LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SIDAMA REGION, ETHIOPIA

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Mr. Markos Morka Biru, who passed away in 2022. He devoted every moment of his life to my well-being and the betterment of my journey in life and study.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and the nature of teaching and learning in the Sidama region of Ethiopia. The theoretical framework is grounded in transformational and instructional leadership theories. Methodologically, the study employed a pragmatic research paradigm with a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, ensuring comprehensive findings related to the research questions and objectives.

The target population included 1,813 teachers, 46 principals, and 41 education office experts from rural public secondary schools in the Sidama region. A total of 400 teachers, 46 principals, and 41 education office experts from 10 public secondary schools participated in the survey, which utilized simple random and purposive sampling techniques. The quantitative data was analyzed by using SPSS version 28. Additionally, 10 Parent Teacher Association's and 8 high scorer students participated in the qualitative phase, selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse and representative sample.

The data collection process employed a self-developed questionnaire based on the research questions for the quantitative phase, along with open-ended semi-structured interviews for the qualitative phase. The quantitative data are presented in tables and figures, while the qualitative data is reported verbatim. The sequential explanatory mixed design and rigorous data collection process enhance confidence in the validity of the study's findings. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the collected data, with ANOVA and expert opinions employed to ensure the validity of the instruments. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the reliability of the instrument, yielding a coefficient value of 0.87.

The study found that respondents have varying levels of understanding regarding the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and the teaching and learning processes in their schools. It was noted that rural secondary school principals face significant challenges in improving student academic performance. The study also indicated that the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region were compromised by low motivation and commitment among stakeholders, as well as a lack of skilled personnel and essential material resources. The researcher recommends that all stakeholders cooperate to enhance students'

academic outcomes and that educational leaders at all levels fulfill their responsibilities in providing necessary educational inputs.

KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A THESIS

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SIDAMA REGION, ETHIOPIA

KEY TERMS: Leadership, Leadership practices, Rural schools, School leadership, Secondary schools, Teaching and learning

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ABE	Alternative Basic Education
ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CRSL	Culturally Responsive School Leadership
DEA	Degree in Education Management
EDPM	Educational Planning and Management
EFA	Education for All
ELMA	Educational Leadership, Management and Administration
ESDP V	Education Sector Development Program Five
EU	European Union
FTA	Future Teachers of America
GEQIP	General Education Quality Improvement Program
IMF	International Monitory Fund
ISLLC	Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium
IT	Information Technology
MA	Master of Arts
MAP	Management and Administration Program

MBE	Management by Exception
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCES	The National Center for School Leadership
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NISL	National Institute for School Leadership
NMLC	National Management and Leadership Committee
NPQH	National Professional Qualification for Headship
NT	New Technologies
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PGDSL	Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PQP	Principal's Qualification Program
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTSA	Parent Teacher Student Association
REB	Regionanal Education Bureau
RR	Response Rate
ScL	School Leadership
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals

SD	Standard Deviation
SMT	School Management Team
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SQH	Scotland for The Headship
SREB	Sidama Region Education Bureau
SSS	Student Success Skills
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organizations
UNISA	University of South Africa
US	United States
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
TV	Television
WEO	Woreda Education Office

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CHAPTER ONE
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This research examines the leadership practices of principals in rural secondary schools and the dynamics of teaching and learning in Ethiopia's Sidama region. Rural schools typically encounter considerable difficulties, often being split along socioeconomic lines and affected by political groups that advocate conflicting values and interests related to the goals of education.

Research has shown that effective principals significantly impact student achievement, with their influence ranking second only to that of teachers over the past 20 years (Karadag, 2020). The role of the principal has become increasingly complex, especially for those in rural areas, where it is characterized as demanding and context-specific (Klar & Huggins, 2020).

Studies show that turnover rates for rural principals differ from those in urban and suburban environments. Snodgrass Rangel (2018) connected variations in rural school contexts to differences in principals' turnover rates and community dynamics. According to Hansen (2018), around 20% of principals in rural areas leave their positions each year. Principal turnover has been linked to teacher turnover and lower student success (Levin, Leung, Edgerton, & Scott, 2020).

Rural principals face unique challenges in their roles, including increased paperwork demands, limited staffing, heightened community pressures, and feelings of isolation both personally and professionally (Hohner & Riveros, 2017; Klocko & Justis, 2019).

Sorber (2021) illustrates how opposing groups can leverage contrasting narratives to gain political influence within a community. In her paper, "The Power of Competing Narratives: A New Interpretation of Rural School-Community Relations," she reveals that one group may be socially excluded while another gains the political clout necessary to influence school district decision-making. Through her inquiry, she raises critical questions about educational policy in the context of school leadership, school performance, and the teaching and learning process.

The development of government educational policies highlights the need for changes in curricula, teaching methods, and the evaluation of school performance and objectives. Implementing these policies frequently requires principals to navigate negative internal responses to substantial external pressures (Corbett, 2017). In rural communities, the role of a school principal is more pronounced and individualized, making the responsibility of being a change agent more challenging compared to urban settings (Anderson, 2016; Lingam, Lingam, & Singh, 2021).

Raney (2020) found that educational leaders frequently encounter obstacles when attempting to integrate local educational interests within a centrally mandated framework, particularly in the implementation of centralized policies. His research demonstrates how residents and school administrators strive to implement a locally developed curriculum centered on the bison hunt to address local issues. However, this local program often requires modification, repackaging, and renaming to conform to government-approved curricula. Likewise, Goddard, Goddard, Bailes, and Nichols (2019) observed that rural principals often face challenges in implementing new policies and centralized curricula, as the mandates and course materials frequently do not meet the specific needs of the local community.

Educational leaders in rural Ethiopia also face numerous internal and external challenges (Oumer & Kejela, 2017; Yallew, 2020). Internally, some teachers neglect co-curricular activities, refuse to collaborate with their peers, and believe their sole responsibility is classroom instruction. They often see the discipline of misbehaving students as solely the responsibility of school administrators (Yallew, 2020). To enhance the teaching and learning process, rural secondary school teachers should conduct research on new topics and network with other professionals; however, many do not engage in these activities (MOE, 2018).

Today's educational leaders are increasingly expected to cultivate healthy and effective teaching and learning environments. To address these challenges, strong leadership skills, expertise, and knowledge are essential (Spillane, 2017). Consequently, educational leaders must possess qualities such as accountability, dedication, and vision. Ineffective leadership may stem from a lack of these abilities. Currently, rural secondary school principals face numerous difficulties due to these factors. The shortage of leadership skills in contemporary organizations complicates the ability to meet both present and future leadership needs (Mohammed & Handiso, 2018).

In this context, the researcher is committed to examining the leadership practices of principals and the teaching and learning processes in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region.

1.2 Problem Statement

Effective school leadership and management drive enhancements in classroom practices, school policies, and procedures, fostering better relationships between schools and their broader communities. Skilled leadership is crucial for increasing both the effectiveness and equity of education, as it acts as the primary link between the classroom, the school, and the overall educational system (Danbaba & Panshak, 2021).

The focus on rural secondary schools leadership is crucial for several reasons. First, the specific characteristics of the school community and its geographic environment serve as the foundation for effective school leadership. However, literature on effective school leadership often overlooks these situational realities and geographical factors (Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). While the specific context of rural school leadership requires more targeted attention, there is a significant gap in research on this topic.

Rural students constitute a significant portion of global school enrollments, underscoring the need to prioritize rural leadership. For example, data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2015-2016) shows that more than one-third of schools in the United States are situated in rural areas, with around 24% of American students identified as rural. Furthermore, research worldwide reveals a significant gap in educational achievement between urban and rural students. As noted by Hamm, Doğurga, and Scott (2016), Novey (2020), and Jones (2021), urban students generally achieve better outcomes than their rural peers, though there are some exceptions (see, for example, Preston & Barnes, 2017).

The challenge of providing quality education continues to be one of Ethiopia's most pressing issues (MOE, 2018). Since the rollout of the Education and Training Policy (MOE, 2018) and the recent Education Development Road Map (2018-2030), the Ethiopian government has launched various initiatives to tackle educational challenges, resulting in significant progress in educational access. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2018) reports that programs aimed at enhancing the professional skills of school principals and improving the school improvement process have been

implemented. However, the impact of a principal's leadership practices on student academic performance remains uncertain despite these initiatives (MoE, 2018).

Furthermore, a review by the Ministry of Education in Education Sector Development Program V reveals that secondary school principals throughout Ethiopia are not effectively promoting a positive school climate, facilitating participatory decision-making, or empowering teachers and the community to enhance student learning (MoE, 2018). Similarly, the Sidama Region Education Bureau (SREB, 2022) found that principals in the region's secondary schools are lacking in effectiveness regarding promoting student achievement, fostering a learning culture, and maintaining discipline.

The persistent challenges faced by secondary schools in the Sidama Region in achieving their desired outcomes emphasize the need for a strategic approach, supported by guidelines and practices from the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders. Historically, Ethiopian secondary schools have faced challenges in delivering quality education due to various factors, including limited resources, a lack of qualified teachers, insufficient leadership and management, unwelcoming learning environments, and low levels of parental and community involvement (Tirfe, 2016). According to the researchers' observations, the Sidama region's rural secondary schools struggle with a lack of physical and human resources, including standardized principals and teachers, a lack of funding to support instruction, issues with standardized restrooms, and a lack of standardized learning materials to support teaching and learning.

The low student test scores, with only 30.9% of students being accepted into tertiary institutions, raise concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in the region. Additionally, comparisons with other regions and districts indicate that Sidama ranks poorly regarding the percentage of students achieving two or more out of a possible four points (SREB, 2022). These findings highlight the need for further research on this topic. Consequently, this study focuses on the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama Region, specifically investigating their influence on teaching and learning.

1.2.1 Research Questions of the Study

1.2.1.1 The main research question in this study is:

What are the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region, and how do these practices impact teaching and learning?

1.2.1.2 The sub- research questions are:

1. To what extent do the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals affect teaching and learning in the Sidama region?
2. How does the school management team perceive rural school leadership practices and their role in enhancing teaching and learning in the Sidama region of Ethiopia?
3. What are the primary factors influencing rural school leadership in secondary schools within the Sidama region of Ethiopia?
4. What strategies can be implemented to improve effective rural school leadership practices and enhance teaching and learning in the Sidama region of Ethiopia?

Hypothesis: The leadership practices of rural secondary school principals contribute to the advancement of the teaching and learning process in the Sidama region.

1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

In this study, the researcher intends to examine the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their effects on teaching and learning in the Sidama region. Based on this objective, the specific goals of the study are:

1. To assess the impact of rural secondary school principals' leadership practices on teaching and learning in the Sidama region.
2. To explore the perceptions of school management teams regarding the effectiveness of rural school leadership in enhancing teaching and learning processes in secondary schools in the Sidama region.
3. To identify the factors that influence the leadership practices of rural secondary schools in the Sidama region of Ethiopia.
4. To propose strategies that can improve rural school leadership practices and enhance teaching and learning in the Sidama region of Ethiopia.

1.4 Rationale of the Study

The objective of this research study is to investigate the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning in the Sidama region. The context of rural secondary schools is constantly evolving, which challenges traditional perceptions of leadership. While leadership is often emphasized in secondary education, the researcher argues that teaching and learning should receive equal attention, as they are crucial elements of effective leadership.

While leadership can offer advantages to students, the researcher argues that teaching and learning should take precedence in secondary schools because of their direct impact on student outcomes. This issue is particularly important for educational progress, informed by the researcher's fifteen years of experience as a teacher and school leader.

Additionally, the researcher believes that the quality of teaching and learning in secondary education is heavily influenced by the leadership styles of principals in rural schools. Just as teachers require training for effective instruction, school leaders also need continuous professional development to thrive in their roles. For rural leaders, particularly those in academic positions, a clear understanding of their responsibilities is vital for effectiveness.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their connection to teaching and learning. To accomplish this, an analysis of the roles and experiences of rural leaders in selected secondary schools in the Sidama region was carried out, emphasizing their influence on teaching and learning.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study aimed to examine the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their effects on teaching and learning. The development of educators, principals, parents, students, community members, government officials, and other stakeholders relies heavily on effective leadership within the education sector. Gaining a clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities in secondary schools in the Sidama region can help students prioritize important tasks and effectively plan, coordinate, and organize activities.

The study's purpose was to provide guidance on the leadership responsibilities related to teaching and learning for rural secondary school principals, vice principals, education office specialists, and parents. The findings are intended to offer constructive feedback to rural teachers and school principals, enhancing awareness of effective strategies for improving teaching and learning. Aspiring school leaders may also find the results beneficial for better preparing themselves to lead rural secondary schools. Enhanced preparation for future leaders can promote improved leadership practices and optimize students' learning experiences.

Additionally, the study explored challenges to effective rural secondary school leadership in teaching and learning and suggested possible solutions. The findings are anticipated to provide recommendations for policies concerning the recruitment of leadership development programs and their influence on academic growth in rural secondary schools. Insights and experiences shared by secondary school teachers regarding rural leadership in teaching and learning are expected to deepen our understanding of this issue and highlight areas that need further research.

1.6 Delimitation of the study

Ethiopia is made up of twelve regional states and two administrative cities. The Sidama regional state, situated in the southern part of the country, is one of these twelve regions and is divided into four zones. In Ethiopia, regions are larger than zones, and "districts" correspond to what are referred to as "woredas." This study specifically targets the Sidama region to ensure manageability.

Stakeholders involved in the education system, such as experts from the Sidama region education bureau, district education office experts, rural secondary school principals, teachers, and high scored students, were identified as key participants in this study. However, officials, experts, teachers, and students from private schools were excluded, as their leadership practices often demonstrate better performance.

A pragmatic worldview embedded in the study's design was crucial, allowing the researcher to examine the issue through the lens of societal perceptions regarding the value of education and students lived experiences. This perspective helped identify factors that either hindered or

facilitated student performance, focusing on "what works now" rather than adopting a monolithic view of reality.

Additionally, urban secondary schools were not part of this study. The researcher focused on public secondary schools in rural areas due to their prior experience working as a teacher, principal, and supervisor in remote locations, aiming to highlight these specific contexts.

1.7 Highlights of Research Methodology and Procedures of the Study

This study sought to explore the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their influence on teaching and learning in the Sidama region. From the introduction to the conclusions and recommendations, the research methodology adhered to scientific principles, logical reasoning, and relevant data, building upon interconnected elements in a meaningful way to achieve this objective. Consequently, the study's strategy, design, techniques, and procedures were carefully selected to effectively guide the entire process toward the successful attainment of the research objectives.

The following sections emphasize the key components of the research methodology: research design, data collection tools, data collection processes, and sampling techniques.

1.7.1 Research Approach, Design and Methods

This study employed a mixed methods research approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was utilized, facilitating the collection of primary data from various sources, including experts from the Sidama region education bureau, specialists from Woreda (district) education offices, rural secondary school principals, teachers, high scorer students, and members of parent-teacher associations (PTAs). This approach enabled a thorough evaluation of leadership practices among rural secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning, followed by qualitative discussions with the participants.

In addition to the primary sources, secondary data were gathered and analyzed from regional, district, and school-level documents. These documents included committee minutes, performance reports, strategic and annual planning documents, as well as secondary school performance results and student exit exam scores, which served as the main data for document analysis.

1.7.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out through questionnaires, interviews, and document analyses. The questionnaire was distributed to experts from the regional education bureau, specialists from the district (Woreda) education office, principals, and teachers, while interviews were held with members of parent-teacher associations and high scorer students from grades 10 and 12. Among the various methods of data collection, questionnaires and interviews were the primary instruments, supported by document analysis. The questionnaire included two types of items: open-ended and closed-ended questions. Similarly, the interviews primarily featured semi-structured questions.

1.7.3 Procedures of Data Collection

To gather adequate and useful data from a significant number of respondents, the questionnaire was prepared in English. It was distributed to experts from the regional education bureau, district specialists, and rural school teachers and principals. In contrast, the interviews were translated from English to Amharic (the national language) for discussions with parent-teacher association members and high scorer students from grades 10 and 12.

In addition to these groups, Dilla University continuing education students and graduates, as well as rural secondary school teachers, principals, and district and school-level civil officers, were involved in the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. However, the researcher personally conducted the interviews.

1.7.4 Sampling Techniques

Administratively, the Sidama region is divided into four zones. Towns in the region have seen improvements in infrastructure, social services, human resources, and other facilities. As a result, schools in these towns benefit from enhanced financial resources, materials, and human resources, both in quantity and quality. To focus on additional issue areas, the researcher employed both simple random and purposive sampling methods to select samples from secondary schools in rural areas.

For sample selection, ten districts were chosen using simple random and purposive sampling techniques to ensure representativeness among the 19 rural districts. Following that, ten schools were randomly chosen from each selected district to form the study sample. Likewise, rural secondary school principals and teachers were sampled using simple random sampling, while education office experts were chosen through purposive sampling. Qualitative sampling methods also employed purposive sampling to identify high scored students and members of parent-teacher associations.

Finally, the researcher coded and tallied the collected data. Additionally, the researcher summarized and categorized the responses from interviews and open-ended questionnaire items.

1.7.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered and analyzed separately, in accordance with the mixed methods research design. The analysis aimed to extract facts and insights from the data to enhance understanding of the issue and aid in drawing conclusions. Similarly, the explanatory sequential mixed methods design guided the data analysis process. As a result, the qualitative data analysis provided valuable insights that complemented and strengthened the conclusions derived from the quantitative research (Ibrahim, 2015). The findings are discussed separately below.

1.7.5.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The process of gathering data involved analyzing quantitative information from a variety of sources, including the regional education bureau, rural secondary schools, and district education offices. Verifiable and measurable information was gathered and assessed. One-way ANOVA tests were run on the information obtained from the surveys to determine whether the variations in respondents' perceptions were statistically significant. The main problems impeding students' advancement were identified by calculating the weighted mean and grand mean using SPSS version 28 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (Ali, 2021).

1.7.5.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The thematic analysis approach was used to examine the qualitative data, as it offers a comprehensive context for exploring individuals' real experiences with the issue. The researcher’s

role involves interpreting the narratives shared by participants to extract meaning. After analyzing the quantitative data, the qualitative analysis sought to address the "why" and "how" of the problem through the lived experiences of those directly or indirectly affected by the study, reflecting the current realities of the area being investigated.

The researcher manually transcribed and analyzed the qualitative data. According to Ntinda (2020) and Cowger and Tritz (2021), this process involved transcribing audio recordings and identifying themes using a narrative approach to extracting meaning.

1.7.6 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The researcher believes that this study should be analyzed within the framework of transformational and instructional leadership theories. Better academic results can be achieved by implementing these leadership theories in schools, improving teacher practices, raising the standard of education, and increasing student learning and engagement. To achieve meaningful and sustainable solutions, it is crucial to consider the complete range of these theories. Therefore, the researcher contends that Transformational and Instructional Leadership theories offer valuable theoretical perspectives to guide this study.

Theoretical frameworks are crucial elements of research that offer a broader context and foundation for understanding the concepts underpinning the study (Imenda, 2014). They provide direction for the researcher's work and outline the range of options available for conducting the project. A solid theoretical basis enhances the credibility of the research, resulting in a thorough understanding of the underlying issues and a focused approach that enhances the significance, acceptability, and applicability of the research findings. (Adam, Hussien & Joe, 2018; Shikalepo, 2020). The detailed theoretical framework is presented in chapter three.

1.7.7. Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness of Research

According to Koonce and Kelly (2014), the quality of study findings depends on the validity and reliability of the measurement tools used. Ensuring that these instruments possess an adequate degree of validity and reliability is one of the most important safeguards researchers should consider. Validity focuses on whether the measuring instruments accurately capture the behaviors

they are intended to measure (Wong & Cooper, 2016). To maintain the research's validity, the questionnaire items were designed to provide comprehensive responses to the research questions. The supervisor meticulously reviewed the items to ensure that the language was clear and appropriate. An appropriate sampling procedure was employed to guarantee the representativeness of the sample. Efforts to enhance reliability—defined as the consistency of measurement results under various conditions—yielded a reliability coefficient as high as 0.87 Alpha. Concurrently, similar efforts were made to improve the trustworthiness of the qualitative instruments, focusing on credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. This approach ensured that the results were free from the researchers' biases and that the information and analysis reflected the perspectives of the participants (Suruccu & Maslakci, 2020; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

1.7.8 Ethical Consideration

From the beginning to the conclusion of the investigation, all ethical processes and procedures were consistently applied. In addition to respecting participants' choices and ensuring their safety, the study upheld ethical treatment that included measures to safeguard their well-being.

Consequently, this study aimed to adhere to ethical research guidelines and committed to upholding scientific integrity, promoting research validity, and safeguarding the rights of research participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants, ethical approval was secured from UNISA, and anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed (see Section 4.9 in Chapter 4).

1.8 Definitions of Key Terms

i. School

A school is a unique setting that provides a particular standard of living, along with specific activities and professions, aimed at fostering a child's growth in desired direction. It is also a special environment where a certain quality of life and certain types of activities and occupations are provided with the object of securing the child’s development along desirable lines.

ii. Rural Schools

A town or municipality outside the commuting zone of an urban center is classified as having rural schools if its population is 10,000 or more (Bollman & Reimer, 2019). In contrast, the Australian Government categorized rural and remote areas as any center with a population under 10,000 in 2016, while the Australian Bureau of Statistics defined them as all settlements with fewer than 1,000 people. The rural areas of other countries, such as Ethiopia, are often described in terms of their primary economic activities (like farming and agriculture), their natural environments (such as arable land and forests), or the services available in their local communities, including hospitals and shops (Taole, 2022).

iii. Principals

School principals are key managers and essential agents in the education system, making them vital partners in education. The principal is the most significant driver of improved educational outcomes. School academic performance is closely linked to the skills and commitment of the principals.

iv. School Leader

According to Pont (2020), a school leader is defined as someone who manages and oversees the administration of a school. They may operate independently or in partnership with a team, such as a school council. Their role generally encompasses organizational, instructional, and pedagogical responsibilities. Depending on the context, school leaders may be responsible for tasks such as scheduling, implementing the curriculum, supervising extracurricular activities, conducting assessments, and evaluating teachers.

v. Leadership

Leadership entails directing and inspiring people and teams to achieve predetermined objectives. Good leaders place more emphasis on doing the right thing than just doing it well. According to Mokgohlwe (2016) and Kouqing (2009), "the right actions include the ability to develop and communicate the organization's vision, engage and gain the support of various stakeholders,

maintain progress toward goals despite challenges, promote a positive culture, and attain desired outcomes."

vi. Education

In its narrowest sense, education refers to classroom instruction. In this context, society's elders employ planned teaching strategies to impart structured knowledge to children, aiming to achieve predetermined goals within a specific time frame. The objective of education is to ensure that students are mentally prepared to enter school (Mbagwu & Igbegiri, 2019). Education is the process of facilitating learning, which includes the development of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and habits (Mohammed & 'Nell'Watson, 2019). Although education can be defined in various ways depending on the field of study, I view it as a force that helps address political and socioeconomic challenges, serving as a powerful tool to shape human behavior and unlock potential.

vii. Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. It is widely recognized that the number of students who learn effectively serves as the best indicator of successful instruction. Students' evaluations of the course content and their overall assessment of the instructor are consistently correlated. Those who learn more tend to give higher ratings to their teachers.

viii. Parent Teacher and Students Association (PTSA)

The Parents Teachers Students Association (PTSA) is a coalition of key stakeholders within the school community. Members of the PTSA engage in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs aimed at school improvement (MoE, 2018). In this study, the PTSA is recognized as an essential stakeholder in the school.

ix. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is an approach in which leaders work with people or organizations to promote constructive change. This entails recognizing obstacles, outlining intended results, and creating creative and inspiring solutions to deal with these problems. It involves interacting with people to establish connections that boost motivation and morale for both the leader and the followers, according to Burns (1978). According to Bass and Riggio (2006) and Kouzes and Posner (2017), transformational leadership is the process by which a leader motivates followers to accomplish organizational goals through idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspiring motivation, and individually tailored consideration.

x. The Sidama Region

Sidama region is among the twelve Ethiopia's regional governments. According to the Ethiopian constitution, which gives its citizens the right to self-determination as a regional state, it is a recently created region in 2020.

1.9 Organization of the Study

This study is structured into six chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

This chapter introduces the study, outlining its background, rationale, problem statement, significance, aims, objectives, and delimitations.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

This chapter reviews pertinent literature and discusses the concepts of rural school leadership at both national and international levels.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study, focusing on leadership practices in rural secondary schools and key reforms in transformational and instructional leadership.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter explains the research methodology, design, and methods used in the study, including population and sampling techniques, data collection tools, research ethics, data analysis methods, and considerations regarding credibility and trustworthiness.

Chapter Five: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings of the study.

Chapter Six: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the study, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations.

1.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the introduction and background of the study are presented, including an overview of leadership theory. It outlines the statement of the problem, detailing the scope of the issue to be investigated, as well as the primary and specific research questions that will guide the research process. The chapter also elaborates on the main and specific objectives of the study and discusses its significance, identifying the target beneficiaries and the study's scope.

Definitions of key terms relevant to the study are provided, along with a summary of the thesis organization. The methodology used in the study is described, utilizing a pragmatic paradigm and a mixed methods approach framed within an explanatory sequential design. Data were collected from various sources through document analysis, questionnaires, and interviews, employing sampling strategies that included simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on the collected data.

Additionally, considerations for credibility, validity, and reliability were taken into account to enhance the quality and acceptance of the research findings. Efforts were made to secure informed consent, ensure participant safety, refine instruments, conduct pilot testing, obtain ethical clearance, and maintain anonymity. Finally, this chapter presents the key findings of the research, while the next chapter reviews the literature and examines concepts of rural secondary school leadership and teaching and learning at both national and international levels.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Lindt and Smith (2022), a literature review is a comprehensive examination of existing research, including books, articles, conference presentations, newspapers, journals, and other relevant sources related to the topic being studied. It is a systematic approach to collecting and synthesizing data from previous studies (Snyder, 2019). This process helps to identify options for advancing the planned study and highlights gaps in the research (Lindt & Smith 2022).

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study issue. The review focuses on defining concepts of 21st-century leadership, teaching and learning within education, rural leadership in education, and the relationship between teaching practices and the leadership styles of principals. It also addresses successful leadership, various leadership theories and traits, leadership practices in different contexts, global leadership practices, school leadership in Ethiopia, the significance of leadership in educational settings, definitions of rural schools, effective leadership in rural schools, characteristics of Ethiopian rural schools, school management teams, preparation programs for principals, community engagement, stakeholder collaboration in education, and the challenges faced by rural schools. The discussion concludes with strategies for effective leadership in schools and the preparation of principals in Ethiopian secondary schools.

2.2 Leadership in the 21st Century

The debate over whether management and leadership are separate processes continues. However, recent research highlights the leadership process, wherein an individual influences a group to reach a shared goal, thereby promoting new behaviors that define effective leadership (Al-Aghbar, Elshurafa, & Lowrey, 2019; Northouse, 2016). These evolving leadership philosophies include: Authentic leadership, wherein the genuineness of leaders and their leadership are emphasized;

- **Spiritual leadership**, which emphasizes leadership that motivates followers by drawing on their beliefs and wisdom of occupation and membership;

- **Servant leadership,** which puts the leader in the role of a servant, focusing on the needs of followers through "caring philosophies" to help them become more self-reliant, educated, and servant-like; and
- **Adaptive leadership,** whereby leaders encourage followers to become more familiar by posing and resolving issues, disputes, and changes.

After years of debate, leadership scholars have come to a consensus on one aspect: they cannot agree on a single definition of leadership. The interpretation of leadership differs among individuals due to factors such as generational variations and the effects of globalization. Ultimately, leadership is a multifaceted concept that can change over time. Northouse (2016) defines leadership as "a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a shared goal." He outlines several key elements of leadership:

1. Process: Leadership is a dynamic process that involves various factors.
2. Group Setting: It occurs within a group context.
3. Goal Achievement: It focuses on accomplishing shared goals.

In the realm of school leadership, this definition includes individuals in various positions, such as supervisors, leadership teams, school governing boards, assistant principals, principals, and other staff involved in leadership activities (Pont, 2020). Akka (2018) characterizes leadership as the influence and relationship between leaders and followers, who collaborate to achieve common goals and foster meaningful change. Effective leadership also necessitates skills that inspire followers to obey, respect, demonstrate loyalty, and cooperate.

Leadership is also often viewed through the lens of power dynamics between leaders and followers. In this context, leaders have the capacity to influence others. Some scholars see leadership as a transformative process that empowers followers to exceed their perceived limitations. Others approach leadership from the perspective of specific competencies, emphasizing the skills necessary for effective leadership. Despite the multitude of theories proposed to explain leadership, the essential elements remain consistent (Northouse, 2016).

a. Leadership is a process,
b. Leadership involves influence,
c. Leadership occurs in groups, and
d. Leadership involves common goals

In this sense, leadership is defined as follows: Northouse (2016) asserts that leadership is the process through which a person persuades a group of people to accomplish a shared goal. Viewed as a process, leadership is no longer just a trait of the leader but rather a transactional interaction between the leader and followers. This viewpoint highlights that followers can influence the leader and are influenced by them, underscoring the idea that leadership is a team endeavor rather than a one-sided exchange. This definition makes leadership accessible to everyone.

These viewpoints lead to the conclusion that influence is at the heart of leadership, which is an interpersonal activity. Leadership is the ability to inspire, support, and value the abilities and creativity of others; it transcends individual authority and power (Northouse, 2018). Rather than being predicated on individual characteristics or experiences, it is a dynamic process that involves people in a particular setting (Northouse, 2018). A key component of leadership is achieving organizational objectives (Northouse, 2018). Posner (2015) argues that effective leadership requires specific relationships among participants in the interaction process. To achieve desired organizational outcomes, leaders must foster systemic interactions among individuals, clearly articulating their vision and mission to inspire followers. Leadership is not just about issuing commands; it necessitates reciprocal communication. Effective communication with subordinates is vital for enhancing motivation to achieve organizational goals. These points underscore the various ways in which scholars and authors define leadership.

2.3 School Leadership

Terminology, concepts, and representations of school leadership differ across languages, countries, cultures, and educational systems. In this study, "school leadership" refers to the individuals or organizations tasked with managing secondary educational institutions. Despite the existence of various terms, "school leadership" has gained prominence among scholars (Hallinger, 2018; Harris, Jones & Ismail, 2022; Robinson & Gray, 2019). Titles such as school administrator, principal, and head teacher are commonly used to describe those in charge of the institution. The terminology differs based on national, cultural, and governmental contexts related to education and leadership approaches. For example, in English-speaking countries, the terms "principal" or "head teacher" are standard, while "school director" is more prevalent in Latin America. In various Nordic countries, the terms "director" or "head teacher" may be used. In some regions, the

definition of "school administrator" may not necessarily include collaboration with teachers to enhance student learning, focusing instead on administrative oversight.

A school leader is defined as an individual overseeing a school and responsible for its management or administration, as noted by the European Union (2019). School leaders can work independently or as part of a team, such as a school council. Their responsibilities may include pedagogical, instructional, and organizational tasks. Depending on the context, school leaders may be tasked with managing scheduling, implementing the curriculum, overseeing extracurricular activities, conducting assessments, and evaluating teachers. In some instances, leaders may also have teaching responsibilities in addition to potential financial duties (Pont, 2020; Esteves, 2017). Since 2015, Eurydice has been providing regular updates on school leadership to all EU member states, introducing concepts like "school head" and "school leadership." It highlights that leadership can be distributed among teams, which may include administrative assistants, accountants, or deputy school heads (Esteves, 2017).

Although the changes in the role of school leadership have manifested differently across countries and contexts, several common themes emerge. Midway through the 20th century, schools were typically managed by principal teachers, or primus inter pares, who acted as leaders. By the 1990s, these leaders were increasingly focused on academic achievement. From 2000 to 2015, the emphasis shifted toward collaboration and accountability, moving away from a sole focus on supervision of highly autonomous institutions. According to the OECD (2016, p. 85), these changes have been significantly shaped by specific circumstances, policies, and the institutional and legal frameworks within which schools operate.

Between 2010 and 2015, the regulation of education in OECD countries experienced significant changes, moving toward models of multilevel governance characterized by various levels of accountability and greater autonomy for school boards, local governments, schools, and their leaders to meet local needs. Furthermore, a wider range of stakeholders are now included in the interactions that take place within the educational system at the school, local, regional, and national levels than in the past. The duties and responsibilities of persons working in education are changing as a result of these developments, especially for school administrators who play a key role in school operations (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

Specifically, the roles of school leaders are evolving from merely managing the institution's academic programs to coordinating professional group projects both within and outside the school, reflecting a more complex and nuanced role. A crucial element of this new position is the cultivation of collaborative cultures. Hargreaves (2025) refers to this as "collaborative professionalism," while Harris, Jones, and Ismail (2022) describe it as schools operating as learning organizations. Educational institutions are increasingly uniting professionals to share knowledge and collaborate to improve student learning (Harris et al., 2022). Fullan (2019) underscores that collaborative cultures that enhance capacity for achieving results are more effective than approaches based on punitive measures. Others have pointed out the role of leaders in networks focused on student outcomes and teacher collaboration (Harris et al., 2022). These discussions indicate that accountability highlights the responsibility of each participant to perform their roles. As a result, communities of practitioners within and between schools are increasingly assuming responsibility for student learning and academic success, moving beyond the efforts of individual teachers.

It's important to recognize that these trends may vary by context but are generally applicable across OECD countries. Scheerens (2019) points out that different leadership philosophies can be identified based on situational factors. For instance, in countries with democratic traditions, where top-down leadership is less prevalent—such as in many English-speaking nations—school culture often emphasizes pedagogical collaboration among teachers. This collaborative approach is what Scheerens refers to as "distributed leadership" (2019), a concept frequently discussed in the literature (Harris et al., 2022; Spillane, 2017). However, Don (2018) suggests that the term could be refined for better practical application.

In contrast, in countries with more centralized bureaucratic traditions, school leaders may take on a more dominant administrative and representative role. In countries where school autonomy is high and governance is more decentralized, leadership can be exercised more directly. Understanding these context-dependent leadership styles is crucial for grasping the types of policies that nations will implement to redefine the roles of school leaders, as these roles are profoundly influenced by cultural context.

2.4 Four Case Studies of School Leadership in Different Context

Finding the policies that will best support excellent school leadership is crucial, as school leadership has emerged as a global priority on the education policy agenda (Miller, 2018). Effective school leadership is a critical component affecting the quality of education, according to the Vaillant (2015). According to recent studies, effective leadership in education can enable communities, staff, and principals to attain favorable learning outcomes for every student (Leithwood, 2021).

Selecting case studies on international school leadership proved challenging due to significant variations in the size of educational systems and the political structures of different countries. In federal nations, decentralized authority often allows regional governments to have a substantial impact on education policies, whereas in other countries, the ministry of education may serve as the sole governing body with authority over educational matters. The relationship between government and schools can range from straightforward to highly complex, depending on the specific representation in each nation.

The four cases presented here were chosen for their relevance to the topic rather than for their representativeness. Three of the examples were drawn from the OECD's 2006–2008 Improving School Leadership Initiative, which generated a wealth of leadership expertise. Among the 22 countries that participated in the initiative were Australia, South Korea, and Chile. South Africa was included due to its relevance to the school leadership training paradigm, complementing the other three cases.

(a) Institute for School Leadership in Australia

Australia has been making changes to its educational system for over a decade to address inequality. The country’s multicultural and multi-ethnic society, which includes more than 100 ethnic communities speaking around 80 different languages, reflects this diversity. However, social minorities often face economic, social, and educational disadvantages, presenting challenges related to this cultural richness (Welch, 2018).

The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century, which are backed by the Ministerial Council on Education, seek to raise enrollment and literacy rates, improve teaching and leadership, and alleviate some students' socioeconomic disadvantages. Furthermore, accountability and transparency at all levels are highly valued in the Australian educational system (Burns & McIntyre, 2017).

Globalization, international mobility, technological development, and socioeconomic shifts are some of the factors that have had a big impact on Australia's educational system, bringing with them both new opportunities and problems (Nastase, 2015). In order to improve learning outcomes for adolescents and children, Australia is concentrating on raising the standard of instruction and school leadership (Burns & McIntyre, 2017). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was founded in the middle of the 2000s in reaction to these developments in order to create and uphold strict professional standards for educators and school administrators. With ties to the Australian Government through the Ministry of Education, the group that oversees AITSL consists of representatives from the federal government, state authorities, principals' associations, teachers' unions, deans of education colleges, and organizations representing independent and Catholic schools (Watterston, 2015).

Encouraging school administrators and leaders to specialize and obtain accreditation in accordance with the 2011 national professional standards is one of AITSL's objectives. The knowledge, abilities, and behaviors required for success in principalship are outlined in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (Caldwell, 2019). Along with vision and principles, this standard is structured around three main criteria: knowledge and comprehension, personal traits, and social and interpersonal abilities. Leading teaching and learning, growing oneself and others, leading innovation, change, and improvement, overseeing school operations, and interacting with the community are the five professional activity domains that represent these characteristics(Watterston, 2015).

As part of AITSL's principal training framework, independent organizations carry out national evaluations to determine the Principal Standard's applicability and efficacy. AITSL also gives school administrators and principals tools to assess their performance critically, obtaining input from governing bodies, students, school teams, peers, and the community. In order to discuss

standardized action plans and implementation techniques, AITSL regularly arranges expert team meetings with schools.

In March 2013, the Australian College of Educators and the University of Melbourne initiated a three-year evaluation of AITSL. The findings from the first annual assessment in 2013 (AITSL, 2014) demonstrated a high level of awareness regarding school leadership standards. Approximately 65% of teachers and principals reported that they applied these standards in their work. Additional findings suggested that AITSL had enhanced communication between school administrators and education policy. The data showed that the standards function as a mechanism for quality control and accountability within educational institutions.

The assessment report (AITSL, 2014) includes examples of how the school leadership standards are implemented in programs that accredit and assess active teachers, as well as in training for aspiring educators. Several Australian universities have launched professional development programs to help school administrators implement these standards.

In conclusion, the creation of AITSL serves as a valuable model for other regions and countries examining school leadership. Run by and for principals and teachers, the Institute provides a range of programs focused on school leadership and has facilitated the evaluation and integration of research on instructional quality and school administration. AITSL is acknowledged both nationally and internationally for its role in organizing professional development and training in school leadership, as well as for its significant national initiatives in this area. It demonstrates how organizations can influence and shape school leadership policies, ultimately affecting educational quality and learning outcomes.

(b) Good School Leadership Framework and Leadership in Chile

Chile's educational system stands out in Latin America due to its nearly equal school enrollment rates in public and subsidized private education. However, the operational requirements for these sectors differ significantly. Public education is regulated by formal norms, while the private sector is guided by professional stability and managerial distribution. Rather than adhering to a single system for selecting leadership teams, Chile integrates basic public sector standards with market-based elements from the private sector. In 2011, the Ministry of Education introduced the Good

School Leadership Framework as a continuation of the successful Good Teaching Framework, which established national standards for assessing classroom teachers (Moreno, Donoso-Díaz & Araya, 2019).

The Good School Leadership Framework allowed Chileans to reach a consensus on the competencies expected of principals. This process, supported by regional and municipal administrations as well as the Teachers Association, involved extensive nationwide discussions. Establishing the necessary institutions to ensure the consensus could advance was vital, alongside the collaborative development of standards, goals, and benchmarks (Weinstein, Muñoz & Beca, 2020).

The technical unit head's function, which involves supporting teachers and being essential to school leadership, is a noteworthy facet of Chile's educational leadership. A solid grasp of leadership is necessary for this role, as is a clear comprehension of the principal's duties and interactions with other team members (Marfán, Muñoz, Weinstein & Sembler, 2023).

The Good School Leadership Framework marked a significant step in redefining leadership roles in Chile. It went beyond traditional legal definitions of managerial functions, distinguishing four key areas: curriculum management, leadership, resource management, and social and organizational climate management (Weinstein et al., 2020).

The leadership dimension of the framework is especially significant, emphasizing the essential role of principals in guiding school stakeholders toward achieving educational objectives. Criteria have been established to assess and enhance leadership, emphasizing skills such as managing change and conflict, providing informed decision-making support, and engaging the school community in the development of the educational project (Flessa, Bramwell, Fernandez & Weinstein, 2018).

The curriculum management aspect highlights the management team's duty to oversee and assess the implementation of the curriculum to guarantee effective student learning and high-quality teaching methods (Flessa et al., 2018). Resource management focuses on the management team's ability to acquire, allocate, and organize resources in line with the school's objectives, considering

both the educational framework and student learning outcomes. This also includes leadership responsibilities related to recruiting, assessing, and training teachers (Weinstein et al., 2020).

Finally, managing ethos and community is crucial for effective leadership. Principals are tasked with creating an environment where all stakeholders feel comfortable and engaged with the school. The Good School Leadership Framework aims to enhance professionalization and provide guidance on the expectations for school leaders, thereby improving institutional administration quality and student learning outcomes. It offers standard criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of technical-educational counselors, principals, and other school officials (Flessa et al., 2018).

According to Donoso, Benavides, Cancin, Castiro, and Lopez (2012), the next step for Chile is to connect the quality of principal leadership with educational outcomes. Transparent assessment systems can be created based on the Good School Leadership Framework, offering valuable, contextualized indicators for accountability and improvement. These components are tied to management control systems that have demonstrated effectiveness in different educational contexts.

Overall, the Chilean case study serves as an inspiration, demonstrating how a transformation in the expectations of principals was connected to significant changes in the 2000s. Principals are now regarded as educational leaders rather than just enforcers of directives from the central educational authority. A key principle outlined in the Good School Leadership Framework is that educational change must first be embraced by school communities, backed by strong educational leadership.

(c) Principals in the Republic of Korea Held in High Social Esteem

The educational system in the Republic of Korea has undergone significant transformation and progress over recent decades, driven by a strong commitment to education. Following World War II, the country faced a high rate of illiteracy, but it has since attained impressive results, including a school dropout rate of only 2% and 60% of the population possessing a university degree (Cho, 2012).

Education is highly valued in Korean culture and society, prompting individuals to invest both money and effort into it. Students typically work hard during the school day and often add five hours of private study to their seven hours of classroom instruction. The first three years of secondary education are mandatory, and primary education is provided free of charge (Harris, Jones & Huffman, 2017).

Public policy development in Korea is closely linked to the education sector, with education and national development strategies being interconnected. Curricula are revised every five years, enabling initiatives to be updated and aligned. A key feature of these strategies is a strong level of systemic integration. Furthermore, teaching is regarded as a prestigious and professional career with competitive salaries. Only the top 5% of secondary school graduates qualify for teaching positions, and salaries reflect the high caliber and professionalism of the role. According to Harris et al. (2017), teachers can expect an 80% increase in pay over an average fifteen-year career, which is subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

The Republic of Korea exhibits a significant trend toward centralization and substantial government involvement in all areas of education (Reid & Kleinhenz, 2015). The government sets teacher policies, while the Ministry of Education manages the hiring, certification, and training of teachers.

To be promoted to the role of deputy principal or principal, a teacher must possess a minimum of 25 years of experience. Consequently, those entering the profession at age 25 typically become eligible for promotion to these leadership roles at age 50 or older. Given that only 1% of teachers ascend to principal positions, the competition is fierce (Reid & Kleinhenz, 2015; Harris et al., 2017). The hiring and promotion processes are highly competitive, ensuring that only the most qualified educators are appointed as system principals (Harris et al. (2017).

Principals are selected from among promoted teachers rather than receiving separate training. Candidates must demonstrate exceptional competence and skill through their research accomplishments and professional records to be considered for promotion. Points for training courses and advanced degrees contribute to their qualifications, with a maximum of two Master's degrees eligible for scoring (Vaillant 2015).

Teachers and principals are viewed by the public as the "cream of the teaching profession" and are held in high esteem (Kane & Andrew, 2007). Criteria for these positions include social trust, moral integrity, and a blend of administrative and pedagogical experience, making them highly sought after roles (Vaillant 2015). Among the highest-paid professionals in the country, teachers and principals are selected from the top graduates of their respective cohorts (Csizmazia, 2019).

In contrast to other East Asian nations like Singapore and China (Hong Kong), which have prioritized principal leadership initiatives, Korea has not placed as much emphasis on this area (Csizmazia, 2019). Nonetheless, the high regard that society holds for teachers and principals is an intriguing aspect of reconsidering school administration. This cultural respect fosters strong academic performance among students and contributes to a disciplined and diligent classroom environment in the Republic of Korea.

(d) South Africa – Leadership and the Training Programme

Since 1994, when South Africa transitioned to a democratic nation, numerous changes have occurred. The Constitution now guarantees the right of all children aged seven to fifteen to attend school. However, significant challenges persist due to the political, social, and economic inequalities inherited from apartheid. One of the major issues is the lack of qualified teachers and principals.

Democratic governments have made training for teachers and administrators a top priority since 1994. This led to the creation of the Advanced Certificate in Education School Management and Leadership (ACE). The South African Ministry of Education has supported its institutionalization after it was first piloted in six provinces between 2007 and 2009 (Vaillant 2015). Members of school management teams who want to become principals can benefit from the structured learning opportunities provided by the ACE program, which will give them the fundamental knowledge, values, and abilities required for successful school leadership that supports the goal of democratic change.

The South African Department of Education collaborated with the National Management and Leadership Committee (NMLC), which includes representatives from universities that offer the

ACE program, during its development. The methodology consists of five components: training materials, on-campus training sessions, support for selected tutors, networking among participants, and online assessments of leadership in practice.

Universities apply a standardized set of requirements for principals and offer the part-time course over a duration of more than 24 months. The program consists of three modules totaling 120 credits: foundation modules (10 credits), elective modules (12 credits), and core modules (90 credits). Formative assessments are based on practical projects conducted in schools, where aspiring principals continue to work part-time. In addition to attending classes, students receive ongoing support from a team of tutors throughout the 24-month program.

An evaluation of the ACE program highlighted the significance of practice-based learning, enhanced by resources, coaching, and networking. Some implementation challenges were associated with the complexities of the multi-strategy model. While theoretical lectures and workshops typically run smoothly, applying theoretical knowledge to actual school leadership has proven to be more challenging (Msila, 2017).

Despite these difficulties, the ACE program's success can be partly attributed to its focus on coaching and peer networking, both of which contribute to effective leadership development. However, this process requires a variety of financial and human resources to support principals' innovative approaches in schools, along with trained mentors within the coaching framework (Bush & Glover, 2021).

In conclusion, the South African case study illustrates that school administrators can receive the training necessary to effectively lead and manage educational institutions. The ACE program employs various strategies to develop school leadership and management skills within a context focused on democratic transformation, aiming to equip principals with the tools required to enhance educational standards.

It is clear from the case studies that these four nations offer insightful perspectives on school leadership. Similar like Ethiopia, Australia is home to a multicultural and multi-ethnic population with a wide range of languages, ethnic groups, traditions, and living conditions. The Australian educational system encourages responsibility and openness at all levels, and the socioeconomic

difficulties that certain children encounter have been addressed with the founding of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The main goal of this organization is to set and uphold strict professional standards for principals and teachers.

Chile's successful implementation of the Good School Leadership Framework demonstrates that school communities must be the first to embrace educational change, which requires strong educational leadership.

In the Republic of Korea, the high regard in which society holds teachers and principals positively influences students' academic performance and fosters a disciplined classroom environment.

The Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) training experience in South Africa could serve as a model for numerous African nations and beyond, providing valuable insights for educational reform.

Ultimately, the experiences of these four countries enhance the examination of leadership practices among rural secondary school principals and the teaching and learning processes in the Sidama Region of Ethiopia.

2.5 Women in Educational Leadership

Brunner (2018) notes that women have historically been underrepresented in leadership roles across different fields, including education, where this gender gap is especially pronounced. Moreau and Fields (2015) highlight that while women make up most teachers in the United States, they occupy a disproportionately small number of leadership positions in schools. Additionally, Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) emphasize that the South African Department of Basic Education has long acknowledged the negative stereotypes surrounding women, which often reinforce the notion that women should be more dependent on men and submissive. For instance, while most men work outside the home, women are still commonly perceived as homemakers (Posel & Bruce-Brand, 2020; Potokri, 2015). The limited representation of women in senior managerial roles within the South African educational system illustrates these stereotypes.

These trends have led to investigations into the challenges women encounter in reaching leadership positions. Studies on women's experiences in educational leadership have identified

several common themes. Key findings include the importance of self-efficacy and leadership identity (Lockhart, 2022), the role of mentorship and professional development opportunities and the impact of gender bias and societal norms on career advancement (Brunner, 2018; Moreau & Fields, 2015). Furthermore, studies emphasize the significance of fostering inclusive and diverse organizational cultures (Lockhart, 2022).

The benefits of gender diversity in leadership are increasingly recognized across various disciplines (Catalyst, 2020). Eagly and Chin (2010) and Day, Riggio, Tan and Conger (2021) assert that gender diversity in educational leadership roles enhances problem-solving abilities, fosters innovation, and promotes equity and inclusion. Research suggests that diverse leadership teams are more inclined to consider a wider array of perspectives and approaches when making decisions, which ultimately enhances organizational performance (Rao & Tilt, 2016).

The presence of women in leadership roles has been linked to positive outcomes in educational contexts. Studies show that women leaders often prioritize cooperation and communication, cultivate welcoming and supportive work cultures, and advocate for policies that advance diversity and equity (Brunner, 2018; Moreau & Fields, 2015). As the demands and values of educational institutions evolve, these leadership attributes make gender diversity increasingly important.

Moreover, women's participation in educational leadership plays a crucial role in collaborating and communicating with diverse stakeholders, enhancing student learning, and fostering intimate connections with girls. Encouraging women to take on leadership positions not only fosters diversity in education but also enhances teaching and learning specifically.

2.6 Teaching and Learning in Education

The growth of any society is universally influenced by education. It plays a critical role in developing human capital, which drives technological innovation and economic growth while also conveying knowledge, skills, and values. Education serves not only as a means of achieving social development but also as a catalyst for progress in an information age fueled by research and knowledge. Effective instruction transforms students' perspectives and equips them to apply what they have learned to solve real-world challenges. Naz and Murad (2017) note that the

performance of students from diverse backgrounds improves when education experts support teachers in innovating and enhancing current teaching strategies.

The teaching profession is reserved for skilled and competent individuals who have received education-related training and possess the pedagogical knowledge, methods, and competencies necessary for the holistic development of students across all educational levels. Teaching is a complex process that involves various essential elements, including goals, materials, methods, assessments, the teacher's personality, and the quality of the students. It is widely believed that the teacher is a creative force and central to both success and failure in education. To be truly effective, a teacher must understand what to teach, how to teach it, when to teach it, to whom to teach it, why to teach it, and where to teach it (Naz & Murad, 2017).

Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. It is widely recognized that the number of students who learn effectively is the best indicator of successful instruction. Students' evaluations of course content and their overall assessments of the instructor are consistently correlated; those who learn more tend to rate their teachers higher (Hammonds, Mariano, Ammons & Chambers, 2017).

It is advisable to use the term "Teaching and Learning method" rather than "Teaching methods," as teaching and learning are interrelated activities (Abd Al Khadhim, 2023). Since learning is the goal of teaching, it is inappropriate to separate the two activities.

Teaching encompasses all activities and strategies used to impart knowledge, skills, and understanding across all educational levels. In essence, it is the act of encouraging others to learn. Consequently, if a student does not learn in a classroom environment, the teacher has not been effective. Given that the primary goal of formal teacher-student interaction is learning, teaching is fundamentally about facilitating that process. A teacher guides students' activities to generate learning, employing both direct and indirect advice, as well as structured and unstructured approaches.

Learning, on the other hand, is the process through which experience leads to a change in behavior or understanding. The measure of effective learning is reflected in these behavioral

changes; however, it is important to note that not all experiences are educational, as such changes can have both positive and negative effects. Ultimately, the goal of instruction is to ensure learning, and if learning has not occurred, that goal remains unmet. The Dictionary of Education defines teaching as "transferring or conveying knowledge, attitudes, and skills" (Shukla & Dungsungnoen, 2016). Soga (2020) further describes it as "a scheduled meeting between the instructor and the student on a specific topic to facilitate learning through suitable techniques and resources in a reasonably comfortable setting."

Learning strategies are the methods students adopt and utilize in the classroom. After completing lectures and grasping academic concepts and lesson plans, students must apply the learning strategies that will reinforce their understanding. To enhance their learning, students must consider a variety of factors, including academic subjects, grade levels, learning capacities, and academic goals. Common learning strategies include memorization, comprehension techniques, the use of technology, group projects, communication with teachers and peers, seeking feedback, and employing logic and reasoning.

While setbacks may occur during the learning process, students can effectively utilize learning strategies if they leverage technology and resources wisely and foster positive relationships with others. Therefore, it is widely acknowledged that organized learning will take place among students who possess the necessary knowledge and utilize a variety of learning resources (Smith, 2019).

In this study, the researcher sought to identify different teaching and learning strategies used in the classroom to improve the effectiveness of rural secondary school principals and enhance student achievement.

2.7 Factors Influencing Perceptions of Leadership Effectiveness

Human resources are a vital competitive advantage for success and long-term growth in today’s information economy and the era of globalization. Organizations that invest in both the quantity and quality of their human resources are more likely to achieve desired outcomes and secure a brighter future. In most educational contexts, school leaders are perhaps the most critical resource,

influencing success or failure, shaping community perceptions of schools, and acting as catalysts for creativity and innovation (Petersen, 2015).

According to the Wallace Foundation (2009), the educational world has long recognized the importance of school leadership qualities, such as efficacy, abilities, and styles, as critical determinants of student performance and school success. According to an increasing amount of research, the complex interactions between different leadership paradigms are ultimately connected to school well-being, staff and student achievement, and happiness (Petersen, 2015).

Recently, initiatives have been made to cultivate skilled human resources for educational innovation and change have focused on enhancing leadership styles and competencies for school leaders worldwide (Gurr, 2015). However, school administrators have not given sufficient attention to leadership effectiveness and the factors that influence it in recent years. Unsuitable leadership styles and a lack of relevant leadership knowledge and skills have significantly decreased teachers' and administrative staff's job satisfaction (Hallinger & Wang, 2015). According to Ali (2017), this decline in productivity contributes to strained and dysfunctional relationships within schools. Consequently, poor leadership practices disproportionately affect students, leading talented staff to leave the education sector for other fields.

The literature on leadership effectiveness, skills, and styles, along with the factors that significantly influence leadership practices, is extensive and varied worldwide (Barrett & Breyer, 2014; Felician, 2019; Hallinger, 2018). The following sections present a detailed exploration of factors influencing perceptions of leadership, including leadership styles, school leadership effectiveness, and leadership competencies.

2.7.1 Leadership Styles

According to preliminary findings, there is a spectrum of development rather than a single ideal leadership style. A leadership style is often thought of as a distinct strategy or technique that leaders use to sway their followers. In particular, it encompasses a collection of behavioral patterns that define a leader's behaviors, shaped by their individual characteristics and qualities as they inspire, manage, and direct people toward the accomplishment of particular objectives. According to recent studies, improving student achievement in the classroom is significantly

influenced by the leadership style of the principal. Effective leadership can engage various stakeholders, support both teachers and students, reduce barriers across the school organization, and foster innovative learning environments (Osborne, 2023; Pan & Chen, 2021; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Bixler & Ceballos, 2023; Ceballos, Eadens & Bixler, 2023).

Generally, there are various leadership philosophies that leaders can adopt depending on the context. According to psychologist Kurt Lewin's groundbreaking research, the three primary leadership styles are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire (Morkel, 2018). Subsequent studies have identified two additional significant leadership philosophies: transformational leadership and transactional leadership (Lunenburg, 2017). In this study, transformational and instructional leadership are the two validated leadership styles.

2.7.2 School Leadership Effectiveness

Leadership effectiveness, as the driving force behind innovation and development, refers to the degree to which leaders foster the success, transformation, and creativity of an organization (Lee, Legood, Hughes, Tian, Newman & Knight, 2019). Effective leaders excel in motivating and influencing team members to collaborate in achieving desired goals, generating revenue, and maintaining the organization's positive reputation (Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

Numerous criteria are typically used to assess leadership effectiveness, including performance outcomes, goal achievement, organizational survival and growth, crisis management abilities, member satisfaction with leaders and the organization, members' psychological development and maturity, leaders' perceptions among their subordinates, the organization's reputation, and success in change and innovation (Lunenburg, 2017; Mitchell, Sun, Zhang, Mendiola & Tarter, 2015;Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

Good school leadership implies that schools are more likely to satisfy the community's socioeconomic and personal development needs in addition to high standards for human resources (Schleicher, 2015). Effective leaders are capable of achieving the intended educational outcomes and efficiency, even when faced with limited resources. A common commitment to responsibly pursuing educational goals is fostered by schools with strong leadership, which have well-defined

missions and visions (Parveen, Phuc, Shafiq & Wei, 2021; Schratz & Schley, 2014). According to Mukhopadhyay (2023) and Lunenburg (2017), educators and school officials can modify their professional knowledge and leadership approaches to meet the demands of their pupils and unique situations.

Thus, effective leadership requires a shift from a passive approach to one that is dynamic and creative, enabling leaders and members to adapt swiftly to challenges and changes. Consequently, effective leadership is likely to influence schools' success, growth, development, and sustainability (Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023).

2.7.3 Leadership Competencies

Leadership competencies are a distinct collection of knowledge, abilities, and experiences that school leaders demonstrate in their self-leadership and school leadership practices (Karia, Hasmi, and Asaari 2019). Characteristics and attitudes that help school leaders perform better and obtain a competitive advantage are also included in these skills. Not everyone is naturally qualified to be a successful leader, even while some abilities, traits, and knowledge can be learned by real-world experiences.

To optimize their performance, school leaders must recognize the need to acquire additional abilities that are in demand within the industry (Seemiller & Croft, 2017; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). This understanding helps school administrators continuously improve and identify their position on the leadership and management path.

Analysing leadership styles, effectiveness, and competencies contributes to bridging the gap in leadership practices among principals and the teaching and learning processes in secondary schools in the Sidama region and throughout Ethiopian secondary schools.

2.8 Successful School Leadership

Research on effective school leadership has provided significant evidence of its impact over the past two decades (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). Day, Sammons, and Grogan (2020, p. 6) summarized this research by outlining ten key dimensions of effective school leadership:

- Defining the organization’s vision, values, and direction

- Improving teaching and learning conditions
- Redefining roles and responsibilities
- Enhancing effective teaching and learning
- Redesigning and enriching the curriculum
- Improving teacher quality (including succession planning)
- Building relationships within the school

Let us see the above successful leadership dimensions in detail.

2.8.1 Defining the Vision, Values and Direction

Leaders must have a clear and compelling vision for their organizations and establish values for their educational institutions. To effectively guide and influence others, they need to define clear goals and objectives. The vision and values inform their actions as well as those of others. School principals act as curators and protectors of their institution's vision, mission, and values, steering students toward achieving these objectives (Barrett & Breyer, 2014; Tingle, Corrales & Peter, 2019).

Effective managers provide a clear understanding of the institution's purpose and direction, which is widely recognized and supported by all stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, staff, and students. When a vision, values, and direction are clearly defined, individuals are more likely to support new projects, policies, and programs (Day, Sammons & Grogan, 2020). By clearly articulating the vision, values, and direction of their schools, administrators play a critical role in improving instruction and learning, according to the writers cited in this paragraph.

2.8.2 Improving Conditions for Teaching and Learning

Improving the teaching and learning environment is the primary responsibility of educational institutions, as it lies at the core of their mission. Leaders must recognize the significance of enhancing the instructional and learning atmosphere (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). To elevate the quality of learning and improve student performance, the environment needs to be appropriately modified. Leaders are essential in creating plans and strategies to upgrade the infrastructure and facilities of educational institutions. They are responsible for ensuring that everyone feels

comfortable and satisfied in their surroundings (Day & Simmons, 2016). In this context, effective leadership also requires access to appropriate teaching and learning resources, methods, and technologies to support enhanced teaching and learning.

2.8.3 Assignment of Roles and Responsibilities

Many responsibilities and tasks cannot be handled by leaders alone (Day & Simmons, 2016). They must foster constructive interactions with other members to coordinate and integrate their activities (Northouse, 2018). Individuals are assigned roles and responsibilities based on their educational backgrounds, skill sets, and abilities. Leaders have the authority to delegate tasks, and it is their responsibility to assess each person's strengths and capabilities. They must understand the various aspects of individuals' personalities and determine who is best suited for specific job duties (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). This underscores the importance of delegating tasks and responsibilities according to each person's skills, abilities, and educational background.

2.8.4 Redesigning and Enriching the Curriculum and Instructional Systems

Implementing curriculum reform requires assembling a team that is honest, effective in leadership, and shares a common vision and goals (Webster & Webster, 2018). Moreover, curriculum and instructional frameworks are considered vital to the evolution of the educational system (Day & Sammons, 2016). Decision-makers must ensure that they conduct research, evaluate information, and contribute meaningfully to the development and enhancement of curricula and educational institutions.

The curriculum and instructional systems must reflect the academic subjects, objectives, and grade levels of the students. Adult learners typically enroll in educational institutions to improve their knowledge and skills in specific fields (Grogan, 2020). Therefore, leaders must be confident that these learners will benefit from participating in training sessions. The knowledge they acquire will enable adult learners to sustain their livelihoods.

2.8.5 Improving Teaching and Learning Processes

Research indicates that as individuals progress through their academic programs and pursue their academic goals, they encounter various challenges and setbacks (Day & Sammons, 2016). In other words, they may find it challenging to effectively grasp academic concepts and apply them

to improve their overall lives. It is the leaders' main responsibility to ensure that essential changes are implemented in the teaching and learning processes.

Utilizing modern technologies and innovative, creative methods can significantly improve these processes (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). Administrators and other staff members in educational institutions must be proficient in using technology. When they lack the necessary skills, they often enroll in training programs to enhance their computer abilities. Thus, researchers suggest that the key to boosting students' academic performance in schools lies in improving teaching and learning practices.

2.8.6 Upgrading of Quality of Educators

Teachers must refine their leadership skills to effectively guide students toward achieving their academic objectives (Day, Sammons & Grogan, 2020). For teachers to fulfill their responsibilities in an organized manner, principals or school leaders must provide them with the necessary guidance and raise their awareness.

In order to improve the quality of instruction, a number of elements need to be taken into account. Effective use of instructional methodologies and teaching-learning tactics is part of this, along with communication, decision-making, time management, and conflict resolution abilities. Improving the caliber and advancement of their schools is ultimately the principal's responsibility (Meyer, Richter & Hartung-Beck, 2022; Ogunode & Musa, 2020). Professional development is a key aspect of this improvement (Day & Sammons, 2016).

To achieve their professional and personal goals, educators must adopt a positive attitude toward their responsibilities and fully utilize their skills. Therefore, improving teacher quality is crucial for enhancing leadership styles as well as instruction and learning in the classroom.

2.8.7 Building of Relationships Inside and Outside of the Educational Institutions

It is crucial for leaders to inform individuals about the significance of fostering positive relationships both inside and outside educational institutions (Day, Grogan, & Sammons, 2020). Additionally, school principals must collaborate, both collectively and individually, to create healthy learning environments (Kwatubana, 2017). Everyone in educational institutions should

have equal rights and opportunities. In the classroom, teachers should engage with students productively and provide them with opportunities to express their thoughts. Promoting strong relationships within educational institutions requires granting everyone equal rights and enabling individuals to voice their perspectives.

For long-term success, it is essential to establish strong connections with others outside the classroom. The purpose of these relationships among leaders is to foster positive change within the community. By doing so, they can expand their knowledge and seek assistance when needed to enhance the efficiency of educational institutions (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021).

2.8.8 Selecting and Developing Smart Tools

To efficiently perform administrative, clerical, and technical tasks, along with teaching and learning activities, individuals must make use of technology, tools, and equipment (Day & Sammons, 2016; Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). Leaders are in charge of making sure that intelligent tools are properly created and chosen. Making sure these tools are well-designed and grounded in solid theories is crucial when selecting and developing them.

When employees are uncertain about how to use smart devices effectively, they should enroll in training and development programs (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021). As a result, attending conferences, seminars, and training sessions is crucial to giving people the information and abilities they need to become more proficient with smart technology.

2.8.9 Participating in Providing Effective Solutions to Problems

Members of educational institutions may face a range of challenges, including inadequate equipment, insufficient civic amenities and infrastructure, lack of technology, ineffective teaching and learning methods, dissatisfaction with incentives and pay, and poor working conditions (Day & Sammons, 2016). Additionally, issues can arise when teachers lack the necessary skills to assist students, especially when students need help with their challenges, and when teaching methods are inadequate.

Therefore, it is the leaders' responsibility to ensure that individuals have access to the resources they need to perform their duties systematically. Leaders must mentor others and listen to their

concerns. Providing effective solutions to problems requires making options readily available and helping individuals choose the best course of action.

2.8.10 Ensuring an Orderly and Supportive Environment

It is crucial for leaders to create policies and initiatives that foster a peaceful and supportive atmosphere, in addition to ensuring that educational institutions have adequate facilities, infrastructure, civic amenities, technology, tools, teaching materials, and equipment (Day, Sammons & Grogan, 2020). To cultivate a supportive and orderly environment, everyone must have equal rights and opportunities, free from prejudice. Consequently, teachers also take on the roles of training, instructing, mentoring, and educating students (Nurdin et al., 2019).
An orderly and supportive atmosphere can be achieved by applying one's skills to fulfill job responsibilities, ensuring consistent discipline procedures, and utilizing peaceful conflict resolution methods (Gurr & Drysdale, 2021).

According to the aforementioned viewpoints, creating a clear vision, values, and direction; improving the teaching and learning environment; defining roles and responsibilities; redesigning and enriching the curriculum and instructional systems; improving the teaching and learning processes; raising the caliber of educators; establishing connections both inside and outside of educational institutions; choosing and developing smart tools; offering efficient solutions to problems; and upholding a supportive and orderly environment are all components of effective school leadership. These elements are crucial to the collection of data for this research.

2.9 Leadership and Power

Power is the capacity to influence others' beliefs, actions, or choices. Leaders use power as a tool to achieve both their own goals and those of their group. While some degree of influence is important for leaders within the organizational hierarchy, it is not always necessary. One theory suggests that power determines dependence. According to Liu, Xu, Zhou and Zhang (2020) and Kouqing (2009), power can be categorized into five primary types, which are as follows:

2.9.1 Coercive Power:

The capacity to have an adverse effect on another person's well-being. People react to this form of power out of apprehension about what might happen if they disobey.

2.9.2 Reward Power:

The capacity to benefit others positively. People follow the wants and instructions of others since doing so brings about advantages.

2.9.3 Legitimate Power:

The influence that comes from a person's place in the formal hierarchy of an organization.

2.9.4 Expert Power-

Is authority derived through knowledge, skill, proficiency, or other specialized abilities.

2.9.5 Referent Power-

Is the authority a person obtains because of possessing attractive assets or character attributes. This ability emerges because of respect for or a desire to resemble another person.

2.10 Leadership Skills

Motivating Employees: The employees who make up an organization are crucial to its success and a key source of its competitive edge. Success is directly influenced by two main factors: motivation and talent. Motivation can manifest in various ways.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs includes five levels: biological needs, safety needs, social and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs. In contrast, the ERG theory ranks needs as relatedness, existence, and growth.

Another relevant concept is the two-factor theory, which posits that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite ends of the same spectrum, but rather distinct states influenced by different factors (Liu et al., 2020; Kouqing, 2009).

Rewarding is one of the primary motivating factors for leaders. Effective motivating practices involve identifying meaningful individual rewards. When an employee performs well within the organization, it is essential to reward them to encourage even better performance in the future.
Another important factor is redesigning work. Job enlargement involves adding new tasks that are as complex as existing ones and require different skills. Job enrichment, on the other hand,

enhances the complexity of the job and increases responsibility. Providing constructive criticism is also a key motivating element. Employees should receive feedback on their work, and any criticism should be communicated positively to avoid negative outcomes. Clear communication of expectations and organizational goals is vital for motivating individuals (Liu et al., 2020; Kouqing, 2009).

Communication: One of the most crucial leadership traits is the ability to communicate effectively in both formal and informal contexts across various levels, including downward, upward, and horizontal communication. However, organizational obstacles such as noise, information overload, time constraints, information distortion, and cross-cultural barriers often hinder effective communication. Personal barriers can include differing opinions, poor listening skills, and self-interest.

To ensure effective communication, the process should follow a clear procedure. This involves encoding a thought, transmitting it from the sender to the recipient, and then having the recipient decode and act upon it. Key strategies for enhancing communication skills include being a good listener, understanding the audience, choosing the appropriate communication medium, encouraging feedback, and managing the flow and timeliness of information (Kouqing, 2009; Liu et al., 2020).

Decision making is a fundamental aspect of effective leadership. It involves several key steps: defining the problem, identifying criteria, collecting and evaluating data, listing and assessing alternatives, selecting the best solution, implementing the decision, and conducting follow-up.
Effective decision-making also requires consideration of various group decision-making processes. One such process is brainstorming, during which a wide range of ideas is generated without immediate evaluation or judgment.

Nominal group methodology- In this approach, discussions are structured, and a silent voting process is employed to select the best solution to the issue at hand.

The Delphi Technique is an innovative approach designed to provide decision-makers with concise, relevant information. This method aims to forecast future trends and evaluate potential

courses of action, positioning researchers and respondents as partners in the prediction process. In essence, those involved in decision-making are asked to share their insights and best judgments. Dialectical Decision Making - To promote thorough discussion, there is debate between quite distinct sets of suggestions and assumptions Liu et.al (2020) and (Kouqing, 2009).

2.11 Leadership Theories

Understanding leadership theories is essential for planning and overseeing community and adult education. The twentieth century saw a growing interest in leadership. While early theories primarily focused on the traits of leaders, later theories expanded to include factors such as skill levels and environmental circumstances. Below is a summary of the differences among various leadership theories, drawing from the works of Landau (2015).

Great Man Theories: Great Man Theories suggest that rather than being acquired via experience, good leaders are born with innate leadership traits. These theories emphasize the valor of exceptional leaders who emerge in times of need. The term "great man" is used primarily because men have traditionally been viewed as possessing the capacity for leadership (Landau, 2015).

Trait Theories: Trait theories often identify specific personality or behavioral traits commonly associated with successful leaders. However, this raises a critical question: how can we explain to individuals who possess these traits yet lack effective leadership abilities? This inquiry highlights one of the challenges of using trait theories to define leadership (Landau, 2015).

Contingency Theories: Contingency theories emphasize the environmental factors that affect the most effective leadership approach for each situation. According to these theories, there isn't a single leadership approach that works in all situations. Success relies on a range of factors, including the leadership style, the personalities of the followers, and the specific context (Landau, 2015).

Situational Theories: Situational theories propose that decision-makers should adapt their leadership style to the unique circumstances they face. Different decision-making contexts may align more effectively with specific leadership styles. For example, an authoritarian approach may be most beneficial when the leader possesses the greatest knowledge and experience within the group. Conversely, a democratic style may be more suitable in scenarios involving highly skilled professionals (Landau, 2015).

Behavioral Theories: Behavioral theories are based on the premise that effective leaders are cultivated through experience rather than being born with inherent traits. Grounded in behaviorism, this approach prioritizes the observable actions of leaders over their internal traits or psychological states. The theory asserts that observation and training are effective strategies for individuals seeking to cultivate their leadership capabilities (Landau, 2015).

Participative Theories: Participative theories posit that the most effective leadership style actively solicits and values the input of others. Leaders who adopt this approach create an environment that encourages group members to participate and contribute, thereby boosting their sense of ownership and commitment to the decision-making process. Nevertheless, within this framework, the leader retains the authority to assess and accept contributions from others (Landau, 2015).

Management Theories: Management theories, often known as transactional theories, place a strong emphasis on group performance, structure, and supervision. According to these theories, leadership is linked to a system of rewards and penalties, whereby workers receive recognition for exceptional work and suffer consequences for subpar work. This approach is frequently applied in business contexts (Landau, 2015).

Relationship Theories: Relationship theories, also referred to as transformational theories, concentrate on the bonds that build between leaders and their followers. By emphasizing the importance and worth of their common goal, transformational leaders enthuse and encourage those around them. While concentrating on group outcomes, these leaders also aim to help individuals achieve their full potential, often guided by strong moral and ethical principles (Landau, 2015).

From these perspectives, examining leadership and power, along with leadership skills and theories, enhances our understanding of the diverse characteristics of leadership. These frameworks are crucial for modernizing organizations broadly and educational institutions specifically in the twenty-first century.

2.12 Leadership Practices in Different Contexts (Urban vs. Rural)

Education disparities between rural and urban areas have significant implications. People living in rural areas often struggle to access high-quality education, leading to lower academic achievement and limited opportunities for personal growth. This, in turn, affects their future employment and career advancement possibilities. To address these educational disparities, comprehensive solutions targeting the root causes must be implemented (Diamond et al., 2020).
To close the educational gap between urban and rural communities, the following actions can be taken:

2.12.1 Increase Access to Education

A significant factor contributing to the educational inequalities between urban and rural communities is the restricted access to high-quality education in rural areas. Many rural villages lack essential infrastructure, such as schools and libraries, which restricts educational opportunities. Governments and non-governmental organizations should invest in establishing and maintaining schools in remote areas, as well as providing resources like textbooks, instructional materials, and internet connectivity (Gill, 2013).

2.12.2 Improve the Quality of Education

Just having access to school is not enough; the quality of education is just as crucial. Governments should make investments in cutting-edge teaching strategies and technology, as well as guarantee sufficient personnel and support for educators, in order to raise educational standards in rural areas (Wood, 2023).

2.12.3 Address the Teacher Shortage

Teacher shortages are a prevalent issue in rural areas, significantly impacting the quality of education. Governments should implement policies to attract and retain skilled educators in these

regions. This could involve rewards including increased pay, better working conditions, and chances for professional growth (Grimmer & Brandon, 2013; Horowitz & Fuhrmann, 2018).

2.12.4 Encourage Community Involvement

Improving education in rural areas can be greatly aided by community involvement. Parents, local organizations, and community leaders can help by donating resources, volunteering, and advocating for educational policies. Encouraging community involvement fosters pride and dedication to rural schools' success.

2.12.5 Increase Funding for Rural Education

Governments should boost financing for this kind of education to make sure that rural schools have the means to deliver high-quality instruction. This may include financing educational resources, teacher training programs, and school infrastructure (Wood, 2023).

2.12.6 Develop Innovative Solutions

Innovative approaches such as e-learning, remote learning, and mobile learning can help bridge the educational gap between urban and rural areas. These solutions offer students in remote locations access to high-quality education, even when traditional teaching methods are unavailable. Fortunately, there are several strategies to address this educational divide. Here are some examples:

2.12.7 Technological Solutions

Technological advancements have made it easier to close the educational gap between urban and rural communities. Digital technology enables students to access high-quality education from anywhere, allowing educational resources to reach remote locations. Rural students can now access the same materials as their urban counterparts through digital libraries, video conferencing, and online courses. Additionally, rural schools can use technology to enhance instruction by providing online assessments and interactive teaching tools.

2.12.8 Investment in Infrastructure

For the educational gap between urban and rural areas to be closed, investments in infrastructure—such as roads, electricity, and internet connectivity—are crucial. The lack of infrastructure poses a significant barrier to education in rural areas. For example, unreliable electricity can hinder the use of technology to enhance instruction. Additionally, poor road conditions make it difficult for teachers to reach remote locations, and students may face long walks to school. By investing in infrastructure, governments can ensure that students in rural areas have equal access to opportunities as their urban counterparts.

2.12.9 Support for Teachers

Supporting teachers is crucial for closing the educational gap between urban and rural communities, as they are the cornerstone of education. Many educators in rural areas face challenges in delivering high-quality instruction because of restricted access to resources and training. By supplying teachers with essential materials, professional development opportunities, and mentorship, we can enhance their skills and knowledge, ultimately leading to better student outcomes. Additionally, offering incentives such as better salaries, housing, and transportation benefits can help attract and retain educators in remote regions (Han, Rap & Bansa, 2021).

2.12.10 Community Involvement

Involving the community is essential for closing the educational divide between rural and urban areas. Community-based groups, parents, and local leaders can significantly impact education in rural locations. They can support educators and students, advocate for improved facilities and resources, and help identify the educational needs of their communities. Community involvement fosters a sense of accountability and ownership, leading to better educational outcomes.

In summary, ensuring equitable opportunities for all depends on closing the educational gap between urban and rural communities. Collaboration among communities, governments, and civil society organizations is necessary to implement long-term solutions that address the root causes of inequality. Strategies such as leveraging technological advancements, investing in infrastructure, supporting teachers, and engaging in the community can help eliminate educational disparities.

Reducing educational disparity between urban and rural areas is a difficult problem with broad societal and personal ramifications. Addressing the socioeconomic causes of educational inequalities, guaranteeing equitable access to high-quality education, and providing funds for outstanding instruction in rural areas are all crucial first steps. It will be impossible to guarantee that everyone can realize their full potential and contribute positively to society unless these issues are resolved.

In summary, everyone should have access to education as it is a fundamental right, irrespective of where they live. Governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities must work together to bridge the educational gap between urban and rural areas. By enhancing educational opportunities, improving standards, addressing teacher shortages, promoting community involvement, increasing funding, and developing innovative solutions, we can ensure that educational disparities are eliminated.

2.13 Leadership Practices: A Global Perspective

Leadership practices in schools differ markedly across various cultures and educational systems globally. The crucial role that school leadership plays in preserving the quality of education has been acknowledged by recent international assessments (Lewis, Sellar & Lingard, 2016). There is an increasing body of research that concentrates on leadership, highlighting the tasks and responsibilities of leaders while also exploring leaders as individuals. Studies suggest that many challenges faced in schools can be addressed through effective school leadership (Flessa, Bramwell, Fernandez & Weinstein, 2018).

Historically, the duties and responsibilities of school management teams have been closely linked to school leadership (Petersen, 2015). Nevertheless, effective leadership necessitates a collective culture of expectations where each individual is responsible for their contributions to the overall results. This concept has been underscored in academic literature and reports from international organizations over the past decade (Sun & Leithwood, 2015).
Here are some global experiences that provide insights into various approaches to school leadership.

2.13.1 Distributed Leadership

The creation of professional learning networks is one of the noteworthy innovations in many educational institutions in recent years. In the education sector, leadership is a critical component of effective professional networking. Leaders at all levels are increasingly encouraged to collaborate and network to achieve system and school development for the best outcomes for students (Azorín, Harris, & Jones, 2020).

A distributed leadership perspective on managing professional learning networks:

I. Explores the role of leadership in promoting productive collaboration and effective networking;
II. Addresses the challenges of coordinating group efforts;
III. Proposes that distributed leadership may offer a crucial theoretical framework for grasping the nature and impact of professional collaboration.

Accordingly, scholars contend that distributed leadership provides a useful paradigm for additional empirical investigation and analysis on the efficient administration of professional learning networks. This section concludes by proposing that the body of knowledge on networks and networking should shift from primarily normative descriptions and self-reports to more advanced data collection and analytical methods. This shift would yield more comprehensive and reliable evidence regarding the goals, processes, and outcomes of professional learning networks (Azorín et al., 2020).

2.13.2 Culturally Responsive Leadership

Skilled school leaders understand the significance of culturally sensitive approaches that consider the diverse backgrounds of their students, especially in multicultural environments. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) has gained prominence in research focused on social justice education, reform, and culturally responsive practices. This comprehensive examination lays the groundwork for the growing body of research aimed at ensuring that the entire school environment—not just instruction—addresses the educational needs of marginalized students.

Based on existing literature, the researchers focus their discussion on four key themes: critical self-awareness, CRSL and school environments, CRSL and teacher preparation, and CRSL and

community involvement. They also provide a list of particular CRSL programs that emphasize social justice, advocacy, equity, and inclusion in schools. Referencing research on social justice, leadership, culturally responsive education, and the experiences of students and communities of color is crucial in the field of education, especially when it comes to teaching and learning (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016).

2.13.3 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership remains a prominent model that emphasize inspiring and motivating staff to achieve a shared vision. This approach is associated with improved teaching, learning, and student outcomes. The body of studies on transformational leadership is extensive. According to Sun et al. (2017), who reviewed twenty years of research, transformational leadership is "the most-studied form of leadership across disciplines in both Western and Chinese contexts" (p. 1). Research indicates that transformational leadership can be an effective framework for leaders enacting change (Litz & Blaik-Hourani, 2020). According to Bush (2017), school administrators must adopt a transformational approach to successfully implement educational mandates.

2.13.4 Instructional Leadership

The importance of school administrators in improving instruction and learning is emphasized by instructional leadership. It is required of leaders to help teachers and actively participate in curriculum creation (Timperley, 2019). While crucial for effective schools, instructional leadership is often overlooked or poorly understood. It encompasses the actions and attitudes of leaders focused on enhancing teaching and learning, going beyond routine administrative tasks.

Instructional leadership involves collaborating closely with educators to improve instruction and raise student achievement. Beyond overseeing a school's daily operations, instructional leaders are tasked with guiding and supporting their teachers, drawing upon their deep understanding of teaching and learning processes. As educational expectations and standards continue to change, the significance of this type of leadership has increased.

Scholars investigate the meaning of instructional leadership and the elements that support its ongoing development. As educational expectations and standards have changed, so too has the

significance of this leadership paradigm. Tesfaye, Legesse, and Legesse (2025) provide real-world examples of instructional leaders who have evaluated their methods and initiatives critically in order to improve teaching and learning in their institutions.

2.13.5 Impact of Technology on Leadership

The rise of digital technology has transformed school leadership practices, requiring leaders to adopt new tools for communication, collaboration, and instruction. One of the biggest challenges facing school administrators in the twenty-first century is integrating technology into the classroom to improve the teaching and learning process. In this digital age, technological leadership is essential for inspiring and motivating educators to effectively use technology (Thannimalai & Raman, 2018).

According to Dexter, Richardson & Nash (2016), it is the responsibility of technology leaders to understand how educational technology can support classroom instruction and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted various sectors, including education, forcing schools worldwide to shift from traditional face-to-face engagement to contactless methods of instruction. Educators were compelled to transition to online teaching within weeks (Arum & Steven, 2020). Despite feeling unprepared and lacking experience with online education, teachers had to innovate and adapt due to school closures (Hechinger & Lorin, 2020).

2.13.6 Global Perspective on Leadership Development

Programs for developing leaders are increasingly designed with a global perspective, addressing the diverse challenges leaders face in various contexts. Research in Educational Leadership, Management, and Administration (ELMA) has expanded significantly over the past fifty years (Gumus Arar & Oplatka, 2021; Hallinger & Kovacevic, 2019). Concurrently, there has been growing interest in mapping and categorizing its knowledge base, methodological and conceptual approaches, and knowledge-production locales (Gunter, 2016; Hallinger, 2020; Thomson, 2017). Researchers have employed various techniques to formalize knowledge production in this field, assessing factors such as volume, growth trajectory, geographic distribution, citation practices, thematic focuses, epistemological orientations, and theory usage. Notable contributions include studies by Hallinger and Chen (2015), Hallinger and Kovačević (2019, 2021), Oplatka and Arar

(2017), Walker and Hallinger (2015), and Castillo and Hallinger (2018). This perspective enriches the literature by tracing the traditions, trends, and trajectories of knowledge generation while identifying both the field's evolution and shortcomings in existing mapping scholarship.

The changing global landscape of school leadership approaches is highlighted by these references. For leaders to fulfill the many needs of their students and communities, they must be more flexible, culturally sensitive, and committed to equity and teamwork. Continuous study and practice will be crucial in developing successful school leadership techniques as educational circumstances continue to evolve.

In several countries, including Singapore, England, Scotland, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States, principals are required to hold a formal qualification in school administration and/or leadership (Bush, 2020). This discussion briefly outlines the prerequisites for principalship in these nations.

Before being appointed as a principal in Singapore, applicants must earn a degree in education management (DEA). The Ministry of Education chooses the participants for the full-time enrollment program. Through approved training focused on educational development, the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in England satisfies key requirements (Maphoto, 2016).

For assessing applicants for principal roles in Scotland, the Headship Standard is a valuable tool (Naidoo, 2019). In order to ensure that candidates are prepared to successfully carry out all leadership and management jobs, the practice-based Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) program asks them to consider their professional values, administrative duties, and skill sets.

New Zealand employs a distinct approach, hiring about 180 new principals annually through a structured methodology that includes a three-phase induction program implemented by the Ministry of Education (Naidoo, 2014). In Sweden, school administrators (head teachers) are selected by the local board of education following a rigorous hiring process, focusing on candidates whose qualities align with the ideal profile for head teachers (Maphoto, 2016).

Therefore, this global perspective on school leadership informs the study by highlighting pathways for improving school leadership practices and enhancing teaching and learning. Employing a range of leadership styles enhances the effectiveness of schools, rather than depending on just one approach. Consequently, principals of rural secondary schools should harness various leadership strengths to stimulate change and transform their institutions.

2.14 School Leadership in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education has been investigating methods to incorporate the concerns of individuals engaged in putting school leadership policies into practice into its procedures for choosing and preparing school leaders. This is vital because relying solely on mechanical models of scientific management is unlikely to yield successful policy implementation. The effectiveness of any initiative aimed at developing school leadership will hinge on its ability to secure support from the user system, specifically, the teachers and principals—who are in key positions to either promote or obstruct implementation.

To effectively craft policies for the twenty-first century, the ministry must involve educational stakeholders in the policy-making process for school leadership development. Several important policy topics were addressed to enhance school leadership throughout the country (Tesfaye Gemechu, 2019).

2.14.1 De- professionalization of the Principalship

After a federal governance structure was established in 1991, the Education and Training Policy of 1994 implemented the decentralization of the nation's educational administration and management (Education and Training Policy 1994, as stated in Tesfaye Gemechu, 2019). The policy's "educational management will be... professional" was stated clearly in Article 2.8.3 (p. 30). The Education Sector Development Programme I (ESDP I), which ran from 1997–1998 to 2001–2002, paralleled this directive. It advocated for the provision of school management training for head teachers, aimed at enhancing the overall management of schools. Furthermore, it stipulated that training in educational management would be extended to head teachers and officials at all levels (MoE 1998, p. 9-10, as cited in Tesfaye Gemechu, 2019).

However, the implementation of these recommendations from 2001/02 onward did not align with the initial goals. At that time, elections were held to fill the principalship position, allowing teachers without formal training in educational administration to be selected as long as they garnered support from their peers. Staff would choose three candidates in order of preference, sometimes against their will, and the Woreda Education Office (similar to a school district) made the final decision on who would be appointed as principal, often disregarding the staff's rankings. This system, referred to by Tekleselassie (2002, p. 57, as cited in Tesfaye Gemechu, 2019, and Gurmu, 2020) as the "deprofessionalization of [the] school principalship," significantly undermined the role.

This arrangement had several negative consequences. First, it wasted resources invested in preparing qualified principals and resulted in the loss of experienced leadership (Gurmu & Davidson, 2014). Second, it led to the appointment of unqualified individuals, necessitating additional training costs. Appointing inexperienced principals and leaving student success and school effectiveness to chance was unacceptable. According to Teffera (2005, p. 31) and Geleta (2018), placing the principalship in the hands of the unqualified raised questions about how effective educational management and administration could be achieved.

Moreover, this system masked fundamental commitment to the field. Tesfaye Gemechu (2019) references Tekleselassie (2002, p. 59), highlighting that elected school principals were frequently "exceptional in their teaching roles or well-liked by colleagues and superiors," often placing loyalty to staff and superiors above their professional responsibilities. This situation prompts the inquiry raised by Geleta (2018) and Tefera (2024): "Why were individuals lacking the requisite training appointed to these roles when qualified candidates were readily available?"

While there were rumors that external parties influenced these decisions, the ministry's precise motivation for this arrangement remained unclear. Some educators suggested that it may have been an attempt to support the democratic transition the country was undergoing by implementing the policy prescription that "educational leadership would be democratic" (Education Development Road Map 2018-30). Regardless of the intention, it is evident that the policy statement was not effectively translated into action in this case.

De-professionalization has had an influence on teachers at Addis Ababa University's Department of Educational Planning and Management. Ironically, Tesfaye Gemechu (2019) observed that students at the university were seeking the same degrees despite already possessing first- and second-degree qualifications in the field. This situation raised concerns regarding the theoretical objectives put forth by external entities considering the ministry's actions.

The remaining diploma program at the university was compelled to discontinue operations because of this circumstance. The program continued until 2003, when it was suspended, only to reopen after the graduation of its final cohort in 2004. Subsequently, no new enrollments were permitted, signaling the cessation of the institution's legacy of offering diploma-level training for school principals. While diploma graduates had previously been adequately positioned within primary schools, this pathway was rendered obsolete by the restructuring of the educational system, which eliminated junior secondary schools. Regrettably, the closure was unavoidable due to the absence of any alternative institution to assume these responsibilities.

The deprofessionalization arrangement was neither strictly enforced nor formally discontinued after a few years of promotion. Some schools had elected principals, while others filled vacant principal positions by designating faculty members or transferring principals from other schools. Consequently, it was unclear what rules were in place, demonstrating how the arrangement failed to meet the theoretical goal that leaders must be elected by their followers. Kiros (1990, p. 2, as cited in Tesfaye Gemechu, 2019) noted that educational policies often lack clear, practical definitions, making it hard to determine which ones are actively being implemented. This challenge is evident in the present situation.

Conversely, the Education for All (EFA) objectives were integrated into the national education agenda through a series of Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs). Development partners contributed to initiatives such as principal training. ESDP I received backing based on agreements between the government and these partners (MoE, 1998). During ESDP II (2002/2003 – 2004/2005), training was planned for around 434 secondary school principals with the goal of promoting efficient, professional, and democratic school leadership, also supported through similar collaborative efforts (MoE, 2012, p. 28).

2.14.2 Principals Mentorship

Newly appointed principals have benefited significantly from mentorship, which helps them build the key competencies needed for successful school leadership (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020). According to Gümüş (2019), mentoring also assists principals in identifying both their strengths and areas where growth is needed. Although there are various approaches to professional development, mentoring has demonstrated efficacy (Gümüş, 2019). Professional development that is adaptable, collaborative, and reflective has proven to be especially advantageous for rural principals (Cothern, 2020). Additionally, context-specific professional development designed for rural environments has yielded positive results (Parson & Hunter, 2019), making mentoring a particularly suitable approach.

In 2022, Pendola and Fuller found that principals in rural areas face distinct or more intense challenges compared to their urban counterparts. A study was carried out to examine the advantages of mentoring for rural principals, aiming to understand how mentorship is viewed as a helpful tool in enabling these leaders to carry out their responsibilities successfully.

2.14.3 The Start of the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) Training

The Ethiopian Teacher Development Program Guideline was replaced in 2013 by the Ethiopian Teachers, Principals, and Supervisors Development Guideline, which serves as the updated framework (MoE, 2013). A new era of school leadership development in Ethiopia began when this updated approach was approved. According to the updated framework, elementary and secondary school principals must have taught for at least three years and possess a bachelor's or master's degree "in one of the school subjects" (MoE, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, it required that elementary and secondary school principals complete their Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) program within two summers of their appointment. In the summer of 2014, a master's degree in school leadership was launched to take the place of the training for secondary school principals (MoE, 2014), while the training requirements for elementary school principals stayed the same.

Thus far, participants in the program have exhibited limited enthusiasm for these training initiatives. Many primary school principals, who already hold bachelor's degrees in diverse fields, have shown a strong interest in pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership to enhance their readiness for their roles. This trend is emphasized by their interest in the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) program. Gorfe and Mersha (2018), for instance, observed a notable deficiency in "readiness and learning interest among students in the PGDSL program." Secondary principals, however, would rather have their degree called "master's degree in educational leadership and management" (EDLM) than the present "master's degree in school leadership." This preference is illustrated by real-world examples; for instance, Ambo University offered MA degrees in both School Leadership and EDLM in regular, summer, and extension formats during 2017 and 2018. While nearly all students pursuing the MA in EDLM attended through a self-sponsored arrangement, none of the MA in School Leadership students did so. Moreover, some individuals admitted to the government-sponsored MA in School Leadership program subsequently withdrew and enrolled in the MA in EDLM program after paying tuition. This trend highlights the participants' preference for the MA in EDLM, revealing a disconnect between the ministry's program offerings and the actual needs of the participants.

The controversy surrounding the program emerged during the curriculum development phase. Educators involved in designing the curriculum proposed the adoption of bachelor's and master's degree programs in educational leadership and management to effectively prepare primary and secondary school principals. However, ministry decision-makers dismissed these recommendations, instead modifying the PGDSL training in accordance with the same political directives frequently observed within the system (Tessema, 2015). This "political command" signifies a top-down approach to policy implementation; wherein political authority solely drives policy initiatives. Levin (2016) argued that "education policy became much less consensual... and more openly influenced by the political agendas of specific governments," emphasizing the decision-makers' sole dependence on political authority. The rejection of the educators' suggestions was foreseeable, as the curriculum development process commenced only after the 2013 decision to initiate the PGDSL program in collaboration with the "Ministry of Education and the regional education bureaus" (MoE, 2015).

Despite the controversies surrounding the PGDSL training and the MA in School Leadership preparation, the ministry sought to concentrate on new and significant areas of leadership development. According to the United Nations (2015), Articles 4.1, 4.3, and 4.c identify three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) particularly pertinent to the Education Sector Development Program V (ESDP V): the provision of "quality education," the "reduction of gender inequities," and the "supply of qualified educational professionals." One of the primary objectives of ESDP V, which is supported through a cooperative agreement between the government and development partners, is to enhance "teaching and leadership abilities across all institutions, accompanied by increased motivation and job satisfaction" (MoE, 2015). According to research, "the quality of school administration and human resource management" is a "key motivating factor for effective teaching," and the main goal of developing leadership abilities is to increase teachers' "motivation and job satisfaction" (MoE, 2015). In order to attain gender parity, the ministry also planned to raise the percentage of women in school leadership positions from 8% to 20% and made sure that all principals, regardless of rank, had licenses. Women were to take part in three months of leadership development training to help achieve this aim (MoE, 2015).

The PGDSL training program is just one of many steps needed to transform school leadership nationwide without compromising existing projects. Data indicate that school principals in Ethiopia face numerous challenges, including student retention and "disciplinary problems" (Gurmu, 2014), in addition to the complexities of their roles and a lack of support from the educational levels that require it (Afework, 2015; Edamo & Netshitangani, 2018). Therefore, a school principal must possess a specific level of knowledge and proficiency to perform their duties effectively.

Research reveals that school principals frequently lack the requisite professional competencies. For example, Afework (2015) noted that "school leaders do not possess adequate knowledge and expertise in modern leadership theories and practices. According to Oumer and Kejela (2017, p. 15), "school administrators had a limited understanding of school leadership orientation." Edamo (2018, p. 20) acknowledged the difficulties in implementing instructional leadership in schools and identified the selection of principals who "lack skills in educational planning and administration." Additionally, school principals have "administrative, coordination, and

leadership abilities," as well as "insufficient planning and implementation skills at the institutional level," according to Wondemetegegn (2017, p. 98).

According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, principals of elementary schools should have a bachelor's degree, while those of secondary schools should have a master's degree (MoE, 2017). However, a shortage of suitable applicants for these posts has prevented this requirement from being successfully implemented in many elementary and secondary schools in the Sidama region and throughout Ethiopia. Mengistu (2020) and Habtamu (2024) also emphasized a number of deficiencies indicated by supervisors, vice-principals, and principals, among other school officials:

- Failure to create a welcoming, appealing, and child-friendly atmosphere in the classroom.
- Inadequate efforts to develop new revenue-generating plans to offset budget shortfalls.
- Misuse and improper management of government funds.
- Minimal attempts to establish strong connections with the school community to secure necessary funding for teaching resources, infrastructure, and tools.
- Lack of dedication, genuine involvement, commitment, leadership, and support in organizing, leading, and assisting school efforts toward essential activities (teaching).
- Engaging in ostentatious behavior and making exaggerated statements.

Furthermore, the Sidama Regional Education Bureau (SREB) report for 2023–2024 highlighted several issues that emerged during the implementation of its plans and received significant attention. These issues include:

- Incompetence among principals and teachers
- Wastage of time in the education process
- Failure to utilize contemporary technologies to enhance or support education
- Lack of teacher guides and student textbooks in certain subjects, along with a scarcity of reference materials
- Increased rates of absenteeism, repetition, and dropout
- Insufficient participation of children with special needs in school
- Inadequate enrollment of new students

Lower representation of female teachers in school leadership positions. These are the primary concerns that are emphasized in the report.

These difficulties highlight the necessity for the Ministry of Education to improve school principals' general training and development so they are better prepared to handle problems and fix the leadership flaws that have been found. Furthermore, the objective of ESDP V to convert "existing ABE [Alternative Basic Education] centers into regular schools" requires the recruitment and training of additional school principals to properly staff these newly created institutions (MoE, 2015, p. 15).

2.15 The Importance of Leadership in School Context

Principals are responsible to the several stakeholders involved in their positions as teachers, administrators, governors, leaders, and school managers (Botha, 2018). This underscores the distinctive nature of leadership within a school setting. Leaders are expected to juggle multiple roles simultaneously while serving diverse categories of stakeholders. The philosophies of these constituencies may not only differ but may also conflict in some cases. According to Botha (2018), "The school principal functions as a teacher or instructional leader, a governor or political leader, a change agent or transformational leader, and a manager or managerial leader."

Building a positive school climate requires effective leadership. Strong interpersonal ties, a feeling of connection and belonging, acceptance of diversity, safe and friendly surroundings, and treating people with consideration, justice, and consistency are all essential components of a healthy school climate (Lynch, 2021). In order to strengthen school leadership and enhance teaching and learning in the Sidama region and throughout Ethiopia's secondary schools, principals must exhibit these attributes.

2.16 School Management Team

A group of people charged with overseeing and managing a school as a whole is known as a School Management Team (SMT). Important individuals like the principal, vice-principal, department heads, and occasionally members of the teaching and support staff are part of the SMT. The primary goal of the SMT is to ensure effective administration, enhance educational quality, and promote a positive learning environment (Bush & Glover, 2016).

2.16.1 Key Responsibilities of a School Management Team

The following are the primary responsibilities of the School Management Team (SMT) aimed at enhancing teaching and learning, as described by McLaren (2017):

A. Strategic Planning: Formulating and executing the school's vision, mission, and strategic objectives.
B. Policy Development:Establishing rules and guidelines for the school to guide its activities.
C. Resource Management: Managing the distribution of resources, including financial, human, and physical assets.
D. Curriculum Oversight: Making sure the curriculum meets the needs of the students and is in line with educational standards.
E. Staff Development: Providing staff and instructors with opportunities for professional development to improve teaching and learning outcomes.
F. Community Engagement: Fostering connections with stakeholders, parents, and the community in order to win their support for the school.

Additionally, Elmore (2022) suggested various managerial and leadership strategies that SMT members should implement to foster collaboration within classrooms:

Shared Vision

SMT members are tasked with developing an inspirational and clearly defined vision for the future of their schools. This vision should communicate to every member of the school organization what lies ahead and how they will fit into it. SMT members must fully understand the vision, which should be communicated repeatedly. They need to be thoughtful and have a strategy for sharing this vision. During their meetings, they must consistently convey the vision and explain how it relates to their current tasks. Additionally, they should welcome feedback, comments, and contributions from others.

Trust among members

Elmore (2022) also argues that SMT members should cultivate a high level of trust and interdependence among one another. He emphasizes that leaders must build trust by being open to

vulnerability and acknowledging their mistakes. SMT members should set high standards for their teams while encouraging risk-taking, constructive criticism, and open communication. This includes clearly outlining expectations and policies.

Established expectations and guidelines

To ensure that the team operates at its maximum potential, Elmore (2022) outlined reciprocal expectations and established guidelines for collaboration among members. Team members must feel that their contributions are valued and co-create the expectations for their work. SMTs should make decisions collectively, using methods such as majority ruling, minority opinions, unanimous consent, or consensus. They should focus on one conversation at a time and defer judgment. Meetings and team guidelines should be aligned with these expectations.

2.16.2 Teamwork

The days of assigning specific tasks to employees based solely on their positions and allowing them to work independently are long gone. Educational institutions today recognize that achieving individual and school objectives requires effective teamwork and commitment.

A team is a group of individuals brought together to establish standards for excellence. To maximize the group's potential, it is essential to foster a cooperative spirit and positive relationships among team members. Webster's New World Dictionary (2008) defines teamwork as "a collaborative effort by a group of individuals, where each person prioritizes the unity and effectiveness of the group over their individual opinions." This definition does not diminish the importance of individual contributions; rather, it emphasizes that productive and successful collaboration transcends individual achievements. All team members must coordinate their efforts and strive toward a common goal to create effective teamwork.

Schlicht (2020) contends that "effective leadership is the cornerstone of successful teamwork." He emphasizes that "one of the most critical elements of teamwork is leadership." This implies that SMT members, in their roles as team leaders, must have the ability to cultivate and sustain a positive workplace culture that motivates others.Bhatti (2024) highlights that this approach encourages and motivates team members to foster an environment that values hard work and

dedication. He states that "a good team leader not only emphasizes the team's goals and direction but also makes sure that other team members share this focus." It's essential for SMT members to foster a strong sense of camaraderie, allowing team members to feel valued and supported. This is especially crucial for preventing unnecessary conflicts that could hinder collaborative efforts.

Conversely, Rajeev and Kalpathi (2016) explain that "effective communication is essential for a successful team." They note that "teamwork itself is a symbol of interpersonal interaction, and communication is a crucial component of interpersonal interaction." Thus, open communication is one of the most important elements of successful collaboration, allowing team members to share ideas, convey plans, articulate feelings, and understand each other's perspectives. They also note that "one of the challenges in developing and maintaining effective teamwork is managing and unraveling the complexities of communication." If poor communication is recognized, measures should be implemented to resolve these issues and foster an environment that promotes effective dialogue.

According to Rajeev and Kalpathi (2016), a team consists of individuals with diverse skill sets who collaborate, either for a short duration or longer, to efficiently complete daily tasks or work on assigned projects. The criteria for managing and building a team remain consistent, whether leading a project team, a new team, or any other type of team, as the ultimate goal is to provide efficient and effective operations and services.

As my reading suggests, the school management team should bear responsibilities such as strategic planning, policy development, curriculum oversight, staff development, and community engagement. They should also cultivate a shared vision, trust among members, established expectations and guidelines, and a spirit of teamwork. This framework should be applied as much as possible in this study.

2.17 Definition of Rural Schools

There is no universal definition of rural schools in the literature, as different countries define them in various ways. For instance, the United States Census Bureau (2013) defines rural areas as populations situated outside urban clusters (which have 2,500 to 50,000 residents) or urbanized regions (which contain 50,000 or more residents). In contrast, Preston and Barnes (2017),

representing Statistics Canada, define rural as populations in towns or municipalities outside the commuting zone of urban centers with populations of 10,000 or more.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) defines rural and remote areas as settlements of less than 1,000 people, while the Australian Government (2013) expands this definition to include any center with a population under 10,000 (Sullivan, 2018).

In Ethiopia, rural areas are often characterized based on economic activities (e.g., agriculture and farming), natural surroundings (e.g., arable land, forests), or the availability of services in a catchment area, such as hospitals and stores (Taole, 2022).

2.17.1 Rural Principal Leadership

Despite being a crucial and demanding function in all educational settings, the role of rural principals differs from other forms of school leadership (Hansen, 2018; Klar & Huggins, 2020; Pendola & Fuller, 2022). It differs from suburban and urban principals in that it is characterized by particular duties and difficulties. About 20% of American students live in rural locations, according to Showalter, Johnson, Klein, and Hartman (2017). Given the substantial influence principals have on raising student achievement and the obvious distinctions between principalships in rural and urban areas, it is imperative to understand how to best assist rural leaders.

2.17.1.1 Context of the Rural Principalship

There are several definitions of what it means to be rural. Despite the common misconception that rural schools are only one-room, tiny establishments where pupils must endure lengthy bus rides, this is not always the case (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Various entities, including the USDA, OMB, the Census Bureau, and state governments, employ differing definitions of rural areas (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Essential characteristics that delineate a rural area encompass size, proximity to metropolitan centers, economic and employment factors, and educational trends (Klar & Huggins, 2020). The U.S. government offers several definitions of rural, capturing populations that range from fewer than one thousand to over fifty thousand (Jeinie et al., 2021). Research indicates that one potential motivating factor for rural school leaders may be their sense of "place" and its influence on their communities and schools (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Swanson, MacKay, Yu, Kagiliery, Bloom, and Schwebel (2020) note that many rural communities are experiencing an aging population, slower growth compared to urban areas, and shrinking job markets. Federal and state agencies apply various criteria to delineate rural areas. In the most recent U.S. decennial census, for instance, "a county with a population of fewer than four hundred thousand" or "a census county division with fewer than fifty thousand residents within a county of four hundred thousand or more" are considered rural areas (AZ Rev Stat § 36-2171, 2016). According to Ratcliffe et al. (2016), the Census Bureau defines rural regions as places that are not urban, taking into account variables including population density, land use, and distance. (Rural County Representatives of California, 2022). Indicators of rurality in California include lower population density, longer distances, and certain demographic and economic characteristics. This study concentrates on schools that qualify to be classified within their state's rural school organization, tackling the complexities associated with defining these terms.

Rural schools are distinctly shaped by their environments. Klar and Huggins (2020) assert that rural schools frequently function as cultural hubs within their communities, fostering a strong bond between the educational system and local residents. The political, economic, demographic, and sociocultural contexts of rural areas profoundly influence their educational institutions. Hallinger (2018) explored a similar notion, investigating how context affects school principals by examining the sociocultural, political, and economic characteristics of their school communities.

He analyzed how institutional context, personal attributes, and community dynamics impact school leaders, ultimately influencing instructional organization, school climate, and student outcomes.

Apart from the impact of rural settings, hiring procedures for principals in rural schools varies greatly from those in urban and suburban locations. Rural schools have historically had lower application rates for principal posts, and those that are selected frequently decline the offers (Pendola & Fuller, 2021b; Yang, Lee & Goff, 2021). These schools typically have a higher proportion of white male principals since fewer women and minorities apply (Yang et al., 2021). According to Grissom, Bartanen, and Mitani (2019), principals in rural schools generally lacked

efficacy, experience, and qualifications. In addition, Grissom et al. (2019) predict that principal turnover rates will be higher in low-income rural schools than in other school categories.

2.17.1.2 Roles of Rural Principals

Principals' responsibilities in rural schools are very different from those in other areas. Rural principals frequently take on extra duties outside of their normal administrative duties, such as those of substitute teachers, bus drivers, and cafeteria employees, according to Parson and Hunter (2019). Wieczorek and Manard (2018) draw attention to the variety of responsibilities that rural principals frequently take on because of a lack of staff in these school systems. They are expected to take the lead in specific areas such as human resources and federal grant management. Furthermore, rural principals often contend with an increased administrative burden, managing paperwork typically handled by district office staff in larger districts, and may also act as superintendents or teachers alongside their principal duties (Canales et al., 2024). Additionally, they are compelled to place a greater emphasis on teaching and learning, particularly regarding measurable student outcomes (Stronge, 2021).

Principals of rural schools usually have to perform a variety of tasks and use a wide range of abilities in their duties (Versland et al., 2020). In order to effectively manage educational processes, improve organizational effectiveness, set strategic direction, and grow faculty and staff, a principal's self-efficacy is essential. The self-efficacy of a school's leaders is directly related to the school's overall success. As instructional leaders, principals are tasked with motivating teachers to boost student performance and attracting and retaining talent, which in turn enhances their own efficacy within the classroom (Minton, 2020). High self-efficacy fosters proactive behavior, while low self-efficacy can lead to inaction and self-doubt. When self-efficacy is diminished, the ability to set ambitious goals, promote peer collaboration, and effectively navigate challenges is significantly compromised.

In addition to their responsibilities as educators, rural school principals are frequently regarded as community leaders. Wieczorek and Manard (2018) highlight the importance of being visible and present in the community as a key theme. These principals are typically well-known individuals who have developed close relationships in their communities (Preston & Barnes, 2017). To

enhance the educational experience for their schools and students, they consciously make use of community resources (Klar & Huggins, 2020).

Principals' experiences in rural schools are significantly shaped by multiplex relationships. Festa-Daigle (2023) characterizes multiplex interactions as complex, interrelated, and overlapping relationships. Knutson and Del Carlo (2018) note that rural leaders are often integrated into their school communities through ties to local organizations, religious institutions, and familial networks. Principals' interactions with staff, students, and families are greatly influenced by these relationships (Knutson & Del Carlo, 2018). The social, civic, and professional spheres of many rural leaders are entwined (Howley, 2021). To effectively run their schools, rural principals must skillfully navigate and leverage these relationships to support school operations.

2.17.1.3 Challenges of Rural Principals

According to Hildreth, Rogers, and Crouse (2018), rural leaders typically confront six significant challenges: geographic isolation, cultural isolation, financial pressure from a diminishing tax base, inadequate staffing that necessitates personnel and leadership to assume multiple roles, personal loneliness, and a legacy of historical stability. New administrators in rural settings often struggle to understand management fundamentals, as they are more likely to serve as the sole leaders within their schools. The absence of collegial support and professional development opportunities exacerbates feelings of professional isolation among rural leaders (Hohner & Riveros, 2017; Klocko & Justis, 2019). Klocko and Justis also noted that rural leaders encounter lower levels of funding. , along with equivalent or heightened expectations for student performance, as well as increased costs associated with travel and professional development.

In addition to their distinctive work responsibilities, rural principals encounter further challenges stemming from their prominent positions within the community and the district (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). In a study by Hansen (2018), principals cited excessive workloads and inadequate professional support as the main reasons for leaving their rural schools. Klocko and Justis (2019) noted that rural principals often felt obligated to attend all community events and maintain readiness to address school-related issues. They also mentioned frequent interactions with superintendents and school boards, which is less commonly observed among principals in other settings. Rural principals are often required to manage underperforming staff who may have local

ties, making the situation more complex. Their approachability can lead to additional pressures to perform well, despite not having training tailored to their specific needs.

Rural principals face unique professional challenges along with personal difficulties. Work-life balance issues are common among them (Hansen, 2018; Klocko & Justis, 2019). They often experience family stress alongside their professional responsibilities (Hansen, 2018). According to Hardwick-Franco (2019), rural principals frequently grapple with staff retention and oversee teachers instructing students outside their areas of expertise. Despite these challenges, rural principals report a high degree of job satisfaction (Parson & Hunter, 2019). To mitigate personal and professional stressors, rural principals need access to appropriate development and support. Without this, rural schools risk experiencing high principal turnover rates.

2.17.1.4 Rural Principal Turnover

Approximately 20% of principals transition out of their roles each year, reflecting a high turnover rate across all principal positions. However, rural principal roles can be even more difficult to fill, with turnover rates in certain rural regions being notably higher (Hansen, 2018). Hansen notes that rural principals frequently depart for personal reasons, which may include family-related stress, new career opportunities, inadequate compensation, overwhelming responsibilities, community expectations, and feelings of professional isolation. Additionally, principals in isolated areas are more inclined to resign when confronted with a rise in new students and inadequate resources to effectively support a growing student population (Pendola & Fuller, 2021a).

High turnover rates are not limited to principals; teachers in rural schools also experience significant turnover due to leadership challenges. Over time, teacher turnover occurs in schools because of these leadership issues (Holme, Jabbar, Germain & Dinning, 2018).
In my observations during data collection and from the experiences of researchers working in the Sidama region, turnover among both rural principals and teachers is a common challenge in this area.

2.17.1.5 Rural Principal Development

Research indicates that principals in rural contexts encounter unique expectations, responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities. Consequently, there is a distinct need for professional development and support that is context-specific and designed for rural principals. The significance of training rural principals as leaders in organizational learning to successfully assist others in enhancing their organizational, interpersonal, and personal skills was emphasized by Klar and Huggins (2020). Their methods are based on an effective school leadership model that prioritizes ongoing school development, developing others' leadership potential, creating a positive teaching and learning environment, and using data to inform instructional decisions in the context of the school and community. In a similar vein, Du Plessis (2017) emphasized the value of professional development for rural principals in order to support their development as instructional leaders, improve their ability to communicate effectively, and help teachers further their careers.

Rural principals often experience higher turnover rates and have fewer opportunities for professional advancement. This turnover leads to financial, cultural, and academic losses for schools (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Reducing turnover has been linked to the availability of professional development opportunities. Despite having fewer resources, rural schools must prioritize principal networking and professional development. Research indicates that individualized, ongoing, and integrated professional development is most effective (Cothern, 2020; Klar & Huggins, 2020). Mentorship and self-study can also benefit rural principals in enhancing their practice (Hardwick-Franco, 2019).

The literature outlines various professional development activities tailored for rural principals. Klar and Huggins (2020) describe several types of professional growth, including leadership coaching, where seasoned principals assist novice principals in developing their skills. Unlike coaching, mentoring involves both skill enhancement and sociocultural development. The most effective coaching and mentoring for rural principals take place when the mentor or coach has experience in rural settings, offering insights that are especially pertinent to those environments. A crucial element of this support is the mentor's capacity to pose thoughtful, probing questions that promote the growth of the novice (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Additionally, coaches aid in the development of action research cycles, referred to as Plan, Do, Study, Act cycles, which help novices cultivate greater self-reflection (Klar & Huggins, 2020).

In their examination of a rural principal development program in Appalachia, Wells, Chimka, and Kaur (2021) discovered that goal setting for the mentee principal emerged as the most effective strategy for enhancing mentorship. Technology has facilitated coaching as a viable form of professional development for rural leaders, particularly when establishing connections with nearby mentors or coaches proves difficult (Klar & Huggins, 2020). This approach effectively addresses the unique needs of less experienced leaders.

The creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is an additional strategy for training rural principals. Through their professional and social networks, these communities give new principals the chance to exchange ideas and information with other leaders (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) help leaders better understand the problems they face and work together to find solutions. They can work together with other districts or autonomously within a district. Rural principal development programs have established robust communities of practice through cohorting and networking (Wells et al., 2021). However, PLCs' geographical isolation may make it difficult to execute them effectively.

Collaboration among districts, corporations, government entities, and other educational institutions can significantly enhance principal development. These partnerships offer novice leaders varied leadership experiences. For instance, collaborations between universities and districts have effectively supported grow-your-own initiatives (Hildreth et al., 2018). Such alliances are advantageous as they align long-term goals by integrating multiple regions and optimizing resource utilization. Many collaborations led by universities have been established to aid in the hiring, training, and growth of mentors. In order to enhance performance, principals gather to talk about difficulties and exchange information (Klar & Huggins, 2020). Because they allow for the sharing of resources that no one institution could supply on its own, these partnerships have proven especially advantageous for rural schools (Wells et al., 2021).

In conclusion, a survey of the literature on rural principals identifies a number of important themes, such as the unique characteristics of the rural principalship and the contextual diversity of rural communities. Rural communities are often close-knit groups with significant influence over their institutions and schools, despite differences in population, political dynamics, economic conditions, and values (Klar & Huggins, 2020). According to research, principals in rural areas

have more obligations than those in non-rural areas (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Principals in rural areas frequently have important positions in their communities (Preston & Barnes, 2017; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). They frequently face loneliness, isolation, a lack of resources, and a lack of support and professional development opportunities (Ashton & Duncan, 2013; Klocko & Justis, 2019). Tailored support specific to their roles has been shown to be advantageous for rural principals (Cothern, 2020; Klar & Huggins, 2020).

2.17.1.6 The Context of Rural-Urban Leadership in Teaching and Learning

Building upon existing research, this study compares two critical areas concerning principals in rural and urban contexts: instructional leadership methodologies and contextual challenges. Despite engaging in similar instructional leadership responsibilities, prior research suggests that the leadership philosophies of principals significantly influence the implementation of these practices (Wilcox & Zuckerman, 2019). This highlights the importance of understanding the specific instructional leadership strategies employed by principals and their defining characteristics (Robinson & Gray, 2019). Furthermore, these findings underscore the necessity of investigating how school leaders can effectively execute these practices in diverse contexts (Hugginsons & Klar, 2020).

The principal's role in managing curriculum and instruction is often seen as instructional leadership (Louis, Murphy & Smylie, 2016). Fostering instruction-focused interactions with teachers requires the deployment of practices frequently associated with instructional leadership, such as mentoring, teacher assessment, and the creation of data-driven instructional systems (Grissom et al., 2021). Since a principal's involvement in enhancing teachers' instructional abilities has the most influence on student progress, these exchanges are crucial (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). A distributed vision of instructional leadership is one strategy administrators employ to improve teachers' ability to teach (Leithwood et al., 2020). Feedback from people in formal and informal roles is encouraged by distributed leadership, which looks at the methods used by all persons in leadership (Spillane & Lee, 2014). It has been demonstrated that this intentional focus on including a variety of stakeholders improves student achievement (Liu, 2021) and cultivates a more favorable school climate (Bellibas & Liu, 2018). School atmosphere is a critical component for improvement since elements like connections and trust are necessary for

facilitating group decision-making, carrying out reform initiatives, and enhancing student learning (Louis et al., 2016).

Since the implementation of the Race to the Top agenda, policy mandates have placed a greater emphasis on principals' observation of instruction and feedback during formal assessments and informal observations (Zuckerman et al., 2018; Grissom & Youngs, 2016; Neumerski et al., 2018). Principals who possess strong instructional skills are able to observe and offer constructive criticism (Kraft & Gilmour 2016).

For interactions with teachers that are instructionally focused, building relationships and trust is just as important as having technical ability. Reputable connections raise the standard of constructive criticism and instructors' sense of shared accountability (Lawson et al., 2017; Louis et al., 2016). An atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and effectiveness is created by trust between instructors (Hollingworth et al., 2018; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Building strong relationships with teachers fosters a shared commitment to improvement initiatives (Lawson et al., 2017), improves the ability to make evidence-based decisions and participate in continuous improvement efforts (Andreoli et al., 2017), and facilitates the development of teacher-student relationships that increase job satisfaction (O'Shea, 2022).

Principals' ability to prioritize instructional leadership duties over managerial and disciplinary duties (Larkin, 2017), comprehend pedagogy and learning (Duncan, 2020), and balance the varied needs of multiple stakeholders in the face of constantly changing demands (McBrayer et al., 2018; Metz et al., 2019) are all critical components of effective instructional leadership. Important considerations also include principals' views of what makes for "effective" leadership (Zuckerman & O'Shea, 2021) and the signals they receive from their districts and preparation programs (Rigby, 2015). This emphasizes how managing competing demands, understanding policy cues, and having a strong basis in instructional knowledge are all necessary for effective instructional leadership.

To investigate disparities in academic achievement among students in rural, suburban, and urban settings, various studies have been conducted. Research often indicates that suburban students generally exhibit higher overall achievement levels compared to their rural and urban counterparts.

Hildreth et al. (2018) found a significant discrepancy in test scores from the Common Core between urban and rural students. Key factors influencing academic success include resource availability, socioeconomic status, parental expectations, and community influence. Du Plessis (2017) notes, "Decades of research data have pointed unmistakably to the relationship between parents' attitudes, behaviors, and actions and student learning and academic performance." Additionally, the principal's effective strategy for optimizing teachers' contributions to academic goals is crucial for enhancing student achievement (Suliah, Harapan & Arafat, 2019).

2.18 Characteristics of Rural Schools of Ethiopia

Rural schools are challenging to define due to the ambiguity surrounding the term and the often-arbitrary distinctions made from urban schools, resulting in a lack of a universally accepted definition. It is essential to acknowledge that Ethiopia encompasses diverse rural areas, necessitating consideration of specific social, economic, educational, and cultural factors to refine the definition of rural education. Generally, rural schools are situated on the periphery of the country, with some referring to them interchangeably as "farm schools" or "small schools."
The following are characteristic features of the rural profile (Hardwick-Franco, 2019):

- Distance from towns
- Topographical conditions, including the state of roads and bridges leading to schools
- Access to information technology

- Transportation availability (roads, buses, taxis)
- Access to essential services and facilities (electricity, water, sanitation)
- Health, educational, and economic status of the community
- Availability of lifelong learning services
- Social conditions within the community Activities of political and civil society organizations, among others.

2.18.1 Rural, Rural Context and Rural Education

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2016) defines rural areas as those with lower population densities, though the term encompasses a range of meanings. According to the NCES, rural areas include any location with a smaller population and/or county boundaries that are adjacent to urbanized regions. The NCES further delineates rural areas into three distinct categories:

- Fringe: Areas that are less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized region.
- Distant: Areas that are more than five miles but less than twenty-five miles from an urbanized region.
- Remote: Areas that are located more than twenty-five miles from an urbanized region.

The rural setting encompasses the conditions under which rural schools function, influenced by historical, economic, and political trends, as well as physical limitations and demographic disparities that distinguish them from their urban and suburban counterparts. Notably, elevated rates of poverty, underemployment, and unemployment profoundly affect academic environments (Curtin, 2016). About 64% of rural counties worldwide face high rates of child poverty, compared to 47% of urban counties (Schaefer et al., 2016). Historically, rural America has remained predominantly rural, with a greater proportion of children in these communities living in poverty today than in previous decades (Lavalley, 2018). Although this percentage varies by state and region, just over one in four rural students identify as non-White (Showalter, 2017).

These disparities are evident in rural schools, which confront considerable academic challenges. While rural students graduate from high school at rates surpassing those of their urban peers, they do not achieve postsecondary degrees at equivalent levels (Showalter, cited in Lavalley, 2018, p. 12). Rural areas are marked by lower literacy rates and limited access to advanced coursework and technology.

According to Wieczorek and Manard (2018), "the central cohesion points of a life interconnected with other beings" (p. 81) are how they define a feeling of place in rural settings. Rural communities and schools represent unique environments marked by a strong sense of place (Lavalley, 2018; Brown & Schafft, 2016). Historically, rural communities have often been framed as "problems to overcome" rather than "settings to understand" (Burton, 2023). Acknowledging these various components is crucial for comprehending the culture of rural communities and the dynamics of rural educational leadership. Importantly, students in rural schools frequently perform as well as, or even outperform, their suburban and urban counterparts on a range of assessments (Showalter et al., 2017).

2.18.2 Unique Characteristics and Issues Related to Rural School Leadership

Several studies have examined common leadership strategies among rural school leaders, despite the small number of research on rural education. Rural principals frequently adopt a people-centered approach and serve as change agents, according to two major themes that have surfaced. However, little is known about how well school administrators, in particular principals, can navigate the special geographic circumstances of rural schools (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Since the distinctive qualities of the school community and its geographic setting influence effective leadership, this emphasis on rural school leadership is crucial. Unfortunately, these situational aspects are frequently overlooked in the majority of the current literature on effective school leadership (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018; Preston & Barnes, 2017).

A people-centered approach entails fostering and sustaining healthy relationships with faculty, staff, students, and community members. These relationships are cultivated through various strategies, including but not limited to:

- Promoting staff collaboration and capacity building (Pashiardis & Kafa, 2022)

- Enhancing accessibility compared to urban principals (Preston, 2017)
- Maintaining fluid communication with parents (Latham et al., 2014; Preston & Barnes, 2017)
- Nurturing positive relationships between the school and the community (Preston & Barnes, 2017)

A change agent is defined as an individual who facilitates educational, social, cultural, and behavioral transformations within an organization. Plessis (2017) contends that the primary function of a rural school is to serve the community, with one of the most significant ways it fulfills this role being its status as the major employer in the area. In rural communities, school leaders are often perceived as "public property," available to the community "twenty-four hours a day" (Andreoli et al., 2020). Unfortunately, high turnover rates among rural school leaders present challenges for these communities, driven by factors such as isolation, budget constraints, inadequate salaries, and community pressures. These turnover rates negatively impact the school community, resulting in a lack of continuity in planning and diminished capacity for effective leadership (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

Despite the emotionally and physically taxing conditions they face, rural school leaders are still anticipated to address the daily needs of students (Plessis, 2017). As noted by Preston and Barnes (2017), rural principals are uniquely positioned to lead effectively (p. 10). Rural principals can act as change agents by balancing the demands of the district and the local community. They must have a thorough awareness of the community's ideals and make sure they are apparent, reachable, and friendly in order to achieve this.

2.19 Principal Leadership and the Context of Rural Schools

There is a strong "sense of place" in rural towns, which are unique school-community contexts (Sorber, 2021; Wargo et al., 2021). It is common to refer to this sense of place as "the central coherence point of a life interconnected with other beings." Pendola (2018) carried out a case study with 11 rural school and community leaders to investigate how principals' perceptions of their schools and communities are influenced by their rural surroundings, highlighting the relationship between school leadership and the rural sense of place. Principals should embrace a leadership style and pedagogy that exemplify a "critical leadership of place," according to

Pendola and Fuller (2018). This would encourage educational leaders to acknowledge that schools are a reflection of the general well-being of the rural community.

The critical leadership of place philosophy highlights the need for school administrators to provide resources that enable all members of the community to "cherish and celebrate local values, histories, cultures, and the ecology of their environment, while also tackling the social, political, economic, and environmental challenges faced by their communities" (p. 81). Relationships formed via personal and social ties are frequently valued by residents of rural areas, and they contribute to the supportive school cultures that are typical of these locations (Harmon et al., 2022). Rural school communities are known for their familial connections, "calm, safety, and compassion," and a strong overall sense of community. However, they also face challenges stemming from the migration of younger citizens to urban and suburban areas, poverty, economic hardship, educational accountability, school consolidation, and changing demographics (Sorber, 2021; Tuters, 2015).

Rural school communities are often described in research and social narratives as homogeneous, culturally static, lacking in diversity, and seen as "problems to overcome rather than settings to understand" (Burton, 2017, p. 8; Tuters, 2015). In actuality, rural communities have unique demands and complex identities that are essential to broader concerns like economic growth, diversity, inclusion, and community involvement (Rami et al., 2021). The quality of rural public education depends on how principals oversee school leadership in these demanding, changing, and diverse environments; however, educational leadership research has yet to adequately examine this topic (Hallinger & Liu, 2016). In addition to the particular difficulties that the community, educational system, and political environment face, contextually responsive leadership takes into account the distinctive traits and culture of the rural sense of place (Hallinger & Liu, 2016).

2.19.1 Contextually Responsive Leadership in Rural Schools

Principals' views and behaviors about instructional leadership are influenced by context, according to studies on educational leadership (Hallinger, 2016; Wieczorek, 2017). Diamond and Spillane (2016) have observed that the leadership styles of principals are essentially "situational," impacted by "the organizational structures that dictate their interactions and the cultural

environment in which they function" (p. 148). Previous research has demonstrated that school leadership is greatly impacted by a number of characteristics, such as local culture, demography, socioeconomic position, regulatory frameworks, and geographic location (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Hallinger, 2016). According to a recent review, school leaders have distinct demands, opportunities, resources, and problems in various community contexts for leadership (Hallinger, 2016, p. 7). The principal of the school is in charge of attending to the needs of the school and the larger community as a major and well-known authority figure.

Principals in rural locations have similar environmental obstacles and problems as their suburban and urban counterparts in terms of educational policy, accountability, poverty, financial limits, and community engagement (Preston & Barnes, 2017). The unique needs of rural schools are, however, addressed by principals in a unique way, according to research on rural communities and modern rural principalship. These needs are influenced by external factors like district consolidation, low academic expectations and motivation (Wargo et al., 2021), difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers (Brenner et al., 2015), geographic isolation (Klar et al., 2020), and staff capacity limitations (Parson, Hunter, & Kallio, 2016).

According to recent studies, context-sensitive leadership in rural schools may be an effective way to solve some of these issues. Rephrase In their case study of Principal Cummings, for example, Klar and Brewer (2014) highlighted his attempts to create a feeling of community among a geographically scattered student body, some of whom commute up to 20 miles to school. He placed a strong emphasis on family and community involvement. by offering convenient schedules for parents to attend school events and ensuring these events were well-publicized. Additionally, he sought collaboration with local businesses and organizations to secure funding for a summer reading program.

Brenner (2015) found that alternative teacher preparation pathways established to address vacancies in rural Mississippi schools were positively received by ten middle school principals. While they expressed optimism about recruiting teachers with strong subject-matter expertise, they voiced concerns regarding the program's requirement for extensive site-based mentoring and development for new educators, cautioning that a shortage of master teacher mentors could impede their capacity to support these teachers effectively.

These results demonstrate the crucial role that rural principals play in their communities as powerful citizens and problem-solvers who bridge the gap between the demands of the community and the school and the objectives of state legislators (Mette, 2022). Unlike their colleagues in urban and suburban areas, principals in rural areas may face professional isolation and the difficulty of managing several duties within the school system. Their self-identification as leaders is significantly influenced by this perception (Preston et al., 2017; Stewart & Matthews, 2015). Preston et al. (2017) found a number of pertinent themes in a systematic evaluation of recent international studies that addressed the difficulties faced by school administrators in rural areas. According to their investigation, faculty and staff consider rural administrators to be "instructional specialists" and they frequently operate alone (p. 7). Successful rural principals build cooperative connections with educators, serving as co-leaders to promote school achievement, especially in resource-constrained environments where educators serve as vital linkages between public education and community values.

According to Preston and Barnes (2017), in order to successfully execute their instructional leadership, rural principals place a high value on person-centered leadership by establishing rapport and working together with stakeholders. A follow-up analysis of 40 research that examined the professional skills, attitudes, and behaviors of successful rural leaders further investigated this theme. For instance, in a cross-case analysis of four administrators in three California districts, Klar (2014) found that rural principals promoted excellent collaboration and involvement among parents, students, teachers, and community leaders. They also emphasized how important it is to set high standards for instruction, teacher efficacy, and student needs.

Likewise, Wieczorek and Manard (2018) examined the leadership challenges encountered by 76 principals in rural districts in Australia because of policy changes. Their findings revealed that rural principals grappled with resource limitations, heavy workloads, and challenges related to time management. The study also emphasized the strategic relationships and partnerships that principals forged with key community stakeholders. Rural school administrators often see themselves as responsible for all areas of school improvement, including resource management, academic goals, professional development, and instructional oversight, often operating as "lone rangers" in their isolated environments (Stewart & Matthews, 2015, p. 1).

Wider theoretical frameworks and research on rural school leadership are crucial for comprehending the distinct features of the rural context and the role of the rural principal. A community that heavily depends on the leadership and standing of its principal must acknowledge the challenges these leaders face while balancing their numerous responsibilities. While the principles of instructional leadership are applicable across various contexts, it is critical to recognize the specific challenges encountered by rural principals.

2.19.2 Leadership for Learning

Research on leadership for learning emphasizes that effective principal leadership is a critical factor in achieving school success, promoting positive growth and development for both teachers and students (Hallinger & Truong, 2016). Hallinger (2016) posits that leadership for learning encompasses a diverse array of stakeholders and instructional leadership practices, suggesting a more comprehensive framework that includes diverse sources of leadership and additional areas for action (p. 126). Hallinger divides leadership for learning into four basic categories: shared leadership, contexts of leadership, values leadership, and leadership focus. For example, in their school communities, principals are supposed to uphold and encourage fundamental values like fairness, respect, and a strong work ethic. Rephrase The phrase "leadership focus" captures how administrators may support the growth of others and improve educational institutions through programs like teacher professional development, efficient resource management, and school growth promotion.

Leadership practices are greatly shaped by contextual elements as well. Using instructional leadership techniques that improve teaching and learning effectiveness, principals modify their methods to meet the particular requirements of faculty, students, and the community while taking into account the particulars of their school and surroundings (Hallinger, 2016).

2.19.3 Professional Development

According to Rubio (2021), cross-country running requires a runner to "adapt [his or her] strengths as a runner to the varied courses while reducing deficiencies" (p. 5). Similarly, rural school leaders can enhance their strengths and address their weaknesses through ongoing professional development. Salazar (2015) notes that in today's rapidly changing, overloaded, and

fragmented world, effective leadership involves inspiring followers to tackle challenging yet essential tasks. For principals to continually update their knowledge and skills, opportunities for professional development must be available (pp. 25-26).

Rural school leaders' unique responsibilities should be taken into account when evaluating their professional development needs. Recent research has brought attention to the difficulties faced by rural leaders, as well as their preferred delivery methods and demands for professional development.

2.19.4 Professional Development Needs for Rural School Leaders

Researchers have explored the professional development needs of rural school leaders (Parson et al., 2016; Salazar, 2015). Salazar's 2015 study concentrated on high school principals in the Northwest United States, evaluating their professional development requirements and preferred modes of delivery. The findings indicated that the most critical professional development requirements for principals included fostering a team-based commitment to improvement, establishing clear instructional direction, and effectively communicating to facilitate change. The survey identified conferences and seminars as the preferred mode of professional development, followed by workshops.

Stewart and Matthews (2015) also examined the perspectives of rural school leaders in Utah regarding their professional development needs. Their study revealed that small, rural school principals have unique requirements in areas such as supervision, student behavior management, and financial oversight. Despite being geographically isolated from urban centers, these principals reported a strong sense of community involvement with their schools. They emphasized the need for professional development focused on community collaboration to fully leverage the potential of the community-school relationship.

Additionally, a study on the professional development of assistant principals in Hawaii highlighted the importance of student achievement (Enomoto & Umeya, 2022). With Hawaii facing a significant shortage of school administrators, the study aimed to identify and prepare future leaders. The training included five key aspects

a. Content knowledge and skill development,

b. Application to school standards, support, and systems,
c. Opportunity to connect with peers and resource teachers,
d. Interactions with administrators, and
e. Reflections for ongoing learning" (p. 267)

The goal of the district was to ensure that school administrators understood the value of lifelong learning as well as leadership abilities.

The leadership ideologies necessary for effective leadership were the main focus of Parson et al. (2016)'s study. According to the study, North Dakota rural principals demonstrated leadership philosophies that included transactional, participatory, instructional, and transformative approaches. However, the review of the data revealed little evidence of transformative leadership—which involves creating inclusive, diverse, and equitable schools—or participatory leadership, where decisions are made collaboratively by the principal and leadership team. The results indicated that rural principals require specialized training to develop effective leadership styles and address issues of equity and diversity (Parson et al., 2016).

Although principals of small, rural schools recognize the importance of networking for their professional development, many report having little to no time for such activities. Leadership roles often come with additional responsibilities beyond those of principal. Consequently, many principals rely on on-the-job training and learning through trial and error rather than formal professional development programs (Preston & Barnes, 2017). Due to time constraints, rural principals frequently seek professional development opportunities that benefit not only themselves as school administrators but also their teachers and the entire school community. This need is underscored by the geographic isolation and time limitations that necessitate networks or learning groups where resources can be shared to facilitate the ongoing growth and development of rural administrators, ultimately benefiting all school stakeholders.

A "one size fits all" strategy is inadequate for developing successful programs for rural school leaders, according to the research findings, which highlight the particular professional development requirements of rural schools. A thorough grasp of their unique requirements and preferred delivery modalities should be the first step in creating engaging and pertinent

professional development. This emphasizes the need for a more thorough examination of the requirements for professional development of school administrators in rural areas. The knowledge gained from ongoing research will provide educators with important direction as they get ready for future and continuing training. In the end, improving results for students and communities will come from giving present and future school leaders the necessary resources to successfully guide educational progress.

2.19.5 Novice Principal Learning and Development

As they start their leadership careers, new principals frequently feel anxious, frustrated, and conflicted about their roles. Most people agree that new principals have a challenging time adjusting to various situations (Karunanayake, 2024; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Research concentrating on inexperienced principals in rural areas has brought attention to the challenges they encounter in fostering positive school cultures, establishing rapport, and attending to the needs of students in the face of scarce resources. For example, a case study involving four novice principals in Texas was carried out by Kılınç and Gümüş (2021). The researchers discovered that although these principals were successful in handling the managerial and technical facets of their jobs, creating and preserving a healthy work atmosphere was a major obstacle. For the principles, relationships were characterized as "a source of angst and support" (p. 697).

In another study, Murphy (2023) interviewed five novice principals in Scotland and analyzed their work logs to gain insights into their experiences. The findings indicated that, amidst various management challenges such as bullying and staff absences, the principals quickly acknowledged the necessity of shifting from task-oriented work to prioritizing community development and school culture.

Wieczorek and Manard (2018) conducted one of the most thorough studies on inexperienced rural leadership by polling seventy Montana elementary and secondary principals. They identified 17 key problem areas where new principals faced difficulties, and the top five of them were connected to instruction: satisfying student needs, evaluating education, implementing research-based techniques, enhancing instructional practices, and encouraging change.

A more recent study by Beycioglu and Wildy (2017) explored the experiences of "Hazel," a new principal in Australia, during her first year. Their thorough assessment highlighted her awareness of community needs and her efforts to manage her responsibilities in relative isolation with limited resources.

Hildreth et al. (2018) provided a thorough literature review on the unique challenges of rural leadership from a practitioner's perspective. They proposed a contextually appropriate toolbox for inexperienced rural principals, identifying eight essential leadership traits for success. These factors include building rapport and strong connections, understanding the broader community, finding a supportive mentor, and developing resilience and coping strategies.

No matter where they are in the world—Texas, Scotland, Australia, Montana—new principals confront significant obstacles, especially those from rural areas just beginning their careers. A increasing body of research indicates that context has a major impact on how well principals practice leadership for learning. According to the literature, improving schools in all contexts depends on the efficacy of the principal. Because their roles are isolated and have a significant impact on remote schools, rural principals should build excellent relationships with teachers, stakeholders, and their communities in order to successfully negotiate their complex obligations.

New administrators frequently experience early role conflicts and ambiguity as they hone their leadership abilities; this phenomena may be particularly noticeable in rural areas. Interestingly, little study has been done on the experiences of newly appointed rural school administrators in places like Ethiopia. In order to provide useful insights into the subject of rural school leadership, this study aims to investigate a particular subset of recently appointed school leaders.

Finally, principals who embrace shared leadership actively seek and value the participation and input of their stakeholders, fostering shared accountability and ownership of school objectives. Previous research has shown that new school principals struggle to navigate the myriad management and leadership expectations during their early years, reflecting the complex nature of their leadership responsibilities (Larson, 2016).

2.20 Strategies for Effective Leadership in Schools

Strategic leadership involves the capacity to foresee, envision, remain adaptable, and empower others to implement essential strategic changes (Gyimah, 2016). This form of leadership is inherently multicultural, requiring leaders to navigate diverse groups, manage the entire institution rather than just specific functional units, and adapt to the constant changes that characterize the competitive landscape of the twenty-first century. As Rowe (2014) notes, strategic leaders must enhance their capacity to effectively influence human behavior, particularly in ambiguous situations. Effective strategic leaders significantly impact the attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets of their colleagues through their words, actions, and foresight. Mutole (2019) argues that visioning is a crucial tool that "effective strategic leaders use to inspire employees." They often seek constructive feedback from colleagues, managers, and staff about the value of their challenging decisions and goals, ultimately fostering strong allies both within and outside the organization to support their strategic initiatives.

However, as Mokgohlwe (2016) notes, "leadership strategy clarifies how many SMT members the school requires and how they should act individually and collectively to ensure the school's overall success." Furthermore, Mbeng (2020) and Elqadri, Suci, and Chandra (2015) stress that leadership strategies, like corporate plans, necessitate a comprehensive analysis of current conditions and a well-informed evaluation of the future. The strategy then provides various recommendations to close the gap between the current state and the desired future.

Mokgohlwe (2016) and Gyimah (2007, p. 87) assert that the effective implementation of the strategic management process relies on robust strategic leadership. Gyimah explains that "strategic leadership involves the capacity to envision possibilities, remain adaptable, foresee events, and empower others to drive strategic change." Schools can leverage their SMT members as valuable resources to create and capitalize on performance advantages. Moreover, strategic leaders can generate performance benefits when their skills and contributions are rare, valuable, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable. For instance, SMT members with significant management and leadership experience consistently back the school's adoption of growth strategies. Overall, SMT members tend to excel when they have a diverse set of skills (Mokgohlwe, 2016).

2.20.1 Global Experiences of Professional Development and Training of School Leaders

According to research, school principals' efficacy is greatly impacted by the caliber of their training (Guerra, Zamora, Hernandez & Menchaca 2017). By participating in top-notch preparation programs, effective school leaders can promote improvement and greatly improve academic performance (Eller, 2010; Louis et al., 2010; Grissom et al., 2015). They can also help to create a positive school climate (Baker et al., 2007). This underscores the growing emphasis on leadership development. For instance, aspiring principals at an urban university in California recognized the significance of employing specific leadership strategies to enhance learning outcomes (Perez et al., 2011), which requires continuous, additional training for effective execution.

Research by Shantal, Halttunen, and Pekka (2014) found that professional development is essential for addressing future challenges faced by school principals in Finland, who are considered some of the most qualified professionals. Current literature emphasizes the need for continuous support and training for school administrators (Mingaine, 2013; Shantal et al., 2014; Maki & Charalambous, 2014; Makri & Vlachopoulos, 2016; Güngör & Yildirim, 2016). According to Dută and Rafailă (2014), further training poses both a challenge and a necessity. Additionally, Bøje and Frederiksen (2019) suggest that professional development and training have been integrated into programs aimed at professionalizing school leadership. This initiative seeks to enhance professionalism and provide valuable information to participants while building their knowledge through ongoing professional development.

At the same time, academic discourse is increasingly focused on quality assurance and the efficiency of the educational system. The above studies also highlight the importance of collaboration between local and global training organizations to promote academic leaders' participation in professional learning networks. The need for training programs is becoming more prominent on contemporary educational agendas, as will be further discussed, especially as principals continue to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- They have not received sufficient additional training when entering the managerial field, resulting in a lack of expertise in educational management.

- Feeling unprepared for administrative responsibilities, they lack the necessary skills due to inadequate preparation during their university education.
- As school heads, they must meet the demands of modern educational realities.
- They face various professional challenges in fulfilling their roles.
- They recognize the need to enhance their professionalism.
- They seek structured, innovative, flexible, and creative approaches to continue their education, such as remote learning.

2.20.2 School Principals' Training Needs

Principals take on a variety of tasks while collaborating with curriculum experts, evaluation advocates, budget analysts, facilities managers, special program managers, educational leaders, and school community builders. They alternate between acting as change agents and educational visionaries (Davis, Rogers & Harrigan, 2020). They organize, manage, and coordinate specific groups while also addressing the communication and information needs essential for school operations. Principals are typically responsible for the efficient functioning of their school units. To achieve optimal administrative efficiency, states must invest in targeted training programs and seminars while encouraging and supporting school leaders. Determining, researching, assessing, and analyzing learners' training needs is fundamental to the successful execution of any training program (Vlachopoulos, 2017).

According to Puruse (2019), the analysis of training needs involves a comprehensive examination that can enhance individuals' or groups' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the workplace. Rothwell and Bakhshandeh (2022), define it as the process of clarifying what individuals need to know and be able to do. This should be distinguished from needs evaluation, which compares what should be happening with what is occurring. "What should be" aligns with established goals and depends on the breadth and depth of the needs analysis (Vergidis, Katsigianni & Brinia, 2009).

In conclusion, the characteristics and requirements of a training program should be shaped by the identified managerial demands and the subsequent requests that arise. As confirmed by Saitis and Saitis (2018), studies have shown that principals' shortcomings can be attributed to a lack of

further training in the management and structure of school units. School administrators themselves recognize the advantages of training programs for effectively carrying out their management responsibilities and staying informed about current practices. Vlachopoulos and Makri (2017) explored the self-perception of school leaders who participated in a training program in the Solomon Islands, finding that leaders initially struggled with management and leadership knowledge, making it difficult to oversee their schools. However, following the program, it was evident that the training had enhanced their ability to meet expected work outputs.

Research typically focuses on the training needs of newly appointed principals and those with several years of management experience. The different levels of experience between these two groups shape their specific demands. A recent study by Ng and Szeto (2016) found that newly appointed administrators are expected to possess human resource management skills. They express particular interest in issues such as empowering leaders, addressing underperforming staff, practical financial management strategies, legal responsiveness in school administration, and curriculum and educational leadership performance. Similar findings were noted by Espinosa (2017), highlighting the challenges faced by newly hired managers in financial oversight. These managers must also manage students and teachers, support staff, and deal with low-parent involvement in school activities. Additionally, they may confront issues such as truancy, threats, unpaid tuition, staff ineptitude, disciplinary concerns, and budget constraints. Many principals do not receive even basic training in financial management before assuming their roles.

According to Miriti and Moses (2014), secondary school principals struggle to effectively manage and perform their institutions' financial resources, and their financial management training frequently ends in failure because of low motivation and insufficient training time. Among other things, Suleman and Packtunkhwa (2015) emphasize negative attitudes, a lack of ethics, frequent absences of educators and support staff, unruly student behavior, unsatisfactory results, insufficient funding, minimal communication with school staff, a lack of facilities, and political interference’s that can disrupt the maintenance of positive school spirit. His research not only validates the challenges. Additional issues that newly appointed principals may encounter include, but are not limited to, unintegrated students, teachers' unions, violence, unfavorable family attitudes toward the school, the attitudes and actions of teachers toward the principals, and progressively undesirable behavior in the classroom.

Skilled educational leaders look for training in management techniques, technology proficiency, orientation, counseling, and collaboration in extracurricular activities. In particular, the latter pertains to financial management. According to Ahmad, Mehmood and Junaid (2022), school unit management is extremely important and encompasses a variety of topics, including academic management, teacher management, curriculum and office administration, human resource administration, general administration, communication, staff retention, official correspondence maintenance and effective archiving, student monitoring, the presentation of reliable reports, evaluation, motivation, and skill development. Several functions, including staff and student management, financial management, and teaching and administrative support, were the focus of an analysis of principals' needs for additional training in seven Asian countries. These functions necessitate additional training to effectively implement government policies that impact secondary education.

As my reading suggests in this literature, the Sidama region secondary school principals have had similar intention regarding the leadership practices that are related to teaching and learning.

According to Miriti and Moses (2014), secondary school principals struggle to manage their institutions' financial resources effectively, with their financial management training often failing due to low motivation and insufficient training time. Suleman and Packtunkhwa (2015) highlight several challenges, including negative attitudes, ethical lapses, frequent absences of educators and support staff, unruly student behavior, poor academic results, inadequate funding, limited communication with school staff, lack of facilities, and political interference, all of which can hinder the maintenance of a positive school environment. His research validates these challenges and identifies additional issues faced by newly appointed principals, such as unintegrated students, teachers' unions, violence, negative family attitudes toward the school, teacher attitudes toward principals, and increasingly undesirable classroom behavior.

Skilled educational leaders seek training in management techniques, technology proficiency, orientation, counseling, and collaboration in extracurricular activities, particularly in financial management. Ahmad, Mehmood and Junaid (2022), emphasize the critical nature of school unit management, which encompasses a range of topics including academic management, teacher management, curriculum and office administration, human resource administration, general

administration, communication, staff retention, official correspondence, effective archiving, student monitoring, reliable reporting, evaluation, motivation, and skill development. An analysis of principals' training needs across seven Asian countries focused on staff and student management, financial management, and teaching and administrative support, highlighting the need for additional training to effectively implement government policies affecting secondary education.

In the Sidama region, secondary school principals have expressed similar intentions regarding leadership practices related to teaching and learning.

A study by Hayat, Abdoliahi, Zainabadi and Arasteh (2015) on the importance of lifelong learning through professional development found that key professional requirements for educational leadership include resource organization, complex problem-solving, understanding student learning and development, creating a school vision and mission based on group commitment, comprehending metrics, and conducting strategy analysis and evaluation. Principals who participated in the study by Güngör and Yildirim (2016) agreed that in-service training aimed at enhancing managerial skills positively impacted their professional growth and work performance, supporting the significance of principals' administrative roles.

As noted earlier, educational leaders must also act as pedagogical leaders to ensure the success of their educational organizations and achieve favorable learning outcomes through effective communication both within and outside the school environment. This collaborative effort among all human resources in the school is vital. Cothern, (2020) argues that essential requirements for professional development include fostering a learning organization, encouraging group cohesion, providing and maintaining motivation for continuous improvement, offering teaching guidance, and ensuring effective communication. Cardno (2005) supports this view, proposing a comprehensive framework for principals' professional development that includes management, curriculum, school, and personal development. Pashiardis and Brauckmann (2019) present a holistic philosophy of administration that allows successful school leaders to adopt various leadership styles, including structural, participative, entrepreneurial, and educational, tailored to the specific context.

In the information age, school administrators are viewed as primary technological leaders who should promote the use of new technologies (NT) and ensure that technology-focused activities are integrated into professional development at both the administrative and pedagogical levels (Grady, 2011). Research has shifted toward how to implement and effectively use NT in educational administration. While leaders recognize the need for more targeted programs utilizing NT, they also advocate for additional training. Weng and Tang (2014) connect technology leadership techniques to effectiveness in school administration, viewing them as essential components of any training and development program for principals. Musau (2016) reinforces the necessity of tech training for principals, arguing that technology plays a significant role in progressive education and enhances communication networks within the school community.

Therefore, it is crucial to plan and organize educational programs for the professional growth of managers in various areas related to school administration, management, and leadership training.

2.20.3 Community Engagement and Stakeholder Collaboration in Education

The holistic development of children and the advancement of societal well-being depend on the community and parents being involved in education (Li & Zhang, 2023). Its importance is highlighted by the fact that this interaction extends beyond the classroom (Hamm et al., 2021). According to Cordova Jr. et al. (2024), cooperation between parents, communities, and educational institutions not only enhances academic achievement but also develops people with the morals and abilities necessary to contribute positively to society. Additionally, school principals must have access to tools that support teachers' professional growth, according to Bozkuş and Bavrak (2019).

Students' academic performance and general well-being are known to be significantly impacted by parental involvement in schools (Beard & Thomson, 2021). Active parental involvement in their children's education produces a nurturing atmosphere at home that promotes learning, rewards good behavior, and cultivates a passion for learning (Hsu & Chen, 2023). Additionally, community involvement expands the support system outside of the family, which improves the educational experience by offering a variety of resources, opportunities, and viewpoints (Kelty &

Wakabayashi, 2020). Communities and parents work together to influence education and equip kids to meet the demands of the contemporary world.

Enhancing educational outcomes and promoting social progress requires collaboration among communities, educational institutions, and parents (Alam & Mohanty, 2023). As highlighted in my readings, community involvement in education encourages effective leadership practices and improves teaching and learning in secondary schools, fostering an environment that produces knowledgeable and literate citizens essential for the country's overall development.

2.20.4 Parental Involvement

The term "parental involvement in education" describes how parents or guardians actively participate in their kids' education (Farooq & Asim, 2020). This engagement encompasses a variety of actions and mindsets intended to encourage and support a child's academic and personal growth. Given that parental involvement has been repeatedly associated with favorable outcomes for both students and educational institutions, its significance is significant.

Ottani (2020) defines parental participation as all the activities parents do to help their kids learn and succeed academically. Both within and outside of the classroom, this involvement can take the form of volunteering at school functions, attending parent-teacher conferences, offering homework assistance, and supporting educational policies that benefit all kids. Parental involvement is essential because it fosters a supportive learning environment and strengthens the idea that families, communities, and schools work together to deliver high-quality education (Alinsunurin, 2020; Oshioste et al., 2023).

Helping children with their schoolwork, providing tools for at-home learning, and having conversations about learning objectives and aspirations are all examples of academic assistance. Attending parent-teacher conferences, working in classrooms, joining school committees or parent-teacher organizations (PTAs), and going to events like plays, sporting events, and fundraisers are all ways that parents can get involved in school life (Hagos & Van Wyk, 2021). Additionally, parents can support laws that address differences in resources, opportunities, and results between various student groups in order to advance educational equity.

Research consistently indicates that children with actively engaged parents are more likely to excel on standardized assessments, attain higher grades, and demonstrate increased motivation for academic success (Prakhov, Kotomina & Sazhina, 2020; Bowen & Kisida, 2023). Parental involvement is linked to fewer disciplinary problems and lower absenteeism, as parents help emphasize the importance of good behavior and regular attendance. According to Aparício et al. (2020), children who have involved parents tend to have better social skills, more self-esteem, and more resilience when faced with obstacles. Family literacy programs give parents the skills and information they need to help their kids develop their literacy at home. Effective parenting strategies, navigating the educational system, and advocating for children's needs are some of the subjects that may be covered in workshops or parent academies (Gil & Johnson, 2021). Parental participation programs include outreach initiatives, communication platforms, and community partnerships to involve parents in school events and decision-making. Families and schools working together generate supportive settings where parents are acknowledged and appreciated and feel empowered to participate in their children's education (Albrecht, 2021).

2.20.5 Community Engagement

Anoke et al. (2023) define "community engagement in education" as the different ways that local communities actively support and enrich students' educational experiences. In order to support student success, this idea emphasizes the cooperation of families, companies, non-profits, schools, and other stakeholders. Involving the community is essential because it acknowledges that education transcends school boundaries and uses a variety of community resources and knowledge to improve student growth and learning (Borup et al., 2020; Udokwu et al., 2023).

According to Onunka et al. (2023), by giving kids access to more resources like books, technology, money, and facilities, communities may enhance the learning environment and increase their educational options. By providing direction, support, and role modeling, community mentors can assist students in overcoming obstacles, exploring career options, and developing new skills. Additionally, communities can plan service-learning initiatives, internships, field excursions, and other experiential learning opportunities that link classroom learning to real-

world situations, encouraging greater comprehension and participation (Rock, 2022; Raji et al., 2023).

By connecting classroom topics to tangible real-world opportunities, challenges, and experiences, community engagement dramatically improves students' motivation and retention (Akindote et al., 2023). Students can access a greater range of learning opportunities, cultural experiences, and career options by utilizing the different skills, viewpoints, and resources found within the community. This leads to a more enriched educational experience.

Schools frequently collaborate with nearby organizations and industries to offer internships, job shadowing opportunities, guest lecturers, and curriculum components that meet workforce demands and get students ready for the workforce (Kirkpatrick et al., 2022; Babarinde et al., 2023). Student involvement, civic engagement, and service-learning programs foster empathy and a feeling of social responsibility in addition to addressing issues facing the community. Parent seminars, community-based after-school programs, and family literacy projects are examples of initiatives that increase student performance by involving parents, community members, and school personnel in joint planning, implementation, and decision-making (Miller & Hutchins, 2021). According to Okunade et al. (2023) and Orikpete et al. (2023), kids can create objectives, acquire confidence, and develop vital life skills by connecting with community mentors who provide support and direction.

In order to create a nurturing atmosphere that supports children' achievement and overall development, cooperation between communities, parents, and schools is essential. These stakeholders can collaborate to address educational hurdles, enhance student outcomes, and promote a positive learning environment by leveraging their unique talents, resources, and experience (Penuel et al., 2020; Aderibigbe et al., 2023). Inclusion, diversity, and respect for one another are given top priority in successful partnerships that strive for social transformation (Uchechukwu et al., 2024). By respecting the unique histories, viewpoints, and contributions of people and communities, these collaborations create inclusive, egalitarian settings that promote learning and development (Warren, 2022).

Stakeholders can identify and resolve systemic problems in the educational framework by forming cooperative partnerships (Orikpete, 2020). Through advocacy, strategic planning, and effective communication, communities, parents, and schools can work together to remove obstacles to educational equity, such as unequal funding, resource disparities, and systemic biases, resulting in more inclusive and equitable educational systems (Radd et al., 2021; Fabian et al., 2023).

These collaborations are crucial to the advancement of educational reforms and policies that guarantee all students fair access to high-quality education (Orikpete et al., 2021). Such partnerships can spur systemic change and advance educational fairness by elevating the perspectives of underrepresented groups, rallying grassroots support, and interacting with legislators and stakeholders at different levels (Datnow et al., 2023; Sapp, 2024). Effective collaborative efforts centered on social benefit include community school programs, parent-led advocacy groups, and school-community partnerships (Stanley & Gilzene, 2023). Particularly effective are initiatives that turn schools into centers for community involvement by offering a variety of programs, materials, and assistance to students, families, and community members (Malone, 2020; Medina et al., 2020).

Schools can provide children with essential resources, enrichment opportunities, and support services that foster their academic, social, and emotional development through partnerships with local companies, organizations, and government agencies (Statti & Torres, 2020; Mahoney et al., 2021). Multi-stakeholder groups that make up diversity and inclusion task forces work to promote equality and inclusion by developing policy, offering training, and starting initiatives to foster an environment where everyone is respected and feels included.

The strategies of community collaboration and engagement within educational contexts are crucial for driving change and improving students' academic outcomes. This study highlights how these collaborative methods contribute to the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and improve teaching and learning in the targeted area.

2.21 Chapter Summary

A variety of leadership concepts were examined in the literature review mentioned above, with a particular emphasis on school leadership and its essential elements as well as the dynamics of teaching and learning in educational settings. This chapter covers a wide range of topics based on the literature that is currently available, such as the characteristics of rural leadership, the importance of leadership in education, effective leadership in rural schools, the teaching and learning divide between rural and urban areas, the unique characteristics of Ethiopian rural schools, principal leadership in rural contexts, principal preparation programs, the difficulties faced by rural school leaders, the roles and responsibilities of school management teams, and strategies for effective leadership in educational institutions.

The chapter thoroughly examined frameworks for principal training and professional development as well as worldwide literature on school leadership in order to provide a thorough grasp of leadership qualities. In addition to studies from abroad, national literature addressing leadership, school leadership, teacher and school leader training, and rural school leadership was also reviewed. The chapter delved into theoretical issues pertinent to teaching and learning that underpin extensive school reform and transformation. Prominent scholars, including Bass and Riggio, Northouse, Naz and Murad, and Leithwood, have conducted research on the implementation of transformational and instructional theories within the context of educational reform.

Furthermore, earlier research has shown that principals' leadership practices in rural and urban schools vary greatly, which affects students' academic achievement. The leadership practices of rural secondary school principals are the study's independent variable, while teaching and learning outcomes are its dependent variable. The leadership practices of rural secondary schools in the study area, particularly with regard to teaching and learning, have been the subject of

relatively little research. Investigating the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning is crucial in light of this study.

CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In educational literature, transformational and instructional leadership are the two most frequently referenced theories(Kwan, 2020). Both theories have been endorsed by scholars as suitable leadership models for school principals (e.g., Bush, Abdul Hamid & Kaparou, 2018). Emmanuel and Valley (2022) argue that successful school principals employ both transformational and instructional leadership styles, which involve creating a shared vision. While there are some similarities between these theories, they also diverge significantly, which can cause confusion for school administrators seeking the best strategies to improve student development.

Both transformational and instructional leadership theories have benefits that improve principals' leadership practices and the teaching and learning process in secondary schools in the study area. Transformational leadership, which is part of the "New Leadership" idea (Bryman, 1992, as mentioned in Northouse, 2016), focuses on the charismatic and emotive elements of leadership. Lowe and Gardner's (2001, as referenced in Northouse, 2016) content analysis of Leadership Quarterly found that one-third of the studies focused on charismatic or transformational leadership. Similarly, Antonakis, House, and Simonton (2017) observed an increase in the volume of research not only in traditional fields like social psychology and management but also in education, nursing, and industrial engineering.

Bass and Riggio (2006) suggest that transformational leadership's appeal may come from its emphasis on followers' growth and internal motivation, meeting the needs of contemporary teams that need encouragement and chances to thrive, especially during difficult times. On the other hand, instructional leadership highlights the principal's responsibility to raise student achievement and improve teaching and learning in the classroom. In addition to emphasizing the importance of curriculum development, setting specific educational goals, and assessing the caliber of teachers and their training, this method places a high priority on students' academic achievement (Day et al., 2016). This study employed transformational and instructional theories to shape its research and methodological framework.

3.2 Transformational Leadership Theory

Reza (2019) and McCloskey (2015) were among the pioneers in formulating the concept of transformational leadership. Sociologist James MacGregor Burns initiated its development as a crucial leadership technique in his work "Leadership" (1978, as cited in Northouse, 2016). Burns sought to connect the roles of leadership and followership, describing leaders as individuals who tap into the intentions of their followers to better meet the objectives of both parties (p. 18). He posited that leadership differs from power in that it is rooted in the desires of followers.

Transformational leadership has been widely researched globally. Sun (2018) examined 20 years of studies and found that it is "the most-studied form of leadership across disciplines in both Western and Chinese contexts" (p. 1). Research suggests that transformational leadership is an effective model for leaders aiming to drive change (Litz & Blaik-Hourani, 2020). Bush's (2017) investigation into the effects of leadership styles on schools emphasizes the importance of a transformational approach for school administrators to successfully implement educational mandates.

3.2.1 Transformational vs. Transactional Leadership

Recent literature on leadership highlights two primary styles: transactional and transformational leadership. Transactional leadership centers on the interactions between leaders and followers (Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn, 2000, p. 27, as cited in Abdella Yuya, 2020). These authors argue that followers achieve their goals according to the will and direction of their leaders, who motivate them based on their performance. Many academics and professionals also advocate for transformational leadership, a style that addresses the shortcomings of transactional leadership.

Burns primarily differentiates between these two leadership styles. Transactional leadership includes most models that emphasize the interactions between leaders and followers. For example, politicians who gain votes by promoting promises such as "no new taxes" exemplify transactional leadership (Northouse, 2016). Similarly, managers display transactional leadership by offering incentives to employees who exceed their targets. Teachers also engage in transactional behavior when they assign grades based on student performance. The exchange aspect of transactional leadership is prevalent across all levels and types of organizations.

On the other hand, transformational leadership is a process in which a leader interacts with others to establish a relationship that motivates and advances moral principles for both the leader and the followers. In an effort to assist their followers reach their greatest potential, transformational leaders pay close attention to their needs and goals (Northouse, 2016).

3.2.2 Features of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership enhances followers' self-worth, motivation, and achievement in several ways. Leaders should recognize followers' strengths and weaknesses to assign tasks that foster their success. By setting an example, they can inspire and motivate others, encourage followers to take more responsibility for their work, and integrate their own identity and character into both their responsibilities and the organization's overall identity. Chitiga (2018) distinguished four essential transformational leadership style:

Charisma or Idealized Influence: This pertains to the degree to which a leader exhibits exemplary behavior, maintains strong beliefs, and adopts stances that encourage followers to distinguish themselves. Such leaders set high standards for moral behavior and serve as role models for their followers.

Inspirational Motivation: This refers to the extent to which a leader conveys a vision that gives perspective to ongoing endeavors and inspires optimism for future objectives.

Intellectual Stimulation: This reflects the extent to which a leader challenges, supports, and encourages followers' innovation. Leaders help followers creatively address challenges by providing a framework that clarifies their relationship with the leader, the organization, each other, and the overarching goal.

Individualized Consideration: This pertains to how much the leader shows genuine interest in each follower's goals and behaviors, acting as a coach or supporter. By acknowledging and valuing each member's contributions, leaders meet and strengthen their followers' needs for self-fulfillment and respect, motivating them to strive for further progress.

School leaders can inspire and motivate their employees by clearly communicating the school's vision and goals. Teachers are inspired to emulate these leaders' positivity and give their all because of their excitement and upbeat outlook on the future. As stated by Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational school leaders inspire teachers and the larger school community while simultaneously addressing the need to finish current tasks in order to create a vision for their institutions. The following figure outlines the key components of transformational leadership.



Fig 3.1. Theoretical framework (Bass & Riggio, 2006)

According to Asencio (2016, p. 16), transformational leaders have a big impact on followers' behavior and are essential for improving performance in the public sector. Public leaders must continually improve their leadership skills. Those who lean more towards transactional leadership should focus on developing their transformational abilities, such as:

- **Role Modeling:** Demonstrating behaviors that align with the organization's values and objectives (idealized influence).
- **Communicating Vision:** Clearly expressing an engaging and motivating organizational vision (inspirational motivation).

- **Encouraging Innovation:** Motivating staff to tackle both new and existing challenges with fresh perspectives and promoting creativity (intellectual stimulation).
- **Demonstrating Care:** Realizing that employees' interests and welfare are important (individualized consideration).

In contrast, transactional leaders are limited in their ability to use extrinsic rewards to inspire staff and enhance productivity within their organizations (Asencio, 2016, p. 16).

The researchers concur that, either directly or indirectly, transformational leadership and students' teaching and learning are positively correlated. In order to improve school performance, Hallinger (2003) combined transformational and instructional leadership. According to these results, Burns and Bass's theory of how transformational leadership affects organizational performance may also be used in educational settings. It is recognized that transformational leadership embodies higher moral ideals and goes beyond simple dedication.

Just as employees can influence their supervisors and peers, transformational leaders shape their organizations through their personal beliefs and values. This approach does not rely on the exchange of rewards between managers and staff. Instead, these leaders are driven by sincere beliefs in justice, equality, dependability, and integrity—values that Burns identified as the highest ideals. Ultimate values cannot be traded or compromised. By communicating their personal ideals and ultimate values, transformational leaders foster unity and harmony among their followers. More importantly, they help followers align their goals and perspectives with those of the organization (Amini et al., 2022).

According to the researcher's findings, transformational leadership significantly affects education, especially in schools. It has the power to transform educational environments, enhance teachers' practices in the classroom, raise educational standards, and promote student learning, achievement, and commitment. Various scholars have confirmed that the transformational approach is highly beneficial for educational organizations in general and for schools in particular.

3.3 Instructional Leadership Theory

Ismail, Don, Husin and Khalid (2018) assert that instructional leadership encompasses fundamental educational tasks like organizing, assessing, planning, and improving instruction. The three main purposes of instructional leadership are to set school goals, oversee curriculum implementation, and create a positive learning environment, according to Ismail et al. (2018). Research indicates that by improving teachers' working circumstances and fostering a positive school culture, instructional leadership significantly affects student achievement (e.g., Kwan, 2020; Shatzer et al., 2014).

These studies imply that instructional leadership may have a more profound effect on learning outcomes compared to transformational leadership, as it prioritizes the quality of teaching and instructional practices. Furthermore, it places greater emphasis on modifying the core curriculum. This analysis emphasizes how both transformational and instructional leadership theories can improve teaching and learning in public secondary schools and increase the effectiveness of principals.

3.3.1 A Focus on Teaching and Learning

Principals of schools are likely to have a much bigger influence on student outcomes when they focus on improving the caliber of instruction and learning. According to Dinham (2016), teaching and learning are usually given top priority in schools with high student accomplishment. In order to create and maintain an atmosphere that promotes exceptional teaching, meaningful learning, and outstanding outcomes, principals are essential (Louis, Murphy & Smylie, 2016).

Instructional leadership places a strong emphasis on teacher quality, making this approach particularly relevant to this study. In fact, transformational leadership has faced criticism for not sufficiently prioritizing educational outcomes (e.g., Dunkan, 2020). Consequently, the researcher chose these theories to examine leadership practices of school principals and their impact on the teaching and learning process in order to enhance secondary school student results.

3.3.2 Building and Sharing the School Vision

Principals must focus on several key aspects of leadership to ensure their schools thrive. According to Leithwood, Sun and Schumacker (2020), the leadership dimension that has the most significant impact on student outcomes is creating a vision and setting school directions. Additionally, Ninković and Knežević Florić (2024) observed that administrators in schools with higher achievement levels intentionally dedicated more effort to defining clear academic and learning goals. These objectives help navigate conflicting demands by identifying what is essential, thereby guiding staff and students with focus and effort.

By prioritizing academic development and making the achievement of these goals a central part of daily operations, leaders can influence teachers and their work habits. School administrators seeking to advance in this area may find both transformational and instructional leadership styles beneficial, as both emphasize improving school culture to enhance student outcomes. Transformational leadership may be most advantageous because it focuses on utilizing a shared vision to drive reform and elevate educational standards.

To build a compelling vision, school administrators must effectively communicate it to key stakeholders (Best, 2024). They should strive to gain staff buy-in on school goals and visions and then articulate these objectives to relevant stakeholders to foster a sense of shared purpose (Silins & Mulford, 2004). Principals need to motivate their staff to align personal goals with the school's objectives; without this alignment, the overall school goals may lack motivational power. Thus, it is justifiable for principals to invest significant time and energy in this area.

3.4 Importance of Transformational and Instructional Leadership Theories

Stewart (2015) argues that instructional leadership emphasizes curriculum, instruction, school objectives, and the school environment, whereas transformational leadership seeks to reconfigure the school by improving the overall atmosphere. To improve student achievement, school principals must embrace their teaching roles, as they oversee all aspects of school operations. According to Kouzes and Posner (2024), a student-learning vision is central to instructional leadership. To foster continuous improvement and effective teaching practices, school administrators should collaborate closely with teachers. Robinson highlights that "direct

involvement with teachers in enhancing teaching and learning is crucial for student-centered leadership" (Kouzes & Posner, 2024).

The most successful educational system combines transformational and instructional leadership approaches (Menon, 2014). Menon contends that although transformational leadership is a powerful and successful approach in educational environments, it cannot function independently. He asserts that "transformational leadership practices are inadequate for effectiveness unless complemented by other leadership behaviors or actions related to instructional leadership" (Menon, 2014, p. 524).

This argument suggests that transformational school principals ought to assume teaching responsibilities as well. The claim that school principals have no direct influence over pupils' academic achievement is contested by this point of view. While some academics contend that principals have an indirect impact on student progress, it is widely accepted that principals are essential in improving academic performance in a number of ways.

Therefore, the researcher believes that analyzing this study using the frameworks of transformational and instructional leadership theories will support the main objectives of the study. Both theories have the power to improve classroom procedures, reform schools, improve instruction quality, and increase student engagement, learning, and accomplishment. A thorough understanding of these theories is essential for developing practical and sustainable solutions. Thus, both transformational and instructional leadership theories are considered essential frameworks for guiding this investigation.

3.5 Guiding Nature of the Theory

In a mixed research strategy, theory consists of a set of concepts and their interconnections. This plan is also known as a model since it seeks to illustrate particular aspects of the world (Maxwell, 2005, as referenced in Tang, 2020). The overall design for the thesis analysis, along with the theory-driven philosophy and performance, creates the theoretical context (Cynthia & Azadeh, 2014). They contend that the significance of the theoretical framework should be emphasized in the research title, research questions, literature review objectives, research technique, and data analysis plan.

In this context, the theoretical perspectives of transformational and instructional leadership theories underpin the entire work. This approach is designed to effectively tackle the research questions and achieve the study's goals and objectives.

3.5.1 Theory and Research Methodology

A strong theoretical framework and an intense commitment to a variety of approaches can produce insightful results (Christopher, Jane & Yussuf, 2021). When these two aspects are misaligned, the study may encounter greater scrutiny and constraints. Limited engagement with theory and methodology can result in overly simplistic conclusions that are either hypothetically unrelated or fail to be recognized as contributing to knowledge advancement. Moreover, an excessive focus on methodology at the expense of theory can be detrimental (Christopher et al., 2021)). Therefore, this investigation gives equal weight to both methods and theory. The pragmatist perspective and hybrid approach of this study align well with the transformational and instructional leadership theories.

3.5.2 Theory and Data Analysis

Understanding the problem, the relevance, the goal, and the research questions of the study is essential to choose a suitable theoretical framework (Cynthia & Azadeh, 2014). These four concepts—problem, purpose, significance, and research questions—must be closely related and thoroughly studied in order for the theoretical framework to support the research and direct the choice of research design and data analysis. Christopher et al. (2021) contend that the use of a theoretical framework aids in the process of knowledge, and that philosophical frameworks provide insight into intricate social relationships and events. This study highlights that in order to effectively guide data analysis from the viewpoints of transformational and instructional leadership theories, there must be a strong alignment between the problem, objectives, and research questions. Therefore, this study assesses leadership practices in rural schools using both transformational and instructional leadership theories in an effort to enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter examines the theories of transformational and instructional leadership, emphasizing how they can be used to assess leadership practices of secondary school principals and the teaching and learning processes in rural contexts. It gives a summary of the main ideas of these theories, talks about their benefits and traits as stated by different writers, and emphasizes how applicable they are to evaluating leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and the teaching and learning methods in the Sidama region's public secondary schools. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of these theories and their practical applications in the research.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodology and chosen research paradigm that served as the study's direction. The population, sample size, sampling methods, and data sources are all covered in detail. The chapter also looks at data gathering procedures and methodologies, as well as data analysis and presentation strategies. Along with the validity, reliability, and credibility of the measurement tools employed in the study, ethical considerations are also covered.

The selection of the research design and inquiry approach was informed by their relevance and significance in achieving the study's objectives. This indicates that the chosen design and methodology were considered appropriate for examining the leadership practices of principals and their impact on teaching and learning in rural secondary schools.

As stated by Novikov and Novikov (2019, p. 3), research methodology includes the methods used for data processing, selection, analysis, and identification. Breakfast, Bradshaw and Haines (2015) refer to the process of gathering and evaluating data as the research technique. They emphasize that researchers should adopt, Bradshaw reliable designs and procedures that ensure a valid and meaningful research process. Research methodology is the science that describes how scientific research is conducted, according to Patel and Patel (2019). Moreover, research approaches offer standard operating procedures that are easy to understand and provide guidelines for conducting research.

4.2 Research Paradigm

According to Sunethra (2018), a "paradigm" refers to a pattern, model, or typical example that encompasses cultural themes, ideas, and societal ideals. Morgan, as cited in Brierley (2017), defines a paradigm as "a shared belief system that influences the type of knowledge researchers seek to obtain and how they interpret any research evidence they may collect." Thus, a researcher’s perspective on understanding and interpreting the world is shaped by paradigms. In academic discussions, paradigms are also essential for demonstrating one's stance or classification.

This study embraces a pragmatism research paradigm, which aligns with the literature and the transformational and instructional theoretical frameworks. The researcher is especially focused on the insights gained from the participants' experiences. In this context, the researcher concurs with the definitions of the pragmatism research paradigm as presented by Nelson et al. (2020) and Krathwohl (2009). A pragmatism paradigm highlights a unified approach to mixed research methods, utilizing a combination of both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This methodology facilitates precise explanations and descriptions of the phenomenon, supporting the attainment of the study's objectives.

For instance, contemporary societies, especially the younger generation, often accept misinformation from sources like social media, radio, TV, and the internet without question, leading to harmful reactions that endanger both human life and property (Kumatongo & Muzata, 2021). Thus, pragmatism fosters curiosity, reason, knowledge verification, and enlightenment, which are essential for preserving harmony, coexistence, and progress in modern society. In summary, it encourages examining occurrences from multiple perspectives, reinforcing the appropriateness of selecting a pragmatism paradigm for this study.

4.3 Research Approach

The "paradigm war" gave rise to mixed methodologies, commonly termed the "pragmatic" approach (Shannon-Baker, 2016), recognized as the third "methodological movement" (Johnson, 2012), or an additional methodology (Cohen et al., 2017). According to Potokri (2011; 2016), mixed methodology entails combining quantitative and qualitative research methods in a single study. While qualitative research prioritizes narrative and descriptive data, quantitative research centers on numerical data and statistical generalization (Denzin et al., 2023). Potokri (2016) claims that the first step in the process of "teaching and learning" is recognizing the letters and numbers that serve as the foundation of meaning in both formal and informal education. This supports the idea that combining both methods can lead to a greater degree of truth, with letters/alphabets corresponding to qualitative research and numbers linked to quantitative research.

Research is increasingly regarded as a complex, dynamic, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary field. Consequently, many researchers find it necessary to integrate multiple methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2011). According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2015) and Potokri (2016), this

methodology results in a "better research product." By employing mixed methodologies, researchers can gain an improved understanding of the phenomenon under study, leading to the generation of more comprehensive knowledge through the collection of complementary yet divergent data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). This approach facilitates the identification of a "point of interface," where the gathering and analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data converge, allowing for comparison and yielding convergent or divergent insights.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2015), mixed method research methodology aims to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in specific investigations while making sure that all viewpoints are taken into account. By combining these methods, the researcher aimed to fully comprehend the problem instead of depending on a single approach.

4.4 Research Design

A design study aims to tackle a specific issue stemming from a knowledge gap through a systematic and rigorous investigation. According to Weligodapola and Darabi (2018), a research design serves as an integrated framework that justifies the technical decisions made during the planning stages of a research project. There are six different kinds of mixed-method research designs: sequential explanatory, sequential exploratory, sequential transformational, concurrent triangulation, concurrent nested, and concurrent transformative designs.

The researcher used a sequential explanatory design for this study. According to this method, the quantitative data is gathered and examined first, followed by the qualitative data, whose findings are then integrated into the study's interpretation stage (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Clarifying causal links between variables or other pertinent elements related to the study problem is the primary objective of explanatory research. A critical objective of the research design in explanatory studies is to reduce the likelihood of incorrect assumptions (Steyn, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2017; Creswell, 2007). This design links the stages influencing qualitative inquiries, data collection, and sampling (Steyn, Myburgh, & Poggenpoel, 2017; Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative data can elucidate quantitative findings that warrant further exploration, while quantitative results can inform the selection of participants for qualitative studies. The researcher

first gathered and arranged quantitative data in accordance with the explanatory sequential design principles. The quantitative findings were then supported by the collection and analysis of qualitative data. Given the quantitative nature of the study's questions, this methodology was considered appropriate. Furthermore, the researcher utilized an exploratory design to tackle new questions that arose during the investigation after collecting the quantitative data. Interviews and document analysis were two techniques utilized to collect qualitative information that supplemented the quantitative results.

To facilitate the integration of complementary data and offer a thorough summary of the findings across different qualitative and quantitative phases, the study utilized a sequential explanatory research design. The philosophical assumptions for the quantitative phase are grounded in post-positivism, whereas the qualitative phase shifts to a constructivist perspective. As a result, qualitative data collection and analysis were conducted after the quantitative data had been gathered, with the objective of using the qualitative findings to clarify the conclusions derived from the quantitative data.

4.5 Population, Sampling Technique and Sample

The term "population" refers to both the full collection of instances and the entire group of people to whom a researcher hopes to generalize findings from a sample (Johanson & Christensen, 2012). A population is further defined by Babbie (2020) and Creswell (2014) as a group of people selected by researchers according to their areas of interest, from which conclusions are made in the framework of a study. In this context, the population includes the individuals with whom a researcher engages and gathers information throughout the study.

On the other hand, a sample is a portion of the population chosen for study. Using observations from the sample to make generalizations about the population is the goal of sampling (Creswell, 2014). According to Cropley and Knapper (2021), a sample consists of members of the group who are qualified to offer insights pertinent to the goals of the study. Before starting data collecting, it is essential to determine the study sample. Teachers, members of the Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA), high scorer students, district and school principals and educational experts from the Regional Education Bureau were sample of this study.

Given the large size of the research population, a multistage sampling methodology was employed. Multistage sampling is the process of selecting random components from groupings of elements rather than from individual units (Johansen & Schanke, 2013). Steyn, Myburgh, and Poggenpoel (2017) and Creswell (2013) suggest selecting "cases that reflect alternative views on the problem, process, or event," advocating for a high number of participants and multiple instances to study the issue. Sarker et al. (2018) recommend including 12–15 participants, as saturation often occurs with around 30 interviews. This balance allows for comprehensive interview data while enabling the use of additional sources to enhance conclusions and present diverse perspectives on the phenomena being studied. Typical interviews last between thirty and forty-five minutes.

Table 4.1: Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

No.	Respondents	Population	Sample	Percentage	Sampling Techniques
1	Teachers	1813	400	22	Simple random sampling
2	Principals	46	46	100	Purposive sampling
3	Supervisors	13	13	100	Purposive sampling
4	REB Experts	16	8	50	Purposive sampling
5	WEO Experts	70	20	29	Purposive sampling
	Total	1958	487	25	

4.5.1 Sampling for the Quantitative Phase

The study's quantitative phase was mainly designed to collect data from 400 teachers, 46 principals, and 41 education office experts (both regional and district). A total of 487 respondents were chosen from a population of 1,958 across ten sampled schools, employing both simple

random and purposive sampling techniques. The purposive method involves selecting participants who possess specific knowledge, experiences, and characteristics relevant to the research question. Additionally, to guarantee a representative sample of responders from each of the ten rural secondary schools, a simple random sampling procedure was employed.

4.5.2 Sampling for the Qualitative Phase

To gain a clear understanding of the issue explored in the second phase of the study, qualitative data were collected and analyzed. This qualitative information was gathered from respondents considered to have in-depth expertise on how principals' leadership practices enhance teaching and learning, thereby complementing the quantitative data.

The second stage of the investigation offered a chance to confirm and validate the information acquired in the first stage of the quantitative study (Creswell, 2021). Using a strategy endorsed by Johnson and Christensen (2014), the researcher used purposive sampling for this phase in order to choose a small sample of respondents who had thorough knowledge of how the leadership practices of rural principals affect teaching and learning. Eight high-scoring students and ten PTSA members from six different schools were thus selected by the researcher to serve as qualitative data sources. All things considered, the information that PTSA members and high scorer students from these schools presented was quite valuable.

4.6 Instrument for Data Collection

Using a variety of data gathering methods allows for the triangulation of data from different sources, reduces the drawbacks of any one tool, and enhances the strengths of each instrument (Creswell, 2021). Questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis were the three different tools the researcher used to collect relevant data from participants and responses.

Questionnaires were the main tool used to gather quantitative data in the initial phase of the study. Semi-structured interviews were the main technique used to collect qualitative data during the second phase, while document analysis was used in both phases. The three selected instruments are elaborated on in the following section.

4.6.1 Questionnaire as Data Collecting Tools of Quantitative Phase

The questionnaire mainly comprised numerous closed-ended questions designed to collect quantitative data, along with a few open-ended questions aimed at gathering additional qualitative insights. The closed-ended questions enabled respondents to choose the most suitable answer from the options provided. In contrast, the open-ended questions allowed respondents to share their thoughts based on their own knowledge, concepts, opinions, or beliefs. The advantage of using open-ended questions lies in their ability to capture the depth and complexity of respondents' perspectives.

The researcher developed the questionnaire by drawing on insights from relevant literature. A key criterion in selecting and crafting each tool, question, and item was its effectiveness in addressing the study's concerns.

The questionnaire was organized into six parts: demographic details of the respondents, current leadership practices of rural secondary school principals, stakeholders' perceptions of rural leadership, factors that affect rural school leadership, and strategies to improve leadership and teaching and learning in secondary schools within the Sidama region.

4.6.2 Qualitative Data Gathering Instrument

The qualitative data collection tools for the study were selected to offer context for the quantitative results and to enable validation against the findings from the questionnaires. According to Creswell (2021), general interviews and observations are the primary methods used by qualitative researchers, as they allow participants to express their opinions freely. He also notes that qualitative researchers can document data using independently developed methods that help organize the material provided by participants in response to each question. By soliciting additional information through information sharing, researchers can gain further explanations for the data collected via interview schedules and document analysis. The upcoming discussion details the interview schedule and document analysis selected for the qualitative phase.

4.6.2.1 Interview

Interviews are a widely used method for collecting qualitative data. As noted by Kothari (2017) and Koul et al. (2016), interviews primarily rely on verbal communication to gather information. According to Johnson and Christensen (2014), an interview is a method of data collection in which an interviewer poses questions to an interviewee regarding the subjects of the study. This communication process allows the interviewee to meet with the researcher in person and verbally provide the required information. By immersing themselves in the lives of the respondents, researchers can gain insight into the real perspectives and interpretations surrounding the problem under examination (Seyfarth, 2024).

In the second phase of the study, the researcher utilized interviews as the primary source of qualitative data collection. Interviews are frequently employed in research because they enable the investigator to gather comprehensive and varied data, making them particularly useful for exploring ideas, emotions, and behaviors across different contexts (Edwards & Greeff, 2017). To facilitate this process, the researcher developed a set of guiding questions aimed at eliciting detailed qualitative data from participants.

A semi-structured interview guide was created to allow for flexibility during the interviews. This approach enables the interviewer to pose additional questions as needed to gather more information from the subject (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). The semi-structured format helps keep the interview focused and aids in collecting relevant data that a questionnaire may not capture, while also allowing for cross-referencing with data obtained through other methods.

These interviews enhanced the data collected and examined in the first stage of the quantitative investigation. Interviews with participants from six secondary schools were conducted in the hopes that their unique perspectives would provide light on the relationship between leadership practices of secondary school principals and teaching and learning . Interviews were conducted with 10 PTA members and 8 high scorer students. Amharic was used for the interviews, which were then translated into English.

Each interview was conducted one-on-one by the researcher. With the interviewee's consent, the sessions were recorded to minimize transcription errors and enhance accuracy. The reports related to these interviews-maintained confidentiality by not identifying any specific individuals or organizations. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes.

4.6.2.2 Document Analysis

Another crucial instrument for collecting relevant data and information for this study was the review of documents. This tool is valuable as it offers insights into past actions and ideas related to the topic being investigated. To ensure that pertinent data were collected and accurately interpreted, the researcher created a checklist by consulting various leadership books and journals to guide the document review.

Using this checklist, the researcher reviewed a variety of school records, including strategic and annual plans of rural secondary schools, reports on leadership practices, performance data from rural secondary schools, and results from the grade 12 leaving exams. Additionally, the following documents were reviewed: management meeting minutes, PTSA meeting minutes, notices and other correspondence, supervisors' comments, as well as the school's slogan, vision, mission, and values.

4.7 Method of Data Presentation and Analyses

The quantitative and qualitative raw data were arranged, examined, and interpreted using different approaches, depending on the type of data being examined: statistical methods for quantitative data and thematic categorization for qualitative data. After being gathered from a sample of teachers, principals, and education office experts through questionnaires, the quantitative data was customized, organized, and tabulated to make it easier to access and comprehend. Based on topical commonalities, all relevant data gathered from interviewers and documents was arranged and displayed in various tables and themes.

The researcher employed the theories of transformational and instructional leadership to investigate the influence of principals' leadership practices on teaching and learning in secondary schools in the Sidama region. The analysis followed a two-phase approach, adhering to the

principles of an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Subsequently, the qualitative phase was conducted based on the findings from the quantitative data. The quantitative results informed the development of a suitable interview schedule. The semi-structured interview guides included open-ended questions designed to clarify and validate the findings from the initial phase of the study while enriching the quantitative data.

4.8 Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness of the Study

An effort was made to uphold the rigor and quality of the study through a variety of methodological strategies. While the approaches to ensuring validity differ between quantitative and qualitative research, both paradigms must adhere to established validity criteria. Validity is the degree to which an instrument assesses the variables it is designed to evaluate (James et al., 2017; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2025). According to de Beer, Horn, and Schaufeli (2022), validity is defined as the degree to which an empirical measure accurately captures the essence of the idea under study, evaluated in terms of its robustness, authenticity, precision, and truthfulness.

Reliability is another pivotal element that influences the credibility of a study. Schurink (2020) defines reliability as the consistency achieved when a subsequent researcher employs the same methodological approach and arrives at identical conclusions and findings.

Based on the previously stated succinct definitions of validity, reliability, and trustworthiness, in-depth discussions of the significance of these ideas in preserving the caliber of both the quantitative and qualitative phases of this research are given. In particular, the "validity and reliability of the quantitative research" are described in section 4.8.1, and the "trustworthiness of the qualitative data" is thoroughly examined in section 4.8.2.

4.8.1 Validity and reliability of the Quantitative Methods Used

The validity of this research was assessed based on how accurate conclusions were drawn regarding the influence of principals' leadership practices on enhancing teaching and learning. Additionally, considerable attention was given to the language used in the construction of the questionnaire to ensure the relevance and clarity of each question, thereby maintaining the instrument's validity.

Reliability is another critical factor that scholars consider when evaluating the quality of a quantitative research study. To address the main study questions posed at the start of the project, the researcher used questionnaires with five sections and a Likert scale format. Two secondary schools participated in a pilot study to assess the survey's statistical reliability. The next part goes into depth on the results of the pilot test.

4.8.1.1 Pilot Test Result

To improve the validity, reliability, and credibility of the research, a pilot study is essential. It serves as a preventative step by anticipating any difficulties that can occur both during and after fieldwork. The researcher assessed the viability of the data gathering tools, such as questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, during this testing phase and validated the tactics to be used.

For this research, the pilot test was conducted over one month, from September 1 to October 15, 2023, at two secondary schools that were not part of the main study. A total of 40 teachers, 5 principals, and 5 education office experts from both regional and woreda levels participated.

Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each group of respondents to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire. The analysis indicated that the 53 items in this investigation yielded an overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.87.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.870	53

Table: 4.2.1 Pilot Study of Reliability Data

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that a dependability level of 0.7 or greater is a reasonable general guideline. Furthermore, George and Mallery, as cited in Koonse and Kelly (2014), provide more detailed criteria:

- 9 – Excellent
- 8 – Good
- 7 – Acceptable
- 6 – Questionable
- .5 – Poor
- < .5 – Unacceptable

Teachers, Principals and Education Office Experts Respondents			
№	Items	Question number	Cronbach ' s alpha
1.	Current Leadership of Rural Secondary School Principals	13	0.86
2.	The Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership	10	0.75
3.	Factors that Affect Rural School Leadership	15	0.72
4.	Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership	15	0.86
	Total	53	0.87

Table 4.2.2 Details of Reliability Test in Each Theme

This indicates that in this research, all variables have reliability values greater than 0.7. According to George and Mallery's categorization, a reliability measure of 0.87 falls under the "Good"

category. The reliability measures expressed by Cronbach's alpha are presented in table 4.2.2 above.

4.8.2 Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Study

The researcher utilized multiple methods to ensure the study's dependability and high quality, particularly considering the qualitative approach to data collection. According to Hughes (2019) and Trochim and Donnelly (2007), credibility parallels validity in quantitative research and pertains to the researcher's capacity to accurately convey participants' perspectives. The validity of the findings is further shaped by the individuals' contextual backgrounds (Mohajan, 2020).

To establish credibility, the researcher undertook several actions, including verifying the members who participated in the study sessions, maintaining clear documentation, reviewing the supervisor's interview questions, and addressing challenges based on the supervisor's comments and suggestions. Additionally, the following sections discuss how the researcher addressed trustworthiness based on the established parameters outlined below.

4.8.2.1 Transferability

Transferability pertains to the capacity of other researchers to conduct studies similar to this one and achieve comparable results (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). To facilitate transferability, the researcher provided detailed explanations and integrated insights from the literature review based on secondary data sources. Additionally, following Shenton's recommendations (2004, p. 70), the researcher provides readers with a detailed "thick description" of the "phenomenon" within its context.

4.8.2.2 Credibility

Credibility involves ensuring that data is collected from reliable sources who are knowledgeable about the issue being studied. Long-term interactions with participants, consistent monitoring, and member checks are some strategies to guarantee trustworthiness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To maintain credibility, the researcher conducted debriefing sessions with his supervisor and staff members to discuss and debate the concepts. This process helped the researcher clarify his interpretations and address his own biases and predispositions (Shenton, 2004, p. 67).

Additionally, the researcher followed specific procedures to further ensure the validity of the results, as noted by Merriam (1998) and Conrade and Serlin (2005) (both referenced in Mafora, 2013, p. 690):

- I refrained from including my personal viewpoints in the data.
- Themes from the reviewed literature and the coding process guided the interview agenda.
- Participants were invited to address any questions regarding my preliminary interpretations of the data to confirm the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

4.8.2.3 Dependability

This ensures that the results are reliable and can be replicated by other researchers. Dependability guarantees that the data collected by the researcher is accurate and can be trusted for future use (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). To achieve this, the researcher employed multiple recording methods, including audio recordings and handwritten notes, to accurately capture and analyze all the data collected (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 278). Furthermore, the researcher consulted his supervisor and other experts in rural leadership practices and teaching and learning to verify the validity of his analysis.

4.8.2.4 Confirmability

The researcher enhanced confirmability by utilizing member verification and triangulation (Shenton, 2004, pp. 65–66). In accordance with triangulation, the researcher conducted in-person interviews and consistently probed participants during the sessions to obtain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their responses. To clarify and confirm the participants' viewpoints, the researcher rephrased and repeated their answers or statements in the form of questions. This approach ensured that the researcher accurately understood each participant's perspective and facilitated the comparison or verification of one participant's viewpoint with those of others.

4.9 The Research Ethics

This study was characterized by its commitment to professional integrity. Consequently, the principles of the teaching profession were carefully considered in the design of this research endeavor. According to Paransa et al. (2022) and Salli (2025), every professional in the teaching

field has an ethical obligation to uphold, preserve, and enhance the standing and reputation of their discipline. Professionals must adhere to high moral standards, demonstrating accountability, ethics, and a value-driven approach.

As a professional educational leader, the researcher carried out this study in alignment with the UNISA research code of conduct and the teaching code of ethics, prioritizing honesty, integrity, and ethical standards. This ensured that genuine and legitimate methods were used for data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting, with no attempts made to manipulate data to draw fictitious or misleading conclusions (Sanusi & Deriba, 2024).

To gain access to the study locations and gather relevant data from designated secondary schools in the Sidama Region, a letter requesting permission was composed and submitted to the Sidama Region Education Bureau (SREB). In response, SREB promised a timely approval letter. Additionally, letters were dispatched to the selected secondary schools to secure their consent and ensure their cooperation for the study.

With guidance from the researcher's supervisor, an application for ethical clearance was submitted to the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Department of Education Management, providing all necessary information. The questionnaire provided by UNISA was completed, and sample consent letters were submitted for review. Consequently, the UNISA Ethics Committee approved the application, granting ethical clearance certificate no. Ref: 2022/11/09/13846256/25/25/AM.

From the beginning to the conclusion of the investigation, all ethical processes and procedures were consistently applied. In addition to respecting participants' choices and ensuring their safety, the study upheld ethical treatment that included measures to safeguard their well-being.

4.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provides a summary of the research approach employed in this investigation. The initial section of the chapter offers a thorough explanation of the rationale for using an explanatory sequential mixed methods strategy. The choice of a pragmatic research paradigm for this study is also well articulated.

Furthermore, the chapter addresses key elements such as the population, sampling techniques, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, and aspects of reliability, including the pilot test, validity, and trustworthiness of the study's instruments. These topics are essential to the mixed methods research approach. Finally, the chapter discusses research ethics in greater detail.

CHAPTER FIVE
DATA PERESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology for the study, detailing the methodologies, paradigm, design, and procedures used in this explanatory sequential mixed methods investigation. It presents and interprets data gathered from both the quantitative and qualitative phases, focusing on how each type of data was presented and analyzed. Chapter Six was focused on triangulating and integrating findings from both components.

This chapter was further divided into four subsections, covering various topics such as response rates, demographic characteristics of respondents, analysis and interpretation of responses from Likert-scale questions, and a summary of the chapter's main ideas. These topics were presented in the following order.

5.2 Response Rate (RR)

The response rate is a crucial indicator for assessing the validity of research. Much work was done in this study to increase the number of teachers, school principals, and education office experts who answered the questionnaires. By dividing the total number of eligible participants in the chosen sample by the number of valid responses obtained, one can get the response rate. In simpler terms, it represents the proportion of returned questionnaires compared to the total distributed. While researchers have not reached a consensus on acceptable cutoff points for response rates, Boparai et al. (2018) and Fincham (2008) suggest that a 60% response rate is indicative of adequate participation and the achievement of the study's objectives. Therefore, Table 5.1 presents the study’s response rate:

Table 5.1: Questionnaire Response Rate

№	Participant Group	Sample size	Responses	Response rate in %
1	Teachers	400	350	87.5
2	Principals	46	45	97.8
3	Education Office Experts	41	40	97.5
	Total	487	435	89.3

Table 5.1 presents the response rates obtained from teachers (87.5%), principals (97.8%), and education office experts (97.5%). The questionnaire was distributed to a sample population of ten secondary schools in the Sidama Region: Leku, Hawela, Boricha, Balela, Darara, Motto, Dilla Afarara, Telamo, Shamana Godo, and Gorche, ensuring representativeness of the secondary school population in the region.

The distribution and collection of the questionnaires took three months (December 2023 to February 2024) due to transportation and communication challenges in some rural districts, requiring the researcher to travel on foot and, where possible, by motorbike or car.

The researcher asserts that, considering the sampling strategies employed to maintain representativeness and the number of valid questionnaires returned, the response rates achieved are sufficient to ensure the study's effectiveness and efficiency. However, further attempts to collect delayed questionnaires would likely be a waste of time and yield minimal benefit, as survey research response rates can still be valid if representativeness and adequate sample sizes are maintained (Abbot & McKinney in Shikula, 2018).

5.3 Analysis and Interpretation of Demographic Data

The demographic data of the sampled population who completed the questionnaire are outlined in the following subsections. Key factors include gender, academic status, age, and years of service

among the research participants. The researcher interpreted the results using percentages, frequency distributions, ANOVA, and descriptive statistics.

Providing an overview of the respondents' demographic composition is essential, as it can influence our understanding of how long stakeholders have contributed to the education system. This serves as the primary objective of presenting and interpreting the respondents' demographic data. Table 5.2 lists all of the demographic indicators.

Table 5.2: Characteristics of Respondents in-terms of Gender, Academic status, Age and Year of Service

No	Item	Category of Items	Respondent Groups							
			Teachers		Principals		Education Office Experts		Total	
			N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Gender	Male	264	75.4	38	84.4	34	85	336	77.3
		Female	86	24.6	7	15.6	6	15	99	22.7
		Total	350	100	45	100	40	100	435	100
2	Academic Status	Diploma	34	9.7	2	4.4	-	-	36	8.3
		BA/BSc/Bed	283	80.9	30	66.6	25	62.5	338	77.7
		MA/MSc	33	9.4	13	29	15	37.5	61	14
		Total	350	100	45	100	40	100	435	100
3	Age in Years	25-29	162	46.3	7	15.5	1	2.5	170	39.1
		30-39	165	47.1	27	60	20	50	212	48.7
		40-49	19	5.4	9	20	17	42.5	45	10.3
		50-59	4	1.2	2	4.5	2	5	8	1.9
		60& above	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	350	100	45	100	40	100	435	100
4	Year of Service	1-5	128	36.6	7	15.5	-	-	135	31
		6-11	151	43.1	20	44.4	7	17.5	178	41
		12-17	48	13.7	12	26.7	17	42.5	77	17.7
		18-22	19	5.4	3	6.7	8	20	30	6.9
		23-27	4	1.2	3	6.7	8	20	15	3.4
		Total	350	100	45	100	40	100	435	100

5.3.1 Gender of Respondents

The gender of teachers and principals is an important variable that literature has examined for its impact on the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, Table 5.2, item 1, shows an underrepresentation of females in the region's education system. The study aimed to capture data from both genders among teachers, reflecting the available proportions and implying representativeness. Specifically, out of 435 respondents, 336 (77.3%) were male and only 99 (22.7%) were female. This finding aligns with the Sidama Region Education Bureau's work performance report (SREB, 2023), which indicates that of the 6,398 secondary school teachers, 5,166 (80.7%) were male, while 1,232 (19.3%) were female.

To tackle the gender gap in the system, various well-meaning measures and strategies have been introduced to boost the number of female teachers. For instance, the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2018) points out the ongoing gender disparity in the education sector, stating that "despite an increase in the proportion of female academic staff and female student enrollment, a significant gender gap remains." To further narrow this gap, it is crucial to strengthen existing affirmative action policies. The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Constitution (1995: 33) states in Article 89 that the "government shall ensure the participation of women in equality with men in all economic and social development endeavors," which supports the goal of increasing female representation in the educational system.

This indicates a commitment from political organizations and the education sector to raise the proportion of women in both the workforce and student body. However, research on female engagement in national and global agendas has not shown statistically significant differences between the sexes regarding effectiveness in student learning and achievement (Islahid & Nasreen, 2013). By employing objective, fair, unbiased, systematic, and scientific recruitment and selection procedures that focus primarily on candidates' competence, commitment, and passion for the profession, the long-standing gender gap in the sector can be closed while still promoting female participation in teaching and adhering to legal and constitutional mandates, all without compromising the quality of education.

5.3.2 Academic Status of Participants

Item 2 of Table 5.2 presents the qualifications of the research participants. The data indicates that 34 (9.7%) of the teachers held diplomas, 283 (80.9%) were degree graduates, and 33 (9.4%) had master's degrees. Among the principals, 2 (4.4%) held diplomas, 30 (66.6%) had degrees, and 13 (29%) possessed master's degrees. For the education office experts, 25 (62.5%) held degrees and 15 (37.5%) had master's degrees

.

The success of any education system hinges on having enough skilled teachers, principals, and education office experts, both in terms of quantity and quality. Qualified teachers and principals are essential for making subject matter accessible and engaging, which in turn enhances student performance. Research supports the importance of qualified teachers, as unqualified educators often struggle to provide effective instruction and prepare students for increasingly complex assignments that foster intellectual growth. In light of this, the Ministry of Education (2018) stipulates that instructors in primary schools must possess a minimum of a diploma and a bachelor's degree in their respective subjects, and teachers in secondary schools must possess both a bachelor's and a master's degree.

The presence of unqualified teachers may negatively impact students' performance and enthusiasm for learning, as reflected in their academic success, survival, retention, and completion rates. This investigation reinforces the findings of Theophile, Paustin, and Benjamin (2020), who noted that “unqualified teachers negatively affect their students’ academic performance.” This is primarily attributed to a deficiency in pedagogical knowledge, which is essential for effective teaching, along with inadequate content knowledge. Consequently, it is crucial for the education department and regional education bureau to prioritize the recruitment of qualified educators and explore ways to enhance the quality of current instructors through various delivery methods, including regular, summer, remote, and weekend classes.

5.3.3 Age of Respondents

Item 3 of Table 5.2 outlines the age categories of the respondents. Among the teachers, 162 (46.3%) were in the 25-29 age group, 165 (47.1%) were aged 30-39, 19 (5.4%) were within the 40-49 range, and 4 (1.2%) were aged 50-59. Similarly, among the principals, 7 (15.5%) were

aged 21-25, 27 (60%) were aged 30-39, 9 (20%) were aged 40-49, and 2 (4.5%) were aged 50-59. For the education office experts, 1 (2.5%) were aged 25-29, 20 (50%) were aged 30-39, 17 (42.5%) were aged 40-49, and 2 (5%) were aged 50-59.

Age is an important demographic factor; many respondents, 382 (87.8%), fell into the adult category. Individuals in this demographic typically exhibit traits such as dedication, accountability, creativity, inventiveness, warmth, and refined intellect (Neeraja, 2020). This suggests a strong potential for this workforce to make significant contributions to efforts aimed at raising educational standards and enhancing student learning through encouragement and the creation of supportive educational environments.

5.3.4 Respondents' Years of Service

Educators with more experience tend to be more effective, having refined their pedagogical skills, communication styles, and areas of focus throughout their careers, while also prioritizing overall performance improvement. Experienced teachers are better equipped to support students' learning. However, some argue that instructional experience beyond the initial years has little impact on student learning. For instance, Irvine (2019) notes that "...there is a complicated, nuanced, and nonlinear relationship between the total number of years of experience and teacher effectiveness, as measured by student achievement gains." Decisions based on the assumption of a direct and linear link between experience and effectiveness often lead to suboptimal policies.

Research indicates that "teaching experience is positively associated with student achievement gains throughout much of a teacher's career; as teachers gain experience, their students are more likely to excel on measures of success beyond test scores; teachers achieve greater effectiveness when they work in supportive, collegial environments or accumulate experience in the same grade, subject, or district; and more experienced teachers benefit their colleagues" (Dodolsky, Darling-Hammond, & Kini, 2019). Another study by Agbo-Egwu, Adadu, Nwokolo-Ojo, and Enaboifo (2017) found that "schools with teachers who have over 10 years of teaching experience achieved better results than those with more teachers who have 10 years or fewer." This finding is corroborated by additional subject-specific research, which shows that "qualified practitioners teaching chemistry performed significantly better than those who were not." Furthermore, students studying chemistry under more experienced teachers outperformed those taught by less

experienced educators (Nbina, 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that some inexperienced teachers excel in their roles.

In this context, Item 4 of Table 5.2 illustrates the years of service of respondents. Specifically, 128 (36.6%) teacher respondents had five years or less of experience, 151 (43.1%) served for 6-11 years, 48 (13.7%) had 12-17 years of experience, 19 (5.4%) fell within the 18-22 year range, and 4 (1.2%) had 23 years or more. Among the principals, 7 (15.5%) worked for 1-5 years, 20 (44.4%) served for 6-11 years, 12 (26.7%) had 12-17 years, and 3 (6.7%) had 18-22 years and 23-27 years. For the education office experts, 7 (17.5%) worked for 6-11 years, 17 (42.5%) served for 12-17 years, 8 (20%) had 18-22 years, and the remaining 8 (20%) had 23-27 years of experience.

The distribution of work experience shows a straightforward increase in experienced teachers up to 17 years, followed by a sharp decline, indicating a thinning of the number of teachers with long service. The advantages of having experienced teachers are numerous; they can effectively convey subject matter using well-considered methods that enhance student comprehension and intellectual growth. Additionally, they serve as mentors for new teachers, helping them acclimate to their roles and environments. Their extensive experience enables them to engage students at various learning levels and stimulate curiosity.

However, a similar downward trend has been noted in the age distribution of mature teachers. The decrease in both work experience and age may be attributed to attrition, which the Ministry of Education (2018) reported to be 5% annually, driven by factors such as lack of interest in the profession, pay disparities, social recognition, unfavorable working conditions, limited advancement opportunities, and insufficient benefits. This study suggests that simply increasing a teacher's years of service will not enhance the teaching and learning process; rather, professional development programs, effective communication styles, and a commitment to the profession are essential for strengthening the link between student performance and teacher experience.

In summary, to prevent experienced teachers from reaching a plateau or becoming stagnant, the education bureau must commit to retaining them and reducing turnover. This includes developing a variety of strategies, such as incentive programs, refresher courses, and additional instruction

through regular, summer, distance, weekend, and evening classes, along with benefits like free healthcare and housing support.

5.4 Analysis and Interpretation of Data Obtained from Likert-Scale Type Questions

Teachers, principals, and education office experts were the three groups of respondents whose information was gathered mostly through a questionnaire. It was developed to take into account all pertinent elements that are either directly or indirectly related to secondary school teaching and learning as well as leadership practices in rural schools. The same content was distributed to all respondents and organized into six categories discussed as follows; part one addressed the personal profile of respondents, part two presented the current leadership of rural secondary schools principals, part three highlighted the perception of stakeholders about rural leadership, part four demonstrated factors that affect rural school leadership, part five presented strategies for improving leadership in rural schools, while the final section included qualitative data aimed at gaining insights into the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and the teaching and learning environment in the Sidama region.

5.5 Current Leadership of Rural Secondary School Principals

Table 5.3A: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Current Leadership of Rural Secondary Schools Principals

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Principals define the vision to improve teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.56	1.15	12.882	.001
	Principals	45	4.36			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.10			
	Total	435	3.69			
Principals define the values to improve teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.57	1.10	13.633	.001
	Principals	45	4.33			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.13			
	Total	435	3.70			
Principals improves the condition for teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.53	1.11	14.44	.001
	Principals	45	4.38			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.03			
	Total	435	3.67			
Principals give the assignment of roles and responsibilities to teachers	Teachers	350	3.54	1.07	8.034	.001
	Principals	45	4.13			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.93			
	Total	435	3.63			
Principals redesign the curriculum of the school	Teachers	350	3.07	1.18	3.189	.042
	Principals	45	3.31			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.68			

	Total	435	3.06			
Principals enrich the curriculum of the school	Teachers	350	3.09	1.14	3.442	.033
	Principals	45	3.44			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.80			
	Total	435	3.10			
Principals upgrade quality of educators to improve teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.21	1.22	7.667	.001
	Principals	45	3.96			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.23			
	Total	435	3.29			

Note: p<0.05 SDA= 1-1.49, DA= 1.5-2.49, UN=2.5-3.49, AG=3.5-4.49, &SA ≥4.5 Ẍ= average mean

As indicated in Table 5.3a, Item 1 reveals that most respondents agreed on the principals' awareness of the school's vision. The grand mean (Ẍ = 3.69) demonstrates how principals articulate their vision to enhance teaching and learning. The uniformity of the respondents' answers suggests a strong consensus on this issue. Additionally, the ANOVA test results, F(12.882), SD = 1.15, P = .001 < 0.05, indicate a significant statistical difference among the groups of respondents. This finding aligns with existing literature, which suggests that effective leadership stems from having a strategic vision. By clarifying their vision, effective leaders help their employees feel a deeper sense of purpose. Worldwide, only one in three employees strongly agrees that their organization's vision is clear and meaningful to their work (Wellbeing at Work, Clifton, 2021). Furthermore, Emmanuel and Valley (2022) assert that transformational and instructional leadership styles, which involve creating a shared vision, are employed by effective school principals (ch. 2.8.6 & ch. 3.1). This evidence indicates that the principals in these schools have a clear understanding of their vision and communicate effectively to enhance teaching and learning in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region.

In Table 5.3a, Item 2, respondents were asked how principals articulate the values of schools to improve the teaching and learning process. The grand mean ($\ddot{X}$ = 3.70) indicates a consensus on the definition of school values, with respondents responding positively to this item.

The ANOVA test results, F(13.633), SD = 1.10, P = 0.001 < 0.05, also show significant statistical differences among the groups. Although the majority agreed that principals define school values effectively, there were varied perceptions regarding this issue. Literature supports this view, with Barrett and Breyer (2014) and Tingle et al. (2019) stating that school principals act as curators and stewards of their institution's vision, mission, and values, inspiring students to pursue these goals. Thus, to establish and maintain high-quality schools in challenging environments, principals must exhibit specific leadership traits (ch. 2.6.1).

In Item 3 of Table 5.3a, respondents were questioned about the principals' initiatives to enhance conditions for teaching and learning. The majority expressed their agreement, reflected in a grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.67, confirming their positive feedback. The ANOVA test results, F(14.44), SD = 1.11, P = 0.001 < 0.05, reveal significant statistical differences among the groups. Literature indicates that to reach essential goals, a school principal should lead by example, inspire and motivate all stakeholders, and demonstrate charismatic leadership. Key aspects involve the principal's ability to maximize teachers' contributions to achieving academic objectives and improving student performance (Suliah, Harapan & Arafat, 2019) (ch. 2.20.2).

Item 4 of Table 5.3a analyzes the extent to which principals assign roles and responsibilities to teachers. Most respondents agreed on this issue, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.63. This finding is supported by interview responses. The ANOVA test results, F(8.034), SD = 1.07, P = 0.001 < 0.05, indicate significant statistical differences among the groups, suggesting varied views among respondents despite a consensus.

In Item 5 of Table 5.3a, respondents were inquired about whether principals modify the school curriculum. The majority indicated they were undecided, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.06. Additionally, the ANOVA test results, F(3.189), SD = 1.18, P = 0.042 < 0.05, show statistically significant differences in perception among respondents. This indicates significant limitations in adapting the curriculum to meet the demands of the workforce. Literature suggests that assembling a team with a shared goal and vision is vital for successful curriculum redesign

(Webster & Webster, 2018) (ch. 2.6.4). Based on the data and document analysis, it can be concluded that principals face challenges in redesigning the curriculum and acknowledge gaps in their ability to do so, as indicated by interview responses.

Item 6 of Table 5.3a addresses principals' efforts to enrich the curriculum. The grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.10 indicates that respondents were undecided on this issue. However, document analysis reveals that curriculum enrichment is not well established in the schools. The ANOVA test results, F(3.442), SD = 1.14, P = 0.033 < 0.05, highlight significant perception differences among respondents.

In Item 7 of Table 5.3a, respondents were questioned regarding the principals' initiatives to enhance the quality of educators in order to improve teaching and learning. The grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.29 indicates that respondents were undecided on this issue. The ANOVA test results, F(7.667), SD = 1.22, P = 0.001 < 0.05, reveal statistically significant differences of opinion among respondents, as the p-value is less than 0.05. This finding is supported by literature stating that the responsibility for improving school quality and advancement largely falls on the shoulders of the principals (Meyer et al., 2022; Ogunode & Musa, 2020) (ch. 2.6.6). Although respondents were undecided, interview and open-ended questions indicated that principals have the capacity to enhance the quality of educators and other professionals in schools to improve the teaching and learning process.

Table 5.3B: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Current Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary Schools Principals

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Principals build good relationships in the inside of the school	Teachers	350	3.44	1.20	15.529	.001
	Principals	45	4.18			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.28			
	Total	435	3.59			
Principals build good relationships outside of the organization/school	Teachers	350	3.29	1.16	11.168	.001
	Principals	45	4.09			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.70			

	Total	435	3.41			
Principals select tools for teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.17	1.15	10.631	.001
	Principals	45	3.98			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.48			
	Total	435	3.29			
Principals develop tools for teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.17	1.15	8.614	.001
	Principals	45	3.91			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.25			
	Total	435	3.25			
Principals participate in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges	Teachers	350	3.43	1.11	12.420	.001
	Principals	45	4.27			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.73			
	Total	435	3.54			
Principals ensure an orderly and supporting environment to stakeholders	Teachers	350	3.61	.994	8.014	.001
	Principals	45	4.18			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.95			
	Total	435	3.70			

Note: $p<0.05$ SDA= 1-1.49, DA= 1.5-2.49, UN=2.5-3.49, AG=3.5-4.49, &SA ≥4.5 $\ddot{X}$= average mean

To analyze Item 1 in Table 5.3b, which focuses on how principals foster positive relationships within the school, the grand mean of the respondents is $\ddot{X} = 3.59$, suggesting agreement on the strong relationships among stakeholders. The ANOVA test results, F(15.529), SD = 1.20, P = 0.001 < 0.05, show statistically significant differences among respondents' views. Literature supports that creating healthy school environments requires the combined efforts of school principals (Kwatubana, 2017), confirming a generally conducive atmosphere among stakeholders (ch. 2.6.7).

Item 2 of Table 5.3b examines how principals build relationships outside the organization. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.41$ suggests that respondents were undecided regarding relationships with stakeholders outside the school. The ANOVA test results, F(11.168), SD = 1.16, P = 0.001 < 0.05, indicate statistically significant differences in opinion among respondents. This suggests varying understandings of good relationships outside the school. Literature indicates that successful school leaders foster relationships beyond the school compound (Day & Sammons, 2016). Thus,

the statistical differences suggest that effective communication with external stakeholders is not sufficiently assured by the principals (ch. 2.6.7).

Item 3 of Table 5.3b focuses on principals selecting tools for teaching and learning. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.29$ indicates that respondents were undecided about the selection of these tools. The ANOVA test results, $F(10.631)$, $SD = 1.15$, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, reveal statistically significant differences in responses among the groups. This may reflect differing perceptions among respondents, implying limitations in the selection of tools that challenge stakeholders' efforts to achieve organizational goals, as supported by interview and open-ended question responses.

Item 4 of Table 5.3b inquiries about principals developing tools for teaching and learning. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.25$ indicates that respondents were undecided about this practice. The ANOVA test results, $F(8.614)$, $SD = 1.15$, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, show statistically significant differences among respondents. However, documentary evidence shows that the development of teaching and learning resources has been inadequate in the rural secondary schools of the Sidama Region, as indicated by the open-ended responses.

Item 5 of Table 5.3b illustrates principals' participation in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.54$ indicates agreement among respondents regarding principals' involvement in this area. The ANOVA test results, $F(12.420)$, $SD = 1.11$, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, reveal significant statistical differences among respondents. This finding aligns with Day and Sammons (2016), who affirm that successful school leaders provide effective solutions to challenges in teaching and learning. Thus, there is strong evidence of principals' active participation in addressing these challenges, supported by both document analysis and interview data.

Item 6 of Table 5.3b examines whether principals ensure an orderly and supportive environment for stakeholders. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.70$ indicates agreement among respondents on this issue. The results of the ANOVA test, $F(8.014)$, $SD = 0.994$, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, reveal statistically significant differences in the responses among the groups. The literature supports the idea that principals are essential in creating an environment that promotes, influences, motivates, and cultivates teachers to become professional educators, thereby raising instructional standards

(Nurdin, Pettalongi, & Ahsan, 2019). This implies significant confirmation of principals' effectiveness in ensuring an orderly and supportive environment for stakeholders (ch. 2.6.10).

5.6 Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership

Table 5.4: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for the Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
The rural leadership of the school is similar with the urban schools	Teachers	350	2.43	1.11	3.254	.040
	Principals	45	2.44			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.90			
	Total	435	2.47			
Rural school leadership has the problem of organization	Teachers	350	3.06	1.18	1.827	.162
	Principals	45	3.00			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.43			
	Total	435	3.09			
The rural leadership has the problem of management	Teachers	350	3.17	1.16	2.594	.076
	Principals	45	2.76			

	Education Office Experts	40	3.15			
	Total	435	3.13			
Leadership of the school motivate or energize teachers to the school work	Teachers	350	3.57	1.08	3.255	.040
	Principals	45	4.00			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.60			
	Total	435	3.61			
Rural leadership contribute to gain self-knowledge /new thinking in the school	Teachers	350	3.43	1.09	.513	.599
	Principals	45	3.60			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.40			
	Total	435	3.45			
Existence of rural leadership in the school increase unity between teachers and other stakeholders	Teachers	350	3.41	1.06	4.961	.007
	Principals	45	3.93			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.53			
	Total	435	3.48			
Leadership problems cause more teachers to leave the school	Teachers	350	3.37	1.16	1.339	.263
	Principals	45	3.62			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.58			
	Total	435	3.42			
Existence of rural leadership help teachers to communicate with each other	Teachers	350	3.54	1.00	3.349	.036
	Principals	45	3.91			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.78			
	Total	435	3.60			
Productivity of the school is affected by the leadership styles of the organization	Teachers	350	3.67	1.07	2.383	.093
	Principals	45	3.91			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.00			
	Total	435	3.73			
School leadership has the positive	Teachers	350	4.01	.96	4.312	.014

impact on the quality of education	Principals	45	4.13			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.47			
	Total	435	4.07			

Note: p < 0.05 SDA= 1 - 1.49 , DA= 1.5-2.49, UN = 2.5 – 3.49 ,Ag = 3.5- 4.49 , &SA ≥4.5
Ẍ= average mean

The perceptions of stakeholders regarding rural leadership significantly influence the enhancement of educational quality in the study areas. Table 4, Item 1, explores the parallels between leadership in rural and urban schools. The respondents' grand mean of Ẍ = 2.47 reflects a consensus of disagreement regarding the similarity of leadership styles in these environments. The ANOVA test results, F(3.254), SD = 1.11, P = 0.04 < 0.05, indicate statistically significant disparities among the respondents. Current literature suggests that rural principals often face difficulties in effective leadership in the twenty-first century due to their isolation and restricted access to networks and professional development opportunities (Klocko & Justis, 2019) (ch. 2.13.1). Consequently, it can be inferred that perceptions of school management teams differ markedly between urban and rural institutions in the Sidama Region, highlighting the necessity of tackling the specific challenges encountered by rural principals.

Item 2 of Table 5.4 asks whether rural school leadership faces organizational problems. Most respondents were undecided, with a grand mean of Ẍ = 3.09. Despite this indecision, the reality suggests that leading schools in rural areas presents significant challenges. The ANOVA test results, F(1.827), SD = 1.18, P = 0.162 > 0.05, show no statistically significant difference among the groups, indicating a consensus on this issue.

Item 3 addresses management problems in rural leadership. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.13 indicates respondents were undecided. The ANOVA test results, F(2.594), SD = 1.16, P = 0.076 > 0.05, confirm there are no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. This suggests management issues exist in rural leadership, even if the average mean indicates indecision, as supported by interview and document analysis evidence.

Item 4 explores whether school leadership motivates or energizes teachers. The grand mean is Ẍ = 3.61, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(3.255), SD = 1.08,

P = 0.04 < 0.05, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions. This implies different perspectives on how principals motivate teachers in the Sidama Region's rural secondary schools. This result is consistent with research showing that principals, in their capacity as instructional leaders, inspire teachers to improve student performance and draw in and keep talent, which boosts classroom efficacy (Minton, 2020). (ch. 2.21).

Item 5 examines whether rural leadership contributes to gaining self-knowledge and new thinking in schools. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.45, indicating respondents were undecided. The ANOVA test results, F(0.513), SD = 1.09, P = 0.599 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences among respondents. Despite the mean score indicating indecision, one can infer that rural leadership contributes to self-knowledge and new thinking in Sidama Region rural secondary schools.

Item 6 discusses whether the existence of rural leadership increases unity between teachers and other stakeholders. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.48, suggesting respondents were undecided. However, the ANOVA test results, F(4.961), SD = 1.06, P = 0.007 < 0.05, indicate significant perception differences among respondents. This suggests varying views on whether rural leadership fosters unity among stakeholders. According to Preston and Barnes (2017), schools benefit from smaller communities, enabling leaders to provide more individualized learning environments through personal interactions with students and families. Although respondents rated themselves as undecided, open-ended questions and interviews indicate that rural leadership enhances unity in Sidama Region rural secondary schools (ch. 2.13.1).

Item 7 examines whether leadership problems cause more teachers to leave their schools. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.42, indicating respondents were undecided. The ANOVA test results, F(1.339), SD = 1.16, P = 0.263 > 0.05, confirm no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Literature supports that teacher turnover often occurs due to leadership issues (Holme & Colleagues, 2018). While the mean score suggests indecision, the p-value indicates that leadership problems do contribute to teacher attrition in Sidama Region rural secondary schools (ch. 2.14.4).

Item 8 discusses whether the existence of rural leadership helps teachers communicate with each other. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.60$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, $F(3.349)$, $SD = 1.00$, $P = 0.036 < 0.05$, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions. Literature suggests that regular engagement and communication among teachers, parents, community members, and leaders are essential attributes of successful principals (Surface & Theobald, 2014) (ch. 2.13.1).

Item 9 explains that the productivity of the school is affected by the leadership styles of the organization. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.73$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, $F(2.383)$, $SD = 1.07$, $P = 0.093 > 0.05$, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. Thus, it can be inferred that respondents concur that productivity is influenced by leadership styles in rural secondary schools within the Sidama Region.

Additionally, Item 10 indicates that school leadership positively affects educational quality, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 4.07$, reflecting agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, $F(4.312)$, $SD = 0.96$, $P = 0.14 > 0.05$, reveal no statistically significant differences in perceptions. According to the OECD (2012), improving the quality of education is greatly aided by efficient school leadership. Thus, in general, it can be said that respondents concur that school leadership improves the standard of teaching in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region (ch. 2.3.1).

5.7 Factors that Affect Rural School Leadership

Table 5.5A: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Factors that Affect Rural School Leadership

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
The school has a living home for teachers	Teachers	350	1.61	.901	20.668	<.001
	Principals	45	2.11			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.42			
	Total	435	1.74			
The management of school are well trained	Teachers	350	3.37	1.114	3.172	.043
	Principals	45	3.73			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.15			
	Total	435	3.38			
The preparation of principals to transform school is good	Teachers	350	3.36	.070	5.846	.003
	Principals	45	3.91			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.25			

	Total	435	3.41			
The school standard is conducive to teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.03	1.157	4.620	.010
	Principals	45	3.58			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.20			
	Total	435	3.11			
Reflections for learning with peers are available in the school	Teachers	350	2.78	1.084	8.517	<.001
	Principals	45	3.47			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.00			
	Total	435	2.87			
Induction for rural instructional teachers are available	Teachers	350	2.60	1.016	4.152	.016
	Principals	45	3.02			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.85			
	Total	435	2.67			
The partner programs are linked with technology in the school	Teachers	350	2.24	978	.615	.028
	Principals	45	2.42			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.65			
	Total	435	2.30			
Trends in budget utilization in schools are unproblematic	Teachers	350	2.21	.943	7.286	<.001
	Principals	45	2.73			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.50			
	Total	435	2.29			
The resources are equally distributed to stake holders to improve teaching and learning process	Teachers	350	2.53	1.066	4.804	.009
	Principals	45	3.04			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.60			
	Total	435	2.59			

Note: p < 0.05 SDA= 1 - 1.49 , DA= 1.5-2.49, UN = 2.5 – 3.49 ,Ag = 3.5- 4.49 , &SA ≥4.5 Ẍ= average mean

According to Table 5.5a, Item 1, the existence of housing for teachers was examined. The grand mean is Ẍ = 1.74, indicating that respondents disagreed on the availability of living accommodations for teachers in the schools. The ANOVA test results, F(20.668), SD = 0.901, P = 0.001 < 0.05, suggest that there are statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. Therefore, it can be concluded that the availability of living accommodations for teachers is questionable in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region.

Table 5.5a, Item 2, inquires whether the training for school management is adequate. The grand mean of respondents is Ẍ = 3.38, suggesting that the groups rated their views as "undecided" regarding the adequacy of management training. Furthermore, the ANOVA test results, F(3.172), SD = 1.114, P = 0.043 < 0.05, show statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. The literature now in publication emphasizes the need for improved qualifications, even though the evidence points to some indecision on this issue. Primary school principals should have at least a bachelor's degree, according to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, whereas secondary school principals ought to have a master's degree (MoE, 2017). Of the principals' educational backgrounds, according to the survey, two (4.4%) had diplomas, thirty (66.6%) had bachelor's degrees, and thirteen (29%) had master's degrees. Furthermore, Mengistu (2020) and Habtamu (2019) draw attention to a number of deficiencies that supervisors, vice-principals, and principals have identified in schools:

- Failure to create a welcoming, engaging, and child-friendly atmosphere in the classroom.
- Inadequate efforts to develop new revenue-generating plans to offset budgetary shortfalls.
- Mismanagement and improper use of funds provided by the government.
- Limited efforts to establish a strong connection with the school community to secure necessary funding for teaching resources, infrastructure, and tools.
- Lack of dedication, genuine involvement, commitment, leadership, and support in organizing, leading, and assisting school efforts toward essential activities (such as teaching).
- Engaging in ostentatious conduct and making exaggerated claims.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the training for school management is below standard, leading to various problems in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region (ch. 2.23.2).
Table 5.5a, Item 3, discusses the preparation of principals for school transformation. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X} = 3.14$, indicating that respondents rated their views as "undecided" regarding the readiness of principals to effect change. Additionally, the ANOVA test results, F(5.846), SD = 1.070, $P = 0.003 < 0.05$, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. However, interview data, as presented in Section 5.6.5, indicates that school principals face challenges in transforming their schools.

Table 5.5a, Item 4, assesses whether the school standards are conducive to teaching and learning. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.11$, leading respondents to rate their views as "undecided" on the standards of the school. The ANOVA test results, F (4.620), SD = 1.157, $P = 0.010 < 0.05$, demonstrate statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. Document observations show that most secondary schools in the region are below standard; from 98 secondary schools, only 32 (33%) meet the standard, while 66 (67%) do not (SREB, 2024). Therefore, the school standards are questionable in terms of attracting student learning.

Table 5.5a, Item 5, describes the availability of opportunities for peer learning per school. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 2.87$, indicating that respondents were "undecided" regarding the availability of peer learning opportunities. The ANOVA test results, F(8.517), SD = 1.084, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents, indicating varied views on this issue. Document analysis reveals that the availability of peer learning opportunities is indeed questionable.

Table 5.5a, Item 6, examines the availability of induction programs for rural instructional teachers. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 2.67$, suggesting that respondents were "undecided" about the availability of these induction programs. The ANOVA test results, F(4.152), SD = 1.016, $P = 0.016 < 0.05$, show that there are statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. Although the mean score shows indecision, it can be generalized that the availability of induction training is insufficient in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region, as supported by document analysis.

Table 5.5a, Item 7, evaluates the extent to which partner programs are linked with technology in schools. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 2.30$, indicating disagreement among respondents on this issue. The ANOVA test results, $F(3.615)$, $SD = 0.978$, $P = 0.028 < 0.05$, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Thus, it can be inferred that technological integration in the rural secondary schools of the Sidama Region is inadequate. Similarly, the Sidama Region Education Bureau (SREB, 2023–2024) revealed several issues in its annual education report that arose during plan implementation, which have received significant attention. These issues include:

- Incompetence among principals and teachers
- Wasted time in the educational process
- Failure to utilize contemporary technologies to enhance or support education
- Lack of teacher guides and student textbooks in certain subject areas, as well as a scarcity of reference materials
- Increased rates of absenteeism, repetition, and dropout
- Insufficient participation of children with special needs in school
- Inadequate admission of new students
- Lower representation of female teachers in school leadership positions. These are the main issues highlighted in the report (Chap. 2.23.2).

Table 5.5a, Item 8, evaluates whether trends in budget utilization in schools are problematic. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X} = 2.29$, indicating disagreement on the notion that budget utilization is unproblematic. The ANOVA test results, $F(7.286)$, $SD = 0.943$, $P = 0.001 < 0.05$, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. The variation in opinion reflects differing perspectives among the respondents. Therefore, it can be concluded that budget utilization in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region is problematic.

Table 5.5a, Item 9, investigates whether resources are distributed equitably among stakeholders to enhance the teaching and learning process. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X} = 2.59$, suggesting that respondents were “undecided” regarding equal resource distribution. The ANOVA test results, $F(4.804)$, $SD = 1.066$, $P = 0.009 < 0.05$, indicate statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. This suggests varying views on resource distribution, despite the overall indecision reflected in the responses. Furthermore, interview data

presented in Section 5.6.5 indicates that resources are not distributed equally among school communities, leading to various challenges as mentioned in that section.

Table 5.5B: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Factors that Affect Rural School Leadership

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
The community involvement is much enough to support school	Teachers	350	2.49	1.001	.468	626
	Principals	45	2.42			
	Education Office Experts	40	2.63			
	Total	435	2.49			
Overlap of job in a few professionals occurs in school	Teachers	350	3.11	1.067	1.705	.183
	Principals	45	3.42			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.13			
	Total	435	3.14			
The bureaucratic administration of the school affects teachers to impart instruction	Teachers	350	3.33	1.095	1.206	.300
	Principals	45	3.42			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.60			
	Total	435	3.36			
School size is the problem for teaching and learning	Teachers	350	3.28	1.173	1.450	236
	Principals	45	3.58			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.43			
	Total	435	3.32			
Unequal gender distribution of resource is the challenge for the school	Teachers	350	3.43	1.106	056	946
	Principals	45	3.38			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.45			
	Total	435	3.43			
The students background have the profound effect to the success of the school	Teachers	350	3.87	.902	3.548	030
	Principals	45	4.22			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.05			
	Total	435	3.92			

Note: $p < 0.05$ SDA= 1 - 1.49 , DA= 1.5-2.49, UN = 2.5 – 3.49 ,Ag = 3.5- 4.49 , &SA ≥4.5

Ẍ= average mean,

Table 5.5b, Item 1, assesses whether community involvement is adequate to support the school. The overall mean from respondents is $\ddot{X}$ = 2.49, reflecting disagreement on this matter. . Additionally, the ANOVA test results, F(0.468), SD = 1.001, P = 0.626 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Interview responses further support the notion that community participation is falling short of expectations, adversely affecting teaching and learning in the region. Therefore, it can be concluded that community engagement in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region is insufficient.

Table 5.5b, Item 2, addresses whether job overlap occurs among a few professionals in schools. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.14, suggesting that respondents are undecided on this issue. The ANOVA test results, F(1.705), SD = 1.067, P = 0.183 > 0.05, indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. This suggests that respondents share similar views regarding job overlap among professionals in Sidama Region rural secondary schools. However, document analysis reveals that job overlap does exist in some departments.

Table 5.5b, Item 3, discusses how bureaucratic administration affects teachers' ability to impart instruction. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.36, indicating that respondents are undecided on this matter. The ANOVA test results, F(1.206), SD = 1.095, P = 0.300 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Thus, it can be concluded that bureaucratic administration negatively impacts teachers' effectiveness in imparting instruction, even though respondents remain undecided on this issue in Sidama Region rural secondary schools.

Table 5.5b, Item 4, evaluates whether school size poses a problem for teaching and learning. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.32, indicating that respondents are undecided on this issue. The ANOVA test results, F(1.450), SD = 1.173, P = 0.236 > 0.05, indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. Literature supports the notion that smaller schools tend to achieve higher academic performance (Slate et al., 2005), raising questions about whether respondents agree or disagree that school size is an issue for teaching and learning in Sidama Region rural secondary schools.

Table 5.5b, Item 5, highlights that unequal gender distribution of resources is a challenge for schools. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.43$, indicating that respondents are undecided on this issue. The ANOVA test results, F(0.056), SD = 1.106, P = 0.946 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Nevertheless, document analysis indicates gaps in resource distribution among different stakeholders.

Table 5.5b, Item 6, discusses the impact of students' backgrounds on the success of the school. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.92$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(3.548), SD = 0.902, P = 0.030 < 0.05, confirm statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. This suggests a consensus that students' backgrounds profoundly affect the success of rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region.

5.8 Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Table 5.6A: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Principals should redefine school leadership responsibilities to improve student learning	Teachers	350	3.95			
	Principals	45	4.24			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.98			
	Total	435	3.98	.856	2.400	.092
Principals need to develop school development frameworks to improve practices	Teachers	350	3.96			
	Principals	45	4.18			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.00			
	Total	435	3.99	.810	1.410	.245
Principals should delegate responsibilities to stakeholders	Teachers	350	3.87			
	Principals	45	4.16			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.90			
	Total	435	3.90	.842	2.282	.103
Principals need to develop skills for effective school leadership to shoulder responsibilities	Teachers	350	4.09			
	Principals	45	4.22			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.08			
	Total	435	4.10	.772	.602	.548
Principals should make school leadership an attractive profession to improve the quality of teaching and learning	Teachers	350	4.07			
	Principals	45	4.18			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.08	.875	.311	.733
	Total	435	4.08			

Principals should give due emphasis on teaching and learning rather than vesting time in administrative activities	Teachers	350	3.83	.918	.505	.604
	Principals	45	3.98			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.85			
	Total	435	3.85			
Principals professionalize organization processes	Teachers	350	3.85	.935	3.356	.036
	Principals	45	4.22			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.83			
	Total	435	3.88			

Note: p < 0.05 SDA= 1 - 1.49 , DA= 1.5-2.49, UN = 2.5 – 3.49 ,Ag = 3.5- 4.49 , &SA ≥4.5
Ẍ= average mean

Table 5.6a, Item 1, discusses the need for principals to redefine school leadership responsibilities to improve student learning. The grand mean of respondents is Ẍ = 3.98, indicating agreement among the groups on this issue. The ANOVA test results, F(2.400), SD = 0.856, P = 0.092 > 0.05, suggest that there are no statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents. They share a similar view on the necessity for principals to redefine their leadership responsibilities to enhance student learning. This is supported by interviews with PTA members and students, who highlighted that principals have multiple roles, such as helping students improve their performance, defining the roles of teachers and students, and acting as intermediaries between the school and the community, as explained in Section 5.6.6.

Table 5.6a, Item 2, addresses the need for principals to develop school development frameworks to improve practices. The grand mean is Ẍ = 3.99, confirming that respondents agree on this necessity. The ANOVA test results, F(1.410), SD = 0.810, P = 0.245 > 0.05, indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Therefore, it can be concluded that principals need training on school development frameworks in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region.

Table 5.6a, Item 3, discusses the importance of principals delegating responsibilities to stakeholders. The grand mean is Ẍ = 3.90, indicating agreement among respondents regarding the

delegation of responsibilities. The ANOVA test results, F(2.282), SD = 0.842, P = 0.103 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. Thus, it can be argued that it is essential for principals to delegate responsibilities to stakeholders in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region.

Table 5.6a, Item 4, highlights the importance of principals developing skills for effective school leadership to manage their responsibilities. The overall mean is Ẍ = 4.10, indicating consensus among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(0.602), SD = 0.772, P = 0.548 > 0.05, reveal no statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. Thus, it is crucial for principals to improve their leadership skills in order to better support stakeholders. Interview responses also support the notion that delegating school responsibilities encourages the development of future leaders, as discussed in Section 5.6.6.

To improve the quality of teaching and learning, it is crucial to make school leadership a desirable career, as shown in Table 5.6a, Item 5. The grand mean, which shows agreement among responders, is Ẍ = 4.08. The findings of the ANOVA test, F(0.311), SD = 0.875, P = 0.733 > 0.05, indicate that there are no statistically significant variations in perceptions. Research backs up this claim, showing that teachers have the greatest influence on students' learning (Karadag, 2020). In order to raise the standard of instruction and learning in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region, principals should work to make school leadership an enticing career (chap.4.1).

Table 5.6a, Item 6, highlights the significance of principals concentrating on teaching and learning rather than administrative tasks. The overall mean is Ẍ = 3.85, indicating consensus among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(0.505), SD = 0.918, P = 0.604 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. Existing literature supports this conclusion, highlighting that principals should concentrate more on teaching and learning, particularly concerning measurable student progress (Stronge, 2021) (chap. 2.14.2). Hence, principals in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region of Ethiopia should focus on teaching and learning rather than administrative duties.

Table 5.6a, Item 7, examines the need for principals to professionalize organizational processes. The grand mean is Ẍ = 3.88, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results,

F(3.356), SD = 0.935, P = 0.036 < 0.05, reveal statistically significant differences in perceptions among respondents. This reveals varying opinions among principals in the Sidama Region's rural secondary schools regarding the professionalization of organizational processes. As evidence for this finding, Bøje and Frederiksen (2019) contend that professional development and training should be incorporated into programs to align with the changing roles of school leadership (chap. 2.22.1).

Table 5.6B: ANOVA and Descriptive Statistics for Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Items	Category	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Principals focus on relative attractiveness of school leadership	Teachers	350	3.87	. 919	1.182	.308
	Principals	45	4.09			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.88			
	Total	435	3.89			
Principals acknowledge the role of professional organizations of teachers	Teachers	350	3.93	.886	.743	.476
	Principals	45	4.09			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.88			
	Total	435	3.94			
Principals provide support for career development of teachers	Teachers	350	3.82	.932	1.852	.158
	Principals	45	4.09			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.75			
	Total	435	3.84			

Principals contribute to hire well equipped professionals for the vacant position as much as possible	Teachers	350	3.66	1.005	2.05	.130
	Principals	45	3.58			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.33			
	Total	435	3.62			
Principals mobilize community to participate in educational affairs	Teachers	350	3.81	.948	4.346	.014
	Principals	45	4.18			
	Education Office Experts	40	4.10			
	Total	435	3.87			
Principals contribute to distribute equitable financial resources	Teachers	350	3.65	1.038	.441	.643
	Principals	45	3.80			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.73			
	Total	435	3.68			
Principals provide the technological equipment as much as possible	Teachers	350	3.54	1.142	.363	.696
	Principals	45	3.69			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.53			
	Total	435	3.55			
Principals provide the equal chance for workers to participate in different activities of the school	Teachers	350	4.09	.836	.628	.534
	Principals	45	4.02			
	Education Office Experts	40	3.95			
	Total	435	4.07			

Note: p < 0.05 SDA= 1 - 1.49 , DA= 1.5-2.49, UN = 2.5 – 3.49 ,Ag = 3.5- 4.49 , &SA ≥4.5

Ẍ= average mean

Table 5.6b, Item 1, discusses principals' focus on the relative attractiveness of school leadership. The grand mean of respondents is Ẍ = 3.89, indicating agreement among the groups regarding the importance of this focus. The results of the ANOVA test, F(1.182), SD = 0.919, P = 0.308 > 0.05, indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in perceptions among the respondents.

This implies a collective recognition of the importance for principals to enhance the appeal of school leadership in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region. This finding is further supported by PTA interviews, which revealed that principals are mindful of this aspect, even though the outcomes may not always align with expectations (see interview section 5.6.6).

Table 5.6b, Item 2, highlights the acknowledgment by principals of the role of professional organizations for teachers. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X} = 3.94$, confirming agreement among groups on this point. Similarly, the ANOVA test results, F(0.743), SD = 0.886, P = 0.476 > 0.05, indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions. Therefore, it can be generalized that principals recognize the importance of professional organizations for teachers in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region.

Table 5.6b, Item 3, examines whether principals provide support for the career development of teachers. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.84$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(1.852), SD = 0.932, P = 0.158 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. This demonstrates a consensus on the support provided by principals for teachers' career development in Sidama Region rural secondary schools. According to Bozkuş (2019), school principals should be equipped with resources to aid in teachers' professional development. Interview responses also confirm that teachers seek performance evaluations for their career advancement, and that school committees provide this feedback to facilitate their development (see chap. 2.24 and interview section 5.6.6).

Table 5.6b, Item 4, discusses principals' contributions to hire well-equipped professionals for vacant positions. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.62$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(2.050), SD = 1.005, P = 0.130 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. However, interview responses indicate that principals do not have the authority to hire equipped professionals; instead, they must seek personnel from the woreda education office.

Table 5.6b, Item 5, evaluates whether principals mobilize the community to participate in educational affairs. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.87$, confirming agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(4.346), SD = 0.948, P = 0.014 < 0.05, reveal statistically significant

differences in perceptions among respondents. This allows for generalization regarding principals' efforts to engage the community in educational affairs in Sidama Region rural secondary schools. However, document analysis indicates that community contributions to education are not meeting expectations, with the SREB report (2022-2023) showing only a 50% average performance in community involvement. This highlights a gap between expected and actual community participation.

Table 5.6b, Item 6, reveals that principals contribute to the equitable distribution of financial resources. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.68$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(0.441), SD = 1.038, P = 0.643 > 0.05, show no statistically significant differences in perceptions. This suggests that respondents share similar views on the principals' role in distributing financial resources equitably in Sidama Region rural secondary schools. However, student interviews reveal that there is no equitable distribution due to departmental biases, with discrepancies in student performance linked to uneven financial support between departments (see interview section 5.6.6).

Table 5.6b, Item 7, discusses whether principals provide technological equipment as much as possible. The grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.55$, indicating agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(0.363), SD = 1.142, P = 0.696 > 0.05, confirm no statistically significant differences in perceptions. This suggests that principals should strive to provide the available technological equipment in Sidama Region rural secondary schools. Interview data from PTA members and students supports this finding, noting that while principals do provide available technological resources, there is a significant scarcity that hinders rural secondary schools in the region (see interview section 5.6.5).

Table 5.6b, Item 8, assesses whether principals offer equal opportunities for staff to engage in various school activities. The overall mean is $\ddot{X} = 4.07$, reflecting agreement among respondents. The ANOVA test results, F(0.628), SD = 0.836, P = 0.534 > 0.05, indicate no statistically significant differences in perceptions. Thus, it can be concluded that principals should guarantee equal opportunities for both teachers and non-teaching staff to participate in school activities in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region. However, document analysis reveals disparities in

performance across different departments, suggesting that equal participation is not consistently achieved.

5.9 Analysis of Qualitative Data

5.9.1 Introduction

This section of the thesis explores the findings and interpretation of qualitative data collected from the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and high scorer students from grades ten and twelve. Data were collected primarily through interviews with a total of 18 informants, consisting of ten PTA members and eight high scorer students.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, this study used a mixed-methods approach, with a primary focus on quantitative data analysis and a balancing inclusion of qualitative data. A more thorough knowledge of the overall outcomes was obtained by gathering and analyzing more qualitative data to see if the qualitative insights agreed with the quantitative findings.

The qualitative information obtained from the interviews was evaluated to determine if the participants' perspectives and opinions supported the conclusions drawn from the quantitative analysis.

5.9.2 Participants' Background

The participants in this segment of the study comprised 10 members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) aged between 33 and 55, alongside 8 high-scorer students aged 16 to 20. Among these individuals, three were female and 15 were male, all possessing between ten to fifteen years of experience. These interviewees offered valuable insights into the four thematic areas of the study, based on their experiences in leadership roles within secondary schools and their perspectives on the teaching and learning processes. Their extensive experience gave them a strong understanding of both the educational environment and the national education system.

The in-depth interview questions were designed to gather firsthand information from the respondents. The researcher also sought to capture insights from the participants' gestures and nonverbal cues during the interviews. The main objective of this study was to examine the

leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and the dynamics of teaching and learning in the Sidama Region.

During the interviews, respondents were encouraged to express their thoughts candidly and freely regarding school leadership practices and educational experiences, with assurances that their responses would bear no negative repercussions. The depth of the responses varied; some participants provided comprehensive answers that exceeded expectations, while others offered more general or superficial insights, touching on various themes from the interview questions.

The researcher carried out the interviews personally, recording the participants' opinions and perspectives in a field notebook. After the interviews were completed, the responses were transcribed and manually entered into a computer for better organization and data analysis.

5.9.3 Theme 1: Understanding the Status of Current Rural Secondary School Principals' Leadership

PTA members and high scorer students chosen from rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region were the target people for the interview questions. The aim was to identify key practices that explore the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning. Research question 1 is directly tied to these interview questions. The insights gained from this group's responses help validate whether the quantitative data regarding perceptions of teachers, principals, and education office experts align with the qualitative findings.

The participants were asked the following interview questions, focusing on three main issues:

- PTAs and students' observation on rural school leadership
- Principals, teachers and other stakeholders view on rural leadership and
- PTAs and students explanation on rural school leadership

Q1: How do you observe the rural school leadership practices of your school?

The researcher asked participants to share their observations regarding rural school leadership practices and teaching and learning in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region. They noted that these areas are particularly challenging due to several factors, including shortages of teaching materials, experienced teachers, and budgets; the lack of organized laboratories and libraries; insufficient pedagogical centers; inadequate community participation in school affairs; and limited access to electricity, which hinders the use of technology.

Most interviewees, 8 PTA members and 6 high scorer students, reported that schools are currently suffering from budget shortages, which is especially difficult for rural schools. This situation is compounded by insufficient community involvement, poor technology, infrastructure issues, lack of teacher motivation to support students, principals' commitment to improving the environment, and students' motivation to change themselves, all of which were identified as major constraints.

To gather additional insights regarding rural school leadership and teaching and learning, the researcher posed the questions. PTA members 1 responded:

> *As a member of the school leadership, I have noticed that leading rural schools poses greater challenges than in urban settings. One significant concern is the extent of community involvement. A PTA member remarked that, despite the strong potential for collaboration between the community and schools to improve educational quality, this is lacking in rural areas. He also pointed out the difficulties faced by the education system in rural secondary schools, citing budget constraints, inadequate facilities, and insufficient community support as major hurdles.*

The data above indicates that rural school leadership faces numerous challenges and requires the attention of various stakeholders. School principals and teachers, as frontline actors, bear the responsibility for collaborating with different stakeholders to transform the schools.

Similarly, PTA member 2 explained that:

In my opinion, teachers tend to prefer continuing their instructional duties over participating in co-curricular activities, possibly due to a lack of incentives. Additionally, there is a significant deficiency in effective school leadership practices. Supervision, which was once a common practice, has become rare. Instead of collaborating on professional platforms within the classroom, teachers now only gather for formal meetings. Notably, discussions related to the curriculum and setting high standards for students are seldom conducted in our classrooms.

Additionally, high scorer students assert that rural secondary schools exhibit unclear leadership practices by not adequately considering employee commitment and knowledge.

In response, high scorer student 1 explained that:

As a student, I have seen firsthand the many leadership issues faced by rural schools. After more than two years of attendance, I've seen a big difference between these secondary schools and metropolitan ones. Lesson delivery, student assistance, teacher preparation, principal commitment, student readiness for classes, parental involvement, facility provision, classroom conditions, and the general quality of the school environment are just a few of the areas where this disparity is apparent. Playground aesthetics, fencing, and other amenities all contribute to an atmosphere that is typically unsuitable for the teaching and learning process.

From the discussion above, the main objective of school administrators has been to produce misleading reports to satisfy higher authorities. Consequently, under administrative pressure, principals appear to have overlooked their essential duties of transforming and reforming schools. Participants noted that many principals spend their time on trivial activities instead of concentrating on effective school reform and transformation. Faced with pressure from higher-ups to follow directives, principals have adopted a transactional leadership style, which enables them to secure promised benefits. Furthermore, issues related to resources have obstructed schools from meeting their intended goals. Schools have increased their funding sources during the last ten years, receiving assistance from institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, no foreign body is currently providing financial support to these schools. It has been challenging for schools to carry out their initiatives to raise the standard of

instruction in rural secondary schools in the Sidama Region due to a lack of funds and insufficient community involvement.

Q2: How do principals, teachers and other stakeholders view rural leadership in terms of planning, implementing and monitoring school activities?

Continuous planning, implementation, and observation of the teaching and learning process indicate the use of instructional leadership approaches in the classroom. Hallinger and Murphy (2013) identify three perspectives on instructional leadership: outlining the school's mission, directing the teaching-learning process, and maintaining a supportive learning environment.

Planning is indirectly related to defining the school's mission, according to Hallinger and Murphy's initial viewpoint. The principal's participation in the teaching-learning process is reinforced by ongoing observation of instruction, which embodies the second viewpoint. Finally, gathering feedback from staff and stakeholders about administration, librarians, pedagogy centers, and teaching processes contributes indirectly to maintaining a conducive learning environment, which is the third perspective of the instructional leadership model. The researcher posed questions to PTA members and high scorer students from grades 10 and 12 to address research question number one.

PTA-3 responded:

> *Effective rural secondary school principals engage in collaborative planning, continuous assessment of instruction, and support for both educators and learners. They excel at identifying opportunities and addressing gaps within the school while conducting collaborative evaluations. By gathering feedback from staff and stakeholders on various aspects of administration, instructional strategies, and learning processes, they ensure a well-rounded approach to school management.*

These principals also take proactive measures to resolve problems and inefficiencies in the educational setting, fostering strong leadership and ongoing development. While stakeholder involvement is crucial for enhancing school leadership beyond governmental accountability, not

all principals prioritize it equally. Successful schools actively engage the community in decision-making, yet many do not consistently involve teachers in the process.

Similarly, grade 12 high scorer students 2 replied that:

> *As a student, I observe the leadership in my school in two ways. During the planning process, I see fewer problems compared to the implementation of those plans. I also notice the efforts of principals in executing and monitoring school activities. However, national exam scores indicate a gap in the implementation and monitoring of school plans compared to expected standards. This suggests shortcomings in the implementation and monitoring roles of teachers, principals, and students alike.*

The findings indicate that school stakeholders are making significant efforts to improve rural secondary schools. However, they face challenges in effectively implementing and monitoring activities due to several factors: budget shortages, varying levels of commitment from some stakeholders to execute the plans, student engagement in educational processes, gaps in community participation, and the commitment of middle-level managers to oversee school activities.

5.9.4 Theme 2: Perceptions of Stakeholders on Rural School Leadership

The second theme was established to address the second research question, focusing on stakeholders' perspectives on rural school leadership and its impact on enhancing the teaching and learning process. This theme mainly investigates two central issues:

- The views of PTAs and students regarding principals' rural leadership
- The explanations provided by PTAs and students about principals' leadership styles

To address these sub-themes, the researcher posed the following questions:

Q1: How do you perceive the leadership practiced by your school principals?

Theme 2 investigates how PTAs and students perceive their leaders (principals) in school management. It also investigates how teachers assess their leaders' competence and dedication to implementing change within their schools.

In this context, PTA member 4 stated:

The treatment of teachers and the services they provide are misaligned, as teachers cultivate a skilled workforce that can be tapped by various sectors to fill job openings. Currently, both teachers and principals hold an inadequate status in our society, and as a result, leaders are not making significant efforts to change this perception. Many principals and teachers view teaching as a steppingstone, particularly given the current state of the country, because this profession does not receive the attention or respect it deserves. Additionally, mental health is a pressing issue for many individuals, especially school principals, who struggle to adapt to the ongoing changes in the nation. Teachers and principals require a significant cultural shift; without substantial changes in workplace practices, they may not perform at the necessary level.

Similarly, high scorer students 3 said:

During the previous administration, both the community and the government held teachers in high regard, and educators were highly esteemed. However, under the current administration, the status of educators and the teaching profession has significantly declined. Teachers are not valued by the political structure in the same way as those in the agricultural and health sectors. School principals operate within this challenging environment as well.

According to the comments mentioned, stakeholders perceive their school leadership as inactive and passive in preparing them for the necessary changes and reforms within their institutions.

Q2: How do you explain the leadership style practiced by your school principals?

Participants noted that rural secondary school principals utilize elements of transactional leadership, such as Management by Exception (MBE). This suggests that they do not proactively address errors in institutional performance, often postponing action until problems escalate. They strive to maintain control over teachers and students by enforcing attendance policies and other regulations.

In this context, PTA member 5 stated:

> *I believe that, in the past, teaching was a highly regarded profession, and both teachers and administrators had a stronger sense of commitment to their work than many do today. In fact, teachers' salaries often exceeded those of district governors. They took accountability and responsibility for their actions, encouraging students to take ownership of their education while closely monitoring their progress.*

However, the circumstances facing principals and educators today are vastly different from those in the past. It seems that many teachers are not putting in the same level of effort; rather than seeking solutions to the various challenges in education, professionals appear to be competing for jobs.

Similarly, PTA 6 also stated the issue in the following manner:

> *The current rural school leadership system often consists of staff members merely trying to meet the demands of higher officials or complete paperwork. I have not observed our leaders making a genuine effort to change the educational system. In meetings, I have yet to see any focus on meaningful change initiatives. Instead, discussions primarily revolve around rules, regulations, and circulars issued by senior officials.*

The issues at hand may or may not be directly related to the quality of education. School administrators often focus on managing superficial complaints, and most follow-up measures involve inspections rather than effective supervision aimed at diagnosing problems. Supervisors typically lack the necessary professional knowledge and skills. Due to the political nature of their roles, they tend to prioritize fulfilling paperwork requirements and reporting to higher officials over actively supporting the advancement of schools.

Based on the findings, it can be inferred that rural secondary school principals primarily focus on meeting the demands of higher authorities by producing written reports. Due to administrative pressure from above, they seem to have neglected their fundamental leadership responsibilities of transforming and reforming schools. Participants' comments also indicated that many rural secondary school principals prioritize securing higher positions in the regional state council over effectively implementing school reforms and transformations. This pressure from superiors has

led principals to adopt a transactional leadership style, as following orders enables them to receive the promised benefits.

5.9.5 Theme 3: Factors that Affect Rural School Leadership

The third theme was created to tackle research question 3, concentrating on the key factors influencing rural school leadership in the secondary schools of the study area. This theme primarily centered on two key issues:

- Shortfalls that encounter performance of rural school leadership
- Causes of poor performance of rural leadership

Q1: What are the factors that hinder the performance of your school progress?

The PTA member 7 explained that:

> *Thinking about rural principals lead schools remains stagnant; they fulfill standard responsibilities such as managing attendance and handling administrative tasks without any creativity or forward-thinking ideas. This lack of innovation leads to a repetitive cycle of behaviors, underscoring the need for proactive leadership and fresh approaches to improve school performance.*

The shortage of instructional resources is a significant issue that needs to be addressed under this theme.

High scorer student 4, expressed concerns about the following:

> *The school is facing a textbook shortage. I was not given any textbooks. As a result, the school provided us with textbooks in groups without considering the distances between our homes. Some students drop out and take the group's textbooks with them, while some female students marry and leave school. In these cases, it becomes challenging to track their addresses and return the textbooks. Consequently, there are major issues with the system the school uses for lending textbooks.*

In this context, students were hindered from studying, completing homework, and engaging in activities designed to inspire independent work due to a shortage of textbooks and other educational resources. Although the government provides textbooks in our country, there remains a gap in implementation—specifically, a shortage stemming from economic constraints, similar to challenges faced in other developing nations. Additionally, issues arose in the distribution of books, as borrowers often stopped returning them (Molla & Nolan, 2019).

Furthermore, since most students in rural schools live in remote communities, group textbook lending presents significant challenges. Consequently, school leadership has not played a crucial enough role in ensuring that the teaching and learning processes are executed effectively to enhance student achievement.

The analysis of open-ended questions revealed several concerns affecting student engagement in school activities, including a lack of textbooks, a dull learning environment, inadequate school lunches, inappropriate social promotion, poor community relations, insufficient routine maintenance, deteriorating classrooms, and a lack of tutorial periods.

School leadership is responsible for refining the curriculum, developing teaching programs, supporting professional development for teachers, fostering a collaborative work environment, providing and wisely utilizing resources, improving student learning and behavior, creating a culture of hard work, and overseeing and evaluating the teaching program. Therefore, it is evident that rural secondary school leadership faces substantial challenges in effectively managing school operations that promote student learning. Rural students encounter numerous issues that hinder their academic performance.

Concerning this, female student 5 replied that:

> *I am committed to studying and completing my assignments, but I often struggle to do so reliably. I find it difficult to keep up because I am pressed for time. I carry firewood to the nearby town to sell, loading it onto a donkey's back both before and after school. After that, I go grocery shopping and gather other necessities for my family. Unfortunately, I can't afford kerosene to study at night. My home responsibilities sometimes cause me to*

forget to study and complete my assignments. I often stay at the market until late in the evening, which occasionally makes me arrive late to school.

Another female student 6 was raised the same view:

I help my mother with her homework. As the only female sibling among my brothers, I handle all the housework on my own. Two of my brothers are too young to assist, and the other has chosen to raise cows. My mother often faces health issues, which adds to my workload. Despite these challenges, I strive to perform well in school.

One of the major challenges impeding student learning in the area is the heavy workload at home. Students often feel too tired, both emotionally and physically, to actively engage with the lessons they were taught in class. This fatigue compels them to miss school or arrive late. Due to their excessive responsibilities, these students frequently become exhausted and struggle to pay attention. They face two significant limitations: first, their fatigue prevents them from focusing, and second, they are confronted with a large amount of homework waiting for them at home after school. As a result, students living in challenging environments have less time for studying, completing homework, and assignments, which ultimately leads to academic setbacks.

Furthermore, PTA member 8 emphasized the operational and educational challenges that teachers encounter, stating:

Teachers also face numerous challenges. The quality of lab work and the methodological approaches used in teaching are inadequate. At our school, it is common to teach abstract concepts without providing real-world examples. Additionally, students often do not bring their textbooks. Our teachers do not consider the minimal learning abilities of students when preparing subject exams and assessments. In contrast, the education bureau's prepared version more effectively addresses minimum learning competencies. He also said that while the education bureau provides extensive training, there are significant issues with applying and disseminating the knowledge gained from these programs. For example, after completing training on teaching methods, teachers conduct orientations for

their colleagues. They have developed a school plan based on this training, but its implementation has not received adequate attention from any departments or sectors.

The above explanation highlights the gap among teachers in implementing active teaching methods. As frontline actors, teachers play a crucial role in equipping students for better academic outcomes. This preparation not only helps students succeed in their future lives but also contributes to the improvement of the country's education system.

Similarly, another respondent, PTA member 9, stated:

To achieve shared goals, it is essential for attitudes to change in this country. Many employees are reluctant to take on new responsibilities and often demand the material benefits they would receive if assigned to activities outside the classroom. They frequently ask, "Why should I put in extra effort when there's nothing in it for me?" As a result, most individuals focus on their own personal objectives. To foster a sense of solidarity, the community must make a concerted effort. National sentiments should be translated into local actions. Schools should not be seen as the sole institutions responsible for preparing the younger generation for their future roles in society. Our community must acknowledge its substantial responsibility in nurturing and developing the next generation into engaged citizens.

The school transformation plan and the regional plan for educational change must be coordinated in order to accomplish this. The PTAs' input indicates that significant cultural change and reform are required to address the current unresponsive school culture, which is typified by a lack of vision. Many respondents pointed out that the majority of civil officials' pay does not correspond with their lifestyles or the cost of living, which has a negative effect on how dedicated teachers, principals, and students are to their jobs.

Q2: What are the challenges that tackling you from doing your part in rural school leadership?

To this question the high scorer student 7 responded that:

As a student, I reply that our schools have relatively low levels of community awareness and involvement in educational activities. We cannot accomplish our educational goals without the active participation of stakeholders. There are issues with students' motivation for learning. This indicates that the students perceive unemployment of graduate students. Parents teach their children how to succeed financially, but after graduation, they don't learn how to be financially independent and wind up back at their parents' mercy. Students are discouraged from participating completely in class activities as a result. In addition, many university graduates sit around doing nothing and end up burdening their families and communities. The current generation is not competitive enough due to the problem of quality to our education. Overall, I observe an inequitable recruitment and deployment of educated individuals, where deployment is not based on merit, alongside an unequal distribution of the nation's resources. Therefore, it is essential to reform and transform our educational system.

The above explanation illustrates that the low community participation and students' motivation in educational affairs has become the challenge to bring the quality of education in the region.

5.9.6 Theme 4: Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

The fourth theme, which focuses on strategies to improve leadership in rural secondary schools and the teaching and learning process in Ethiopia's Sidama region, was created to answer the fourth research question. To investigate this theme, interviewees posed the following question:

Q1: What remedial actions should be taken to improve the leadership practices in your school?

10 PTA members responded:

Principals should adopt a participatory leadership style to make school activities more attractive to all stakeholders. They need to redefine school leadership responsibilities to enhance the teaching and learning process, which can increase stakeholder participation in school activities. Additionally, principals should concentrate on teaching and learning rather than wasting time on administrative tasks. Active stakeholder engagement and

participation are critical for improving student learning and achievement. Since parents and teachers have direct contact with students, it is essential to hold broader discussions and awareness-raising sessions with stakeholders to enhance their understanding of the negative effects of ineffective rural secondary school leadership strategies on school performance. Participants emphasized the importance of accepting shared responsibility and collaboratively addressing issues related to rural school leadership by delegating leadership tasks. He also stated that to foster students' interest in learning and help them establish high goals, parents should counsel, supervise, and value their children's behavior and engagement. They should also provide necessary tools and resources, including necessities. Teachers can use a student-centered approach and instructional aids to make lessons engaging and understandable. To ensure proper learning, subject matter must be delivered skillfully at a reasonable pace.

The above explanations illustrate that rural secondary school principals should devote adequate time to collaborating with parents, students, teachers, and other relevant groups to identify children in need and provide personalized support. Additionally, other stakeholders, including the regional education bureau, zonal education department, Woreda (district) education office, and NGOs, and private organizations, should closely supervise schools and provide support in the form of materials, funding, ideas, and professional guidance to advance student retention and progress in their education.

Another high scorer student 8, added:

An essential part of every educational process is teaching and learning. I raised these concerns to address them and improve the educational experience in schools. Key issues include assigning qualified teachers, promoting the use of teaching aids, employing a student-centered approach, implementing effective continuous assessment strategies, reducing cheating, providing textbooks and stocking libraries with reference materials, setting up tutorials and make-up sessions, monitoring attendance, homework, assignments, and other activities to ensure student engagement, preventing teacher absenteeism and tardiness, addressing underperformance, and providing ongoing professional development and incentive programs for teachers. Additionally, I want to address the

equitable distribution of financial resources between departments. There is a noticeable variation in how resources are allocated. This is evident in the performance of departments relative to their financial resources. For instance, the natural science and social science departments vary in performance based on their financial allocations. Therefore, there is inconsistency in equitable financial resource distribution in schools.

The above insights highlight the need for relevant authorities to take responsibility for improving rural secondary secondary school leadership in the Sidama region. To implement effective strategies, principals should adopt participatory leadership styles, prioritize teaching and learning, and encourage active stakeholder participation in the educational process. Broader discussions with various stakeholders are necessary. Parents should guide, oversee, and acknowledge student engagement and behavior while also supplying necessary materials and resources. Teachers are tasked with making their lessons engaging and clear. Principals should prioritize collaboration with parents, students, and teachers, as well as ongoing professional development and incentive programs to boost their effectiveness and improve overall educational outcomes.

5.10 Data Triangulation's from Quantitative and Qualitative Perspective

This section focuses on the triangulation and integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. A mixed-method approach was employed to examine the study, utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. In this framework, quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, which informed the methods for gathering qualitative data. The qualitative phase aimed to explore, enrich, and enhance the results of the quantitative findings.

To compare the results, data from both sources were triangulated. In the context of mixed-method research, triangulation is defined as "...a strategy for validating results obtained with the individual method" (Bergman in Dawardi, Shrestha & Girri, 2020: 28). Consequently, conclusions drawn from both quantitative and qualitative sources were verified through triangulation, providing insights into ways to enhance teaching and learning in the study region and offering a comprehensive understanding of the leadership practices of principals in rural secondary schools.

Descriptive statistics, including standard deviation and mean scores, were utilized to analyze the quantitative data. The collected data were examined in relation to transformational and instructional leadership practices—specifically, transformational and transactional leadership—which are considered crucial for effective school leadership and teaching and learning.

SPSS software version 28 was used to analyze statements using descriptive statistics such as frequency and mean, along with inferential statistics including regression and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The analysis revealed that one-way ANOVA was primarily employed to investigate perceptions of principal leadership practices among education office experts, teachers, and the principals themselves. The results indicate that the leadership practices of principals in rural secondary schools exhibit drawbacks when viewed through the lens of transformational and instructional theories. Principals predominantly employ transactional leadership, primarily focusing on management by exception (active) leadership.

Substantiating these findings, the quantitative results reveal that principals, teachers, and office experts agreed on several key points regarding leadership practices. Specifically, they indicated that principals define a vision to improve teaching and learning, with a grand mean of 3.69 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.15. Respondents also agreed that principals define values to enhance teaching and learning, achieving a grand mean of 3.70 and SD of 1.10. Additionally, they concurred that principals improve conditions for teaching and learning, with a grand mean of 3.67 and SD of 1.11.

Moreover, respondents agreed that principals assign roles and responsibilities to teachers, with a grand mean of 3.63 and SD of 1.07. However, respondents were undecided about whether principals redesign the school curriculum, reflected in a grand mean of 3.06 and SD of 1.18. Similarly, they were undecided about principals enriching the curriculum, with a grand mean of 3.10 and SD of 1.14. Additionally, respondents expressed uncertainty regarding whether principals upgrade the quality of educators to improve teaching and learning, with a grand mean of 3.29 and SD of 1.22.

In terms of relationships, respondents agreed that principals build good internal relationships within the school, achieving a grand mean of 3.59 and SD of 1.20. However, they were undecided

about principals building relationships outside the organization, with a grand mean of 3.41 and SD of 1.16. Similarly, respondents were undecided about whether principals select tools for teaching and learning, with a grand mean of 3.29 and SD of 1.15, and developing such tools, with a grand mean of 3.25 and SD of 1.15.

Additionally, respondents agreed that principals participate in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges, with a grand mean of 3.54 and SD of 1.11. They also agreed that principals ensure an orderly and supportive environment for stakeholders, with a grand mean of 3.70 and SD of 0.994.

To further substantiate these findings, the researcher posed questions to PTA members and high scorer students from grades 10 and 12 in response to research question number one.

PTA-2 replied that:

> *Proficient secondary school principals engage in cooperative planning, continuous assessment of instruction, and support for both educators and learners. They excel in identifying opportunities and addressing gaps within the school, conducting collaborative evaluations to ensure well-rounded management. By gathering feedback from staff and stakeholders on various aspects of administration, instructional strategies, and learning processes, they create a more effective educational environment.*

Additionally, proactive measures are taken to resolve problems and inefficiencies, fostering strong leadership and ongoing development. Beyond governmental accountability, stakeholder involvement in school programs is essential for improving leadership. However, despite its importance in community engagement—from planning to evaluation—not all principals prioritize this equally. While better schools actively include the community in decision-making, many do not consistently involve teachers in the process.

Similarly, grade 12 high scorer student 2 observed:

> *As students, I see the leadership of my school in two ways. In the planning process, there are no significant issues compared to the implementation of the plan. I notice the efforts of*

principals in implementing and monitoring school activities. However, the national exam scores indicate a gap in how well plans are executed and monitored, which suggests that there are shortcomings among teachers, principals, and students in this regard.

PTA member 3 echoed similar sentiments:

In my opinion, teachers prefer to focus on instruction rather than participate in co-curricular activities, possibly due to a lack of incentives. There is also a significant deficit in effective school leadership practices. While built-in supervision was once common, these practices have diminished. Instead of collaborating on professional platforms in the classroom, teachers are limited to formal meetings. Important activities, such as curriculum discussions and setting high standards for students, are often neglected.

The relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data reveals that respondents provided superficial and careless answers to the quantitative queries. For instance, many indicated agreements or uncertainty regarding the issues raised. In contrast, the qualitative responses highlighted deeper problems within the school that require solutions.

Supporting these findings, the quantitative results from research question 2 indicated that principals, teachers, and education office experts disagreed that rural school leadership is comparable to urban schools, with a grand mean of 2.47 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.11. Respondents were undecided about the organizational problems in rural school leadership, with a grand mean of 3.09 and SD of 1.18. Similarly, they were undecided about management issues, with a grand mean of 3.13 and SD of 1.16. However, respondents agreed that school leadership motivates teachers, with a grand mean of 3.61 and SD of 1.08. They were undecided about whether rural leadership contributes to gaining self-knowledge or new thinking in schools, with a grand mean of 3.45 and SD of 1.09. Additionally, respondents were undecided about the role of rural leadership in fostering unity among teachers and other stakeholders, with a grand mean of 3.48 and SD of 1.06. They also expressed uncertainty about whether leadership problems lead to higher teacher turnover, with a grand mean of 3.42 and SD of 1.16. Nevertheless, respondents agreed that rural leadership facilitates communication among teachers, with a grand mean of 3.60 and SD of 1.00. Furthermore, they agreed that the productivity of the school is influenced by

leadership styles, with a grand mean of 3.73 and SD of 1.07. Lastly, respondents agreed that school leadership positively impacts the quality of education, with a grand mean of 4.07 and SD of 0.96.

Substantiating these findings, respondents' qualitative data discloses:

PTA 4 said that:

> *The treatment of teachers and the services they provide are misaligned, as teachers generate a pool of skilled labor that can be utilized across various sectors. Currently, both teachers and principals hold an inadequate status in our society, and leaders are not doing enough to change this perception. Many principals and educators view teaching merely as a career move, particularly given the current state of the country. This profession does not receive the attention or respect it deserves, and mental health issues are prevalent among educators.*

Many school principals find it challenging to adapt to the ongoing changes in the nation. A significant cultural revolution is needed for teachers and principals; without substantial changes in workplace practices, their performance may not meet necessary standards.

Similarly, high scorer student 3 noted:

> *In the past, both the community and the government held teachers in high regard. Educators were esteemed. However, the status of teachers and the teaching profession has significantly diminished under the current administration. The political structure of the country does not value teachers as highly as those in the agricultural and health sectors. School principals operate within this same environment.*

PTA member 5 added:

> *I believe that teaching was once a highly regarded profession, leading teachers and administrators to have a greater sense of commitment to their work than current educators do. At one time, a teacher's salary even surpassed that of the district governor. Teachers were accountable for their actions and encouraged their students to take*

ownership of their education, closely monitoring their progress. However, the circumstances facing principals and educators today are vastly different. It seems that many teachers aren't putting in the effort they once did; rather than seeking solutions to the various challenges in education, professionals appear to be competing for jobs.

Quantitative data provided insight into respondents' views regarding stakeholders' perceptions of rural leadership. According to the respondents, rural and urban schools differ significantly in many aspects, with some issues remaining unresolved. This gap was further substantiated by qualitative data gathered from interview responses, which highlighted problems that hinder the development of both students and schools.

Supporting these findings, the quantitative results from research question 3 revealed that principals, teachers, and education office experts disagreed that the school provides adequate housing for teachers, with a grand mean of 1.74 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.901. Respondents were undecided about whether school management is well trained, with a grand mean of 3.38 and SD of 1.11. Additionally, they were uncertain about the adequacy of principals' preparation for school transformation, with a grand mean of 3.14 and SD of 1.07.

Additionally, respondents were uncertain about whether the school's environment supports effective teaching and learning, reflected in a grand mean of 3.11 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.15. They also expressed uncertainty regarding the availability of peer learning opportunities, reflected in a grand mean of 2.87 and SD of 1.08. Furthermore, respondents were undecided about the availability of induction programs for rural instructional teachers, with a grand mean of 2.67 and SD of 1.01.

Respondents disagreed that partner programs are effectively linked with technology in school, resulting in a grand mean of 2.30 and SD of 0.978. They also disagreed that trends in budget utilization are unproblematic, with a grand mean of 2.29 and SD of 0.943. Additionally, respondents were undecided about whether resources are equally distributed among stakeholders to improve the teaching and learning process, with a grand mean of 2.59 and SD of 1.06.

Respondents disagreed that community involvement is sufficient to support the school, with a grand mean of 2.49 and SD of 1.00. They were undecided about the occurrence of job overlap

among a few professionals in the school, with a grand mean of 3.14 and SD of 1.06. Furthermore, respondents were undecided about whether bureaucratic administration negatively affects teachers' ability to impart instruction, with a grand mean of 3.36 and SD of 1.09.

Respondents were also undecided about whether school size is a problem for teaching and learning, with a grand mean of 3.32 and SD of 1.17. They expressed uncertainty about unequal gender distribution of resources being a challenge for the school, with a grand mean of 3.43 and SD of 1.10. Lastly, respondents agreed that students' backgrounds have a profound effect on the success of the school, with a grand mean of 3.92 and SD of 0.902.

Supporting this finding, qualitative data said that:

> *The way principals lead schools remains stagnant; they primarily focus on standard responsibilities like attendance and administrative tasks without any creativity or forward-thinking ideas. This lack of innovation creates a cycle of repetitive behaviors, underscoring the need for proactive leadership and new approaches to improve school performance.*

High scorer student 4 expressed concerns about the school's textbook shortage:

> *The school is facing a shortage of textbooks, and I wasn't given any. As a result, the school provided textbooks in groups, without considering how far apart our homes are. Some students drop out and take the group's textbooks with them, while some female students marry and leave school. In these cases, it's challenging to find their addresses and return the textbooks, leading to significant issues with the school's textbook lending system.*

In response to this, female student 5 shared her struggles:

> *I am committed to studying and completing my assignments, but it's difficult to do so reliably. I often find myself pressed for time. I carry firewood to the nearby town to sell, loading it onto a donkey before and after school. I also must go grocery shopping and get other necessities for my family. Unfortunately, I don't have the money to buy kerosene for studying at night. Because of my home responsibilities, there are times when I forget to*

study and complete my assignments. I often stay in the market until late in the evening, and sometimes I arrive late at school.

Another female student, 6, expressed a similar viewpoint:

I help my mother with household chores. As the only female sibling among my brothers, I handle all the housework by myself. Two of my siblings are too young to assist, and the other has chosen to raise cows. My mother's frequent health problems leave me overloaded with work. Despite these challenges, I strive to perform well in school.

Additional feedback pertaining to this theme was offered by PTA-8, who pointed out the operational and pedagogical challenges encountered by teachers:

Teachers encounter significant difficulties. The lab work and methodological approaches used are inadequate. In our school, we often teach abstract concepts without providing concrete examples, and students rarely bring their textbooks. The minimal learning abilities of students in their subjects are not considered when teachers prepare exams and assessments. The version provided by the education bureau better addresses minimum learning competencies. While the bureau offers extensive training, there are challenges in applying and disseminating the knowledge gained. For example, after completing training on teaching approaches, teachers were expected to orient their colleagues. They created a school plan based on this training, but its implementation has not received adequate attention from any department or sector.

Similarly, another respondent, PTA-9, stated:

To achieve shared goals, it is essential for attitudes in this country to change. Many employees are reluctant to take on new responsibilities and often demand material benefits associated with activities outside the classroom. Frequently, they ask, 'Why should I suffer when there's nothing in it for me?' As a result, most of us focus on our personal objectives. For solidarity to be achieved, the community must make a concerted effort. The sense of national responsibility must be translated to the community level. Schools should not be seen as the only entities accountable for preparing the younger generation for future societal roles. Our community needs to acknowledge its substantial

role in nurturing and developing the next generation into engaged citizens. Therefore, it is essential to align the school transformation plan with the regional plan for educational reform.

Similarly, high scorer student 7 remarked:

Many university graduates are unemployed and become a burden on their families and communities. The current generation suffers from a lack of competitiveness due to a decline in education quality. Overall, I observe an inequitable recruitment and deployment of educated individuals, which is not based on merit, alongside an unequal distribution of the nation's resources. Consequently, reforming our educational system is crucial.

Substantiating these findings, the quantitative results revealed that principals, teachers, and education office experts largely agreed on several key points regarding school leadership responsibilities. Specifically, they agreed that principals should redefine their leadership roles to improve student learning, with a grand mean of 3.98 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.856. Additionally, respondents indicated that principals need to develop school development frameworks to enhance practices, achieving a grand mean of 3.99 and SD of 0.810. There was also consensus that principals should delegate responsibilities to stakeholders, with a grand mean of 3.90 and SD of 0.842, and that they need to develop skills for effective leadership, reflected in a grand mean of 4.10 and SD of 0.772.

Moreover, respondents concurred that principals should make school leadership an appealing profession to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, reflected in a grand mean of 4.08 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.875. They highlighted the need to prioritize teaching and learning over administrative duties, achieving a grand mean of 3.85 and an SD of 0.918. Additionally, respondents agreed that principals should professionalize organizational processes, with a grand mean of 3.88 and an SD of 0.935, and emphasize the relative appeal of school leadership, with a grand mean of 3.89 and an SD of 0.919.

Moreover, the respondents acknowledged the role of professional organizations in teacher leadership, with a grand mean of 3.94 and SD of 0.886. They also agreed that principals should

support teachers' career development, with a grand mean of 3.84 and SD of 0.932, and strive to hire well-equipped professionals for vacant positions, achieving a grand mean of 3.62 and SD of 1.00. Furthermore, respondents agreed that principals should mobilize the community to participate in educational affairs, with a grand mean of 3.87 and SD of 0.948, and distribute financial resources equitably, with a grand mean of 3.68 and SD of 1.03. They also agreed that principals should provide technological equipment as much as possible, with a grand mean of 3.55 and SD of 1.14 and ensure equal opportunities for staff participation in various school activities, with a grand mean of 4.07 and SD of 0.836.

Supporting this finding, qualitative data discloses.

PTA 10 stated:

> *Principals should adopt a participatory leadership style to make school activities more appealing to all stakeholders. They need to redefine leadership responsibilities to enhance the teaching and learning process, which can increase stakeholder participation in school activities. Additionally, principals should focus on teaching and learning rather than spending excessive time on administrative tasks.*

The above explanations illustrate that principals should dedicate sufficient time to collaborating with parents, students, teachers, and other relevant groups to identify children in need and provide personalized support. Moreover, other stakeholders—including the regional education bureau, zonal education department, and Woreda (district) education office, NGOs, and private organizations—should closely oversee schools and provide support through materials, funding, innovative ideas, and professional guidance to promote student retention and advancement in their education.

5.11 Chapter Summary

This research examined the leadership practices of principals in rural secondary schools and their effects on teaching and learning in the Sidama region. Additionally, the study evaluated existing knowledge regarding global leadership perspectives that inform rural secondary school practices related to education.

This chapter presents and discusses quantitative data analysis, focusing on responses from three groups: teachers (N=350), principals (N=45), and education office experts (N=40), totaling 435 respondents. The qualitative data analysis was grounded in four themes established at the outset of the investigation. The qualitative participants included 10 Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members and 8 high-scorer students from the study area.

Quantitative findings indicated that while school stakeholders made significant efforts to enhance secondary schools, they encountered challenges in implementing and monitoring activities due to budget constraints, varying levels of stakeholder commitment, and inadequate community participation. Qualitative data from interviews revealed that most participants highlighted a critical budget shortfall, particularly in rural schools, which was further exacerbated by insufficient community involvement, poor technology, and infrastructure deficiencies.

Challenges such as teacher motivation, principals' commitment to change, and students' self-motivation emerged as significant barriers. The findings, derived from both quantitative and qualitative data, revealed several significant insights. The next chapter will provide a more detailed discussion of the study's findings and results.

CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how the insights gained from the data analysis in chapter five enhance our understanding of the leadership practices employed by rural secondary school principals to improve teaching and learning. Leadership issues are becoming increasingly prominent in this field of study. Evaluations based on student academic achievement, along with school inputs, processes, and outcomes, have been utilized to identify low performance in schools. Consequently, principals play a crucial role not only in managing school processes but also in providing feedback and collaborating with others to monitor results.

Recent studies suggest that a principal's leadership style plays a vital role in enhancing student achievement in the classroom. Effective leadership can engage various stakeholders, support both teachers and students, reduce barriers across the school organization, and foster innovative learning environments (Osborne, 2023; Pan & Chen, 2021; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021; Bixler & Ceballos, 2023; Ceballos, Eadens & Bixler, 2023).

As a result, numerous studies conducted globally provide compelling empirical evidence that effective leadership practices significantly contribute to variations in student academic achievement. However, there remains an ongoing discussion regarding the extent of the impact of different leadership styles and how they may enhance school performance, either directly or indirectly (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020).

The researcher was inspired by this continuing conversation to carry out a study entitled "Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in the Sidama Region, Ethiopia." The study's aim is to gain a better understanding of rural secondary school principals' leadership practices and how they affect teaching and learning. In order to improve educational outcomes, the primary objective is to look into these practices in the Sidama region.

To achieve this objective, the main research question addressed in the study is: What are the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region, and how do these

practices impact teaching and learning? In connection with this primary question, four sub-research questions have been formulated (see sec. 1.3.1.1).& 1.3.1.2)

6.2 Summary

This section summarizes the study and outlines the entire research process. Following the first chapter, which introduces the study, Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five are summarized in Chapter Six to give an overview of the research process. The first chapter centers on the study's orientation, guided by the research title, which examines the leadership practices of secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning in the Sidama Region, Ethiopia.

This chapter briefly discusses the background of contemporary leadership evaluation procedures as well as the relationship between rural school principals' leadership philosophies and their influence on enhancing teaching and learning (refer to sections 1.1 and 1.2). The study's rationale, the research problem statement, a literature review, the objectives, importance, and research questions are all thoroughly explained (see sections 1.3 through 1.9). An overview of the methodological framework is also provided in this chapter, which includes information on the target population, paradigm, research approach, sampling strategies, data sources, data collection techniques, validity and reliability, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the thesis's general structure (refer to section 1.10).

In the second chapter, the definitions of leadership, its dimensions, teaching and learning concepts in education, rural leadership traits, leadership theories and skills, the state of school leadership in Ethiopia, and principal training programs are all covered. It provides key definitions of leadership, explains their importance, and discusses several leadership theories (see sections 2.2, 2.3, & 2.4). The theories analyzed include the Great Man theory, trait theories, behavioral leadership theories, contingency theory, situational leadership theory, and instructional leadership models (see sections 2.4.1–2.4.9).

The study's theoretical foundation is examined in Chapter 3, which highlights the significance of investigating rural secondary school principals' leadership practices and how they impact teaching and learning in the Sidama region. Numerous studies suggest that effective leadership strategies can substantially enhance educational outcomes. However, there continues to be

ongoing debate regarding the degree to which various leadership practices influence teaching and learning, both directly and indirectly. The theoretical framework is delineated in the initial section of the chapter (see sec. 3.2), proposing transformational and instructional leadership as pivotal elements contributing to school effectiveness and efficiency.

A thorough explanation of the research design and methodology was provided in Chapter Four. In addition to providing the operationalization of the study variables (see secs. 4.2 and 4.3), this chapter restates the main questions of the investigation. It describes the pragmatic study paradigm used for this investigation (see sec. 4.4) and looks at the mixed-methods approach, emphasizing the relationship between qualitative and quantitative data (see secs. 4.4.2 & 4.4.3). In the chapter, the explanatory sequential mixed research design used in this study is presented and justified (see sec. 4.5). Analyses were conducted in two phases, with findings triangulated to assess the alignment of results from both stages. The study population was identified, and ten participating schools were chosen using simple random and purposive sampling techniques (see sec. 4.6 and 4.7). The chapter also details the data collection methods, including questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis (see sec. 4.8). Additionally, it discusses data analysis techniques, focusing on rigor, validity, reliability, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the study's context (see sec. 4.9–4.13).

Chapter 5 presents, analyzes, and interprets a variety of data related to the research questions of the study, with a focus on leadership practices in rural schools that support improvements in teaching and learning. The chapter starts with a summary of the demographic characteristics of respondents for both the quantitative and qualitative data (see sec. 5.2), and the quantitative data analysis uses both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequency counts, means, percentages, and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics, such as one-way ANOVA and regression analyses. The chapter further analyzes the principal data concerning rural leadership practices from the perspectives of teachers, education office experts, and principals' self-assessments (see sec. 5.3–5.6).

Analysis of qualitative data is done in light of the initial research questions (see sec. 5.8). The results of the study's qualitative phase support the conclusions drawn from the main quantitative

analysis (see sec. 5.9). Finally, the data from both stages are discussed and summarized in the chapter with respect to the sub-questions of the study (see sec. 5.10 and 5.11).

Chapter Six provides a brief introduction to the study process, followed by a condensed summary of the research causes (see sec. 6.1 & 6.2). The findings of the research are presented, along with conclusions and suggestions based on the primary findings in relation to the research questions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations, recommendations for future research, and a closing statement.

6.3 Findings

This section of Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings obtained from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, along with relevant literature. The findings and related discussions are organized around the study's four sub-questions. It is expected that these insights will enrich the existing body of knowledge regarding the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their effects on teaching and learning. The sub-questions provided the framework for presenting and discussing the research findings.

6.3.1. Demographic Information

- In the study area, there were 336 male teachers (77.3%) and 99 female teachers (22.7%). This indicates that most of the teaching staff in the schools within the research area were male, with only one-third of the teachers being female.

- Most participants lacked qualifications for leadership positions. Specifically, 36 individuals (8.3%) held diplomas, 338 (77.7%) had bachelor's degrees, and 61 (14%) possessed master's degrees. However, a master's degree is necessary for roles as secondary school teachers and principals.
- Individuals in this age group, generally considered middle-aged, are marked by their crystallized intelligence and divergent thinking. As a result, the number of older teachers declines sharply after adulthood, illustrating the detrimental effects on creative idea generation and collaboration essential for meeting school objectives (see Table 5.2).

- The percentage of experienced teachers significantly decreased after 15 years of teaching, underscoring the negative impact this had on student development, performance, and effective teaching (see Table 5.2).

6.3.2 Findings Concerning Study Sub-Question 1

This section presents the study's findings regarding the current leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their approaches to teaching and learning were presented under this section. The results, which support the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals inferences, are analyzed based on the four sub-questions of the study. These findings draw from the conclusions reached in Chapters Two and Three, as well as the empirical data analyzed in Chapter Five (see sec. 5.3a).

The study identified that in the rural secondary schools of the Sidama region, principals exhibit a positive awareness of their vision, as rated by education office experts, teachers, and their own self-assessments. The grand mean ($\ddot{X} = 3.69$) indicates how effectively principals articulate their vision to enhance teaching and learning. However, there were statistically significant differences among respondents' views. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of a strategic vision in effective leadership. By clarifying their vision, effective leaders help their staff find greater purpose in their work. Emmanuel and Valley (2022) assert that transformational and instructional leadership styles, which include creating a shared vision, are essential for effective school principals. Thus, the results of this study align with previous research.

Regarding how principals view the importance of their schools in enhancing the teaching and learning process, respondents offered positive feedback. They largely agreed that principals effectively convey the school's values to improve educational outcomes (see Table 5.3a).

When questioned about the conditions for teaching and learning, most respondents confirmed that favorable conditions exist in their schools, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.67$ reflecting their agreement (see Table 5.3a). This finding aligns with literature indicating that a school principal must lead by example, motivate stakeholders, and exhibit charismatic leadership to achieve

essential goals. A key aspect is the principal's ability to maximize teacher contributions to meet academic objectives and boost student achievement (Suliah et al., 2019).

On the issue of curriculum redesign, most respondents indicated that they were "undecided," with a grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.06$. Literature emphasizes that assembling a team with a shared goal and vision is crucial for successful curriculum redesign (Webster & Webster, 2018). However, data and documentary indicate that principals face significant limitations in this area, as supported by interview responses (see Table 5.3a).

The average response from participants was ($\ddot{X} = 3.29$) when it came to boosting educator quality to improve teaching and learning, indicating some uncertainty regarding the efficacy of programs meant to raise educational quality. According to studies, school principals are essential to improving the caliber and progress of their organizations (Meyer et al., 2022; Ogunode & Musa, 2020). Although there was some uncertainty among respondents, interviews and open-ended questions revealed that principals can indeed enhance educator quality and positively influence the teaching and learning process (refer to Table 5.3a).

In discussing relationships with stakeholders outside the school, the grand mean of respondents was $\ddot{X} = 3.41$, suggesting uncertainty regarding the strength of these relationships. This finding is supported by literature indicating that successful school leaders cultivate positive relationships beyond the school environment (Day & Sammons, 2016). However, based on statistical differences among respondents and interview responses, it can be concluded that effective communication with external stakeholders is not adequately ensured by principals (see Table 5.3b).

The findings regarding the selection and development of teaching and learning tools showed grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.29$ and $\ddot{X} = 3.25$, respectively, indicating that respondents were undecided in this area (see Table 5.3b). Nonetheless, on-the-ground realities suggest that selecting and developing effective teaching tools has been challenging in the rural secondary schools of the Sidama region, as reflected in responses to open-ended questions.

This section demonstrates how principals can help create practical solutions to challenges in teaching and learning. The respondents' grand mean of Ẍ = 3.54 indicates their agreement that principals should be involved in addressing educational problems. Effective school leaders are recognized for providing viable solutions to these challenges (Day & Sammons, 2016), highlighting strong support for the involvement of principals in this aspect. Additionally, interviews and document analysis further reinforced this viewpoint.

The final aspect addresses how principals ensure that stakeholders operate in a supportive and organized environment. The respondents' agreement on maintaining such an environment is reflected in a grand mean of 3.70. Literature supports the notion that principals, as leaders, assist, influence, inspire, encourage, and develop teachers into professional educators capable of enhancing instructional quality (Nurdin et al., 2019). The findings suggest a strong affirmation of principals' efforts to create a supportive and orderly atmosphere for all stakeholders.

Qualitative data reveal that rural secondary school students face significant challenges due to a lack of technological resources, community participation issues, budget shortages, inadequate facilities, and insufficient parental support. These factors hinder school leadership in implementing and monitoring activities effectively. Key obstacles identified include principals' limitations in motivating stakeholders, budget constraints, inconsistent commitment from stakeholders to execute plans, student engagement in educational processes, community participation gaps, and the commitment of middle-level managers to oversee school activities (see interview section 5.6.3).

6.3.3 Findings Concerning Study Sub-Question 2

This section outlines the study's findings regarding how school management teams in the Sidama region view the rural leadership of secondary school principals. The results, which are consistent with the reviewed literature, are analyzed based on the empirical data from Chapter 5 (see sec. 5.6) and the literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

Regarding the similarities between rural and urban school leadership, the respondents' grand mean was Ẍ = 2.47, indicating disagreement about the similarity of leadership practices. According to published research, rural principals frequently struggle to lead effectively in the

twenty-first century due to their remote location and limited access to professional development opportunities (Klocko & Justis, 2019). This implies that urban and rural schools in the Sidama region have somewhat different opinions about school management teams, highlighting the necessity of providing rural principals with specialized assistance to close the gaps.

When asked about organizational issues in rural school leadership, most respondents expressed uncertainty, with a grand mean of Ẍ = 3.09. Despite this indecision, survey results indicate that leading schools in rural areas presents significant challenges, suggesting a shared understanding among respondents regarding this issue.

Regarding management problems in rural leadership, the grand mean was Ẍ = 3.13, again reflecting indecision among respondents. However, this indicates that management issues exist in rural leadership, as corroborated by interview and document analysis.

This section also examines the ability of school leadership to motivate and energize teachers. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.61 indicates agreement among respondents on this issue. This finding is supported by literature suggesting that principals, as instructional leaders, motivate teachers to enhance student performance and retain talent, thereby increasing classroom efficacy (Minton, 2020) (see Table 5.4).

The next section discusses rural leadership's contribution to fostering self-knowledge and new thinking within schools. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.45 indicates that respondents were undecided on this issue. However, considering the p-value results, it can be inferred that rural leadership does contribute to fostering self-knowledge and new thinking in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.4).

This section also reveals that rural leadership helps to increase unity among teachers and other stakeholders, with a grand mean of Ẍ = 3.48 indicating indecision. According to Preston and Barnes (2017), rural schools benefit from smaller communities, allowing educational leaders to provide more individualized learning environments through personal interactions with students and families. While respondents rated their views as undecided, open-ended questions and interview data suggest that rural leadership does enhance unity among stakeholders in Sidama region rural secondary schools (see Table 5.4).

Furthermore, the findings indicate that leadership problems contribute to higher teacher turnover, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.42$ reflecting indecision on this issue. Literature supports the idea that leadership challenges lead to teacher turnover (Holme et al., 2018). Despite the undecided mean score, both the p-value results and existing literature suggest that leadership issues do cause teachers to leave rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.4).

The following section elaborates on how rural leadership facilitates communication among teachers. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.60$ indicates agreement among respondents on this matter. This aligns with literature that emphasizes the importance of regular engagement and communication among teachers, parents, community members, and school leaders as key attributes of successful principals (Surface & Theobald, 2014) (see Table 5.4).

Next, the findings examine how leadership styles impact school productivity, with a grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.73$ indicating agreement. Thus, it can be concluded that the productivity of rural secondary schools in the Sidama region is influenced by organizational leadership styles (see Table 5.4).

Finally, this section underscores that effective school leadership significantly improves educational quality. The grand mean for respondents' agreement on this matter was $\ddot{X} = 4.07$. According to the OECD (2012), effective school leadership is a crucial factor influencing educational quality. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that there is agreement on the positive impact of school leadership on educational standards in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.4).

Qualitative data further reveal that respondents expressed diverse perspectives on leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and teaching and learning. Despite the variety of opinions, a common theme emerged: principals often adopted transactional leadership styles due to administrative pressures from higher officials, which led them to neglect their primary responsibilities for school reform and transformation. Many principals seemed more focused on competing for better positions within the regional state council rather than on improving the implementation of school reforms (see interview section 5.6.4).

6.3.4 Findings Concerning Study Sub-Question 3

According to these sub-questions, the first item addresses the availability of housing for teachers. The grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 1.74 indicates that respondents disagreed on the existence of living accommodations for teachers in the schools. Thus, it can be concluded that the availability of housing for teachers in Sidama region secondary schools is questionable (see Table 5.5a).

This section evaluates whether the training for school management is adequate. The grand mean of respondents is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.38, indicating that the group rated their opinions as "undecided" about the quality of management training. Although the data show uncertainty, literature supports that Ethiopia's Ministry of Education recommends elementary school graduates hold a first degree and secondary school graduates a master's degree (MoE, 2017). Survey data show that 2 respondents (4.4%) held diplomas, 30 (66.6%) held bachelor's degrees, and 13 (29%) held master's degrees (see Table 5.5a). Therefore, one can conclude that the management training in Sidama region rural secondary schools is below standard, creating various challenges.

The next section talks about the preparedness of principals to transform schools. The grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 3.14 indicates that respondents rated their views as "undecided" regarding principals' readiness for transformation. However, interview data indicate that school principals encounter considerable challenges when attempting to implement school reforms (see section 5.6.5).

This section assesses whether school standards are conducive to teaching and learning. The grand mean is $\ddot{X}$ = 3.11, leading respondents to rate their views as "undecided" on this issue. Document analysis shows that most secondary schools in the region are below standard; of 98 secondary schools, only 32 (33%) meet the required standards, while 66 (67%) do not (SREB, 2024). Thus, it can be concluded that the school standards may hinder student learning (see Table 5.5a).

The following item addresses the availability of opportunities for peer learning in schools. The grand mean of $\ddot{X}$ = 2.87 indicates that respondents were "undecided" about the availability of peer learning opportunities. Document analysis suggests that such opportunities are indeed lacking in schools.

This section examines the availability of induction training for rural instructional teachers. The grand mean of Ẍ = 2.67 suggests that respondents were "undecided" on this matter. Despite the indecision, one can generalize that induction training for rural secondary schools in the Sidama region is insufficient, as supported by document analysis (see Table 5.5a).

Next, the section explores the connection between partner programs and educational technology. The grand mean of Ẍ = 2.30 demonstrates that respondents disagreed on the adequacy of technological connectivity in secondary schools. The Sidama Region Education Bureau (SREB, 2023-2024) reported several issues during plan implementation, including the failure to adopt modern technologies (see Table 5.5a).

This section discusses trends in budget utilization in schools. The grand mean of Ẍ = 2.29 indicates disagreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of budget utilization. This suggests that budget management in Sidama region rural secondary schools is problematic (see Table 5.5a).

Next, this section assesses whether resources are equitably distributed among stakeholders to improve the teaching and learning process. The grand mean of Ẍ = 2.59 indicates that respondents were "undecided" on this issue. There are varying perceptions regarding resource distribution, and interview data suggest that resources are not distributed equally among school communities, leading to various challenges (see section 5.6.5).

The following section evaluates community involvement in supporting schools. The grand mean of Ẍ = 2.49 confirms that respondents disagreed on the sufficiency of community support. Interviews also revealed that community participation fell short of expectations, negatively impacting teaching and learning in the region. Thus, it can be concluded that community engagement in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region is insufficient (see Table 5.5b, interview section 5.6.5).

This section discusses job overlap among professionals in schools. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.14 suggests that respondents were "undecided" about the occurrence of job overlap. However, document analysis indicates that job overlap does occur in some departments (see Table 5.5b).

The following section explores how bureaucratic administration affects teachers' ability to deliver instruction. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.36$ indicates that respondents were "undecided" on this issue. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that bureaucratic administration negatively affects teachers' instructional effectiveness in Sidama region rural secondary schools (see Table 5.5b).

The following section addresses whether school size presents a problem for teaching and learning. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.32$ indicates that respondents were "undecided." Literature supports that smaller schools tend to achieve higher academic success (Slate, John R., 2005). This leads to a discussion about whether school size is a challenge for teaching and learning in Sidama region rural secondary schools (see Table 5.5b).

This section highlights the issue of unequal gender distribution of resources as a challenge for schools. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.43$ shows that respondents were "undecided" on this issue. However, document analysis from the SREB report indicates gaps in resource distribution among different stakeholders (see Table 5.5b).

Finally, this section examines the influence of students' backgrounds on school success. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.92$ indicates that respondents agree that students' backgrounds significantly impact school outcomes. This supports the notion that students' backgrounds are crucial to the success of rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.5b).

Qualitative data show that low commitment from principals and students, a lack of vision, and an unresponsive school culture are all variables influencing school leadership in rural areas. Additionally, challenges such as limited community participation, a lack of innovation, inadequate implementation of active teaching methods, and low student motivation were identified as significant issues.

6.3.5 Findings Concerning Study Sub-Question 4

This section summarizes the study's findings regarding rural secondary school principals' strategies to enhance leadership practices in the Sidama region, as reported by teachers, principals, and education office experts. The findings are supported by data from Chapter 5 (see sec. 5.7) and relevant literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, providing a theoretical foundation for the conclusions.

The first point emphasizes that principals should redefine their leadership responsibilities to improve student learning. The respondents' grand mean is $\ddot{X} = 3.98$, indicating agreement on this issue. ANOVA test results show no statistically significant differences in perceptions ($F(2, 400) = 0.856$, $P = 0.092 > 0.05$), suggesting a consensus that principals need to redefine their roles to enhance students' learning abilities. Interview responses from parents and students confirmed that principals play multiple roles, including supporting student achievement, defining the roles of teachers and students, and acting as liaisons within the community and administrative hierarchy (see Table 5.6a).

The next section discusses the need for principals to develop school development frameworks. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.99$ indicates agreement among respondents. The ANOVA results ($F(1, 410) = 0.810$, $P = 0.245 > 0.05$) confirm no significant differences in perceptions, leading to the conclusion that principals in Sidama region rural secondary schools require training in school development frameworks (see Table 5.6a).

The following section emphasizes the importance of delegating responsibilities to stakeholders. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.90$ indicates agreement among respondents that delegation is necessary. Interview responses support this, highlighting that delegating school responsibilities fosters future leadership development (see Table 5.6a).

According to interview data, active engagement and participation of stakeholders are crucial for improving student learning and achievement. Parents and teachers, who interact directly with students, should engage in discussions and awareness-raising activities to understand the negative impacts of inadequate leadership strategies on school performance. Participants stressed the importance of shared responsibility and collaborative efforts in addressing rural school leadership challenges. Parents should counsel and oversee their children's behavior and engagement, while teachers can enhance lessons through student-centered approaches and effective instructional aids.

This section stresses the need for principals to develop skills for effective school leadership. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 4.10$ indicates strong agreement among respondents. ANOVA results ($F(0.602) = 0.772$, $P = 0.548 > 0.05$) show no significant differences in perceptions, affirming that principals must cultivate leadership skills to fulfill their responsibilities (see Table 5.6a).

Concerning the appeal of school leadership as a profession, the grand mean is Ẍ = 4.08, indicating agreement. ANOVA results (F(0.311) = 0.875, P = 0.733 > 0.05) show no significant differences in perceptions. Research indicates that the influence of principals is second only to that of teachers in promoting student learning (Karadag, 2020). Therefore, enhancing the attractiveness of school leadership is vital for improving teaching and learning standards in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.6a).

This section highlights that principals should prioritize teaching and learning over administrative tasks. The overall mean of 3.85 suggests that respondents believe principals should focus more on educational responsibilities. ANOVA results (F(0.505) = 0.918, P = 0.604 > 0.05) confirm no significant differences in perceptions. Literature supports this conclusion, emphasizing that principals should concentrate on teaching and learning, especially regarding measurable student growth (Stronge, 2021) (see Table 5.6a). Additionally, interview data indicate that principals should adopt participatory leadership to engage all stakeholders in school activities.

By redefining leadership responsibilities, they can enhance the teaching and learning process and encourage stakeholder participation. The necessity for principals to professionalize organizational procedures is covered in this section. The respondents' agreement is indicated by the grand mean of Ẍ = 3.88. Statistically significant differences in perceptions are indicated by the ANOVA results (F(3.356) = 0.935, P = 0.036 < 0.05), which suggest differing views on the professionalization of organizational processes in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region. In order to match school leadership with evolving roles, Bøje and Frederiksen (2019) emphasize the importance of professional growth and training (see Table 5.6a).

The relative attractiveness of school leadership is covered in the next section. Respondents' agreement is shown in the grand mean of Ẍ = 3.89. ANOVA results show no significant differences in perceptions (F(1.182) = 0.919, P = 0.308 > 0.05), indicating that school leadership in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region has to be made more appealing. Interview responses from parents confirm that principals focus on the attractiveness of school leadership, even if results do not always meet expectations (see Table 5.6b). To identify students in need and provide personalized support, principals should collaborate closely with parents, students, teachers, and relevant stakeholders. These groups, including the regional education bureau and

NGOs, should monitor schools and provide necessary resources, funding, and professional advice to enhance student retention and progress (see interview section 5.6.6).

This section recognizes the significance of professional associations for teachers. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.94 suggests that respondents concur that principals are aware of these organizations' significance. Principals in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region recognize the value of professional organizations for teachers, according to the ANOVA results (F(0.743) = 0.886, P = 0.476 > 0.05), which show no significant differences in perceptions (see Table 5.6b).

This section explores whether principals actively support the career development of teachers. The grand mean of respondents is Ẍ = 3.84, indicating agreement on this matter. According to the ANOVA test results, there are no statistically significant variations in the respondents' perceptions (F(1.852) = 0.932, P = 0.158 > 0.05). This implies that there is agreement that principals in Sidama region's rural secondary schools provide assistance to teachers' professional growth. According to Bozkuş (2019), school principals should be equipped with resources to facilitate teachers' professional development. Interview responses from PTA participants confirm that teachers seek performance feedback for career advancement, and the school committee provides this feedback to assist in their development (see Table 5.6b).

The next item discusses principals' contributions to hire well-equipped professionals for vacant positions. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.62 indicates that respondents agree on this matter. ANOVA results (F(2.050) = 1.005, P = 0.130 > 0.05) show no significant differences in perceptions. However, interview responses indicate that principals have limited authority to hire qualified professionals, as they must rely on the woreda education office to fill these positions (see Table 5.6b).

This section highlights how principals mobilize the community to participate in educational affairs. The grand mean of Ẍ = 3.87 confirms agreement among respondents on the importance of community mobilization. ANOVA results (F(4.346) = 0.948, P = 0.014 < 0.05) indicate statistically significant differences in perceptions. This allows for a generalization that principals effectively engage the community in educational initiatives in Sidama region rural secondary schools. However, document analysis shows that community contributions to educational affairs

are below expectations, with the SREB report (2022-2023) indicating only a 50% average performance in community involvement. This highlights a gap between expected and actual community participation (see Table 5.6b).

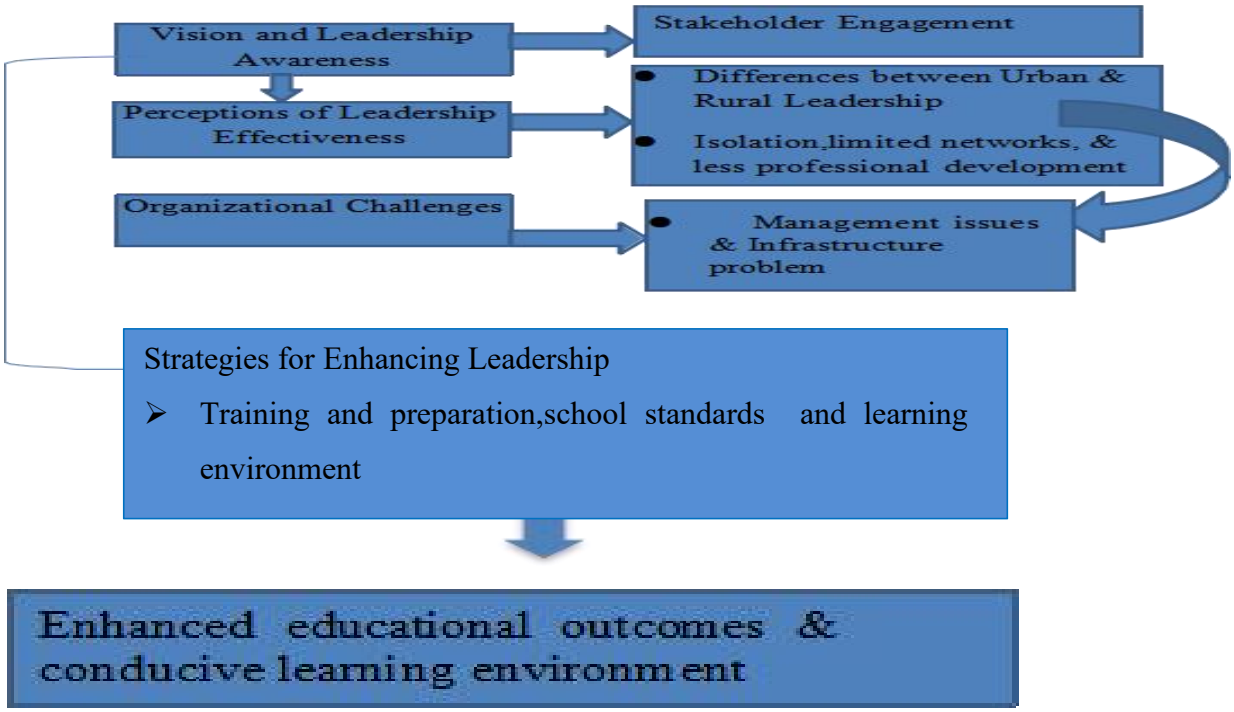
The following section addresses principals' efforts to distribute equitable financial resources. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.68$ reflects agreement among respondents on this issue. Similarly, ANOVA results ($F(0.441) = 1.038$, $P = 0.643 > 0.05$) show no significant differences in perceptions, indicating that respondents share similar views on principals' contributions to equitable financial distribution in Sidama region rural secondary schools. In contrast, student interview responses reveal inequities in financial distribution among departments. For example, disparities in funding have led to uneven student performance between the natural and social sciences due to differing financial support (see Table 5.6b).

The next item discusses principals' provision of technological equipment. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 3.55$ indicates that respondents agree on the importance of principals providing technological resources. ANOVA results ($F(0.363) = 1.142$, $P = 0.696 > 0.05$) confirm no significant differences in perceptions. Interview data from PTA members and students support this finding, as they noted that principals strive to provide available technological equipment to improve student outcomes. However, they also highlighted a scarcity of technological resources as a significant challenge facing rural secondary schools in the Sidama region (see Table 5.6b).

The final item in this section assesses whether principals offer equal opportunities for staff to participate in different school-related activities. The grand mean of $\ddot{X} = 4.07$ reflects strong agreement among respondents on this issue. ANOVA results ($F(0.628) = 0.836$, $P = 0.534 > 0.05$) indicate no significant differences in perceptions. This suggests that principals should ensure equal opportunities for both teaching and non-teaching staff to engage in school activities. However, document analysis reveals variations in performance among different departments, highlighting disparities in participation (see Table 5.6b).

6.3.6 Proposed Model of Leadership Practices in Rural Secondary Schools in Sidama Region (the researcher).

The following model is proposed in light of the thesis's findings about the leadership practices of principals of rural secondary schools and how they affect teaching and learning in the Sidama region.



The model illustrates that, despite a basis for effective leadership practices among rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region, significant challenges persist. These challenges include disparities between urban and rural contexts, organizational inefficiencies, inadequate support for teachers, and a pressing need for improved training and resources. Principals must rethink their duties and embrace participatory leadership techniques in order to improve educational outcomes and create a more favorable learning environment. This model encapsulates the core findings of the thesis and can serve as a framework for further research or practical implementation in educational leadership within the region.

6.4 Recommendations

The aim of this study was to investigate the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region and to explore ways to enhance teaching and learning. The study also sought to review literature on leadership styles that promote improved performance in rural secondary schools, analyze the nature and extent of transformational and instructional leadership practices, and provide practical recommendations for enhancing teaching and learning. Based on the study's conclusions, the following suggestions are offered in response to the four research sub-questions posed at the outset of the inquiry, with the goal of improving leadership practices in secondary schools by equipping principals with effective leadership strategies.

6.4.1 Recommendations for Ministry of Education

- The Ministry of Education ought to create a nationwide plan to give teachers, principals, supervisors, and educational leaders continual training in rural leadership practices. They will be better equipped to deliver high-quality instruction thanks to this training. In addition, the MoE ought to create national competency requirements for educators that are in line with the technical, scientific, sociocultural, and economic contexts of both domestic and international societies.

- The MoE should create a national legal framework that promotes local leadership participation in the development of the secondary school curriculum and related processes. A clear and comprehensive national policy on rural school leadership practices is also recommended.

- The MoE ought to create a national protocol that emphasizes the value of both individual and group leadership, creative and indigenous methods, social and private development, and general accountability in the context of rural school leadership.
- The Ministry should establish a national framework that combines the theoretical and practical expertise of educational managers in areas such as decision-making, employee motivation, communication, and conflict resolution.

- The MoE should organize formal visits to local educational management by its professional representatives to gather updates on the challenges facing educational structures, ensuring that all stakeholders have access to relevant information.

- The MoE should look for support from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in order to solve particular issues that schools face and enhance the process of teaching and learning in light of the findings.

6.4.2 Recommendations for Regional Bureau of Education

- The Bureau of Education should promote local leadership involvement in the development and design of the secondary school curriculum. It is also suggested to establish clear and robust regional guidelines for rural school leadership. Regional policymakers should adopt various strategies to reassess their plans and tackle the current challenges faced by school leadership.

- The Regional Bureau of Education should give training on rural school leadership practices to supervisors, teachers, principals, and educational leaders in order to improve the quality of instruction. The Bureau shall guarantee that teachers have the knowledge and abilities necessary to satisfy the scientific, technical, sociocultural, and economic demands of local, national, and international populations.

- The Bureau of Education should create a regional framework to assist rural school leaders in understanding individual and team management, indigenous and innovative approaches, private and social development, and overall accountability.

- The Regional Bureau of Education should provide resources at all leadership levels to help educational leaders gain the theoretical and practical knowledge necessary for decision-making, communication, employee motivation, and conflict resolution.
- The Regional Bureau of Education should appoint qualified officials to carry out responsive visits to grassroots educational leadership, ensuring that all stakeholders have

access to vital resources. This will help in collecting data on the challenges encountered by educational institutions.

- Whenever possible, the Regional Bureau of Education should provide a range of technological resources, such as computers and laptops, to help address technology-related issues in the region's rural secondary schools.

6.4.3 Recommendations for Woreda Education Offices

- Woreda Education Offices should ensure the participation of teachers and school administrators in the secondary school curriculum development process. It is crucial to establish clear and effective regional protocols for rural school leadership. Additionally, regional policymakers are encouraged to engage with grassroots educational leadership through various approaches to address the current challenges faced by school leadership during strategic reassessment.

- Woreda Education Offices should initiate training programs on rural school leadership strategies for teachers, principals, supervisors, and educational leaders. This will enable them to provide high-quality instruction more effectively and with greater focus. It is also advisable for these offices to evaluate the sociocultural, scientific, technological, and economic competencies of their teachers in relation to the needs of local, regional, national, and international communities.

- Woreda Education Offices must carry out regional initiatives to provide rural school leaders with a thorough understanding of private and social development, indigenous and innovative approaches, individual and team leadership, and overall accountability at the woreda level.

- Woreda Education Offices should promote and strengthen regional frameworks that enable the sharing of theoretical and practical knowledge and skills among educational leaders, especially in areas such as employee motivation, decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution across all leadership levels.

- Woreda Education Offices should employ knowledgeable representatives to carry out regular official observations in schools that exhibit effective educational leadership. This will aid in collecting adequate information on the challenges facing educational structures and provide all stakeholders with the resources needed for school improvement.

6.4.4 Recommendations for School Principals

- Transformational Leadership: Rural secondary school principals are encouraged to adopt a transformational leadership style rather than a transactional one. This includes engaging with stakeholders about their shared mission and core values while prioritizing the group's needs over their own and projecting confidence and authority. Principals should mobilize the community to participate in educational activities, motivate school leaders, and enhance stakeholder commitment to improve student engagement and academic performance.

- Inspire and Collaborate: Principals should motivate and empower both staff and students to achieve outstanding results. Idealized influence should center on collaborative planning, performance assessment, and feedback, while also identifying opportunities and gaps within the school. Continuous, structured collaboration among teachers is crucial for improving teaching quality and boosting student learning and morale.
- Curriculum Development Involvement: Principals must ensure that teachers and school administrators are actively engaged in the design and development of the secondary school curriculum. It is crucial to have committed and skilled educators who can carry out school-based research on rural leadership strategies. Collaboration with parents, students, and local government organizations is advised to tackle the fundamental issues faced by school leadership during strategic reassessment.
- Teacher Development: To improve the teaching and learning process, principals should concentrate on raising the caliber of teachers and other school employees. They should also highlight the selection and development of excellent teaching and learning resources.

- Professional Development: Principals should engage in training programs provided by the Ministry of Education, regional education bureaus, and woreda education offices to effectively deliver high-quality education. They should also organize training for supervisors, teachers, and educational leaders. Moreover, school administrators should evaluate teachers' qualifications in relation to the socio-cultural, economic, scientific, and technical needs of their communities.

- Leadership Development: Principals should implement initiatives at the regional and woreda levels to promote team leadership, individual accountability, and innovative practices that enhance school leadership.

- Observational Insights: Experienced departmental representatives should carry out regular observations of school leadership to collect information on the challenges faced by educational structures. This feedback will help enhance school performance and support all stakeholders involved.

- Addressing School Standards: According to findings, a large number of secondary schools in the area fall short of academic requirements (see Table 7.4). Principals should work with local education offices and the Ministry of Education, among other stakeholders, to address this and enhance the quality of instruction in rural secondary schools in the Sidama region.

- Resource Distribution: Principals should ensure fair resource distribution to tackle budget utilization issues identified in the findings (see Table 7.9 & interview section 5.6.5).

6.4.5 Recommendations for Teachers

- Capacity Building: Teachers should participate in capacity-building workshops organized by the Ministry of Education, regional education bureaus, woreda education offices, and schools.

- Communication Skills: Teachers must develop strong communication abilities, as well as soft skills like interpersonal planning and patience. They should also ensure effective scheduling and organization for class planning and parent-teacher conferences.

- Teamwork and Adaptability: Teachers should emphasize collaboration, cultivate a vibrant classroom environment, and modify their teaching strategies to align with student needs and evolving educational standards.

- Lifelong Learning: Teachers should foster a passion for lifelong learning and a commitment to ongoing education while sharing their knowledge and experiences with others.

- Legal Framework Awareness: Teachers need to be familiar with the legal frameworks and strategies related to rural school leadership, as well as their roles at various levels. They are encouraged to conduct research on curriculum design, enrichment, and leadership practices.

6.4.6 Recommendations for Parents and Community

- Community Involvement: Training programs designed to enhance schools should actively engage parents and the community as key stakeholders in education.

- Encouraging Participation: Parents and the community should advocate for involvement and foster a spirit of collaboration among all stakeholders.
- Preparing for Real-World Challenges: Parents and the community should organize experiences that provide knowledge and skills to equip locals for practical learning and offer sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by rural school leadership.

- Oversight and Support: Parents and the community should actively monitor decision-making processes, promote collaboration, and support the effective utilization of available resources. A strong sense of belonging and responsibility is crucial.

- Staying Informed About Training Opportunities: Parents and the community should keep abreast of training opportunities offered by the Ministry of Education, regional education bureaus, and school leadership. They should establish forums to share experiences with educators and fulfill their responsibilities in accordance with the socio-cultural and economic needs of their communities.

6.4.7 Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study explored the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their impact on teaching and learning in the Sidama region. However, the researcher was unable to address all important aspects of school leadership in secondary education. Consequently, the following topics are recommended for further research:

- Leadership practices of urban secondary school principals and their influence on teaching and learning in the Sidama region.
- Leadership practices of private secondary school principals and their effects on teaching and learning in the Sidama region.

6.5 The Study's Contributions

Exploring the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals and their effects on teaching and learning in the Sidama region was the main objective of this study. The findings are valuable for education colleges, policymakers, educators at various levels, secondary school principals, and education stakeholders. This study introduces fresh perspectives that can enhance principals' leadership methods and increase student achievement, along with credible suggestions for improvement. The following sections highlight contributions to theory and practice.

6.5.1 Practices-Related Contribution

In rural secondary schools, the leadership practices now in place are insufficient to provide the resources required to run schools efficiently, enhance the teaching and learning process, and raise

academic achievement. Many of the secondary schools in the Sidama region do not fulfill the required criteria, according to the regional education bureau's inspection report. Out of 98 secondary schools, 42 (42.8%) were found to be standardized, while 56 (57.2%) fell below standard (SREB 2024) (see Table 7, Item 4).

Principals and school leadership share responsibility for the daily operations of their schools. Therefore, this study promotes effective practices by educating secondary school principals about instructional and trasformational leadership methods. The results indicate that principals should ensure the three interdependent primary leadership responsibilities are present and effectively executed. These responsibilities include fostering teachers' and students' engagement and satisfaction, encouraging community involvement, and providing adequate resources through transformational leadership models.

This study gives secondary school principals advice on how to use instructional leadership models to improve the teaching and learning process. Teachers, students, and the school community all put in more effort and are more satisfied with these models. Key components of the instructional leadership model include for principals include establishing high standards for students, regularly monitoring their progress, protecting instructional time, providing feedback, and delivering targeted teacher training to address identified gaps. These strategies also help cultivate a positive school climate. When applied consistently, they empower principals to support teachers in building confidence and enhancing efforts to boost academic achievement.

Stakeholders within the school system must mobilize labor, materials, and financial resources to ensure adequate community engagement and participation. This involves the Parent Parent-Teacher and Student Association (PTSA), the Kebele Education and Training Board, and the School Management Team, which consists of the principal, vice-principal, representative teachers, parents, and esteemed community members. Effectively leveraging these structures is crucial for obtaining the necessary resources. Consequently, the study suggests that school principals embrace a transformational approach to effectively engage community involvement and resources to improve teaching and learning.

Furthermore, actively discussing school goals, prioritizing the public good over self-interest, demonstrating authority to stakeholders, rewarding exceptional performance, seeking diverse perspectives during planning and evaluation, and celebrating achievements collaboratively will increase participation. Greater involvement from the community and other stakeholders is likely to lead to improved access to resources for the schools.

6.5.2 Theory-Related Contribution

This study offers a theoretical contribution by providing novel insights into the relationships between various leadership traits and the enhancement of teaching and learning. It contributes to academic discourse aimed at identifying effective leadership philosophies that improve principal efficacy, boost teachers' engagement and satisfaction, and increase student achievement.

The study supports the notion that rural secondary school principals can significantly enhance the vision and stakeholder awareness of rural school leadership. By effectively managing their schools, serving as role models for the school community, and promoting positive behavior among students, principals can create a more conducive learning environment. Additionally, principals can learn how to motivate and encourage dedicated educators and learners by embracing humanistic principles that value fairness, altruism, kindness, and thoughtfulness.

Furthermore, principals can gain valuable insights into making their school environments visually appealing and ecologically sustainable by studying the strong values of rural leadership, particularly regarding environmental protection and combating deforestation. The egalitarian nature of rural leadership promotes positive and collaborative interactions among school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

Poor management continues to impact educational institutions, particularly those under government control. However, the ideals inherent in rural leadership practices—such as prioritizing honesty over dishonesty, rejecting theft, and fostering community over selfishness—can alleviate current challenges when embraced by school principals. These principles represent key theoretical contributions of the study.

6.6 The Study's Limitations

Several constraints of the study must be acknowledged. Explanatory sequential mixed methods research adopts quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques separately and finally integrates the findings to create a comprehensive understanding of the problem. The qualitative data is meant to explain, enrich, build-up, and strengthen the quantitative findings. The integration phase stands to present vivid evidence and concise meaning for the phenomenon under investigation. Due to this, topics or sub-topics that are addressed in the quantitative phase re-appear in the qualitative and integration phases which make the data analysis and interpretation lengthy, repetitive, tiresome, and monotonous to the reader. Additionally, the study faced a low participation rate. Consequently, the findings may not be representative of secondary education systems across Ethiopia. The results may have limited applicability due to the study's focus on public secondary schools in the Sidama region and the selective sampling methods used for certain participants.

6.7 Conclusion

This research study revealed that all stakeholders, including education office experts, rural secondary school teachers, and principals, are working diligently to implement effective practices in rural secondary school leadership and teaching and learning. However, it also highlighted a significant shortage of educational resources at both the school and grassroots levels.

All educational stakeholders must receive structured, adaptable, and needs-based training in order to comprehend and implement transformational and instructional leadership principles, especially with regard to recommendations for rural secondary schools and the responsibilities of each stakeholder. Additionally, the report pointed out that crucial educational costs in rural secondary schools have not received enough support from the Ministry of Education and the provincial education bureau.

Additionally, the study revealed that rural secondary school principals encounter considerable challenges in improving student academic performance. Many rural secondary schools are struggling with a shortage of necessary human resources. In summary, the study indicated that the leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in the Sidama region are compromised

by low motivation and commitment among stakeholders, as well as a lack of skilled personnel and essential material resources.

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APPENDICES

Appendix-A

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2022/11/09

Ref: **2022/11/09/13846256/25/AM**
Name: Mr DM Morka
Student No.:13846256

Dear Mr DM Morka

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2022/11/09 to 2027/11/09

Researcher(s): Name: Mr DM Morka
E-mail address: 13846256@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: +251916163745

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr. Potokri Collins
E-mail address: cnuive@gmail.com
Telephone: +27842671740

Title of research:

Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia

Qualification: PhD Educational Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2022/11/09 to 2027/11/09.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2022/11/09 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2027/11/09**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2022/11/09/13846256/25/AM** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za

Appendix-B

ዲላ ዩኒቨርሲቲ
ማህበራዊ ሳይንስና ስነሰብዕ ኮሌጅ

DILLA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Ref.no CSSH/dean's office/801/25

Date Aug. 28/ 2025

LETTER OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE EDITOR

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Belilew Molla Gebre (PhD), currently serving as an assistant professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Dilla University, confirm that I have provided language editing, formatting and, proofreading services to Mr. Dereje Markos Morka for his doctoral dissertation titled **"Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia"**

I affirm that I have completed the necessary language editing, formatting, and proofreading tasks as requested by Mr. Dereje Markos Morka, a doctoral candidate at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Should you require any further information, please feel free to contact me at 251924408355 or belilew67@gmail.com or Belilewm@du.edu.et

With best regards,

ዲላ ዩኒቨርሲቲ
College of Social Sciences & Humanities
Dilla University

በሊሰው ሞላ ገብሬ (ዶ/ር)
Belilew Molla Gebre (PhD)
የማኅበራዊ ሳይንስና ሥነሰብዕ ኮሌጅ ዲን
Dean, College of Social Sciences & Humanities

P.O. Box 419 Tel. +251924408355 belilew67@gmail.com

Appendix-C

SIDAAMU DAGOOMU QOQQOWI MOOTIMMA ROSU BIIRO

የ ሲዳማ ብሔራዊ ክልላዊ መንግስት ትምህርት ቢሮ

M.K 79/25.150/3/35

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Barra 02/04/2016

Haja La''nnohu Balunkura

Hajo: - **Xiinxalaanchu Dereja Marqosihura kaa'lo assinannisi gede xawisate**.

Aleenni su'munni xawinsi xiinxalaanchi Qoqqowinke giddo addi addi rosi minnara PHD rosaancho ikkinota xawinanni '**Exploring Leadership Practcies of Rural Secondary School Principals in Sidaama Region**' yinanni birxichinni xiinxalo assano.

Konnira hajo la''annonsahu baalu ikkado kaa'lo assannosi gede egensiinseemmo.

Keeru ledo!

Asaammerew Addato Yomme
አሰም'ረው አዳቶ ዮ.ሚ
Fo/Qi/Ga/Ro/Ke/Xi/Da/
Dayirekitere
የፈተ/ዝግ/አስ/ት.ም/ም.ዘ/ጥና/
ዳይ/ዳይሬክተር

Affino:-

- Ro/ Ros/Keenote Handaarira
- Fo/Qi/Ga/Ro/Ke/Xi/Dayirekitoreetera Rosu Biiro

Sidaamu Dagoomu Qoqqowi Mootimma Rosu Biiro * የሲዳማ ብሔራዊ ክልላዊ መንግስት ትምህርት ቢሮ

APPENDIX D: REQUEST PERMISSION LETTER TO SIDAMA REGION EDUCATION BUREAU

P.O.Box 419
Hawassa, Ethiopia

The Head of Regional Education Bureau
0462204027
Hawassa
Dear Sir/madam
RE: Request for authorization to conduct research study in Sidama region public secondary schools

I, Mr Dereje Markos Morka am doing research under supervision of Dr Potokri Collins, senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We are applying for been granted permission to conduct a research study within your region. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled:

Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama Region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced. In Sidama region; Shebedino, Boricha, Gorche and Dale woreda are among the practiced and matured woreda, thus making it ideal for this study. The study will entail semi-structure interviews and questionnaires. The interview will be one-on one, and it will be less than an hour (45 minutes). The questionnaires will be distributed for the participants and latter collected by the field workers. The study will benefit the stakeholders by exposing gaps in relation with leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced.

The participants will volunteer to take part in the research; no one be forced to take place. There will be no incentives given to participants during the research. All suggestion of participants will be respected, and their view will be respected. Permission to record all interview from participants, if granted a voice recorder will be used. All information obtained will be stored in secured places. Hard copies will be stored in locked cupboard, and soft copies will be password secured.

To avoid potential risks all covid-19 protocals must be observed. The hand sanitizers will be used. No masks no entry in the interview rooms to avoid any covid cases during the research.
The woreda education offices and schools participated in the study will have access to the final report; a link will be granted and soft copies.
The permission to conduct this study will be obtain from University of South Africa, College of Education Research Ethics Committee in order to make sure that this study observes and practice research ethics.
Below are my contact details and my supervisor's contact details where we can be contacted any time if need arises.

Yours Sincerely
Dereje Markos Morka
Researcher
Cell phone: +251916163745
Email: derejemarkos090@gmail.com
Supervisor: Dr Potokri Collins
Cell phone: +27842671740
Email: cnuive@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: REQUEST PERMISSION LETTER TO WOREDA EDUCATION OFFICE

P.O.Box 419
Dilla, Ethiopia

---------- Woreda Education Office

Dear Sir/madam
RE: Request for authorization to conduct research study in Sidama region public secondary schools

I, Mr Dereje Markos Morka am doing research under supervision of Dr Potokri Collins, senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We are applying for been granted permission to conduct a research study within your region. We are requesting your participation in this study. The research title is:

Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices of rural secondary School principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced. In Sidama region; Shebedino, Boricha, Gorche and Dale woreda are among the practiced and matured woreda, thus making it ideal for this study. The study will entail semi-structure interviews and questionnaires. The interview will be one-on one, and it will be less than an hour (45 minutes). The questionnaires will be distributed for the participants and latter collected by the field workers. The study will benefit the stakeholders by exposing gaps in relation with leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced.

The participants will volunteer to take part in the research; no one be forced to take place. There will be no incentives given to participants during the research. All suggestion of participants will be respected, and their view will be respected. Permission to record all interview from participants, if granted a voice recorder will be used. All information obtained will be stored in secured places. Hard copies will be stored in locked cupboard, and soft copies will be password secured.

To avoid potential risks all covid-19 protocals must be observed. The hand sanitizers will be used. No masks no entry in the interview rooms to avoid any covid cases during the research.
The woreda education offices and schools participated in the study will have access to the final report; a link will be granted and soft copies.
The permission to conduct this study will be obtain from University of South Africa, College of Education Research Ethics Committee in order to make sure that this study observes and practice research ethics.
Below are my contact details and my supervisor's contact details where we can be contacted any time if need arises.

Yours Sincerely
Dereje Markos Morka
Researcher
Cell phone: +251916163745
Email: derejemarkos090@gmail.com
Supervisor: Dr Potokri Collins
Cell phone: +27842671740
Email: cnuive@gmail.com

APPENDIX F: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION LETTER TO RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

P.O Box 419
Dilla
Ethiopia

The school Principals
……..public secondary Schools
Leku/Yirba/Yirgalem/Gorche

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Request for permission to conduct research in your School.

I, Mr Dereje Markos Morka am doing research under supervision of Dr Potokri Collins, senior lecturer in the Department of Educational Leadership and Management towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We are applying for been granted permission to conduct a research study within your school. We are requesting your participation in this study. The research title is: **Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia.**
The study aims at examining stakeholders' perception on current reality regarding leadership practices of rural secondary school principals to enhance the teaching and learning situations of the schools, mainly in public secondary schools in Sidama regional state. The study will use the interviews, document analysis and questionnaires as data collection methods. The study may benefit the school as to expose gaps in leadership practices of rural secondary school principals.

The study aims to involve the region and woreda education officials, school principal, supervisors, teachers, parent teacher associations and students. All covid protocols will be observed. There will be no incentives given to participants. We will return to the school to give feedback after the research has been completed.
The University of South Africa requires me to carry out this research and your contribution in the study will be highly appreciated. My contact details and of my supervisor are given below. You can use them anytime to contact us if the need arise.

Yours Sincerely
Dereje Markos Morka
Researcher
Cell phone: +251916163745
Email: derejemarkos090@gmail.com
Supervisor: Dr Potokri Collins
Cell phone: +27842671740
Email: cnuive@gmail.com

Appendix-G

Department of Education Management

Questionnaires Completed by Secondary School Principals of Sidama Region

Dear prospective respondents,

This questionnaires forms part of my doctoral research entitled: **Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia** for the degree philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa. You have been selected by purposive sampling techniques from the population of secondary school principals. Hence, I invite you to take part in this survey.

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced. The findings may bring better leadership style which advances a positive school environment and improve school performances. You are kindly requested to complete these survey questionnaires, comprising six sections as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately the maximum of 30-40 minutes to complete.

All information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential.

Dereje Markos

Phone: +251916163745/+251916783716

Thank you in advance for your valued cooperation!

General Direction

1. No need to write your name.
2. Answer all the items as much as possible.
3. Use ' ✔ ' or ' **x**' mark for answering objective items.

Part I: Background Information of the respondents

Instruction One: Please indicate your response by marking "X" in the space provided.

Sex: M _____ F_____

Academic Status: Diploma----------BA/BSc/Bed _____MA/MSc_____

Age: 25 – 29 ---------- 30 – 39 -------- 40 – 49 ----- 50 – 59 ----- 60 =-------

Years of service: 1 – 5 ------- 6 – 11 ------ 12 – 17 ------- 18 – 22 ----- 23 – 27 -------

Part II: The Current Leadership of Rural Secondary School Principals

Instruction Two: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the current leadership of rural secondary school principals by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals define the vision to improve teaching and learning					
2	Principals define the values to improve teaching and learning					
3	Principals improves the condition for teaching and learning					
4	Principals give the assignment of roles and responsibilities to teachers					
5	Principals redesign the curriculum of the school					
6	Principals enrich the curriculum of the school					
7	Principals upgrade quality of educators to improve teaching and learning					
8	Principals build good relationships in the inside of the school					
9	Principals build good relationships outside of the organization/school					
10	Principals select tools for teaching and learning					
11	Principals develop tools for teaching and learning					
12	Principals participate in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges					
13	Principals ensure an orderly and supporting environment to stakeholders					

Part III. The Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership

Instruction Three: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the perception of stakeholders about rural leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The rural leadership of the school is similar with the urban schools					
2	Rural school leadership has the problem of organization					
3	The rural leadership has the problem of management					
4	Leadership of the school motivate or energize teachers to the school work					
5	Rural leadership contribute to gain self- knowledge/new thinking in the school					
6	Existence of rural leadership in the school increase unity between teachers and other stakeholders					
7	Leadership problems cause more teachers to leave the school					
8	Existence of rural leadership help teachers to communicate with each other					
9	Productivity of the school is affected by the leadership styles of the organization					
10	School leadership has the positive impact on the quality of education					

Part IV. Factors that affect rural school leadership

Instruction Four: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on factors that affect rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The school has a living home for teachers					
2	The management of school are well trained					
3	The preparation of principals to transform school is good					
4	The school standard is conducive to teaching and learning					
5	Reflections for learning with peers are available in the school					
6	Induction for rural instructional teachers are available					
7	The partner programs are linked with technology in the school					
8	Trends in budget utilization in schools are unproblematic					
9	The resources are equally distributed to stake holders to improve teaching and learning process					
10	The community involvement is much enough to support school					
11	Overlap of job in a few professionals occurs in school					
12	The bureaucratic administration of the school affects teachers to impart instruction					
13	School size is the problem for teaching and learning					
14	Unequal gender distribution of resource is the challenge for the school					
15	The students background have the profound effect to the success of the school					

Part V. Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Instruction Five: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on strategies to improve rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals should redefine school leadership responsibilities to improve student learning					
2	Principals need to develop school development frameworks to improve practices					
3	Principals should delegate responsibilities to stakeholders					
4	Principals need to develop skills for effective school leadership to shoulder responsibilities					
5	Principals should make school leadership an attractive profession to improve the quality of teaching and learning					
6	Principals should give due emphasis on teaching and learning rather than vesting time in administrative activities					
7	Principals professionalize organization processes					
8	Principals focus on relative attractiveness of school leadership					
9	Principals acknowledge the role of professional organizations of teachers					
10	Principals provide support for career development of teachers					
11	Principals contribute to hire well equipped professionals for the vacant position as much as possible					
12	Principals mobilize community to participate in educational affairs					
13	Principals contribute to distribute equitable financial resources					
14	Principals provide the technological equipment as much as possible					
15	Principals provide the equal chance for workers to participate in different activities of the school					

Part VI: Open ended questions

Please, write your opinion, comments and suggestions with respect to the questions below.(To write your responses exhaustively; you can use Amharic language, if you wish.)

1. What kind of problems do you face in your school/organization regarding the current rural school leadership?----------
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2. How do you view rural school leadership? Please, Explain in detail on the space provided.------
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3. What are the additional factors that affect rural school leadership in your school/organization? Write your opinion in detail.----------
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4. What strategies did your school/organization used to resolve rural school leadership problems that occurred in your organization?----------
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5. If you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the rural school leadership of your school/organization, please state them.----------
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Appendix-H

Department of Education Management

Questionnaires completed by Education Office Experts of Sidama Region

Dear prospective respondents,

This questionnaires forms part of my doctoral research entitled: **Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia** for the degree philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa. You have been selected by purposive sampling techniques from the population of Education Office Experts. Hence, I invite you to take part in this survey.

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced. The findings may bring better leadership style which advances a positive school environment and improve school performances. You are kindly requested to complete these survey questionnaires, comprising six sections as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately the maximum of 30-40 minutes to complete.

All information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential.

Dereje Markos

Phone: +251916163745/+251916783716

Thank you in advance for your valued cooperation!

General Direction

4. No need to write your name.

5. Answer all the items as much as possible.

6. Use ' ✔ ' or ' **x**' mark for answering objective items.

Part I: Background Information of the respondents

Instruction One: Please indicate your response by marking "X" in the space provided.

Sex: M _____ F_____

Academic Status: Diploma----------BA/BSc/Bed _____MA/MSc_____

Age: 25 – 29 ---------- 30 – 39 -------- 40 – 49 ----- 50 – 59 ----- 60 =-------

Years of service: 1 – 5 ------- 6 – 11 ------ 12 – 17 ------- 18 – 22 ----- 23 – 27 -------

Part II: The Current Leadership of Rural Secondary School Principals

Instruction Two: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the current leadership of rural secondary school principals by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals define the vision to improve teaching and learning					
2	Principals define the values to improve teaching and learning					
3	Principals improves the condition for teaching and learning					
4	Principals give the assignment of roles and responsibilities to teachers					
5	Principals redesign the curriculum of the school					
6	Principals enrich the curriculum of the school					
7	Principals upgrade quality of educators to improve teaching and learning					
8	Principals build good relationships in the inside of the school					
9	Principals build good relationships outside of the organization/school					
10	Principals select tools for teaching and learning					
11	Principals develop tools for teaching and learning					
12	Principals participate in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges					
13	Principals ensure an orderly and supporting environment to stakeholders					

Part III. The Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership

Instruction Three: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the perception of stakeholders about rural leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The rural leadership of the school is similar with the urban schools					
2	Rural school leadership has the problem of organization					
3	The rural leadership has the problem of management					
4	Leadership of the school motivate or energize teachers to the school work					
5	Rural leadership contribute to gain self- knowledge/new thinking in the school					
6	Existence of rural leadership in the school increase unity between teachers and other stakeholders					
7	Leadership problems cause more teachers to leave the school					
8	Existence of rural leadership help teachers to communicate with each other					
9	Productivity of the school is affected by the leadership styles of the organization					
10	School leadership has the positive impact on the quality of education					

Part IV. Factors that affect rural school leadership

Instruction Four: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on factors that affect rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The school has a living home for teachers					
2	The management of school are well trained					
3	The preparation of principals to transform school is good					
4	The school standard is conducive to teaching and learning					
5	Reflections for learning with peers are available in the school					
6	Induction for rural instructional teachers are available					
7	The partner programs are linked with technology in the school					
8	Trends in budget utilization in schools are unproblematic					
9	The resources are equally distributed to stake holders to improve teaching and learning process					
10	The community involvement is much enough to support school					
11	Overlap of job in a few professionals occurs in school					
12	The bureaucratic administration of the school affects teachers to impart instruction					
13	School size is the problem for teaching and learning					
14	Unequal gender distribution of resource is the challenge for the school					
15	The students background have the profound effect to the success of the school					

Part V. Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Instruction Five: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on strategies to improve rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals should redefine school leadership responsibilities to improve student learning					
2	Principals need to develop school development frameworks to improve practices					
3	Principals should delegate responsibilities to stakeholders					
4	Principals need to develop skills for effective school leadership to shoulder responsibilities					
5	Principals should make school leadership an attractive profession to improve the quality of teaching and learning					
6	Principals should give due emphasis on teaching and learning rather than vesting time in administrative activities					
7	Principals professionalize organization processes					
8	Principals focus on relative attractiveness of school leadership					
9	Principals acknowledge the role of professional organizations of teachers					
10	Principals provide support for career development of teachers					
11	Principals contribute to hire well equipped professionals for the vacant position as much as possible					
12	Principals mobilize community to participate in educational affairs					
13	Principals contribute to distribute equitable financial resources					
14	Principals provide the technological equipment as much as possible					
15	Principals provide the equal chance for workers to participate in different activities of the school					

Part VI: Open ended questions

Please, write your opinion, comments and suggestions with respect to the questions below.(To write your responses exhaustively; you can use Amharic language, if you wish.)

6. What kind of problems do you face in your school/organization regarding the current rural school leadership?----------

7. How do you view rural school leadership? Please, Explain in detail on the space provided.------

8. What are the additional factors that affect rural school leadership in your school/organization? Write your opinion in detail.----------

9. What strategies did your school/organization used to resolve rural school leadership problems that occurred in your organization?----------

10. If you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the rural school leadership of your school/organization, please state them.----------
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Appendix-I



Department of Education Management

Questionnaire completed by secondary school Teachers of Sidama Region

Dear prospective respondents,

This questionnaires forms part of my doctoral research entitled: **Leadership Practices of Rural Secondary School Principals and Teaching and Learning in Sidama Region, Ethiopia** for the degree philosophy in Education at the University of South Africa. You have been selected by simple random sampling techniques from the population of secondary school teachers. Hence, I invite you to take part in this survey.

The aim of this study is to explore leadership practices of rural secondary school principals in Sidama region in order to understand how teaching and learning can be enhanced. The findings may bring better leadership style which advances a positive school environment and improve school performances. You are kindly requested to complete these survey questionnaires, comprising six sections as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. No foreseeable risks are associated with the completion of the questionnaire which is for research purposes only. The questionnaire will take approximately the maximum of 30-40 minutes to complete.

All information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential.

Dereje Markos

Phone: +251916163745/+251916783716

Thank you in advance for your valued cooperation!

General Direction

7. No need to write your name.

8. Answer all the items as much as possible.

9. Use ' ✔ ' or ' **x**' mark for answering objective items.

Part I: Background Information of the respondents

Instruction One: Please indicate your response by marking "X" in the space provided.

Sex: M _____ F_____

Academic Status: Diploma----------BA/BSc/Bed _____MA/MSc_____

Age: 25 – 29 ---------- 30 – 39 -------- 40 – 49 ----- 50 – 59 ----- 60 =-------

Years of service: 1 – 5 ------- 6 – 11 ------ 12 – 17 ------- 18 – 22 ----- 23 – 27 -------

Part II: The Current Leadership of Rural Secondary School Principals

Instruction Two: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the current leadership of rural secondary school principals by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals define the vision to improve teaching and learning					
2	Principals define the values to improve teaching and learning					
3	Principals improves the condition for teaching and learning					
4	Principals give the assignment of roles and responsibilities to teachers					
5	Principals redesign the curriculum of the school					
6	Principals enrich the curriculum of the school					
7	Principals upgrade quality of educators to improve teaching and learning					
8	Principals build good relationships in the inside of the school					
9	Principals build good relationships outside of the organization/school					
10	Principals select tools for teaching and learning					
11	Principals develop tools for teaching and learning					
12	Principals participate in providing effective solutions to teaching and learning challenges					
13	Principals ensure an orderly and supporting environment to stakeholders					

Part III. The Perception of Stakeholders about Rural Leadership

Instruction Three: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on the perception of stakeholders about rural leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The rural leadership of the school is similar with the urban schools					
2	Rural school leadership has the problem of organization					
3	The rural leadership has the problem of management					
4	Leadership of the school motivate or energize teachers to the school work					
5	Rural leadership contribute to gain self- knowledge/new thinking in the school					
6	Existence of rural leadership in the school increase unity between teachers and other stakeholders					
7	Leadership problems cause more teachers to leave the school					
8	Existence of rural leadership help teachers to communicate with each other					
9	Productivity of the school is affected by the leadership styles of the organization					
10	School leadership has the positive impact on the quality of education					

Part IV. Factors that affect rural school leadership

Instruction Four: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on factors that affect rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The school has a living home for teachers					
2	The management of school are well trained					
3	The preparation of principals to transform school is good					
4	The school standard is conducive to teaching and learning					
5	Reflections for learning with peers are available in the school					
6	Induction for rural instructional teachers are available					
7	The partner programs are linked with technology in the school					
8	Trends in budget utilization in schools are unproblematic					
9	The resources are equally distributed to stake holders to improve teaching and learning process					
10	The community involvement is much enough to support school					
11	Overlap of job in a few professionals occurs in school					
12	The bureaucratic administration of the school affects teachers to impart instruction					
13	School size is the problem for teaching and learning					
14	Unequal gender distribution of resource is the challenge for the school					
15	The students background have the profound effect to the success of the school					

Part V. Strategies to Improve Rural School Leadership

Instruction Five: Please mark an "X" in the column that nearly reflects your actual opinion on strategies to improve rural school leadership by using the following five rating scales, such as; 5=Strongly agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly disagree

No	Items	Rating scales				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Principals should redefine school leadership responsibilities to improve student learning					
2	Principals need to develop school development frameworks to improve practices					
3	Principals should delegate responsibilities to stakeholders					
4	Principals need to develop skills for effective school leadership to shoulder responsibilities					
5	Principals should make school leadership an attractive profession to improve the quality of teaching and learning					
6	Principals should give due emphasis on teaching and learning rather than vesting time in administrative activities					
7	Principals professionalize organization processes					
8	Principals focus on relative attractiveness of school leadership					
9	Principals acknowledge the role of professional organizations of teachers					
10	Principals provide support for career development of teachers					
11	Principals contribute to hire well equipped professionals for the vacant position as much as possible					
12	Principals mobilize community to participate in educational affairs					
13	Principals contribute to distribute equitable financial resources					
14	Principals provide the technological equipment as much as possible					
15	Principals provide the equal chance for workers to participate in different activities of the school					

Part VI: Open ended questions

Please, write your opinion, comments and suggestions with respect to the questions below.(To write your responses exhaustively; you can use Amharic language, if you wish.)

11. What kind of problems do you face in your school/organization regarding the current rural school leadership?----------

12. How do you view rural school leadership? Please, Explain in detail on the space provided.-----

13. What are the additional factors that affect rural school leadership in your school/organization? Write your opinion in detail.----------

14. What strategies did your school/organization used to resolve rural school leadership problems that occurred in your organization?----------

15. If you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the rural school leadership of your school/organization, please state them.----------
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Appendix-J

Interview questions for Parent Teacher Associations and Students

Personal Data

Sex M ____ F_____

Academic Status: Diploma----------BA/BSc/Bed _____MA/MSc_____ other----------

Age 25 – 29 ---------- 30 – 39 -------- 40 – 49 ----- 50 – 59 ----- 60 -------

Years of service: 1 – 5 ------- 6 – 11 ------ 12 – 17 ------- 18 – 22 ----- 23 – 27 -------

1. How do you observe the rural school leadership practices of your school?
2. How do principals, teachers and other stakeholders view rural leadership in terms of planning, implementing and monitoring school activities?
3. Do you think your principal's leadership style is effective to bring the desired change in your school?
4. How do you observe current instructional leadership practices of your school?
5. How do you describe the role of your school leadership to enhance the quality of education in your school?
6. What are the factors that hinder the performance of your school progress?
7. How do you explain the leadership of your school?
8. What is the role of teachers to equip the students related to leadership of your school?
9. What are the challenges that tackling you from doing your part in rural school leadership?
10. What are the remedial actions to be taken to improve the leadership practice of your school?