have a positive or negative influenceon the adoption of SSL. We collect data from official documents and analyze them using a combination of content and thematic analysis. The data show that certain collective capacity policies support the adoption of SSL, while others undermine its materialization. School culture policies appear to encourage the materialization of SSL apparently, despite containing flaws that undermine or at least prevent them from supporting the adoption of 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. This is because such policy prescription is the first decisive move towards furnishing school supply, strengthening collecting capacity and facilitating school leadership sustainability.

However, there appears to be a specific caveat regarding the policy of support staff availability. The policies define support staff primarily as individuals who are responsible for administrative tasks, whereas literature discusses support staff as classroom personnel who support teachers to be free from routine activities, allowing them to focus on legitimate instructional activities (Blatchford et al., 2011; Chambers, 2015). It is true that policy in Ethiopian education system too allows availability of special needs teachers (MoE, 2012). However, the allowed number per school is limited. Furthermore, teachers who do not have students with special needs in their classes cannot 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. Our term "students without special needs" indicates this.

As argued by Eacott and Asuga, "government initiatives aimed at building [functioning]... education systems are unlikely to succeed without significant attention to the [professional] preparation and development of school leaders" (2014, p. 919). And the OEB itself acknowledges that "the qualifications of teachers... [are among the] main factors [that] affect the quality of education" (OEB, 2019, p. 115). This is about the critical need to qualify school principals and teachers to the level required to maintain quality and build a system that constantly strives to maintain sustainability and excellence.

However, requiring principals to be trained in one of the school subjects may leave them without the skills to do the job adequately, which may undermine their ability to sustain their efforts and achieve sustainable results (Geletu, 2024; Gurmu & Oumer, 2023). This may 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). However, such strong principals' identity is lacking among the principals the current policy deploys as they are 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 can lead to superior performance (Crow et al., 2017; Cruz-González et al., 2021). This can 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 fact that teachers lack confidence to teach at higher grades of primary school or middle school grades can compromise with their quality teaching and assisting collective capacity. Upgraded teachers' qualification beyond diploma can solve the problem, but one must also recognize that there are teachers in the system who have not fulfilled the minimum requirements (MoE, 2021). The lack of confidence may indicate a lack of ability, resulting in a lack of stability, which is not conducive to maintaining sustainability. 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 is now being transferred to the lower grades in the Ethiopian education system (MoE, 2020) also call for upgrading teacher qualification.

The MoE (2015) recognizes that "for any organization to be effective, it is not enough to have an appropriate structure and staff with the right profile". It is about the need for position holders to have the necessary motivation and commitment to work appropriately, and to have the necessary qualifications to maintain organizational effectiveness and thus sustainability. Hence, the existence of policies that encourage strong employee motivation and commitment and offer mechanisms for implementing them is praiseworthy. However, the fact that school leaders do not have at least complete control over the motivation and commitment mechanism may limit its implementation and jeopardize collective capacity building and adoption of SSL.

The principals qualification that the policy prescribes is similar to the finding reported by a study of the African context that "a teaching qualification and teaching experience are

the only requirements for principals (Bush et al., 2011, p. 31), which we believe still hold true, but it 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, that principals' "[r]oles and identities do not coincide" (p. 810). The support staff policies enacted in terms of administrative personnel is different from what support staff that scholars such as Blatchford et al. (2011) and Chambers (2015) discussed. Nigerian National Teacher Education Policy prescribes primary school teachers to achieve Teacher Certificate Grade II (TCGDII), which is not consistent with the recommendation of Diploma qualification for primary school teachers (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2014). And it is 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 is 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.

Robbins et al. (2017) assert 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 demonstrates the critical importance of school culture in building stability, productivity, and sustainability in the school system (Hanselman et al., 2016). Therefore, the containment of the cultural prescription in the current policy document is essential. However, the lack of documents which guide principals through cultural creation and maintenance can make the materialization of cultural prescription problematic. Even the fact that school principals are subject graduates who have no training in organizational leadership coupled with the prescriptions that lack details can deter the implementation of cultural prescriptions. The cultural policies considered in the current study are also consistent with what scholars have advocated about the need for the presence of a strong culture to materialize school productivity (Plaku & Leka, 2025; Robbins et al., 2017), although we do not encounter studies that examine policies for their supporting or undermining effects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and discussion, the study draws the following conclusions and makes recommendations. The collective capacity policies we consider seem to support the materialization of SSL when we see them from the perspective of the majority of the policies' having prescriptions that seem to positively affect the adoption of SSL. However, the study highlighted a number of collective capacity policies that might impair the materialization of SSL. For example, principals are subject specialists, and this denies them the capacity to sustain school leadership. The ways departing principals are deployed can impact the motivation and commitment of incumbent principals, block the appetite of PCs to become principals, and de-motivate departing principals not to work to their fullest potential. The problem teachers' face in teaching with the current qualification can undermine the

building of collective capacity and stability. Even some of the key policies that the study identified as undermining SSL materialization, can have further repercussions beyond their immediate impact. For example, inadequate qualification of principals not only affects individual performance but also causes a problem to supporting teachers. It also negatively affects building collective capacity in other, and creates unfavorable conditions in school to ensure school leadership stability and sustainability. The manifestation of such policies results in a major breakdown in collective capacity policies at the point of school principals' qualification area that can undermine the adoption of SSL. This and other policy deficiencies highlighted may make the cumulative influence of collective capacity policies lean toward policies that undermine the realization of SSL.

A school culture must be created and recreated at the school level. And it must become the means by which the quality and character of each school are defined, and by which each school is identified. However, the cultural provisions that the current study considers come from above and undermine the task of creating a culture at the school level. Such policies also reinforce the creation of identical rather than differentiated identities for educational institutions, working against ideal cultural policy provisions (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016). When school principals are responsible to build and maintain school culture, they lack the skills and knowledge and specific guidelines that can help them to deal with the issue. This leaves the process of creating and sustaining school culture in a suspicious atmosphere, and its contribution to collective capacity and sustainability of school leadership uncertain.

Therefore, we provided the following recommendations. The Ministry of Education needs to revisit the area of the qualification of school principals so that they can be qualified in the subject of educational leadership to make schools productive and school leadership sustainable, which is the right qualification for the job. This is important because regions adapt the criteria according to their own situation, based on the ministry's requirements. The ministry also needs to look for ways to improve the qualification of primary school teachers and thus increase the collective capacity of schools. Similarly, the Ministry of Education has to consider more measures that schools and principals can easily implement to increase teacher motivation and commitment. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education needs to revise policies used to deploy departing principals in a way that does not operate against leaving and serving principals' motivation to work and PCs' motivation to become school principals. The Ministry of Education also has to provide certain manuals to guide school principals through the complex process of cultural creation, maintenance, and transformation, as they are subject graduates and lack skills to deal with the issue.

Limitation

The sources of this study are official documents alone. Although documents alone can serve as a valid source of data for the study (Cardno, 2018), the fact that this does not allow cross-checking of data from other types of sources can be a limitation.

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