THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SIDAMA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA

By

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SEPTEMBER 2025

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I, MILLION MAMO GONESSO, declare that this doctoral thesis titled: **"*THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SIDAMA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA,*"** submitted to the University of South Africa, is my own work in design and execution and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged utilizing complete references.

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DEDICATION

This piece of my thesis work is humbly to my late mother, Mrs. Tirunigo Tumicha Argisso, and my late uncle, Mrs. Dun'ga Shilla, whose unconditional love, sacrifices, and unwavering support made my educational journey possible. Despite their limited educational opportunities, they worked tirelessly to create opportunities for my learning and personal development. Their memory continues to inspire and guide me.

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The manuscript has been reviewed and edited to ensure that it meets the highest standards of English usage.

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The research proposal received formal approval from the UNISA Ethics Committee on 2024/05/08 (Approval Reference: 2024/05/08/13392123/14/AM).

All participants in this study received a comprehensive information sheet detailing the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the research. We obtained written (or verbal) informed consent from all participants before their involvement, and informed them of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants have been rigorously protected. All personally identifiable information has been removed or pseudonymized during data collection, analysis, and reporting. Data will be stored securely in accordance with [UNISA's] data protection policy and Relevant Law, for a period of 5 years after the completion of the study.

I affirm that the work presented here is my own, except where due acknowledgment is made. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor any fabrications or falsifications of data.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EHEECE	Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination
ESDP	Education Sector Development Programme
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
GEQUIP	General Education Quality Improvement Package
MoE	Ministry of Education
QUAL	Qualitative
QUAN	Quantitative
REB	Regional Education Bureau
SNRS	Sidama National Regional State
SPSS	Statistical Programme Software for Social Science
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
ETP	Education and Training Policy
TDP	Teacher development programme

ABSTRACT

The study addresses the declining students' academic achievement on EHEECE, a concern raised by discussions in the media, among social and political groups, the government, and the business sector. These stakeholders are increasingly worried about this decline and are seeking solutions, which motivated my engagement in this research. The study aimed at investigating effectiveness of leadership practices in students' academic achievement of secondary schools on EHEECE of SNRS, Ethiopia. In philosophical assumption, grounded in a Pragmatic Research Paradigm with Mixed Research Approach the study utilized a convergent concurrent design. The study employed a convergent concurrent Mixed Method design to extract the perception of senior teachers, Head of Departments, Principals, Vice-principals, Unit leaders, PTSAs, and supervisors using both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently to supplement each other and interpreted separately and triangulated at the end of the discussion for better grasping the problems understudy. Data were gathered from 225 senior teachers and 115 Head of Departments, Principals, 59 Vice-principals, 42 Unit leaders, using Simple Random Sampling techniques while 11 school principals, 5 vice-principals and 4 supervisors took part on an interview and 6 FGDs of 30 participants of PTSAs by using Purposive Sampling techniques. Questionnaires, semi-structured interview and Document Analysis were major instruments for data collection. Data were analysed using frequency, mean, standard deviation, independent sample t-test, and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis and thematic analysis techniques. The study found that the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices in terms of '*setting and communicating shared vision and goals*', *'teaching-learning programs management'*, '*fostering teachers professional'*, '*lead community and stakeholders' engagement'* and *'managing school resources and operations' were poor. From the summary of the perceived principal leadership practices, the study also revealed that there is positive relationship between principal leadership practices in 'setting and communicating shared vision and goals', 'teaching-learning programs management' and 'fostering teachers professional' and students' academic achievement while there is no significant relationship with 'community and stakeholders engagement', and 'managing school resources and operations' and students' academic achievement. School-leadership related factors, shortage of resources and material facilities and other external factors were found moderately*

challenges while students related, home-environment related, and teacher-related factors were found strongly challenging school leaders in the process of supporting students' academic achievement on EHEECE. The study also suggested strategies such as the central government motivation in playing their role; developing school leaders' commitment and capacities; enhancing teaching-learning; mobilizing and allocating school resources; and working on school autonomy.

KEY TERMS*: Academic achievement, Leadership effectiveness, Leadership styles or types, mixed methods research, Pragmatism, Professional development, School leadership, Secondary school, School environment, School principal, Shared mission and goals.*

CHAPTER ONE

1. ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND MOTIVATION

This chapter introduces the study. This study investigated the variables associated with the effectiveness of principals' leadership as instructional leaders and their contribution to students' academic achievement, as measured by Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) scores, in secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS). This chapter introduces the research topic and problem, states the research questions, and provides background on the study. Research objectives and questions were formulated based on the identified problems and context to guide the study.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the research problem and motivation, followed by a discussion of the background, purpose, research questions, and hypotheses. It then outlines the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research procedures, assumptions, delimitations, scope, significance, limitations, and the study's gaps. It also includes operational definitions of terms, the thesis structure, a chapter summary, and a projection statement for the next chapter.

Education is a process through which experiences, findings, and accumulated values are transmitted. It empowers individuals and societies to participate fully in development by acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Education and training are central to the Ethiopian government's policies to achieve middle-income status within a decade. The general education sector must prepare competent young citizens with core academic knowledge and practical skills to support higher education institutions, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, and the workforce (MoE, 2023). Ethiopia's current educational policies outline goals aligned with individual and societal needs, supporting educational development.

Education serves as the foundation for improving quality of life. Sustainable development is challenging without enhancements to the education system, as the quantity and quality of human capital are crucial determinants of economic productivity (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013). The importance of high-quality school leader preparation programs for educational quality is well documented, and global demand for quality education has

increased over time. Studies have consistently highlighted the effectiveness of principals and specific leadership practices in improving access to and the quality of academic outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008).

To achieve these aims, school principals play vital roles. The Ethiopian education policy reform roadmap (2018) emphasizes the importance of quality education for the country's long-term development. Effective leadership in secondary schools is essential for improving teacher performance and, consequently, student outcomes. Educators have long been concerned about principals' effectiveness in carrying out these roles (Ozuruoke, Ordu & Abdulkarim, 2011).

According to the National Educational Annual Abstract (MoE, 2019), since 2019, there is only one national examination in Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE), administered at the end of grade 12. The grade 10 national examination has been discontinued under the new education roadmap, although regional examinations continue for grade 8 nationwide. Over the past 20 years, secondary school enrolment has expanded rapidly, with an average annual growth rate of 9.7% in the last five years. Secondary education encompasses grades 9 through 12 for students aged 15 to 18, offering a diverse curriculum that prepares them for higher education and the workforce.

Under the new Education Road Map, secondary students would study all subjects as part of a "General Education" curriculum before splitting into Social and Natural Science streams in grade 11. The Natural Science stream will provide five Career and Technical Education (CTE) options, while the Social Science stream will offer three CTEs, enabling students to graduate with full technical skills in their chosen field (MoE: Education Road Map, 2018). This educational level is critical to ensuring the continuity and sustainability of government initiatives, prompting ongoing efforts to address challenges in providing quality and inclusive education, as it serves as the gateway to higher education and future careers.

Leadership is defined as the process of influencing leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change (Lussier & Achua, 2016). In the literature, leadership and management are often used interchangeably (Harrison, 2018). While key educational leaders, such as the Department of Education (DoE), principals, and

teachers, strive to uphold effective leadership, challenges continue to hinder their efforts (Spaull & Jansen, 2019; Moyambo, 2023).

1.2 SITUATION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF THE REGION

Among Ethiopia's twelve regional states, Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) is in the southern part of the country, approximately 273 km from Addis Ababa to Hawassa, the seat of the regional government council. The region comprises five administrative zones and 36 woredas. The Ministry of Education structures the education system at the national level, with regional education bureaus and district education offices at the zone level. In SNRS, there are five zones, 36 woredas, and 118 secondary schools, of which 97 are government-owned, and the remainder are private or Non-Governmental Organization-owned and managed.

The academic achievement patterns in the region from 2018/19 to 2023/24 reflect a concerning trend. In the 2023/24 academic year, only 8.2% of students who sat for the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) passed. Across the five zones, the highest pass rate over the past six years was only 2.4% for students who achieved the minimum passing mark (≥50%). The male-to-female pass ratio was also 1:1. In contrast, in Hawassa city, 15.4% of students who took the exam performed well.

A significant challenge facing secondary school principals in Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) is the ongoing decline in students' academic achievement on the EHEECE score. The country's educational success directly affects economic participation, including learners' skills relative to their qualifications, unemployment rates, participation in sports, and productivity in workplaces and industries. This concern extends beyond high pass rates to the overall economic contribution of educated individuals. In SNRS, the unemployment rate remains high, partly due to a shortage of skilled personnel.

In summary, over the past five years, students' academic achievement on EHEECE across both the highest and poorest students' academic achievement zones in the region has been poor. Additionally, the academic performance of 12th grade female students in secondary schools has shown no consistent improvement during this period.

Table 1.1 Students pass rate and percentage of declination in SNRS, Ethiopia (2018-2023).

Year	Number of Students Sat for EHEECE	Number of Students who Have Pass Mark (≥ 50%)	Pass Rate (100%)	Declination Percentage Change
2018	7,229	4,173	86.90%	
2019	5,356	1,840	34.40%	52.50%
2020	21,771	5,233	24.00%	10.40%
2021	53,303	1,274	2.39%	21.61%
2022	54,503	54,503	1.90%	0.94%
2023	40,877	1,341	3.33%	-1.43% (increased by 1.43% from 2022)

Source: *Adapted from Sidama National Regional State Education Bureau, 2018/19 – 2023/24 annual reports.*

The scholars Leithwood & Riehl (2003) state that responsibility for students' academic achievement has created pressure on all stakeholders, such as principals, students, teachers, and administrative bodies. School principals are now seen not only as managers but also as school leaders in teaching and learning organizations. They have a fundamental responsibility to apply leadership effectively to drive educational improvement and improve students' academic achievement. This perspective implies that principals must be adequately prepared to create high-quality schools. They need to transform the collective energy within schools into meaningful academic and social growth for all students, while also adapting to the progressively more multifaceted demands of the twenty-first century.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The researcher was motivated to conduct the study because students' academic achievement on EHEECE scores has significantly deteriorated, and to investigate the variables related to leadership effectiveness in secondary schools in the region and how those variables affect EHEECE scores in SNRS. This study examines the effectiveness of secondary schools' leadership practices on students' academic achievement in Sidama region, aiming to align with the standards and principles expressed in the introduction of the Constitution of the Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic (EFDR, Act 108 of 1996) and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education (MoE, 2013). Meeting these standards will require a strong school leadership team to implement, lead, and manage effectively.

Leadership literature consistently questions the extent to which schools' impact on students' academic achievement can be attributed to leadership (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2004). The consensus is that effective school leadership, particularly that of principals, significantly enhances students' academic achievement (Waters et al., 2004) and is a fundamental prerequisite for organizational success (Onsman, 2003). Therefore, investigating the variables related to the effectiveness of school leadership and their impact on improving students' academic achievement in the EHEECE scores is essential, which motivates my research.

1.4 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Scholars agree that effective leadership and management are essential for the efficient functioning and continuity of schools. This study aims to explore the multidimensional aspects of educational leadership within secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS), reflected in the title: "Leadership Effectiveness of Principals on Students' Academic Achievement in Secondary Schools of Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia." In an era of accelerating globalization, education is a vital tool for addressing challenges and deficiencies locally and globally. Educating a nation remains a critical strategy for societal development throughout the developing world (Aikaman & Unterhalter, 2005).

According to Bush (2020), interest in educational leadership and management has grown significantly since the early 21st century, driven by the belief that effective leadership can strongly influence schools and learner outcomes. Many countries are now focused on achieving excellence in education. This commitment is one reason the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015-2019) redefined education to ensure everyone can learn and contribute meaningfully to a sustainable world. Accordingly, Ethiopia's new education policy roadmap aims to:

> "… education is a tool for development and for solving social, political and economic problems; education enables individuals and groups to make all-round development by acquiring knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes", (MoE: Education Road Map, 2018:22).

The researcher's involvement in studying this enormity and level of complexity arose from extensive formal and informal communications with individuals and groups about the decline in student achievement in the EHEECE. These discussions included strategic

planning meetings, analyses of student performance, and comments on debates and press releases related to this issue. Participants came from diverse social, intellectual, and political backgrounds, all aiming to identify the main causes of the declining EHEECE score pass rates and the potential role of school leadership in addressing the problem. Pigozzi (2008) noted that poor educational quality undermines efforts to use education as an effective tool for economic growth and development. These interactions have highlighted those certain variables, when linked to effective school leadership, could positively influence students' academic achievement in the EHEECE. The following section provides additional background on this study.

The success of a country's education system significantly affects economic participation, including students' skills relative to their qualifications, unemployment rates, participation in sports, and productivity in workplaces and industries. This indicates that success is not limited to high pass rates or the number of students advancing to high school. In SNRS, Ethiopia, the unemployment rate is notably high, and many learners lack the essential life skills needed for self-sufficiency, often relegating them to generic jobs with minimal impact on production and development. This educational shortfall can be attributed to failures in educational leadership and management.

The following sections highlight students' academic achievement on EHEECE scores to provide a clear theoretical understanding of the challenges hindering principals' efforts to improve academic achievement. For ease of reference, this study highlights the education system by detailing the national pass rate on EHEECE from 2019 to 2023. This background indicates that public education is lagging, primarily due to issues in educational leadership and management.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The fluctuations in pass rates raise concerns not only for regional and provincial education sectors but also for other areas of civil society. The current decline in students' academic achievement in the EHEECE results in SNRS, Ethiopia, can be attributed to the slow transition of students from secondary school to universities and other higher learning institutions. Many school principals lack adequate training in educational leadership, and even those who have received training often struggle to lead effectively. As a result, they cannot develop a clear vision or coordinate the school community to achieve their goals (MoE, 2007).

The decline in students' academic achievement in EHEECE results and fluctuations in pass rates alarm national and regional education departments, as well as parents and other members of civil society. The issues include: 1) widespread examination failures leading to minimal academic achievement in SNRS secondary schools over the years (Yusuf, 2012; Eguridu, 2014); 2) a lack of effective leadership models for school principals; and 3) insufficient understanding of how principals' leadership styles and types impact student achievement and overall school performance.

The National Education Development Road Map (MOE, 2018) addresses these concerns by stating that:

> *"... the fast shifts in policy in the assignment of school principals based on election, giving due regard to short-term trainings, considering certificates and postgraduate diplomas as adequate level of qualification for leading schools are challenges. Inconsistent, incoherent, lack of practice & research-based educational leadership development is a major challenge" (MoE, 2018, p.19).*

The problem is that little research has examined the widespread failures in EHEECE that result in minimal academic achievement for students in SNRS, Ethiopia. There is also limited understanding of how principals' leadership styles, types, gender, qualifications, and experience affect school performance and students' academic achievement. Additionally, principals lack an effective leadership model to follow.

Fundamentally, research has insufficiently focused on the relationship between principal leadership effectiveness and student academic achievement. It is crucial to explore the variables affecting the effectiveness of principals' leadership in relation to student outcomes. This includes investigating the perceptions of principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HODs), and unit leaders about leadership effectiveness and its effect on student achievement.

The widespread failures in the EHEECE highlight the urgent need to evaluate, explore, understand, and describe how principals' leadership variables affect student achievement and overall school performance. This mixed-methods study examined and described principals' leadership styles, types, qualifications, experiences, and gender through interviews with principals, deputy principals, HODs, and unit leaders.

Against this background, I aimed to analyze the different leadership styles and types exhibited by principals and their effects on secondary school administration and students' academic achievement. The goal was to suggest a model that can enhance or maintain school performance and improve student outcomes in SNRS, Ethiopia.

1.6 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.6.1. Purpose of the study

The purpose/ or aim of this study was to investigate the variables related to the principal's leadership effectiveness in secondary schools and their contribution to the academic achievement of grade 12 students in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE). This investigation was prompted by the significant decline in students' academic achievements in the EHEECE results from governmental secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) of Ethiopia.

1.6.2. General Objective

The general objective of the study is to evaluate and investigate the secondary school principals' leadership effectiveness on students' academic achievement in the EHEECE results. This involved investigating the contribution of independent variables (perceptions of respondents on principals' leadership practices, with respect to current secondary school principals' roles, leadership styles/types, experiences, principals' education, gender, and challenges experienced by principals and strategies set/adopted for improvement) in relation to the dependent variable (leadership effectiveness as reflected in students' academic achievement) in secondary schools. The study focused on these variables and related environmental and extraneous variables, analyzing EHEECE results from the past three consecutive years (2021 to 2023) in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) of Ethiopia. The study also intended to recommend strategies to improve principals' leadership effectiveness, particularly in relation to students' academic achievement, in secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia.

1.6.3. The Specific Objectives

The study intends to address the following specific objectives of the study on the way to measure and determine the effectiveness of school principals' leadership on students' academic achievement, specifically:

a) Evaluate the extent to which school leaders fulfill their roles in enhancing students' academic achievement,
b) Identify the major factors that hinder school leaders from contributing to students' academic achievement success,
c) Explore if there is/are the associations between school principals' leadership practices and variables such as gender, qualifications, and job experience with respect to students' academic achievement on the EHEECE score,
d) Identify the perceptions of the heads of department (HODs), unit leaders, and deputy principals of their principals regarding instructional leadership and student academic achievement,
e) Ascertain the strategy adopted by school principals to improve students' academic achievement and propose a leadership model or strategy for secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia.

1.7 RATIONALE AND INVOLVEMENT

Several reasons motivated me to undertake this PhD thesis study. Firstly, the significant decline in students' academic achievement in the EHEECE results greatly intrigued me, particularly regarding the effectiveness of instructional school leadership and the challenges it presents. Second, I am interested in school leadership and management activities, such as implementing curriculum programs and management, as well as the extent to which the school principal's preparation for effective leadership practices meets national and regional standards.

Additionally, my experiences as a student researcher, along with a review of the literature, have led me to identify and evaluate the theoretical and practical gaps that impact the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievements. For these reasons, I believe this research is crucial, especially during a period of transformation in Ethiopia and globally. It aims to illuminate and address the academic challenges linked to school leadership practices in improving student achievement in the EHEECE results in SNRS, Ethiopia.

1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research problem outlined above, the study is guided by a main research question, which is then divided into sub-questions.

What variables are related to the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices in secondary schools, and what is their effect on student academic achievement on the EHEECE in SNRS of Ethiopia?

To answer this central research question, the researcher formulated five basic research questions to investigate the main research question. The first basic research question set is based on the core leadership practices of school principals in terms of: "setting directions, developing people, developing the school, community engagement, managing the school operations and resources," and the remaining basic research questions are as shown below through questions 2 to 5, namely:

1. To what extent do secondary school leaders fulfill their roles in improving students' academic achievement?
2. What are the major factors that hinder school leaders from contributing to students' academic success?
3. What is the relationship between school principals' leadership effectiveness and variables such as leadership styles or types, gender, education qualification, and experience in relation to student academic achievement?
4. How do principals, supervisors, department heads, unit leaders, senior teachers, and deputy principals perceive their own (their) principal's leadership styles?
5. What strategies do school principals adopt to maintain or improve the secondary schools' students' academic achievement pass rates in SNRS of Ethiopia?

While all sub-questions are important for informing this study, the second and third sub-questions are expected to have a greater impact. For quantitative data, two types of questionnaires were designed for educational supervisors, principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), senior teachers, and unit leaders, and for qualitative data, structured interview questions and an observational checklist were developed to gather their perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their principals as school leaders.

1.9 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

This study, "the effectiveness of school leadership on secondary school students' performance/ academic achievement", will investigate secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. Thus, for each research question and objective, the alternative research hypotheses (Ha…) and the null research hypotheses (H0...) are developed as shown below.

***H_{a1}*: The extent to which the school leaders discharge their functions has a positive effect on students' academic achievement.**

***H_{01}*: The extent to which school leaders discharge their functions is not related to students' academic achievement.**

***H_{a2}*: Factors impede and hinder school leaders from contributing to students' academic achievement.**

***H_{02}*: No factors impede or hinder school leaders from contributing to students' academic achievement.**

***H_{a3}*: Gender, qualifications, and job experience of secondary school principals have a positive influence on students' academic achievement.**

***H_{03}*: Gender, qualifications, and job experience of the secondary school principal leadership effectiveness have no effect on the students' academic achievement.**

***H_{a4}*: The leadership style dominantly used by the principal is essential for improving students' academic achievement.**

***H_{04}*: The leadership style dominantly used by the principal has no effect on improving students' academic achievement.**

***H_{a5}*: Strategies used to reduce external learning environment factors have a positive effect on improving students' academic achievement.**

***H_{05}*: Strategies used to reduce external learning environment factors have no effect on the improvement of students' performance/academic achievement.**

1.10 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars in educational leadership agree that it is a process of influence grounded in clear beliefs and values, leading to a "vision" for the school. Leaders articulate this vision to gain the commitment of the school community and stakeholders to improve the school's future and that of its students (Bush, 2007).

As illustrated in Chapter Three, Figures 3.1 and 3.2, the researcher employed theories of social activity (Bolden, 2011) and leadership practices (Bush, 2007), along with the distributed leadership framework (Spillane, 2005), viewing the school environment as a social system. These theories help explain how leadership practices manage teaching and learning through collaboration and coordination among multiple stakeholders

(Spillane & Diamond, 2007). For this study, the instructional and transformational leadership theories served as the main frameworks.

Spillane (2005) describes distributed leadership as a diagnostic and analytical tool that uses various artifacts to focus collective attention on core tasks. Teaching and learning are critical to school performance, and implementing distributed leadership allows school leaders to coordinate teaching methodologies to address underperformance. Therefore, this study's theoretical framework is adapted to leadership practices in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Improving the academic achievement and pass rate of deteriorated students in EHEECE and addressing underperformance in schools requires coordination and collaboration between school leaders and teachers to develop initiatives and programs that facilitate learning and improvement. Accordingly, Harris and Spillane (2008) assert:

> *"…the distributed leadership theory serves as both a diagnostic and a design tool that offers a lens on leadership practices within school and between schools".*

Additionally, distributed leadership requires examining the activities of school leaders willing to explore organizational practices, routines, and tools that enhance instructional development and delivery (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). I selected instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership theories as the framework for improving school performance because they support leadership practices that transform the functions and responsibilities of both teachers and school leaders (Boncana & Crow, 2008; Burgess, 2011).

School leaders play a crucial role in a school's effectiveness and efficiency. They are accountable for managing educational institutions, nurturing students, and promoting community values while adapting to the demands of modern education policy (Kebede, Demissie & Labiso, 2019).

Principals approach their followers with the intention of exchanging rewards for performance, such as recognition or incentives for a job well done. This leadership style involves bargaining and negotiating resources, as well as persuading staff to achieve higher student academic outcomes. These leadership styles interact to foster satisfied students and improved results in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE). Thus, the principal works to promote unity and connectivity

within the school, ensuring that teachers, students, and all stakeholders have satisfying experiences and rewards.

1.11 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

I established the conceptual framework for this study based on the relationship between the effectiveness of school principals' leadership and perceived independent variables, including leadership styles, types, experience, gender, and educational qualifications. The focus was on achieving satisfaction in the dependent variable, which is students' academic achievement, while excluding background and extraneous variables. This framework is illustrated diagrammatically in the theoretical framework in Chapter Three (Figure 3.1) and the conceptual framework (Figure 3.2).

1.12 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods research methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. As noted by Cohen and Manion (2001), this approach allows the use of quantitative methods in one phase of the study and qualitative methods in another, yielding the highest-quality data within the research context.

To examine and analyze the leadership factors affecting their effectiveness on students' academic achievement in secondary education, the study used a multi-faceted approach known as triangulation. The survey questionnaire provided broad coverage and was realistically applied to a wider population from which the study sample was drawn (Brown & Dowling, 1998).

Bryman (2001) emphasizes that when researching organizations and individuals, mixing methods can provide greater insights into the phenomena being investigated. Combining both methods within the same research design can strengthen the study, offering a more complete picture that appeals to both academics and policymakers. This integration is likely to yield richer data, enabling a comprehensive analysis of leadership effectiveness in secondary education and its influence on students' academic achievement. Additionally, it is essential to confirm, cross-validate, and collaborate on the study's findings. Similarly, Bazely (2003) describes it as using mixed data (qualitative and quantitative) along with various analytical tools. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) define mixed methods research as a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and integrating both

quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or series of studies to better understand a research problem.

Burke and Onwuegbuzie (2005) also note that mixed methods research complements traditional qualitative or quantitative methods, defining it as a class of research in which the researcher combines these techniques in a single study. They describe mixed methods research as a "third wave" movement that transcends paradigm wars by offering a logical and practical alternative. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach 'alone' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 5).

In this study, mixed research methods, or both quantitative and qualitative research designs, were selected to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The qualitative design enabled interaction with principals regarding their instructional leadership practices and how these can address the current decline in the EHEECE pass rate. Given that the building blocks of quantitative research are variables, and one focus of this study was to investigate the variables related to principals' leadership practices, a questionnaire (a quantitative research tool) was administered to principals, heads of departments (HoDs), and senior teachers to gather data not obtainable through interviews and which supplement each other.

1.13 PHILOSOPHICAL OVERVIEW

Mixed methods research treats philosophical assumptions as central, incorporating a fundamental set of beliefs that guide the investigation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The Ethiopian Education Road Map (2018) states that education is a tool for development and for addressing social, political, and economic challenges; it enables individuals and groups to achieve holistic development by acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities. Many scholars acknowledge that while Ethiopia's economic growth is globally recognized, significant challenges to student academic achievement remain unresolved.

Scholars such as Dagnew, Gbre-eyesus (2017) argue that:

> *"…satisfactory student academic performance results from various factors, including health, parents and communities' participation in school activities, family*

financial income, effective educational policies, safety and security, educational resources, and students' motivations"

To ensure educational quality, all stakeholders in the education system must contribute to its development, as quality education is a key indicator of a country's progress. UNESCO (2001), reports that education and training play a vital role in a nation's overall development, serving as the foundation for growth in both developed and developing countries. As noted earlier, education significantly affects a country's development and the living standards of its citizens. Thus, school leaders (principals) have a primary responsibility to facilitate effective teaching and learning and enhance students' academic performance. School leaders bear significant accountability for fulfilling their leadership duties within the school. By achieving higher academic standards, students gain motivation, knowledge, and skills that prepare them for successful careers and lifelong learning.

Various worldviews provide philosophical direction for research and can be used jointly or independently (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The key differences among these worldviews lie in their perspectives on ontology (reality), epistemology (knowledge), axiology (value), methodology (the research process), and the language of research (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 2000 in Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In this study, I aimed to propose a model of leadership style and type by examining the variables related to the effectiveness of school principals' leadership practices and their relationships with students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia. Pragmatism was the most suitable approach because it allowed the use of available methods to address the problem, guided by the principle of "what works."

1.13.1 Rationales for Using Mixed Methods Design

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:5) provide a broad definition of mixed methods research, describing it as a research design grounded in a philosophical framework that guides data collection and analysis. They define mixed methods research as:

"…design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of data collection and analysis, and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches across many phases of the research process.

As a research design, mixed methods encompass philosophical assumptions that are linked to specific methods, such as experimental research, surveys, and mixed methods research itself. Thus, scholars Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) define mixed methods research and identify three common designs: triangulation, explanatory, and exploratory. Each design focuses on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting separate but complementary quantitative and qualitative data (See chapter 4.5.2).

One reason I chose this study design in this transformative 21st century is my belief that research of this magnitude can highlight gaps and address the intellectual dilemmas related to the role of leadership in improving students' academic achievement in the EHEECE. Creswell (2012: 555) explains that the advantage of mixed methods lies in the assumption that using both quantitative and qualitative methods together provides a better understanding of the research problem than either method alone.

Additionally, this method allows researchers to gather current, detailed information on the issue at hand. It is useful for describing the present effectiveness and practices of secondary school principals as leaders, enabling in-depth exploration of the stated research problems and variables through statistical analysis of the results.

1.13.2 Applying Pragmatist Approach in the Study

I emphasized the study's practicality, believing the primary assumption should be to address real-world problems. To this end, I used the most effective methods to address the issues raised. The study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure robustness, completeness, and credibility, collecting data through surveys, interviews, and document analysis. This approach facilitated triangulation of the findings and provided a mixed perspective, allowing for effective responses to the research questions. The pragmatic worldview helped me to achieve a critical element of the study by gathering diverse suggestions from participants, leading to a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of principals' leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in Ethiopia.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) explain the elements of worldviews and their implications for practice: ontologically, pragmatists acknowledge both singular and multiple realities; epistemologically, they focus on practicality; axiologically, they embrace multiple stances; methodologically, they support "combining"; and rhetorically, they adhere to both formal and informal approaches.

Feilzer (2010:8) postulates:

> "…rigorous consultation for multiple scholarly works as: "*pragmatism, when regarded as an alternative paradigm, sidesteps the antagonistic issues of truth and reality, accepts, philosophically, that there are singular and multiple realities that are open to empirical inquiry and orients itself toward solving practical problems in the real world".*

1.13.3 Epistemology or/ Theory of Knowledge

As defined in the Collins English Dictionary (2012), epistemology refers to a particular theory of knowledge and the study of valid forms of knowledge concerning the nature of truth.

Simango (2016: 81) explains epistemology as:

> *"…Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, of the methods or grounds of knowledge, and refers to what is known and who can know. Interpretivism takes what positivism, experimentation, and critical rationalism ignore. These include the meanings and interpretations, the motives, and intentions that people use in their everyday lives. The interpretative paradigm was then the basis of this research. My interaction with respondents, especially school principals and teachers, aimed to interpret the interactions that exist in such organizations. In this instance, the research strategy was based on interpretation and understanding.*

1.13.4 Ontology

Ontology can be defined as the theory of a particular philosopher or school (system) of thought concerning the fundamental types of entities in the universe, reflecting a certain vision of the world. Simango (2016) and Gruber; Nyoni (2007:13) state:

> *"…ontology is an explicit specification of a conceptualization. Ontological issues are concerned with questions pertaining to the kinds of things that exist within society or beliefs about reality."*

When I was conducting this research, I maintained an open mind and believed that there is no single reality. My interactions with respondents regarding the effectiveness of school principals' leadership have shaped the ontology of this research, which is framed within

the context of leadership styles and types as integral components of general management practices within the school system.

1.14 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Scholars such as Morrison et al. (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that establishing reliability aims to minimize errors and bias in a study. In contrast, validity is assessed based on the fairness and accuracy of the presented data (Johnson & Christensen, 2020). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection instrument before applying it to the actual subjects, this study conducted a pre-test in seven secondary schools. Chapter Three presents the analysis results. Before dissemination, the supervisor revised and approved the instruments and also oversaw a pilot study at one of the largest governmental secondary schools in the region.

To ensure validity and reliability, legitimize the data, and enhance the credibility of the research report, I employed several processes: triangulation (including data triangulation and methodological triangulation), thick descriptions, and peer review.

1.14.1 Pilot Study

The pilot test provided an essential opportunity for the investigator to review the questionnaires and interview guiding questions, minimizing instrument-design errors such as wording or sequence issues. The pilot study sample consisted of thirty respondents, of whom twenty were teachers, two principals, two vice-principals, five PTSA members (for qualitative data), and one supervisor, who were purposively selected from three governmental secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State, Hawassa city, under the Administration Department of Education. These schools were not part of the main study. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The pilot study was also conducted to test reliability. Based on the findings, several adjustments were made, including considerations for the research population, revisions of ambiguous questions, and the development of a plan for the main research study. Relevant questions were formulated to gather authentic data addressing the research questions.

The results were analyzed to establish percentage representation using the content validity index. The pilot sample consisted of thirty respondents (twenty teachers, two principals, two vice-principals, and one supervisor) purposively sampled from five secondary schools in the SNRS of Ethiopia. The pilot study helped determine the

feasibility of the research, test the instrument's validity, and assess respondent trustworthiness for data collection in the main study. It also evaluated the instrument's appropriateness, clarity, and practicality, addressed any issues before the main study, and estimated the time required to complete the questionnaires.

After completing the questionnaires, the researchers used interview guides, observations, checklists, and other materials during the research process. The researchers checked and weighted responses to ensure relevance and accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The official statistician at Hawassa College of Teacher Education was consulted for data analysis. Findings from the pilot study informed the reformulation of study objectives, consideration of the research population, elimination or revision of ambiguous questions, and planning for the main research study. Relevant data from respondents were systematically analyzed, captured, and checked for errors before presentation (Saldana, 2021).

1.14.2 Reliability

Reliability, or trustworthiness, refers to a study's precision. A study earns trust when its methods, data collection, and interpretations uphold quality and rigor. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on quantifiable measurements, qualitative research demonstrates rigor through four key aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Accordingly, I documented the procedures from the initial stages to the conclusion of the study. Observation and interview protocols, along with checklists, were designed to assess reliability and ensure research rigor.

1.14.3 Validity

To ascertain face validity, the instruments were designed and submitted to the supervisor and senior educationists at one of the oldest universities for analysis and feedback. The instruments were then revised based on their comments. Additionally, content validity was established by requesting input from two experts in the field on the relevance and suitability of the items.

1.15 INSTRUMENTATIONS

Both quantitative and qualitative data are essential for scientific research, depending on the researcher’s objectives and study design. For the qualitative component of this study, I collected data using various methods. Marshall and Rossman (2011) identified four

primary data collection methods in qualitative research: observation, participation, interviews, and document analysis.

As I used a mixed-methods approach, my data collection tools included structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGDs) with school leaders, and document analysis. Quinn (2015:149) notes that using different data types allows for cross-data validity checks.

Neuma (2017) supports this, noting that researchers relying on a single data collection method are more susceptible to method-specific errors than those using multiple methods. Therefore, the study developed questionnaires, FGDs, observations, and semi-structured interviews based on the study questions to gather primary data. Data collection is described as a systematic and accurate gathering of data relevant to the research sub-problems, utilizing techniques such as focus group discussions, interviews, participant observation, case histories, and narratives (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, the data collection methods employed were structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, interactions with school leaders, and document analysis.

1.16 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

For this research study to proceed, I made the following general assumptions drawn from the literature, the effectiveness of the principal's leadership on the students' academic achievement, and personal experience from my interaction with principals regarding the respondents and the processes used in the studies:

1. The leadership practice involves improving teachers' teaching skills and students' academic achievement.
2. The researcher assumes that the respondents are self-reporting and expressing their own beliefs and attitudes about the practiced leadership effectiveness in their schools, honestly and accurately.
3. The principal understands his/her role as a leader, and his/her engagement with teachers on issues of curriculum delivery positively influences the performance of students.
4. The researcher assumes the responses from the sample are representative of the population that he is interested in studying and generalizing.
5. The instruments applied in this study measure current leadership role practices, perceived leadership styles and types of all the principals, supervisors, deputy

principals, department heads, parents, teachers, and students (PTAs) associations, and leadership challenges.

6. The distribution of the randomly selected respondents was assumed to be normal and provided a valid representation of the population of the study.

1.17 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Mixed methods research is chosen for its ability to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, as illustrated in Chapter Four in Figure 4.1. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be analyzed using their respective analytical procedures, then merged through triangulation of both sets of results, as shown in Figure 4.2.

Data collected from all data collection tools were analyzed accordingly: quantitative data were assessed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, frequencies and percentages, means, and weighted means. Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and school observations were compared with data obtained from document analyses to evaluate the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia. In other words, the data collected were analyzed using a concurrent convergent design.

1.18 DELIMITATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1.18.1 Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations are the boundaries the researcher deliberately sets for the study. They are the choices the researcher makes to define the research scope.

- Think: "What did I decide NOT to do and why?"
- They are within the researcher's control.
- Purpose: To make the study feasible, focused, and relevant.

As mentioned, this study investigated variables associated with the leadership effectiveness of secondary school principals and their contribution to students' academic achievement, as reflected in the EHEECE results in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. This included gathering perceptions from principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), unit leaders, senior teachers, and PTSAs regarding their leadership styles and types. The study also examined students' academic achievements

over five years (2018/19 to 2022/23) in EHEECE results, the school environment and culture through observations, and leadership-related factors that might hinder effectiveness.

This research measures principals' leadership effectiveness on students' academic achievement using document analysis, questionnaires, FGDs, and structured interviews. However, it also examined the leadership practices and perceptions of principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), unit leaders, senior teachers, and PTSAs regarding their principals, as well as principals' views on their own leadership effectiveness. Additionally, the study explored whether principals' leadership style, types, gender, educational qualifications, and years of job experience play significant roles in achieving students' academic success on EHEECE.

The research scope was the Sidama region and focused on principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), unit leaders, senior teachers, and PTSAs from those twelve regional states in Ethiopia, specifically selecting Sidama regional state from the southern geopolitical region of Ethiopia, which contains five zones: North Zone, Central Zone, West Zone, South Zone, and the Hawassa City administration of SNRS. The study used document analysis of the EFDR from the Ministry of Education, a self-reported questionnaire, and FGDs with structured interview questions. It was limited to deputy principals, unit leaders, and HoDs with at least two years of experience under their current principals.

To address potential inaccuracies, the study focused solely on government secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State and students' academic performance in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) conducted by the National Examination Agency (NEA), MoE. The research was conducted from May 2024 to October 2025 and did not include extraneous variables, background variables, or school performance due to time, cost, and the extensive coverage required for the study.

1.18.2 Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are mostly beyond the researcher's control. They are the constraints the researcher encountered during the research process.

- Think: "What are the shortcomings of the researcher's study?" They are often outside the researcher's direct control
- Purpose: To acknowledge imperfections and suggest areas for future research, thereby strengthening the credibility of the researcher's work. Thus, this study presents a detailed discussion of limitations in Section 7.3.

1.19 SIGNIFICANCE

Leadership in education guides schools to align with national educational policy (Ibrahim, 2021). This study on the effectiveness of secondary school principals on students' academic achievement, as measured by EHEECE scores, in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia is significant. It emphasizes the importance of principals' motivation within the school community, which directly impacts students' academic achievement. Additionally, it may help the regional education bureau, the Ministry of Education, policymakers, and other stakeholders assess the appropriateness of secondary school principals and support timely decision-making regarding school leadership.

The findings of this study may contribute valuable knowledge aligned with stakeholders' expectations of principals. Thus, I believe that effective leadership is the foundation for improving teacher performance and enhancing students' academic achievement. The insights gained might help principals in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia adjust their leadership practices to foster a conducive learning environment, ultimately leading to higher academic success for students and supporting the goals of the SREB and Ministry of Education.

This study is important in several ways. Researching principals' leadership styles and their relationship to students' academic achievement provides insights into a unique leadership model that can enhance students' academic achievement. The proposed model aims to support the implementation of effective leadership not only in secondary schools but also at other levels of the education system. The findings may inform researchers and practitioners by helping educational leaders identify appropriate leadership styles and variables to use in different situations. Effective leadership in schools is expected to improve students' academic achievement on the EHEECE scores.

Furthermore, this study might assist school principals who have struggled to fulfill their responsibilities by enabling them to work more effectively through the adoption of suitable leadership styles/types to enhance school performance and, in turn, students' academic achievement. Thus, the research might be significant for the academic community, as educating and training principals to the development of a skilled workforce in society.

1.20 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I obtained ethical clearance from UNISA and approval from the SNRS education bureau to access the selected schools (see Appendix A_1). I then sent formal letters to the head teachers at these schools to negotiate access. I created and distributed a consent form to all study participants (Appendix F). Through these consent forms, I obtained informed consent from all participants and informed them of their right to withdraw at any time and that participation was voluntary.

I used pseudonyms to protect participants' and schools' identities. The consent forms emphasized that any information obtained would remain confidential between the researcher and the participants, ensuring strict adherence to anonymity and confidentiality. During data collection and analysis, the researcher maintained data security by storing data on a locked computer in the researcher's office, accessible only through data protection passwords to prevent unauthorized access.

1.21 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Several concepts are integral to understanding the effectiveness of principal leadership on secondary school students' achievement. Given the complexity and varied definitions of these concepts, this study defines key terms to prevent confusion arising from similar meanings in the social sciences. These concepts are crucial for understanding the aspects addressed in this study, and comprehensive descriptions of their interactions are provided in the following sections:

i. Secondary Schools in the Ethiopian Context

Secondary schools encompass grades 9 to 12, where students prepare to join higher education institutions, such as colleges or universities (Ministry of Education, MoE, 2019).

ii. School principal

Refers to the head of the school, who is responsible for ensuring smooth operations. So that students achieve high-quality learning outcomes (Akinbode & Al Shuhumi, 2018).

This role involves overseeing daily instructional and managerial activities, which include monitoring the teaching and learning program, creating a supportive environment for teachers and students, equitably distributing resources, recruiting staff, and formulating a clear school vision.

iii. Leadership

Refers to a process of influence aimed at achieving desired goals. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools grounded in personal and professional values. They consistently articulate this vision and inspire their staff and stakeholders to embrace it (Bush & Glover, 2003).

iv. Leadership types

Refer to the ways a leader maintains the school's infrastructure and supervisory roles that may not be immediately observable. They depend on the leader's overall disposition rather than specific situations. A leader may inherently possess one or more of these qualities.

v. Leadership styles

Refer to the methods adopted by various leaders. For this study, leadership style is defined as the manner and approaches used to provide direction, implement plans, and motivate people. These styles reflect how principals manage subordinates to achieve their goals within schools. Leadership styles—such as situational, distributive, transformational, transactional, instructional (pedagogical), authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire- may vary depending on the situation.

vi. Instructional leadership

It focuses on the core activity of schools: teaching and learning in the classroom, aimed at improving student performance (Southworth, 2002). This directive, top-down approach emphasizes the principal's role in coordinating and controlling the instructional program (Hallinger, 2003). Thus, instructional leadership encompasses all activities the school principal performs across various levels of leadership to ensure effective teaching and learning.

vii. School performance

is encompasses the activities that define a school's success in achieving high student academic achievement. This is measured by students' academic results, particularly pass rates and success in national examinations. A school performs well when more students

achieve at least 50% of the total points (out of 700 or 600) in relevant subjects, such as social or natural sciences.

viii. Students' Performance

Boyd (2002:155) defines student performance as changes in abilities, temperament, motivation, and situation, with each factor influencing the others. This concept includes changes in learners' behaviors and attitudes. It highlights that after completing an instructional program, learners begin to perceive things differently and act more responsibly.

ix. Students' academic achievement

This is achieved when a student aims to get admission into university. The average marks (grades) a student obtains in their EHEECE results are good or passing for admission to university; greater than or equal to 50% (≥50%) is good, and less than 50% (<50%) to zero is considered bad.

x. Effectiveness

Defined as achieving the set standards or even doing better than the intended outcomes. As Cameron (2016) states:

> *"…school effectiveness is achieved if the school meets the characteristics of the ideal school, to an organization's ability to accomplish its objectives. Several definitions of effectiveness emerged, and regarding school effectiveness, effectiveness means accomplishing school goals, obtaining needed resources, satisfying all stakeholders, and maintaining high-quality internal processes."*

1.21 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This research is organized into seven chapters, each discussed in this section.

CHAPTER 1 presents the introduction and motivation for the study, including the background, problem statement, purpose and objectives, rationale and contributions, research questions, hypothesis, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, philosophical overview and assumptions, data analysis procedures, scope and significance, and an outline of the methodology used. This chapter also clarifies key concepts and terms supporting the study.

CHAPTER 2 is a literature review that provides an in-depth analysis of both international and African literature relevant to the study.

CHAPTER 3 explains the study's theoretical and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 4 describes the research design and methodology, thoroughly explaining the instruments used, including questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and document analysis.

CHAPTER 5 presents the findings from the quantitative data analysis.

CHAPTER 6 presents the findings from the qualitative data analysis.

CHAPTER 7 summarizes and concludes the thesis by synthesizing the findings from the mixed-methods research, offering recommendations, discussing contributions, suggesting areas for further research, and providing concluding remarks.

1.22 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter introduces the study and provides background, highlighting the current situation of students' academic achievement in SNRS secondary schools as reflected in the EHEECE results. It outlines the issues that motivated the researcher to pursue this research.

Additionally, the chapter covers the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the rationale and significance of the study, research questions, study objectives, hypothesis, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, research design and methodology, philosophical overviews (epistemology and ontology), and summary, conclusion to the study, and synthesis of the findings. The chapter discusses the rationale for using mixed methods, as well as the study's validity and reliability.

The chapter clarifies key concepts and outlines the study's assumptions. The chapter also addresses data analysis procedures, delimitations and limitations, and the study's significance. This research proposal also includes ethical considerations and the study's contribution to existing literature on leadership effectiveness.

1.23 TO THE NEXT CHAPTER PROJECTION

In Chapter One, the researcher provides an overview of the analysis of the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools. This includes investigating the contributions of independent variables such as leadership styles, types, experiences, education level, and gender of school principals on the

dependent variable of students' academic achievement in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. A research question guiding the study has also been formulated.

The next chapter discusses the conceptualization of principal leadership, the historical context and models of school leadership, the purposes and functions of school leadership, key elements of effective school leadership, the relationship between school leadership and supervision, prerequisites for effective school leadership, professional development, and perceptions of effective school leadership among principals and other school leaders. It also explores school principal leadership in four different countries and reviews related literature based on the research questions.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW ON LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I define and describe the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices, based on secondary school students' academic achievement outcomes on EHEECE in SNRS. I review relevant literature to summarize existing scientific research and/or books related to the effectiveness of principal leadership practices and their impact on secondary school students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Thus, the related literature review is organized into six major sections based on the research objectives. The first section presents concepts of principal leadership practices and effectiveness. The second section provides an overview of educational leadership theories, styles, and/or types. The third section discusses elements of leadership effectiveness. The fourth section examines school leadership development in Ethiopia and the characteristics of effective school principal leadership practices. The fifth section highlights how principal leadership styles and types influence secondary schools. Finally, the sixth section addresses challenges to principal leadership effectiveness that impact students' academic achievement.

Different scholars have described literature reviews in various ways. According to Hempel et al. (2020), a literature review provides an overview of available research in each area, offering background for the study included in the paper's introduction. McCombes (2023) confirms this, describing a literature review as a survey of scholarly sources on a specific topic, which helps identify relevant theories, methods, and gaps in existing research. Similarly, Efron and Ravid (2019) define a literature review as a logical examination of scholarly literature on a specific topic. In conducting a review, researchers must clearly describe their search process, findings, and conclusions, which helps them develop a research framework (Greetham, 2021). Samoilenko and Osei-Bryson (2018) argue that frameworks connect theory to practice and help to formulate research outcomes.

Recent studies show growing interest in school leadership and management among researchers, stakeholders, and practitioners. Research indicates differing views on whether the principals' instructional leadership practices measurably affect learner performance (Mafuwane, 2011).

For this study, the literature review drew on online databases from UNISA, Addis Ababa, Hawassa, and Jimma universities, as well as journals, books, educational articles, published annual reports, Google Scholar, and other sources. The study explored relevant literature to provide background and enhance understanding of the topic.

The main research question guiding the study is: *"What are the variables related to the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices in secondary schools, and how do they affect students' academic achievement on the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) and the adopted strategies to overcome those challenges in SNRS of Ethiopia?"* This study is framed by four educational leadership theories: transformational theory, instructional theory, distributed leadership practices, and situational theory.

2.2 DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS OF LEADERSHIP

In the previous chapter, I acknowledged that leadership has many explanations and interpretations. Since, different scholars have interpreted the concept of leadership differently. Further to that, Oyetunyi (2006) infers that the leader's task is to build the followers' confidence in their jobs so as to be effective, and that it is a leader's responsibility to communicate the picture of what the organization should be, to convince followers, and to channel all activities towards accomplishing it. Hence, Dubrin (2006) defines leadership as the ability to inspire confidence and support among followers who are expected to achieve organizational goals. This aligns with the contemporary approach but from a more recent perspective.

Nevertheless, no single definition of leadership exists; for all authors, leadership involves having followers, influencing relationships, and being ethical or good. For the purposes of this study, the definition of 'leadership' that guided the investigation, selected from among the various definitions advanced by different scholars, is that leadership involves the directly or/and indirectly influence of school principals on teachers and other stakeholders to enhance educational objectives and thereby improve students' academic achievement.

2.3 AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES

School principal leadership is a multidimensional concept with diverse definitions that can be understood in various ways. As Witziers et al. (2003) noted, these differing conceptualizations contribute to the contradictory findings in the field of principal leadership. Accordingly, Robinson and Gray (2019) and Shen et al. (2019) identified two primary approaches to conceptualizing principal leadership practices. The first focuses on specific leadership models that embody effective practices, such as instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership. The second identifies the behaviors and traits of leaders that affect students' academic achievement.

Hence, the scholars Gumus et al. (2018), in their review of studies from 1980 to 2014, found that instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership practices are the most studied constructs in educational research, particularly regarding their effects on organizational behaviors and student achievement. In the following section, I summarize each construct, examining its origins, definitions, interactions, and comparisons in relation to its effects on students' academic achievement.

Leadership has evolved over time, adopting various forms and definitions. In this regard, Leithwood and Riehl-Wossenu (2001) emphasized that most definitions of leadership share two core functions: "…*providing direction and exercising influence."* Thus, leaders mobilize and collaborate with others to achieve common goals, making leadership an influential process that helps individuals work enthusiastically toward shared objectives. This broader concept of leadership suggests that authority does not reside solely in one person but can be distributed among various individuals within and beyond the school.

Moreover, Leithwood and Riehl (2004) state that educational leaders occupy various roles within a school and provide influence and direction to achieve the school's goals. Leithwood and Riehl (2004) described educational principals' actions as both "administrative and instructional," purposefully designed to impact the school's primary focus and ultimately enhance students' academic achievement. Consequently, school leadership encompasses a range of roles, including school governing boards, principals, deputy principals, school leadership or management members, and staff involved in leadership tasks. Depending on the context, the terms "school leadership," "school management," and "school administration" are often used interchangeably, including in this study.

Thus, educational leadership includes various roles and functions, such as principals, deputy and assistant principals, leadership teams, and school governing boards (Poloncic, 2016). As many leadership theories as there are philosophers, researchers, and scholars who have studied and published them. Scholars have sought to define what distinguishes authentic leaders from the rest (B. Simango, 2016). Consequently, numerous leadership theories have emerged, each generating extensive literature with both proponents and critics.

2.3.1 Early Theories of Leadership

Among the earliest leadership theories are those that focused on leaders' personal characteristics, behaviors, and relationships with followers. Kurt Lewin (1939) made a pioneering contribution, introducing some of the most fundamental and well-documented leadership styles. Subsequently, researchers developed more comprehensive leadership frameworks and styles (Bowman, 2000). As Bolden (2001) summarizes, *"a review of the literature reveals an evolving series of 'schools of thought,' ranging from 'Great Man' and 'Trait' theories to 'Transformational' leadership."* This progression reflects the continuous development of leadership theory from leader-centered perspectives to more relational and transformational approaches.

Moreover, Simango (2016: 36) explains that followers elevate leaders because of unique qualities others may lack, leading them to trust their leader's judgment. While early theories focused on the characteristics and behaviors of successful leaders, later theories began to consider the role of followers and the contextual nature of leadership. Hill-McShane (2009:441) asserts that *"the Great Man theory assumes leaders are born, not made, and possess traits such as tireless energy, penetrating intuition, uncanny foresight, and persuasive powers."* This perspective suggests that leaders are inherently right and that their authority derives from their perceived blamelessness.

Like the Great Man theories, the trait perspective hypothesizes that "great leaders are born with distinguished behaviors *that set them apart."* Researchers searching for the secret to great leadership, like Stogdill, found that leaders tended to be slightly more intelligent, outgoing, creative, assertive, responsible, taller, and heavier than average individuals (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003, p. 19).

However, these trait differences did not yield statistically significant results. Consequently, we must consider the physiognomies of the circumstances before ascribing greatness to any individual leader. Historically, hundreds of trait studies have attempted to identify the traits that contribute to leadership greatness.

Contingency theory posits that the best leadership style depends on the context. According to Fiedler, changing one's leadership style is difficult, if not impossible. He believed that a leader's effectiveness should be measured by the performance of the team, group, or organization under their leadership. The first possible factor is leader-member relations, which refers to the respect, trust, and likability followers have for their leaders. The second factor is task structure, indicating the degree to which subordinates' jobs are highly structured with clear responsibilities, explicit goals, and specific procedures. The assumption is that certain leadership behaviors lead to greater subordinate commitment, resulting in higher performance in pursuit of organizational goals (Hill-McShane, 2009).

2.3.2 The New or Contemporary Theories of Leadership

The previously mentioned approaches provided some insights into leadership and its effectiveness. However, they do not convincingly define leadership effectiveness. Leadership is not merely about personal traits, leaders' behaviors, or their ability to act appropriately in a given situation. In response to the need for effective leadership styles to improve organizational performance, new perspectives have emerged, such as transformational and situational leadership theories. These approaches are central to transforming individuals and organizations to achieve desired outcomes (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003).

The Scholar Oyetunyi, (2006) notes that: "*the leadership paradigm has shifted over the decades from traditional approaches to contemporary perspectives."* Hence, Schermerhorn et al. (2000: 287) and Hoy and Miskel (2001: 409) categorize Great Man Theory, Trait Theory, Behavioral Theories, and Situational or Contingency Theories as traditional leadership theories. In contrast, contemporary theories encompass situational, transactional, transformational, and Instructional/Pedagogical leadership theories.

Theories are often categorized based on which aspects are believed to define leaders most effectively. Regardless of the approach, all leadership theories ultimately focus on determining organizational effectiveness. Consequently, much of modern leadership

research has concentrated on the impacts of transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership theories.

2.3.3 The Situational Leadership Theory

Situational leadership theory proposes that effective leaders embody both leadership and management roles. It emphasizes assessing situations to determine how leaders can effectively address a wide range of organizational tasks (Northouse, 2001; Simango, 2016). Depending on followers' readiness, leaders can apply four styles: delegating, coaching, directing, and supporting. An effective situational leader knows these styles and uses the right one by accurately assessing a follower's readiness and selecting a style that combines directive and supportive behaviors.

Situational leadership remains relevant because it addresses the evolving complexity of tasks and followers' changing abilities as they work toward shared goals. As followers mature in their task performance, leaders gradually reduce their task-related behaviors and increase relationship-oriented behaviors until followers reach a moderate or higher level of maturity. Once followers attain above-average maturity levels, leaders further decrease both task and relationship behaviors. This theory emphasizes adapting leadership practices to the organization's specific context (Daniëls et al., 2019).

2.3.4 The Transactional Leadership Theory

As Burns (1978) and Simango (2016) describe, transactional leaders identify followers' expectations and establish a clear link between effort and reward. They possess the authority to evaluate, correct, and train subordinates when performance needs improvement and to reward effectiveness when desired outcomes are achieved. Transactional leaders focus on the everyday transactions involved in running an organization, helping it meet its current objectives (Armstrong, 2010: 32).

2.3.5 The Transformational Leadership Theory

Sun and Leithwood (2012) conducted a meta-analysis that documented a weak positive relationship between principals' transformational leadership and students' academic achievement. However, they noted that certain transformational leadership practices, such as building collaborative structures and providing individualized consideration, contribute significantly more to student achievement than others. Despite the absence of adequate causal models explaining how transformational leadership influences student

outcomes, it remains a highly relevant theory today with significant implications for principal leadership (Berkovich, 2016).

Transformational leadership theory is hierarchical and emphasizes the distinction between leaders and followers. This theory has been extensively discussed over the last three decades (Gumus et al., 2018; Hallinger, 2003). Hence, the scholar Armstrong (2010: 32) states that:

> "…transformational leaders empower their followers and encourage them to do more than they originally expected to do by heightening followers' awareness about the importance and value of designated goals and the means to achieve them, inducing followers to transcend their self-interests for the good of the group and its goals and meeting followers' higher order needs".

Accordingly, Kouzes & Posner (2002) and Northouse (2007) state that transformational leadership theory is based on the premise that leaders' actions should be guided by moral, ethical, and equitable considerations for everyone within the organization. Thus, Warrilow (2012) identifies four components of transformational leadership as: *"Charisma or Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Personal and Individual Attention, and he defines them as follows.* He explained them as follows:

- ***Charisma or Idealized Influence:*** The extent to which the leader behaves admirably, displays strong convictions, and takes stands that encourage followers to identify with them as role models.
- **Inspirational Motivation:** The degree to which the leader articulates a compelling vision that inspires optimism about future goals and provides meaning for current tasks.
- ***Intellectual Stimulation:*** The degree to which the leader challenges assumptions, stimulates creativity, and encourages followers to see how they connect with the leader, the organization, each other, and the overall mission, thereby enabling them to creatively overcome obstacles.
- ***Personal and Individual Attention:*** The extent to which the leader attends to each follower's needs, acts as a mentor or coach, and shows respect and appreciation for individual contributions. This approach fulfills each team member's need for self-fulfillment and self-worth, inspiring further achievement and growth.

2.3.6 The Instructional or Pedagogical Leadership Theory

As calls for accountability in school leadership grew, instructional leadership emerged in the early 1980s, focusing primarily on school principals' roles in instruction and curriculum (Hallinger, 2003). Likewise, Celikten (2001) states that instructional leadership refers to leadership directly related to the teaching process and involves interaction among teachers, students, and the curriculum. Instructional leaders must oversee various aspects of teaching and learning, including supervision, assessment, staff development, and training. This role involves providing direction, resources, and support to teachers to encourage student learning and improve educational outcomes (Celikten, 2001).

Some scholars describe instructional leadership as attainment-based rather than time-based and customized rather than standardized. Townsend (2019) supports this view, describing instructional leaders as goal-oriented and combining charisma with expertise. Alemayehu (2021) also argues that researchers in effective schools claim every school can be effective, typically under the guidance of capable leaders. Effective instructional leaders go beyond merely "running a tight ship"; they drive change by ensuring students are well disciplined, budgets are managed effectively, and educator contracts are upheld (Reigeluth, Beatty & Meyers, 2017).

Nixon (2015) and Munna (2022) state that instructional leadership is a term frequently used in recent years, but it should not be assumed to have a universal meaning. An instructional leader in a small school may be very hands-on, while in a large school, the focus may shift to building other staff's leadership capacity. Instructional leadership can also extend beyond the school setting, as anyone influencing learning outcomes can be considered an instructional leader.

Because of its direct link to core school activities, instructional leadership is gaining attention and is significant for enhancing school effectiveness and accelerating student learning (Alemayehu, 2021). According to Bellibas and Gumus (2019), this philosophy aims to improve student outcomes and holds principals accountable for strengthening teaching and learning through curriculum coordination. An instructional leader is viewed as the primary source of knowledge for school development; however, challenges arise because resources, school size, staffing, and student needs vary across schools.

The emphasis on teaching and learning suggests a stronger focus on teaching rather than learning, leading critics to argue that both should be equally prioritized (Moyambo,

2016). School leaders are expected to fulfill multiple roles (political, managerial, and instructional), but excessive focus on one role can result in dysfunctional schools (Munna, 2022; Alemayehu, 2021). However, Hallinger (2011) and Ahmed (2016) conceptualize principals' instructional leadership practices into three dimensions: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive learning climate.

School leaders' instructional leadership roles are directly linked to creating optimal conditions for teaching and learning. These dimensions are further delineated into ten instructional leadership functions: framing the school's goals, communicating these goals, coordinating the curriculum, evaluating and supervising instruction, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, providing professional development, and offering incentives for both teachers and students.

2.3.7 Distributed Leadership Theory

In today's era of modernization, organizational leaders must create a shared vision as organizations become increasingly complex, despite advancements in technology such as computers and Artificial Intelligence (AI). Regardless of the circumstances, school leaders need to leverage existing opportunities and foster a supportive organizational climate so subordinates can achieve their goals.

According to Bush and Derek (2016), implementing distributed leadership in traditional hierarchical contexts can be challenging, highlighting the potential for dysfunctional and unplanned consequences. Distributed leadership theory relies on multiple sources of leadership within the organization to guide and complete various tasks of differing size, complexity, and scope. Most schools in the SNRS region of Ethiopia operate in environments that do not support distributed leadership. However, during this new standard period, schools should apply a combination of distributed and compassionate leadership.

This research study acknowledges that applying this philosophy exclusively within the education system may lead to dysfunctional schools. Nevertheless, the theory is relevant to this study because it focuses on variables related to principal leadership effectiveness and curriculum, ultimately improving student outcomes and performance. It is most effective when combined with other relevant educational leadership theories, such as transformational, instructional, and/or compassionate leadership.

2.4 CONCEPTS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND THEIR ELEMENTS

2.4.1 Definitions of Leadership

Current educational policies in Ethiopia outline goals relevant to individual and societal needs and support educational development.

Education serves as the foundation for improving quality of life. Sustainable development is challenging without enhancements to the education system, as the quantity and quality of human capital are crucial determinants of economic productivity (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013). The importance of high-quality school leader preparation programs for educational quality is well documented, and global demand for quality education has increased over time. Studies have consistently highlighted the effectiveness of principals and specific leadership practices in improving access to and the quality of academic outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008).

To achieve these aims, school principals play vital roles. The Ethiopian education policy reform roadmap (2018) emphasizes the importance of quality education for the country's long-term development. Effective leadership in secondary schools is essential for improving teacher performance and, consequently, student outcomes. Educators have long been concerned about principals' effectiveness in carrying out these roles (Ozuruoke, Ordu & Abdulkarim, 2011).

Consequently, Yabo (2007) posited that leadership involves the ability to control, initiate, or set behavioral patterns among members by influencing, stimulating, or providing direction towards achieving organizational goals. While questions about leadership have long been a subject of assumption, scientific research on the topic did not begin until the twentieth century (Yukl, 2008). Despite this late start, leadership has a rich history that parallels the history of human organization. Leadership exists in all cultures, regardless of their economic or social structures.

Furthermore, leadership is an age-old concept; it remains complex and continues to be explored by researchers and scholars. Adeyemi (2013) defines a leader as someone who influences people to willingly strive towards achieving objectives. This concept can be broadened to include a leader's functional behaviors toward subordinates that facilitate the accomplishment of group goals. Chambers Dictionary of the 21st Century defines

leadership as the ability to lead others towards the successful attainment of organizational goals.

The pressures of globalization and social expectations are prompting principals to take the lead in instructional activities, such as setting goals, leading academic programs, and evaluating teachers' performance. As Smith et al. (2004) state, "modern thinking on facilitative instructional leadership requires school leaders to possess vision, quality, and values to transform their schools toward success." Furthermore, Townsend (2019) and Sutcliffe (2013) argue that school leaders must possess key qualities for successful leadership, including honesty, effective communication, knowledge, consistency, a visionary outlook, selflessness, courage, and willpower. School principals play a vital role in fostering successful education.

2.4.2 Elements of Effective Leadership

Effective leaders must acquire and maintain essential qualities to be effective in their leadership roles. Scholars have varying perspectives on these elements. Pamela, Murphy, and Helms (2012) described the most common indicators of effective leadership as including communication, modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, and empowering others:

a. **Communication**: A principal's primary responsibility is to communicate effectively and meaningfully with teachers, students, parents, and colleagues. Key areas for improvement include enhancing effectiveness and efficiency through decentralized educational planning and management, establishing transparent and productive systems, and promoting effective communication throughout the education system (MoE, 2008).

b. **Being Visionary and Inspiring a Shared Vision:** A clear vision is essential for aligning and inspiring group members. Without it, an organization lacks direction, leaving individuals uncertain and reliant on supervisors for guidance (Asefa, 2018). Effective leaders develop and endorse a school vision grounded in the best theories of teaching and learning (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). They also communicate that learning is the school's primary mission (Stronge, Richard & Catano, 2008).

c. **Model the Way:** Kouzes and Posner (2010) state that followers expect their leaders to be role models, demonstrating the behavior they wish to see in others and

acknowledging their mistakes. Keeping promises and admitting errors build trust in a leader's integrity and foster followers' confidence. Bonnici (2011) highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships, noting that principals should model strategies to resolve conflicts among teachers, students, and parents.

d. **Challenge the Process:** Highly effective leaders encourage teachers to question long-held beliefs about education and engage in meaningful discussions about policies and programs (McEwan, 2003). Kouzes and Posner (2010) assert that challenges help leaders discover their true potential. Reicher (2007) adds that effective leadership relies on a shared identity between leaders and followers, using that identity as a blueprint for action.

e. **Empower and Encourage Action:** Kouzes and Posner (2002) emphasize that successful leadership is determined by a leader's ability to foster relationships that enable people to achieve extraordinary results. Lezotte (2004) refers to the next generation of school leaders as those who must develop skills in cheerleading and coaching. Personal contact, recognition, and appreciation are critical but often neglected due to time constraints. Kouzes and Posner (2006) note that while tangible rewards may not yield increased commitment, demonstrating genuine concern and respect will.

f. **Human Resource Development:** is a process that employs developmental practices to enhance quality, productivity, and employee satisfaction. It is a complex process that is often poorly executed, frequently because leadership lacks focus. School leaders must support teachers' professional growth. Harris (2005) emphasizes that school leadership must build capacity by developing the school as a learning community. Furthermore, human resource development programs should be continuous and not treated as one-time tasks.

g. **Creating an Orderly, Conducive Environment:** School leaders play a crucial role in creating a sustainable and conducive school environment that promotes effective professional development for teachers and enhances student learning. Tigistu (2012) notes that school leaders have a specific responsibility to guide staff in developing policies to manage student behavior. Establishing an orderly, conducive environment matters for several reasons. Principals and other school leaders find it challenging to plan and implement activities in a chaotic setting. Therefore, leaders

must prepare and act on the school improvement plan while ensuring a relatively stable work environment.

Ubben and Hughes (1997) highlight two vital premises: i) learning occurs best in an orderly environment, and ii) the environment improves when staff behavior is orderly and self-controlled. Cooperation among the school community, effective student behavior management, and encouragement of leadership for high achievement are key indicators of a promising/conducive school environment.

2.4.3 Structures of Effective Leadership

Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2001) proposed five fundamental features that define the actions of an effective leader: *"change agency, teamwork, continuous improvement, trust-building, and the eradication of short-term goals".* And described as follows;

1. **Change Agency:** Kanter (2003) defines change agency as a leader's ability to stimulate organizational change. This involves analyzing the need for change, eliminating structures and routines that hinder progress, creating a shared vision and sense of urgency, implementing plans that facilitate change, and fostering open communication.

2. **Teamwork:** A key feature of total quality management (TQM) is the importance of teams within an organization. Huang (2009) describes teams as two or more individuals with complementary skills who collaborate toward a common, task-oriented goal. Team members are collectively accountable for achieving their objectives. Effective leaders not only establish teams but also ensure their viability by providing necessary resources and support.

3. **Continuous Improvement:** Derived from the Japanese term "kaizen," continuous improvement refers to the ongoing incremental enhancement of critical organizational aspects by all members. According to Schein (2010), a leader must invite and sustain continuous improvement by keeping organizational goals at the forefront and assessing effectiveness against them.

4. **Trust Building:** Trust-building involves creating a climate where both employers and employees perceive the organization as a "win-win" environment. Hahn, Olsson, Folke, and Johansson (2006) describe it as the process of establishing respect and instilling confidence in followers through leader integrity, honesty, and

openness. Leaders cultivate trust through their daily actions by understanding employee concerns, motivations, and the conditions necessary for optimal performance.

5. **Eradication of Short-Term Goals:** Deming refers to the elimination of traditional management by objectives (MBO) goals that focus on quotas, are highly numerical, and are short-term (Hahn et al., 2006). He criticized such goals for emphasizing short-term quantitative results. While Deming did not oppose specific goals, he advocated for those centered on processes and long-term perspectives. Effective leaders not only set criteria for goal setting but also actively participate in designing and implementing these goals.

2.4.4 Concepts of Effectiveness

Various scholars and researchers have conceptualized leadership effectiveness and its link to student achievement in different ways. To systematically describe school leadership effectiveness, this section explored definitions provided by early 21st-century researchers.

Effectiveness is defined in various ways. An effective school system that supports the positive actions of leaders and teachers can significantly reduce students' poor academic performance. Therefore, school leadership requires knowledge, preparation, training, and ongoing professional development to facilitate active student participation. Farr (2011) identified six leadership strategies that have proven successful in enhancing students' academic performance: setting ambitious goals, engaging students in their learning, purposeful planning, making necessary adjustments, continuous improvement, and relentless effort. Stumbo and McWalters (2010) noted that effective leadership fosters manageable and sustainable efforts when teachers and principals collaborate with students to achieve academic success.

Effective leadership develops through collaborative professional learning and aims for purposeful change in schools. All teachers can contribute to school improvement leadership but need opportunities to engage. Under challenging circumstances, leaders can succeed by building a strong school community, fostering relationships, and providing optimal teaching and learning opportunities. Harris argues that a single principal's exceptional practices alone cannot achieve success (Salahuddin, 2011). This study treats

the effectiveness of school leadership in relation to student achievement as a fundamental concept.

The positional leader is tasked with developing organizational procedures, fostering a positive cultural climate, and supporting all teachers in contributing their knowledge and skills to leadership, thereby building leadership capacity. The effectiveness of the school's operations depends on cooperation between these individuals and the principal (Ibukun, 2011). However, school leaders often find themselves overwhelmed by day-to-day responsibilities, leaving insufficient time to practice leadership effectively.

2.4.5 Effective school leadership

Leadership effectiveness of secondary school principals is a fundamental concept in this study. Mullan (2007:23) describes instructional leadership as the principal's responsibility for curriculum management, emphasizing that the principal must be a "master generalist" who understands the change processes affecting the entire school. Instructional leadership focuses on high student achievement, adequate resource allocation for learning improvement, effective organization and coordination, and maintaining positive human relations to foster collaboration and commitment among school members (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008).

School leadership is central to quality curriculum delivery and plays a crucial role in improving student performance (Naidoo, 2019; Maponya, 2020). Proper management of teaching and learning programs, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, and creating a conducive learning environment enhance the quality of education students receive (Maponya, 2020). To execute their leadership duties effectively, school leaders require comprehensive training to develop the necessary skills and knowledge (Naidoo, 2019). Research indicates that school leadership is critical in providing an effective educational system, making it the most significant factor contributing to improved student performance.

School leaders play an increasingly important role in promoting student achievement (John, 2006). A school system composed of various departments, teaching and non-teaching staff, and students requires effective educational leaders. These leaders must possess professional skills and competence across multiple dimensions, including educational vision, instructional leadership, assessment expertise, discipline, community

building, public relations, budgeting, facility management, and compliance with legal and policy frameworks.

In an era of heightened accountability, strong leadership is essential for school success. Historical standards, such as those from the Reading First initiative, emphasized the need for schools to monitor student progress and set high individual goals. Key factors identified in successful Reading First schools, despite challenging student populations, can be applied today to foster an open, supportive school environment where strong leadership is a shared responsibility among principals, coaches, and teachers. Research on effective school leadership highlights four key factors: organizational knowledge, data utilization, scheduling, and positive beliefs with high expectations.

Schools face increasing public scrutiny, and regional supervision monitors school management effectiveness, teacher performance, and student achievement (MoE, 2008, p. 11). Leadership cannot be divorced from the socio-political, cultural, historical, or ideological contexts in which it operates. School leaders face challenges in educating diverse student populations while responding to societal needs and remaining accountable for effective teaching and learning processes. Effective principals are visionary and clear about their mission, motivating teachers and fostering a collaborative community. Without effective leadership, schools are unlikely to achieve their articulated goals. Effective school leaders maximize the skills of all stakeholders to reach school goals efficiently.

Brooke (2017) noted that successful schools consistently demonstrate strong aspects in each of the four key factors of effective school leadership. These successes often begin with principals establishing a collaborative leadership approach. As a principal, you do not need all the answers; instead, you must ask the right questions and create an environment that empowers shared ownership of problems and solutions.

Mulford (2006) emphasizes that effective principal leadership provides individual support, values staff input, and promotes a trusting atmosphere. They create structures that encourage staff participation in decision-making by distributing leadership and fostering autonomy. Leaders must work toward consensus among staff and communicate this to students, teachers, and staff, providing a strong focus on school goals.

2.4.6 Key Dimensions to Effectiveness of Principal Leadership

Effectiveness is defined in various ways. According to Temesgen (2011), the effectiveness perspective focuses on whether actions remain appropriate in an increasingly demanding external environment. Effective school leaders prioritize personal interactions among teachers, parents, and students over bureaucracy and paperwork (Bonnici, 2011).

Effective leadership leads to higher performance, while ineffective leadership can cripple an organization. When leaders are effective, subordinates are motivated and strive to achieve organizational objectives. Ibukun (2011) notes that a school leader's effectiveness is measured by their ability to fulfill duties that reflect personal effectiveness. A school system's work effectiveness relies on mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation between the school head and subordinates. Leadership is crucial for achieving organizational goals; thus, effective leadership is essential for improving students' academic achievement (Bolden, 2003).

Different scholars interpret the concept of leadership in various ways. The study of leadership has intrigued humanity since ancient times (Bass, 1990). It allows aspiring leaders to gauge themselves against those who have attained greatness. Egwuonwu (2000) defines leadership as "the moral and intellectual ability to visualize and work for what is better for the organization and its employees." In contrast, Ade (2003) sees leadership as a social influence process where the leader seeks voluntary participation from subordinates to achieve organizational objectives.

Mullan (2007:18) describes curriculum leaders as actively working to advance schools by providing relevant learning programs that prepare students for future success and demonstrate results over time. According to Glatthorn (2000), curriculum leaders transcend routine tasks, aiming to maximize student learning through quality content. This raises the question of whether principals should manage and lead or simply lead and manage schools. Leadership inherently requires initiative, creativity, and innovation.

The perception of leadership is shifting from a bureaucratic model—where leaders direct and make decisions for others — to a more inclusive approach that emphasizes motivating and empowering followers (Oyetunyi, 2006). Dubrin & Oyetunyi (2006) define leadership as the ability to inspire confidence and support among followers to achieve organizational goals. This definition is particularly relevant for this study, as it emphasizes

change, inspiration, and motivation, key ingredients for school performance. The next section discusses leadership effectiveness and its elements.

In recent years, research has shifted from studying various leadership models to examining specific dimensions of principal leadership (Robinson & Gray, 2019; Shen et al., 2019). Researchers have made several attempts to identify specific dimensions of principal leadership associated with school effectiveness and student achievement. Robinson et al. (2008) proposed five dimensions of principal leadership:

> *"a) establishing goals and expectations; (b) strategic resource allocation; (c) planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and curriculum; (d) promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and (e) ensuring an orderly and supportive environment".*

The study of secondary school principals' leadership effectiveness and its potential contribution to student achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia, has garnered scholarly attention over the past two decades. A considerable body of literature addresses variables related to principal leadership effectiveness, leadership practices, and the challenges principals face regarding students' academic performance. However, none of these studies have provided definitive answers on how to improve student pass rates in EHEECE in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Scholars now argue that the lack of effective leadership is a critical issue in education. Leadership should include positional leaders while also encouraging others' leadership activities. Harris (2004) examines effective leadership essentials in schools facing challenges related to public examination achievement rates and socio-economic status. This study suggests that successful leadership requires a range of styles, as no single style suits all situations. Harris (2004) found that factors influencing success include the school's vision and values, distributed leadership, investment in staff development, relationship building, and community engagement. Successful leaders prioritize human needs over organizational demands, distribute leadership among teachers, and promote collaboration through investment in teacher development.

2.5 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN ETHIOPIA CONTEXT

The principalship in institutions like schools is one of the most influential administrative positions in pursuing school success. According to Ahmed (2006), the history of school leadership in Ethiopia was initially dominated by foreign principals. However, the development of Ethiopia's modern education system is closely tied to the history of its educational framework. Gurmu (2019:9) states that the emergence of school principalship in Ethiopia is fundamentally linked to Western education. A qualitative analysis of secondary sources, such as scholarly writings and historical documents, categorizes the evolution of the educational system and school leadership into several phases, as discussed below.

2.5.1 School Leadership Development

The principal holds one of the most influential administrative positions in the success of educational plans, particularly given the historical background of the principalship. The history of the Ethiopian education system traces its origins to the introduction of Christianity around the fourth century A.D., with schools established for the children of adherents (Ahmed, 2016).

Ethiopia has more than 80 nations, nationalities, and peoples. In most regional states and nationally, Amharic is the country's national working language, and it has its own alphabet. Berhanu (2022) notes that Ethiopia has its own alphabet, calendar, and traditional schooling, and is recognized for its rich historical civilization. Over a century ago, in 1908, Emperor Menelik II introduced a Western-oriented education system and opened the first school in Ethiopia (Gemechu et al., 2017, p. 2). However, the conservative church, which exerted significant influence over education, did not welcome modern schooling.

Researchers such as Kassaye (2005:106) declare that

> "…*the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has dominated traditional education historically, which dates back to the 4th century during the Aksumite kingdom of Ethiopia".*

The Western-style education system was formally introduced to Ethiopia in 1908 with the opening of Menilik Secondary School. Until 1943, the country had no government-owned high schools, and that year marked the establishment of the first high school, which

primarily served emigrants. According to Ahmed (2006), foreign principals dominated Ethiopia's early history of principalship. Some worried that this new education system could impose foreign religions and introduce ideas that might challenge the existing social structure (Tefera, 1996; Negash, 1996; Ahmad, 2013). The introduction of Islam in the 7th century also strengthened traditional education, as these institutions became centers for teaching reading and writing (Ahmad, 2013, p. 3). These educational institutions were crucial to the nation's cultural development. However, education in traditional Ethiopia was not accessible to both boys and girls; churches and mosques primarily provided religious education to indoctrinate their respective faiths (Tefera, 1996, p. 3). To address these concerns, the government hired teachers from the Egyptian Coptic Church, which shared similar religious beliefs (Semela, 2014, p. 2).

The Ethio-Italian War of 1935-1941, known as the 'Occupation Period,' severely hindered the growth of education; schools were closed, and intellectuals, already few, were killed. Semela (2014:2) stated that the already fragile educational system collapsed during this time. Even after the nation regained independence in 1942, foreign powers continued to influence the education system. Britain introduced its educational model as part of the liberation effort, resulting in a 4-4-4 system (four years of elementary school, followed by four years of intermediate school and four years of secondary school), (Tefera, 1996, p. 4).

2.5.2 School Principal Leadership in Modern Era

All government-owned schools established before and after the Italian occupation had expatriate principals from France, Britain, Sweden, Canada, Egypt, and India. After regaining independence in late 1941, the government prioritized education, leading to the opening of schools across the country. During this time, many teachers and principals were from foreign countries such as the UK, USA, Canada, Egypt, and India (ICDR, 1999).

However, in the early 1960s, it became evident that graduates with a B.A. degree in pedagogy were directly assigned to secondary schools. Career advancement for secondary school principals was typically reserved for those holding a first degree, preferably in educational management, along with experience as a unit leader, department head, or teacher. The Ministry of Education (MoE) job description issued in 1989 also emphasized sufficient work experience in secondary school administration and

supervision. Currently, the MoE uses various criteria to select school principals, particularly for preparatory schools, which require candidates to hold an M.A. in Educational Planning and Management (EDPM).

The main objective of this program is to maximize student learning outcomes by improving conditions that impact them. As mentioned earlier, the program focuses on four key areas: enhancing teaching and learning, creating a conducive learning environment, improving school leadership, and increasing community participation in school affairs. The objectives outlined in the manual align with dimensions of instructional leadership (MoE, 2007). The Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994:29-30) states that educational management should be democratic, professional, efficient, coordinated, and effective, with teacher management organized based on professional principles.

According to the MoE, (2002), prior to 1962, expatriate principals were assigned to elementary and secondary schools across various provinces of Ethiopia during the 1930s and 1940s, with Indian expatriates often taking these roles due to their experience. In 1964, a turning point occurred as Ethiopians began to replace expatriates in principalship positions. As Teshome and Ahmed (2006) note, this new phase began with supervising principals responsible not only for individual schools but also for the broader educational system in their communities.

Ethiopian school heads were assigned to elementary schools without competitive selection. After 1960, senior MoE officials appointed Ethiopian graduates with a B.A. or B.Sc. degree in any field as principals, primarily based on educational level and work experience (MoE, 2002). In the early 1960s, graduates with B.A. degrees in pedagogy were directly assigned to secondary schools. Career structure promotion advertisements from 1973 to 1976 indicated that secondary school principals were typically required to hold a first degree, preferably in educational administration (EdAd). Additionally, teachers with experience as unit leaders or department heads were considered for principalship. The job description issued by the MoE in 1989 specified that secondary school principals should possess a first degree in school administration and supervision, along with sufficient work experience.

In the early development of modern education in Ethiopia, both teachers and curricula were imported without considering the nation's needs, culture, or local realities. Teachers were tasked with ensuring students met competency levels, comprehended the material,

and adapted to foreign curricula and national exams (Gemechu et al., 2017: 2). This emphasis on education led to the establishment of numerous schools and higher education institutions, with the primary goal of producing qualified professionals to serve in various government administrative roles (Ahmad, 2013: 4).

Regarding teacher preparation, the policy mandates that instructors from kindergarten through higher education must hold the requisite teaching credentials and have competency in instructional media, achieved through pre-service and in-service training (FDRE-MoE, 1994, pp. 20-21)

Maponya (2020) described effective principals' leadership practices as central to instructional delivery and as playing a crucial role in motivating educators to meet expected standards, thereby enhancing student performance. Instructional leaders significantly influence academic achievement by encouraging educators to fulfill their instructional responsibilities. That is when principals understand their instructional duties, they are better positioned to enact their leadership roles effectively. This also aligns with Naidoo's (2019) recommendation for a minimum entry qualification for principals, ensuring that prospective leaders possess the necessary knowledge and skills. This preparation enables them to execute their duties effectively, resulting in improved students' academic achievement.

2.5.3 Principalship in Current Ethiopian Education Policy Framework

Ethiopia enacted a new educational policy in 2018 through the *"Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30)",* emphasizing competence, access to education, transformation, equity, and innovation (Melese et al., 2019). This policy standardized the high school education system and introduced a uniform syllabus for both government and private schools, excluding community schools. However, all regions were allowed to localize textbooks and use ethnic languages as mediums of instruction (Melese et al., 2019; UNESCO & IBE, 2011). Although the policy is theoretically appealing, a study criticized its practicality (Oumer et al., 2018). The 2015 Education for All report indicated that there is only one high school for every 15 elementary schools (Ahmed et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, students in rural areas must travel long distances to access high school education.

The Government of Ethiopia prioritizes improving education quality at all levels. To address this, the Ministry of Education (MoE) developed the General Education Quality

Improvement Package (GEQIP), which comprises six programs. The Education and Training Policy (1994) emphasizes education quality, stating that “educational management will be decentralized to create the necessary conditions to expand, enrich, and improve the relevance, quality, accessibility, and equity of education and training.” The Growth and Transformation Plan of Ethiopia (GTPE) also prioritizes improving and ensuring the quality and efficiency of education at all levels. Education quality depends on competent, committed school principals, who provide professional leadership and management. Principals set the vision and ensure the school is organized to meet its goals. Recognizing this, the Ministry of Education has established standards for school principals to ensure they continually strive to meet these expectations.

Additionally, the quality of high school education is a critical issue in Ethiopia’s curriculum. According to Ahmed et al. (2019), increased student enrolment does not guarantee effective teaching and learning, particularly in rural areas, because educational resources are unevenly distributed. Educational challenges are not solely the responsibility of local governments; rather, they have become pressing issues on national policy agendas (Henig, 2013; Galey, 2015). Researchers argue that current educational policies and approaches need revisiting, as the curriculum's relevance and accessibility are in question (Melese et al., 2019). This study explores the effectiveness of principals in supporting students’ academic achievement in SNRS secondary schools in Ethiopia in relation to EHEECE.

An effective leader develops realistic strategies, supports subordinates, and rewards their dedication (Northouse, 2013). Leaders focused on social transformation concentrate on day-to-day activities and seek solutions to emerging issues. Accountable leaders feel responsible for enhancing students’ academic achievement and are committed to exploring innovative approaches and policies to address challenges at both regional and national levels.

2.5 ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM AND THE CURRENT REFORMS

The literature widely acknowledges education as an essential element of national development (UNESCO, 2005). Another related study states that education is a socially organized and regulated process of continuously transferring socially significant experience from previous generations to the next. The main way to receive an education is to take a course of training in the system of educational institutions (Lazarev, 2002).

In the Ethiopian context, education is also defined as a process by which a person transmits his/her experiences, new findings, and values accumulated over the years, in his/her struggle for survival and development, through generations. Education enables individuals and society to participate fully in the development process by acquiring knowledge, ability, skills, and attitudes (MoE, 1994). Moreover, education, as a key factor in human development, is a high priority in the government's overall development agenda (MoE, 2015).

A high-quality education system is needed for development, industrialization, democratization, and security today and tomorrow. It is a key factor in human development (Townsend, 2007). In line with these global and national perspectives, the federal government of Ethiopia has been making sustained efforts to drive socio-economic development by formulating policies, strategies, and sector development programs. This is a high priority for the government, which means it needs an appropriate direction to set a new process in motion and change the current alarming situation of low education quality in Ethiopia (MoE, 2010).

Ethiopia's current education system consists of four levels. These are: Primary School (Grades 1-6), Middle School (Grades 7-8), and Secondary School (Grades 9-12). As outlined in the Education and Training Roadmap of Ethiopia (2019) and according to the General Education new curriculum framework:

> *"Primary education has six years' duration, and Middle school has two years, offering basic and general primary education to prepare students for further general secondary education and training, and secondary education has four years' duration. Also, Grades 9 and 10 are the levels at which General Courses will be given to all students, whereas starting in Grade 11, students are able to choose either the Natural or Social Science Stream for their future learning."*

Moreover, the MoE Roadmap (2019) stated: "Students take a national exam (Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination) at completion of Grade 12, which certifies completion of secondary general education, and selects students who qualify for higher education (colleges or university) level of education. The Natural Science stream provides five CTEs (Career and Technical Education), and the Social Science stream provides three CTEs, in which students graduate with full technical skills in their chosen CTE. This level of education is quite pivotal in ensuring the continuity and sustainability

of all government efforts, and hence the government continues to implement different strategies to address the numerous challenges associated with the provision of quality and inclusive education, since the level is the entry point to higher education and for future careers" MoE, (2019).

2.5.1 Grade Twelve (12) Completion Examination

Starting in 2012 E.C. (2019/20), the country has had only one national examination: the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE), given at Grade 12 completion. While the new education roadmap has terminated the Grade 10 national examination, a regional examination continues to be given at Grade 8 throughout the country.

2.6 THE BEST PRACTICES OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

For effective school leadership, MoE, in its National Professional Standard for Principals (2013:3), identified "core practices" or "basics" and states: *"Research done on school improvement revealed that the most effective principals have a clear vision of how the school could serve its students; had aligned resources and priorities with the vision; and could engage other key players, within and outside the school, in achieving the goals embedded in the vision". The standard guideline* identified three school principal domains and five competencies that principals should know when decisions are required and can use available evidence and information to support, inform, and communicate their decisions.

Moreover, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006:18) expressed that successful school leadership is characterized by four general central practices, namely, *'setting directions', 'developing people', 'developing school' and 'teaching-learning program management'.* Moreover, Leithwood et al. (2006:35) further added that core practices have a critical and considerable effect on institutional aims. This means school principals need to be competent and willing to adopt these core practices and implement them as effective instructional leadership practices. Each core practice for successful school leadership would be elaborated as follows.

The standard guideline identified the three school principal domains and five competencies: "Defining and communicating school community with shared vision and goals", "Leading and managing the curriculum and teaching-learning programs", "Leading

and managing teachers' capacity development opportunities", "Leading and managing the school development and engaging the community", "Allocating resources and managing school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment".

2.7 FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS

Schools, as learning organizations, deserve effective leadership. The roles and responsibilities of school leaders often change because of ongoing reforms, creating continuous challenges. Ambiguities about what constitutes leadership make it difficult to define the boundaries of a leader's work (Mayrowetz, 2008). Depending on the school context and personal characteristics, leaders may work independently or collaboratively to achieve their goals.

Robbins and Judge (2013: 277) define "functions" as a set of expected behavior patterns associated with someone holding a specific position in a social unit, such as a school. This section describes principals' leadership functions internationally by presenting the roles of school principals in selected countries. The second part of the literature review discusses principals' functions and responsibilities in Ethiopia.

According to Tekamura (2008) and Nsubunga (2008: 60), school principals manage various professional tasks, including: setting achievable educational objectives, seizing new opportunities, adapting to change, maintaining a committed staff, managing effective teams, developing communication systems, allocating and managing resources, participating effectively, managing time, and evaluating the school curriculum.

Furthermore, Everard (2004: 227) notes that inspectors have become more skilled at evaluating the quality of management and leadership in schools using various criteria. They look for clear vision, sense of purpose, high aspirations, strategic planning, and the ability to inspire and motivate staff and students. Effective leadership also involves building strong teams and demonstrating knowledgeable, innovative leadership in teaching and curriculum, along with a commitment to an equitable and inclusive school environment.

According to Adedoyin (2013); Yohannes (2023:17), important elements of management functions include the principal as a learner, planner, visionary, politician, advocate, organizational developer, manager, leader, and agent of change. While these

characteristics may be described in different terms—such as planning, organizing, directing, supervising, controlling, staffing, communicating, motivating, and evaluating—they all emphasize the need for effective leadership to enhance teaching and maximize student academic achievement (Yohannes, 2023, p. 17).

The literature on principals' roles across countries reveals common themes. Despite variations in cultural orientation, political views, and developmental needs, principals in the six reviewed countries require training and orientation in their leadership roles. The literature suggests that principals possess a range of competencies, including capacity and team building, to improve educational quality. However, these roles are just a few among the many responsibilities of school leaders worldwide. In the following section, I present the roles of school principals in Ethiopia.

2.7.1 Functions of the School Principal Leadership: An International Perspective

School principals typically perform three broad, interchangeable functions: manager, leader, and administrator. According to Naidoo (2019:1), principals as managers focus on supervising and controlling individuals, materials, and financial resources. As leaders, they create the school's vision and emphasize progress and enhancement. Kowalski (2010:23) adds that principals' administrative responsibilities involve handling daily operational issues while balancing leadership and management activities.

DeMatthews (2014:194) and Tingle, Corrales, & Peters (2019:8) describe the principal's leadership role as constantly shifting between instructional/pedagogical and transactional leadership, while also embodying aspects of transformational leadership. In the 21st century, principals undertake diverse roles, and their responsibilities during complex and uncertain times are crucial (Bekere, 2023, p. 37). Daily routines often include administrative tasks such as preparing timetables, reporting, fostering relationships with parents and the community, and resolving unexpected conflicts among students and teachers.

Moreover, Grant, Gardner, Kajee, Moodley, and Somaroo (2010) and Bekere (2023) emphasize that building a culture of accountability, mutual trust, and respect between school leaders and teachers is essential to a principal's role. This perspective highlights that school principals engage in managerial, leadership, and administrative functions.

They can embody transactional, instructional, and transformational leadership styles. This diverse and multifaceted role makes the position of school leaders particularly challenging.

2.7.2 Ethiopia School Principal Leadership Functions

School leaders' roles and responsibilities frequently change due to ongoing reforms, creating constant challenges in their work. Given the ambiguity around activities that can be classified as leadership, defining the boundaries of effective leadership is difficult (Mayrowetz, 2008). Depending on the specific school context and individual characteristics, leaders can work independently or collaboratively to achieve their objectives. As emphasized throughout this study, principals play a crucial role as school leaders, influencing various functions through their behavior, personal characteristics, and biases. Researchers have attempted to define the traits that contribute to a successful leadership scheme (Hughes, 1999).

While numerous characteristics have been identified, notable similarities remain. Adedoyin (2013) and Yohannes (2023:17) state that the following elements of management functions are commonly recognized as important: the principal as a learner, planner, visionary, politician, advocate, organizational developer, manager, leader, and agent of change. Although described differently, these characteristics collectively demonstrate the need for effective leadership to enhance teaching and maximize student academic achievement.

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2002, p. 31), the principal's major functions are categorized into nine areas: planning, organizing, leading, coordinating, following and controlling, conducting research, appraising teachers, report writing, and other activities. Within these areas, secondary school principals engage in approximately sixty-three activities related to both administrative and teaching-learning aspects.

The MoE (2002: 33) guidelines outline twenty-two roles for school leaders, with key responsibilities including: preparing yearly plans and implementing approved budgets, motivating teachers and heads of departments (HoDs) to align their annual plans with school and national goals, organizing training for teachers on innovative teaching methods and professional development, and coordinating extracurricular activities with parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs) both in and out of school. Because

instructional and pedagogical work is a daily activity, school leaders must consistently fulfill their responsibilities.

In Ethiopia, principals are expected to serve as instructional and pedagogical leaders. With the introduction of the Post Graduate Diploma in School Leadership in 2013, the MoE developed a framework outlining the roles and professional standards expected of principals. Thus, (EFDR- MoE, 2013: 11-14) approved five domains with competencies that serve as a foundation for the preparation, qualifications, licensing, and professional development of principals. These competencies are categorized under three major domains: school vision and community leadership, instructional leadership, and administrative leadership, which will be discussed in the following subsections.

2.7.2.1 Setting School Vision and Community Leadership Function

According to the MoE (2013:12), the first domain includes two sub-competencies: "leading and facilitating a vision of learning" and "developing and managing school-community relations." In relation to leading and facilitating a vision of learning, principals are expected to assist in articulating and understanding a shared vision for continuous school improvement. They should guide the process of setting, monitoring, and achieving specific and challenging goals that reflect high expectations for all students and staff. Additionally, they manage the change process for ongoing improvement and anticipate, analyze, and respond to educational advancements that affect school dynamics and atmosphere.

Furthermore, MoE (2013) elaborates that, in developing and managing school-community relations, principals are expected to connect the school with the community, engage parents and community members in enhancing student education, use community resources to promote student learning, and establish expectations for culturally responsive activities that recognize and value diversity.

2.7.2.2 Instructional Leadership Function

As stated in MoE (2013:12), the second main domain is instructional leadership. Principals, as instructional leaders, play a crucial role in directly influencing student academic achievement. For example, Hallinger (2011b:126) describes this as an effort to understand how school leadership, particularly principals', impacts student learning. Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (1999:8) emphasize that a principal's primary focus as

an instructional leader is on teachers' conduct as they engage in activities aimed at promoting student development.

In this context, MoE (2013:13) identifies two sub-competencies under this domain: "guiding and supervising instruction" and "guiding and developing individuals and teams." The MoE further outlines that, in relation to guiding and supervising instruction, principals are expected to ensure that the subjects taught align with national standards, implement effective teaching methods that address all students' needs—including those who are exceptional or at risk to promote high educational standards for all students, engage in and support meaningful research, facilitate the effective use of data by staff, and supervise and evaluate the quality of instructional activities.

Yimer (2017:17) states:

> *"School leaders play a facilitative role in the functioning and advancement of the curriculum. They are involved in managing learning and teaching, specifically as implementers of courses, where they focus on fostering greater teacher engagement in the curriculum implementation within the school."*

This implies that school leaders are responsible for providing guidance and direction, ensuring that teachers have the necessary teaching and learning tools to fulfill their duties. Effective operations are unlikely without school leaders' support. Additionally, the MoE (2013:13) outlines criteria principals are expected to meet in leading and developing individuals and teams. Under these sub-competencies, principals must identify and prioritize teachers' professional growth needs; develop individuals and teams; evaluate and assess classroom learning; create networks to support individuals and teams; and help academic staff plan and implement research-based professional development.

2.7.2.3 Administrative Leadership Function

The third and final domain for principals in secondary schools pertains to their administrative leadership role. Principals manage daily activities and the school environment by effectively aligning resources with goals and vision. According to MoE (2013), under the domain of principals as administrative leaders, one key competence is leading and managing school operations and resources. In this capacity, principals are expected to: ensure a safe school environment; create a supportive learning atmosphere that addresses the physical and intellectual needs of all students and teachers; mobilize,

allocate, and utilize resources, including technology, to enhance learning; establish policies and procedures that support education; uphold and promote a strong professional code of ethics; embrace diversity within the school community; and transparently manage school resources efficiently and effectively.

In conclusion, secondary school leaders in Ethiopia have diverse and numerous roles and functions. However, the Ministry of Education has categorized these competencies into three major areas: developing school vision and community leadership, serving as instructional leaders, and fulfilling administrative leadership roles. Therefore, principals are expected to implement each competence effectively, as outlined by the MoE, to enhance student academic achievement and overall school performance.

2.7.3 The Models for School Performance

DeCenzo and Robbins (1998) examine performance in relation to effectiveness and efficiency. They define effectiveness as goal accomplishment. For instance, a principal who revitalizes a struggling school and improves its performance can be considered an effective leader. Efficiency, on the other hand, evaluates the ratio of inputs consumed to the outputs achieved. The greater the output for a given input is the more efficient the operation.

In a school context, a principal who provides quality education to students from low socio-economic backgrounds, despite limited resources, can be viewed as an efficient leader if those students qualify for the next level of education. In this case, performance is assessed in terms of productivity (DeCenzo & Robbins, 1998). Additionally, productivity, measured by both efficiency and effectiveness, can also describe an employee who not only performs well but also minimizes problems for the organization by being punctual, maintaining good attendance, and reducing losses. In summary, satisfactory performance implies a combination of many factors, encompassing both efficiency and effectiveness.

Defining educational performance is challenging yet essential. It is not limited to academic achievement; it also includes the social and emotional dimensions of a child's overall development and the school's role in the community (Genck, 1983).

2.8 FACTORS AFFECTING ENACTMENT OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SNRS, ETHIOPIA

2.8.1 Introduction

This section discusses the factors affecting the effectiveness of secondary school principals' leadership functions in improving students' academic achievement on the EHEECE in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. It also outlines initiatives introduced by the EFDR government to enhance academic performance through quality teaching and learning, as well as the current challenges arising from these initiatives and principals' roles within the modern education system.

This study examines the initiatives and functions of principal leadership in the modern secondary education system to better understand the root causes affecting the effectiveness of these leadership roles and efforts to improve student achievement through quality education. The factors discussed include principal leadership functions, the national policy framework, school funding, teachers' unions, the appointment of school principals to leadership positions, and school integration.

2.9 THE RESEARCH GAP

The literature review indicates that students' academic achievement in the EHEECE of SNRS, Ethiopia, continues to deteriorate, and schools face increasing challenges. It highlights that certain research topics, particularly in education leadership and management, have not been extensively explored. Additionally, much of the existing literature is based on a limited number of case studies. Consequently, further research is needed on specific topics, such as the SNRS education system and the 50% pass mark requirement. This pass mark is relatively low compared to other countries that set higher standards.

Further investigation is needed to assess the effectiveness of instructional leadership on students' academic achievement in government secondary schools. This proposed study will focus on a case study of twenty-two (22) secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia.

2.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter reviews existing literature and outlines four theoretical frameworks supporting this study. This literature review draws insights from various sources and

philosophies related to the research topic, specifically the effectiveness of leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools. It also guides the reader through the topic, focusing on a case study of selected secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. Additionally, it presents a synthesis of the literature and the identified research gaps.

CHAPTER THREE

3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two presented relevant literature on the factors that influence the effectiveness of principals' instructional leadership in secondary schools and students' academic achievement in Ethiopia, particularly in SNRS secondary schools. This chapter briefly addressed the actors involved in leadership effectiveness and improving student achievement, drawing on a range of theories to develop the theoretical framework guiding this study.

In Chapter Three, I develop the theoretical framework, which serves as a guiding compass for the research. I explain the importance of frameworks in a study. Next, it explores and defines the concepts of theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework. In this chapter, I clarify the distinction between a theoretical framework and a conceptual framework and justify the selection of the theoretical framework used in this study. It also discusses the role and purpose of the theoretical framework in research, followed by an examination of the 'Leadership-for-Learning' Model as the theoretical framework supporting this study.

Research is guided by both theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This section briefly discusses why these frameworks are necessary. This study uses four theories—transactional leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and situational leadership. I then summarize definitions related to leadership styles, types, theories, and their significance in supporting this research.

Next, I define a theory and discuss the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, highlighting their differences. In the final section, I explain the purpose of the theoretical framework in this study, particularly in conceptualizing variables related to the effectiveness of school principals' leadership and its impact on students' achievement in the EHEECE in SNRS, Ethiopia.

The theoretical framework is developed from existing theories, starting with a definition of theory to provide context for how the framework links to theory and its importance in the study. Moreover, the theoretical framework consists of theories articulated by experts in the field and serves as a guide or roadmap for conducting research. It is a subsection of

the overall research project and is interconnected with all other sections. In contrast, the conceptual framework summarizes all concepts, ideas, and constructs related to the problem under study.

3.2 BACKGROUND TO A THEORY

According to Adom, Hussein, and Joe (2018), a theory is a statement that explains how the world operates and often clarifies relationships between different phenomena. A theoretical framework, by contrast, guides and supports research. In this sense, theory provides a perspective for observing and understanding things, conducting research (including methodologies, methods, and validation processes), and setting research priorities and determining what to study and how. It also represents a broad set of principles that apply beyond specific cases, situations, phenomena, or observations. Therefore, theories form the basis for understanding key relationships across various fields (Lussier & Achua, 2016). Consequently, a theoretical framework helps select, categorize, and organize ideas, processes, and concepts. Hence, all research should be informed by both theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Kivunji (2018:45) defines theory as a collection of interconnected constructs, definitions, and propositions that provide a systematic understanding of phenomena by specifying relationships among variables, with the goal of explaining and predicting these phenomena. Similarly, Gabriel (2008) describes theory as an abstract generalization or a set of ideas that systematically explain and predict relationships between phenomena. This definition implies that theory aims to explain and forecast events, situations, and phenomena by illustrating the relationships among variables (Glanz, 2008).

3.3 REASONS WHY FRAMEWORKS ARE NEEDED FOR THE STUDY

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks guide research. This section briefly outlines why they are necessary for this study. It begins by defining theory, then discusses theoretical and conceptual frameworks and their differences. Finally, it highlights the theoretical framework's role in this research. These frameworks chart the course for research and function like a map to maintain coherence during empirical investigation. This study briefly addresses the importance and purpose of these frameworks. Next, this study will define theory and discuss theoretical and conceptual frameworks and how they differ.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks establish the direction of the research. Both guide and steer the study, much like a blueprint that provides instructions for constructing a building (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Mbuisa, 2022). As Kivunji (2018) notes, these frameworks clarify the research path, acting like a compass that directs travelers. Without solid frameworks, conducting research is like a traveler seeking directions without guidance. Furthermore, Mensah et al. (2020) explain that the main purpose of theoretical and conceptual frameworks is to direct researchers toward the concepts and theories that will support and validate their research. Additionally, these frameworks help readers understand the researcher's assumptions about the phenomenon under study and determine the researcher's academic position. They also enable readers to critically evaluate the research's significance and purpose, as well as engage with relevant scholarship.

Larsen and Adu (2022:84) state that.

> *"… without a guiding lens of theoretical framework or hermeneutics of suspicion that can serve as a lens, the researcher may unwittingly end up applying a 'folk-psychological' frame of reference when trying to analyze the data and convey the research findings".*

Drilling (2018) explains that theoretical and conceptual frameworks differ in scale: the theoretical framework encompasses broader ideas, while the conceptual framework focuses on specific concepts within that larger context. A theoretical framework may include many ideas that are not directly explored in the paper or experiment it supports. However, all components of the conceptual framework are integral to the research process. Additionally, the theoretical framework can outline which ideas are excluded from the conceptual framework, while also linking the two by incorporating these ideas to enhance the overall research.

Based on this understanding, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks are defined and explained as follows. This discussion will now focus on the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework is developed from existing theories, and the following section begins by defining theory to provide a foundation for understanding how the theoretical framework is linked to theory. Importantly, a theoretical framework connects all aspects of the research by justifying relevant and specific theories that explain the study's purpose, clarifying the problem statement and related research questions, guiding the

literature review, determining the methodology, and directing data analysis and interpretation (Mbuisa, 2023).

3.4 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

3.4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in previous sections, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks outline the research path and firmly ground it in theoretical constructs (Adom, Hussein, and Agyem, 2018). Accordingly, these frameworks aim to make research findings more meaningful and acceptable within the field's theoretical constructs, ensuring generalizability. They help stimulate research and extend knowledge by providing direction and impetus to the inquiry, enhancing the study's pragmatism and rigor.

In this research, the investigator is guided by both theoretical and conceptual frameworks. The primary goal is to examine variables related to principals' leadership effectiveness and their contribution to students' academic achievement on the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) in government secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two casts a wide net to capture relevant theories that inform the theoretical framework guiding this study. Therefore, this chapter focuses on developing the theoretical framework, which will serve as a compass to guide the study. In this chapter, I begin by explaining the need for research frameworks.

3.4.2 The Difference between Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

As Avitch et al. (2017) and Mbuisa (2023) note, a key difference between a conceptual framework and a theoretical framework lies in how they are developed. A theoretical framework originates from established theories developed by experts in the relevant field, whereas a conceptual framework is formulated by the researcher based on their understanding of the research issue and the interrelationships among variables (Collins et al., 2018). Furthermore, Mensah et al. (2020) clarify that a conceptual framework reflects the researcher's individual ideas or a constructed model for examining the research issue, while a theoretical framework relies on established theories that the researcher may choose to evaluate in a new context.

A conceptual framework results from thoughtfully organizing concepts relevant to the issue being investigated, while a theoretical framework is built on validated theories

acknowledged as credible within academic discourse (Kivunji, 2018). In essence, a conceptual framework arises from concepts, while a theoretical framework is built upon theories (Ravitch et al., 2017; Mbuisa, 2023). Although a theoretical framework is shaped by well-crafted, tested, and acknowledged theories that provide a broad interpretation of relationships between variables, a conceptual framework proposes responses to specific research challenges by detailing the inputs, processes, and outcomes involved in the overall study (Mensah et al., 2020). The subsequent subsections will explore the definitions, justifications, and significance of both frameworks. Moreover, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the overarching concepts elaborated in the literature review.

3.4.3 Theoretical Framework

Generally, any research project should be framed by both theoretical and conceptual frameworks. This section illustrates the theoretical framework for this investigation. As per Lussier and Achua (2016), theories provide an essential foundation for knowledge and understanding across various domains.

Similarly, Delahunty and Riordain (2022) state that:

> *"Theoretical and conceptual frameworks reveal the researchers' epistemological paradigm, provide clarity regarding variables and concepts, and tell a clear methodological approach to the study".*

Moreover, as Morrison et al. (2018:70-71) state, a theory provides a framework for understanding phenomena, guiding research methodologies, and setting research agendas—essentially defining what should be studied and how. It consists of general principles that are independent of specific cases or observations.

Theoretical frameworks help select, classify, and organize ideas, processes, and concepts. According to Chikwuedo and Uko-Aviomoh (2015:99) and Mbuisa (2023), a theoretical framework applies a theory or set of concepts to explain an event or illuminate a particular phenomenon or research problem.

Essentially, a theoretical framework reveals the researcher's epistemological paradigm, clarifies variables and concepts, and outlines a clear methodological approach to the study (Kivunja, 2018). From this definition, three key points emerge: First, a theory consists of interrelated, well-defined constructs. Second, these constructs provide a systematic view of the phenomena, events, or situations being studied. Finally, a theory

offers systematic explanations of how these phenomena are interrelated, showing the relationships between variables. In essence, a theory is a generalized statement that provides systematic explanations and predictions about relationships among phenomena. This underscores the centrality of theory in research, as research aims to discover and develop knowledge guided by a chosen theoretical framework.

Given this context, it is vital to emphasize what a theoretical framework entails. Scholars highlight its importance in providing a structure that helps researchers collect and analyze data, making findings more meaningful and acceptable to experts in the field. It helps researchers identify the data they need to collect and what to focus on during their investigation.

According to Bush (2011), educational leadership can be viewed as a process of influence grounded in clear beliefs and values that leads to a "vision" for the school. Leaders articulate this vision and seek the school community's commitment to improve outcomes for students and stakeholders. Thus, this study's theoretical framework is based on leadership practices. Leadership styles often involve corrective measures, including constructive criticism and negative reinforcement. Leaders engage in active management, intervening when standards are not met or problems arise (Suleiman, 2015). Ultimately, a theoretical framework serves as the foundation for research.

Furthermore, Suleiman argues that school principals approach followers with an exchange mentality, offering rewards for well-done work. This leadership style involves bargaining and negotiating resources while being persuasive to achieve higher academic outcomes for students. These leadership styles and their interactions significantly influence student academic achievement, particularly in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) at the completion of secondary education (Grade 12).

3.4.3.1 Justification for Selecting the Theoretical Framework

From the discussions on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, it can be concluded that the conceptual framework serves as the master plan for the entire research project, while the theoretical framework is a subset of the conceptual framework (Ravitch et al., 2017; Collins et al., 2018; Kivunji, 2018; Mensah et al., 2020; Mbuisa, 2023). Therefore, this study selected a theoretical framework because it meets the requirements of this research project.

3.4.3.2 Integrative Leadership Style as Theoretical Framework

To clarify the integrative leadership model or style, it is crucial to define what integrative leadership entails. According to Fernandez, Cho, and Perry (2010:310), an integrative leadership style amalgamates multiple leadership roles by synchronizing the efforts of workers and leaders across various levels. This style encompasses elements such as responsibilities, relationships, transformation, diversity, and integrity. Integrative leadership effectively merges one or more leadership roles with employee engagement to reach desired results. Marks and Printy (2003) first proposed this model, which combines transformational and instructional models, as Hallinger (2007) further explains.

Hallinger (2007:4) notes that instructional and transformational leadership models share the objective of cultivating a unified sense of purpose. This encompasses defining the school mission in the instructional leadership framework, establishing high expectations for student achievement, promoting a positive school culture, coordinating activities among stakeholders, exemplifying desired values, and fostering a sense of ownership among educators. Similarly, Marks and Printy (2003:393) highlight the synergistic influence of leadership in enhancing teachers' ability to boost student achievement and overall school performance through collaborative, shared leadership among stakeholders.

Therefore, the principal aims to nurture unity and interconnectedness within the educational institution, ensuring that teachers, students, and all relevant stakeholders have fulfilling experiences that contribute to enhanced school performance and improved academic achievement in the EHEECE. This research problem is rooted in instructional leadership theories developed by school leadership specialists. This study aims to further test these theories, initially formulated in Western contexts, within South African township schools.

The previously discussed theoretical framework emphasizes the importance of testing existing theories, making it well suited to guide this investigation. The next section will discuss the purpose and significance of the theoretical framework. From this angle, a theoretical framework provides the foundation that allows the researcher to articulate and correlate the study with the research problem or phenomenon being examined. As mentioned by Mensah et al. (2020), a theoretical framework is anchored in well-designed, tested, and acknowledged theories, which present a broad depiction of the relationships

among the involved variables, while a conceptual framework offers solutions to defined research questions by outlining the inputs, processes, and outputs of the entire investigation.

3.4.5 The Importance of the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework's primary role in this research is to guide the researcher throughout the entire process. Mensah et al. (2020) compare the theoretical framework to a travel itinerary that guides the researcher through the study. It sets the boundaries for the research and ensures adherence to established theories, thus enhancing the credibility, validity, transferability, generalizability, dependability, and scholarly nature of the findings. The theoretical framework is vital because it highlights the study's significance and assures readers that the research is grounded in credible literature from field experts (Kivunja, 2018). This framework offers a shared viewpoint that substantiates the research findings in relation to the problem under investigation.

Chikwuedo et al. (2015) emphasize that the theoretical framework dictates the research methodology and clarifies the research results. It helps select research designs and supports developing the data analysis plan needed to discuss and present the findings. By restricting the analysis within the defined framework, the theoretical framework improves the focus and clarity of data interpretation. Additionally, a theoretical framework encompasses all facets of the research, including justifying relevant theories, clarifying the problem statement and related research inquiries, guiding the literature review, determining the methodology, and directing data analysis and interpretation.

Kivunja (2018) describes the theoretical framework as a lens through which the researcher evaluates data, conducts analysis, discusses findings, and draws conclusions. It provides foundational support for the research findings and legitimizes them within the academic sphere. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to validate the use of both in this study.

From the context of the above discussions, and as Yahya (2015) states:

> "…*a leadership style that occurs when leaders intervene to make some correction usually involves corrective criticism and negative reinforcement. The leader engaged in active management and intervened when followers have not met*

standards, or problems arise." This study's theoretical framework is based on principal-led leadership practices.

Thus, this encourages exchanges such as offering awards or honoraria for effective practices; this leadership style involves negotiation and persuasion with employees to achieve better academic outcomes for students. These leadership styles and/or types interact to support effective leadership practices, resulting in strong academic performance for students in their final year of EHEECE.

The principal strives for unity and interconnectivity in the educational environment, ensuring that teachers, students, and all stakeholders involved have fulfilling experiences and rewards. This concept is adapted and modified from Armstrong (2001) & Mullins (2002); Yahiya (2015). These concepts may be visually represented in Figure 3.1. Consequently, the theoretical framework consists of theories articulated by field experts and serves as a guiding roadmap for the researcher throughout the study. It forms a subsection of the entire research project and is interconnected with all other sections. In contrast, the conceptual framework condenses the concepts, ideas, and constructs pertinent to the research issue (see Figure 3.1). The theoretical framework consists of theories articulated by field experts and serves as a guiding roadmap for the researcher throughout the study.

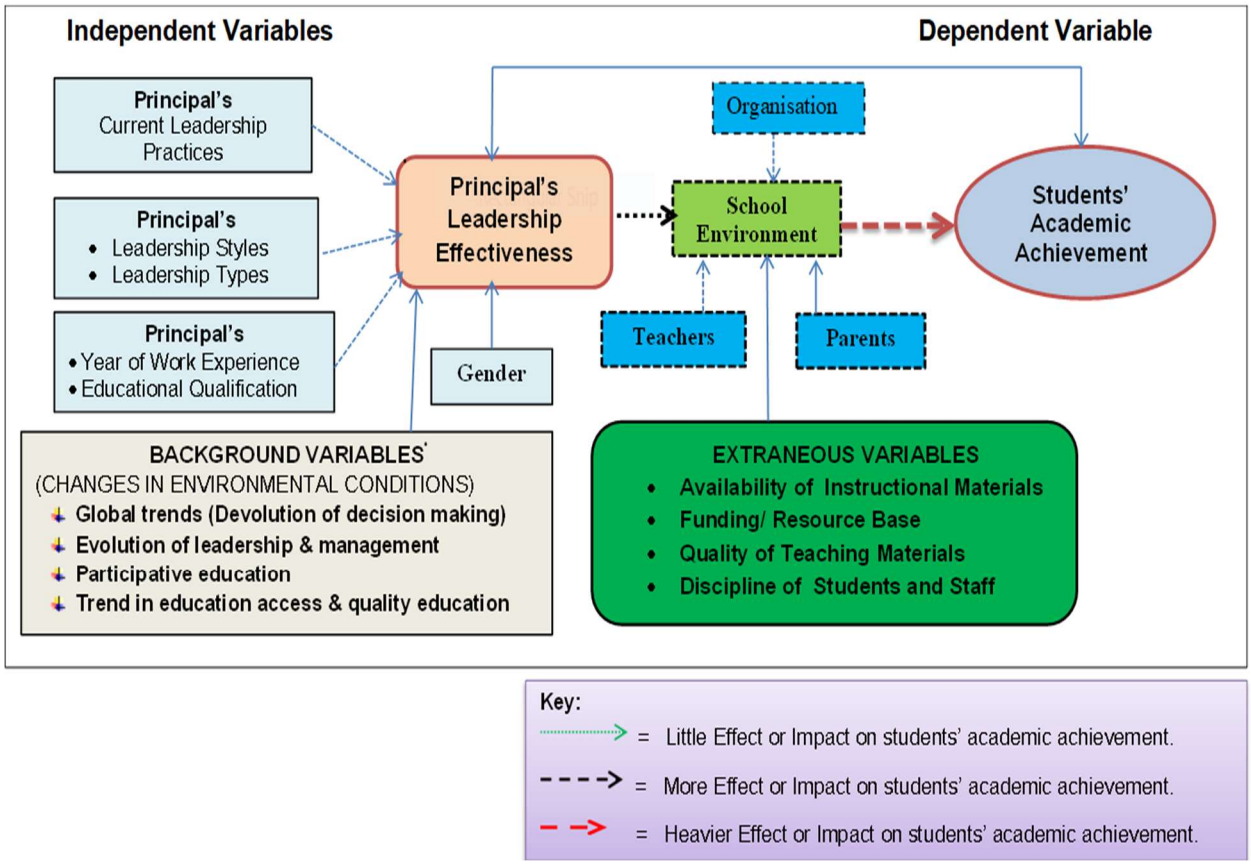


Figure 3.1. The theoretical framework of the study.

Figure 3.1, the theoretical framework for the study on the effectiveness of secondary school principals' leadership on students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia, was adopted and modified from Armstrong (2001) and Suleman Anaf Y. (2015).

Therefore, focusing solely on instructional leadership or transformational leadership independently is inadequate. Combining both necessitated the selection of the Integrated Leadership Model for this study. This model allowed the researcher to explore the relationship between principals' leadership practices and students' pass rates by using core leadership practices of school leaders.

Moreover, the Integrated Leadership Model effectively combines elements of both instructional and transformational leadership, making it ideal for analyzing principals' leadership practices. Consequently, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed-methods approach integrated quantitative data to inform the qualitative analysis. By setting clear boundaries for the study, the model prevented an overly broad examination of variables. This synergistic advantage is why the research favored the

Integrated Leadership Model as a guiding framework during data collection and analysis in this thesis.

3.4.6 Conceptual Framework

3.4.6.1 Introduction

This section describes the study's conceptual framework. A conceptual framework is a coherent and comprehensive theoretical structure that emerges from the inductive integration of previous literature, theories, and relevant information. It provides the foundation for reframing research questions and formulating hypotheses or informal predictions about potential study outcomes (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). According to Shields and Hassan (2006, p. 315), a conceptual framework outlines possible courses of action and presents a preferred approach to a concept. It also acts as a map, providing coherence for empirical analysis.

In practice, the conceptual framework includes identifying the research topic, the problem to be investigated, the questions to be asked, the literature to be reviewed, the concepts to be applied, and the methodology to be used. It includes the methods, procedures, and instruments for data collection, as well as data analysis, interpretation of findings, and recommendations. Thus, the conceptual framework represents the logical structure of the entire research project and serves as a thoughtful, operational element throughout the research process.

To conceptualize the study, we focus on how principals motivate teachers to achieve their schools' primary objective: effective leadership and teaching-learning. For this thesis, successful principal leadership activities are assumed to directly influence students' academic achievement, particularly pass rates.

Derived from the Principal Standards Elements and Indicators stated in (MoE, 2013), the conceptual framework of this thesis is based on the Core Leadership Practices for Successful Schools Standard and integrated with the CIPP Model (where CIPP = comprises four elements: 'C' for context, 'I' for input, 'P' for process, and the second 'P' for product), for evaluation developed by Stufflebeam and Zhang (2017). This CLPSS model focuses on key concepts: 'setting and communicating shared vision and goals', 'teaching-learning programs management', 'fostering teachers' professionalism ', 'leading community and stakeholders' engagement ', and 'managing school resources and operations.''

Students' academic achievement over time is influenced by various perceived leadership behaviors and other internal or external factors. These perceptions of leadership styles, types, and related factors significantly contribute to students' academic achievement, particularly on the EHEECE in SNRS. Hence, the conceptual framework extracted and summarized from the theoretical framework underscores the complexity of investigating leadership effectiveness and its impacts on students' academic achievement, highlighting that many of these independent variables are interrelated and mutually influential.

According to Marshall et al. (2016), a conceptual framework is a visual or written representation of the expected relationships between variables. It systematically describes these relationships and their causative mechanisms, illustrating the interactions among the variables involved in the study, along with the concepts and constructs derived from the literature review (Ravitch et al., 2017; Mensah et al., 2020). The conceptual framework is developed from concepts and ideas based on a literature review and relevant theories related to the study topic (Marshall et al., 2016). In this case, it examines how various independent variables—such as principals' leadership styles, types, gender, experience, and educational qualifications—affect students' academic achievement, the dependent variable.

3.4.6.2 Conceptual Elements Established as Effectiveness of Secondary Schools Principal Leadership and Students' Academic Achievement

For this study, from the National Professional Standards for Principals (MoE., 2013), effective principal leadership is considered to encompass five dimensions that relate to overall effectiveness and specifically to improving students' academic achievement: (a) defining and communicating a shared vision and goals; (b) managing curriculum and instruction; (c) promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities; (d) monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process; and (e) establishing a positive leadership environment that supports students' academic achievement and their success. They refined the instrument through a thorough literature review and empirically validated it, demonstrating strong psychometric properties in representing the underlying dimensions of principal leadership and predicting student achievement (Shen et al., 2012, 2019).

This study primarily examines the decline in students' academic achievement on national EHEECE or matriculation examinations and the role of principal leadership in addressing it. This concern has been prevalent in media discussions and among various societal groups, including government and business sectors, all of which are seeking solutions to the declining academic achievement reflected in EHEECE results in SNRS. School principals are responsible for fostering a supportive teaching and learning environment while fulfilling appropriate leadership roles. Ultimately, students also have a responsibility for their own learning.

Every leader within an organization performs specific roles that contribute to achieving the organization's goals and enhancing performance. As Benson Simango (2016, p. 47) notes, *"…the way the leader performs these roles and directs the affairs of the organization is referred to as his/her leadership style."* Leadership style can be characterized by whether a leader prioritizes task completion or focuses on relationships with subordinates, both of which are central to effective leadership.

Some researchers use situational, transformational, and instructional (pedagogical) leadership theories to study leadership and management phenomena. This research hypothesizes that these theories, along with situational, transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership, provide a solid theoretical foundation for examining the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievement in government secondary schools, specifically in the SNRS region of Ethiopia.

The conceptual framework is divided into two parts. The first part addresses three major issues that directly affect principals: the decline in students' academic achievement in the EHEECE, principals' basic skills and capacities, and principals' professional preparation. These issues are identified as primary challenges because they form the basis of the study, particularly the deterioration in students' academic achievement (as shown in Table 1:2).

The second part of the conceptual framework outlines strategies suggested in the literature regarding principal leadership in relation to the research problem. This includes five variables: 'setting and communicating shared vision and goals', 'teaching-learning programs management', 'fostering teachers' professional', 'leading community and stakeholders' engagement' and 'managing school resources and operations to enhance students' academic outcomes'. These are categorized as secondary challenges because,

while they aim to improve students' academic achievement, they may not align with principals' traditional roles. Implementing these variables continues to challenge school leadership.

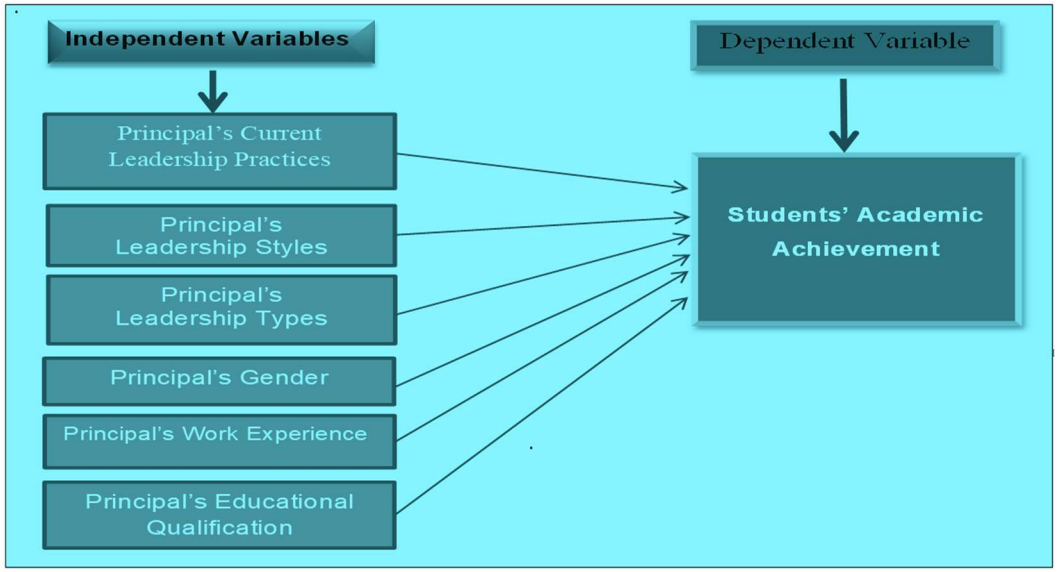


Figure 3:2 The study conceptual framework.

Figure 3.2, adapted and modified from Suleiman Anaf Y. (2015), presents the conceptual framework for leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the interactions of principals' leadership practices, including their roles, styles, gender, experience, and educational qualifications (independent variables) in relation to student academic achievement (dependent variable) in secondary schools in the SNRS of Ethiopia. This framework conceptualizes the effectiveness of principals' leadership on students' academic achievement, emphasizing that leadership practices can influence subordinates to perform effectively.

3.5 CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP

3.5.1 Primary Challenges

Students' academic achievement over time is significantly influenced by various perceived leadership behaviors and other factors. The diagram above illustrates the conceptual framework upon which the entire study is based. The two parts of this framework are discussed in detail below. Through the literature review, the researcher identified three major challenges reflected in this study's conceptual framework. These challenges are explored in detail in the following sections:

3.5.1.1 Deterioration in Students' Academic Achievement on EHEECE

The decline in students' academic achievement in government secondary schools in the SNRS of Ethiopia, as reflected in EHEECE results from 2018/19 to 2023/24, prompted my engagement with this study. Various education stakeholders began to expect school principals to drive change within their institutions. This situation required principals to adopt a leadership style conducive to actively managing teaching and learning. Among the different leadership types, instructional leadership emerged as the most suitable approach for this purpose. The literature review for this study indicates a clear correlation between instructional leadership and student performance (academic achievement).

3.5.1.2 Basic Skills and Capacity of the School Principal

Past studies show the principal's role has changed over time. It has moved from simple school management to leading instruction. This shift sets high demands on principals. They must handle curriculum and teaching plans. They need to monitor instruction and provide feedback on learning. Principals also share a clear vision and goals for the school. They support teacher growth. This research checks how much skill and ability principals have for these leadership tasks. It appears that this leads to better student results in final exams.

The review of studies also stresses the skills needed for these roles. This view leads to questions about what the department expects from principals as teaching leaders. It questions the support the department gives to build those skills, especially in leading instruction. The study added this topic to the structured interview questions.

3.5.1.3 Professional Preparation of the Principals

The training of principals as teaching and learning leaders needs more study. In Ethiopia, the role of school principals has shifted from administrative management to instructional leadership, requiring competencies in curriculum supervision, teacher development, instructional monitoring, and school improvement. However, many principals assume leadership positions without adequate preparation, limiting their effectiveness (Gedifew, 2023). Although the Ministry of Education introduced the Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership (PGDSL) to strengthen leadership capacity, limited practical training, inadequate mentoring, and weak alignment with school realities have constrained its implementation.

Moreover, principals spend much of their time on administrative tasks, reducing their focus on instructional leadership. Studies also point to deficiencies in leadership knowledge, professional development, and institutional support that hinder principals' ability to improve teaching and learning (Tesfaye et al., 2025). Consequently, scholars recommend competency-based principal preparation, merit-based recruitment, continuous professional development, mentoring, and reduced administrative workloads to enhance instructional leadership and improve students' academic achievement (Amsale & Beyene, 2022).

3.5.1.4 Recruitment and Appointment of Principals: The Current Situation in SNRS Context, Ethiopia

The Ministry of Education states that before 1962, foreign principals led primary and high schools in Ethiopia's provinces during the 1930s and 1940s (MoE, 2002). Many Indians took these jobs because of their education and leadership experience. A big change came in 1964. Ethiopians began replacing foreign principals (Ahmed, 2006). After 1960, Ethiopian college graduates with bachelor's degrees in any area became principals. Top officials from the Ministry picked them based on school background and job history (MoE, 2002, p. 42).

From 1994 onward, it became clear that pedagogy bachelor's holders went straight to high schools. For career advancement, high school principals often needed a master's in educational management, plus past roles as team leads, department heads, or teachers. The Ministry's 2018 job outline stresses enough experience in high school oversight and guidance. Now, the Ministry uses set rules to pick high school principals. They require a master's in educational management.

The program's main goal is to boost student learning results. It does this by improving factors that affect students. The focus hits four main areas. These include better teaching and learning. It covers a good learning environment. It builds stronger school leadership. It grows community roles in school matters. The goals in the school performance guide align with teaching and leadership areas (MoE, 2028). The 2018 Ethiopian education policy declares that management must be fair, skilled, smooth, linked, and strong (p. 29-30). It adds that handling teachers must follow proper rules.

In SNRS, Ethiopia, today, selecting and appointing principals follows\ these rules. Candidates need a master's in educational management and at least seven years of on-the-job experience. They must show good personal traits. One key question is whether teacher training includes parts that prepare people for principal jobs. If not, does the degree alone make someone fit for principal? A master's in educational management plus seven years seems too light for the job's tough parts. It raises the question of whether a well-trained person with long experience will always do well as a principal. The survey for principals covers this point.

3.5.2 The Secondary Challenges

The secondary challenges in this framework include four factors tied to teaching leadership. Chapter two points them out. As added hurdles to the principal's job, each gets its own look here. Each factor's main ideas stand out.

3.5.2.1 Promoting Frequent and Appropriate School-Wide Teacher Development Activities

The review for this factor shows schools need less strict control and more help and skill-building. The Education Department should aid principals and strengthen their skills. Principals then aid teachers and build their skills to meet teaching duties. This happens through workshops and talks on all subjects. The main ideas here are help and skill building. Interviews asked about the support and skill development principals receive from the department.

3.5.2.2 Defining and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals

Studies on setting and sharing a common vision and goals stress strategic leadership. They cover turning the school's vision into a clear action plan. The plan involves all groups and builds a sense of shared control. This supports strong learning. Studies also show that principals keep conversations going with all involved parties. These conversations align everyone with the school's vision and goals. In interviews, principals shared how much they include others in talks on school direction. They described how they involve teachers in plans that affect students' final exam scores.

3.5.2.3 Monitoring and Providing Feedback on Teaching and Learning Activities

Some experts in teaching leadership call watching and giving feedback on teaching and learning "facilitative leadership." This sees the principal as a guide for good teaching and learning. Studies list key tasks principals should do.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

As a result, the conceptual framework for this study was established based on the relationship between the effectiveness of secondary school principals' leadership and several independent variables. These include five key areas: (a) defining and communicating shared vision and goals; (b) managing curriculum and instruction; (c) promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities; (d) monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching and learning process; and (e) establishing a positive leadership environment that enhances student outcomes (academic achievement).

Additionally, the framework considers principals' leadership styles, types, experience, gender, and educational qualifications as independent variables impacting the dependent variable: students' academic achievement. This is measured by results in the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE), specifically a minimum pass mark (CGPA ≥ 50%) for admission to universities and technical and vocational education and training colleges.

Thus, this chapter is based on the premise that principals' engagement with the four secondary challenges (variables) in the conceptual framework will enable them to address the primary challenges effectively, which may otherwise complicate their performance. Given the various definitions of school leadership in the literature, its origins in the school effectiveness paradigm, and the evolving role of principals amid educational reform in Ethiopia, more research is needed.

In my view, the literature from the SNRS region of Ethiopia provides insufficient evidence on any single or combination of effective leadership styles and types. This study aims to fill that gap. By addressing these challenges, principals can enhance the teaching-learning process and ultimately improve students' academic achievement on the

EHEECE. The conceptual framework's primary and secondary challenges have been used to answer the main research question and the subsidiary questions.

The next chapter will focus on the research Paradigm, Approaches, design, and research Methodology employed in the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. RESEARCH PARADIGM, APPROACHES, METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research paradigm, design, and methods selected for the study, along with the rationale for their appropriateness in gathering the information needed to address the research questions. It outlines the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis, focusing on the research design, the population under investigation, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection methods and instruments, measures to ensure instrument validity and reliability, research procedures, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

The survey questionnaire is anticipated to provide broad coverage that can be credibly applied to a wider population from which the study sample is drawn. Quantitative methods tend to be relatively low-cost and time-consuming, allowing the collection of a large amount of relevant data that can be subjected to statistical analysis in a short timeframe. In contrast, qualitative methods, such as interviews and documentary analysis, will offer depth and valuable insights into principals' leadership styles and types in secondary school management in the SNRS region of Ethiopia. When researching organizations and the individuals within them, a mixed-methods approach is beneficial, as triangulation provides greater insights into the phenomena being investigated (Bryman, 2001).

Overall, this study aims to explore variables related to the effectiveness of principals' school leadership and how these variables contribute to improving students' academic achievement. This objective necessitates a dynamic research approach grounded in both qualitative and quantitative epistemology. Respondents—principals, deputy principals, unit leaders, supervisors, and Heads of Departments (HoDs) —must be allowed to express their subjective views on the complex phenomena being studied while maintaining objectivity throughout the research process. Accordingly, this study uses a mixed-methods research approach, which is explained in detail in the following sections.

4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL WORLDVIEWS

In this section, I present the research components, including a detailed description of the research paradigm, ontological and epistemological considerations, and the philosophical

worldview guiding the study. When undertaking any investigation, it is crucial to select appropriate paradigms and methods of inquiry likely to yield the highest-quality data within the research context. Therefore, this study aims to examine and analyze the variables related to leadership effectiveness that affect students' academic achievement in EHEECE results.

4.2.1 The Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to a category of fundamental assumptions and principles that govern how people perceive the universe. It serves as a framework to guide researchers' activities during empirical investigations (Wahyuni, 2012). This definition suggests that a research paradigm includes principles for understanding and studying the universe. Its main function is to establish principles that guide behavior from fresh perspectives, across diverse social environments, and with broader implications for conducting research (Morgan, 2014). In essence, a research paradigm guides how the researcher approaches the study.

There are four main research paradigms: positivism, constructivism, realism, and interpretivism, which researchers use to clarify societal realities and other phenomena (Maxwell, Delaney & Kelley, 2018; Matias, 2021). These paradigms acknowledge multiple realities or truths about the world (ontology), as perceived by different individuals in the research setting. Consequently, the researcher constructs a single reality through interaction with the subjects (epistemology), effectively reducing the distance between the researcher and the researched.

A research paradigm is an assumption that guides researchers on what they will learn and how they will learn it during their inquiry. It shapes how researchers approach the investigation (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). According to Bazeley (2014:19), a research paradigm lays the groundwork for conceptualizing reality (ontology) and helps explore how that reality can be known (epistemology). The functionalist paradigm is a primary framework for organizational study, characterized as realistic, positivist, deterministic, and nomothetic, and provides explanations for social phenomena.

It is objectivist, suggesting that social truths exist independently of human perception (Karnevio, 2007). Adopting a pragmatic paradigm will enhance this study's comprehensiveness.

4.2.3 Pragmatism as a Philosophical Worldview

At the beginning of this study, I was uncertain and did not fully understand the concept of "research paradigms." However, after reviewing various methodologies and publications, this "bibliophile" researcher now has a clearer understanding of these paradigms. The following section discusses the research approach employed in this study.

This study adopts pragmatism as its philosophical worldview. Pragmatism prioritizes the practical consequences of the methods used to answer specific research questions (Creamer, 2018, p. 91). For pragmatists, knowledge emerges from identifying a problem's essential features and determining appropriate interventions for a given situation (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 16). Pragmatists also believe that all knowledge is tentative and must be tested against experience (Bazeley, 2014, p. 22). The pragmatic paradigm emphasizes that quantitative research alone cannot adequately explain the world's complexities (Saunders et al., 2009; McMillan et al., 2010).

Thus, researchers can better understand the world by employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Creswell (2007) argues that positivism and constructivism are not independent; rather, they have a dialectical relationship. In this context, positivism and constructivism complement each other in generating authentic knowledge. This paradigm asserts that the world can be understood through both scientific knowledge and the lived experiences that individuals bring to it (Creswell, 2014). These complementary methodologies enhanced the outcomes of this research on improving the effectiveness of school principals' leadership roles in secondary schools, resulting in more comprehensive findings.

The primary paradigm relevant to this study is pragmatism. This paradigm draws on positivist and constructivist elements. Since this study employs a mixed-methods approach, embracing the pragmatic paradigm is essential, as it encompasses both qualitative and quantitative methods. The following section will discuss the pragmatic paradigm in detail.

Morgan (2007) describes pragmatism as granting researchers the freedom to select methodologies, procedures, and specific actions designed to produce meaningful research results (Creswell, 2014, p. 11). Mixed-methods research provides the most comprehensive understanding of a research problem, which is why researchers often

utilize both qualitative and quantitative data. Pragmatism opens the door to a variety of methodologies and perspectives for mixed-method studies (Newby, 2014, p. 48). The researcher adopts an ontological stance and uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate both objective and subjective conceptions of reality in addressing the research issues.

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003a:713), define pragmatism as a deconstructive paradigm that challenges concepts such as "truth" and "reality," focusing instead on "what works" as the truth relevant to the research questions at hand. Ontology refers to the explicit specification of a conceptualization, with ontological issues concerning what kinds of things exist within society and beliefs about reality. In this study, ontology is examined through the lens of the pragmatic paradigm. Reality, within this framework, is meaningful when it enables us to form valuable relationships with various aspects of our experience and is grounded in the notion of "what works". Pragmatism does not reject the ontological stances of positivism or interpretivism.

4.2.4 The Purpose of a Pragmatic Study

The purpose of this empirical investigation was to collect data to answer the main research question: How effective is secondary school principals' leadership in relation to students' academic achievement as measured by their EHEECE results in the SNRS of Ethiopia? To fully address this research question and its subsequent sub-questions, the researcher decided to conduct a pragmatic study to gather evidence-based data that could enhance secondary school leadership effectiveness and improve students' academic achievement in SNRS secondary schools. Before delving into the specifics of the pragmatic study, it is essential to first explain the concept of pragmatic research.

Adopting a pragmatic paradigm strengthens this study's comprehensiveness. The underlying assumptions and subsequent paradigms influenced my methodological choices, leading me to utilize both qualitative and quantitative approaches (mixed methods research). This approach incorporates the social constructivism (interpretive) paradigm, which employs inductive logic and qualitative methods, along with the post-positivism (positivist) paradigm, which utilizes deductive logic and quantitative methods (Rocco et al., 2003, p. 21).

My choice to adopt pragmatic mixed methods stems from the belief that researchers seek to understand the world in which they live and work by developing subjective meanings based on their experiences and the meanings they relate to specific objects or concepts. The researcher intends to make sense of the meanings others hold about the world (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Thus, the pragmatic paradigm, which combines elements of both the positivist and constructivist paradigms, has significantly influenced this study.

According to McMillan et al. (2010), researchers conduct studies to provide information that guides school leaders in decision-making, ultimately improving classroom delivery and the quality of teaching and learning. In line with this perspective, as an educator and school leader, I aimed to conduct this evidence-based inquiry to provide detailed insights into school leadership practices and their impact on student performance in township schools. I assumed the findings would significantly contribute to the existing body of evidence on disparities in EHEECE results and students' academic achievement in SNRS Ethiopian schools.

Considering the context of the problems, seventy-six secondary schools were selected to participate in this research. This study fundamentally employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing multiple qualitative methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of leadership on students' academic achievement in EHEECE results within government secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) of Ethiopia. The goal was to draw recommendations and strategically suggest effective leadership styles and types to improve overall school performance.

4.3 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PARADIGM CONSIDERATIONS

4.3.1 Ontological Overview

The researcher's ontological beliefs concern the nature of reality, examined through questions such as: What is the nature of the world, including social phenomena? Is reality orderly or lawful? Does a natural social order exist? Is reality fixed and stable, or is it constantly changing? Is reality unitary or multiple? Can reality be constructed by the individuals involved in the research situation? (Creswell, 1998, p. 76; Mafuwane, 2011).

4.3.2 Epistemological Overview

The researcher's epistemological beliefs focus on the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and the subject being studied. Epistemology studies

valid forms of knowledge and the nature of truth. It addresses the theory of knowledge, including what is known and who can know. Epistemology concerns the nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 7).

In this research, a blended qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. According to Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017:6) and Morse (2016:2), the researcher utilized an inductive strategy to derive meaning from narratives, taking notes during individual and focus group interactions. This approach aligns with the constructivist/ Interpretivizm philosophy. Additionally, the researcher employed a quantitative method, focusing on objective, quantifiable facts that could be generalized to the entire population and guided by established scientific rules and principles. The researcher combined the findings following Morse's recommendations to mitigate the drawbacks of relying solely on either approach (Morse, 2016, p. 2).

These two paradigms helped me recognize and appreciate multiple realities, or truths about the world (ontology), as perceived by different individuals in the research setting. Consequently, a single reality can be constructed through the researcher's interaction with the subjects (epistemology), effectively reducing the distance between the researcher and the researched.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This section defines research, research methodology, and the research design used in this study. It incorporates the research paradigm, research approach, research design, and data collection procedures, including questionnaires, documentary analysis, focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and observations. It also discusses data analysis, the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, ethical considerations, and the researcher's role, and concludes with a summary. Diagrams help readers follow the stages, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend.

According to Newby (2014:53), research techniques are the tools used in research, while research methodology refers to data-collection methods and adherence to research guidelines. It represents a systematic approach that specifies how the research problem should be framed and addressed. Thus, the organization of various research methodologies to tackle the research problem can also be described as research methodology. This includes the researcher's perspectives and reflections on research

designs, methodologies for determining sample sizes, data collection methods, analysis procedures, implications of findings, and standards for assessing and enhancing quality.

In this study, it is crucial to clarify the concepts of research design and research methodology to reduce the confusion often associated with their use, particularly among emerging researchers. Each concept is presented as a compound term, with "design" and "methodology" attached to the noun "research." Therefore, it is appropriate to first answer the questions: “What is research?” and “What is research design?”

4.4.1 Research Methodology

Numerous definitions of research have been proposed by scholars and researchers across various fields. According to McMillan (2016) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), research is defined as a process involving stages used to gather and analyze information to enhance understanding of a topic or question. Moreover, Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003) describe research as “something that people undertake to find out new things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge”. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (1986:720) defines research as a systematic investigation undertaken to discover new facts and obtain additional information.

From these definitions, research is a scientifically planned activity aimed at establishing new facts and information about a particular phenomenon. The research process involves identifying a specific problem or area of interest, translating that problem into a research question, collecting data, analyzing the data, and reporting the findings. More specifically, research seeks to predict events, explain relationships, and develop theories. As defined by researchers such as Tracy (2020) and Dubey & Kothari (2022), research methodology is a theory regarding how an inquiry should proceed. It involves analyzing the assumptions, principles, and procedures associated with a particular approach to inquiry. Essentially, research methodology outlines the procedures researchers follow in their investigations.

According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), as cited in Creswell’s "Educational Research" (2012:535), they state: *“a mixed methods research design is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and ‘mixing’ both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem.”*

In addition to this, Mafuwane (2011: 69) also states:

"…it is common to use various methods sequentially, in an explanatory design, quantitative data are usually collected first and, depending on the results, qualitative data are gathered next, to interpret, elaborate on or explain the quantitative findings".

Qualitative approaches refer to descriptive methods of data management primarily used to analyze interview data and secondary sources, which cannot be fully addressed using quantitative methods alone. Simultaneously, quantitative approaches will be employed to manage data from closed questionnaires. Furthermore, quantitative methods will examine the relationship between leadership styles, types, and students' academic achievement in secondary schools, as determining these relationships requires rigorous statistical analysis. While qualitative methods may raise methodological and ethical issues regarding the researcher's influence on the data and informants, the quantitative approach is limited to highly structured data extraction techniques.

4.4.2 Research Paradigm

Before discussing the paradigmatic assumptions of this study, it is essential to define the concept of "paradigm," its components, and various perspectives on paradigms. In this sub-section, the term "paradigm" is defined, followed by an explanation of the philosophical assumptions associated with the adopted pragmatic paradigm.

A research paradigm is the philosophical assumption that guides and shapes our understanding of the world and the interactions that occur in social contexts (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). According to Jourbish et al. (2011), the philosophical assumptions and fundamental beliefs represented by a research paradigm reflect what individuals hold about the nature of the social world and its relationship to social interactions. Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to a research project, which inform how they conduct and write the study. In simple terms, a paradigm is a framework of beliefs, values, and norms within the research context.

A research paradigm guides researchers on what they will learn and how they will learn it during their inquiry, shaping their overall understanding of what their investigation can reveal (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). According to Bazeley (2014:19), a research paradigm lays the foundation for conceptualizing reality (ontology) and helps explore how that reality can be known (epistemology). Defining one's paradigmatic perspective as a researcher

highlights the interplay among ontological and epistemological assumptions, meta-theoretical foundations, research questions, and research methodology. The philosophical assumptions shaping our thinking include epistemology, ontology, methodology, and methods (Cuba & Lincoln, 2000; Saunders et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2014; Neumann, 2014). Epistemology refers to philosophical assumptions about what constitutes reliable and valid knowledge and what counts as valid evidence from reality (Neumann, 2014).

According to Scotland (2012:9), paradigms differ in their assumptions about reality and knowledge because they differ in ontology and epistemology. These assumptions support their unique research methodologies. In this sub-section, the researcher addresses the advocated philosophical worldviews, along with clarifications and reflections on the specified worldview and how it guided the research approach. As a result, the researcher discusses the worldviews from a philosophical perspective and how the identified worldview influenced the research methodology.

4.4.3 Research Design

Many scholars define research design in various ways across different fields. According to Creswell (2014), research design is the general path or roadmap that a researcher follows to gather empirical data to convincingly answer the research question. It is a systematic and planned process for establishing and outlining the research methodology to be used in a study. The term "research approach" refers to the strategies and methods employed, encompassing everything from general hypotheses to detailed procedures for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Chetty, 2016).

The type of research problem being addressed determines the research approach. It includes the research paradigm, the research approach, the study population, research instruments, research strategies, data analysis techniques, and the presentation of research findings (McMillan et al., 2010). This approach connects findings from the literature review to empirical data, allowing for authentic and reliable conclusions to be drawn in response to the research question (Creswell, 2014). In simpler terms, research design outlines the processes of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. It serves as the plan for collecting data to answer the research question and specifies the data analysis techniques the researcher intends to use.

Durrheim (2004:29) describes research design as a strategic framework for action that bridges research questions and the execution of the research strategy. It includes a plan for selecting subjects, research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research questions. The goal of a sound research design is to produce credible results. Therefore, research design can be viewed as a systematic arrangement of procedures and methods used during a study, establishing the logic by which researchers interpret their findings.

Yin (2016:83) defines research design as a logical blueprint that serves as a plan, detailing the connections between research questions, the data to be collected, and strategies for analyzing that data. This logic ensures that the study's findings address the intended research questions and enhances the accuracy of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018:41) note that research design is a plan or strategy for inquiry, which can fall within one of three main approaches: quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods.

Cohen et al. (2018:38) provide a comprehensive definition of research design as a plan that serves as the foundation for approaching, operationalizing, and investigating the research problem. This includes setting the approach, theories, and methodologies to be employed, determining the type of data required and how it will be collected, and identifying the population or sample from which data will be gathered.

This study employed a descriptive survey design with mixed methods for data collection. Structured questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions were utilized to gather reliable and valid information. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequencies, means, and standard deviations, while T-tests were used to assess the significance of differences among respondent groups. The qualitative data collected through open-ended questions, interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed narratively to triangulate findings and obtain additional insights on the issues.

The quantitative data gathered through questionnaires were analyzed statistically and kept separate from the qualitative data collected through interviews, which were analyzed alongside the quantitative data. In the discussion section, statistical results were presented first, followed by qualitative quotations that either confirmed or contradicted the statistical findings. This side-by-side integration approach was adopted in the study, allowing for a comparison between quantitative results and qualitative findings to

determine if the quantitative results were supported by the qualitative evidence. Furthermore, the two datasets were compared to assess whether the quantitative results converged with or contradicted the qualitative findings. In this way, the quantitative results were triangulated with the qualitative findings to cross-validate the evidence from both datasets.

4.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

4.5.1 Mixed Methods Research Approach

This section describes the mixed methods approach adopted in this study. It includes definitions of mixed methods, the rationale for choosing this approach, planning for mixed methods research, notations, types of mixed methods design, and the specific mixed methods design used in this study. The choice of research approach depends on the research challenge, the investigator's skill level, and the study's goals. In this study, a mixed methods approach was utilized to achieve

the aim of examining the variables related to the effectiveness of leadership on students' academic achievement and their contributions to school improvement.

A mixed-methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative research methods. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), the term "qualitative" emphasizes the characteristics of entities and processes, focusing on explanations that are not experimentally tested or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. The qualitative research approach provides explanatory data, typically expressed in written or verbal form by participants (Brynard & Hanekom, 2014). This approach enables a deeper understanding of how people perceive, act, and manage their everyday situations.

4.5.2 Definition of Mixed Methods

The mixed methods approach explicitly combines both quantitative and qualitative methods within the same study. Creswell (2014:3) defines research approaches as methods and strategies that encompass all phases of information gathering, analysis, and interpretation, ranging from general to detailed. These processes involve several choices, and in this study, literature reviews, questionnaires, observations, and interviews were used to collect data.

A mixed method is a methodology that incorporates philosophical presuppositions guiding data collection, processing, and the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies at various stages of the study. This strategy integrates conceptual and empirical assumptions, allowing the gathering, examination, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or set of studies. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:5) explain, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative strategies provides a more effective solution to research objectives than relying on either method alone. Furthermore, Caruth (2013:113) notes that combining methodologies can complement one another, offering deeper insights and generating additional research questions.

According to scholars like McMillan et al. (2010:396) and Creswell (2014), a mixed methods research approach yields greater insight into the phenomenon being studied and clarifies results—insights that cannot be achieved when using only one approach in isolation. The mixed methods approach "combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, and inference techniques) to provide breadth and depth of understanding and collaboration." This integration emphasizes the convergence of qualitative and quantitative approaches to enhance comprehension of the phenomenon under investigation, ultimately leading to more complete and valid results (McMillan et al., 2010).

The mixed methods approach employs a variety of techniques, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the problem being investigated. Rensburg et al. (2011) confirm that the mixed methods approach is increasingly utilized because many phenomena are best studied through diverse designs. Therefore, the researcher chose and applied this approach to enhance the findings on principals' leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement in the EHEECE within secondary schools in the SNRS of Ethiopia, given its comprehensive scope and the richness of its findings.

4.5.3 Why Mixed Methods

The rationale for using a mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative data, is to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem than either method could achieve alone. This approach leverages the strengths and interactions between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Mixed methods research integrates these approaches within a single study to better understand a

research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Consequently, both quantitative and qualitative research designs were selected as they facilitate a deeper understanding of the research problem.

The qualitative method was particularly suitable because it allowed the researcher to interact with principals about their instructional leadership practices and how these practices can address the current decline in the EHEECE pass rate. Since the foundation of quantitative research lies in variables, and this study aims to investigate variables related to leadership effectiveness, a questionnaire as a quantitative research tool was administered to principals, deputy principals, unit leaders, and heads of departments (HoDs) to collect information that may not have been captured through interviews.

Creswell (2005), notes that qualitative researchers utilize various strategies of inquiry, including narratives, phenomenology, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, and case studies. In these instances, researchers collect open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes. I believed qualitative research was particularly suited to analyzing the leadership styles of principals and other line managers, as it involves interviews and focus group discussions.

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, placing greater emphasis on quantitative methods through closed-ended questions. The quantitative approach was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data to gain in-depth insights into the effectiveness of principals' leadership on students' academic achievement, specifically examining the last five years of EHEECE results from secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. The qualitative approach provided additional information through interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and open-ended questions. It was anticipated that participants would share their beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about the effectiveness of principal leadership, thereby validating and substantiating the quantitative data.

Typically, the primary focus of this study is quantitative, with qualitative results serving a secondary role. The qualitative phase is intended to augment the statistical data. Therefore, the mixed methods design is appropriate for gathering comprehensive data to achieve better outcomes. The qualitative component enables the researcher to engage with school principals, HoDs, and unit leaders regarding their practices in leadership effectiveness and how these practices can address the current decline in students' academic performance, as measured by the national examination (EHEECE) pass rate.

Given the study's objective of investigating variables related to school leadership effectiveness, the questionnaire will be administered to school principals, deputy principals, HoDs, and unit leaders to collect data that may not be obtainable through structured interviews and focus group discussions.

4.5.4 Rationale for Adopting the Mixed Methods Approach

The researcher's selection of a mixed methods approach was informed by the pragmatic paradigm, which is closely linked to this approach as well as the research design, sample, data collection methods, and instruments. The mixed methods approach allows for a more detailed study of a phenomenon by leveraging the strengths of each method to compensate for the weaknesses of the other (McMillan et al., 2010).

This study explores the variables related to secondary school principals' leadership effectiveness and its impact on students' academic achievement in the EHEECE within SNRS, Ethiopia, focusing on their instructional roles. It is positioned within mixed-methods research, encompassing characteristics of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This approach was selected because it is not confined to traditional methods or to either qualitative or quantitative approaches but instead uses both to provide a more comprehensive investigation (McMillan et al., 2010). As Kothari (2004:5) notes, qualitative research generates data that are either non-quantitative or have not undergone rigorous quantitative analysis. Accordingly, qualitative research is grounded in a phenomenological paradigm that views reality as socially constructed through individual or group definitions (Williams, 2021, p. 378).

The personal evaluation of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors is central to qualitative research, considering the opinions and insights of the researcher. Creswell (2014:3) states that, in contrast, quantitative research aims to test hypotheses and investigate relationships between variables, utilizing statistical tools to quantify and examine these factors. Through intensive investigation using questionnaires (quantitative) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and observations), this study collected sufficient data to produce authentic and credible results. Using a mixed methods approach provided a deeper understanding of the research questions, as a single approach would not have adequately answered the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

The rationale for employing mixed methods and concurrent triangulation in this study is supported by various advantages discussed by scholars. One key benefit is that

triangulating the two databases allows the strengths of one database to offset the weaknesses of the other, resulting in stronger evidence that enhances the credibility, validation, and acceptance of the conclusions.

Additionally, I preferred the concurrent triangulation design because qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously, resulting in a shorter data collection period compared to sequential designs (McMillan et al., 2010). This reduced the number of visits to research sites, thereby minimizing costs and time spent in the field. This design also mitigates disturbances at the research sites by allowing for simultaneous data gathering without requiring multiple visits (Creswell, 2014).

I chose this method based on the principle of complementary strengths. In mixed methods research, researchers can strategically combine the strengths of quantitative and qualitative approaches to address a single purpose or multiple objectives effectively. This approach enabled me to answer a broader range of research questions without being confined to a single method. Moreover, combining qualitative and quantitative research produces integrated knowledge that informs both theory and practice.

Another advantage of the concurrent triangulation mixed methods design is its intuitive nature, which makes it accessible to researchers. McMillan et al. (2010) note that concurrent triangulation is often favored by researchers new to mixed methods, as it allows for generalizability of results and provides detailed explanations of the context. This design enabled me to conduct an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study through qualitative data collection, allowing the researcher to examine the individual characteristics of principals, deputy principals, HoDs, and unit leaders intensively. It also facilitated probing and analysis of multiple aspects that constitute the school environment.

4.5.5 Scheduling Mixed Methods

To use mixed methods effectively, careful planning helps the researcher minimize factors that could negatively impact the study. According to Creswell (2014), the most important factors to consider when planning mixed methods procedures are timing, weighting, mixing, and theorizing. These factors significantly influence mixed methods research design.

Timing in mixed methods research refers to whether data will be collected sequentially or concurrently. When data are collected sequentially, data are gathered in phases, either

starting with qualitative data followed by quantitative data, or vice versa (McMillan et al., 2010; Creswell, 2014). If the research aims to explore a topic in a context with fewer participants, qualitative data will be collected first, followed by quantitative data to expand the research to a larger population sample in a different context. Another timing consideration is how much time will be allocated to each phase (McMillan et al., 2010).

The term "research design" refers to the relationship between a research study's goals and the methods used to carry out the entire research process. The aim of the study design is to facilitate the acquisition of relevant data with minimal effort, cost, and time. In a mixed methods design, mixing can occur concurrently. When qualitative and quantitative data are mixed concurrently, the two data sets are integrated (McMillan et al., 2010). Qualitative themes are transformed into counts and compared with descriptive quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). This concurrent mixing integrates the two data sets through the emergence of qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data can be transformed into quantitative formats to allow for comparison, helping to identify differences, convergences, or combinations.

4.5.6 Procedure of the Study

This study aligns with the concurrent convergent design within mixed methods research. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) state, this study followed four key procedures.

The first procedure involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data separately but concurrently on the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. The second procedure consisted of analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data using the respective analytical methods for each approach. The third procedure entailed merging the findings from both qualitative and quantitative results. Finally, the fourth procedure involved analyzing and interpreting the combined findings.

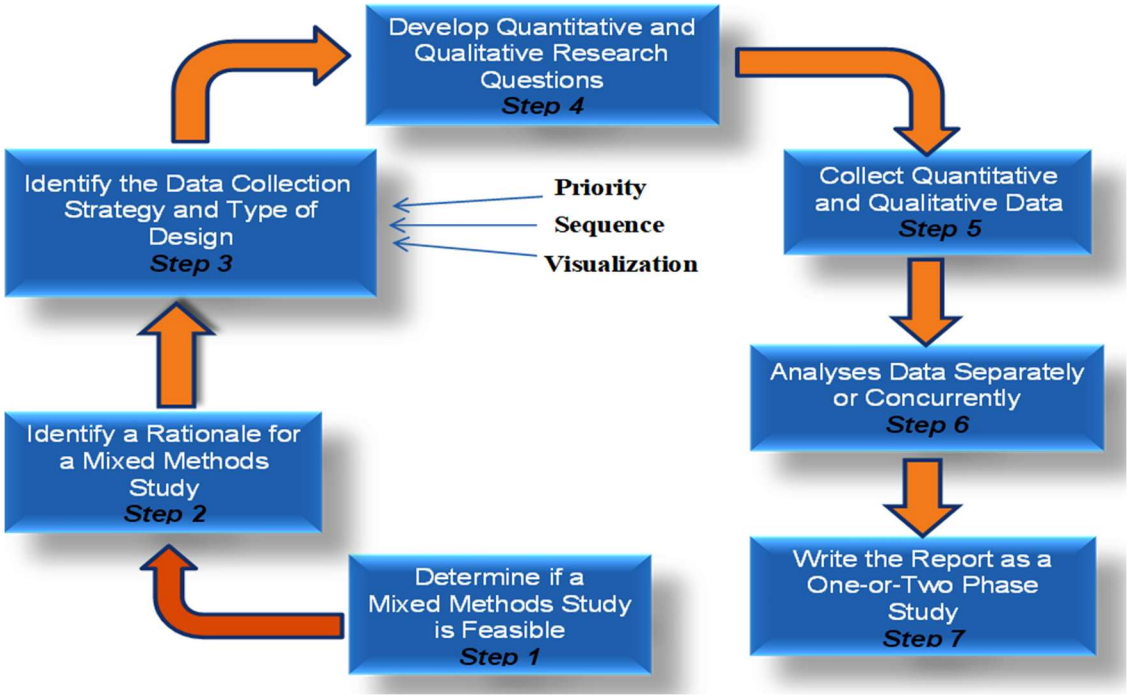


Figure 4.1. Steps in conducting this mixed-methods study.

Figure 4.1 shows the steps in conducting a mixed-methods study; the seven steps span the planning stage through data analysis. Adapted from Creswell and John (2012:535), Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.

Mixed methods research typically begins with a clear purpose and at least one research question, while the subsequent steps may vary. Creswell (2012) outlines the steps in more detail. Figure 4.1 illustrates the four steps involved in conducting mixed methods research and provides a simplified overview of the methodology used in this study. This visual representation aims to help the reader easily understand the research methodology employed.

4.5.7 Concurrent Convergent Triangulation

This study adopted a convergent concurrent triangulation design, which this section discusses in detail. This design was chosen because it enhances the validity of findings by integrating multiple data sources (McMillan et al., 2010).

Jakob (2001) states:

> "By combining multiple observers, theories, methods, and empirical materials, researchers can hope to overcome the weaknesses or intrinsic biases associated

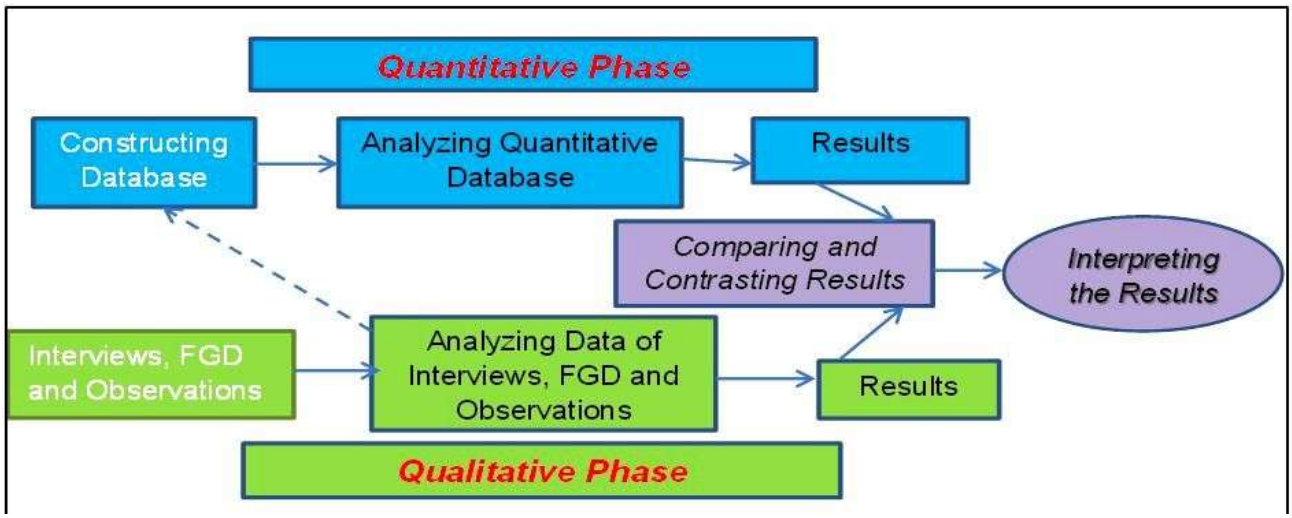
with single-method, single-observer, and single-theory studies. Triangulation often aims to confirm findings through the convergence of different perspectives. The point at which these perspectives converge is seen to represent reality".

Triangulation is a verification procedure in which researchers seek convergence among multiple, diverse sources of information to identify themes or categories within a study. It involves sorting through the data to find commonalities while eliminating overlapping areas. This study employed triangulation by utilizing data from 114 principals and 228 deputy principals and HoDs who completed questionnaires, along with 60 principals involved in focus group interviews and 5 principals in structured interviews. These participants were drawn from various secondary schools in the SNRS region of Ethiopia, representing different sizes and community backgrounds, thus providing multiple sources of information from which to derive themes.

Triangulation offered several benefits for this study: it provided additional valuable insights that could not be obtained from the literature review alone; it minimized the limitations of single-source research by incorporating three complementary data sources that verified each other; and it enriched the data set, allowing the researcher to gather firsthand experiences from the principals. In this study, I conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and structured interviews with principals to triangulate the quantitative data.

As illustrated in Figure 4.2 below, I collected and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. I collected qualitative data from principals through interviews, while I gathered quantitative data through a questionnaire administered to deputy principals, HoDs, unit leaders, and teachers. I gave equal priority to both the quantitative data collected through questionnaires and the qualitative data gathered from interviews, FGDs, and documents.

Figure 4.2 The figure representation of the convergent concurrent design of the study.



Source: *Figure representation of this mixed-methods design, modified from the convergent concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 2014, p. 110) and John W. Creswell (2012:540), Educational research: planning, conducting and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.*

Both data types were treated equally throughout data collection, analysis, and presentation. In this concurrent triangulation design, the weighting is evenly distributed between the quantitative and qualitative datasets, with both types of data collected simultaneously. Creswell (2014) describes the Convergent-Parallel Design method and triangulates the results for interpretation.

5.5.8 Limitations in Using a Mixed-Methods Design

A mixed-method research design is not free from limitations or challenges. Mixed-methods research may not always achieve its goal, as mixing quantitative and qualitative methods can produce several threats (Dawadi, S., Shrestha, S., & Giri, R. A., 2021).

Moreover, Dawadi (2021) described or pointed out five limitations or challenges (challenges of using a mixed-method approach) as:

> *The first limitation is deciding which mixed method (discussed in the section on 'which mixed-method study design?') is appropriate for a particular research project. Secondly, maintaining a balance between the two research traditions may be a challenge because it is easy for any researcher to focus more on one tradition they are more comfortable with. Thirdly, integrating data from two methods to complement and extend data analysis and interpretation, and especially triangulating them, may*

be a challenge. Finally, a mixed-method approach is lengthy because each research method consumes time. Therefore, a research project may require more time than is available.

To minimize these methodological challenges, the study implemented several measures. Through advanced doctoral research-methodology training, workshops, an extensive review of the mixed-methods literature, and continuous academic guidance from the supervisor throughout the research process, the researcher strengthened methodological competence.

4.6. STUDY AREA, POPULATION, SAMPLING, AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

4.6.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the study's participants and respondents. It begins by discussing the population, followed by the sampling procedures and samples for both the quantitative and qualitative phases. The final part addresses the study sample size, detailing both the quantitative and qualitative samples.

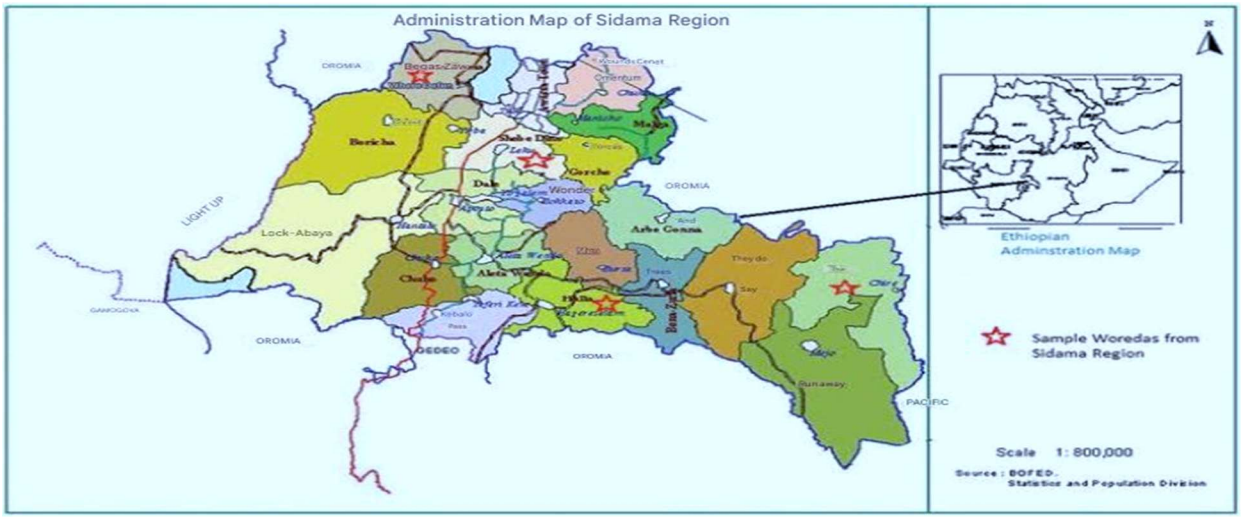
4.6.2 Description of the Study Area, Study Population and Sources of Data

4.6.2.1 Description of the study area and SNRS Regional Map

This study is carried out in the SNRS of Ethiopia. SNRS is one of the twelve regional states in Ethiopia. According to the Sidama Statistics Agency (2020), Sidama Regional State covers the southern part of Ethiopia and lies between 12 degrees north to 15 degrees North latitude and 36 degrees 30' east to 40 degrees 30' east longitude. The region is surrounded by the Oromia region in the North, East, and west, and the South Ethiopia region in the South. Based on the current border delimitation, the region covers an estimated 53,638 square kilometers (20,710 square miles).

The Sidama National Regional State is divided into four zones, one city administration, and thirty-six Woredas (13 rural and 23 urban). The region has 97 government secondary schools, organized into four (4) school clusters (SEB, 2023). The name comes from the Sidama nationality clan, who originally occupied the territory. Figure 4.3 shows the map and location of SNRS, with its respective zones and woredas.

Figure 4:3 Map of Sidama National Regional State (SNRS), Ethiopia.



4.6.2.1 Population of the Study

The population of the study refers to the entire group of people, objects, or events that the researcher is interested in investigating (Rensburg et al., 2011). Brynard and Hanekom (2014) define a population as a collection of objects, events, or people that share certain traits of interest to the researcher. McMillan et al. (2010:129) further define population as “a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria to which we intend to generalize the results of the research”. These definitions indicate that the elements studied possess similar characteristics. Therefore, a study's population encompasses the entire group from which the researcher aims to collect data to address the research problem.

In this study, which investigates the effectiveness of principals' leadership on students’ academic achievement, the population consisted of all 114 government secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) of Ethiopia. This included all principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), unit leaders, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and students across these schools. However, due to the large number of schools and the challenges of accessing all of them, the researcher identified a target population for the study.

The target population refers to the sample frame or survey population from which the sample will be drawn. It consists of the actual elements from which the sample is selected (McMillan et al., 2010). Because of financial constraints, time limitations, and difficulty accessing all participants in the target population, a sample was drawn to represent the population. Cohen et al. (2011), state that a sample is chosen when the entire population

cannot contribute to data generation due to such constraints. Similarly, Pandey and Pandey (2015) describe sampling as selecting a certain number of participants from a specific population to represent that population, with a sample being a portion of the entire population.

McMillan et al. (2010) define a sample as a group of people from whom researchers collect data. Rensburg et al. (2011:151) refer to a sample as "a subset of the defined population which the researcher is interested in." Based on these definitions, a sample is a group of individuals selected from the population that the researcher wishes to investigate to gather data and answer the research question.

Mixed methods sampling involves combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to address the research problem in innovative ways. This approach often combines both purposive and probability sampling to meet the requirements specified by the research questions. Sampling is the process of selecting representative parts of a population so that findings from the sample can be generalized back to the population from which it was drawn (McMillan & Schumacher, 2015). Thus, a sample comprises the individuals the researcher selects from the defined research population.

4.6.2.2 Data Sources

This study used both primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources included principals, deputy principals, department heads, unit leaders, senior teachers, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and the Regional Education Bureau (REB). Additionally, students' academic records, annual planning reports, management meeting minutes, and official documents served as supplementary qualitative data sources.

4.6.3 Sampling, Sampling Design and Sampling Procedures

4.6.3.1 Sampling

Mixed methods research can encompass various types of both quantitative and qualitative sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Combining these two sampling methods yields complementary data that provide evidence characterized by both depth and breadth (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Thus, this study incorporates both purposive and simple random sampling designs. Concurrent mixed methods sampling involves selecting units of analysis for a mixed methods study by simultaneously using

both probability and purposive sampling (Teddlie and Yu, 2007: 89). The design is explained as follows.

4.6.3.2 Sampling Design

Sampling designs provide the framework for sampling, including the number and types of sampling schemes and the sample size (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). To determine the sampling design, the researcher considered two criteria suggested by these authors: time orientation (concurrent vs. sequential) and the relationship between the qualitative and quantitative samples (identical, parallel, nested, or multilevel).

This study surveyed principals, deputy principals, heads of departments (HoDs), and unit leaders for the quantitative component. In contrast, the qualitative component included interviews with principals, focus group discussions (FGDs) with supervisors, PTAs, and senior teachers, and document analysis and school observations. The study also used various documents, such as meeting minutes and policies from the Regional Education Bureau (REB) and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

The sampling design adopted is a concurrent multilevel approach, which uses two or more sample sets drawn from different levels of the study (different populations). In stratified random sampling, the population is divided into groups, subgroups, or strata based on characteristics such as gender, race, location, education level, or age, depending on the researcher's variables (McMillan et al., 2010; Creswell, 2012). After dividing the population, researchers can draw two types of samples: proportional and non-proportional (Weathington et al., 2012).

Another type of probability sampling is cluster sampling. Cluster sampling is similar to stratified sampling in that samples are drawn from groups (Johnson et al., 2014). However, in cluster sampling, the researcher selects subjects from naturally occurring groups, such as schools, churches, neighborhoods, or regions (Cohen et al., 2011). In this method, groups may be defined by different levels, such as class, school, district, province, or nation.

4.6.3.3 Sampling procedures and sample for quantitative phase

In the initial planning stages of my research proposal, I aimed to involve all 118 government secondary schools in the Sidama region. However, because of the region's

size, time constraints, and financial considerations, I reduced the sample to 32 government secondary schools. This focus excludes the 21 private secondary schools in the region and the 5 schools used for the pilot study, which did not participate in the actual study. Additionally, 27 government secondary schools do not offer national grade 12 completion or EHEECE.

The 32 secondary schools selected for this study offer grade 12 and EHEECE and share similar characteristics in terms of geographical location, school facilities, funding models, and performance outcomes. From the target population of 118 secondary schools, the sample will include 32 school principals, 86 deputy principals, 32 unit leaders, and 275 department heads. The study will use cluster sampling to select five zones from the region. Geographical regions represent natural groupings (Gall, 1989; Babbie, 1990; Fowler, 1988) that can be organized into clusters.

Using purposive sampling, I will select from the five zones within the region, which contain a total of 36 Woredas, resulting in the identification of 32 secondary schools. Additionally, I will include regional education sector experts and Woreda education office supervisors, as they play a key role in initiating policies and regulations on various administrative issues, including secondary school leadership.

The target groups, total population, sample size, and sampling techniques for quantitative data are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 The sample size and sampling techniques for Quantitative Data Collection.

Target Groups	Population	Sample	Sample (%)	Methods
4 Zones and a City Administration	5	5	100%	Purposive
Secondary Schools	96	61	95% cof. level	SRS
Principals (P)	96	61	95% cof. level	CR. Kothari
Deputy Principals (DPs)	384	61	95% cof. level	CR. Kothari
Unit Leaders (Uls)	110	32	95% cof. Level	CR. Kothari
Department Heads (DoHs)	660	142	95% cof. Level	CR. Kothari
Senior Teachers (STs)	835	201	95% cof. Level	CR. Kothari
Total		**497**		

Source: *The sample size and sampling techniques, adapted from Research Methodology Methods & Techniques, 2nd revised edition. (CR. KOTHARI, 2004: 64).*

4.6.3.4 Sampling procedures and sample for qualitative phase

The above section discussed types of probability sampling. In contrast, non-probability sampling is used to determine the sample for the qualitative phase. This sampling strategy is suitable when the sample size is small, and there is no intention to generalize the findings to other contexts (Weathington, Cunningham, and Pittenger, 2012). Types of non-probability sampling include convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, quota sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, and purposive random sampling (Cohen et al., 2011).

For this study, the population consists of the entire group of people to whom the research findings will apply. From the sampled secondary schools, principals, deputy principals, unit leaders, and department heads were selected because they are directly responsible for the day-to-day leadership activities of the schools. Additionally, regional education bureau experts and Woreda secondary school supervisors were included, as they initiate policies and regulations related to various administrative issues and leadership aspects in schools, as well as the implementation of curriculum concepts.

In non-probability sampling, purposeful sampling involves selecting participants based on their knowledge of the topic being investigated (McMillan et al., 2010). The researcher chooses subjects from the population based on their judgment of the participants' ability to provide the best information to answer the research question (Patton, 2002). In stratified purposeful sampling, the researcher stratifies the population into subgroups based on their criteria (McMillan et al., 2010). The researcher then uses purposeful sampling within each stratum to conduct in-depth studies. The researcher profiles the population into groups and selects information-rich cases from each group for intensive investigation (Cohen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, as Creswell (2012) states, purposive random sampling involves selecting a small number of participants for in-depth investigation, followed by randomly selecting a larger group. McMillan et al. (2010) note that this method can provide qualitative results that supplement quantitative findings. In this study, 5 regional education sector experts, 5 Woreda education department supervisors, 5 principals, 5 PTAs, and 5 senior teachers were selected because they play a key role in initiating policies and regulations regarding various administrative issues, including leadership in secondary schools. All school leaders (principals, vice principals, department heads, unit leaders, school supervisors,

and education experts) were included as study subjects, as their numbers are assumed to be minimal and manageable.

Sections 4.6.3.3 and 4.6.3.4 addressed how the quantitative and qualitative samples were selected from the study population, specifically focusing on how the sample sizes for each were determined. The following section discusses how data were collected from participants.

4.7 LANGUAGE USED

English is the medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education in Ethiopia and is also taught as a subject in elementary and secondary schools. Given that the respondents hold first, second, or third degrees, the questionnaires were prepared and administered in English.

Article 5 of the Constitution of Ethiopia states that: “Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government”. Furthermore, Ethiopia has a federal government structure comprising 13 regional states and two city administrations, with nine of these regions using Amharic as their working language, except for the SNRS, Tigray, Oromia, and Somali regions.

Amharic is also the language the researcher uses in his work environment and daily life, as he lives in a diverse society. Therefore, the FGD interviews were conducted in English, with direct (live) translation by the researcher for clarification; the responses were then translated into English without significant difficulty. This helped reduce language barriers. Finally, the overall thesis was edited in line with UNISA language policy.

4.8 INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

4.8.1 Introduction

This section focuses on the quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments used to gather data for this study. To obtain reliable information about the effectiveness of school leadership and students’ academic achievement in the study area, I employed both quantitative and qualitative data sources. A pragmatic research paradigm and a mixed-methods approach guided the choice of methods and data collection instruments. The quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments are discussed below.

Before data collection began, I sent letters requesting permission to conduct research in schools to the principals. After permission was granted, I contacted participants to inform them about the study, request their participation, and obtain consent by having them sign a consent form. Data collection tools included structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, focus group discussions (FGDs) with school leaders, and document analysis. Quinn (2015:149) notes that different data types allow cross-data validity checks. The mixed methods study relied on multiple data collection methods: questionnaires, structured interviews, observations, and documentary analysis.

Neuma (2017) further emphasizes that researchers using a single data collection method are more susceptible to method-specific errors than those employing multiple methods. Therefore, the questionnaires, FGDs, observations, and semi-structured interviews were designed based on the study questions to collect primary data. In addition, the study analyzed students' secondary school grade reports and state documents to triangulate the information gathered.

Data collection is a systematic and accurate process of gathering information relevant to the research sub-problems, using techniques such as focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews, participant observations, case histories, and narratives (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, this study used structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, interactions with school leaders, and document analysis.

4.8.2 Quantitative Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire is a widely used data collection instrument in quantitative research, consisting of a set of questions addressed to a statistically significant number of subjects. It serves as a means of gathering information for surveys, collecting statistical data or opinions about individuals. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (1997: 952) defines a questionnaire as a written or printed list of questions to be answered by several people, especially as part of a survey. McMillan et al. (2010) describe a questionnaire as a set of questions crafted for a specific purpose, making it one of the most widely used techniques for collecting data from subjects. Johnson et al. (2014) further define it as a set of questions designed in a specific format to gather important data from participants regarding their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and values about the phenomenon being investigated.

For this study, the questionnaire was developed as the primary method for quantitative data collection. In addition to quantitative data, the questionnaire also included qualitative elements through open-ended questions. Both closed and open-ended questions were constructed based on the research's core questions. A pilot (pre-test) was conducted to assess the items' statistical validity. According to Kothari (2004:102), questionnaire design significantly affects the quality and efficiency of respondents' answers. He suggests that researchers should pay close attention to the order of questions when creating a questionnaire.

The order of questions must be clear and logical, allowing respondents to easily understand the relationship between questions, with simpler questions presented first. A well-structured question order reduces the likelihood of misunderstanding. Additionally, questions should be objective to avoid misrepresenting the actual situation. It was important to ensure that questions fit logically into a coherent tabulation scheme. The statement or question stems included a value or direction, and response items were developed to provide scaled responses indicating levels of agreement or disagreement. The Likert scale guided the development of questions, statements, and responses, providing fair assessments of beliefs and opinions (McMillan et al., 2010). The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section A gathered background information, Section B collected demographic data, and Section C addressed school leaders' enactment of instructional leadership.

Quantitative research aimed to predict, explain, and generalize outcomes, while qualitative research aimed to contextualize, interpret, and understand participants' perspectives. The questionnaire was administered to collect data from 97 principals, deputy principals, department heads, and unit leaders in the Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) of Ethiopia.

4.8.3 Instruments for Qualitative Data Collections

The qualitative data collection instruments and techniques include direct observation, document analysis, focus group discussions or interviews, and structured interviews. These techniques help researchers understand the meanings individuals assign to social phenomena and explain the mental processes behind fundamental behaviors. In this study, interviews were a key component of the qualitative data collection instruments, in line with this mixed-methods approach. As McMillan et al. (2010) state, open-ended

questions do not restrict participants to predefined answers or responses; instead, they allow participants to generate their own specific responses. Accordingly, the interviews included open-ended questions to complement the closed-form items in the questionnaire, ensuring that both general and individual-specific data were gathered.

McMillan et al. (2010) define an interview as a face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Johnson et al. (2014) elaborate that interviews allow the interviewer to pose oral questions to the interviewee in a direct setting. This data collection method provides the researcher with the opportunity to ask questions orally in a face-to-face interaction. Interviews were chosen to collect qualitative data because they are one of the most widely used methods in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011).

Interview schedules were prepared well in advance of the interview dates to guide the process and maintain focus. Two distinct interview schedules were created: one for collecting data from principals and deputy principals, and another for focus group interviews with heads of departments (HoDs), parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and supervisors. Each interview schedule contained specific questions tailored to the participants (see Appendices F and G). The study shared these schedules with participants beforehand so they could choose the order in which they preferred to answer the questions. This approach gave participants a significant say in organizing the interview process, enabling them to express their experiences and ideas freely (De Vos et al., 2005).

The study conducted five face-to-face interviews with the principals of five selected secondary schools. The interviews took place in the principals' offices in the afternoon to minimize disruptions during teaching hours. Each principal interview was conducted on separate days from the focus group discussions (FGDs). Additionally, five focus group interviews were held with HoDs, PTAs, and supervisors from the same schools. These FGDs were conducted at agreed-upon venues and times, preferably in the staff room at the end of their class. To allow participants to express themselves freely, the researchers paid careful attention to creating an encouraging environment.

Moreover, the researchers analyzed documents from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and regional education policies, along with meeting minutes and students’ records from the participating schools, to assess their impact on students’ academic achievement in

secondary schools. This analysis aimed to generate useful data to supplement the information collected through interviews.

4.9 PILOT TEST OF THE STUDY TOOLS

A pilot study was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments before the main data collection. This pilot test aimed to ensure the questionnaire was free of ambiguous or irrelevant questions. During the pilot test, participants were informed about the study's goals and instructed on how to complete the questionnaire. They also provided feedback on the relevance, length, and arrangement of the question items. The researchers made amendments based on their comments. According to Creswell (2012:390), a pilot test involves adjusting an instrument based on feedback from a small group of individuals who complete and evaluate it.

The first phase involved piloting the questionnaire, which was designed based on the major research problem and themes identified in the literature review presented in Chapter Two. Feedback from the pilot study was used to evaluate the clarity and relevance of different items in the questionnaire. The researcher revised or removed irrelevant or outdated items and carefully examined the language in the data collection tool for ambiguity, spelling errors, grammar, offensiveness, and appropriate item difficulty relative to participants' cognitive capacity (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 496).

Feedback from the pilot test highlighted the need to adjust the length of the data collection instrument to ensure it could be completed within a maximum of thirty minutes. Consequently, the researcher redesigned the questionnaire to consist of six sections (A to F) for principals and five sections (A to E) for vice principals, HoDs, unit leaders, and senior teachers. Each section contained different questions, all intended to be covered in approximately thirty minutes. Cohen et al. (2018:497) assert that, in quantitative research, questionnaire validity measures how accurately the questions assess what they are intended to measure. In qualitative research, these aspects are represented by data trustworthiness and consistency. The researcher also pre-tested the demographic section of the questionnaire to ensure it captured adequate and relevant information for presenting the study's findings.

The researcher piloted the research instruments in five government secondary schools in the region. Following the pilot study, the researchers made final adjustments to the instruments, including minor edits to questions. Piloting the research instruments helped

verify the clarity of wording in the interview schedules and establish the time required to complete an interview. Capturing narratives as accurately as possible was essential so the analysis reflected the true intentions of the interviews and focus group discussions. At times, my interpretations did not fully capture what participants intended to convey, underscoring the importance of piloting to clarify contextual issues. To contextualize, de-contextualize, and re-contextualize the data, I needed to conduct a pilot study. The pilot study findings served three purposes: contextualization—to provide a contextual framework; de-contextualization—to extract elements from their original context; and re-contextualization—to place elements into a new context (Nyoni, 2012).

Moreover, Yin (2018:37) notes that a pilot test helps researchers refine various aspects of the research based on feedback from the pilot study sample. The pilot study was a small-scale replication of the actual study, targeting a small group of individuals with characteristics like the target respondents, namely principals, deputy principals, unit leaders, and heads of departments in secondary schools. The researcher developed the tools (questionnaires, individual and FGD interview questions, and observation checklists) with assistance from an official statistician from the Department of Mathematics at Hawassa Teachers College, who advised on the statistical validity of the items.

4.10 ENHANCING QUALITY OF THE RESEARCH

To enhance the quality of this study, the researcher carefully considered issues such as reliability, validity, and trustworthiness. A key component of the research process is the quality of the data collection tools, as their quality significantly impacts the reliability and rigor of the research. The most important criterion for validity is how well an instrument aligns with its intended purpose. In other words, it reflects the degree to which the differences detected by a measuring tool accurately represent the attributes being tested (Kothari, 2004, p. 74).

4.10.1 Testing Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness

The most vital concepts in research are reliability, validity, and trustworthiness. Reliability and validity checks were applied to the quantitative aspects of this research. Arthur, Waring, Coe, and Hedges (2012: 244) define reliability as the extent to which a given data set is consistent or dependable. According to Creswell (2012:159), reliability refers to the

stability and dependability of scores obtained from data collection tools. Creswell (2012) further explains that these scores should yield similar results when administered to different respondents at various times.

Reliable results imply that the measuring instrument is expected to produce consistent outcomes over time. Supporting this, Martella et al. (2013: 71) state that reliability assesses whether a participant responds similarly at different times, emphasizing the consistency of measurement devices. Reliability focuses on the instrument's stability and accuracy.

4.10.1.1 Testing Reliability

Through a pilot study with 30 respondents in five schools in the northern zones of SNRS, Ethiopia, the researcher established the instruments' reliability. The researcher conducted reliability assessments on case studies outside the primary study. Reliability testing is critical because it refers to consistency across different parts of the measuring instrument. The most used measure of internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha, particularly for items using Likert scales (Taherdoost, 2016: 33). This method was used, and the instrument was modified based on respondents' feedback to establish a standard for understanding its reliability.

Established benchmarks exist for evaluating instrument reliability. Taherdoost (2016: 33) notes that while no absolute rules exist for internal consistency, a minimum internal consistency coefficient of 0.70 is generally accepted. He further defines four cut-off points for reliability: ≥ 0.90 is excellent; 0.70 to 0.90 is high; 0.50 to 0.70 is moderate; and ≤ 0.50 is considered low reliability.

In this study, the researchers conducted pilot testing to assess item reliability using Cronbach's alpha. Consequently, they needed to objectively measure the reliability of the questionnaire developed for teachers and heads of departments. Based on the results, the researchers made necessary adjustments and corrections to ensure the items met the established standards. After pilot testing, the researchers refined the instruments to ensure respondents in each secondary school context could easily understand them during actual data collection. While reliability is crucial, it is not sufficient on its own without validity (Taherdoost, 2016: 33).

4.10.1.2 Testing Validity

The most important criterion for validity is how well an instrument aligns with its intended purpose. Validity concerns the accuracy of the inferences drawn from data and addresses whether the measurement tool is appropriate for what needs to be measured (Martella et al., 2013, p. 352). For an instrument to be considered valid, it must accurately and appropriately measure the intended construct. In this regard, Taherdoost (2016: 30) notes that establishing content validity involves conducting literature reviews followed by evaluations from experts or panels. He emphasizes that researchers must present their instruments to experts to facilitate validation. In this study, the researchers reviewed the literature on leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement. The researchers presented the questionnaire contents to participants and obtained necessary comments, leading to further corrections and modifications.

Validity is determined by assessing whether the instruments accurately focus on the information they are intended to collect. According to Creamer (2018: 69), validity encompasses the methods used during data collection and analysis that confirm the legitimacy, conformability, and justification of the conclusions and inferences drawn from the study. Validity applies to both qualitative and quantitative research.

To ensure reliability and validity, the self-designed questionnaires were revised to align with the research objectives and prepared in English after pilot testing in two secondary schools in SNRS that were not part of the sampled schools. Consequently, 20 teachers, 2 principals, 2 vice-principals, 5 PTSAs, and 1 supervisor participated in the pilot testing.

Table 4.2 Summary of pilot test results.

No	Items	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Remarks
Part 1: **Effectiveness on *Current School Leadership Practices***				
1	Defining and communicating shared vision and goals	8	.757	Reliable
2	Managing the curriculum and teaching-learning activities	7	.855	Reliable
3	Promoting frequent and appropriate school-wide teachers' development activities	7	.834	Reliable
4	Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching-learning process	10	.871	Reliable
5	Manage school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment.	10		
6	Perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership style/type	7	.657	Reliable
7	Perceptions on gender type, work experience and education	3	.725	Reliable

8	Challenges experienced to school leadership effectiveness	10	.825	Reliable
Part 2: *Principal Leadership Challenges and* Adopted Strategies taken to overcome the problems		10	.685	Reliable
	Overall	**62**	**.800**	**Reliable**

Based on the pilot questionnaire results, as shown in Table 4.2 above, the study's validity and reliability yielded an overall value of 0.80, indicating high reliability. The researcher made minor language modifications and corrections to ensure respondents understood the questions. To strengthen the data collection tools, the researcher carefully selected wording so respondents could understand the relevance of the study for all items.

The second phase involved piloting the interview guide and questions for collecting qualitative data through face-to-face interviews. The pilot test helped the researcher adjust the interview time from twenty to thirty minutes per session and highlighted logistical challenges with using WhatsApp video calls for one-on-one interviews. The researcher also refined the language used in the questions and adjusted their complexity to ensure clarity and facilitate appropriate responses. Feedback from the pilot test informed changes to the quantitative aspects of the interview questions. For example, the original Question 1 was rephrased qualitatively to: "Describe your understanding of the results-based management system." With the data collection tools piloted and customized to the participants' levels, the next stage of the study involved planning field visits, collecting data, and establishing a framework for analyzing and presenting the generated data.

Because this study aimed to help principals perform their leadership roles more effectively, I used a mixed-methods research approach with a concurrent triangulation design. I used both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. In line with this design, I analyzed the data concurrently and compared them to assess convergence, confirmation, disconfirmation, cross-validation, or collaboration (McMillan et al., 2010). I analyzed the qualitative and quantitative datasets separately but alongside each other and integrated the findings in the discussion section (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the following section discusses how each dataset was analyzed before integrating the findings in the discussion.

4.10.1.3 Trustworthiness

In qualitative data, validity is addressed through participants' perspectives, the degree of triangulation, and the researcher's objectivity. It can also be influenced by the honesty, depth, richness, and scope of the data obtained. For quantitative data, validity may be enhanced through proper sampling, adequate instrumentation, and appropriate statistical processing (Cohen, 2007, p. 333). To establish face validity in this mixed methods study, a pilot test was conducted to assess the relevance and usability of the two data collection instruments used. A small group of seven secondary school principals, representing characteristics like those of principals in SNRS of Ethiopia, participated in the pilot study.

This research employs a mixed methods approach. For the qualitative aspect, the term "trustworthiness" is applied to the qualitative data. Trustworthiness is a means by which researchers can assure themselves and their readers that their findings are worthy of consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 289). The best-known criteria developed for trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Credibility is the first criterion under the umbrella of trustworthiness and is essential for maintaining the quality of qualitative research.

The term “credibility” refers to whether participants’ analyses of events align with the researcher’s descriptions in the report. In other words, the researcher must accurately reflect participants' thoughts, reactions, and actions. Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2006:273) outline several techniques to ensure credibility. Lincoln and Guba (1985:301) identified strategies such as extended engagement, persistent inspection, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking. In this study, the researcher ensured credibility through extended engagement, triangulation, and member checking. The researcher applied these strategies as follows:

The first strategy was extended engagement. Creswell (2009:192) explains that extended engagement involves spending sufficient time in the research setting to build trust, uncover half-truths, and become familiar with the data, ultimately leading to richer insights. This approach fosters trust with study participants. Therefore, during one-on-one interviews, the researcher encouraged participants to elaborate by providing additional examples and asking follow-up questions.

As noted by Bekere (2021) and Anney (2014), this research employed questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis to improve and triangulate the results. Thus, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach that integrates the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data.

> *"…portrays that methodological triangulation utilizes different research instruments or methods, for instance, interviews, Focus Group Discussion or participant observation, or that utilizes diverse informants to enhance the quality of the data from diverse sources"* (Bekere, 2021*).*

The second criterion for trustworthiness in qualitative research is transferability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985: 316), transferability relates to applicability. In qualitative research, as Lodico et al. (2006: 275) explain, "transferability" refers to the extent to which findings from one research location can be applied to other settings as perceived by respected researchers. This criterion can be supported by the strategy of "thick description," which involves providing detailed context so behaviors and experiences are meaningful to external readers and can be transferred to their own settings. In this study, the researcher provides rich data, including context, setting, sample size, and sampling techniques: specific information about SNRS of Ethiopia.

The third and fourth criteria of trustworthiness are dependability and conformability. Bitsch (2005:86) defines dependability as the consistency of study results over time.

Supporting evidence is essential for future reference and verification. In this context, Lodico et al. (2006:275) state that "dependability" refers to whether the researcher can trace the procedures and processes used to collect and interpret the data. This means good qualitative studies should clearly explain how they collect and analyze data. Lincoln and Guba (1985:317) describe a dependability audit as a technique for establishing dependability, focusing on how data were gathered and maintained.

Conformability, the final criterion, pertains to neutrality. This means that the interpretation of the data should not reflect the researcher's own ideas but should instead be grounded in the data itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318).

Hence, (2021) states that:

"… in this study, the investigator kept a record of raw data, examine notes/ field notes, coding notes, transcripts, reports, and all the stages of the research process so that any research auditor, the researcher's supervisor, would make an audit. Moreover, the researcher documented the course of development of the completed analysis. This helped the researcher in examining the research procedure and the product of inquiry to verify the findings' trustworthiness.

The final strategy for ensuring credibility is member checking or confirmation. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:315), member checking involves returning data, findings, interpretations, and conclusions to participants to confirm their accuracy. This practice enhances data credibility, as both the researcher and respondents can examine the findings from diverse perspectives.

Before finalizing the analysis of the collected data, the researcher provided participants with transcripts of the telephone and one-on-one interviews, along with the research analysis, interpretation, and conclusions. This allowed participants to provide feedback and ensure their views were included in the final draft of the thesis.

4.11 DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The quantitative data from the closed-ended questionnaire were edited, categorized, and entered into SPSS version 25 for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation (SD), and percentage, were used to summarize the data. Additionally, One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent-samples t-tests were used to identify significant differences among groups of respondents.

The qualitative data were organized into meaningful categories and described both as expressed by the interviewees and as interpreted by the researcher. The data were initially categorized into five codes: awareness, importance, extent of practice, support and follow-up, and challenges of principals' leadership. These codes were developed to address the research questions. The codes were examined in depth to generate emerging themes, subthemes, and key issues from the data. The themes were subsequently reviewed, and the emergent data are presented here. In exploring the themes, the researcher aligned them with the quantitative findings to highlight any confirmatory, divergent, or new issues that may arise.

4.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics encompass essential moral principles that govern human behavior. This section outlines the procedures the researcher followed to safeguard participants' rights and interests throughout the research process. Research ethics are defined as principles that guide researchers in conducting investigations ethically. Scholars such as McMillan and Schumacher (2017) and Johnson and Christensen (2014:192) describe research ethics as concerned with beliefs about what is morally right or wrong, emphasizing that every researcher must evaluate their behavior during the research process.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that ethical practices must be observed at every stage of the research process, including data gathering, reporting, and dissemination. According to Tracy (2020), ethics are based on human interdependency, co-generated knowledge, and equitable power relations. Fouche, Strydom, and Roestenburg (2021:33) highlight that ethical research conduct centers on the principle of "do no harm."

At the end of this report, a list of appendices details the measures the researcher took to comply with ethical standards at various stages of the study. These
include obtaining ethical clearance, securing permission to conduct research, minimizing participant risk, avoiding plagiarism, arranging informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting the right to privacy and confidentiality.

4.12.1 Obtaining Ethical Clearance

The researcher obtained an ethical clearance certificate from the University of South Africa's College of Education Ethics Review Committee (Appendix M) to conduct the investigation. With this clearance, the researcher applied to the SNRS Education Bureau in Ethiopia for permission to enter government secondary schools in the region to collect data for the study. The researcher addressed the permission request to the Deputy Head of the SNRS Education Bureau (Appendix B) and sent a copy of the permission request letter (Appendix C) to all sampled secondary schools.

This procedure is supported by Cohen et al. (2018:134), who assert that seeking permission from the relevant authorities of institutions targeted for research is a fundamental requirement that aligns with the principle of informed consent. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the researcher sent letters to the principals of the selected

schools, requesting their approval to conduct the study and outlining the objectives and procedures involved.

4.12.2 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

In this study, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. McMillan et al. (2010) state that consent in research involves obtaining permission from participants who choose to take part voluntarily. The researchers sent consent letters to all participants, accompanied by a covering letter detailing the study's purpose, a description of the research procedures, and the anticipated duration of participation. The covering letter also outlined the participants' roles in the study and explained how confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy would be maintained.

Ethical standards in research are upheld by ensuring that participants voluntarily agree to take part (Babbie, 2014). Participants were given ample time to decide whether they wished to participate. They were assured they could withdraw at any time without repercussions. The covering letter included a statement affirming free voluntary participation and guaranteed the right to withdraw without consequences, along with the researcher's contact details.

Participants were provided with a consent form (Annex E) to sign, indicating their agreement to take part in the study and their understanding of the research purpose. This process involved clearly explaining the research process and its objectives to the participants. Permission was sought not only from the participants but also from the schools involved in the study.

4.12.3 Anonymity and Confidentiality

In this study, participants' privacy was a top priority, given that human beings were involved. Anonymity is essential, as it ensures that information provided by participants does not reveal their identities (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 129). To maintain anonymity, participants' names were not disclosed, and their responses were coded to ensure no identifiable information was used or published. This approach also enhanced confidentiality, as participants were not required to write their names on the questionnaires. Interviews were conducted at locations agreed upon by the participants and at times convenient for them to further ensure their privacy. This assurance was detailed in the information sheet (Appendix G) provided to participants.

Confidentiality must be respected, which requires researchers to keep research data and its sources confidential unless participants consent to their release (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2022). Throughout the study, confidentiality and anonymity protocols were strictly observed during data collection, observations, processing, consultations, and feedback. Individuals responsible for ensuring research integrity could review participants' responses, including the transcriber, external coder, supervisor, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Identifying records were accessible only to those directly involved in the study unless participants granted permission for others to view them.

I adhered to protocols for privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality throughout data collection and storage. Data and research records will be preserved for a minimum of five years in the UNISA repository (or as required by policy or legal frameworks) after the submission of the report. Following this period, the data would be destroyed. Hard copies of responses will be stored securely in a locked cupboard or filing cabinet for five years for future research or academic purposes, while electronic data will be stored

on a password-protected computer. Any future use of the stored data will be subject to a research ethics review and approval, if applicable. Hard copies will be shredded, and electronic files will be permanently deleted using appropriate software.

Finally, a letter of gratitude will be sent to the participant schools and relevant bodies, providing feedback on the study's findings. Additionally, a copy of the approved thesis will be made available to these institutions. Schools with libraries would be encouraged to store the thesis there, while those without libraries will be advised to keep it in a secure location for reference materials or important documents.

4.12.4 Protection from Harm

Ethics codes and regulatory frameworks consistently emphasize avoiding harm, and researchers should strive to protect participants throughout their studies. According to Yin (2018:126), researchers are responsible for safeguarding participants from harm, including any use of deception. This research adopted a pragmatic paradigm and involved human participants; however, they were non-vulnerable, and the information collected was not sensitive. The only foreseeable risk was the potential inconvenience of data collection during working hours, which could disrupt participants' schedules.

To minimize this inconvenience, I focused on relevant questions and ensured that participants had the opportunity to agree and sign the consent form before the interviews. This approach helped to limit participation time. For the study's results and findings to be accepted, the data must be trustworthy, reliable, and valid. I achieved trustworthiness by applying the principles of dependability, transferability, conformability, and credibility. Finally, to ensure the ethical justification of this study, I considered principles such as full disclosure, voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm to participants, maintaining privacy, and adherence to Institutional Review Board requirements.

4.13 SUMMARY

In this chapter, I examined mixed methods research, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, along with their respective advantages and disadvantages. I presented an overview of research assumptions and major paradigms and discussed different designs. I detailed the research methodology, including sampling techniques, sample size, and data collection instruments. I also explained the data analysis procedures and the steps taken to ensure that the study was conducted ethically. Toward the end of the chapter, I outlined strategies to enhance research quality, focusing on reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

This chapter outlined the research paradigm, design, and methodology that underpin this study. It provided detailed information on the mixed methods design, including its origins, relevance to this study, and general characteristics. The chapter emphasized the rationale for choosing a mixed-methods approach to data gathering. I asserted that this approach is particularly relevant for this study.

The chapter discussed the instruments used for data collection, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documentary analysis. The chapter also summarized the data analysis procedures. It also outlined the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and adhere to ethical considerations. Subsequent chapters will present a detailed analysis and findings from the data collected at five schools through questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews, with relevant comments.

4.14 PROJECTIONS FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER

In the next chapter, I present, analyze, interpret, and discuss the data. It presents both qualitative and quantitative data gathered through interviews, focus group discussions

(FGDs), school observations, document analysis, and questionnaires. I use the proposed data presentation and analysis approaches to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data, using triangulation to strengthen the validity of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, this study elaborated on the research design, paradigms, and methodology in their respective subsections. This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets qualitative and quantitative data using a mixed-methods framework. The first section presents quantitative data gathered from a sample of 497 respondents (educational supervisors, principals, vice principals, senior teachers, and department heads) from selected secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. The primary objective of this chapter is to discuss the findings relative to the research questions and hypotheses articulated as discussed in Chapter One, sub-sections 16.2; 1.6.3). To achieve this, it emphasizes the systematic presentation, analysis, and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data through a Convergent Concurrent Mixed Method design.

Thus, the first section focuses on respondents' quantitative data. As detailed in Chapter Four, sub-section 4.5 on research design, paradigms, and methodologies, this convergent concurrent mixed-methods approach involved collecting qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously. According to Creswell (2014:15), this method allows for the triangulation or integration of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research issue. Thus, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately and subsequently integrated, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

I begin by presenting the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, sex, profession, work experience, and school location. This is followed by the presentation of the views (perceptions) of the educational supervisors, principals, deputy principals, department heads, senior teachers, and unit leaders on the principal’s leadership effectiveness in their core roles.

The statistical analysis is structured to provide a rich, multi-layered interpretation of the mixed data (quantitative and qualitative data). It begins with a detailed descriptive analysis of the core dimensions or roles of leadership practices and perceived leadership styles, followed by an inferential analysis of the effectiveness of the leadership

relationships between these and leadership variables and student academic achievement on EHEECE.

This chapter presents the data in three major components. The initial portion presents and analyzes quantitative data from the first part of the study. This segment evaluates respondents' demographic characteristics using percentages and frequency distributions, capturing the perspectives of educational supervisors, principals, vice-principals, department heads, senior teachers, and unit leaders regarding professional development, work experience, and gender. In conjunction, the study analyzed principals' key leadership roles; the connection between principals' leadership role enactment and student academic achievement; challenges faced by principals; and the strategies adopted by school principals, using descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The study also used inferential statistics, including the independent T-test and Pearson product-moment correlation analysis.

5.2 TRIANGULATION OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

This section focuses on triangulating the quantitative and qualitative datasets. The numerical data obtained from the quantitative data is merged with qualitative data obtained from interviews, school document analysis, and field observations. In doing so, I was guided by the study objectives stated in 1.6.3 of Chapter One. Qualitative data will be compared and contrasted with quantitative data to identify similarities and differences in participants' views and opinions on the effectiveness of leadership practices, leadership style/type, challenging factors, and strategies adopted to overcome those factors in improving students' academic achievement.

5.3 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

This thesis aims to assess the effectiveness of school principal leadership and its influencing factors on student academic achievement, as reflected in Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) scores from government secondary schools in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia.

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of quantitative data collected from 497 secondary school senior teachers and leaders in SNRS, Ethiopia. It reports the findings in relation to the research questions and hypotheses outlined in Chapter One. The analysis was structured to provide a rich, multi-layered interpretation of the quantitative

data. It begins with a detailed descriptive analysis of the core dimensions of leadership practices and perceived leadership styles, followed by an inferential analysis of the relationships between these leadership variables and student academic performance. Finally, I examined the influence of key principals' demographics, compared the results, and provided interpretations.

In conducting this evaluation, I chose questionnaires as the preferred method for gathering data from principals, vice-principals, educational supervisors, unit leaders, senior teachers, and heads of departments, on the premise that this method would facilitate the collection of reliable information from a large respondent pool. As stipulated by the Ethiopian Professional Standard for Secondary School Principals (MOE, 2013:12), effective educational leadership practices entail adherence to the national guidelines spanning key practices of school principals, which include setting direction, developing personnel, enhancing the school environment, engaging with the community, managing school operations and resources, and strategizing for school improvement and enhancement of students' academic achievement as evidenced by EHEECE recorded scores.

5.4 THE RETURN RATE OF DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS OF THE STUDY AND RESPONDENTS' DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

5.4.1 Data Collection Tools Return Rate

As discussed above in subsection 5.1, this thesis employed a mixed data collection method, collecting quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires, structured open-ended questions, interviews, and document analysis. For these purposes, two types of questionnaires were developed, and the study participants involved in completing the questionnaires were, for Type One, 67 principals, 67 deputy principals, and 20 educational supervisors to whom questionnaires were distributed for completion and return to the data collectors; and, for Questionnaire Type Two, 67 unit leaders (4*67=160) department heads, and (6*40=240) senior teachers were distributed and involved to complete and return to the data collectors.

Even though the researcher made all his struggles and efforts, among these sampled respondents, 61(91.1%), principals, 63 (94%), deputy principals, 17(85%), education supervisors, 66(98.5%), unit leaders, 111(69.4%) department heads, and 179 (74.6%)

senior teachers completed and returned the questionnaire. This resulted in an average return rate of 80.03% for the quantitative data instruments.

The relevant data required to conduct this research study were collected from the sampled secondary schools and the respective Woreda education supervisors. Thus, the return rates of the study questionnaires from both groups are as shown above. Despite the researcher's efforts, fewer respondents did not return the questionnaires for several reasons. Hence, the overall return rate of quantitative data for type-one was 141 (91.6%) and for type-two 356 (76.2%), and the overall returned data from the quantitative data collection instruments (questionnaires) was 497, which is about 80.03% of the distributed questionnaires. Accordingly, all returned questionnaire items were found useful and used for data analysis using SPSS software version 27.0.

5.4.2 Demographic Data Characteristics

As noted in chapter four (under 4.3), this sub-section presents the quantitative research data that were collected from respondents. It consisted of two parts of questionnaire items that were administered separately. *Part one was for* principals and educational supervisors; *part two was for* deputy principals, senior teachers, heads of departments, and unit leaders of forty-six (46) sampled government secondary schools, which all use the same academic legislation as a guiding policy, such as the Ethiopian Education Development Road Map (2018) and NPSSP (2013) in the region.

Both questionnaires were structured in five *parts* or themes: (1) the demographic data, (2) effectiveness of leadership on current secondary school leadership practices, (3) perceptions of respondents on the relationship of leadership effectiveness with variables (leadership style(s)/ type(s), gender type, work experience, and education level), (4) major challenges experienced in leadership practices of secondary schools organized in line with the research questions, and (5) the strategies adopted for the improvement of students' academic achievement in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Accordingly, the first part of the questionnaire items covered by the survey aimed at identifying relevant demographic variables of the principals, including the name of their Woreda and secondary schools, sex, age, education level, years of service as principals in secondary schools, and field of qualification. Table 5.2 presents a cross-tabulation of these variables, showing the frequency and percentage distribution of principals, deputy

principals, educational supervisors, senior teachers, unit leaders, and department heads in SNRS sampled secondary schools.

Table 5.2: Table of Demographic Data Presentation

Demographic Variables	Category	Count	%
1. Sex of respondents	Female	96	19.3%
	Male	401	80.7%
Total		**497**	**100**
2. Age of respondents	<=30	79	15.9%
	31-40	324	65.2%
	41-50	79	15.9%
	51-60	15	3.0%
Total		**497**	**100**
3. Highest qualification attained	Diploma in teaching	10	2.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	316	63.6%
	Master's Degree	171	34.4%
Total		**497**	**100**
4. Working experience in general as a supervisor, principals, teacher, HOD, unit leader in secondary school	<5 yrs.	37	7.4%
	5-10 yrs.	169	34.0%
	11-15 yrs.	141	28.4%
	16-20 yrs.	99	19.9%
	>20 yrs.	51	10.3%
Total		**497**	**100**

Note: *Demographic statistics of respondents (educational supervisors, principals, senior teachers, HODs, unit leaders of sample secondary schools)*

Of the total sample population, 497 respondents actively participated in the quantitative part of the study, providing a detailed foundation for interpreting the subsequent findings. Observational data on the sex/gender distribution of the respondents show that most respondents were male, accounting for 80.7% (n=401) of the total participants. Female participants accounted for a considerably smaller proportion at 19.3% (n=96), indicating a remarkable gender disparity within this sample that could potentially influence certain aspects of the data.

Regarding the age distribution of the respondents, the result reveals a predominantly mid-career cohort. The majority, 65.2% (n=324) of the participants, fell within the 31-40 age range, suggesting a group of respondents who have moved beyond their initial years of teaching and are likely at a stage of established professional practice. Teachers aged 30 or younger and those aged 41 to 50 each represented 15.9% (n=79) of the sample, providing insights from both newer and slightly more senior professionals. The oldest group, aged 51 to 60 years, contributed a smaller but still valuable share at 3.0% (n=15), bringing decades of experience to the fore.

The educational attainment among the respondents highlights a well-qualified group. A significant majority, 63.6% (n=316), reported a bachelor's degree (encompassing BA, BSc, or B.Ed.) as their highest qualification. Furthermore, 34.4% (n=171) had secured a master's degree (MA, MSc, or MEd), indicating a strong commitment to advanced academic and professional development. A smaller proportion, 2% (n=10), held a Teacher's Diploma, suggesting a foundational level of teaching qualification.

Lastly, respondents differed substantially in their years of teaching, department head (HoD) or secondary school unit leader roles, and as principals or education supervisors, but were predominantly experienced professionals. The sample population represented the population and had 34% (n=169) of respondents with experience of 5-10 years, 11-15 years (28.4%, n=141), and 16-20 years (19.9%, n=99) of respondents. This wide range of experience benefits the study because these respondents have experienced different education reforms, student diversity, and changing issues in education. The remaining 10.3% (51) of respondents have over 20 years of experience, and the remaining 7.4% (37) have less than 5 years of experience.

5.4.3 Data Analysis on Effectiveness of Leadership Practices of Secondary School Principals

Based on the research problem outlined in section 1.5, the study is guided by a main research question, which is further divided into subsidiary questions. This is: *"What variables are related to the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices in secondary schools, and what is their effect on student academic achievement on the (EHEECE) in SNRS, Ethiopia?"* I formulated five fundamental research questions, namely:

1. *To what extent do secondary school principals fulfill their core leadership practices in improving students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia?*
2. *What are the major impediment factors that hinder school leaders from contributing to students' academic achievement?*
3. *What is the relationship between school leadership effectiveness and variables: leadership styles/ types, gender, education qualification, and experience in relation to students' academic achievement on EHEECE?*
4. *How do principals, supervisors, department heads, unit leaders, senior teachers, and deputy principals perceive his/their own principal's leadership style effectiveness?*

5. *For the improvement of students' academic achievement, what are the strategies adopted by the school principals in SNRS, Ethiopia?*

Of these five basic research questions, the first question (To what extent do secondary school principals fulfill their core leadership practices in improving students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia?) serves as the core of this study and is developed around *five* components of current key leadership practices. That is, *"establishing and communicating shared vision and goals, managing the curriculum and teaching-learning program, developing teachers' professional development, developing the school, engagement of community and stakeholders, managing the school operations and resources".*

For this study, based on the above research questions, the following sections present discussions and analyses of quantitative and qualitative data (sections 4.4.1.1 through 4.4.1.5 and 4.4.2.1 to 4.4.2.5). Thus, basic question 1 above, data assessed across five key dimensions (sections 5.4.1.1 to 5.4.1.5) of the current leadership practices set in the Ethiopian professional standard for secondary school principals (MOE, 2013, p.12), and the remaining research questions (2 to 5 above) are also discussed accordingly. The analysis moves beyond a mere presentation of scores to explore the realities of practical school leadership in secondary schools in the Sidama region, interpreting the data through the lens of established educational leadership theory and practice.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). To assess principals' leadership practices in the sampled secondary schools of Sidama National Regional State, educational supervisors, principals, unit leaders, senior teachers, and heads of departments were invited to evaluate the effectiveness of these core leadership practices in enhancing students' academic performance. For meaningful analysis, based on the average rating scale value (3.00), the mean values were interpreted as follows: mean ≥4.00 signifies strong practice, means between 3.00-3.99 indicate moderate practice, and means ranging from 1.00-2.99 denote poor or weak practices. The subsequent section discusses school principals' leadership practices in establishing and communicating shared vision and goals.

5.4.3.1 Effectiveness of leadership of secondary school principal: setting and communicating shared vision and goals; students' academic achievement

Creating and supporting a shared vision is crucial for good leadership. The capacity to initiate and nurture a shared vision is widely considered in educational literature as a guarantee of effective leadership. As Sergiovanni (1992) stated, a school vision and goals serve as the foundational guide for all improvement efforts, providing a shared purpose and a moral compass for the entire school community. This involves working together to develop, share, and weave this direction into the school's daily life. As Hallinger and Hosseingholizadeh (2020) point out, a clear mission motivates staff and others to work towards common goals. This section examines how effective school leaders are in these goal-setting tasks.

Moreover, setting directions, which is synonymous with setting goals, framing goals, and creating a shared vision, is one of the key leadership functions of leadership practices (Sun & Leithwood, 2015:500). This sub-section of the chapter, therefore, provides a detailed assessment of the perceived effectiveness of principals in these critical, direction-setting tasks, examining whether the vision is simply stated or truly serves as a living document that guides the school's journey.

The effectiveness of principals ' leadership practices in secondary schools in improving students' academic achievement, in terms of their pass rate on EHEECE, mainly depends on whether they implement/achieve those core leadership roles. Because school leadership is expected to perform the core practices mentioned above effectively, the researcher raised a basic question that supplements the main research question: "To what extent do secondary school leaders fulfill their *roles in improving students' academic achievement of SNRS, Ethiopia?"* The analysis of the data below is thus undertaken with this sub-research question 1 in mind.

Table 5.4 Respondents' Perceptions of School Leaders' Effectiveness on Vision & Goals

Item	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1. **Builds understanding of the school vision**	497	3.33	1.03
2. **Communicates the school vision to stakeholders**	497	3.36	1.02
3. **Establishes measurable school goals**	497	3.37	1.04
4. **Facilitates a shared vision of improvement**	497	3.43	0.99

5. Helps in setting short-term goals	497	3.35	1.03
6. Ensures goals are widely known and visible	497	3.33	1.06
7. Uses targeted goals when making decisions	497	2.83	1.03
8. Uses community resources to set achievable goals	497	2.79	0.98
Overall Mean		**3.22**	**0.65**

Note: *Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*

The results in Table 5.3 show that school leaders are perceived as moderately effective in establishing vision and goals, as shown by a modest overall dimension mean score (M = 3.23, SD = 0.65) on a five-point scale. This suggests general competence rather than outstanding skill. On individual items, school leaders are strongest at working with others to create and share the vision. For example, "Facilitates a shared vision of improvement" (M=3.43, SD=0.99), "Communicates the school vision to stakeholders" (M=3.36, SD=1.02), and "Establishes measurable school goals" (M=3.37, SD=1.04) received the highest ratings. This means school leaders are generally good at getting the school community to agree on a direction and set clear objectives.

In contrast, "uses targeted goals when making decisions" (M=2.83, SD=1.03) and especially "uses community resources to set achievable goals" (M=2.79, SD=0.98) received lower ratings. This indicates a key problem in translating this vision into practical daily practice. Most respondents believe that school leaders have not done enough to demonstrate how the vision is put into practice. This discrepancy highlights a gap between articulating the vision and acting on it. The study shows that the item "Ensures that goals are widely known and visible" has the highest variance in responses (M=3.33, SD=1.06). This also indicates that making goals a visible part of school life is not consistently successful. This pattern strongly suggests an "implementation gap" between a good vision and real changes in the school (Day and Leithwood, 2007).

Overall, the quantitative findings suggest that most sampled secondary school principals in the Sidama region are moderately effective in setting and communicating a vision and goals. While school principals excel at articulating a clear vision and engaging stakeholders in its development—as shown by higher scores in facilitating and communicating a shared vision—they show less proficiency in consistently operationalizing it. This indicates that leadership practice is strong in declarative aspects

(communicating 'what' and 'why') but weaker in enactive leadership (consistently applying 'how' to achieve goals).

Essentially, leaders are effective at generating shared aspirations but struggle to integrate these goals into daily decisions, resource allocation, and the school's visible practices. This 'implementation deficit' poses a significant challenge to translating well-understood strategic directions into concrete improvements for students' academic achievement and staff performance.

This gap between vision and action has important, though often indirect, consequences for student academic performance. A clearly stated vision, as these school leaders provide, is a necessary first step for school improvement. It lays the groundwork for aligning teaching efforts toward common academic goals, a process that strong leadership can foster (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). However, when the vision isn't fully implemented, strategic decisions about budgets, schedules, and new programs may not directly support the stated goals.

This means school resources may not go where students need them most. Teachers may be asked to raise goals without receiving the practical support they need to teach. Over time, this disconnect can frustrate staff and diminish their shared trust in helping students succeed, which can negatively affect student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). Without consistent implementation, the vision remains just words, and the school's efforts to improve student outcomes may falter, leading to inconsistent progress (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021).

To sum up, establishing and communicating a shared vision and goals is a core practice to evaluate school principals' current practices in secondary schools in SNRS, with eight interrelated items for participants. Despite this, the overall mean value (M=3.22) is slightly above the average value. Overall, the quantitative and closed-ended structured interview findings suggest that most secondary school leaders are moderately effective in setting a vision and goals. While school principals excel in articulating a clear vision and engaging stakeholders in its development, as shown by higher scores in facilitating and communicating a shared vision, they show less proficiency in consistently operationalizing it. Hence, participants rated the principals' establishment and communication of a shared vision and goals as a weak practice.

5.4.3.2 Leadership effectiveness of school principals in teaching-learning program management; students' academic achievement

School leadership plays a crucial role in promoting students' academic achievement. Leadership influence is most pronounced when focused on enhancing teaching and learning, and this impact is greatly magnified when responsibilities for leading teaching and learning are broadly distributed within the school (AITSL 2018; Robinson et al., 2009; Waters et al., 2003).

Instructional program management within a school focuses on ensuring that school objectives are aligned and effectively translated into classroom practices (Gumus et al., 2018, p. 29). This responsibility encompasses coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, and providing supportive supervision and evaluation of instructional practices. Principals who actively engage in educational leadership, monitor student progress, and set high expectations for all students contribute to better educational outcomes and a more effective, cohesive school environment.

School Leaders implementing high-quality, standards-based instruction are the most significant factor in improving students' academic achievement because they directly influence the quality of teaching and learning, often referred to as the "technical core" of the school's mission (Elmore, 2000). While all leadership functions matter, empirical evidence shows that leaders actively engaged in pedagogy have the most significant and direct influence on student outcomes (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). This section evaluates the extent to which school leaders in the Sidama region fulfill this central role. It assesses key practices such as actively monitoring instruction, ensuring the curriculum is aligned with rigorous standards, and maintaining a persistent focus on high academic expectations for all students, thereby moving beyond managerial duties to become true leaders of learning.

Table 5.5 Respondents' Perceptions of Principal Effectiveness on Teaching-Learning Program Management

Item	N	Mean (M)	SD
Ensure that the classroom objectives are consistent with the stated academic goals of the national academic content standards	497	3.22	0.99
Recruit qualified, interested, and competent teachers to support achieving goals	497	3.26	1.05

Encourage teachers to consider & use new technologies for their teaching	497	2.96	0.62
Advocate for high levels of learning for all students, including students with special educational needs.	497	3.14	1.09
Participates actively in review, selection, and preparation of curricular materials workshops	497	3.02	0.95
The school principal understands, promotes, and shares relevant research.	497	3.17	1.08
Ensures instructional practices are effective and meet the needs of all students, including students with special educational needs.	497	3.26	1.15
The principal monitors and evaluates the quality of teaching and learning programs.	497	3.27	1.16
Implementing high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students.	497	3.16	0.66
(Overall Mean)		**2.81**	

Note: *Scale:* Mean value ≥4.50 = very high, 3.50-4.49 = high, 2.50-3.49 = moderate, 1.50-2.49 = low & ≤1.49 = very low.

Table 5.4 indicates that instructional management presents a significant challenge for most secondary school leaders in the Sidama regional state, with an overall dimension mean score of M=3.16 (SD=0.66). This score suggests that leadership practices tend to prioritize monitoring existing academic structures over actively driving instructional innovation and continuous improvement, which is not ideal. This finding is significant given the extensive research consistently linking robust instructional leadership to effective teaching (Esa et al., 2017; Sarıkaya & Erdoğan, 2016; Hilton et al., 2015). Studies by Saleem et al. (2020) and Kim & Lee (2020) further reinforce that administrators' instructional leadership profoundly affects teachers' ability to teach effectively, thereby significantly improving student learning outcomes. Therefore, the identified challenges in instructional management highlight a clear opportunity for school leaders to enhance their impact on both teacher development and students' academic achievement.

According to the OECD (2009), standards of teaching and learning must improve continuously if schools are to ensure that children and young people can be successful in the future. School principals play a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing teachers' motivation and capacity and shaping the climate and environment in which they work and learn. To increase their influence, school principals need to take a more active role in instructional leadership by monitoring and evaluating teacher performance;

arranging mentoring and coaching; planning teacher professional development; and organizing teamwork and collaborative learning.

School principals' practice in maintaining and evaluating the quality of teaching-learning programs received a moderate mean rating (M = 2.81). However, this result indicates that school principals are not effectively guiding and ensuring compliance with established national standards, a fundamental prerequisite for overall school effectiveness. The high standard deviation of 1.16 suggests high variability among these perceptions. Overall, the results suggest a reactive leadership posture, focused on maintaining existing programs rather than proactively driving continuous improvement and innovation.

Such a responsive approach often manifests as a lack of critical leadership roles, including ineffective instructional supervision, inadequate staff development initiatives, failure to communicate compelling strategic visions, and limited embrace of participatory decision-making processes. To close this gap and improve school efficiency, school leaders must implement an instructional leadership model. This approach necessitates actively evaluating pedagogical practices, providing targeted support and constructive feedback to teachers, and leveraging empirical data to inform strategic change and foster systemic improvement within the educational environment.

Concern about leaders' effectiveness in encouraging teachers to consider and use new technologies in their teaching is relatively low (M=2.96, SD=0.62), below the Likert scale average (3), indicating less efficacy in promoting innovative pedagogy. Furthermore, school leaders received modest scores for "Advocating for high levels of learning for all students, including students with special educational needs" (M=3.14, SD=1.09) and for "understanding, promoting, and sharing relevant research" (M=3.17, SD=1.08). The high standard deviations for these items signify wide variation in perceptions and suggest irregular effectiveness in promoting equity and evidence-based innovation across schools. This observation shows that school leaders are not effectively acting as catalysts for educational improvement by using research to inform and strengthen their leadership and fostering a culture where all students, including those with special needs, can achieve high levels of learning.

In short, respondents' opinions suggest school leaders show a fair level of effectiveness in meeting curriculum and instructional standards, which points to a compliance-driven leadership style. While this is a solid foundation, it comes with notable shortcomings in

encouraging innovative teaching methods and providing consistent support for all students, especially those with diverse needs. This leadership style likely has two main impacts on students' academic achievement. On one hand, regularly monitoring standards sets a baseline for student performance, ensuring quality doesn't drop too low. On the other hand, the lack of emphasis on innovation and uneven support for all students creates a "ceiling" that limits overall student potential.

School principals' practice of maintaining and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning programs received a moderate mean rating (M=2.81). However, this result indicates that school leaders are not effectively guiding and ensuring compliance with established standards, a fundamental prerequisite for overall school effectiveness. By not consistently advocating for every student's needs, school principals risk allowing achievement gaps between groups to persist or widen. Additionally, by not nurturing an environment where teachers can explore new technologies and research-based strategies, this leadership practice suppresses the school's ability to continuously improve instruction. As a result, this limits the long-term academic growth potential for all students.

5.4.3.3 Effectiveness of school leadership in fostering teachers' professional development; students' academic achievement

It is a widely accepted axiom that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Consequently, a school leader's role in developing staff professional capacity is a critical lever for school improvement. This dimension assesses the principal's effectiveness as a professional learning leader, a role that involves more than organizing workshops. It requires cultivating a collaborative culture, identifying teacher needs, and providing targeted, sustained, job-embedded learning opportunities that translate into improved classroom practice (Timperley, 2011). This section therefore examines the practices leaders use to build the collective teacher efficacy of their schools, thereby creating the human capital necessary to achieve ambitious academic goals.

Table 5.5 Respondents' Perceptions of Principal Effectiveness on Teacher Professional Development

Items	N	Mean	SD
Encourage teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school goals	497	3.21	0.723

Plan for professional development around teacher needs and wants	497	3.33	0.781
Broadens teachers' knowledge and skills by inviting education experts to give lectures in schools	497	3.33	0.762
Supporting staff in planning and implementing research-based professional development	497	3.30	0.834
Recognizes the accomplishments of individual teachers and teaching staff equitably	497	3.22	0.796
Plan and develop individualized & team professional development networks to support individuals and team	497	3.34	0.837
Schedule in-service training and develop collaboration among teachers	497	3.28	0.851
Lead and Managing development opportunities for teachers of the school to build their capacity	497	3.29	0.55
Overall Mean		**3.29**	**0.77**

Note: *Scale: Mean value ≥4.50= very high, 3.50-4.49= high, 2.50-3.49= moderate, 1.50-2.49= low and ≤1.49= very low*

As shown in Table 5.5, school principal leadership is perceived as moderately effective in fostering teacher professional development, with an overall dimension mean of (M=3.29, SD=0.77). Their strengths primarily lie in the logistical and planning aspects of professional learning. Notably, school leaders achieved their highest ratings for "Plan and develop individualized and team professional development networks to support individuals and teams" (M=3.34, SD=0.84) and "Broadens teachers' knowledge and skills by inviting education experts to give lectures in schools" (M=3.33, SD=0.76). These results suggest that school leaders are seen as capable organizers, skilled at arranging and coordinating formal training opportunities for their staff.

However, a noticeable contrast emerges between this planning proficiency and a relative weakness in the cultural and relational dimensions crucial for professional growth. "Recognizes the accomplishments of individual teacher and teaching staff equitably" recorded the lowest mean score within this dimension (M=3.22, SD=0.80). This disparity has significant implications, suggesting a leadership profile more skilled at managing professional development events than at consistently cultivating a motivating and appreciative professional environment.

The influences of this leadership practice on students' academic achievement is likely multidimensional. On one hand, school principals' leadership effectiveness in organizing and encouraging relevant professional development directly invests in the school's most

vital resource for improving students' learning: its teachers. Enhancing teacher skills, indeed, constitutes a fundamental pathway through which leadership positively impacts student outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021). Conversely, the less effective practice of equitably recognizing teacher accomplishments presents a substantial impediment.

Without consistent, meaningful recognition, teachers' morale and motivation to implement new, often challenging, instructional strategies—acquired through training—may well diminish (Kraft & Papay, 2014). This situation risks professional learning opportunities failing to translate into improved classroom practices. This challenge often arises when professional development lacks strong support from a motivating school culture (Timperley, 2011). Similarly, respondents' perceived results suggest that school principals, as leaders, are viewed as capable of organizing, arranging, and coordinating formal training opportunities for their staff. As a result, even if school principals successfully provide the necessary training to improve students' academic achievement, their failure to fully cultivate a motivational and celebratory professional culture may ultimately limit the impact of these efforts on student learning.

5.4.3.4 Effectiveness of school principals in school development and community and stakeholder engagement; students' academic achievement

Modern educational theory recognizes that schools do not operate as isolated "islands" but are deeply embedded within a complex web of social and community relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This dimension explores the principal's crucial role as a "boundary spanner," building bridges between the school and its external environment. This function is especially critical because community partnerships can provide essential social, cultural, and material support for the school's mission, directly and indirectly influencing student learning outcomes (Epstein, 2018).

Table 5.6 Respondents' Perceptions of Principal Effectiveness on Community Engagement

Item	N	Mean	SD
Participate and connect the school with parents and community members in the educational process.	497	2.93	0.97
Involve parents and community members in improving student learning.	497	3.01	0.98
Mobilize allocate and utilize resource to support teaching- learning	497	2.85	0.96

Discuss regularly with students and stakeholders how to improve their academic achievement.	497	2.91	1.01
Establish and maintain safe school security, ensuring the smooth progress of teaching-learning	497	2.87	0.96
Distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities	497	2.87	0.96
Use community resources successfully for students' academic achievement improvement.	497	2.90	0.96
Nurturing learning environment that addresses the physical and mental health needs	497	2.95	0.93
Establishes the structure of teams and groups who works together on problem solving.	497	2.97	0.99
Establish expectations for the use of culturally responsive practices that acknowledge and value diversity.	497	2.89	0.99
Lead and managing the school development and engages community	497	2.91	0.58
Overall Mean		**2.91**	**0.94**

Note: *Scale: Mean value ≥4.50= very high, 3.50-4.49= high, 2.50-3.49= moderate, 1.50-2.49= low and ≤1.49= very low*

The school principal's instructional leadership practices, along with encouraging parent-child interactions at home, influence students' academic performance and success at school *'indirectly and most powerfully'*. Table 5.6 summarizes respondents' perceptions of school principal effectiveness in community engagement, and the overall mean summary statistics (M=2.91; SD=0.58) indicate that community and stakeholder engagement is the area of perceived weakness for secondary school principals.

The study found that secondary school leadership effectiveness in mobilizing, allocating, and utilizing resources to support teaching-learning is the lowest-rated area (Mean=2.85; SD=0.96), the greatest perceived weakness, with nearly every practice rated below the scale's midpoint of 3.0, indicating perceived ineffectiveness. Similarly, school leaders are seen as least effective in their ability to establish and maintain safe school security, ensuring the smooth progress of teaching-learning (Mean=2.87; SD=0.97), distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities (Mean=2.87; SD=0.97), and establish expectations for the use of culturally-responsive practices that acknowledge and value diversity (Mean=2.89; SD=0.99).

This pattern suggests that school leaders are not effectively building the collaborative relationships required to leverage community and family assets. This inward focus represents a significant missed opportunity to build the rich social and cultural capital that can enhance student motivation and create a shared sense of responsibility for academic success (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2022).

Similarly, as shown above, a distinct pattern emerges: the only areas of moderate competence are internal-facing ones, *"Nurturing a learning environment that addresses physical and mental health needs"* (Mean=2.95; SD=0.93) and Involve parents and community members in improving student learning (Mean=3.02; SD=0.93. While important, this contrasts sharply with the profound weaknesses identified in all external-facing roles. The study also shows that school leaders have a gap in the area of participating in and connecting the school with parents and community members in the educational process (Mean=2.93; SD=0.97), discussing regularly with students and stakeholders how to improve their academic achievement (Mean=2.91; SD=1.01), and using community resources successfully for students' academic achievement improvement (Mean=2.96; SD=0.96).

Ultimately, the finding shows this leadership approach directly constrains students' academic achievement by isolating the school from the vital web of support a fully engaged community can provide. When school leaders fail to mobilize community resources, students may lack access to essential materials, technology, or enrichment opportunities that could bridge learning gaps. When parents and community members are not actively involved in the educational process, learning is not consistently reinforced at home, and struggling students lack a crucial support network. The school effectively operates on an island, forcing it to rely solely on its own limited resources. For students, this means facing academic challenges without the full backing of their families and community, which can lead to lower motivation, increased absenteeism, and ultimately, poorer academic achievement or outcomes.

5.4.3.5 Effectiveness of school principals in managing resources and school operations; students' academic achievement

While instructional leadership is paramount, it must be supported by a stable, safe, and well-managed learning environment. This dimension assesses principals' managerial effectiveness in managing school resources, ensuring orderly and ethical operational procedures, and creating the structural conditions necessary for high-quality teaching-learning activities. This function is not merely administrative; as Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argue, strategically aligning resources—including time, funding, and personnel—to support a school's pedagogical goals is a key leadership competency. This section therefore examines how effectively school leaders manage the organizational and ethical

fabric of their schools, providing the predictable and supportive foundation on which a culture of academic excellence can be built.

Table 5.7 Respondents' Perceptions of Principal Effectiveness on Resource and Operations Management

Item	N	Mean	(SD)
Mobilize, allocate and utilize resources, including technology, to support student and staff learning.	497	3.36	0.91
Understand, uphold and model professional ethics, policies and codes of professional ethics	497	3.51	0.96
For academic achievement improvement, discuss regularly with PTAs and teachers.	497	3.39	0.99
Systematically monitor and assess students' classroom academic achievement for more improvement.	497	3.50	0.94
Treats all students in ways that emphasize success and potential rather than failures and shortcomings	497	3.32	1.03
Promote the values and challenges of the diverse school community.	497	3.61	0.89
Discuss with the community and stakeholders to mobilize school resources for students' school performance improvement.	497	3.38	0.84
Motivate teachers to monitor students' achievement to keep track of improvement.	497	3.44	0.95
Provide report to the community and stockholders on the effective and efficient use and management of school resources	497	3.42	0.97
Overall Dimension Mean		3.40	0.95

***Note**: Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.*

The data in Table 5.7 indicates that school principals are perceived as being moderately effective in managing the resources and operations of their schools, with an overall mean score (Mean=3.40; SD=0.94). A closer examination of the individual items, however, reveals a clear and significant pattern: school principals are perceived as more effective in the systemic, ethical, and monitoring aspects of their role but weaker in the interpersonal and cultural aspects more directly tied to the student experience. This duality suggests a leadership profile that is more oriented toward managing the school's systems and procedures than toward leading its human capital.

The primary strength in this dimension is establishing and maintaining the school's organizational and ethical fabric. School leaders received their highest rating for "Promote the values and challenges of the diverse school community" (M=3.61, SD=0.89) and also scored well on systemic tasks such as "Systematically monitor and assess students' classroom academic achievement" (M=3.50, SD=0.94) and "Understand, uphold and

model professional ethics, policies and codes of professional ethics" (M=3.51, SD=0.94). These findings suggest that school leaders are viewed as competent systemic managers who are skilled at ensuring procedural order and monitoring performance data. This managerial competence is a crucial, though often overlooked, component of effective school leadership, as it provides the stable, orderly, and predictable learning environment that is a necessary precondition for effective instruction to occur (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

However, scores decline significantly on items that require interpersonal skill and the cultivation of a positive school climate. The lowest-rated item, *"Treats all students in ways which emphasize success and potential"* (M=3.32; SD=1.03), is particularly telling. This weakness points to a critical deficit in fostering a supportive and motivating school culture. This distinction matters because while a well-managed school provides a necessary foundation, a school's climate—the underlying beliefs about student potential — is a powerful predictor of student motivation, engagement, and ultimately, academic achievement (Starrett, 2004). When students do not feel their potential is valued, it can lead to disengagement and self-limiting beliefs, creating an environment that may constrain academic performance even if it is orderly and well-run.

This specific leadership dimension has direct and significant implications for students' academic achievements. The school principal's strength in managing systems and monitoring data creates a stable and predictable learning environment, which acts as a crucial "floor" preventing academic standards from collapsing. This stability is essential for consistent instruction. However, the notable weakness in fostering a success-oriented culture creates a restrictive "ceiling" on how much students can achieve. When students are not consistently treated in ways that emphasize their potential, it can damage their self-efficacy and academic motivation. They may become disengaged or adopt a mindset that limits their own aspirations, believing that high achievement is not expected of them. As a result, even in a well-organized school, student performance may stagnate or fall short of its true potential because the school's culture fails to inspire and empower students to excel.

Based on this analysis, the study concludes that the school principal is a competent systemic and ethical manager but is less effective in the interpersonal and cultural aspects of

leadership. While their ability to manage the school's organizational fabric provides a stable foundation for learning, deficiencies in consistently fostering a positive, student-centered climate may limit the school's long-term improvement capacity and directly affect student outcomes. Therefore, professional development for school leaders should move beyond logistical training and focus on specific, practical modules on cultivating a positive school climate, leading effective and empathetic communication with parents and teachers, and implementing strategies to build a success-oriented culture for all students. Furthermore, to address this relational weakness, school leaders should receive training on how to use their management skills to support and enhance the school's psychological and social environment, ensuring that the school's human capital is valued and developed as effectively as its physical assets.

5.4.3.6 Summary of the perceived effectiveness of leadership practices on students' academic achievement

Overall, the findings from the five areas of core leadership practices show a clear and concerning pattern. The study in the Sidama region sampled secondary school principals; their effectiveness in core leadership practices is seen as somewhat skilled in day-to-day management tasks but much less effective in their most important core leadership duties/practices. This creates a leadership picture more focused on following rules and procedures than on inspiring positive change and improving students' academic achievement.

Specifically, schools' principals show some ability in tasks that keep the school running smoothly, such as upholding policies, monitoring data, and organizing school operations. This management skill provides a necessary stable foundation for the school. However, this is not enough to create a truly successful school. These strengths are overshadowed by major weaknesses in the areas that matter most for improvement. School principals are not effective at putting the school's vision into practice, encouraging new teaching methods, creating a supportive and motivational environment for teachers, or working with parents and the community.

Moreover, this leadership style directly and seriously affects students' academic achievement. It creates an environment with both a **low floor and a low ceiling.** The **"floor,"** which is the basic quality of education students receive, is set low. Because school principals are weak at guiding teaching and learning, the school experience

focuses on meeting minimum requirements rather than delivering high-quality instruction. This gives students a weak foundation for learning.

At the same time, leadership weaknesses create a restrictive "ceiling" that limits how much students can achieve. Without a leader who promotes new ideas, builds a positive school culture, and brings in community support, students have few opportunities to be challenged and truly excel.

In the end, this type of leadership is not enough to drive meaningful improvement. It creates a school environment where students' progress is likely to slow down, achievement gaps between students can become permanent, and the school fails to provide the conditions needed for students to succeed on their EHEECE.

5.4.4 Major Challenging Factors Hindering Effectiveness of School Leadership Practices on Students' Academic Achievement

School principals, as leaders, play a dominant role in supporting or improving students' academic achievement in secondary schools. Nevertheless, when implementing leadership practices to improve students' academic achievement, school principals may face various impediments that hamper their success. To identify the challenges that most affect school principals in secondary schools, the researcher forwarded ten challenges frequently observed in developing countries like Ethiopia to senior teachers, education supervisors, unit leaders, and HoDs to rate the extent to which these challenges affect the principal.

Participants were asked to respond to possible factors presented by the researcher that may challenge their school principal's leadership practices and are associated with students' academic achievement on EHEECE; the participants' opinions are analyzed in Table 5.8. To identify the factors most likely to challenge school leadership and student success, participants were also asked to rate their level of agreement with a list of potential areas hindering success.

The following is an overview of findings in counts and percentages. The findings show a generally high degree of agreement that leadership potential, human resources (students and teachers), and basic resources are the most essential hindrances to schools in the region. Respondents rated the possible factors that may hinder leadership effectiveness

and affect students' academic achievement, as presented by the researcher, and the following table presents their responses.

Table 5.8 Rating on factors affecting school leadership practices and results of statistical analyses

Hindering Factors (Challenges)	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Lack of capacity-building training on leadership and management	436 (87.73%)	28 (5.63%)	33 (6.64%)
Lack of the required standard facilities, which enable teachers to perform their tasks and allow students to properly attend their education efficiently	423 (85.11%)	43 (8.65%)	31 (6.24%)
Teachers' low qualifications and their high turnover	420 (84.51%)	40 (8.05%)	37 (7.44%)
A teaching-learning environment is not attractive, which empowers and supports students.	418 (84.10%)	47 (9.46%)	32 6.44%)
Lack of school leadership and management policies and guidelines	417 (83.90%)	48 (9.66%)	32 6.44%)
Lack of sufficient resources (financial, material, facilities)	404 (81.29%)	50 (10.06%)	43 (8.65%)
High workload of school leaders and shortage of time	393 (79.07%)	59 (11.87%)	45 (9.05%)
Inactive participation of parents in school affairs of their children hindered students' learning activities and outcomes	389 (78.27%)	52 (10.46%)	56 (11.27%)
Lack of interest of teachers towards teaching profession due lack of enough incentives	371 (74.65%)	61 (12.27%)	65 (13.08%)
Poor students' desire and motivation to do well and high dropout rate	369 (74.25%)	69 (13.88%)	59 (11.87%)

Note: *N is assumed to be 497 based on the "Neutral" total count. Percentages reflect this total. "Agree" includes 'Strongly Agree' and 'Agree' responses.*

From the strong consensus in Table 5.8, several significant factors hinder educational leadership and students' academic achievement. Nine out of ten (87.73%) respondents identified the lack of leadership training as a major challenge. This indicates a critical need to develop leadership skills among educational leaders.

Regarding issues related to the teaching workforce, most respondents (85.11%) agreed that low teacher competency, turnover, and lack of motivation (84.51%) were major issues for teacher quality, stability, and morale. This highlights the importance of professional development, competitive compensation, and supportive work environments. Resource deficiencies also emerge as a substantial obstacle, with Lack of Sufficient Resources gathering 84.10% agreement. This suggests potential underfunding

or misallocation of essential materials and support systems needed for effective teaching and learning.

Student-related factors are also important.83.90% of respondents agreed on low student motivation and a high dropout rate, suggesting challenges in engaging students and retaining them in the education system. This may necessitate interventions focused on curriculum relevance, student support, and addressing socio-economic barriers.

Leadership challenges extend beyond training, as High Leader Workload and shortage or lack of Time is agreed upon by 81.29% of respondents. This suggests that even with adequate training, leaders may struggle to implement effective strategies because of excessive responsibilities and insufficient time.

Community engagement also appears to be lacking, with 79.07% of respondents citing low parental involvement as a factor affecting effective leadership and student outcomes. This suggests the need for strategies to enhance collaboration between schools and families to support student learning.

Finally, the table above indicates that most respondents stated that inadequate infrastructure and a lack of an encouraging (conducive) school environment hinder the effective performance of an educational principal. Lack of formal facilities (78.27%) and unattractive learning environment (74.65%), and lack of leadership policies/guidelines to guide educational leadership and activities (74.25%) were identified as major challenging factors to the effective performance of school principals as leaders over their roles, practices, and students in achieving better academic achievements in EHEECE through quality education.

In summary, the analysis strongly indicates that systemic issues related to leadership development, teacher quality and motivation, resource availability, student engagement, parental involvement, and physical infrastructure collectively impede educational effectiveness and student academic achievement in EHEECE. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive and integrated interventions.

5.4.5 How do the respondents perceive their principals' leadership styles/types, gender, work experience, and profession as associated with leadership effectiveness?

The third basic question of this study investigated the extent to which school principals are effective in their school leadership practices, the leadership styles/types these schools' principals used, and which of these leadership styles/types helped improve students' academic achievement. The study also assessed possible impediments to effective school leadership. Closely related to the leadership theories discussed above, the study sought to identify the leadership style/type(s) predominant among secondary school principals in SNRS, as well as why certain leadership styles/types are preferred.

5.4.5.1 The influence of Demographic Characteristics of Principal on Students' Academic Achievements

Effective school leadership plays a significant role in shaping and strengthening a supportive teaching-learning environment that enables students to access higher-quality education and achieve better results. As central figures in school governance, school principals play a crucial role in maintaining educational quality through their leadership style, management decisions, and professional competence. While most studies and research have examined the positive and negative aspects of various leadership skills on teachers and teaching, there is often debate about the actual impact of specific characteristics of school leaders such as their gender, accumulated work experience, and educational qualifications on school effectiveness and students' academic achievements (*sections 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4 and 2.4.5*). This subsection discussed how these characteristics contribute to leadership effectiveness and, in turn, to students' academic achievements.

Table 5.9 below summarizes respondents' perceptions of the school principal's demographic characteristics, their effectiveness, and their influence on students' academic achievement (EHEECE scores), and reveals differences across the principal's gender, work experience, and educational background.

Table 5.9 Respondents' perceptions on principal characteristics: Effectiveness of leadership practices and their influence on students' academic achievement

Component	N	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Chi-Square	Sig.
Men perform more than females, and they have a more significant impact on students' academic achievement	497	34.6% (172)	8.7% (43)	56.8% (282)	86.229[a]	0.00
School principals with higher work experience have a more significant impact on students' academic achievement	497	79.8% (397)	3.4% (17)	16.7% (83)	336.149[a]	0.000
Principals who have a second degree in education management have a more significant impact on students' academic achievement	497	95.4% (474)	0.6% (3)	4.0% (20)	472.296[b]	0.000

First, regarding gender's effect on leadership effectiveness, the data in Table 5.9 show that more than half (56.8%; 282) of the sample respondents claimed that gender is not a determining factor in a principal's leadership effectiveness and has no significant influence on students' academic achievement. The estimated chi-square test $(\chi_4^2 = 86.229\text{a}, \text{p} < 0.01)$ is statistically significant; this also confirms that most respondents perceived no association between principals' gender and their leadership effectiveness or students' academic achievement.

In contrast, only 34.6% of respondents agreed with the issue, while the remaining 8.7% were neutral. This indicates a widespread belief that gender is not a predictive factor in a principal's ability to positively influence students' academic achievement. Therefore, the relationship between a principal's gender (specifically, being male) and perceived leadership effectiveness, as it relates to students' academic achievement, is seen as negligible or non-existent in a positive sense.

Regarding the influence of principal work experience on leadership effectiveness, over three-fourths (79.8%) of respondents agree that a school principal with more experience has a greater impact on leadership effectiveness and, in turn, a significant effect on students' academic achievement. This indicates a strong belief in the value of practical, accumulated experience for effective school leadership. Whereas only 16.7% of respondents disagreed with the issue, and the remaining 3.4% remained neutral. This perception is further supported by the chi-square test (χ4^2 = 336.149, p < 0.01), which was statistically significant. This finding confirms that most respondents associate a

principal's leadership experience with their leadership efficacy or students' academic achievement.

Finally, the findings show that principals' educational background is the most determining factor for school leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement. An overwhelming majority of respondents (95.4%) agree that a principal with a second degree in education management has a more significant impact on students' academic achievement (agree=35.2%; strongly agree=60.2%). The estimated chi-square test $\left(\chi_4^2 = 472.296^{\mathrm{b}}, \mathrm{p} < 0.01\right)$ is statistically significant; this result also underscores strong confidence that specialized advanced education, specifically in education management, is highly beneficial and directly contributes to a principal's ability to positively influence academic performance.

In summary, the quantitative data discussion highlights that gender, often dismissed as a determinant of effectiveness, is not a determinant of effectiveness; both extensive work experience and advanced educational leadership skills are highly valued and significantly impact students' academic achievement. These observations can inform policies on principal selection, professional development, and career advancement that emphasize experience and specific academic qualifications over gender.

5.4.5.2 Perceptions on Effectiveness of Leadership Styles/ Types Vs Students' Academic Achievement

This sub-section addresses the fourth research question: *"How do secondary school principals, educational supervisors, teachers, unit leaders and HoDs perceive their principal's leadership styles/types?"* and informs the testing of Hypothesis Ha_4. It moves beyond leadership practices to explore perceptions of the leading styles that are most contributing to improving student achievement. Respondents were asked to rate the positive/negative impact of various leadership styles on students' academic achievement. The results provide a clear indication of the leadership approaches valued by the study's participating respondents in the region.

Table 5.10 Respondents' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Leadership Styles/Types

Variable *(Leadership Style)*	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Rank
Laissez–faire education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	2.52	1.145	7

Authoritative/ Autocratic education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	2.79	1.310	6
Transformational/ Relational education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	3.75	1.098	3
Transactional style education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	4.01	1.080	1
Democratic education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	3.29	1.136	5
Instructional/ Pedagogical education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	497	1	5	3.55	0.997	4
Combination (Integration) of Democratic, Transformational and Distributive	497	1	5	3.88	1.188	2

Note: *Scale:* Mean value ≥4.50= very high, 3.50-4.49= high, 2.50-3.49= moderate, 1.50-2.49= low and ≤1.49= very low

The data in Table 5.10 reveal a clear difference in the perceived effectiveness of leadership styles on students' academic achievement. Transactional leadership is viewed as having the most significant positive impact (M = 4.01, SD = 1.080) on students' academic achievement, highlighting the value placed on leaders who set clear expectations and use rewards and punishments as motivators. The second-rated leadership style was a combination of leadership styles: the Democratic, Transformational, and Distributive leadership style (M=3.88; SD =1.188), and Transformational/Relational education leadership style (M = 3.75; SD = 1.098), where principals, as leaders, inspire and motivate their team by creating a clear vision, encouraging innovation, and fostering personal growth.

These findings align with a large body of literature advocating post-industrial leadership models that empower staff and foster a professional learning community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). In contrast, leadership styles that are either passive or overly controlling are perceived as having a negative/negligible impact on students' academic achievement. Laissez-faire (M = 2.52; SD = 1.145), characterized by a hands-off approach, is viewed as the least effective style by a significant margin. This finding strongly refutes any notion that simply hiring good teachers and avoiding involvement is a viable leadership strategy. Similarly, the low rating for Authoritative (Autocratic Leadership) (M = 2.79; SD = 1.310) suggests that a top-down, command-and-control approach is seen as counterproductive in the complex professional environment of a school.

This result strongly supports Hypothesis Ha_4: *"The leadership style dominantly used by the principal is essential for improving students' academic achievement".* The wide variance in mean scores between styles like Transactional style I (M=4.01) and Laissez-faire (M=2.52) confirms that the specific leadership approach a principal adopts is not trivial; rather, teachers perceive it as a critical factor in a school's capacity to improve students' academic achievement (outcomes). Hence, effective leadership requires the leader to understand, engage, and care for followers and enable them to maximize their contributions. The vision of any school in Ethiopia, regardless of the managing agency, is to provide effective instruction to improve student performance. Adopting the right kind of leadership style(s) can equip the principal to function optimally within their schools. Knowing the various leadership style(s) can help a principal adapt more effectively in a changing environment. In addition to understanding the various leadership style(s), principals should be more aware of their predominant leadership style(s) so they can adapt better and more confidently to the demands of the complex educational environment.

5.4.6 Strategies adapted by School Principal to Improve Students' Academic Achievement on EHEECE in SNRS

Educational supervisors, senior teachers, and HoDs were asked to recommend promising strategies to overcome the hurdles that prevent secondary school principals from improving students' academic achievement, which could be employed on EHEECE in secondary schools in SNRS.

This is intended to prompt opinions on basic question five in Chapter One, which states: *"What are the strategies adopted by the school principal to improve students' academic achievement and rate in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia?"* In this subsection, data from open-ended questions collected from educational supervisors, senior teachers, and HoDs were used to gather insights into potentially beneficial strategies for principals' leadership practices. The responses were categorized by theme, quantified, and presented in Table 5.11, organized by frequency and percentage for clarity, and integrated with sections 5.4.2 and 5.5.5.

According to Table 5.11, a total of 87(21.6%) respondents indicated that government at various levels should allocate more resources or funding to secondary schools, aiming to improve infrastructure such as libraries (including textbooks and reference materials),

laboratories with its equipment, internet access, and water supply to create more appealing working conditions. Furthermore, 65 (19.1%) respondents emphasized that both governmental and private sectors must create job opportunities for recent graduates, which would motivate students to remain engaged and strive academically. As shown by the quantitative data analysis results, this reflects the observed disinterest among secondary school students (most students lack interest) in their academic responsibilities, leading to poor academic achievement or poor EHEECE results.

Table 5.11 Percentage and frequency distribution of responses on strategies adopted

No.	Strategies	Respondents							
		Teachers (N=213*)	%	Unit leaders (N= 40*)	%	HODs (N=1 49*)	%	Total (N=4 97)	%
1	Allocating resources & facilities	47	22.1	9	22.5	31	22.1	*87*	*21.6*
2	Community & stakeholders participation	43	20.2	7	17.5	22	15.5	*72*	*17.9*
3	Principals' & Teachers' training development	44	20.2	11	27.5	48	34.3	*103*	*25.4*
4	Trust building	19	8.9	5	12.5	15	10.5	*39*	*9.7*
5	Working on school autonomy	21	9.9	3	7.5	13	9.3	37	9.2
6	Government creation of jobs opportunity	39	18.8	5	12.5	20	14.3	*64*	*16.2*
	Total	**213**	**100**	**40**	**100**	**149**	**100**	***402***	***100***

***N.B**. * Respondents overlapping on strategies 1-7 above were rejected to align with the originally planned sample sizes, whereas respondents who listed similar strategies were tallied and counted.*

Additionally, as presented in Table 5.11 above, frequencies of the three variables: *Allocating resource and facilities 87(21.6%), Community participation 72(17.9%), Principals and Teachers training development 103(25%)* with a grant total frequency 262(64.9%) indicates the highest opinions about the strategies that requested to be adopted, also government creation of jobs opportunity 64(16.27) of the respondents listed that, the government body, private sectors in different sectors needs to create job opportunities for the newly graduates, which may encourage and motivate students to have hop and to work hard, and has a greatest or significant value strategy to mitigate challenges. Encouraging parental support, both financially and morally, was suggested as a way to help students focus on their education without distractions.

Another strategy noted by 64(14.2%) respondents was the government's role in creating job opportunities and trust-building, and 39(9.7%) identified the influence of politicians on

school leadership practices of principals in Table 5.11 above as a barrier to the effectiveness of principals' leadership, respectively. Furthermore, 37(9.2%) experienced teachers, unit leaders, and HoDs suggested that promoting school autonomy was a crucial strategy.

Similarly, Table 5.11 showed that 65 (15.9%) respondents endorsed teacher training and professional development as vital strategies. Moreover, 65 (15.9%) respondents stated that, for teacher training and development, teachers should receive training in their subject area and in teaching skills (teaching methodology). Similarly, 38 (9.5%) respondents advocated for training that aligns with their subject areas and enhances their teaching methodologies. Moreover, 38 (9.5%) respondents stressed the importance of principals also engaging in ongoing professional development to strengthen their leadership skills and knowledge.

In summary, the major strategies proposed to address the challenging factors identified in section 5.3.3 include resource allocation, job creation for graduates, community involvement, commitment to teacher preparation and professional development, leadership training, enhancing school autonomy, and fostering trust within the school community. The findings suggest that to overcome significant and moderate challenges identified in this research, strategies such as equitable resource allocation, government job creation for graduates (which could motivate students), community involvement in school activities, and strong commitment to teacher training and leadership development are essential. Thus, the following section presents the possible solutions suggested by the participants for each strategy.

Consequently, to overcome those strong and moderate challenges identified in this study, the findings show that allocating resources and distributing school resources fairly, government creation of employment and job opportunities for university and college graduates motivates secondary school students, the participation of the communities in some school activities, being committed to teacher training and leaders' professional development, appealing leadership for training and development, working on school autonomy and building trust among school community were the strategies suggested to improve the identified challenges. Each strategy has been discussed in detail in section 5.3.4.

5.4.7 Correlational Analysis of Core Leadership Practices and Students' Academic Achievements

This section presents the empirical findings regarding the relationships between various dimensions of school leadership practices and student academic achievement. The primary objective was to test the central hypothesis (H_{a1}), which hypothesizes a significant positive relationship between effective leadership and improved student outcomes. To this end, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to quantify the strength and direction of the linear association between leadership practices, as perceived by education supervisors, principals, senior teachers, HoDs, unit leaders, and students' academic achievement. This inferential statistical approach moves beyond descriptive statistics to provide robust evidence of leadership's impact on the technical core of teaching-learning.

Table 5.12 Pearson Correlation Matrix for Leadership Dimensions and Students' Academic Achievement

Variables	Students' Performance	1	2	3	4	5	6
Students' Performance	1	.476**	.473**	.537**	.464**	.445**	.694**
Setting Vision & Goals		1	.328**	.471**	.312**	.309**	.716**
Instructional Management			1	.332**	.212**	.324**	.661**
Teacher Development				1	.469**	.452**	.774**
Community Engagement					1	.254**	.634**
Resource Management						1	.665**
Overall leadership practices							1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As depicted in Table 5.12, the Bivariate Pearson Correlation Matrix and its analysis provide a clear understanding of the relationship between school leadership effectiveness dimensions and students' academic achievement in EHEECE scores. Each measured leadership effectiveness dimension shows a statistically significant positive correlation with students' outcomes. The estimated bivariate Pearson correlation coefficient between overall leadership practices effectiveness and students' academic achievement was $r(497) = .694,\ p < .001$. This implies a positive, strong linear relationship between the overall effectiveness of school principals in their core practices and students' academic achievement on EHEECE scores.

The coefficient of determination (r^2 = .48) shows that 48% of the variation in students' exam scores can be explained by the effectiveness of the school leadership roles. The substantial magnitude of this coefficient indicates that school leaders need to engage in leadership practices daily to meet the standard.

Therefore, this coefficient's significance emphasizes that school leaders must engage in various activities as instructional leaders to enhance teaching and learning. These activities include collaboratively defining the school's vision, mission, goals, and objectives with staff, communicating them effectively to stakeholders, and ensuring collective efforts toward shared goals. Additionally, as instructional leaders, principals should organize diverse training opportunities for staff development, cultivate a positive teaching and learning environment, and possess professional skills in school management and leadership to enhance educational quality.

Regarding school leadership effectiveness in leading and managing development opportunities for teachers of the school to build their capacity and students' academic achievement, the estimated Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficient is r (497)= .537, p<.01. This implies that school leaders' effectiveness in fostering teachers' professional growth, providing training, and offering continuous support is directly and strongly linearly associated with students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia. The more effectively school leaders support their teachers, the better students tend to perform academically. The coefficient of determination was r2 0.29; this implies that 29% of the variation in students' academic achievement can be statistically explained by the effectiveness of leadership in leading and managing development opportunities for teachers at the school to build their capacity.

There is a strong, direct linear relationship between the effectiveness of school leadership practice in implementing high-quality standards-based instruction and students' academic achievement, r(497) = .473, p < 0.001. This highlights that school leaders who effectively coordinate curriculum, supervise instruction, and monitor and evaluate learner progress within the school are directly and positively correlated with student academic achievement.

The more effectively a school leader manages the teaching and learning process, the better students tend to achieve. The coefficient of determination was $r^2 = (.473)^2 \approx 0.2237$, this implies that 22.37% of the variation in student exam result can be statistically

explained by the effectiveness of leadership in Lead and managing high-quality standards-based instruction.

The study found a significant strong positive linear relationship (r=.464$**$, p<.01) between the extent of leadership effectiveness in leading and managing school development and engaging the community, and student academic performance. The coefficient of determination was r² = (0.464) ² ≈ 0.22. This implies that school leadership's practice of building strong relationships with parents, community members, and external stakeholders can explain 22% of the variation in student exam results.

A positive, direct linear relationship exists between a school leader's effectiveness in allocating resources and managing school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment and students' exam scores (r=.445, n= 497, p<0.001). This indicates that school leaders who are competent in allocating resources and managing school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment are associated with higher student exam scores. This means effective school resource management improves educational quality.

Finally, from the quantitative data analysis, the study found that there is a direct and significant linear relationship between the extent of a school leader's effectiveness in defining the school vision and mission and students' academic achievements, r(479)=.476, p<.001. This highlights that secondary school principals who effectively frame the school's goals and communicate them to staff and students throughout the school community will impact overall student outcomes (students' academic achievement on EHEECE) by providing clear direction and goals for all school activities. The coefficient of determination was r2 = (.476) ^2 = 0.23. This implies that the effectiveness of school leaders who are effective in setting clear goals that ensure the success of all students and communicating the goals precisely to all students and staff helps to develop a common vision between the leader and the staff and ensures that all stakeholders know their responsibilities and what is expected from them in achieving this vision and can explain 23% of the variation in student exam results.

In summary, the above correlation analysis confirms a direct and significant relationship between school leadership effectiveness across all five leadership dimensions and student exam scores. The strength of these relationships varies with school leaders' responsibilities, as school principals include setting objectives, coordinating programs,

providing didactic leadership, organizing enrichment programs, conducting evaluations and examinations, taking remedial steps, and creating a conducive school climate. Similarly, effective school principals as leaders excel at setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers. To carry out these functions, school principals need theoretical knowledge, skills, adequate experience, and training opportunities in school leadership and management (ESDP IV, 2010/11).

5.4.9 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Predicting Students' Academic Achievement

While correlation analysis reveals the strength of relationships, multiple linear regression was employed to build a predictive model. This powerful technique allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple independent variables to determine which factors are the strongest and most significant predictors of student academic achievement. This analysis directly addresses the main research question in section 1.8: *"What variables are related to the effectiveness of the secondary school principal's core leadership practices and what is their correlational effect on student academic achievement?"*

5.4.9.1 Testing Assumptions of Classical Linear Regression

Before interpreting the results of a multiple regression model, it is important to verify that the underlying statistical assumptions have been met. Failure to do so can lead to unreliable conclusions. The key assumptions tested were linearity, independence of residuals, homoscedasticity, absence of significant multicollinearity, and normality of residuals.

5.4.9.2 The Linearity Test

Linearity refers to the degree to which changes in the dependent variable are related to changes in the independent variables. To determine whether the relationship between the dependent variable (student exam score) and the independent variable (effectiveness of Leadership) is linear, we used plots of the regression residuals in SPSS. The graph of *ZRESID and *ZPRED should look like a random array of dots evenly dispersed around zero. If this graph funnels out, then the chances are that there is heteroscedasticity in the data. If this graph shows any curve, the data likely violate the assumption of linearity.

Figure 5.1 shows the plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values. The points are randomly and evenly dispersed throughout the plot. This pattern is indicative of a situation in which the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity have been met.

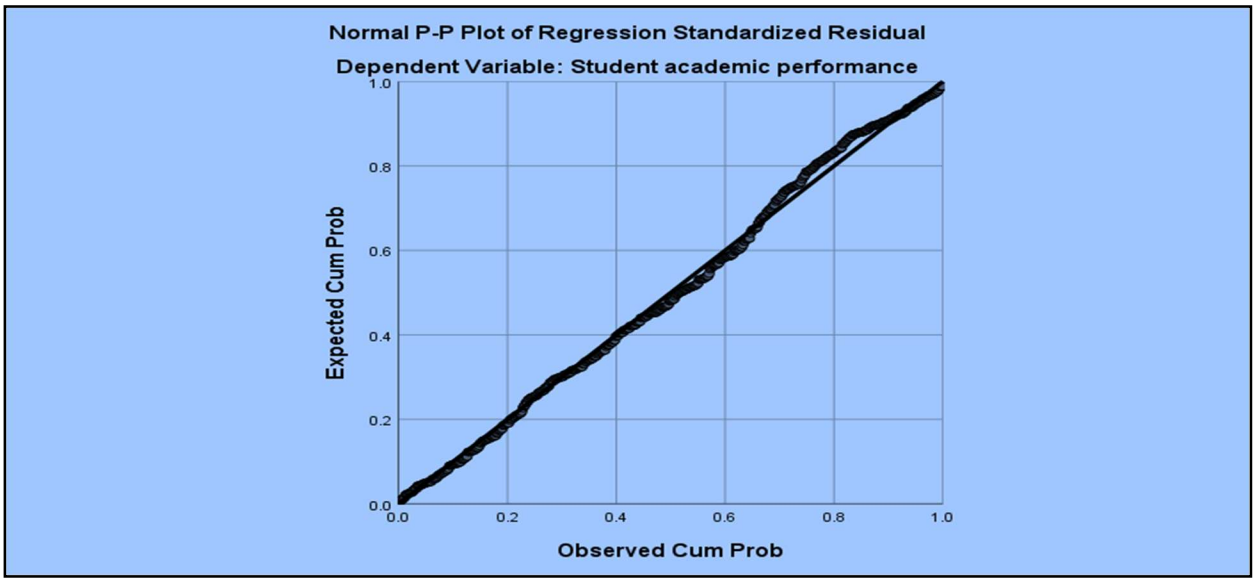


Figure 5.1: Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residuals

5.4.9.3 Homoscedasticity

Homoscedasticity is an assumption in linear regression where the variance along the regression line is similar as we move along the line. At each level of the predictor variables, the variance of the residual terms should be constant (Field, 2009). Consequently, this assumption was tested. When the graph does not look like a cone and the residuals are evenly dispersed at each level of the predictors, homoscedasticity is assumed.

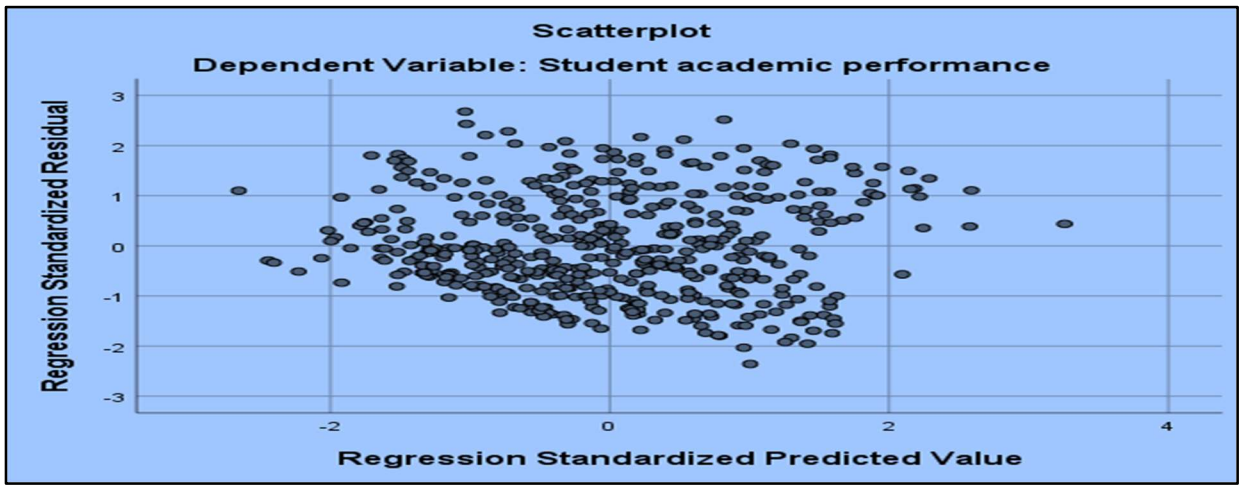


Figure 5.2: Scatterplot of Standardized Residuals vs. Standardized Predicted Values

5.4.9.4 Normality Test

Figure 5.3 below shows the frequency distribution of the standardized residuals compared to a normal distribution. Although there are some residuals (those occurring around 0) that are relatively far away from the curve, many of the residuals are close. Moreover, the histogram is bell-shaped, which suggests the residuals are normally distributed.

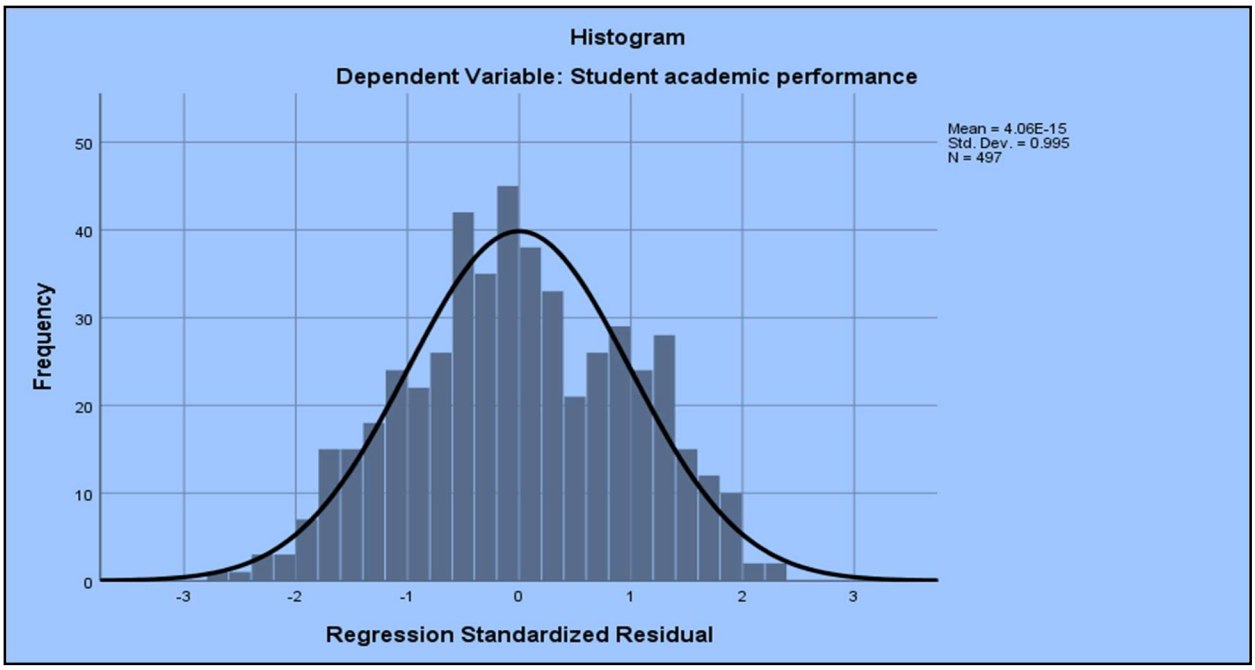


Figure 5.3: Histogram of Standardized Residuals

The PP- plot of residuals can be used to visually check the normality assumption. The normal probability plot of residuals should approximately follow a straight line. The P-P Plot shown in Figure 5.1 shows that all points fall approximately along the reference line, so we can assume normality.

The histogram in Figure 5.3 and the Normal P-P Plot in Figure 5.1 are used to assess the normality of the residuals. The histogram should approximate a normal, bell-shaped curve. The P-P plot should show the points lying closely along the 45-degree diagonal line. The histogram shows a reasonably normal distribution, and the points in the P-P plot do not systematically deviate from the diagonal line. This indicates that the assumption of normally distributed residuals is satisfied.

5.4.8.5 Model Diagnosis:

In addition to visual checks, statistical tests were conducted to assess the remaining assumptions.

Table 5.13 Summary of Statistical Regression Model Diagnostics

		Collinearity Statistics	
Assumption	**Assumption**	Tolerance	VIF
Absence of Multi-collinearity	1. Vision & Goals	0.732	1.366
	2. Instructional Mgt.	0.821	1.218
	3. Teacher Dev.	0.584	1.712
	4. Community Engage.	0.767	1.304
	5. Resource Mgt.	0.756	1.323
A. Independence of Residuals	Durbin-Watson Statistic	1.803	Assumption met. The value is close to 2, indicating no significant autocorrelation.

In Table 5.13 above, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.803 is well within the acceptable range (typically 1.5 to 2.5), confirming that the residuals are independent and that this assumption is met. Furthermore, all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were well below the common threshold of 10 (and even the stricter threshold of 5), indicating that multicollinearity among the predictor variables is not a concern that would compromise the model's integrity. Because all visual and statistical diagnostic checks were satisfactory, the multiple regression results can be interpreted with a high degree of confidence.

5.4.9.6 Test of Model Fitness and Significance

Having established the model's validity, the next step is to assess its overall effectiveness. This is done by examining the ANOVA table, which tests the model's overall significance, and the Model Summary table, which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the predictors.

Table 5.14 ANOVA for the Overall Regression Model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	103.393	5	20.678	92.312	**<.001**
Residual	109.985	491	0.224		
Total	213.375	496			

a. Dependent variable: Student academic achievement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Vision & Goals; Instructional Mgt. Teacher Dev. Community Engage and Resource Mgt.

The ANOVA table (Table 5.14) tests the null hypothesis that the regression model has no predictive capability (i.e., that all regression coefficients are zero). The results show a highly significant F-statistic, $\boldsymbol{F(5, 491) = 92.312, p < .001}$. This suggests that the *null hypothesis* of the linear regression's F-test, which proposes that the model accounts for zero variance in the dependent variable (i.e., $R^2 = 0$), can be rejected. The highly significant F-test implies that the model explains a substantial portion of the variation in students' performance in paragraph writing skills. Consequently, the combined influence of the identified factors serves as significant predictors of student academic performance (i.e., Secondary school Students' National exam), as evidenced by $\boldsymbol{F(5, 491) = 92.312, p < .001}$

In summary, the ANOVA results indicate that the multiple linear regression models incorporating Vision & Goals, Instructional Mgt., *Teacher Dev. Community Engages and Resource Mgt*. as predictor variables, significantly explain the variance in student motivation. This finding supports the effectiveness of the blended learning approach in enhancing student motivation.

Table 5.15 Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.696[a]	0.484	0.479	0.475	1.803

a. Predictors: (Constant), Vision & Goals; Instructional Mgt. Teacher Dev. Community Engage and Resource Mgt.

b. Dependent variable: Student academic achievement

The Model Summary table (Table 5.15) measures the explanatory power of the model. The R Square (R^2) value of .484 indicates that nearly half (48.4%) of the total variation in students' academic achievement scores can be statistically explained by the combination of the five leadership variables included in the model. This finding underscores the critical role school principals' leadership plays in shaping student outcomes, specifically academic achievement. The small standard error value indicates that this estimate (i.e., the variation accounted for) is precise. Furthermore, the *Durbin-Watson statistic* (d = 1.803) falls within the acceptable range (1.5 < d < 2.5), confirming no first-order linear autocorrelation in the multiple linear regression data.

5.4.9.7 Leadership Effectiveness on Students' Academic Achievement in Secondary Schools of Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia

This study examined the effectiveness of leadership practices strategy on students' academic achievement. Each beta value has an associated standard error indicating how much it would vary across samples, and these standard errors are used to determine whether the ***b-value*** differs significantly from zero. A $\mathrm{T}-\mathrm{test\ statistic}$ can be derived that tests whether $\beta\ value$ is significantly different from 0. In simple regression, a significant value of t indicates that the slope of the regression line is significantly different from horizontal. However, interpreting the significance of t-values in multiple regressions is more complex. In this context, t-tests indicate whether a predictor variable contributes significantly to the regression model. When the T-test associated with a beta value is significant, it implies that the predictor contributes substantially to the model.

A smaller significance value (Sig.) and a larger t-value indicate a greater impact of the predictor. In the current model, leadership effectiveness Implementing high-quality standards based instruction (Instructional Mgt) (*t(496)*=6.182*, p<.001*), communicative Vision and Goals setting (t(496)=4.904, p< .001), lead and managing development opportunities for teachers (*t(496)*=4.416*, p< .001,*), lead and managing the school development and engages community (t(496)=6.037, p<.001) and allocate resources and manage school operations (*t(496)*=44.39*, p< .001*) were found to be significant in predicting students' academic achievement on EHEECE score results.

5.4.10 Analysis of Individual Predictors

Having established that the overall model is both valid and powerful, the final step is to examine each individual predictor's contribution.

Table 5.16 Coefficients of the Multiple Regression Model

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient B (Std. Error)	Standardized Coefficient Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	95% CI for β	
(Constant)	-1.035(0.172)		-6.021	<.001	-1.373	-0.697
Vision & Goals	0.188(0.038)	0.186	4.904	<.001	0.113	0.263
Instructional Mgt.	0.247(0.035)	0.249	6.962	<.001	0.177	0.317
Teacher Dev.	0.225(0.051)	0.187	4.416	<.001	0.125	0.325
Community Engage.	0.262(0.043)	0.223	6.037	<.001	0.177	0.347
Resource Mgt.	0.193(0.044)	0.165	4.439	<.001	0.108	0.279

Note: *Dependent Variable: Students' Academic Achievement. Bolded p-values are statistically significant (p< .05).*

Table 5.16 describes detailed estimates of the individual predictors of students' academic achievement on EHEECE (Grade 12 University Entrance Exam). The Standardized Beta (β) coefficients allow for a direct comparison of the relative strength of each predictor in the model. The most significant finding is that school leaders' effectiveness in instructional management emerges as the strongest and most significant predictor of students' academic achievement (β = .249, p < .001).

This means that for everyone standard deviation increases in the effectiveness of a principal's school leadership and management practices, students' academic achievement on EHEECE (score on Grade 12 National Exam) will increase by 0.249 units, even when holding all other variables constant, with a 95% confidence interval (0.177, 0.317).

The findings show that leadership effects operate indirectly to improve student outcomes by supporting and enhancing teaching and learning conditions through direct impacts on teachers and their work. Furthermore, the study highlights that secondary school principals actively provide a wide variety of professional learning and development

opportunities for staff, strategic efforts aimed at elevating standards, sustaining motivation and commitment, and improving staff retention, leading to better student learning outcomes.

Secondary school principals' leadership and management of school development and direct engagement with the community significantly and positively affect students' academic performance (**β = 0.223, p < .001**). This means that for every one standard deviation increases in the effectiveness of principals in leading and managing school development and engaging the community directly, students' exam scores (EGSECE) will likely increase by 0.223 units, when holding all other variables constant, with a 95% confidence interval (0.177, 0.347). These findings highlight that a school leader's effectiveness in managing school development and engaging the community strongly influences student learning outcomes by fostering a positive school culture, supporting teachers, and creating a conducive learning environment.

Furthermore, this study found that effective leadership in leading and managing development opportunities for teachers to build their capacity directly affects students' academic achievements (**β = 0.185, p < .001**). This means that for every step a principal in implementing high-quality, standards-based instruction, student performance likely improves by 0.185 units, even when holding all other variables constant, with a 95% confidence interval (0.125, 0.325).

The research findings of Hilton et., al. (2015) underscore the positive impact of school leaders' active involvement in teacher professional development programs. This participation not only strengthens teachers' capacity to apply and reflect on new information and practices but also supports school leaders' professional growth. This symbiotic relationship between teacher and principal professional development underscores the collaborative nature of educational leadership and its pivotal role in driving positive change within educational institutions. This finding aligns perfectly with research by Hilton et al. (2015), which emphasizes the profound positive impact of school principals' (leaders') active involvement in teacher professional development.

This participation not only builds teachers' capacity to apply new knowledge and reflect on their practices; it also fosters the professional growth of school leaders. This interdependent relationship highlights the collaborative essence of educational leadership and its pivotal role in driving transformative change within schools. Similarly, this study

identifies that leadership's impact extends beyond professional development. School leaders recognized that defining and communicating a shared vision and goals plays a crucial role in maximizing teaching quality, student learning, and students' academic achievement.

The study assessed that secondary schools' leadership effectiveness in defining the vision, values, direction and communicating these with the school communities is significantly improves the academic achievement level of students (**β = 0.186, p < .001**). This implies that school leader effectiveness in leading and managing school development and engaging the community will lead to 0.182 units in students' academic achievement, even when holding all other variables constant, with a 95% confidence interval (0.113, 0.263). This result suggests that effective educational leaders (EELs) can develop, advocate for, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values for high-quality education and each student's academic success and well-being.

The school principals identified the need to improve the conditions that maximize educational quality and improve students' academic achievement. They developed strategies to improve the school buildings and facilities. By changing the school's physical environment and improving classrooms, school leaders established an important link between high-quality conditions for academic activities and the well-being and performance of both staff and students.

The regression results also found that the second significant predictor is leadership effectiveness in allocating resources and managing school operations to ensure a safe and productive teaching-learning environment **(β = .165, p < .001)**. This implies that for every one standard deviation increase in a principal's leadership effectiveness in allocating resources and managing school operations, students' examination scores (EHEECE) will increase by 0.169 units, even when holding all other variables constant, with a 95% confidence interval (0.108, 0.279). This finding demonstrates that the principal's leadership effectiveness in allocating resources and managing school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment is another key factor for improving students' academic achievements or outcomes.

The provided statement highlights that a school principal's effectiveness in resource allocation and operations management is a significant predictor of improved student outcomes. This means that when leaders efficiently manage finances, personnel, and

daily operations to create a secure and productive school environment, students are more likely to achieve better results. Essentially, good leadership that ensures effective resource use and smooth operations is crucial to fostering a positive learning atmosphere that benefits students. The study's findings suggest that school leaders play a key role in student academic success not just through instructional practices, but also through their ability to manage the school's resources and daily operations effectively to create an ideal learning environment.

5.4.11 Conclusion and Hypothesis Testing

In summary, the regression analysis provides robust evidence that multiple facets of a principal's leadership effectiveness significantly predict student academic achievement.

The overall equation,

$$\boldsymbol{The\ overall\ equation}: \boldsymbol{Y}_{\boldsymbol{academic\ acheivment}} = \mathbf{-1.199} + \mathbf{0.186}\ (\mathbf{Vision}\ \&\ Goals) + \mathbf{0.249}(\mathbf{Instructional\ Mgt.}) + \mathbf{0.187}(\mathbf{Teacher\ Dev.}) + \mathbf{0.223}(\mathbf{Community\ Engage.}) + \mathbf{0.165}\ (\mathbf{Resource\ Mgt.})$$

The hypothesis testing, summarized in Table 4.17, led to the rejection of all five null hypotheses, confirming a significant relationship between each identified leadership practice and students' academic achievement:

*$H0_1$ (**Vision & Goals**): Rejected (t=4.904, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship.*

*$H0_2$ (**Instructional Management**): Rejected (t=6.962, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship.*

*$H0_3$ (**Teacher Development**): Rejected (t=4.416, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship.*

*$H0_4$ (**Community Engagement**): Rejected (t=6.037, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship.*

*$H0_5$ (**Resource Allocation**): Rejected (t=4.439, p<.001), indicating a significant relationship.*

Table 5.17 Summary of the hypothesis test value

Hypothesis	T-test value	Decision
H01: There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of a school leadership practice in defining and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals and student academic achievements.	4.904 (p<.001)	Reject null hypothesis
$H0_2$: There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of school leadership practice in implementing high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students. and students' academic achievements	6.962 (p<.001)	Reject null hypothesis
$H0_3$: There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of a school leadership practice in providing professional learning opportunities for teachers and students' academic achievements	4.416 (p<.001)	Reject null hypothesis
HO_4: There is no significant relationship between effectiveness of a school leadership practice in leading and managing the school development and engaging community and student's academic achievements.	6.037 (p<.001)	Reject null hypothesis
$H0_5$: There is no significant relationship between the effectiveness of a school leadership practice in allocating resources and manage school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment and students' academic achievements	4.439 (p<.001)	Reject null hypothesis

These findings strongly support the theory that effective school leaders achieve results both directly through their instructional leadership practices and indirectly by strategically developing their teachers, fostering a positive school environment, managing resources effectively, and engaging the wider community and stakeholders. The dual role of principal of school leaders–as instructional leaders and comprehensive school managers – is therefore indispensable for fostering a thriving educational environment and ultimately enhancing students' academic achievement in Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia.

5.5 PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE DATA

5.5.1 Introduction

To complement the quantitative data, the study collected the perceptions and insights of principals, deputy principals, and educational supervisors through telephonic and one-on-one interviews, as well as document analysis. This section presents a concise analysis of the study's qualitative findings, supplementing the structured questions in the

questionnaires distributed to respondents. Data collected from individual interviews, telephonic conversations, and Focus Group Discussions were systematically analyzed by identifying, coding, and categorizing thematic variables.

Data were collected from school principals, educational supervisors, and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations. Interviews focused on current leadership practices, challenges, opinions on leadership styles/types, and strategies for improving the effectiveness of secondary school leadership on students' academic achievement. The interviews were designed to be factual, clear, and representative of the participants' perspectives. Participants were selected based on their experience in leadership, management, and teaching within their schools.

5.5.2 Reporting on how Qualitative Data were analyzed

Qualitative data from interviews, literature review, observations, and document analysis were analyzed using the data analysis approach developed by McMillan et al. (2010). The researcher used this approach to organize, divide, and synthesize non-numerical data into segments, codes, categories, patterns, and themes. Following this approach, the researcher transcribed interview data using a word processor to facilitate analysis. The audio-taped data were transcribed into Word format to prepare data for visual review. The researcher organized the transcribed interview data and divided it into workable, manageable units. The researcher used the main categories and themes that emerged from data analysis.

Qualitative data analysis resulted in some codes and categories being labeled as major, important, and minor. Major codes and categories appeared in all datasets, important codes and categories appeared in most datasets, and minor codes and categories appeared less frequently. To achieve anonymity and participants' privacy, participants' responses were coded and labeled. (cf. see Table 1).

In this sub-section, the second major part of the analysis presented the qualitative results from structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. The qualitative data included demographic information about interview and FGD participants. The data were categorized into five themes and 16 categories, and presented in detail. Every single saying of the participants in various topics was presented through direct quotations of the transcribed voices of the respondents. Towards the end, an attempt was

made to conclude the findings to comprehend the results of the analysis, and each of the themes is briefly discussed.

5.5.3 Qualitative Data Collection Sites and Participants' Demographic Presentation

The researcher employed purposive sampling techniques based on participants' expertise and knowledge relevant to the research topic. Consequently, the researcher selected principals, PTA members, and supervisors because of their strong understanding of school leadership practices in secondary schools. As Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016, p.2) describe, purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants based on specific characteristics, enabling the researcher to identify individuals with the insights needed to contribute valuable information. Similarly, Schumacher and McMillan (2014:5) defined purposive sampling as a method that allows for the selection of small groups or individuals likely to possess relevant knowledge about the research topic. In practice, participants discussed their opinions or perceptions in groups, and the study considered whether they shared perspectives directly related to the research topic.

Hence, opinions expressed by participants during group discussions that correlated with the research focus were deemed significant. The subsequent table outlines the coding and number of participants in the interviews and FGDs. From six (6) selected secondary schools, all school principals (6), three (3) deputy principals, and three (3) educational supervisors were identified through purposive sampling to participate in interviews, alongside 30 members in six (6) groups of PTSAs drawn from four (4) zones and one city administration (Hawassa City Administration) across six (6) secondary schools. Participants were designated as follows: six principals (P_1, P_2…P_6), three academic deputy principals (VP_1, VP_2, VP_3), resulting in nine principal-level participants, and three educational supervisors (SV_1, SV_2…SV_3). To minimize disruptions, interviews were scheduled for the afternoon and used both one-on-one and telephonic formats for participant engagement.

Table 5.18 Sampling and samples distributions for FGDs and interviews

Zones(Z) and Secondary Schools (SS)	Focus Group Discussion		Interview	
	Number of FGDs	Number of participants	Number (Principals)	Number (Supervisors)
1 Hwassa city (Z_1SS_1), (Z_1SS_2) (Z_1SS_3), (Z_1SS_4)	1	5	2	1
2 West Sidama (Z_3SS_3), (Z_3SS_3), (Z_3SS_3)	1	5	2	‘
3 North Sidama (Z_2SS_2), (Z_2SS_2) (Z_2SS_3)	1	5	1	-
4 Central Sidama (Z_3SS_1), (Z_3SS_2) (Z_3SS_3), (Z_3SS_4)	1	5	2	1
5 South Sidama (Z_4SS_5), (Z_4SS_5), (Z_4SS_5), (Z_4SS_5), (Z_4SS_5), (Z_6SS_6)	2	10	2	1
Sub-total	**6**	**30**	**9**	**3**
Total	**6;30**		**12**	

***Source**: Researcher, 2024.*

In Chapter Four (Section 4.5), the study indicated that it employed a mixed research approach; thus, quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the basic research questions. This approach was preferred because neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone had sufficient potential to capture the trends and details of school leaders’ practices in capacitating teachers to support improvements in students' academic achievement. Accordingly, in its procedures, the concurrent convergent design was applied, and to supplement the quantitative data collected, qualitative data were collected from the views and standpoints of principals and educational supervisors through telephonic interviews, one-on-one interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) of six groups with thirty members from parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs) or (Parents, Teachers and students representative associations), and document analysis was also conducted.

Each one–on–one interview and FGD was recorded using a digital recording camera during data collection (Maree & Westhuizen, 2009). In PTSAs, participants’ interviews and group discussions were reviewed after recording, and the transcripts were sent to participants for member-checking (Maree, 2009). I highlighted key topics during the interview, captured them on tape, and wrote them down to remember them later for the

analysis. The focus group (FGD) participants were asked questions to prompt responses and gather data; the questions were the same as in the individual interviews and were arranged according to the research questions and objectives in the same sequence.

5.5.3.1 Qualitative Data Collection Study Sites (Sampled Secondary Schools)

In Ethiopia's Sidama National Regional State Districts, 333 kilometers from Addis Ababa, six secondary schools were purposefully sampled for the qualitative data collection phase. For confidentiality and privacy, the schools are referred to as Secondary School One (1) through Six (6).

5.5.3.1.1 The Study School – **I** *(Hawassa Tabor Secondary School)*

The chosen secondary schools were located in the regional state city (Hawassa), which is 333 kilometers away from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The regional state council office, education and other sector bureaus, and the Hawassa city administration head offices are located there. The city is one of the region's oldest townships and was established more than 50 years ago. Hawassa Tabor Secondary School has over 3,700 students and 502 teachers. Similarly, Hawassa Alemura secondary school has over 2,850 students and 212 teachers. Both schools are non-fee-paying, and students come from Hawassa city and the surrounding rural area. The condition of the *Hawassa Tabor secondary school* infrastructure was old relative to Hawassa Alemura secondary school but appeared relatively good. However, both schools lack enough infrastructure to adequately accommodate all students who come from the city and the surrounding rural area. The schools have functioning science laboratories, sports fields, water supplies, and libraries.

According to the MoE and the regional Education Bureau, the teacher-student ratio exceeds the recommended level, translating to 65 students per class for Grades 9 through 12. All admissions to classes were higher than the MoE's recommended standard. Grades 11 and 12 also met the MoE standards. There were 68 students enrolled in the classes, with 68 students admitted for this grade. In Schools 1 and 2, the previously mentioned lack of a proportionate ratio and other educational accessibility issues made it difficult to implement the school improvement program and its domains and stages.

The school's teaching and learning infrastructure consisted of seven buildings, three of which were brick and one was wood. Teachers lacked adequate accommodation, training

opportunities, and educational supplies. Principals' leadership practices and implementation in these schools were poor, and learner achievement was also low because the schools did not involve stakeholders in their educational activities. One block had eight classrooms, providing only eight squat holes for 32 teachers. Both male and female teachers were assigned to the two separate classes. With the number of students in the school, the student restroom facilities were insufficient. Only one block had eight classes and a total of eight cramped spaces for 1,996 students.

Running water was accessible to the schools. However, the campus did not receive consistent service; each week, the schools received water for only a couple of days. Because of limited access to water, schools could not create an attractive, clean learning environment. These circumstances directly affected school performance improvement and student academic achievement in both schools, S1 and S2. The schools also did not perform well in co-curricular activities. Making the school environment conducive to learning is one of the SIP components. School number one is in a lowland area where temperatures are high. The two schools have different types of student-staff clubs. Among these clubs, the sanitation and afforestation clubs make the campus conducive by sowing various seeds to maintain and balance the campus' positive atmosphere.

5.5.3.1.2 The Study School **- II** *(Hawassa Alemura Secondary School)*

School B is in a relatively new suburb that extends the old township where School A is situated. This is one of the schools that were built after the attainment of democracy in 1994. The school is a no-fee-paying school. The enrolment stands at 1,200 students, and it has 34 teachers. Students attend this school from Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP) houses built by the government for the less privileged and from a nearby suburb where the owners acquired the house through bond financing from banks. The school buildings were relatively good. The school has a functioning computer laboratory, science laboratory, and a library. Like School 1, the sports fields are in a deplorable state and need immediate attention.

5.5.3.1.3 The Study Schools **– III** *(Aleta Wondo Hidasie Secondary School)*

From South Sidama zone, two secondary schools were selected. The chosen secondary schools were located 65 kilometers away from the regional state city’s center (Hwassa). This district has eight secondary schools, some of which opened only recently. As a result,

teachers have many questions and are putting principals under pressure. The zone and region do not provide the schools with the necessary professional and other support. I purposefully selected two secondary schools from the list above. In the chosen schools, 4,799 students were enrolled in Grades 9 through 12. Two thousand, three hundred and sixty-seven (2,367) of these students were in Grades 9 through 10, and 741 were in Grades 11th through 12th. Schools 3 and 4 had 459 teachers in total; all were qualified to teach their respective classes. However, the teacher-student ratio was a concern.

5.5.3.1.4 The Study School **- IV** *(Aleta Wondo Secondary School)*

The school is in one of the oldest townships in Aleta Wondo town, and it was established more than 60 years ago. The school has over 1700 students and 42 teachers. The school is a no-fee-paying school, and the teachers come from the old suburb and informal settlements. The infrastructure was old but appeared relatively good. However, the school lacked enough infrastructure to adequately accommodate all learners. The school acquired mobile classrooms to mitigate the shortage. The school has a functioning science laboratory and a library. The sports fields are in poor condition and show signs of neglect and dilapidation.

5.5.3.1.5 The Study School – ***V*** *(Yirgalem Secondary School)*

From the Central Sidama Zone, one secondary school was selected. The chosen secondary school was located 46 kilometers away from the regional state city's center (Hwassa). The city is one of the oldest townships in the region, and it was established more than 70 years ago. In the city, School 5 is one of the oldest township schools in the region, and it was established more than 60 years ago. This zone has four secondary schools, though some have only recently opened. The school is a no-fee-paying school. The school buildings are relatively good. The school has a functioning computer laboratory, science laboratory, and a library. Teachers in these schools are not afraid to question principals and ask many questions. At the Zone and regional levels, schools do not receive the necessary professional and other support. The researcher purposefully selected one secondary school.

The enrolment stands at 3,128 students, and it has 134 teachers. Two thousand, one hundred and ninety-eight (2,198) students in Grades 9 through 12 were enrolled in the chosen school. One thousand, three hundred and eighty-nine (1,389) of these students

were in Grades 9 through 10, and 809 were in Grades 11 through 12. School 3 had 34 teachers, all of whom were qualified to teach their respective classes. However, this school also had a teacher-to-student ratio problem.

According to the MoE, the teacher-to-student ratio exceeded the recommended level, resulting in 63 students per class in Grades 9 through 10. All class enrolments exceeded the MoE's recommended standard. Grades 11 and 12 also met the MOE standards. The classes had 56 students enrolled. In School 5, the previously mentioned lack of a student-to-teacher ratio and other educational accessibility issues hindered the effectiveness of the principal's leadership and created barriers to implementing its roles/domains and stages.

The eight buildings that make up the schools' infrastructure for teaching and learning were built from standard building blocks. Facilities for teachers, such as housing, training, and supply of educational materials, were severely lacking. Like schools 1 and 2, schools 3 and 4 did not involve stakeholders in their educational activities; as a result, the principal's leadership practices were ineffective in these institutions, and students' achievement was also low. There were four classes in one block, making a total of eight short holes available for the 34 teachers. Male and female teachers had two separate classes. With the number of students in the school, the student restroom facilities were insufficient. Only one block of ten classes, totaling ten squat holes, could accommodate 2,198 students.

The school campuses had access to piped water that provided ongoing service. Piped water helped create a comfortable learning environment for students. In addition, this campus was beautiful and well-kept. These circumstances positively affected student achievement and the implementation of leadership domains in School 5. The school's extracurricular activities were excellent, helping make the environment conducive to teaching and learning. The first and second schools are situated in a low-lying area with high temperatures. The school campus became more hospitable through sanitation and afforestation clubs, which also helped balance temperatures by cleaning and sowing various seeds.

5.5.3.1.6 The Study School - VI (Bensa Daye Secondary School)

The secondary school was located 101 kilometers from the regional city's center (Hawassa). The zone had five secondary schools. However, only one of them had

recently opened. As a result, teachers had many questions and put principals on the defensive. The Zone and Districts did not provide the schools with the necessary professional and other support. The researcher purposefully selected one secondary school from the list above. The chosen school had 1,378 students in Grades 9 through 12; of these, 879 were in Grades 9 and 10, and 580 were in Grades 11 through 12. School 6 had 66 teachers in total, all of whom were qualified to teach their respective classes. This school is situated in a high-altitude area with cold temperatures. However, this school also had a problem with the teacher-to-student ratio.

According to the MoE, the teacher-to-student ratio exceeds the recommended level of 75 students per class for Grades 9 through 12. All class admissions exceeded the MoE's recommended standard. Grades 11 and 12 also met the MoE standards. There were 68 students enrolled in the classes, with 67 students admitted for these grades. In School 6, the previously mentioned lack of a proportionate ratio and other educational accessibility issues made it difficult to practice the principal's leadership domains and created barriers to improving students' academic achievement.

According to the MoE, the teacher-student ratio exceeds the recommended level, translating to 65 students per class for grades 9 through 10. All class admissions exceeded the MoE's recommended standard. Grades 11 and 12 also met the MOE standards. The classes had 58 enrolled students, with 60 admitted for this grade. In School 4, the previously mentioned lack of a proportionate ratio and other educational accessibility issues made it difficult to implement the School Improvement Program and its domains and stages. Male and female teachers had separate classes. With the number of students in the school, the student restroom facilities were insufficient. Only one block had eight classes, with eight cramped spaces for 1,378 students.

The schools had access to running water, but it was only provided intermittently for the campus. On average, they received water for 3 or 4 days per week. The campuses were not attractive or well-kept because the schools could not create a learning environment suitable for students. These circumstances directly affected student achievement and principals' leadership domain practices in School 4. There were no significant developments in the school's co-curricular activities, which was a problem. Making the school environment conducive to learning was one of the SIP components. School 4 was situated in a low-lying area with high temperatures. The sanitation and afforestation clubs

must create a learning-conducive environment by planting various types of plants on the school campus to maintain a good environmental balance.

5.5.4 Demographic Presentation and Analysis of Participants in Qualitative Data

In this sub-section, the qualitative data collected by data tools, interviews, FGDs, and document analysis will be presented. The first section presents the demographic data of the sampled secondary schools for this qualitative data collection. That is, from those six sampled secondary schools, six principals, three vice principals, and three educational supervisors were interviewed; six groups of five (thirty individuals) secondary school FGDs with PTSAs were conducted; and school document analysis was conducted, detailed based on/ with the following table descriptions of percentage and frequency distribution analysis.

Table 5.20 below describes the demographic data of interview and FGD participants. It includes the percentage and frequency distribution of participants by sex, qualification, years of service, and school location. By sex, 9 (75%) of the 12 participants were male, while the remaining 3 (25%) were female. Female participation in principal positions is almost none. Academic qualification and year of service were other important demographic characteristics of participants. And so, 1 (8.3%), 10 (83.3%), and 1 (8.3%) of the study participants were Bachelor's, Master's degree, and 1 (8.3%), Doctoral degree holders, respectively. In years of service, 2(16.7%) of the participants are in the range of 5-10 years, 4 (33.3%) are 11-15 years of service, and 4 (33.3%) of the participants are in the range of 16-20 years of service, while only 2 (16.7%) are 11-15 years of service.

In the FGDs, the participants were 26 (87%) male and 4 (23%) female, and the sampled schools were half rural and half urban in the region, as presented in Table 5.18 above. As a result, participants could provide information on leadership practices and student pass rates from their contexts. In general, school principals have sufficient leadership experience to enhance quality education in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Table 5.20 *Demographic data for qualitative participants: the percentage and frequency distribution analysis*

	Investigators	Classifications	Participants							
			In Interview						In FGDs	
			Principals & V/Principals		Educational Supervisors		Total		Six groups	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Sex	Female	2	33	1	17	3	25	4	13

		Male	7	67	2	83	9	75	26	87
		Total	9	100	3	100	12	100	30	100
2	Qualification	College Diploma	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	16.7
		Bachelor's degree	1	11.1	-	-	1	8.3	18	60.0
		Master's Degree	7	77.8	3	100	10	83.3	7	23.3
		Doctorate Degree	1	11.1	-	-	1	8.3	-	-
		Total	9	100	3	100	12	100	30	100
3	Leadership experience	< 5 years	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	60
		5 - 10 years	2	22.2	-	-	2	16.7	7	23.3
		11 - 15 years	3	33.3	1	33.3	4	33.3	5	16.7
		16 - 20 years	2	22.2	2	66.7	4	33.3	-	-
		> 20 years	2	22.2	-	-	2	16.7	-	-
		Total	9	100	3	100	12	100	30	100
4	School Location	Rural	3	50	2	66.7	5	55.6	3	50
		Urban	3	50	1	33.3	4	44.4	3	50
		Total	6	100	6	100	9	100	6	100

***Source**: Researcher, 2024 (where,* F = Frequency and % = Percentage).

5.5.5 Development of Themes, Sub-Themes and Categories

According to Cohen (2007, p.462), qualitative data analysis involves organizing, accounting for, and explaining data to make sense of it in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories, and uniformities. The aim of the interview and focus group discussion sessions for research question one was to explore the interpretations and experiences of educational supervisors, principals, and senior teachers regarding leadership roles and teaching-learning practices, and their perspectives on leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement.

For analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher followed the steps suggested by Creswell (2012:262). The researcher organized qualitative data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questions by sub-theme. I transcribed the interview and focus group discussion data into text. With this, themes and sub-themes were identified. The identified themes and sub-themes were organized in line with the research questions to discuss the findings in an organized and meaningful manner. Thus, thematic analysis and narrative description were used to analyze the data.

Based on the study goals in Part 1.4.1.3 of the first chapter and the basic research questions under 1.4.1.2, themes, categories, and sub-themes emerged from the interview and FGD data. Based on the basic questions in Chapter One, the scholastic review in Chapter Two, and the study context and research frameworks in Chapter Three, the researcher developed themes, categories, and sub-themes. To better understand the meaning, Table 5.14 recapitulates the themes, categories, and sub-themes. After

identifying the themes, categories, and sub-categories, the presentation and analysis of interview and FGD data for each basic question follow in the following consecutive sections.

Table 5.19 The Outline of Research Questions, Themes and Sub-themes for Interview and focus group discussion questions.

Themes	Sub-Themes	Categories
1. *Current* Leadership Practices of Principals	• *Establishing & communicating shared vision and goals*	• Defining Clear Vision, Mission & Goals
		• Communicating Shared Vision & Goals.
	• Developing Teachers	• Encouraging frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities
		• Constructing trusting relationships
	• Managing *engagement of community and stakeholders*	• Building a collaborative culture, creating a safe and healthy environment, allocating resources
	• Managing the curriculum and teaching-learning programs	• Providing instructional support
		• Monitoring and providing feedback on the teaching-learning process to teachers
		• Evaluating students' academic achievement
	• Managing resources and school operations	• Allocating resources and time
		• Creating a safe and healthy environment
2. Relationships b/n effective leadership practices & SAA	• Principal's *Current* Leadership Core Practices	• Grade 12 academic achievement rate on EHEECE in percentile
3. Relationships between principal's leadership Styles/ Types, his gender, work experience, or his qualifications & effectiveness	• His leadership Styles/ Types • Gender/sex, his work experiences, his profession	• Grade 12 academic achievement rate on EHEECE in percentile
4. Leadership Challenges	• Schools' leadership-related challenges	• Lack of training on leadership
		• Lack of qualified leadership
		• Lack of leadership capacity
	• Teacher-related challenges	• Lack of teaching interest and motivation
		• Teacher quality and professionalism
	• Student-related challenges	• Lack of interest and motivation
	• Students' home environment-related challenges	• Family socio-economic background
		• Family education status
	• Lack of resources and material facilities	• Water, Internet, and Electricity
		• Lack of enough Budget and funds
		• Infrastructures
5. Strategies to be adopted by School Principals	• Government motivation in playing their roles	• Allocating Budgets, Teachers' training, increasing Teachers' salary
	• Developing School Leaders' Commitment and Capacities	• Advising Students, encouraging and motivating teachers
	• Improving the teaching and Learning environment	• Motivation and Evaluation Mechanisms
	• Mobilizing and allocating school resources	• Influence of Woreda, Zone, and Regional Education Offices
	• Working on school self-sufficiency	• Political interference of Woreda Education Office as a challenge

Theme 1: Effectiveness of School Principal on Current Core Leadership Practices

According to Lumadi (2017:1), *"leading and managing teaching-learning is one of the most important activities for principals and other school leaders".* This part of the thesis reports on the findings from the structured interviews and FGDs, which were conducted with twelve (12) participants: six principals, three deputy academic principals, and three educational supervisors for interviews, and thirty (30) participants for FGDs, who were purposively selected from the 61 principals, senior teachers, and supervisors who participated in the completion of the questionnaire for the quantitative part of this study.

Nowadays, the government of Ethiopia is focused on education since it is a tool for development and for solving social, political, and economic problems; education enables individuals and groups to make all-round development by acquiring knowledge, abilities, skills, and attitudes, as stated in the new Ethiopian education police reforming road map (2018) and (MoE, 2005), placing great attention on education with firm belief that the long-term development of the country rests upon the expansion and provision of quality of education. Therefore, to use education as a tool for the country's economic, social, and political development, emphasis on education quality is needed (MoE, 2005, pp. 1-6).

Informed by the above, this section presents the analysis and discussion of data collected from principals, senior teachers, and educational supervisors of five secondary schools through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews on the effectiveness of leadership practices on students' academic achievement in their schools. Data were inspected and summarised based on the research sub-questions (1.6.2). To this end, the data gathered were analyzed and discussed according to themes that emerged from interviews, FGDs, observations, and documentary analysis. The participating principals and educational supervisors were interviewed to reflect on and evaluate their opinions on core leadership practices in their schools, based on the first sub-question: What *are the current leadership practices of school principals in SNRS, Ethiopia?* As mentioned in sections 2.7.1 to 2.7.4 of Chapter Two, the principals' core leadership practices in secondary schools were considered in five sub-themes: 'Setting and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals', 'Developing People', 'Leading Community & Stakeholders' Engagement', and 'Managing Curriculum Teaching-Learning Programs'.

Theme 1: School Principal in Setting and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals

The qualitative data, interviews from every participant, principals (P1-P6), academic deputy principals (DP1-DP3), supervisors (SV1-SV3), senior teachers (ST1- ST3), and

FGDs of PTSAs, were used to discuss the effectiveness of principals' leadership practices in terms of setting directions accordingly. This category was further operationalized through the school leader's ability to define a clear vision and goals and communicate those visions to the stakeholders. The pivot of the work lies in school leaders' ability to define a clear vision, goals, and mission and communicate them. The first question under this category is: *How do you evaluate your school leadership practices as school stakeholders in terms of setting direction by defining a clear vision and goals for students and teachers?*

The interview results showed that the secondary schools defined clear visions, goals, and missions (P1, P2, DP3, ST1, SV2, and SV_1). However, these activities lack a coordinated implementation plan P_3. In strengthening this, interviewee DP2, for instance, stated:

> *…we set our mission in Sidamu Afoo and Amharic. Our school mission is to make our school one of the outstanding schools in Sidama Regional State. We want to make our school a model. To do this, we are working with parents, teachers, and school administrators. But we don't have an implementation plan, and we are not sure whether it is effective.*

As indicated in the interview, school leaders in SNRS can confirm that they are defining the mission, goals, and vision. To do that, they are working with significant stakeholders. However, their actual performance seems vague. In this regard, P_1 said:

> *We are working on setting our vision, goals, and mission, but some problems are emerging. The leading one is student discipline. Our students are entering without permission and leaving the compound illegally.*

This shows that although school principals have a clear vision and mission, they are busy with other issues that divert their attention from implementing the practice. Similarly, P_3 and ST_3 stated:

> *...already we have school vision, mission and goal. We communicate that vision and mission to teachers and students. But our students and teachers didn't fully understand our mission and vision. I cannot believe they understand, except for some teachers.*

It can be inferred that, although principals communicate the school vision, goals, and mission, teachers and students still have a gap in understanding them.

(P_3)

> *This variable matters most to me. Teachers need to know the school's goals and what the school needs to achieve.*

Another important aspect of setting direction is whether principals communicate the vision, goals, and mission to stakeholders and the community. Secondary school principals are expected to explain their reason for existence to the relevant stakeholders. However, the attention given to stakeholders in communicating the vision, goals, and mission varies from one school to another. In this regard, the interviewee's response is worth noting.

> *…we communicate our school vision and goals to the community and stakeholders by posting on the bulletin board (P1), announcing them at the beginning of the year (P2), and sharing them during staff meetings* (P_3, P_4, P_5). *For the community, we especially communicate at the end of the academic year to attract their attention and support.*

(DP_1)

> *…we have Parent-Teacher Student Associations (PTSAs). We have a community representative. We express our vision and mission to them. For instance, we were facing a challenge with student discipline. They always conduct violent demonstrations. We call the surrounding community through their representative. Because of these violent demonstrations, students often miss regular classes, which affects their performance and overall pass rate in our school. That is why the community is involved in advising students.*

(ST_3 and P_3)

As indicated in the quotations, school leaders communicate their vision and mission through different channels. Most do this by posting on the bulletin board and announcing it at the beginning of the year, during flag ceremonies, during staff meetings, and through PTSA. The other interviewee stated:

> *We use mini media for our students to pass on information, while guests can read the billboard posted outside.* (ST_3 and P_2)

SV_2 expressed concern that they were not effectively communicating and monitoring the implementation of their mission, goals, and vision as planned. It can be implied that most

principals communicate their vision, goals, and mission to stakeholders and the community through various mechanisms. However, principals lack commitment to following up on implementing the school's mission, goals, and vision.

Similarly, three of the six FGDs and PTSAs interviewed ranked this variable as most important, but their school principals rated their performance in setting directions for goals and vision as moderate. However, they supported this choice by indicating that the school's vision and goals define what the school is about: providing quality teaching and learning, “where teachers and students have to share a common understanding with regard to what shapes the school". They further indicated that, with the school's vision and goals in mind, principals can ensure that planning for their school’s activities and programs aligns with those vision and goals. Principals believe that if schools' vision and goals are clearly defined and communicated to all parties in the school, particularly students, students’ academic achievement will improve.

In general, school principals' current practice of setting direction is moderate because partners do not fully understand the mission (ST_3 and P_2). Thus, the qualitative data suggest that school leaders partially set direction at a moderate level. The study showed that principals implemented their current leadership practices in setting direction at a moderate level. This is because principals were unsure whether stakeholders understood the mission, goals, and vision.

Theme 2: School Principals in Development of Professional Teachers

Participants were asked to evaluate their level of school leadership practices in developing people in secondary schools in SNRS. To put this core leadership practice into practice, questions were forwarded on the levels of providing support, demonstrating consideration, and building trusting relationships among all school stakeholders: teachers, students, parents, and school administrators.

The three secondary school principals regarding principals' level of providing support and signifying similar thoughtfulness, P_1, P_3, and DP_2, stated:

> *We support teachers by providing materials and moral support for model teachers. Those who worked hard became very happy. But some teachers voiced to us, 'You are discriminating and unfair.’ Discouraged teachers can affect students' academic performance. But we did not support teachers as we should. One thing we support*

teachers with is allowing them to become examiners for national exams based on their performance evaluation in our school. They receive no other advantage or benefit from us.

(P_2)

In my view, teacher development falls outside my responsibilities as an instructional leader. It is more the responsibility of curriculum implementers from the regional office and the department head office than the principal.

This indicates that school principals offered routine materials and allowed them to be part of the national exam, which already exists. Teachers receive no sustainable support. Similarly, other participants said:

.... there is no motivation for teachers from the government body. But during our regular monthly meeting, we call the names of better-performing teachers and encourage others to follow their examples. We appreciate them in front of others.

(P_5)

From the field note and interview conducted, it was also observed that the level of providing support and demonstrating consideration is low. In confirming this, similarly P_1 and SV_3 stated that:

There is not much support in our school. But some teachers are performing better. We have planned to give motivators. We are recording what they did to motivate them, and we are supposed to give rewards at the end of the semester or the school year.

Therefore, principals showed less consideration and support for teachers. For instance, ST_3 and P_3 confirmed that teachers complain to principals, who side only with students. Their school lacks a budget, and teachers need additional pay for extra hours. Thus, principals in secondary schools do not support or consider teachers' individual needs; they simply present plans on paper rather than through actual practice. Another way to develop people in secondary schools is by building trusting relationships. Regarding principals' practice of this sub-practice, the study participant observed that mistrust sometimes exists *in our school. We address it by discussing what causes mistrust.*

(P_1) The other interviewee added:

> *…there is mistrust between teachers and students. For example, when we give model teachers a chance to be involved in examining the national exam with some incentives, other teachers assume we are one-sided. They complain about what special thing those model teachers do. We spend our time providing evidence of how the model teachers perform.*

As shown above, principals' status in building trusting relationships was not strong. ST_1 confirmed that:

> *…there is a lack of trust between teachers and students to some extent. Students do not respect teachers. Conflict was common in our school. Most students are unethical. There was no tolerance. Some teachers are also not fair. So, conflict exists because of a lack of trust in our school.*

This suggests mistrust among students and teachers in most secondary schools in the region. In some schools, teachers and principals mistrust each other. In support of this, P_1 contended that:

> *…as principals, we administer financial issues. Most teachers don't trust us. Especially teachers who are not interested in supporting their students have a negative attitude toward principals. As a result, teachers resist the school's plan to support students.*

The above quotations imply that many teachers mistrust the principals regarding the transparency of financial matters. P_4 further added: "*teachers assume us as if we are utilizing school money for our own personal benefit instead of paying them additional payment for the support they render to students*". In confirming this:

> *"…there is mistrust between teachers and school administration. Most teachers presumed that administration staff, including me, use school money for themselves when purchasing school materials, which has affected our teaching-learning process to some extent.*

Therefore, the status of school principals in developing people by offering support, demonstrating consideration, and building trusting relationships among teachers, students, and school administration is low in most schools. This may be due to a lack of necessary support and consideration for teaching staff, as well as a lack of trust among teachers, students, and school leaders. That is why, even though most principals in

regional government secondary schools say they implement this practice, their actual work falls below expectations.

The principals identified a link between this variable and the variable related to monitoring and provision of feedback on the teaching and learning process. One principal (P_2) and education supervisor (SV_3) indicated that the underperformance in *teacher development* identified during the supportive supervision and monitoring process creates opportunities for the development of teachers, and another supervisor agreed, saying that, *"challenges identified during the monitoring process can be resolved in the school through school-based teacher development workshops during which teachers can share findings from the monitoring process and wider encompassing workshops can be arranged".*

These findings clarify that when the principal is a strong instructional leader, he/she will ensure the development of quality teachers by training them and serving as a role model classroom teacher. Principals need to accompany their subordinates in teacher development activities, as this will build the principal's professional expertise in curriculum, monitoring, and evaluation.

These participants' contributions suggest that teacher development activities need not be the responsibility of the zone education department; principals should be empowered to conduct them in their schools. This view is also reflected in the principals' need for support from the zone education department, as they indicated that the department's support should be sufficient to empower and capacitate them to carry out some of these activities themselves. A conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that when the principals' capacity is improved, such a principal should be able to build the capacity of his/her staff.

Theme 3: Leadership Effectiveness of secondary school principal in engagement of community and stakeholder

One school leadership practice is developing the organization or developing schools. The research participants were requested to evaluate their status of this practice in terms of building a collaborative culture in Timetable preparation, creating a safe and healthy environment, and allocating resources. To begin with, principals created a collaborative culture by preparing timetables (P_1-P_6, DP_1-DP_3, SV_1-SV_3, and ST1-ST_3). All 6 secondary schools, as almost all participants indicate, have created their own Timetable for teaching, as it is difficult to teach without it.

Regarding maintaining a safe and healthy environment, school principals vary. In this regard, one principal said:

> *…as our school is far from the center of the town, there is no internet connection, electricity, laboratory, and ICT room. There is a problem of infrastructure.* (P_2)

This means schools lack a safe and orderly environment, and they struggle to maintain physical facilities such as internet connection, electricity, laboratory, and ICT room. It was further confirmed by interviewees that:

> *…there is a small teachers' entertainment center for tea break. But the entertainment center is not attractive.*

Similarly, P_4 added:
Our school was unsafe. People and students broke the fence and entered the school compound to cause disturbance. We maintained the fence, which was destroyed.... but sometimes they still broke the corrugated iron sheet and entered to cause destruction.

(P_6) also maintained that:

> *…as our school is new and found in lowland areas, we have no water supply in our school. The school community complains about the lack of clear water.*

One can say that most secondary schools lack a safe and orderly environment and lack physical facilities. As seen from interviewees and the researcher's observations during the interview, some schools do not have strong fences. Intruders can enter the school and may disturb the teaching-learning environment during political unrest or movement. Moreover, the lack of internet connection, electricity, and water supply contributes to an unsafe and disorderly environment in secondary schools.

Regarding school resource allocation, schools have few resources. Principals, vice-principals, and supervisors responded that they allocate the resources they have fairly. One interviewee, P2, noted that resources are allocated based on the school's potential. We allocate resources to each department, but most of the time, we are fulfilling their demand as they request."

In addition to this, the interviewees further added the following:

> *…there are not enough resources in our school. Students and parents contribute some money. Until now, the school grant has not been sent to us.*

(DP_3)

The school has no internal income; we can say almost nothing. But we allocate the few resources we have fairly.

(P_2)

In a similar fashion, DP1 witnessed that: "there is resource scarcity, though they are fairly distributing. According to P1, "there are different departments who complain to their office for not getting enough budgets." 'It is too low,' they complained. This principal further added: "all the questions cannot get treated because of budget scarcity."

From these participants, one can understand that although most principals confirmed they allocate resources fairly, resource scarcity makes distribution unfair. In their interviews, principals said some academic departments complain that school principals distribute resources unfairly.

To this end, secondary school principals in developing schools were unable to secure schools' physical facilities from unwanted interruptions. Schools did not distribute available resources equally and fairly to each department because budgets were insufficient. Most schools lack a safe and orderly environment. They also lack physical facilities such as internet connections, electricity, laboratories, and ICT rooms. In addition, insufficient budgets meant resources were not distributed equally and fairly across departments. These gaps affect students' achievement, as shown by pass rates in their respective schools.

Sub-Theme 4: Leadership Effectiveness of secondary school principal in Managing Curriculum and Teaching-Learning Programs

The fourth theme in which participants evaluated leadership practice is managing teaching-learning programs. School principals, vice-principals, and supervisors were asked how they affect the quality of instructional activities in terms of granting instructional support, evaluating teachers, and evaluating student achievement.

One major way principals contribute to improving student achievement and the quality of education overall is through managing the teaching-learning program. In relation to principals as to whether school leaders are providing instructional support, one study participant witnessed that:

> *…we have many students in one class, on average, 87. This makes it difficult to support each student.*

(P_3)

Like this, DP_2 confirms that instructional support influences the quality of education; he responded:

> *…we have a big challenge due to the number of students in one classroom. This school has at least 40 sections, with 80-90 students in one section. Due to this, it is difficult to reach and support each student. This also makes it impossible to meet each teacher's needs.*

ST_3 also stated that:

> *…we are not supporting teachers very well. Teachers need incentives. Government should support teachers. They are teachers who wear the same clothes for a week while students change daily. Without motivating teachers, we should not think of the quality of education.*

School leaders are not supporting instruction because of teachers' economic conditions and the government's lack of support for additional incentives. Another participant further added that:

…we are not supporting our teaching-learning process as we expect. There is a problem with registration and enrolling students. It took us one month to arrange the number of students in one class, as opposed to our school policy. The maximum is 112 students per class. On average they are 90 students in one section. That is totally wrong and unacceptable. There is a problem with the number of teachers assigned. As a result, teachers cannot support and manage the teaching-learning process. (SV_3)

Participants imply that school principals were not influencing the quality of education through instructional support because of the large number of students in one class. Regarding teacher evaluation, almost all participants said their schools have a teacher evaluation culture. DP_1, P_2, P_3, SV_1, SV_2, ST_1, and ST_2 all confirmed that they evaluate teachers at the end of every semester, twice annually, based on the given checklist and teachers' 'annual, weekly and daily Lesson Plans'. Strengthening the above statements, interviewee P_1 added: "there is evaluation of teachers." However, the interviewee

expounds: “We have around 90 teachers, and we cannot evaluate all of them. We evaluate them “randomly” (P_1).

DP_3 further added that:

> *We evaluate the teaching-learning process at the departmental level. We use an evaluation format or checklist to assess teachers’ performance according to their plan. During the evaluation process, some teachers are unhappy, while others, the best performers, are eager to be evaluated. Those who are unhappy are not meeting students' needs. The performance of those students is lower in those subjects with unsatisfied teachers.*

The above quotations imply that school leaders evaluate teachers accordingly, though implementation varies. Despite this, lower-performing teachers dislike evaluation because of several factors. Most teachers (87%) indicated that principals were not giving timely feedback after their evaluation. As a result, most are unhappy with evaluation. In this regard, DP_1, portrays that:

> *…some teachers who don't have the weekly plan used to complain. We give feedback to those teachers. We appreciate and motivate teachers who are doing well. We give feedback to those who are not doing well on areas that need improvement. Despite these efforts, we make less progress in improving the quality of education because of other related problems.*

From the quotations, we can infer that most school leaders evaluate their teachers, although a few teachers are not content with the process. Teachers’ dissatisfaction stems from their low performance, as principals viewed it. But when principals connected the evaluation system with rewards, teachers were trying their level best to achieve high. P_4 strengthened this by saying that:

> *…we have around 25 evaluation criteria. Based on the results, teachers can achieve either better or lower results. As a result, if the government offers summer professional development courses, evaluation results become one of the selection criteria. Hence, every teacher does their best to get those benefits.*

It seems that if teachers’ evaluations are properly managed, teachers will work hard to improve the quality of education, as reflected in students' pass rates.

School principals' practice in managing curriculum and teaching-learning programs can influence the quality of education through evaluating student academic achievement. Because it is mandatory, principals must evaluate students' academic achievement at least once a year. For instance, P_2 expressed that:

> *…in our school, last year 2023/24 there was no such improvement. A year before, around 70% passed the national exam and joined universities. But last year, 2023/24, only 32.57% of Grade 12 students in our school joined public universities.*

Another interviewee, P_5, responded as follows when asked, "How are you evaluating students' achievement?"

> *…we follow up on our students' achievement by observing their exercises, exam results, etc. Based on their results, we prepare a plan to adjust the methods so teachers can support them. But the students' results were not improved as we expected. Because this school is located in a low-lying or hot area, students are not interested in their education. We are almost forcing them to learn. They spend their time supporting their families.*

It can be inferred that, even though most principals evaluate students' achievement, this does not reflect the quality of education by itself, as students' attention was focused on supporting their families and they showed little interest in their education. This creates a challenge to their academic performance. In general, principals in SNRS secondary schools did not manage the teaching-learning program at the expected level. However, challenges hindered the implementation of principals' leadership practices.

$PTSA_4$, ST_1 and SV_2 expressed that:

> *…principals were not influencing the quality of education through instructional support. Due to large class sizes, teachers did not support and manage their teaching-learning process. School principals evaluate their teaching staff every semester. But most principals did not give timely feedback after evaluations. This contributed to a lack of interest among teachers in teaching their subject matter. In addition, although most principals evaluate students' achievement regularly, there was no significant improvement in pass rates, which may be due to teachers' lack of interest and less support from families, among other challenges.*

Data from interviews with the two principals (P2 and P5) indicate that curriculum planning, a core function of the school principal's instructional role, focuses on fundamental school activities: teaching and learning.

One of the senior teachers (ST_2) pointed out:

> "…*we, with the guidance and follow-up of the vice principal and department heads of school, start preparing our yearly plans, which are year plans, assessment plans, management plans, and lesson plans*".

This role involves planning how the curriculum is delivered in the classroom by selecting and aligning the curriculum and drafting a school master timetable and individual class timetables. A participating school principal (P_4) acknowledged that, "*We also formulate school timetables*"

5.5.6 Relationship between Current Principals' Leadership Practices and Students' Academic Achievement

The principals were interviewed to reflect and describe the relationship between principals' leadership practices in 'setting directions', 'developing people', 'developing schools', and 'managing curriculum and teaching-learning programs' and students' academic achievement improvement in secondary schools of SNRS. The findings from the structured interviews and FGDs revealed an association between principals' leadership practices and students' academic achievement in the corresponding secondary schools.

For example, as discussed above, P_1 stated:

> *"…I think, to my understanding, there is a relationship between what we are doing in our school as a principal and the students' academic achievement. Because when we prepare a vision and properly communicate goals to parents, teachers, and students, everyone participates accordingly, and because of that, we assume our students achieve better."*

P_4, in relation to this, complemented that:

> *In my opinion, when teachers exert their effort to support our students, and as we build positive relationships between teachers, students, and our stakeholders, that would help especially low- and middle-level learners to improve their education.*

Similarly, SV_4 explained that:

> *…our teachers mistrust us. They assume we are manipulating them for political purposes when we ask them to offer make-up classes. Because of that mistrust, our teachers were unwilling to provide additional support to our students. Last year, our students' academic achievement decreased, according to EHEECE.*

From the above quotations, it appeared that when school leaders clearly communicate goals and build trusting relationships, students' academic performance can improve.

The other participants (ST_1, ST_3) underlined:

> *In our school, as you can see, we lack infrastructure, sufficient internet facilities, and a sufficient water supply. Because of these problems and challenges, we fail to achieve our goals. For instance, our last year students' academic achievement and pass rate were 1.9%, 1.2%, and 1.1%, respectively. Nearly all Grade 12 students failed to join university.*

(P_2), in the same breath, SV_2 exclaimed:

> *In this school, my leadership practice in supporting the teaching-learning process is almost rare. Because we have large classes, and many students are in one class. Teachers cannot visit to observe individual students' needs. As a result, we cannot say, "I am positively influencing students' academic achievement," but we can say that, in one way or another, our leadership practices relate to improving our students' academic achievement.*

Another participant (P_3) stated:

> *As for me, the principals' leadership practices, such as evaluating teachers' performance in managing the teaching-learning process, were not properly managed. Since there are ninety-nine teachers in our school, the academic vice-principal and I could not evaluate all of them due to their number. We didn't give them immediate feedback after evaluation. That became the major source of teachers' dissatisfaction.*

$PTSA_1$ also stated**:** ***"One can say that if principals' leadership practices in developing schools to fulfill school physical facilities and not supporting teaching-learning programs, without doubt the students' academic achievement rate would decline."*** These ideas

coincided with a positive association between principals' leadership practices in ‘setting direction’, ‘developing people’, ‘developing schools’, and ‘managing teaching-learning programs’ and secondary school students' academic achievement.

The principals whose schools have performed below the relatively good students’ academic achievement over the years spend a large percentage of their time on administrative and other activities rather than on instructional leadership. This finding suggests that these principals were aware of instructional leadership as a practice, but they did not necessarily regard it as their responsibility.

Three out of the six principals interviewed had clearly demarcated plans for their daily activities. However, the interviews showed that these principals found it difficult to follow their plans because the department called unplanned meetings from time to time. These principals believed that if they could implement their programs without departmental interference, their schools could improve students’ academic achievement. The value of spending more time on managing the curriculum and teaching-learning programs featured frequently in their responses. However, this was undermined by the fact that their personal programs are often disrupted by departmental interference through service meetings at short notice, which sometimes take them away from their schools for several days. The interviews showed that four of the principals, except P1, prioritized administration over the curriculum, viewing curriculum management as the vehicle for improving students’ performance.

Based on these submissions, it was clear that principals' leadership practices were positively and negatively related to the management of teaching and learning programs in secondary schools.

Theme 5: Challenging Factors Experienced by Secondary School Principals

In practice, school principals, as educational leaders, are regarded as problem solvers and facilitators of teaching and learning practices. In particular, the principals are expected to play a significant role in promoting teachers' job performance in secondary schools (Miller, 2016; Williams-Boyd, 2002). Thus, all secondary school principals are expected to work towards achieving high student academic achievement. But this effort was hindered by some outstanding challenges.

Therefore, this study assumed that principals' school leadership practices were not free from challenges that could, in turn, hinder their effectiveness in promoting improvements in students' academic achievement in the study area. For this purpose, the respondents were requested to show their levels of perception about the existence of diverse factors affecting the implementation of school leadership roles and addressing one of the basic research questions: "What are the major challenges that affect the effectiveness of the principals' leadership for students' academic achievement in *SNRS?"* Based on this, the interviewees indicated that schools' objectives were not completely fulfilled due to some major drawbacks. Depending on participants' responses, the challenges that emerged fall under the following six subcategories.

5.5.6.1 Problems Focused on Students

Despite school leaders' efforts, one major area of challenge involves problems connected with students. Almost all interviewees agreed that students' lack of interest and motivation is the major challenge. They noted that this lack of interest stems from many factors. Among them, for instance, P_1 confirmed:

> *The main reason for the lack of interest is that those who graduated in engineering and other fields have been unemployed for five years since graduation. That is why current students' morale is declining.*

The above finding implies that students are less interested in their education because their friends or relatives are jobless. Participants emphasized that students' discontent stems from a lack of basic knowledge and a failure to understand core subjects. In addition, many teachers and HoDs added that students' lack of interest is the main challenge preventing them from achieving high-quality academic results. Joblessness and a lack of fundamental subject knowledge are the main reasons contributing to students' lack of interest. Principals' and teachers' efforts would be in vain to boost students' pass rate without students' interest and motivation.

5.5.6.2 Problems Related to Home-Environment

The second theme interview participants raised was home-environment-related problems. From their responses, family socio-economic status and family educational level received attention in this part. Students' family socio-economic status hindered principals' actual practices. Another participant, P2, also added that low participation by

parents and communities in contributing money to improve individual students' results is due to parents' lack of sufficient income. ST1 and ST5 confirmed that a lack of family support for their children affects the achievement of the school principals' objectives. Similarly, P4 also pointed out that, because of the family's economic situation, some students came to school from the countryside. As a result, they often arrived late to school. If not for the family's economic problems, they could have rented houses in nearby homes in town.

Another home-related factor is family educational background. In this regard, SV1, P3, and ST1 showed that family educational background is the main challenge to students' academic achievement. P_3 added that students from rural areas are not interested in education. ST_1 also added that, because of families' educational background, parents do not follow up on their children's education. Educated families, on the other hand, are more aware and support their children by purchasing materials, and follow-up will increase students' academic achievement. In responses to the open-ended questionnaire, unit leaders, teachers, and HODs raised problems in students' academic achievement stemming from a lack of financial support from families. They also noted a lack of community participation in school activities around our schools.

5.5.6.3 Problems Related to Teachers

The third challenge mentioned by participants was teacher-related problems. In SNRS secondary schools, another challenge hindering school principals' and students' academic achievement is teacher-related problems, such as a lack of teacher interest. Teacher quality and professional commitment: teachers directly affect students' pass rates. In this regard, interview informants indicated that one of the main challenges principals face during their efforts to improve students' pass rates in secondary schools is lack of teachers' interest; P_3 specified:

> *Teachers expect additional payment for additional make-up classes and related issues. 'The income of a shoe polisher is better than our salary,' a teacher exclaimed. Even the salary of our vice-principals is equal to that of any teacher in the same profession and year of service. Morale must be different.*

It seems that the lack of additional incentives and motivation causes teachers to lose interest, and they cannot provide extra support to students.

Teachers' quality and professional commitment are additional teacher-related problems. Specifically, a lack of qualified teachers in some subject areas (DP1), low teacher commitment, and teachers not paying careful attention to students (SV_2). The interviewees underscored that teachers who did not graduate from universities and were not certified for their degree are not contributing to students' high academic achievement. Another concern raised in the open-ended questionnaires by teachers and HODs is teachers' lack of unity due to biases. They are divided along ethnic lines. This contributes to low commitment among teachers toward their profession.

In general, teachers' lack of interest in the teaching profession due to a lack of incentives, the absence of qualified teachers in subject areas, and low professional commitment are contributing factors to students' low achievement and affect principals' school leadership in turn.

5.5.6.4 Problems Related to School-Leadership

Executing all school activities requires strong leadership follow-up and practices. Hence, the fourth challenge, as mentioned by participants, was categorized under school-leadership-related problems. In interviews, principals and vice-principals were reluctant to discuss leadership-related problems. Interviewees who were principals and vice-principals were not willing to raise any issues related to their leadership problems. They didn't accept it and diverted the blame to others. However, educational supervisors who participated raised, in the open-ended items, teachers' and HoDs' lack of leadership training, lack of qualified leadership, and lack of leadership capacity as some of the many problems. For instance, ST_3 said that a lack of consecutive leadership training is one of the challenges. Most teachers and HoDs, in the open-ended items on the questionnaire, reported that school leaders did not give them timely feedback due to a lack of leadership qualifications.

In addition, ST_1 stated that a lack of principals' leadership capacity challenges school principals in achieving their aims. He explained that school leaders are assigned if they are from that community without considering their merit and potential. The other participant expounds, "*Assigning leaders without merit and potential has severely affected the quality of education in those schools*."(ST_2). Thus, a lack of leadership training, qualified leaders, and leadership capacity are school-leadership-related challenges affecting principals' ability to improve students' pass rates in secondary schools.

Theme 6: ***Leadership effectiveness in managing resources & school operations***

5.5.6.5 Shortage of Resources and Material Facilities

School resources and material facilities are the most important inputs with which schools achieve their objectives. Participants raised the following under lack of resources: insufficient budget and funds; and under material facilities: Internet, electricity, and infrastructure as major challenges. To begin with, not enough budget was allocated to secondary schools. The data obtained from interviewees corroborate this:

> *"…enough budgets were not allocated to our school. As a result, we couldn't build classrooms, repair broken chairs, or purchase necessary teaching materials.*

Concurrently, interviewees (P_5, P_1, SV_1, and ST_3) confirmed that insufficient budgets are one of the challenges hindering their schools from achieving their objectives. As a result, secondary school principals did not properly implement core activities related to students' academic achievement.

In addition, P_5, added:

> *"There is no internet access in our school. There was wireless access, but it is no longer functioning.* There are no other facilities such as a laboratory room with its equipment. However, P_2 and P_4 indicated a lack of water and staff toilets.

In addition, SV_3 claimed a deficit of resources; the principals also face a lack of material facilities. One participant confirmed a lack of electricity and internet access.

> *Electricity and internet access are the big challenges. Without internet, we are severely affected. Because we are far from the center of the town, the network signal is weak. Also, because we lack electricity, we have stopped teaching using the plasma TV. All of this has affected our students' results.*

P_5 confirms this:

> *We have a laboratory but no laboratory equipment and chemicals. Even in most schools with a laboratory and equipment, there is no laboratory technician.*

Participants further explained that there are more than 100 students in one class and additional classrooms are needed. P_2 and S_4 added that they lack material support, such as textbooks in some subjects and references for students. Without teaching materials,

teachers struggle to reach every student. From the quotations above, one can say that without electric power, there is no internet access, no teaching resources, and other related issues.

In addition to the problems raised, P_3 also added that:

> *There is a water problem in our school. He further stated that there is no tap water in our school compound. As a result, most students go long distances to fetch water, and some students even dropped out of school to sell water as an income-generating means.*

Furthermore, the same issue was raised with the discussants; they concluded that improper utilization or wastage of resources was observed in many of their respective secondary schools. In this case, both quantitative and qualitative analyses produced convergent results: improper utilization of resources varied across the sample zones and within secondary schools. Therefore, these results suggest that unwise use of available school resources by principals in most schools was a major challenge that could negatively affect schools' improvement and, in turn, students' academic achievement in the study region.

Water is life and directly affects the achievement of school performance objectives. From the open-ended items, it was inferred that resources and material facilities were not fully provided due to budget shortages. Therefore, this discussion suggests that a lack of resources and material facilities is a major cause of poor quality of students' learning and also affects school leaders in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia, in ensuring effective leadership.

5.5.6.6. Other External Factors

The last challenge hindering school principals' achievement was other external factors. These challenges were subcategorized under: Lack of Woreda and Zonal support, challenges from the Woreda Education Office, and political interference. In confirming this, interviewee (P_5) exemplifies:

> *"…the Woreda administration is not giving us full support in most issues we are requesting."*

Participants also said the Woreda offices are slow to address their problems, especially financial issues (VP_1). Zonal and Woreda offices planned and promised much to support the school, but in practice they are not doing so as promised (VP_1; P_1 & S_3). As explained above, principals in some secondary schools face a lack of support from the prospective Woreda, and even the support they receive is weak. Consequently, principals cannot give the required support to their teachers. This directly affects the quality of education.

The second external factor for school principals is the Woreda Education Office. In connection with this, P_5 witnessed that,

> *… the government is forcing us through the Woreda Education Office to enroll all the students applying to our school regardless of our capacity. They used to aver that 'where should these students go?' Instead of building additional classrooms or looking for funds, they force us to accept students.*

This influence and push from Woreda to enroll more seems logical, but school principals needed autonomy and extra classrooms. The third theme under this challenge is political interference. In support of this, for instance, P_4 has something to say:

> *Our students are entrenched in politics without understanding, or maybe intentionally. Because of this, it takes time to convince students, teachers, and other stakeholders of the problem. They never analyze its merits and demerits. Even now, the reason most students are not coming to school is politics, as if students are learning for someone else. Students cannot even express themselves properly, let alone engage in politics.*

As shown in one of the interviews, schools have become an epicentre of interference from different political party ideologies. Some interviewees linked these challenges to a lack of peace and stability in the country, especially in the Sidama Regional State (P_3; P_4). Specifically, P_4 stressed that a school principal should have been a member of the incumbent party leading the country. In connection with this, P_4 added that lack of peace and conflicts are the major challenges in schools. Students are the ones igniting revolution in our school. He further added that the party uses him/her to enforce its ideology.

In the same tone, P_2 added political interference as the main challenge these days when he mentioned:

In school, you need to make the educational system secular. The students come and challenge me. They disturb us with rumors from other schools and universities. This wastes our quality instructional time.

From this quotation, it can be deduced that when instructional time is disrupted and wasted, students do not have time to attend classes and study their lessons. In open-ended questionnaires, most teachers and HODs also wrote that these political interferences have taken our precious time, and they even added that they fear teaching in such situations. Thus, political interference, whether initiated by external forces, challenges the implementation of leadership practices and the work of school leaders. In general, secondary school principals of SNRS were externally challenged by a lack of Woreda and Zonal support, and by the Woreda Education Office and political interference that undermined the quality of education. All of them made the teaching-learning process difficult.

Theme 7: Strategies to be adopted by Principals to Improve Challenges

Principals, deputy principals, and supervisors were asked to recommend promising strategies to overcome the hurdles that prevent school leaders from improving students' pass rates in secondary schools. With the intention of eliciting the responses, basic question four in Chapter One reads: “What are the strategies adopted by the school principal to maintain/improve students’ throughput rate in secondary schools of SNRS of Ethiopia?

The collected interview and FGD data were analyzed, and five themes were developed: government motivation in playing their roles, developing school leaders’ commitment and capacities, enhancing teaching-learning, mobilizing and allocating school resources, and working on school autonomy. The following sub-sections present the participants’ perceptions of the possible solutions for each strategy.

5.5.7.1 Government Motivation in Playing their Roles

The national government has taken the initiative to enhance the quality of education, particularly at the secondary school level. However, the interviewees raised what the government should do. For example, participants (P_2; P_5) argued that solutions belong to different stakeholders and groups. They need support from government bodies, for instance, the MoE and the Sidama Education Bureau, to allocate financing budgets fairly.

In relation to this, P_3 and P4 added that the Ministry of Education should follow up on the performance of each Education Bureau at the regional level.

P_1 also added:

> *Regional education bureaus should plan training and professional development for teachers. Often, students who score lower marks enter the teaching profession. The Ministry of Education should change its policy. This will directly affect the quality of teaching. Because of this, the clever or best-performing students should join the teaching profession. In addition, teachers should be valued and given a salary increase to motivate them.*

In connection with this, SV_3 emphasized,

> *"…teachers should be given attention. He also added that salaries should be increased because they are still below those in other sectors in the country. Teachers don't have extra time to work and earn additional income."*

These excerpts show that the government should improve the lives of individual teachers to attract competent professionals to the teaching profession. In general, the government should take responsibility for allocating the budget fairly, encouraging private investment, attracting competent teachers to the teaching profession, and increasing teachers' salaries to achieve its major goals.

5.5.7.2 Developing School Principal Leaders' Commitment and Capacities

The second strategy the interview participants suggested is developing school leaders' commitment and capacities. As mentioned in the definition of terms, 'school leaders' refers to principals, vice-principals, and supervisors. One of the major challenges raised was lack of students' interest in education. Accordingly, P_1 suggested:

> *School leaders should communicate the vision, mission, and values of education. As a principal, we should inform them of the challenges they would face without education. Daily, we must tell them the benefits and significance of education.*

In support of this, P_2 advised that:

> *Students should be properly trained in lower classes and primary schools to owe basic knowledge. In rural areas, students learn and support themselves and their*

families through farming activities. They don't have full support and are therefore not interested. Mechanisms or systems should be in place to support those students financially in collaboration with stakeholders.

To solve students' discipline, P_3 recommended, "we should group students into smaller teams." Homeroom teachers would help us. In line with this, P_2 added:

As a principal, we should motivate and encourage teachers to advise the students in their respective classes. We advise students to always wear uniform, due to disciplinary problems, to have an exercise book, pen, pencil, cut their hair, etc. Each week, they must be informed.

From the quotations above, one can say that principals should advise students daily, encourage and motivate teachers, and work with other stakeholders to attract and retain students.

5.5.7.3 Enhancing Teaching-Learning

The most effective principals prioritize improving student pass rates by enhancing the effectiveness of classroom teaching. From the open-ended items with teachers and HoDs, one teacher said: *…principals were not giving timely feedback to teachers. Principals should delegate duties to Heads of Department and vice-principals to provide timely feedback.*

Regarding unmotivated teachers, P_3 suggested:

We have to advise teachers to be committed and not to work only for money. We need to encourage them to shoulder the responsibility of the nation.

This shows that principals should use techniques to motivate teachers to achieve school goals. P_2 also added:

…to solve the lack of interest of teachers, at our school level, there is no enough support. But if teachers teach extra time, we should try to give them incentives for those supplementary classes from our internal income.

Outstanding principals apply proper evaluation and monitoring mechanisms through classroom observations, feedback through student surveys, and one-to-one conversations with teachers about teaching.

Other areas related to enhancing teaching-learning, as suggested by participants, are teachers' training and professional development. In this regard, one interviewee stated thus:

> *School principals should regularly work with stakeholders to arrange teachers' training and professional development activities. Principals should create and support teams and arrange teacher-teacher collaboration in teaching.* (SV_1)

In relation to this, ST_1 added:

Teachers are also expected to play their roles in making their subject matter lovable. This requires self-improvement through reading and upgrading their skills.

From the above findings, it seems that teachers need to upgrade their knowledge of the subject matter because the world is dynamic. Principals are obliged to motivate teachers, evaluate them properly, provide opportunities for training on teaching methods, and share best practices with colleagues.

5.5.7.4 Mobilizing and Allocating School Resources

Many school activities go undone due to a lack of proper resource mobilization and allocation. Highly effective and efficient principals direct and apply available school resources to maximize students' pass rate. In this regard, the view of interviewee (P_1), reads:

> *The principals should mobilize and allocate school resources such as money, material facilities, internet access, and physical facilities such as water and electricity. Principals should work in collaboration with the community and the Woreda Education Office to raise money, material facilities, and physical facilities.*

From this quotation, principals were obliged to mobilize the resources to enable effective working conditions in the school. In line with this, ST_3 advised that:

> *…it is also important to work with potential community members and surrounding NGOs to fund the school and meet its needs.*

Supporting this finding, a participant indicated that the school principal should push the Woreda education department to influence Sidama Electric Utility to provide electricity to the school, which would solve internet access and other facility issues (P_4).

In addition, interviewees recommended that the water problem receive attention. Interviewee SV_2 suggested:

> *The concerned body should solve the water problem in our school as soon as possible. If there is no drinking water, we cannot talk about the quality of education.*

P_1 also exclaimed that:

> *We must generate other sources of income, especially by communicating with state farms in this Woreda to support us. We must request sponsorship from the nearest college, university, Woreda, and PTSA so that they can support us.*

P_2 further strongly advised:

> *We should communicate with the community through PTSA members to at least solve some minor facility problems in our school. We should also communicate with educational offices to support us and the Hawassa town administration to provide solutions to our facility problems. Adding library and laboratory rooms for science courses is mandatory, as it has reduced the number of students in one class. Principals should arrange a way to mobilize community education offices at the Woreda and the town administration to support classroom construction.*

As explained above, to solve the problems of school resources: money, internet access, water, electricity, and other infrastructure, principals should tirelessly and patiently work hard in influencing the concerned body to give due attention to solve each problem accordingly.

5.5.7.5 Working on School Autonomy

Most secondary schools and their principals are now challenged by external forces such as Woreda education office political interference and other problems.

P_3 suggested that:

> *Woreda Education Offices are forcing us to accept and enroll students without considering our capacity. I suggest our school should be autonomous to set our standards and accept students based on our intake capacity. Secondary school principals are demanding the right to decide their intake capacity by securing their autonomy.*

In addition, P_4 also declared that:

> *The number of students in one class should be minimized. This will help follow and support individual students' needs, and consequently improve students' academic achievement.*

It can be inferred that Woreda and town administration education offices seem to be pushing secondary schools to enroll students beyond the school's intake capacity. This may be because regional Education Departments and Woreda education offices pressure schools to make education accessible to all, in line with national education goals. However, the school's autonomy in managing its school based on its capacity was not considered. When class sizes are very large, teachers may be unable to support individual students based on their level of understanding. This can severely affect the quality of education and student pass rates in secondary schools.

The second external challenge to schools is political interference. Political interference mainly involves students' political involvement and principals' political affiliations. Students are easily involved in politics. The easiest way to involve students in political affairs is to ignite sensitive issues. Participants suggested ways or strategies to solve the problems.

One participant suggested the following way out as follows:

> *As school leaders, we must teach our students that politics doesn't help them. We should regularly remind our students to focus on their educational activities. Principals should work with parents to keep the school free from politics* (P_5).

In connection with this assertion, P_2 also suggested:

> *Training should be given to each student in their respective class through trained teachers to make the school secular and free of politics. It is the lion's share of the government's responsibility to make the schools free from politics.*

Whereas P_4 recommended:

> *The government's role is to create stability and peace. Without keeping peace and stability, it is impossible to cover the portion of subject matter and keep the quality of teaching-learning.*

The above citations imply that students can easily delve into politics if the government does not support schools and principals in keeping schools free from politics. Therefore, Woreda Education Offices are responsible for supporting schools to remain secular and autonomous, making the school environment safe and free of political involvement.

Regarding principals' political affiliation, the participant does not seem to be responding on that matter. From the field interview notes and open-ended questionnaires distributed to teachers and HoDs, most principals were assigned to leadership positions based on their political affiliations. They were supposed to be leading party members. More than 50% of respondents in the open-ended items commented that principals spent most of their time dealing with issues unrelated to instructional activities. In this regard, SV2 suggested that some school principals spend more time in government meetings representing their schools. During data collection, the researcher also observed that, in some schools, only vice-principals were interviewed because principals were absent for government meetings. Based on this, it can be inferred that when principals spend their time away from quality school time, the quality of education is at greater risk. Thus, due to a lack of autonomy, principals lack the freedom to make decisions that improve the quality of education; principals should be assigned based on merit, and schools should be free from politics.

Hence, the study identified leadership challenges experienced by principals in secondary schools. That is, the revealed challenges student-related problems, home-environment-related problems, and teacher-related problems are strong challenges, whereas school-leadership-related matters; lack of resources and materials; facilities; and other external factors to schools were identified as moderate constraints. Under each sub-topic, a detailed analysis was made. Principals' current practices in managing the teaching-learning program were not at the required level.

5.5.8 Summary of the findings from the Qualitative data

This section reports on the responses of the principals and supervisors to the structured interview questions. Seven themes were identified from the focus group, and structured interview questions and the responses of the principals are presented according to the seven themes, and how the individual principals touched on these themes in their responses to the questions (refer to Appendix I for the raw data on the principals' and supervisors' responses.

For the purpose of analysing and reporting the findings from the principal's and supervisor's responses, the following seven themes which include the four variables identified earlier in the study and three new themes are used: defining and communicating a shared vision and goals; Managing the curriculum and teaching-learning programs; monitoring and providing feedback on teaching-learning process; encouraging for frequent and appropriate school-wide teacher development activities; Building Collaborative Culture and Creating safe and healthy environment; principals' time allocation and impact on students' academic achievement; qualifications, gender and leadership experience of the principal and students' academic achievement; and support from the education sector offices and students' academic achievement. After presenting the findings by theme, the chapter reflects on how these themes address the secondary (next) research questions of this study.

5.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The Chapter mainly presented and analyzed the quantitative and qualitative research findings in two phases. This began with the analysis of quantitative data obtained from survey questionnaires. The analysis began with the respondents' demographic data. After this, the data were analyzed based on the basic questions and statements of the problems raised in Chapter One. The analysis used descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean, percentile, independent t-test, and Pearson Product-moment correlation, using SPSS version 25. After presenting and analyzing the quantitative data, conclusions were drawn. The second major part of the analysis covered qualitative data from structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Qualitative data were presented to include demographic information about interview and FGD participants.

The data were categorized into five themes and 16 categories, and presented in detail. Every participant's statement on various topics was presented as direct quotations from the transcribed interviews. Towards the end of the qualitative data phase, an attempt was made to conclude the findings to comprehend the results of the analysis. Chapter six below provides a detailed discussion of the key research findings.

CHAPTER SIX

6. DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the data, analysis, and discussion of the key findings obtained through a mixed-methods research approach, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. The first section presents and analyzes the quantitative data, while the second section presents and analyzes the qualitative data. These data were analyzed and integrated using a concurrent convergent design, and the findings were presented accordingly.

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the study's key findings. The chapter also discusses the interpretation and integration of quantitative and qualitative data findings on the effectiveness of leadership; the relationship between principals' leadership practices and students' academic achievement on EHEECE pass rate; leadership-challenging factors experienced by principals; and strategies adopted by principals to maintain/improve students' academic achievement or pass rate *in secondary schools of SNRS.* After concurrently analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, the findings were integrated and discussed with support from a literature review of similar earlier studies.

The study followed the research question paraphrased in Chapter One as: "*What variables link the effectiveness of principal's leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia?"* From this main question, five basic sub-questions were developed, and five research objectives were subsequently derived from those corresponding sub-questions (sections 1.8 and 1.6.3). Accordingly, the study findings are discussed in line with these elements.

From the above main leading research question, the following sub-questions were derived:

1. *To what extent do secondary school leaders fulfill their roles in improving students' academic achievement?*
2. *What are the major factors that hinder school principals from contributing to improvements in students' academic achievement?*

3. *What is the relationship between school leadership effectiveness and variables: leadership styles/ types, gender, education qualification, and experience in relation to students' academic achievement?*
4. *How do principals, supervisors, department heads, unit leaders, senior teachers, and deputy principals perceive their own or their principal's leadership styles and effectiveness? and*
5. *What are the strategies adopted by the school principals to improve students' academic achievement on EHEECE in SNRS, Ethiopia?*

The results will be compared to similar past studies from the literature review. To this end, the researcher will propose school leadership strategies and/or models that contribute to the existing body of knowledge to improve students' academic achievement and education quality at large in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. As noted earlier, the study employed a mixed-methods design, specifically a Concurrent Convergent Mixed approach, as discussed in sections 4.4.3 and 4.5.7 of this study. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently and separately. The results from both analyses were checked against each other, triangulated with a literature review of similar studies, and incorporated and discussed accordingly.

6.2 EFFECTIVENESS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS LEADERSHIP ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN SNRS, ETHIOPIA

From Chapter Two sections 2.7.1, 2.7.2 and 2.7.3, the secondary schools' principals' leadership functions or practices, which were set to investigate basic research question one, are categorized into five sub-questions, namely: in setting directions and communicating shared vision and goals, developing people (teachers' professional development), utilizing community and stakeholder engagement, managing resources and school operations, and leading and managing the teaching-learning program. Accordingly, sub-sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.5 discuss each practice, and the remaining basic research questions are discussed in the following sections.

6.2.1. Effectiveness of School Principal's Leadership in Setting Directions and *communicating shared vision and goals*

As presented above in section 5.3.3.1, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that secondary school leadership in setting directions and communicating shared vision

and goals in SNRS secondary schools was moderately effective. The results above show that school leaders are perceived as moderately effective in establishing vision and goals, as shown by a modest overall dimension mean score on a five-point scale. This suggests that secondary school principals are exercising general competence rather than outstanding skill. Across individual items, school leaders are strongest at working with others to create and share the vision. For example, "Facilitates a shared vision of improvement", "Communicates the school vision to stakeholders", and "Establishes measurable school goals" received the highest ratings. This means school leaders are generally good at getting the school community to agree on a direction and set clear objectives, which in turn positively affect the students' academic achievement (section 5.3.3.1).

On the other hand, it "uses targeted goals when making decisions" and especially "uses community resources to set achievable goals" are low-rated items. This indicates a key problem in translating this vision into practical daily practice. Most respondents believe that school leaders have not done enough to demonstrate how the vision is put into practice. This discrepancy highlights a gap between articulating the vision and acting on it. The study revealed that the item "Ensures that goals are widely known and visible" has the highest variance in responses. This also indicates that making goals a visible part of school life is not consistently successful. Hence, this pattern strongly suggests an "implementation gap" between a good vision and real changes in the school (Day & Leithwood, 2007).

Essentially, leaders are effective at generating shared aspirations but struggle to integrate these goals into daily decisions, resource allocation, and the school's visible practices. This 'implementation deficit' poses a significant challenge to translating well-understood strategic directions into concrete improvements for students' academic achievement and staff performance. As school leaders, principals are expected to clearly define their goals and vision and communicate them effectively to stakeholders. For example, Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay (2021) suggested that, without consistent implementation, vision and goals remain just words, and the schools' efforts to improve students' academic achievement may weaken, leading to inconsistent progress, rather than communicating the school's mission/goals constantly to the staff, parents, and students.

This gap between vision and action has important, though often indirect, consequences for student academic performance. A clearly stated vision, as these school leaders provide, is the necessary first step for school improvement. It lays the groundwork for aligning teaching efforts toward common academic goals, a process that strong leadership can foster (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). However, when the vision isn't fully implemented, strategic decisions about budgets, schedules, and new programs may not directly support the stated goals.

This means school resources may not go where students need them most. Teachers may be asked to meet goals without receiving the practical support they need to teach. Over time, this disconnect can frustrate staff and diminish their shared trust in helping students succeed, which can negatively affect student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004). Without consistent implementation, the vision remains just words, and the school's efforts to improve student outcomes may falter, leading to inconsistent progress (Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay, 2021).

Therefore, triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative results with related review findings suggests that most secondary school leaders are moderately effective in setting a vision and goals. While school principals excel at articulating a clear vision and engaging stakeholders in its development, as shown by higher scores in facilitating and communicating a shared vision, they show less proficiency in consistently operationalizing it. Thus, the school principals' practice of establishing and communicating a shared vision and goals is rated as weak.

6.2.2 Effectiveness of School Principal’s Leadership in Developing People

One core leadership practice of principals involves developing staff by fostering trust between teachers and school leaders. However, quantitative and qualitative data show this practice is weak. Moreover, in the sampled secondary schools of SNRS, qualitative data analysis supports that mistrust exists, and school principals, on some key school issues, lack clear information from teaching staff and school administrations. This was supported by quantitative data, which revealed that school principals’ efforts to develop people by fostering a caring and trusting environment and committing to creating a good school campus culture were not strongly implemented. This disparity has significant implications, suggesting a leadership profile more skilled at managing professional development events than at consistently cultivating a motivating and appreciative

professional environment. Research evidence shows that, because teachers are key participants in the learning process, the conditions in which they work are expected to be encouraging to build strong rapport with students (Moos & Johannson, 2009, p.770).

Hence, as suggested by Heathfield (2019), the school principal can build this trust by explaining the school's purpose, background, and decision-making process, which is a key part of building trust. If principals do not develop teachers, teachers' commitment may decline, which can affect student learning and, in turn, academic achievement. Enhancing teacher skills, indeed, constitutes a fundamental pathway through which leadership positively impacts student outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021).

Conversely, the less effective practice of equitably recognizing teacher accomplishment presents a substantial impediment. Without consistent, meaningful recognition, teachers' morale and motivation to implement new, often challenging, instructional strategies—acquired through training—may well diminish (Kraft & Papay, 2014). This situation risks professional learning opportunities failing to translate into improved classroom practices. This challenge often arises when professional development lacks robust support from a strong, motivating school culture (Timperley, 2011).

Moreover, Adams (2013:377) found that the extent of trust among principals, teachers, and students is positively associated with the school's academic performance. As a result, even if school principals successfully provide the necessary training to improve students' academic achievement, their failure to fully cultivate a motivational and celebratory professional culture may ultimately limit the impact of these efforts on student learning. When teachers trust principals, they will be accountable and helpful in all aspects (Singh, 2016, p. 28). Similarly, the respondents' perceived results imply that school principals are viewed as capable leaders who can organize and coordinate formal training opportunities for staff members. This finding is consistent with the literature and supplements it.

6.2.3 Effectiveness of School Principal's Leadership in Utilizing Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The school principal's effective use of community and stakeholder engagement highlights the principal's crucial role as a "boundary spanner," building bridges between the school and its external environment. This function is particularly critical, as community partnerships can provide essential social, cultural, and material support for the school's

mission, directly and indirectly influencing student learning outcomes (Epstein, 2018). The school leadership practices related to instructional leadership, along with encouraging parents/ child interactions at home, influence students' performance and success at school *'indirectly and most powerfully'*.

The study found out that secondary school principals are not effectively building the collaborative relationships required to leverage community and family assets. The study also shows that school leaders have a gap in participating in and connecting the school with parents and community members in the educational process, discussing regularly with students and stakeholders how to improve academic achievement, and using community resources successfully. Thus, respondents' perception of leadership effectiveness in mobilizing, allocating, and utilizing resources to support teaching and learning is perceived as weak. Overall, the analyzed data across nearly every practice indicate ineffectiveness in improving students' academic achievement.

When school leaders fail to mobilize community resources, students may lack access to essential materials, technology, or enrichment opportunities that could bridge learning gaps. When parents and community members are not actively involved in the educational process, learning is not consistently reinforced at home, and struggling students lack a crucial support network. Modern educational theory recognizes that schools do not operate as isolated "islands" but are deeply embedded within a complex web of social and community relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). For students, this means facing academic challenges without full support from families and the community, which can lead to lower motivation.

6.2.4 Effectiveness of School Principal's Leadership in Managing Resources and School Operations

This section examined how effectively school principals lead and manage the organizational and ethical fabric of their schools, providing the predictable, supportive foundation on which a culture of academic excellence can be built, and students' academic achievement can improve. The study findings suggest that school leaders are viewed as competent systemic managers who are skilled at ensuring procedural order and monitoring performance data. This managerial competence is a crucial, though often overlooked, component of effective school leadership, as it provides the stable, orderly, and predictable learning environment that is a necessary precondition for effective

instruction to occur (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). While instructional leadership is paramount, it must be supported by a stable, safe, and well-managed learning environment. The primary strength in this dimension is establishing and maintaining the school's organizational and ethical fabric.

When students do not feel that their potential is valued, it can lead to disengagement and self-limiting beliefs, creating an environment that may actively constrain their academic performance despite being orderly and well-run. However, a significant decline in "t*reats all students in ways which emphasize success and potential" scores is evident for items that require interpersonal skills* and the cultivation of a positive school climate. This weakness points to a critical deficit in fostering a supportive and motivating school culture, with direct and significant implications for students' academic achievement. As a result, even in a well-organized school, student performance may stagnate or fall short of its true potential because the school's culture fails to inspire and empower students to excel.

Based on this analysis, the study concludes that school leaders are competent systemic and ethical managers but are less effective in the interpersonal and cultural aspects of leadership. While their ability to manage the school's organizational fabric provides a stable foundation for learning, the deficiencies in consistently fostering a positive, student-centered climate may limit the school's long-term improvement capacity and directly impact student outcomes.

6.2.5 Effectiveness of School Principal's Leadership in Teaching and Learning Program Management

This section evaluates the extent to which school leaders in the Sidama region fulfill this central role. It assesses key practices such as actively monitoring instruction, ensuring the curriculum aligns with rigorous standards, and maintaining a persistent focus on high academic expectations for all students, moving beyond managerial duties to become true leaders of learning.

This score suggests that leadership practices tend to prioritize monitoring existing academic structures over actively driving instructional innovation and continuous improvement, which is not ideal. This finding matters given extensive research linking strong instructional leadership to effective teaching (Esa et al., 2017; Sarıkaya & Erdoğan, 2016; Hilton et al., 2015). Studies by Saleem et al. (2020) and Kim & Lee (2020) further

reinforce that administrators' instructional leadership profoundly impacts teachers' ability to teach effectively, thereby significantly improving student learning outcomes.

Based on respondents' perceptions, school leaders' practices in maintaining and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning programs received a moderate mean rating, and the high standard deviation suggests high variability in these perceptions. However, this result indicates that school principals are not effectively in guiding and ensuring compliance with established national standards, a fundamental prerequisite for overall school effectiveness as expected. By not consistently advocating for every student's needs, school principals risk allowing achievement gaps between different groups to either persist or grow. Additionally, by not nurturing an environment where teachers can explore new technologies and research-based strategies, this leadership practice suppresses the school's ability to continuously improve teaching-learning programs and instruction.

In this regard, qualitative data also show that principals did not influence the quality of teaching and learning programs through evaluation. As a result, this limits the long-term potential for academic achievement growth for all students. Hence, the result suggests that, a reactive leadership posture, primarily focused on the maintenance of existing programs, rather than a proactive stance aimed at driving continuous improvement and innovation.

Such a responsive approach often manifests as a lack of critical leadership roles, including, but not limited to, ineffective instructional supervision, inadequate staff development initiatives, failure to communicate compelling strategic visions, and limited embrace of participatory decision-making processes. To close this gap and improve school efficiency, school leaders must implement an instructional leadership model. This approach necessitates actively evaluating pedagogical practices, providing targeted support and constructive feedback to teachers, and leveraging empirical data to inform strategic change and foster systemic improvement within the educational environment.

Concern regarding leader effectiveness in encouraging teachers to consider and use new technologies for their teaching is relatively low, indicating less efficacy in promoting innovative pedagogy. Furthermore, school leaders received modest scores for "Advocating for high levels of learning for all students, including students with special educational needs" and for "understanding, promoting, and sharing relevant research".

The high standard deviations for these items signify wide variation in perceptions and suggest irregular effectiveness in promoting equity and evidence-based innovation across schools. This observation shows that school leaders are not effectively acting as catalysts for educational improvement by using research to inform and strengthen their leadership and fostering a culture where all students, including those with special needs, can achieve high levels of learning.

According to the respondents' opinions, school leaders show a fair level of effectiveness in meeting curriculum and instructional standards, suggesting they lean toward a compliance-driven leadership style. While this is a solid foundation, it comes with notable shortcomings in encouraging innovative teaching methods and providing consistent support for all students, especially those with diverse needs. This leadership style likely has two main impacts on students' academic achievement.

On one hand, regular monitoring of standards sets a baseline for student performance, ensuring that quality doesn't drop too low. On the other hand, the lack of emphasis on innovation and uneven support for all students creates a sort of "ceiling" that restricts overall student potential.

6.2.6 Summary of the perceived effectiveness of leadership and their impact on students' academic achievement

Overall, the key findings for these five areas of school leadership core practices show a clear and concerning pattern. The study in Sidama region sampled secondary school principals on the effectiveness of leadership; in turn, students' academic achievement was seen as somewhat or moderately effective and skilled in day-to-day management tasks but is much less effective in their most important and core leadership effectiveness, which is measurable by their students' pass rate (academic achievement) in EHEECE. This creates a picture of leadership that focuses more on following rules and procedures than on inspiring positive change and improving students' pass rates.

Specifically, school principals demonstrated the ability to lead and manage their schools by upholding policies, monitoring data, and organizing school operations. This management skill provides a necessary stable foundation for the school. However, this is not enough to create a truly successful school. These strengths are overshadowed by major weaknesses in the areas that matter most for improvement. School principals are not effective at putting the school's vision into practice, encouraging new teaching

methods, creating a supportive and motivational environment for teachers, or working with parents and the community.

Moreover, this leadership style directly and seriously affects students' academic achievement. It creates an environment with both a **low floor and a low ceiling.** The **"floor,"** which is the basic quality of education students receive, is set low. Because school principals are weak at guiding teaching and learning, the school experience focuses on meeting minimum requirements rather than delivering high-quality instruction. This gives students a weak foundation for learning.

At the same time, leadership weaknesses create a restrictive "ceiling" that limits how much students can achieve. Without a leader who promotes new ideas, builds a positive school culture, and brings in community support, students have few opportunities to be challenged and truly excel.

In the end, this type of leadership is not enough to drive meaningful improvement. It creates a school environment where students' progress is likely to slow down, achievement gaps between students can become permanent, and the school fails to provide the conditions needed for students to succeed on their EHEECE.

6.3 PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES/TYPES, GENDER, EXPERIENCE AND PROFESSION

6.3.1 Perceptions on Effectiveness of Leadership Styles/ Types Vs Students' Academic Achievement

The third basic question of this study involved investigating the extent to which school principals are effective in performing their school leadership practices, the leadership styles/types these schools' principals used, and which of these leadership styles/types has/have helped improve students' academic achievement. The study also assessed possible impediments that affect school leadership effectiveness. Closely related to the leadership theories discussed above, the study sought to identify the leadership style/type(s) predominant among secondary school principals in SNRS, as well as why certain leadership styles/types are preferred.

Adopting the right kind of leadership style/type(s) can equip the principal to function optimally within their schools. Knowledge of the various leadership style/type(s) could enable a principal to be more adaptable in a changing environment. In addition to

understanding the various leadership style/type(s), principals can better identify their predominant leadership style/type so they can adapt more confidently to the demands of the complex educational environment. Analysis of the quantitative data shows that the transactional education leadership style has the most significant positive impact on students' academic achievement, highlighting the value placed on leaders who set clear expectations and use rewards and punishments as motivators.

The second-rated leadership style was a combination of education leadership styles: the Democratic, Transformational, and Distributive leadership styles; principals, as leaders, inspire and motivate their team by creating a clear vision, encouraging innovation, and fostering personal growth.

In contrast, leadership styles that are either passive or overly controlling are perceived as having a negative/negligible impact on students' academic achievement. Laissez-faire, characterized by a hands-off approach, is viewed as the least effective style by a significant margin, and Authoritative (Autocratic Leadership) suggests that a top-down, command-and-control approach is seen as counterproductive in the complex professional environment of a school.

This result strongly supports Hypothesis Ha_4: *"The leadership style dominantly used by the principal is essential for improving students' academic achievement".* The wide variance in mean scores between styles like Transactional style and Laissez-faire confirms that the specific leadership approach a principal adopts is not trivial; rather, teachers perceive it as a critical factor in a school's capacity to improve students' academic achievement (outcomes). This could hinder teachers from participating freely and making their own judgments on academic issues.

Hence, effective leadership requires the principal to understand, engage, and care for followers and enable them to maximize their contributions. The vision of any school in Ethiopia, regardless of the managing agency, is to provide effective instruction and support students' performance. Adopting the right kind of leadership style(s) can equip the principal to function optimally within their schools. Knowing the various leadership style(s) can help a principal adapt in a changing environment. In addition to understanding the various leadership style(s), principals should be more aware of their predominant leadership style(s) so they can adapt better and more confidently to the demands of the complex educational environment.

6.3.2 The Influence of Demographic Characteristics of Principal Vs Students' Academic Achievements

Regarding gender's effect on leadership effectiveness:
The relationship between a principal's gender (specifically, being male) and perceived leadership effectiveness, as it relates to students' academic achievement, is seen as negligible or non-existent in a positive sense.

Concerning the influence of principals' work experience on their leadership effectiveness, This finding confirms that most respondents associate a principal's leadership experience with their leadership efficacy or with students' academic achievement.

Principal educational background:

Finally, this study shows that principal educational background is the most determining factor for school leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement.

In summary, the quantitative data discussion above suggests that gender is likely dismissed as a determinant of effectiveness; both extensive work experience and advanced educational leadership skills are highly valued and significantly impact students' academic achievement. These observations can inform policies on principal selection, professional development, and career advancement that emphasize experience and specific academic qualifications over gender.

These observations can inform policies on principal selection, professional development, and career advancement that emphasize experience and specific academic qualifications over gender.

6.4 MAJOR CHALLENGING FACTORS THAT HINDERING EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

School principals play a dominant role in supporting or influencing students' academic achievement in EHEECE. To understand the factors that may hinder school leadership and student success, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with a list of potential hindering areas. The integrated quantitative and qualitative findings identified the major challenges principals in selected secondary schools face in supporting students' pass rates. To identify which challenges are most affecting, from possible challenging factors that may hinder leadership effectiveness in turn secondary schools'

students' academic achievement, some challenging factors (about ten) that were frequently observed were forwarded to senior teachers, education supervisors, unit leaders, and HoDs to rate.

According to respondents' perceptions, several significant factors hinder educational leadership and students' academic achievement (section 5.4.2). Regarding issues related to the teaching workforce, nine out of ten respondents identified a lack of leadership training as a major challenge, along with low teacher competency, turnover, and lack of motivation (major issues for teacher quality, stability, and morale). High Leader Workload and a shortage of Time, resource deficiencies, and community engagement also appear to be lacking; student-related factors are also important. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure and lack of an encouraging (conducive) school environment are seen as strong factors that hinder the effective performance of the role of an educational principal.

Analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data showed that leadership-related challenges include deficiencies or a lack of leadership training, indicating a critical need to develop leadership skills among educational leaders in the education system. Moreover, leadership-related challenges extend beyond training, including high leader workload, time shortages, and a lack of leadership policies/guidelines to guide educational leadership and activities. Qualitative data analysis also indicated that, even with inadequate training, leaders may struggle to implement effective strategies because of excessive responsibilities and insufficient time.

Key findings from students and teachers identified student-related factors (low student motivation and high dropout rates) and teaching workforce factors (low teacher competency, turnover, and lack of motivation) as major issues affecting teacher quality, stability, and morale. Although qualitative participants identified these issues, they also identified a lack of resources, material facilities, and other external factors as moderate challenges. Most students in secondary schools lack interest and motivation. The finding stated by (Sivrikaya, 2019, p. 313) as;" lack of student interests and teachers' interest affects students' academic achievements" is also similar to challenges related to a lack of students' and teachers' interest or motivation. Similarly, students' learning motivation, students' attitude towards learning, and students' school attendance influenced students' academic achievement (Anbesse, 2018, p. 49).

From the qualitative data analysis, most secondary school students' family socio-economic status and educational level are linked to poverty, in line with Anbesse (2018. Hence, the absence of these two factors would hinder principals' efforts to improve students' academic achievement. Educated families can support their children by purchasing educational materials and following up with them, which in turn improves students' academic achievement. Similarly, family socio-economic status and family educational backgrounds are among the home-related problems affecting students' academic achievement. This argument aligns with Anbesse (2018) and Desta K. (2021), who noted in their studies that parental educational level, occupational status and income level, and students' attitude toward their education are among the most challenging factors affecting students' academic achievement. Hence, community engagement impacts effective leadership and better student outcomes. This suggests the need for strategies to enhance collaboration between schools and families to support student learning.

Based on this and similar related reviews, the researcher argued that the educational system itself has contributed to the students' lack of interest and motivation. The Ministry of Education stated in its study (MoE & ESC, 2018, p.27) that: "students' lack of interest in knowledge and skills can be explained by the failure of the educational system *to motivate students".*

The other challenge to secondary school principals, with inadequate or a lack of basic resources and formal facilities, physical infrastructure, and a lack of an encouraging (conducive) school environment, including human and physical resources such as laboratories and equipment, ICT rooms, libraries, and the like, mainly contributes to low quality of education in secondary schools and was also identified as a major challenging factor to the effective performance of school principals as leaders over their roles in practicing and students in achieving better academic achievements in EHEECE through quality education.

Moreover, school observations showed that SNRS secondary schools did not receive enough budget allocation. As a result, principals did not meet their objectives by providing resources and material facilities. Lack of material facilities and resources affects leadership practices and indirectly affects students' academic achievement. In support of

this, Gemechu (2019, p.57) found that a lack of educational material supplies and facilities is majorly affecting students' academic achievement.

The researcher supports the claim that an effective school principal cannot shift blame to others; rather, they self-evaluate and act proactively. In this regard, the personal qualities needed of a school principal moderately affect leadership effectiveness. In agreement with this finding, Hailemichael (2019:37) states that if a school principal does not possess the necessary personal qualities, it constrains him/her from carrying out the responsibilities.

The findings show a general and strong agreement that leadership potential, human resources (students and teachers), and basic resources are the most essential hindrances to the schools' leadership effectiveness in the region. This strong consensus suggests that several significant factors hinder educational leadership and students' academic achievement. This indicates a critical need to develop leadership skills among educational principals in the education system. This may necessitate interventions focused on curriculum relevance, student support, and addressing socio-economic barriers.

In summary, the analysis strongly indicates that systemic issues related to leadership development, teacher quality and motivation, resource availability, student engagement, parental involvement, and physical infrastructure collectively impede educational effectiveness and student academic achievement in EHEECE. Addressing these multifaceted challenges will require comprehensive and integrated interventions.

6.5 STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY PRINCIPALS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SNRS

This study also presented suggested strategies to address the challenges secondary school principals face in implementing their leadership practices effectively. From participants' suggestions, even with less consistency and follow-up, the central government's motivation to implement its major practices was identified as a strategy to minimize hindering challenges to secondary schools' leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement on their EHEECE pass rate.

As related review findings of the study research: the effectiveness of principals' leadership in secondary schools, based on their leadership practices to the expected standard, is

perceived as challenging problems beyond the schools' capacity to solve, such as: budget allocation, lack of policy implementation guidelines, lack of teachers' motivation, students' demotivation, poor participation of the community, and an un-conducive school environment. In relation to this, the government's motivation in playing its roles shall comprise allocating enough budget and encouraging private investment (MoE, 2018, p. 39), attracting competent teachers (MoE, 2015, p. 19), and increasing teachers' salary and benefits, such as health insurance, low-interest loans to buy houses and cars (MoE & ESC, 2018, p. 45). Similarly, Goshu and Woldeamanuel (2019:10) suggested that the government should allocate an appropriate budget for each school, revise curricula to include civic and ethical education, Ethiopian history and geography, work on retaining experienced teachers, and improve teachers' basic living conditions.

6.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY RESEARCH

This study investigated the effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievement pass rate, as reflected in their EHEECE scores, in government secondary schools in the SNRS, Ethiopia. School leadership is a dynamic and intensive activity that requires collaboration among leaders and key stakeholders at different levels. Hence, the researcher recognized that principals' effectiveness alone could not fully achieve the desired continuous change in students' academic achievement. Hence, the study proposed a model that could help improve students' academic achievement pass rates. Based on the overall purposes and specific objectives of the study (section 1.6), the researcher develops the following major contributions.

- Firstly, the researcher, in his PhD thesis, would contribute a lot to the study area or cite. As it was mentioned previously in section 2.9, the research gap was identified both internationally and at the national level in Ethiopia, specifically in SNRS. None of them investigated the relationship between leadership effectiveness in terms of schools' principals' leadership practices: *"setting directions and communicating shared vision and goals", "developing people", "utilizing community and stakeholder engagement", "leading and managing resources and school operations", and "leading and managing teaching-learning programs"* and the improvement of students' academic achievement or their pass rate in secondary schools of SNRS. It would contribute significantly to the concerned bodies at the national, regional, zone, and Woreda levels, as well as to school principals in secondary schools.

- Secondly, addressing and solving the leadership problems of schools that are newly arising. For example, among the basic questions raised, the major challenging factors hindering the effectiveness of principals' leadership and, in turn, students' academic achievement were student-related, parent-related, environment-related, and teacher-related problems, as well as a lack of resources and materials. School-leadership-related issues and other external factors were moderately challenging. The suggested solutions aim to contribute to the existing literature on this subject and support researchers in expanding their studies in this field.
- Lastly, based on the key findings of the study, develop a unique or new model which could help regional education bureaus, school principals, researchers, and practitioners who would be interested in undertaking further research on principals' leadership effectiveness, in the overall improvement of schools' level to the standards, and improvement of students' academic achievement (passing rate on EHEECE).

The study highlighted the integrated efforts and involvement of various stakeholders in improving school leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement. The findings of the study revealed that the effectiveness of secondary school principals, on their leadership practices, in turn, affects students' academic achievement, and strong involvement and contributions by other concerned bodies (stakeholders), could largely determine the effectiveness of school principal leadership in promoting the overall performance of the school and students' academic achievement.

Proposed Model for the Effectiveness of School Leadership

This part of the research presents the model developed from the data analysis, related literature, and educational leadership theories. To start, the problem level of school leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement was conceptualized in SNRS, Ethiopia. The study also addressed different leadership styles/types, school principals' practices, challenges faced by school principals, and other relevant literature in the context of the Ethiopian education system. The study used a pragmatic paradigm and a mixed-methods design, and collected data from participants through questionnaires, FGDs, interviews, and Document Analysis. The study conducted both quantitative and qualitative analyses, and the results, supported by educational

leadership theories, formed the foundation for developing the model. It is called the Five-Phase School Leadership Model (FPSLM).

Therefore, the model is grounded in the research topic and internationally recognized educational leadership theories and frameworks. This model is strengthened by integrating established educational leadership theories: Instructional Leadership Theory (focusing on teaching, learning, and curriculum supervision),

- Transformational Leadership Theory (motivating teachers and fostering school improvement),
- Distributed Leadership Theory (shared leadership among principals, teachers, and stakeholders),
- Systems Theory (viewing the school as an interconnected system influenced by internal and external factors),
- Fullan's Change Theory, OECD School Improvement Framework, UNESCO School Leadership Framework, and the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) Continuous Improvement Cycle).

These theories and frameworks provide a robust conceptual foundation while allowing the model to be adapted to the policy, school culture, and educational context of Sidama National Regional State. Collectively, these theoretical and conceptual foundations provide a robust basis for the proposed five-phase strategic process. Together, they explain how strategic educational leadership can drive systematic school improvement through effective leadership, strengthen instructional quality, enhance organizational effectiveness, and ultimately improve students' academic achievement and the quality of education in secondary schools.

The proposed five-phase strategic process model shows that effective strategic educational leadership initiates a systematic cycle of school improvement that ultimately enhances students' academic achievement and the overall quality of education. The role of the federal government at the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Regional Education Bureau (REB) level is outlined in FDRE (2018:660-662), Proclamation 1097/2018 on the definition of the Powers and Duties of the Executive Organs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, sections 25 and 26.

Consequently, **the process begins** with strategic educational leadership, where school leaders establish a shared vision, strengthen leadership capacity, mobilize resources, and create an enabling environment for teaching and learning. **This foundation informs** strategic planning, during which school leaders conduct comprehensive needs assessments, identify institutional challenges, analyze student performance data, and develop evidence-based improvement strategies with clearly defined goals and performance indicators.

The third phase focuses on effective implementation, where strategic plans are translated into practice through instructional leadership, teacher professional development, curriculum implementation, student support programs, efficient resource utilization, stakeholder collaboration, and quality assurance mechanisms. Successful implementation is followed by monitoring, evaluation, and organizational learning, which are carried out through the quality assurance unit to ensure continuous assessment of implementation progress, monitor teaching and learning processes, evaluate students' academic achievement, and utilize data to inform decision-making and align with established educational objectives while promoting continuous organizational learning and sustainable excellence.

Supporting Strategic Components (Cross-cutting Factors)

The proposed five-phase strategic process is underpinned by several cross-cutting strategic components that influence all phases of the framework and serve as the foundation for sustainable school improvement. These components do not operate independently; rather, they interact throughout the strategic process to strengthen leadership effectiveness, improve organizational performance, and enhance students' academic achievement and education quality.

Importantly, the model incorporates **continuous feedback loops** across all phases. Evidence from monitoring, evaluation, and educational outcomes (students' academic achievement) feeds back into strategic leadership and planning, enabling schools to refine strategies, address emerging challenges, and sustain long-term improvement. Consequently, the model represents a cyclical and evidence-based school improvement process in which *Strategic Educational Leadership → Strategic Planning → Effective Implementation → Monitoring, Evaluation and Organizational Learning → Continuous Improvement and Sustainability → Improved Students' Academic Achievement and*

Education Quality at large, with continuous feedback ensuring ongoing organizational teaching and learning activities and sustainable educational excellence.

The **final phase** emphasizes continuous improvement and sustainability, whereby successful practices are institutionalized, policies and strategies are refined, innovations are scaled, accountability systems are strengthened, and a culture of continuous professional learning is promoted. The cumulative effect of these interconnected phases is improved students' academic achievement, enhanced teaching effectiveness, strengthened school leadership, improved school climate, greater stakeholder satisfaction, and sustained education quality. Thus, based on the study's findings, the following model (as shown in Figure 6.1) was developed to help researchers, academicians, and practitioners interested in undertaking further research on the effectiveness of principals' leadership in improving students' academic achievement.

Figure 6.1 above illustrates the integrated efforts and involvement of various stakeholders in improving school principals' leadership and students' academic achievement. As the findings revealed, the effectiveness of principals' leadership in improving overall school performance largely depends on principals' leadership practices and the strong involvement and contributions of other concerned bodies (stakeholders).

As shown by the thick arrows, principals have central roles and responsibilities in improving overall school performance, but they do not alone bring about the desired progressive change in schools' standards. Therefore, stakeholders, favorable learning environments, and students should play major roles in improving schools and, in turn, students' academic achievement.

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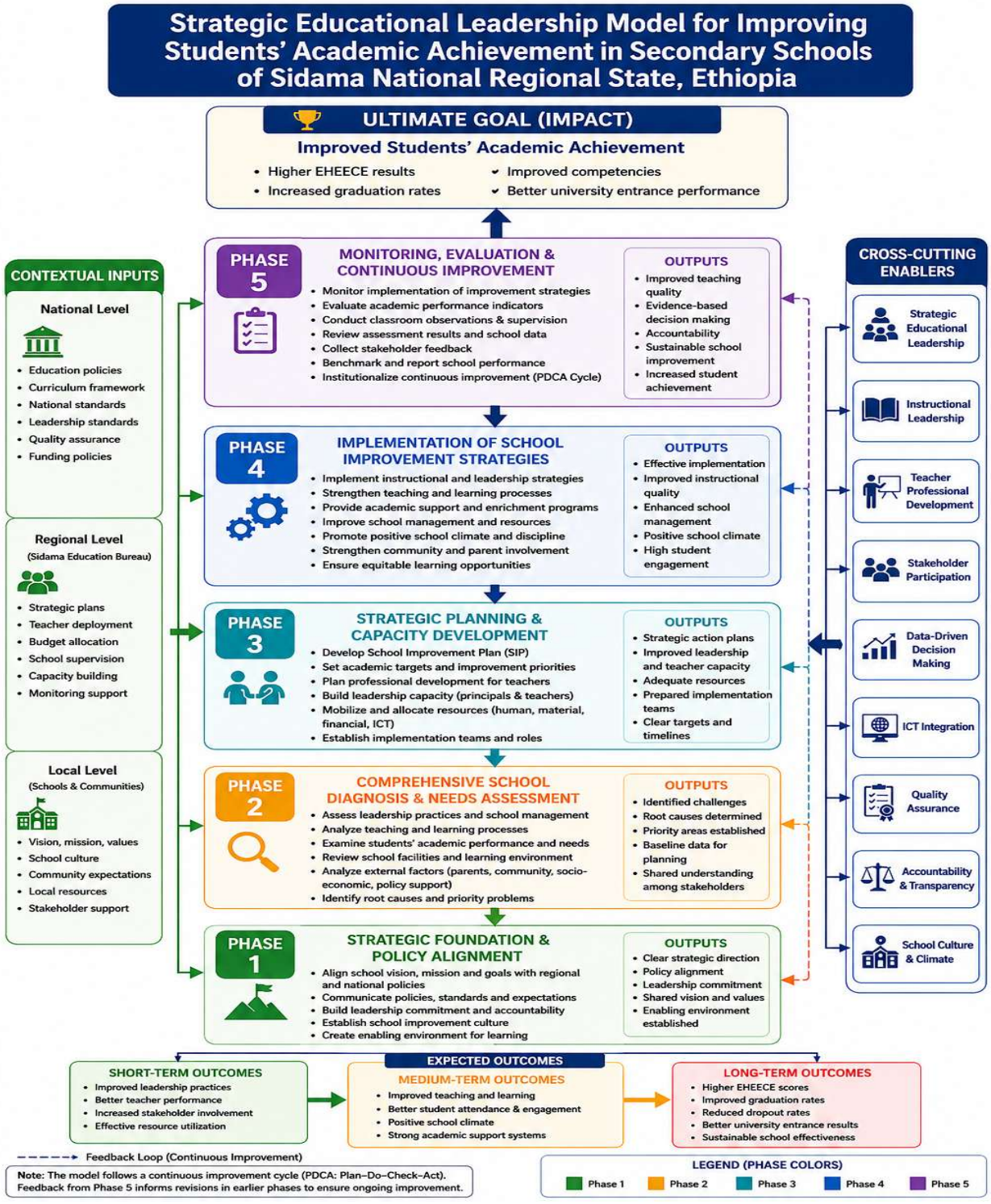


Figure 6.1 Model of secondary school principal's effective leadership on students' academic achievement.

Source: *The model was conceptualized, modified, and developed from leadership theories and national leadership roles for principals, and adapted from Raihani R. (2008:281), An Indonesian model of successful school leadership.*

The model also indicates that principals, together with the school's stakeholders, are expected to improve the school, which inevitably improves students' academic achievement. However, many students have opportunities to achieve the best results through self-effort and cheating (based on past experiences). Hence, school improvement as a mediated effect is not fully functional in the current context of Sidama Regional State. From another angle, principals could be strongly motivated to adopt leadership styles if students' academic results are achieved successfully and sustainably.

6.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the collected quantitative and qualitative data and used the Concurrent Convergent Mixed Method design for analysis. After discussing the research findings, the chapter summarized the proposed model of school leadership that would contribute to the current or existing body of knowledge to intervene in challenging and emerging problems hindering the effectiveness of secondary school leadership practices in improving students' academic achievement in SNRS of Ethiopia. The next and final chapter presents a summary of key findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations as an intervention strategy to improve secondary school students' academic achievement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the key findings, the conclusions drawn from the key findings, and intervention strategy recommendations made to improve the effectiveness of schools' leadership, in turn students' academic achievement, depending on the integrated major findings from both quantitative and qualitative characteristics, as presented and discussed in Chapter Six of the study. To develop this study, the research question was guided through seven chapters. Initially, the study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of secondary school leadership on students' academic achievement in the SNRS, Ethiopia.

Above all, this chapter of the study presents a summary derived from key findings of the study, its contributions, and then, from the key findings obtained by the study, the conclusions drawn, as well as intervention strategy recommendations made and suggestions for future research studies and for recent improvement in education emanated from the findings of the study, and finally forwards concluding remarks. The chapter also addressed the study's limitations and gaps, along with concluding remarks, recent improvements in education, and recommendations for further research. The study identified a shortage of educational resources, insufficient parents' involvement, teachers' incompetence, low student motivation, absence of extracurricular activities, weak and ineffective non-academic policies, an unfavorable school environment, and unproductive school leadership as the major factors for the decline in secondary school students' academic achievement in SNRS, Ethiopia.

Consequently, findings across the five leadership areas show a clear and concerning pattern. Secondary school principals in the Sidama region are seen as somewhat skilled in day-to-day management tasks but much less effective in their most important or core leadership duties. This creates a leadership picture more focused on following rules and procedures than on inspiring positive change and improving students' academic achievement.

Specifically, school principals show some ability in tasks that keep the school running smoothly, such as upholding policies, monitoring data, and organizing school operations.

This management skill provides a necessary stable foundation for the school. However, this is not enough to create a truly successful school. These strengths are overshadowed by major weaknesses in the areas that matter most for improvement. School principals are not effective at putting the school's vision into practice, encouraging new teaching methods, creating a supportive and motivational environment for teachers, or working with parents and the community.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

As discussed in Chapter One above, the main objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of secondary school principals' core leadership practices in turn on students' academic achievement in government schools of Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia. Hence, the study was guided by and aimed to address the following five basic research questions.

These were:

(1) *'to what extent those perceived core leadership practices were effective, and their relationship with students' academic achievement on EHEECE',*
(2) *'the perceptions of the effectiveness of leadership style/type on leadership practices used by the principal',*
(3) *'the exceptional relationship of effectiveness of leadership with principal's demographic behaviors and students' academic achievement',*
(4) *'the possible challenging factors for effectiveness of leadership',*
(5) *'the strategies adopted by school principals to overcome those leadership challenging factors of the region have been assessed.*

Moreover, the study used a pragmatic research paradigm and a convergent concurrent mixed-methods design. The study included principals, one of their vice principals, education supervisors, HoDs, senior teachers (represented by heads of departments), and PTSA representatives. To include these respondents in the study, the researchers used purposive sampling followed by simple random sampling.

The researchers collected relevant data (quantitative and qualitative) from the data sources using questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Accordingly, the quantitative data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and standard deviations. Moreover, the study used inferential statistics, namely the independent-samples t-test and Pearson's product-moment

correlation coefficient (r). The qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive content analysis, and the Concurrent Convergent Mixed Method design was used to integrate and analyze the results from both data types.

As stated in previous chapters, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. This study was based on the observed and recorded decline in students' academic achievement, particularly scores on the national EHEECE for grade 12 completion, with specific reference to government secondary schools in the region, from 2019 to 2023.

The study results from the quantitative and qualitative data gathered, and the mixed-methods research carried out using a concurrent convergent design, are detailed in the previous chapters. According to the main research question and its sub-questions, the key findings from the integrated mixed data, presented through concurrent-convergent analysis and summary, are presented in the subsequent sections. Cross-references to the specific sub-sections were also made for brief understanding.

According to the quantitative data, effective educational leadership in SNRS secondary schools requires an effective principal, effective leadership, effective school facilities, effective students, and effective technological equipment. Similarly, the qualitative data also found that effective educational leadership in SNRS secondary schools requires the provision of satisfactory human and material resources, as well as financial funding.

The literature review data indicate that effective leadership in SNRS secondary schools is determined by school policies, school funding, and appointments to school principals' leadership positions; the collected quantitative data align.

7.2.1 Perceptions of respondents on the effectiveness of leadership and students' academic achievement

The effectiveness of leadership in these five core leadership practice areas shows a clear and concerning pattern in the overall mean value (M=2.81) in SNRS secondary schools, indicating that school leaders are not effectively guiding and ensuring compliance with established standards, a fundamental prerequisite for overall school effectiveness. (See section 5.3.3.1).

Hence, the integrated data analysis from both quantitative and qualitative data suggests that most secondary school principals are moderately effective in setting a vision and

goals. While the qualitative data, specifically their own responses on this aspect, showed that they excel in articulating a clear vision and engaging stakeholders in its establishment, as shown by higher scores in facilitating and communicating a shared vision, they show less proficiency in consistently operationalizing it. Hence, the level of establishing and communicating a shared vision and goals by the schools' principals is rated as a weak practice.

The practice of schools' principals maintaining and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning programs achieved a moderate mean rating (M=2.81). By not consistently advocating for every student's needs, school principals risk allowing achievement gaps between different groups to persist or grow. Additionally, by not nurturing an environment where teachers can explore new technologies and research-based strategies, this leadership practice suppresses the school's ability to continuously improve instruction. As a result, this limits the long-term academic growth potential for all students. (See section 5.3).

School principal leadership practices in fostering teacher professional development, indicated by an overall dimension mean of (M=3.29, SD=0.77), are perceived as moderately effective. Even though their strengths predominantly reside in the logistical and planning facets of professional learning, as they achieved the highest ratings for "Plan and develop individualized and team professional development networks to support individuals and teams", in contrast, their proficiency is a relative weakness in the cultural and relational dimensions crucial for professional growth. This disparity has significant implications, suggesting a leadership profile more skilled at managing professional development events than at consistently cultivating a motivating and appreciative professional environment.

The influences or effects of these leadership practices or approaches on students' academic achievement is likely multidimensional. On one hand, school principals' leadership effectiveness in organizing and encouraging relevant professional development directly invests in the school's most vital resource for improving students' learning: its teachers. Conversely, the less effective practice of equitably recognizing teacher accomplishments presents a substantial impediment.

The respondents' perceived results imply that school principals are viewed as capable of organizing and skillful at arranging and coordinating formal training opportunities for their

staff. As a result, even if school principals provide the necessary training to improve students' academic achievement, their failure to fully cultivate a motivational and celebratory professional culture may ultimately limit the impact of these efforts on student learning.

School principals' instructional leadership practices, as well as their encouragement of parent-child interactions, influence students' academic performance and success at school *'indirectly and most powerfully'*. The overall summarized statistics (M=2.91; SD=0.58) indicated that respondents perceived school principals' effectiveness in community and stakeholder engagement as a weakness.

When parents and community members are not actively involved in the educational process, learning is not consistently reinforced at home, and struggling students lack a crucial support network. The school effectively operates on an island, forcing it to rely solely on its own limited resources. For students, this means facing academic challenges without the full backing of their families and community, a situation that can lead to lower motivation, increased absenteeism, and ultimately, poorer academic achievements or outcomes.

School principals are perceived as moderately effective in managing school resources and operations, with an overall mean score (Mean=3.40; SD=0.94). A closer examination of the individual items, however, reveals a clear and significant pattern. The study concludes that school principals are competent systemic and ethical managers but are less effective in the interpersonal and cultural aspects of leadership. While their ability to manage the school's organizational fabric provides a stable foundation for learning, deficiencies in consistently fostering a positive, student-centered climate may limit the school's long-term improvement capacity and directly affect student outcomes.

In summary, the analysis of the integrated results of both quantitative and qualitative data from respondents' perception analysis on the effectiveness of the leadership practices and students' academic achievement confirms a direct significant relationship between school leadership effectiveness across all five leadership practice dimensions and students' exam scores on EHEECE (as students' academic achievement). The strength of these relationships varies with principals' responsibilities, as school principals determine objectives, coordinate programs, provide didactic leadership, organize enrichment programs, conduct evaluations and examinations, take remedial steps, and

create a conducive school climate. As revealed by most respondents, school leaders fail to properly discharge their core leadership practices in setting directions and communicating shared vision and goals, developing people, developing schools and community engagement, and managing teaching-learning programs to improve students' academic achievement by increasing their pass rate on EHEECE.

7.2.2 Relationship between Principal's Core Leadership Practices Effectiveness and Students' Academic Achievement

The empirical findings regarding the relationships between various dimensions of school leadership practices effectiveness and student academic achievement. Each measured dimension of leadership effectiveness shows a statistically significant positive correlation with students' outcomes. The estimated bivariate Pearson correlation coefficient between overall leadership practices effectiveness and students' academic achievement indicates a positive, strong linear relationship between school principals' overall effectiveness in core practices and students' academic achievement on EHEECE scores. The more effectively a school leader manages the teaching and learning process, the better students tend to achieve.

In the current model applied for this study, leadership effectiveness in Implementing high-quality standards based instruction (Instructional Mgt) ($t(496)$=6.182, $p<.001$), Communicative Vision and Goals setting (t(496)=4.904, p< .001), Lead and Managing Development opportunities for teachers ($t(496)$=4.416, $p< .001$,), lead and Managing the school development and engages community (t(496)=6.037, p<.001) and Allocate resources and manage school operations ($t(496)$=44.39, $p< .001$) were found to be significant in predicting students' academic achievement on EHEECE score.

Moreover, the Pearson product-moment correlation analysis shows a direct and significant linear relationship between the extent of a school principal's effectiveness in predicted leadership practices and students' academic achievement on the EHEECE pass rate. School principals who frame the school's goals and communicate them clearly and consistently across the school community can improve overall student outcomes (students' academic achievement on the EHEECE) by providing clear direction and goals for all school activities. Moreover, the coefficient of determination result analysis disclosed that the effectiveness of school principals who are effective in setting clear goals that ensure the success of all students and communicate the goals precisely to all students

and staff helps to develop a common vision between the leader (principal) and the staff and ensure that all stakeholders know their responsibilities and what is expected from them in achieving this vision, which can bring to the expected standard of the variation in student exam result (refer sections *5.3.7).*

The summarized hypothesis testing also led to the rejection of all five null hypotheses, confirming a significant relationship between each identified leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement *(see section 5.4.5).* These findings strongly support the theory that effective school leaders achieve results both directly through their instructional leadership practices and indirectly by strategically developing their teachers, fostering a positive school environment, managing resources effectively, and engaging the wider community and stakeholders. The dual role of school principals–as instructional leaders and comprehensive school managers–is therefore indispensable for fostering a thriving educational environment and ultimately enhancing students' academic achievement in Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia.

In summary of the quantitative data analysis, the ANOVA results indicate that the multiple linear regression models, incorporating Vision and Goals; Instructional Management; Teacher Development; Community Engagement; and Resource Management as predictor variables, significantly explain the variance in student motivation. This finding supports the effectiveness of the blended learning approach in enhancing student motivation. The ANOVA regression summary also underscores the critical role school principals' leadership plays in determining student outcomes (in this case, academic achievement). Moreover, the analysis of the qualitative data findings is also presented.

These findings strongly support the theory that effective school leaders achieve results both directly through their instructional leadership practices and indirectly by strategically developing their teachers, fostering a positive school environment, managing resources effectively, and engaging the wider community and stakeholders. The dual role of school principals–as instructional leaders and comprehensive school managers–is therefore indispensable for fostering a thriving educational environment and ultimately enhancing students' academic achievement in Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia.

7.2.3 Effectiveness of School Principal's Leadership Style(s) and Students' Academic Achievement

Exploring perceptions of the respondents about their school principal's leadership style(s) moves beyond leadership practices; as related studies explained, it contributes to improving student achievement. Thus, the analyzed results revealed a clear difference in the perceived effectiveness of leadership styles on students' academic achievement. Hence, transactional leadership is viewed as having the most significant positive impact (M = 4.01; SD = 1.080) on students' academic achievement, highlighting the value placed on leaders who set clear expectations and use rewards and punishments as motivators. Moreover, the second-rated leadership style was a combination of the three leadership styles: the Democratic, Transformational, and Distributive style (M=3.88; SD=1.188), and the Transformational education leadership style (M=3.75; SD=1.098); principals inspire and motivate their team by creating a clear vision, encouraging innovation, and fostering personal growth.

In contrast, leadership styles that are passive or overly controlling are perceived as having a negative/negligible impact on students' academic achievement. Laissez-faire (M = 2.52; SD = 1.145). Similarly, the low rating for Authoritative (Autocratic Leadership) (M=2.79; SD=1.310). The wide variance in mean scores between styles like Transactional (M=4.01) and Laissez-faire (M=2.52) confirms that the specific leadership approach a principal adopts is not trivial; rather, teachers perceive it as a critical factor in a school's capacity to improve students' academic achievement (outcomes).

Hence, effective leadership requires the leader to understand, engage, and care for followers and enable them to maximize their contributions. The vision of any school in Ethiopia, regardless of the managing agency, is to provide effective instruction to improve students' performance. The findings reveal a strong relationship between students' academic achievement on the EHEECE pass rate and the secondary school principal's leadership style/type and effective school leadership practices in improving students' academic achievement. This result provides strong support for Hypothesis Ha_4 (section 5.4.4).

7.2.4 Leadership Challenging Factors Experienced by School Principals

7.2.4.1 Challenging Factors related to school principals' leadership practices

The findings show strong agreement that leadership potential, human resources (students and teachers), and basic resources are the most significant hindrances to schools in the region. Nine out of ten (87.73%) respondents identified a lack of leadership training as a major challenge. Thus, most respondents (85.11%) agreed that low teacher competency and turnover, and lack of motivation (84.51%), were major issues for teacher quality, stability, and morale. Respondents agreed that low student motivation and a high dropout rate are student-related factors (83.90%).

Community engagement also appears to be lacking, at 79.07%. Inadequate infrastructure and a lack of an encouraging (conducive) school environment also hinder the effective performance of the educational leader's role. Lack of formal facilities (78.27%), an unattractive learning environment (74.65%), and lack of leadership policies/guidelines to guide educational leadership and activities (74.25%) were identified as major challenging factors to the effective performance of school leaders in their roles practicing and to students in achieving better academic achievements on EHEECE through quality education.

In summary, the analysis strongly indicates that systemic issues related to leadership development, teacher quality and motivation, resource availability, student engagement, parental involvement, and physical infrastructure are collectively impeding educational effectiveness and students' academic achievement (see section 5.3.4). Integrated findings from both quantitative and qualitative data acknowledged multifaceted challenges in inputs, processes, and outputs that may have affected principals' leadership practices and styles and, in turn, students' academic achievement and the EHEECE pass rate.

7.2.4.2 The Demographic Characteristics of Principals as Challenging Factors on Students' Academic Achievements

Regarding the demographic characteristics of school principals' effectiveness and their influence on students' academic achievement in EHEECE scores, the study found different results across principals' gender, work experience, and educational background. As estimated Chi-squarst $(\chi_4^2 = 86.229\text{a}, \text{p} < 0.01)$ is found there is no association

between principal's gender and his/her leadership efficacy and their influence on students' academic achievement on EHEECE scores. Therefore, the relationship between a principal's gender (specifically, being male) and perceived leadership effectiveness, as it relates to students' academic achievement, is seen as negligible or non-existent in a positive sense. Regarding the influence of principal work experience on leadership effectiveness, the chi-square test ($\chi 4^2 = 336.149$, $p < 0.01$) was statistically significant. This finding confirms that most respondents associate a principal's leadership experience with their leadership efficacy and, in turn, with students' academic achievement. Moreover, the chi-square test found that the principal's educational background is also shown as statistically significant; the most determinant factor for school leadership effectiveness, in turn, is students' academic achievement as well.

In summary, the quantitative data discussion highlights that gender, often dismissed as a determinant of effectiveness, is not a determinant; both extensive work experience and advanced educational leadership skills are highly valued and significantly impact students' academic achievement on the EHEECE pass rate (see section 5.3).

7.2.5 Strategies adapted by School Principal to Improve Students' Academic Achievement on EHEECE in SNRS

This study examined the effectiveness of educational leadership on students' academic achievement. The study also presented suggested strategies to address the challenges secondary school principals face in implementing effective leadership practices. To improve students' academic achievement and the EHEECE pass rate, the research participants' data analysis recommended that secondary school principals adopt the strategies (refer to sections 5.4.5-6). Educational supervisors, senior teachers, and HoDs were asked to recommend promising strategies to overcome the hurdles that prevent secondary school principals from improving students' academic achievement, which could be employed on EHEECE in secondary schools in SNRS.

Based on the study's findings, the first strategy was for the government to play its role in allocating budgets and creating job opportunities for graduates. 65 (19.1%) respondents emphasized that both the government and private sectors, at various levels, must create job opportunities for recent graduates to motivate students to remain engaged and strive academically, and to improve teachers' incomes through methods like salary increments and incentives. From participants' suggestions, even with less consistency and follow-up,

the central government's motivation for implementing its major practices was identified as a strategy to minimize challenges that hinder secondary schools' leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement, as reflected in the EHEECE pass rate.

Furthermore, the study presented suggested strategies to address the challenging factors secondary school principals face in implementing leadership practices effectively to improve students' academic achievement through the EHEECE pass rate. Hence, the second strategy is to develop school leaders' commitment and capacity through leadership training and capacity updates. Hence, 87 (21.6%) respondents indicated that government at various levels should allocate more resources or funding to secondary schools to improve infrastructure such as libraries (including textbooks and reference materials), laboratories with equipment, internet access, and water supply to create more appealing working conditions.

The third strategy relates to improving teaching and learning. School principals were advised to create an encouraging teaching-learning environment, such as by providing attractive facilities and supporting teachers' professional development to update their subject knowledge.

The fourth one is mobilizing and allocating school resources in secondary schools. The combined data showed that school principals should work tirelessly to positively influence relevant bodies, mobilize the community, and develop income-generating practices to address the lack of material and physical resources at their disposal. The fifth strategy is working on school autonomy. Secondary schools should be made free from political interference and influence, as suggested by all the participants.

7.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitations are potential weaknesses in a study that are mostly beyond the researcher's control. They are the constraints the researcher encountered during the research process.

- Think: "What are the shortcomings of the researcher's study?" They are often outside the researcher's direct control.
- Purpose: To acknowledge imperfections and suggest areas for future research, thereby strengthening the credibility of the researcher's work.

The study identified four major limitations commonly seen in studies. The first limitation was methodological: self-reported data. I could not independently confirm respondents' responses on the questionnaire they filled out and the interviews I conducted. One of the issues was senior teachers' and HoDs' exaggeration of the problems of principals' leadership practices, while principals and vice-principals reported themselves as better performing. Some participants were also hesitant to provide more information about their school's status, especially negative aspects. Some felt that asking the questions measured their understanding of the effectiveness of school leadership.

The other limitations were time and limited funding to carry out the research. Time is an important factor in research and can affect findings positively or negatively when conducting comprehensive research on the issue. Funding, just like time, is equally important in research. I used personal resources to finance the research activities and combined work and research.

However, I worked hard and was determined to complete open-ended items given to senior teachers, HoDs, unit leaders, and Document Analysis to justify students' academic achievement rate (EHEECE pass rate) and the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices. It would have been better if I had considered other alternatives, such as including students, officials from MoE and the regional education bureau, and teachers' association members, to gather more comprehensive information.

The main reason for excluding, for instance, school observation was the shortage of resources. In this study, I found a workaround by designing a telephonic interview and a one-on-one interview, and by obtaining documents on EHEECE pass rates from the SNRS Education Bureau and respective schools to triangulate and collect qualitative data instead of using class observation and FGDs, as originally planned. The findings would have been stronger if the interviews and FGDs had included students, parents, the regional education bureau, the Woreda education office, MoE experts, and policymakers.

The third limitation was sampling and sample selection. The study focused on a sample of 64 governmental or public secondary schools from 5 Zones, 18 Woredas, and 2 city administrations of SNRS. The region has 97 secondary schools, excluding private and NGO secondary schools in Ethiopia. This limits the generalization of the results to the larger community.

The researcher could have found more if he had included at least one school from each Woreda and included private and NGO secondary schools. This does not mean the sample selection was an oversight, because the selected secondary schools were in different contexts, in both geographical and socioeconomic terms, and the intention was to examine the effectiveness of secondary school principals' leadership on students' academic achievement in the EHEECE pass rate.

7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This study placed special emphasis on the effectiveness of principals' leadership in turn on students' academic achievement in government secondary schools of the SNRS region, Ethiopia. The study also addressed different leadership theories, school principals' practices, challenges faced by school principals, and other relevant literature in the context of Ethiopian education policy. The study investigated the effectiveness of leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in the SNRS region, Ethiopia. The study was framed based on the leadership framework developed by Leithwood et al. (2010) and the National Professional Standards for School Principals (MoE, 2013), which emphasized only four core leadership practices: developing and communicating vision, mission, and goals; setting directions; developing people; developing organizations; and managing teaching and learning programs. Leadership style(s) in terms of students' academic achievement on EHEECE partially framed the study.

Thus, the study recommended that future studies address the influence of principals' core leadership practices on students' academic achievement in terms of pass rate or other variables by expanding this framework or model or developing a new one. Further study should be conducted on other leadership practice areas and their effects on quality education and students' academic achievements, such as: teachers' behavior management and students' attendance with quality education; teachers' quality and satisfaction with students' academic achievement; leadership styles and teachers' performance; Female leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement should be studied by other researchers.

- The respondents, namely: senior teachers, HoDs, principals, deputy principals, unit leaders, educational supervisors and PTSAs, were given more emphasis for their perceptions on this study; on effectiveness of leadership on students' academic

achievement of secondary schools. To gain a holistic national perspective, further study should include the perceptions of other education stakeholders, such as students, regional and zonal education experts, and MoE policymakers.

- This research was conducted in sampled government secondary schools of SNRS. The same study addressing similar problems can be done in different settings of the education system. Such as in primary, technical and vocational education training, higher education, and private education institutions and schools. In other multicultural settings, such as regions and city administrations and/or private secondary schools, further research can be conducted.

- The research methodologically applied a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, this study recommends similar future studies, but they need more time and adequate funding.

Apparently, school leadership is a dynamic and intensive activity that requires working with other leaders and key stakeholders at different levels. Hence, the researcher recognized that principals' effectiveness alone cannot fully achieve the desired continuous change in school levels and students' academic achievement. To achieve this, the study recommends further research on the effectiveness of secondary school leadership, especially among secondary school supervisors and Woreda education office heads.

This study relied only on 64 government secondary schools, excluding public, private, and non-government schools within five sample zones of Sidama National Regional State. This limited the findings to secondary schools in the region. In another case, the study analyzed the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) as a university entrance examination for five successive years (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023). Hence, future studies should use a large sample of secondary schools in Sidama and other regions to assess the effectiveness of principals' school leadership practices on students' academic achievement, using the same research methods. In line with this, more longitudinal analyses of academic achievement in the two compulsory and other subjects should be conducted to obtain more valuable information on progress in relation to improving school levels. If so, the result of the future study will be generalized to the government secondary schools across the country.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study investigated the effectiveness of the school principal's leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools in SNRS, Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study drew conclusions based on its major findings. These findings address the basic research questions and objectives listed in Chapter One of the study.

The study found that the secondary school principals' level of implementation of their leadership roles, such as 'setting direction and communicating their shared visions and goals', 'developing people', 'developing school', and 'managing teaching-learning program' in secondary schools of SNRS, was weak. This suggests that school principals did not contribute much to improving students' academic achievement on EHEECE. That might be attributed to the school principal's lack of sustainable training, the inability to follow up on the vision and mission of the school systematically, and the personal and professional quality of the school principal as an educational leader.

This study also revealed that there was a positive relationship between principals' leadership role practices in Grade 12 National EHEECE; there was a positive relationship between principals' leadership role practices in 'setting direction' and 'developing schools' and students' EHEECE pass rate. The relationship between principal leadership and students' academic achievement on the EHEECE pass rate differs in Grade twelve on EHEECE scores in some leadership role practice variables. The influence of principals' leadership roles of practice in 'setting direction' and 'developing schools' has more impact on the secondary school national EHEECE pass rate than 'developing people' and 'managing teaching-learning program'. Other factors might be contributing to that variation. This calls for schools' principals to revisit their leadership roles and core practices and prioritize them according to their significance.

This study achieved its objectives, but further research is needed to investigate why the influence of the core principals' leadership practices varied among schools. Regarding principals' leadership challenges that hinder performance effectiveness and students' academic achievement or the national EHEECE pass rate, this study found that lack of students' interest and motivation, students' families' socio-economic status and educational level, and teachers' lack of interest were the strongest hindering factors. Lack of resources and material facilities, other external factors such as limited Woreda and Zone educational support, the influence of Woreda Education Offices, and political

interference moderately contributed to low performance among school principals and their influence on students' academic achievement and the national EHEECE pass rate.

Previous studies raised concerns about students' academic achievement (performance) and the quality of education in Ethiopia's secondary schools, despite the country's recent economic development (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-Eyesus, 2017). Similarly, this study examined current secondary school education, policies, and students' academic achievement (performance) in the Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia and confirmed these gaps. In this regard, the key findings of this study play an important role in promoting positive social change by extending knowledge to different stakeholders, including principals, MoE, SEB, and policymakers.

The findings suggested that students, home environment factors, and teacher-related problems had a greater impact on the implementation of principal leadership roles and practices than the lack of financial and material facilities, as well as external factors, on the principal's leadership skills. This finding surprised the researcher, and it is true that, regardless of a principal's effort to enhance students' academic achievement on the national EHEECE pass rate, in the absence of students' motivation and interest, family support and educational background, and teachers' interest, it is difficult to improve the students' academic achievement in terms of their pass rate on EHEECE. This requires the strategies that emerged during this study as it was summarized in sections 5.4 & 6.2 in tackling those challenges in leading successful schools.

This finding indicates that transformational leadership has been shown to be a significant factor in improving students' academic achievement on EHEECE when implemented across different participants, settings, and situations. Thus, it is recommended that secondary school principals implement and maintain transformational leadership combined with a democratic style to improve students' academic achievement and, in turn, school performance overall.

Moreover, now that the leadership styles employed in secondary schools in SNRS are known, this study could help address the challenges of managing leadership practices' effectiveness on students' academic achievement (i.e., pass rate on EHEECE) by applying the identified leadership styles. Leadership theories are diverse, with no real consensus among researchers. Many elements influence leadership, and only a select few were discussed. I further believe that the problems revealed related to leadership

styles at secondary schools in SNRS need to be addressed earnestly and urgently to improve the quality of education in the region.

The survey findings revealed that 92.4% of the principals who participated in this study were male. This implies that females were underrepresented in principalship positions in the study area. The study also showed that 52.9% of the principals held a bachelor's degree, implying that nearly half of the principals were underqualified in reference to the national professional standards for principals in Ethiopia (MoE, 2015), which stipulate that all secondary school principals should hold a master's degree. In terms of professional background, 2/3 of the principals were not trained in school leadership and management. This underqualification and lack of professionalism among these prominent school leaders negatively affected overall school performance because they likely lacked the ability, basic knowledge, and skills pertinent to the profession of school leadership and management.

The findings showed that transformational leadership was the most dominantly practiced, followed by instructional and transactional school leadership styles in the study area. Therefore, adopting the dominant leadership style was relevant, as the majority of the sample secondary schools need sustainable improvement to reach the required standards (level 3 and 4).

Joint analyses of the principals' and HoDs' responses showed that components of transformational and instructional school leadership were implemented significantly above the medium point, whereas transactional leadership practice was medium. However, improvement in secondary schools lagged or was very weak, as no changes were observed in schools' levels with respect to students' academic results on EHEECE within the four years (2019-2023). This was because 86.3% of the sample secondary schools (64) had students' academic results on EHEECE below expected levels. This implies that, even though principals adopted the most appropriate school leadership styles, their effectiveness in improving school performance and students' academic achievement did not meet expectations.

The correlation analysis showed a weak positive correlation between the schools' principals' leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement in 2021. In contrast, the schools' levels had a negative association with English in 2018 and mathematics in 2019. This varying direction of correlation between the two variables

implies that the objectives of the school, such as organizational improvement and the effectiveness of leadership, whose mirror image is the students' academic achievement mainly through effective principal's school leadership, were not consistent, yet were met in the study area.

However, in some target zones of the Sidama region, the South Zone, and the Hawassa City administration, a considerable number of secondary school principals met the required standard of leadership practices, and their students' academic achievement was found to be better than that of others. Therefore, the study concluded that improvements in schools' leadership effectiveness, in terms of the level of practice of their roles, had a mediating effect on students' academic achievement in the study area.

The findings also showed that secondary school principals face multifaceted challenges. The challenges include inactive participation of parents in school affairs, low commitment of students to the improvement of academic results, lack of standard facilities and curriculum inputs, lack of capacity building for principals and teachers, absence of attractive learning environments in the schools, and weakness of the school principal in properly developing strategies for improvement of his leadership effectiveness and students' academic achievement in the study area.

These and other challenges generally prevailed in the form of inputs, processes, and outputs in the sample secondary schools. Hence, achieving optimal effectiveness in school leadership styles among principals was very difficult. From this evidence, it can be inferred that these prevailing challenges may have affected principals' ability to fully practice appropriate school leadership styles to sustainably improve school performance to general standards and students' academic achievement, particularly in the study area.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations based on the study's findings on how principals, deputy principals, education supervisors, HoDs, unit leaders, and senior teachers in the sampled secondary school perceive the effectiveness of the principal's leadership practices on students' academic achievement. The recommendations are derived from the study's key findings, as presented in section 6.2, and its conclusions, as presented in section 7.5. The following recommendations were suggested to be practiced primarily by secondary school principals, as they are expected to play central roles and take responsibilities in school leadership effectiveness, as well as by government,

policymakers, and stakeholders at different levels, aiming at enhancing the improvement of schools and, in turn, students' academic achievement based on EHEECE scores.

7.6.1 Recommendations for the Secondary Schools Principals

The study indicated that there was a positive relationship between the effectiveness of principals' leadership roles and practices in 'setting directions', 'developing schools', and students' academic achievement rate on EHEECE in secondary schools of the region. Moreover, principals need to make extra committed efforts to fill the practical gaps observed in school leadership activities, particularly by implementing the dimensions of appropriate school leadership styles to the utmost extent. As a starting point, they should prepare organized, participatory strategic and annual plans and implement them properly to improve the effectiveness of principals' leadership.

Other factors may also contribute to low student academic achievement rates in EHEECE. Thus, school principals should rethink their leadership roles and practices and prioritize personal leadership development by arranging and requesting professional training and reading on how to build their capacity. The results of this study also showed that parents' participation in school affairs was unsatisfactory. Therefore, principals should take the assignment of inspiring and sustaining these stakeholders as a priority area for effective leadership to improve students' academic achievement. Principals should meaningfully foster a strong working culture in the school compound so that teachers, students, and other stakeholders work together toward the common vision and goals of achieving high standards in schools.

Furthermore, they must develop more income-generating activities and influence the Woreda Education Offices to secure adequate budget allocations. They should also use and manage their financial resources properly and faithfully. Principals must monitor and evaluate the quality of the teaching-learning process regularly and effectively and give timely feedback to their teachers. These key managerial and leadership activities should be accompanied by adequate rewards for the best-performing staff. To this end, principals should upgrade and update their knowledge and skills in school leadership and management through self-initiated efforts and by using opportunities provided by SEB and MoE.

Principals should strengthen their communication networks and relationships with PTSA members and other stakeholders so they can collectively solve school-related problems and bring about desired changes in school performance and students' academic achievement. They should also make the school environment conducive to positive feelings and raise the morale of teachers and students so they stay in school and perform their duties efficiently. As the findings revealed, in most secondary schools, students' efforts were very low because of their background in the lower grades and negative attitudes and interest toward taking their own responsibilities. Therefore, principals, together with teachers and parents, should shoulder the responsibility of shaping students' dependency and reversing the inattention they absorbed from their seniors.

As the findings revealed and discussed, in most secondary schools, students' effort was very low due to a lack of interest and motivation in their education, attributed to lower educational backgrounds and the joblessness of college and university graduates. Therefore, the principals, together with teachers and PTSAs, should shoulder the load of shaping students' attitudes of dependency and reverse the inattention they acculturated from their seniors, and encourage neighboring pre-primary and primary school principals to work on quality education at their level so that students should have demonstrated the basic knowledge, attitude, and skills in their core subject matters before reaching the secondary schools' level.

7.6.2 Recommendation for policy makers of the government

The joint results of both quantitative and qualitative data analyses showed that there was poor academic achievement of students in the sampled schools who joined national EHEECE, insufficient contributions of school principals to students' academic achievement and success, and were found to be moderate in effectiveness of secondary schools principals' leadership practices; in 'setting a well communicated school vision, mission and goals', 'developing people (teachers)', 'developing schools', and 'managing teaching-learning program', to improve students' academic achievement with teachers and concerned stakeholders. This may be attributed to principals' lack of on-the-job training, weak follow-up of the school vision and mission, and their personal and professional leadership quality.

The Ethiopian Federal Democratic Republic government, specifically the Ministry of Education (MoE), in collaboration with middle-level leaders in the regional education

bureau, Woreda education office heads, and nearby universities, should arrange and offer continuous, sustainable training on principals' personal leadership skills and knowledge development through on-the-job training. Moreover, the federal government and the regional education bureau should also provide continuous professional support to school principals by re-establishing Quality Audit Teams at the Woreda and school levels, in addition to formal monitoring and supervision activities.

The research found that student-related problems (demotivation), parents' educational and socio-economic status, and teachers' professional demotivation hindered school principals' performance and students' academic achievement, rather than other challenges such as school-leadership-related matters: lack of resources and material facilities. Thus, to moderate these challenges, the study recommends that both government authorities and school principals take appropriate measures within their respective areas of responsibility. To address students' demotivation due to unemployment among graduates from universities and colleges, governments should create new job opportunities so secondary school students are motivated to attend classes.

The study found that, in most cases, schools' principals were assigned based on personal affiliation with the nearest higher officials and favoritism. Therefore, WEO heads should allocate professionals, master’s degree holders, and competent, committed, and experienced leaders based on merit and open competition, and then build the capacity of principals who took positions this way through formal long-term or short-term professional training. Moreover, Woreda education office heads are expected to arrange follow-up programs and provide school leaders, mainly principals, with relevant professional and technical support.

School leadership and management activities call for collaboration among various stakeholders; for this reason, WEO heads must raise awareness among key stakeholders about education policy, strategies, goals, and programs so they understand their roles and responsibilities and help schools achieve their goals. In particular, heads should strengthen local community participation in school endeavors that promote and improve schools and students' learning outcomes, and positively influence the government to provide the necessary inputs, facilities, and standards. They should encourage women to compete and pursue school principalship because, as the findings indicated, their participation was at the lowest level in the study area.

Regarding teachers' lack of interest in the teaching profession, the findings revealed that most teachers were dissatisfied due to a lack of incentives and professional commitment. The Ethiopian national government, the MoE, and other stakeholders should work to improve teachers' income and other benefits that cover basic needs (housing, transportation, health insurance, scholarships), as well as an additional payment system for extra-workload classes in secondary schools. Because teachers' salaries and benefits are low compared with other sectors, the teaching profession is not respected or valued in Ethiopia. To improve this, the government should attract the best-performing students at the end of secondary school into the profession and assign them to teaching in universities.

In addition, most secondary school teachers, especially in towns, suffer from high rent. Thus, the government should work with the Sidama National Regional State to provide land for free and offer loans for building houses with long-term repayment plans. Furthermore, all the problems raised, such as lack of the Internet and water in most schools, and lack of enough classrooms, electric power, and related resources, can be fulfilled when enough attention is given to the improvement of secondary schools by the national and regional governments in allocating adequate budgets.

Hence, the bureau should allocate sufficient budgets and provide schools in each Woreda with all pertinent educational materials, technical, and professional support. Furthermore, the bureau should develop and issue policies and guidelines on school leadership and/or management to support principals in serving schools with full professional confidence and assurance, rather than being assigned based on the political willingness of Woreda education office heads and/or political officials.

The policymakers should draft a policy provision that attracts the best-performing, experienced, and professional personnel in education management and leadership. Moreover, policymakers at the Ministry of Education should propose a detailed framework and curriculum for advanced training for school principals and provide continuous professional development.

In summary, the quantitative discussion above suggests that gender is likely dismissed as a determinant of effectiveness; both extensive work experience and advanced educational leadership skills are highly valued and significantly affect students' academic achievement. These observations can inform policies on principal selection, professional

development, and career advancement by emphasizing experience and specific academic qualifications over gender.

Hence, professional development for school principals should move beyond logistical training and focus on practical modules on cultivating a positive school climate, leading effective and empathetic communication with parents and teachers, and implementing strategies to build a success-oriented culture for all students. Furthermore, to address this relational weakness, school principals should receive training on how to use their management skills to support and strengthen the school's psychological and social environment, ensuring that the school's human capital is valued and developed as effectively as its physical assets.

Principals have a vital responsibility for discharging managerial duties in the school. Principalship is a well-established position as the head, providing educational leadership by coordinating curricular activities such as schemes of work, lesson notes, and continuous assessment to achieve academic goals. In addition, the principal oversees extracurricular programs and manages the general administration of the secondary school.

As educational leaders, principals are well positioned to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate, and share up-to-date information on educational issues and current teaching techniques with teachers to motivate them and improve students' academic achievement. The principal oversees overall school management (leadership styles and types), working with and through teachers to make the best use of their professional capabilities and achieve the desired educational goals (highest student academic achievement).

7.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Concurrent Convergent Mixed Method design was used to investigate the impact of principals' leadership on students' academic progress in SNRS secondary schools. The results showed that school principals' leadership methods were not very effective at the implementation level. The study demonstrated that students' academic achievements (i.e., on EHEECE scores) in SNRS were significantly correlated with the effectiveness of secondary school leadership practices in 'setting and communicating shared vision and goals', 'teaching-learning programs management', 'fostering teachers' professionalism ', 'leading and managing community and stakeholders' engagement', and 'leading and managing school resources and operations'.

The study also found that issues pertaining or related to students, the family/home environment, and teachers were strong obstacles, whereas issues pertaining to school leadership, such as a lack of school funding and resources, and outside influences, were somewhat difficult to overcome in order to prevent school principals from improving students' academic achievement. Moreover, the discussion highlights that gender, often dismissed as a determinant of effectiveness, is not a determinant of effectiveness; extensive work experience and advanced educational leadership skills are highly valued and significantly impact students' academic achievement. Observations inform policies on secondary school principal employment, professional development, and career advancement, emphasizing experience and specific academic qualifications over gender.

Consequently, professional development for school principals should go beyond knowledge-based training and focus on practical modules on creating a positive school climate, communicating with parents and teachers effectively and compassionately, and implementing strategies to build a success-oriented culture for all students. To address this relational weakness, school principals should receive training on how to use their management skills to support and enhance the school's psychological and social environment, ensuring that the school's human capital is valued and developed as effectively as its physical assets.

According to this study, in order to improve the quality of education targeted at improving students' academic achievement and overall school outcomes, this study came to the conclusion that various stakeholders, including parents of students and non-governmental organizations, should be involved in funding schools and teachers' dedication to quality teaching and inspiring students to be motivated and like education. Additionally, the study included suggestions for additional research in areas where it was limited. However, this PhD thesis has successfully met its goals!

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LIST OF ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Measurement Tools

Table1: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-1.035	0.172		-6.021	0.000	-1.373	-0.697		
	A. Defining and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals	0.188	0.038	0.186	4.904	0.000	0.113	0.263	0.732	1.366
	B. Implementing high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students.	0.247	0.035	0.249	6.962	0.000	0.177	0.317	0.821	1.218
	C. Lead and Managing development opportunities for teachers of the school to build their capacity	0.225	0.051	0.187	4.416	0.000	0.125	0.325	0.584	1.712
	D. Lead and managing the school development and engages community	0.262	0.043	0.223	6.037	0.000	0.177	0.347	0.767	1.304
	E. Allocate resources and manage school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment.	0.193	0.044	0.165	4.439	0.000	0.108	0.279	0.756	1.323

a. Dependent Variable: Student academic performance

Table2: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.696[a]	0.484	0.479	0.475	1.803

a. Predictors: (Constant), Vision & Goals; Instructional Mgt. Teacher Dev. Community Engage and Resource Mgt.

b. Dependent variable: Student academic achievement

Table3: ANOVA[a]

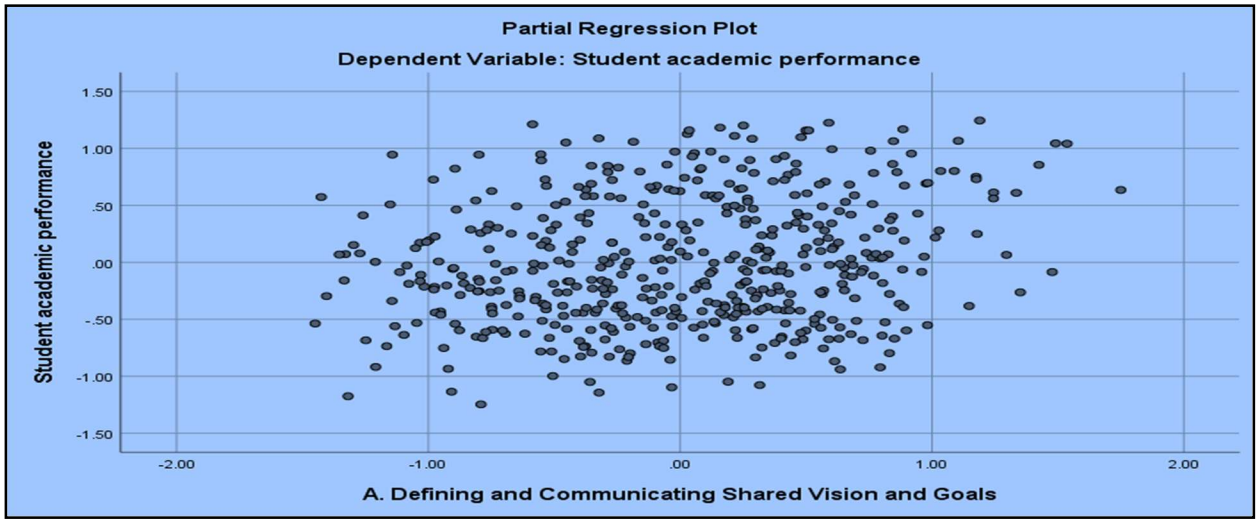
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p-value)
Regression	103.303	5	20.661	92.162	<.001
Residual	110.071	491	0.224		
Total	213.375	496			

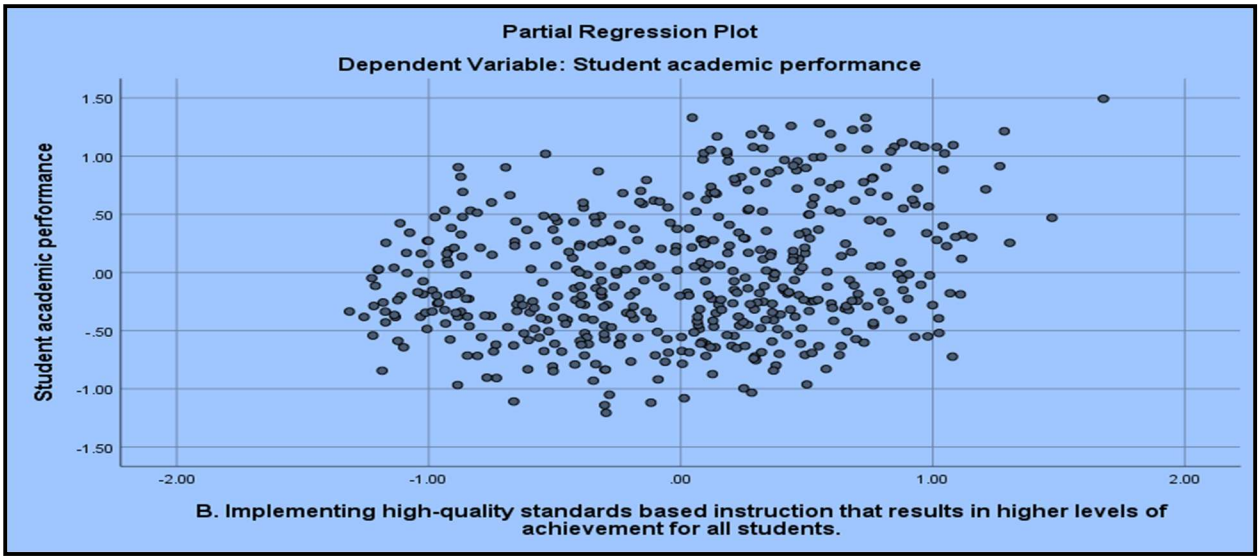
a. Dependent Variable: Student academic performance

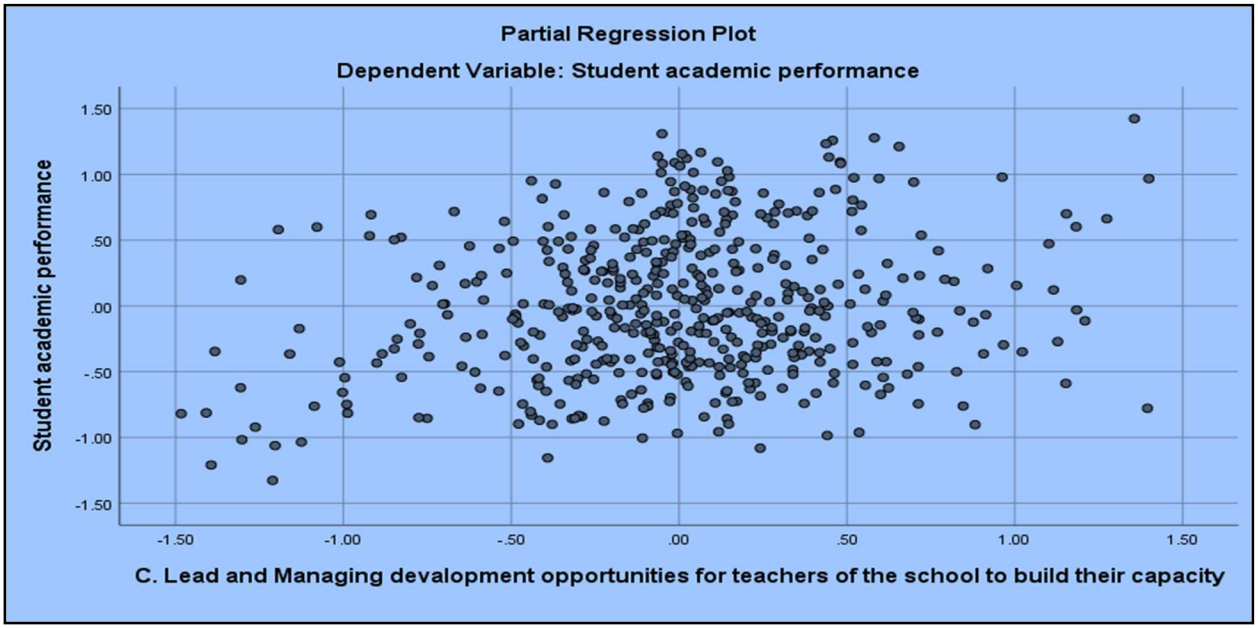
Predictors: (Constant), E. Allocate resources and manage school operations in order to ensure a safe and productive learning environment., A. Defining and Communicating Shared Vision and Goals, D. Lead and managing the school development and engages community, B. Implementing high-quality standards-based instruction that results in higher levels of achievement for all students., C. Lead and Managing development opportunities for teachers of the school to build their capacity,

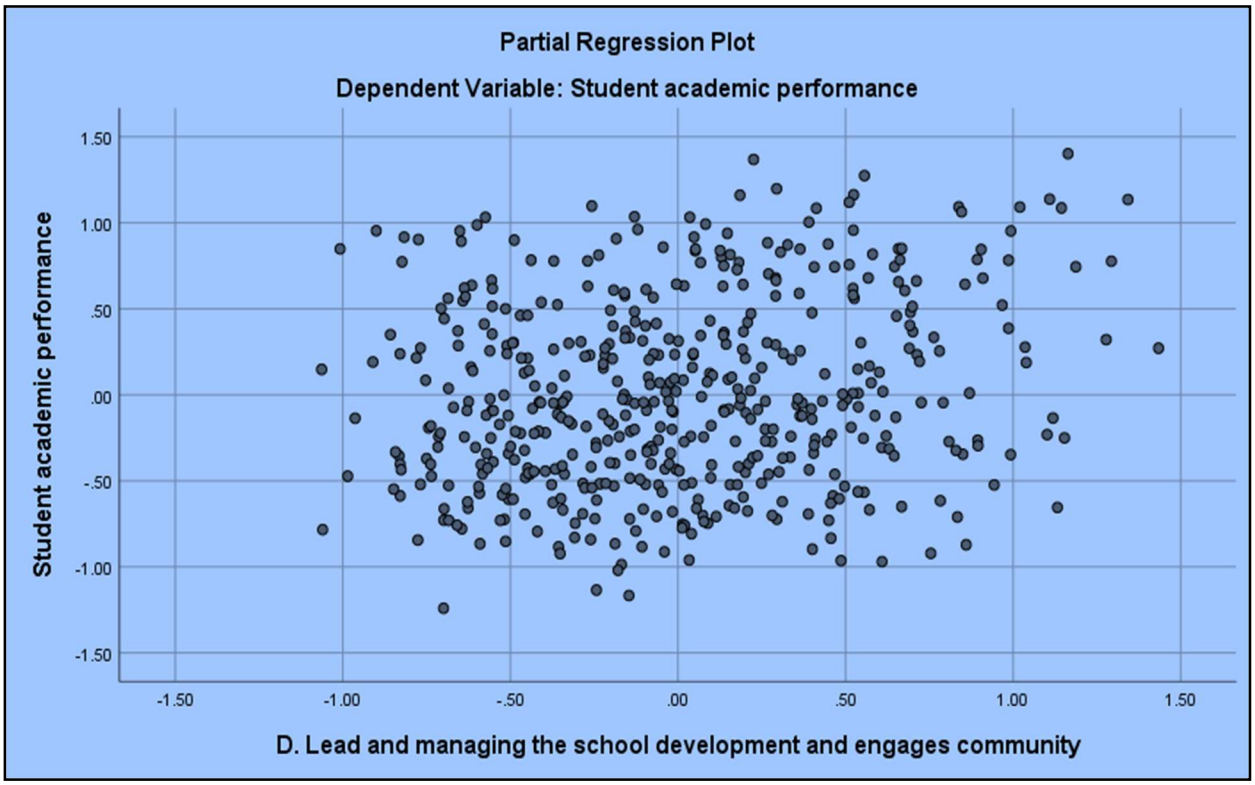
Annexure B: Graphs

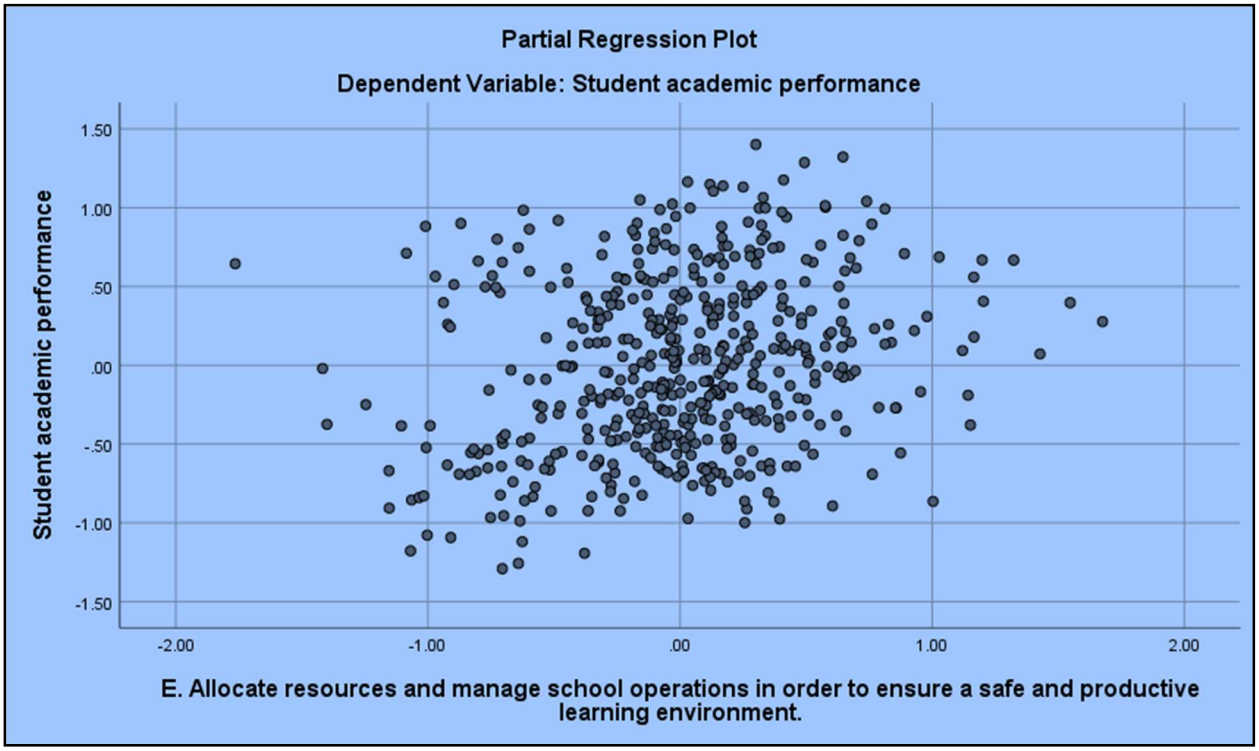
Graphs (A-E) of Data Presentation of Partial Regression Plot



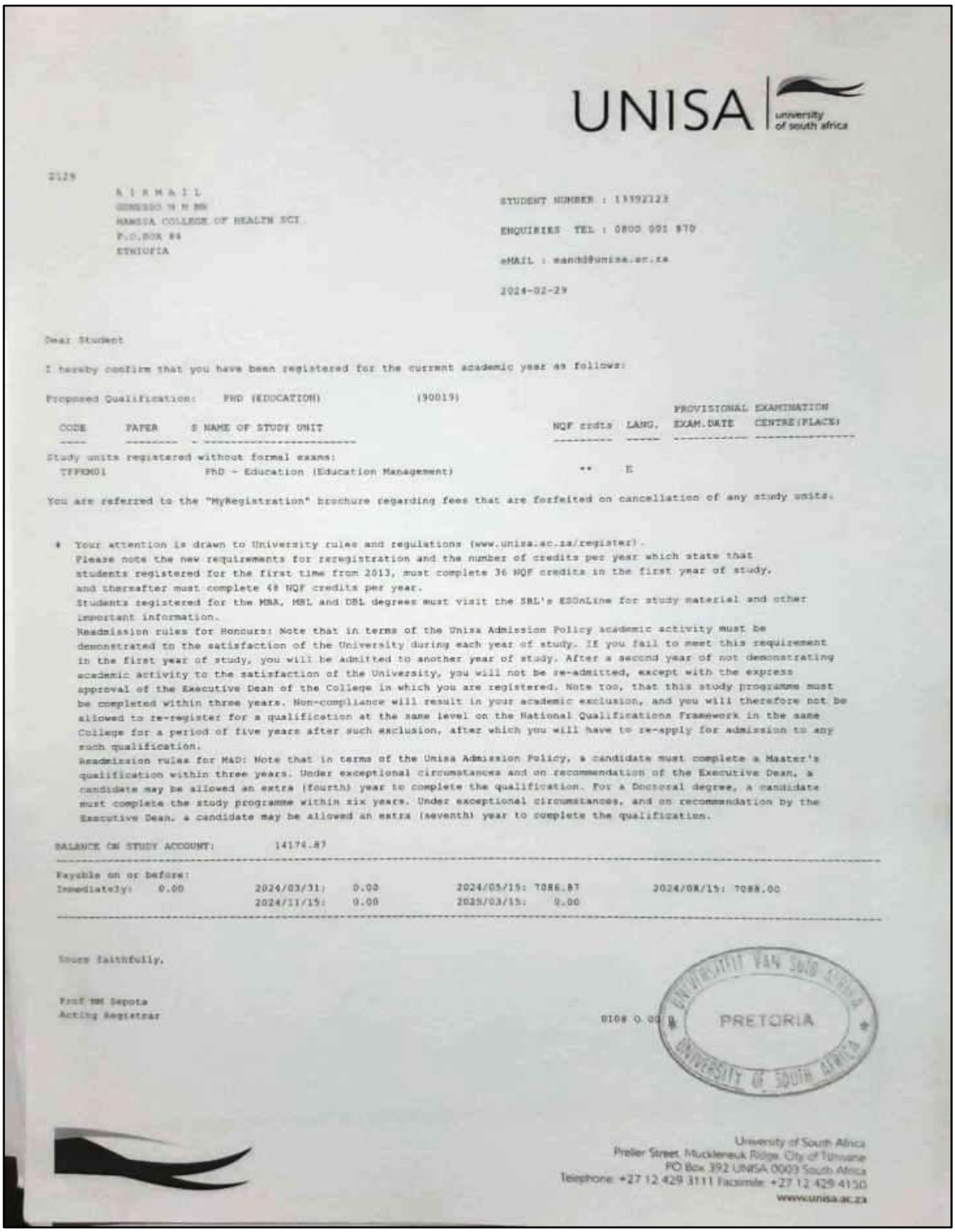



Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Student academic performance
Student academic performance
1.50
1.00
.50
.00
-.50
-1.00
-1.50
-1.50
-1.00
-.50
.00
.50
1.00
1.50
C. Lead and Managing devalopment opportunities for teachers of the school to build their capacity


Partial Regression Plot
Dependent Variable: Student academic performance
Student academic performance
1.50
1.00
.50
.00
-.50
-1.00
-1.50
-1.50
-1.00
-.50
.00
.50
1.00
1.50
D. Lead and managing the school development and engages community



Annexure C: Proof of registration at UNISA for 2025



UNISA university of south africa

2129

AIRMAIL
[redacted]
HAMASA COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCI.
P.O.BOX 84
ETHIOPIA

STUDENT NUMBER : 13392123

ENQUIRIES TEL : 0800 001 870

eMAIL : wandd@unisa.ac.za

2024-02-29

Dear Student

I hereby confirm that you have been registered for the current academic year as follows:

Proposed Qualification: PHD (EDUCATION) (90019)

CODE	PAPER	S	NAME OF STUDY UNIT	NQF credits	LANG.	PROVISIONAL EXAM.DATE	EXAMINATION CENTRE(PLACE)
Study units registered without formal exams:							
TFPEN01			PhD - Education (Education Management)	**	E		

You are referred to the "MyRegistration" brochure regarding fees that are forfeited on cancellation of any study units.

* Your attention is drawn to University rules and regulations (www.unisa.ac.za/register).
Please note the new requirements for reregistration and the number of credits per year which state that students registered for the first time from 2013, must complete 36 NQF credits in the first year of study, and thereafter must complete 48 NQF credits per year.
Students registered for the MBA, MBL and DBL degrees must visit the SBL's ESOnLine for study material and other important information.
Readmission rules for Honours: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy academic activity must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the University during each year of study. If you fail to meet this requirement in the first year of study, you will be admitted to another year of study. After a second year of not demonstrating academic activity to the satisfaction of the University, you will not be re-admitted, except with the express approval of the Executive Dean of the College in which you are registered. Note too, that this study programme must be completed within three years. Non-compliance will result in your academic exclusion, and you will therefore not be allowed to re-register for a qualification at the same level on the National Qualifications Framework in the same College for a period of five years after such exclusion, after which you will have to re-apply for admission to any such qualification.
Readmission rules for M&D: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy, a candidate must complete a Master's qualification within three years. Under exceptional circumstances and on recommendation of the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (fourth) year to complete the qualification. For a Doctoral degree, a candidate must complete the study programme within six years. Under exceptional circumstances, and on recommendation by the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (seventh) year to complete the qualification.

BALANCE ON STUDY ACCOUNT: 14174.87

Payable on or before:

Immediately:	0.00	2024/03/31:	0.00	2024/05/15:	7086.87	2024/08/15:	7088.00
		2024/11/15:	0.00	2025/03/15:	0.00		

Yours faithfully,

Prof MM Sepota
Acting Registrar

0108 0 00 [redacted]

UNIVERSITEIT VAN SUID AFRIKA PRETORIA UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

Annexure D: Requesting Supporting letter

RE: - Request for Permission to Conduct Research at Secondary Schools of Sidama National Regional State (SNRS) Education Bureau

Date: 30/05/2024
Name of the person to who you address the request: Mr. Million Yosa Sambe
Department of the person: Deputy Head, Education Bureau and Head for Teachers Development Affairs SNRS, Ethiopia.
Contact details of the person: Tele (Mobile): +251 (0) 913 323 9289 (928 87 8187)
E-mail address: millionyosa@gmail.com

Dear sir

I, Million Mamo Gonesso am doing research under supervision of Nyoni Jabulani a Professor in the Department of educational leadership and management, towards a Doctor of Philosophy of Education at the University of South Africa. I am to request you to have permission letter and to do this research in secondary schools of the region and let the principals to be informed and voluntarily to participate free of fee cost from the researcher, since the research is thesis towards a PhD.

The aim of the study is to investigate Variables related to the Effectiveness of Secondary Schools Principal Leadership and its contribution on students' academic achievement, SNRS, Ethiopia.

Your region office has been selected because it has direct authority to give permission and direct order to secondary schools of the region and to those selected secondary school to conduct the research.

The study will entail two phases during which I will interact with principals, deputy principals, unit leaders and HODs of secondary schools. The first phase will involve distributing questionnaires to all the principals, deputy principals, unit leaders and HODs of sample selected secondary schools in the region. The second phase will involve structured interviews with fifteen principals and for FGDs six groups of principals with five in a group will be sampled in purposive simple random sampling method from sampled schools which start grade 12 national examinations for their students from 2019 and questions about thoroughly to 2023.

The benefits of this study are to make policy for improvement of secondary schools' leadership effectiveness, and your employing authority, education bureau to improve students' academic performance and helps to improve education quality by showing the new paradigm direction in secondary schools' leadership.

This study has no foreseeable potential risks associated.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedure will entail, after the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Yours Sincerely



MM Gonesso (Researcher)
Contact address: Telephone: 0916582065; email: 13392123@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Hawassa College of Health Sciences,

Annexure E: Sample of supporting letter to Schools

SIDAAMU DAGOOMU QOQQOWI MOOTIMMA ROSU BIIRO
የሲዳማ ብሔራዊ ክልላዊ መንግስት ትምህርት ቢሮ

T.K. ጥቅ/ቁ 3390/06-3339/5/35
Barra ቀን 31/10/2016

To: _____ Secondary School

Subject: Requesting cooperation of your esteemed secondary school

Mr. Million Mamo Gonesso, student number: 13393123 requested us to write letter of cooperation for your esteemed school to collect data for his PhD study research entitled "The Effectiveness of Secondary Schools Principal Leadership on students' academic achievement, Sidama National Regional State (SNRS), Ethiopia". As described by the researcher, the aim of the research is to investigate *Variables related to the Effectiveness of Secondary Schools Principal Leadership and its contribution on students' academic performance and to find the research based solutions to overcome the students' academic achievement gap, and also helps to improve education quality by showing the new paradigm direction in secondary schools leadership in the region.* Moreover, we have confirmed that the university by which the researcher pursuing his study, the University of South Africa has officially granted the Ethical Clearance Certificate for the researcher to collect data.

Appreciating the researcher's commitment perusing his research in the area of principal leadership in secondary schools. We hereby request your cooperation during his data collection.

Yours Sincerely!

CC:

- Deputy Head: Curriculum and Technology Expansion Department
  Regional Education Bureau, Hawassa.

Sidaamu Dagoomu Qoqqowi Mootimma Rosu Biiro

Rosu Baali Qicceeffannaa Leenji Handaarsa
☎046 2123805/0462123815 E-mail: [illegible] Fax (046) 2204710
Isllancho Roso Wo'munkura

Annexure F: Questionnaires to be field by senior teachers, department heads and unit leaders

Dear respondent

This questionnaire consists of questions that must be answered by Deputy Principals (DP), Head of Departments (HoDs) and Unit leaders (UL) *ONLY*. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data regarding your perceptions about *school leadership roles enactment and effectiveness on students' academic achievement* in your school. There are no correct and wrong answers. The researcher is only interested in your honest opinion for his doctoral study research entitled with "the effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia", for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa under the supervision of Prof Dr J. Nyoni.

As a researcher, I assure you that, your response will only be used for this research, and no harm is associated. You are not required to indicate your name and all information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for the aims of the research only and will remain confidential. Your participation in completing the questionnaire is voluntary and you have full right to omit any question or to withdraw at any time.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

For any information contact me by cell Phone: 0916582065/ 0911747640 or

E-mail address: millimamog@gmail.com or 13362123@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Million Mamo Gonesso (the researcher)

Part I: DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

INSTRUCTION: These questions (1 to 6) are about your demographic data. In responding to the questions, please write 'X' mark in the space provided and write briefly your opinions for open-ended items.

1. Name of the school _____ Woreda _____ Zone _____

2. Indicate your Sex

1. Female	
2. Male	

3. Indicate your current position

1. Principal	
2. Deputy Principal	
3. Supervisor	

4. Your current job post (title)

1. Teacher	
2. Department head	
3. Unit leader	

5. Indicate your age group

1. Under age 30	
2. 31-40	
3. 41-50	
4. 51-60	
5. 61 and above	

6. Highest Qualifications attained (Please mark one choice)

1. College Diploma in teaching	
2. Bachelor's degree (BA, BSc, or B.Ed)	
3. Master's Degree (MA, or MSc, or Med)	
4. Doctorate Degree (PhD)	
5. Other (Specify)	

7. How long have you been working in secondary school as a teacher, HoD and unit leader?

1. For 5 years and below	
2. For 5 - 10 years	
3. For 11 - 15 years	
4. For 16 - 20 years	
5. For more than 16 years	

Part II: Effectiveness of Current School Principal Leadership Practices on Students' academic Achievements

Instruction: This part of the questionnaires is structured according to the variables which are related to current school leadership functions effectiveness on students' academic achievement of SNRS, principal leadership specifically. Please, familiarize yourself with each variable and then indicate your responses on the questionnaire.

- Current Principal's leadership practices (depends on it five competences)
- Major Factors or Challenges Experienced by Principals on their leadership practices,
- Perceptions of respondents on Effectiveness of Principals' leadership styles/ types used,
- Perceptions of respondents on r/ships Effectiveness of Principals' leadership with their gender, education and job experience,
- Strategies adopted for the improvement of students' academic achievement.

1. Thus, how strongly do you agree or disagree that the following *school principal leadership competencies* used as for effective execution on students' academic achievement? Please, answer encircling numbers in table indicate your responses for items with alternative responses. ***Response:*** 1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Not to decide 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

a. Defining and communicating school community with shared vision and goals

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Develop and builds understanding of the specific implications of the school vision and goals	1	2	3	4	5
2	Provides helpful assistance to teachers in setting short term goals	1	2	3	4	5
3	Establishes measurable school goals aligned to the vision and mission that promote high standards for all students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
4	Communicates the school visions and goals to teachers and other stockholders	1	2	3	4	5
5	Use community resources to improve student learning and set high but achievable standards of goals	1	2	3	4	5
6	Facilitates the articulation and realization of a shared vision of continuous school improvement	1	2	3	4	5
7	Ensuring that school the goals are widely known, understood, and visible in the daily life of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Connect the school with community and use targeted school goals when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

b. Lead and managing the curriculum and teaching - learning programs

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Ensure that the classroom objectives are consistent with the stated academic goals of the national academic content standards	1	2	3	4	5
2	Recruits qualified, interested and competent teachers to support achieving goals	1	2	3	4	5
3	Encourage teachers to consider and use new technologies for their teaching	1	2	3	4	5
4	Advocate for high levels of learning for all students, including students with special educational needs.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Participates actively in review, selection and preparation of curricular materials workshops	1	2	3	4	5
6	School principal understands, promote and share relevant research.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Ensures teaching-learning practices are effective for students with special needs.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Monitor & evaluate the quality of teaching and learning programs.	1	2	3	4	5

c. Lead and Manage teachers' capacity development opportunities

N	Practices	Responses				
1	Encourage teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school goals	1	2	3	4	5
2	Plan for professional development around teacher needs and wants	1	2	3	4	5
3	Broadens teachers' knowledge and skills by inviting education experts to give lectures in schools	1	2	3	4	5
4	Supporting teachers in planning and implementing research-based professional development	1	2	3	4	5
5	Recognizes the accomplishments of individual teacher and teaching staff equitably	1	2	3	4	5
6	Plan and develop individualized and team professional development networks to support individuals and team	1	2	3	4	5
7	Schedule in-service training and develop collaboration among teachers	1	2	3	4	5

d. Lead and managing the school development and engages community

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Participate and connect the school with parents and community members in the educational process	1	2	3	4	5
2	Involve parents and community members in improving student learning.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Mobilize, allocate and utilize resource to support teaching- learning	1	2	3	4	5
4	Discuss regularly with students and stakeholders how to improve their academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Establish and maintain safe school security, ensuring the smooth progress of teaching-learning	1	2	3	4	5
6	Distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities	1	2	3	4	5
7	Use community resources successfully for students' academic achievement improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Nurturing learning environment that addresses the physical and mental health needs	1	2	3	4	5
9	Establish the structure of teams and groups who works together on problem solving.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Establish expectations for the use of culturally responsive practices that acknowledge and value diversity.	1	2	3	4	5

e. Allocate resources and manage school operations to ensure a safe and productive learning environment.

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Mobilize, allocate and utilize resources, including technology, to support student and staff learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Understand, uphold and model professional ethics, policies and codes of professional ethics	1	2	3	4	5
3	For academic achievement improvement discuss regularly with PTAs and teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

4	Systematically Establishes evaluation system and assess to ensure students' classroom academic achievement for more improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Treats all students in ways which emphasis success and potential rather than failures and shortcomings	1	2	3	4	5
6	Promote the values and challenges of the diverse school community.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Discuss with the community and stakeholders to mobilize school resources for students' school performance improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Motivate teachers to monitor students' achievement to keep track of improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Provide report to the community and stockholders on effective and efficient use and management of school resources	1	2	3	4	5
10	Working on Development of School Autonomy and academic freedom to ensure the smooth progress of students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Perceptions on leadership style(s)/type(s), gender type, work experience and education used for leadership effectiveness with respect to students' academic achievement. Please encircle your perceptions

a. Leadership Styles or types

No	Leadership styles	Responses				
1	Laissez–faire education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
2	Authoritative/ Autocratic education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
3	Democratic education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
4	Transactional style education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
5	Transformational/ Relational education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
6	Instructional/ Pedagogical education leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
7	Combination (Integration) of Democratic, Transformational and Distributive education leadership style has higher impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5

b. Perceptions on gender type, work experience and education

No	Items	Responses				
1	Gender man performs more than female and they have significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Principal with higher work experience related to secondary school leadership has higher significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Principal who has a post graduate education in management/leadership profession has significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Challenges Experienced on Practices of Education Leadership and Adopted Strategies taken to overcome the problems.

2.1 What your perceptions on challenges of school leadership as leader face when supporting students' academic achievement? How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following factors hider effective execution of leadership functions in the school? *Response: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=I have no Detail 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.*

No	Challenges	Responses				
1	Lack of capacity building training on leadership and management	1	2	3	4	5
2	Lack of the required standard facilities in the school, which enable teacher to perform their tasks & allow students to properly attend their education	1	2	3	4	5
3	Teacher low qualification and their high turnover	1	2	3	4	5
4	Absence of attractive teaching - learning environment in the school which empower and support students in the learning situations.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Lack of school leadership and management policy and guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
6	Lack of sufficient resources (financial, material, facilities) and facilities	1	2	3	4	5
7	High workload of school leaders and shortage of time	1	2	3	4	5
8	Inactive participation of parents in school affairs of their children	1	2	3	4	5
9	Lack of interest of teachers towards teaching profession due to incentives	1	2	3	4	5
10	Poor students' desire and motivation to do well & high dropout rate	1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Please mention some additional challenges that school leaders face during their secondary school leadership in relation to improving students' academic achievement in your secondary school/s? ----------

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2.3 What do you think of the strategies that will help to tackle the above-mentioned challenges for the improvement of students' academic achievement? (you can write in Amaharic or English) ----------

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THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

Annexure G: Focus Group Discussion Schedule for *PTSAs*

Dear Respondent,

This *interview schedule for FGD* is designed to collect data for the study entitled as: the effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia. Therefore, you are selected to be part of this study by purposive sampling. Be honest in giving your responses. Even confidentiality also assured.

This study is supported by the following *five variables* which are related to secondary school of SNRS principal leadership roles and practices, specifically:

- Current Principal's leadership practices (depends on it five competences)
- Major factors or Challenges Experienced by Principals on their leadership practices,
- Perceptions of respondents on Effectiveness of Principals' leadership styles/ types used,
- Perceptions of respondents on Effectiveness of Principals' leadership with their gender, education and job experience,
- Strategies adopted for the improvement of students' academic achievement.

How much time do you devote to the functioning's of your leadership role practices,

E.g. time spent on teacher development activities?

1. As school PTA how do you practicing or sharing, setting directions by defining clear vision and goals to the students, teachers and other stakeholders?

2. From your experience, what proposals can you put forward to the school and district to improve school leadership and management?

3. In your view, describe the relationship between principals' leadership roles and students' academic achievement in setting directions, developing people (teachers), developing school and managing academic programs in your school? Please explain one by one.

4. What are the major factors that affect effectiveness of principals in promoting school improvement and students" academic achievement? Do you agree with existence of these limiting factors listed below? Why?

5, Gaps in School Improvement Program preparation and implementation

Weakness in monitoring and evaluation

Unwise/ineffective use of resources

Low communication and participation

Shortage of standard facilities

Low efforts and commitment

Weak implementation of school structure and procedures

Un-conducive school environment and

If any other…

6. What strategies you suggest as solutions for the problems or practical gaps you discussed above to increase principals school leadership effectiveness which in turn enable to improve school performance and students‟ academic achievement?
7. In your opinion, how do you think about developing students' academic achievement through building the collaborative school culture, such as managing teaching-learning programs, maintaining safe and healthy environment, allocating resources to support school vision and goals?

8. Comment on the following statements:

8.1 the higher the qualifications of the principal, will be the better the results of students' academic achievement.

8.2 there is a degree of compatibility between gender man and work experiences of the principal and students' academic achievement.

8.3 the improvement or declination of students' academic achievement in EHEECE is influenced by the enactment of principal's leadership to the standard.

9. What leadership style(s) do you perceive as the principal used and is/are likely to yield the best students' academic achievement or helps to improve students' academic achievement?

10. What is your proposed model of leadership styles and types appropriate for the SNRS Secondary School Principals based on your school students' academic achievement?

Thank you for participating actively in the focus group discussion!

Annexure H: Questionnaires to be field by Principals, Deputy Principals & Supervisors

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for my doctoral study research entitled *"The effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia",* for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa under the Supervision of Professor J. Nyoni.

As an educational professional, your participation is very valuable and thus, you are kindly requested to complete this survey questionnaire honestly and frankly based on your views and experience. The findings and recommendations will help the government's effort of improving the quality of education.

As a researcher, I assure you that, your response will only be used for this research, and no harm is associated. You are not required to indicate your name and all information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for the aims of the research only and will remain confidential. Your participation in completing the questionnaire is voluntary and you have full right to omit any question or to withdraw at any time.

For any information contact me by cell Phone: 0916582065/ 0911747640 or

E-mail address: 13392123@mylife.unisa.ac.za or millimamog@gmail.com

I thank you in advance for your assistance.

Million Mamo Gonesso (the researcher)

Part I: Demographic Background of Respondents

Instruction: These questions are about your demographic data. In responding to the questions, please write 'X' mark in the space provided and write briefly your opinions for open-ended items.

1. Name of the school _____ Woreda _____ Zone _____

2. Indicate your gender

1. Female	
2. Male	

3. Indicate your current position

1. Principal	
2. Deputy Principal	
3. Supervisor	

4. Indicate your age group

1. Under age 30	
2. 31-40	
3. 41-50	
4. 51-60	
5. 61 and above	

5. Highest Qualifications attained (Please mark one choice)

1. Teacher Diploma (Diploma in teaching)	
2. Bachelor's Degree (BA, BSc, or B.Ed)	
3. Master's Degree (MA, or MSc, or Med)	
4. Doctorate Degree (PhD)	
5. Other (Specify)	

6. How long have you been working in secondary school as a Principal?

1. For less than 5 years	
2. For 5 - 10 years	
3. For 11 - 15 years	
4. For 16 - 20 years	
5. For more than 16 years	

7. Type of School where you are serving

1. Public Ordinary (General) Secondary School	
2.Public Comprehensive School	

8. Indicate your school location

1.Rural	
2.Urban	

Part II: Effectiveness of Leadership on Current School Leadership Practices

Instruction: This part of the questionnaires is structured according to the variables which are related to current school leadership functions effectiveness on students' academic

achievement of SNRS, principal leadership specifically. Please, familiarize yourself with each variable and then indicate your responses on the questionnaire.

- Current Principal's leadership practices (depends on it five competences)
- Major factors or Challenges Experienced by Principals on their leadership practices,
- Perceptions of respondents on Effectiveness of Principals' leadership styles/ types used,
- Perceptions of respondents on Effectiveness of Principals' leadership with their gender, education and job experience,
- Strategies adopted for the improvement of students' academic achievement.

1. How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following *school principal leadership competencies* used as for effective execution on students' academic achievement? Please, answer encircling numbers in table indicate your responses for items with alternative responses. ***Response:*** 1= Strongly Disagree 2= Disagree 3= Not to decide 4= Agree 5= Strongly Agree

a. Defining and communicating school community with shared vision & goals

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Develop and builds understanding of the specific implications of the school vision and goals	1	2	3	4	5
2	Provides helpful assistance to teachers in setting short term goals	1	2	3	4	5
3	Establishes measurable school goals aligned to the vision and mission that promote high standards for all students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
4	Communicates the school visions and goals to teachers and other stockholders	1	2	3	4	5
5	Use community resources to improve student learning and set high but achievable standards of goals	1	2	3	4	5
6	Facilitates the articulation and realization of a shared vision of continuous school improvement	1	2	3	4	5
7	Ensuring that school the goals are widely known, understood, and visible in the daily life of the school.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Connect the school with community and use targeted school goals when making decisions.	1	2	3	4	5

b. Lead and managing the curriculum and teaching - learning programs

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Ensure that the classroom objectives are consistent with the stated academic goals of the national academic content standards	1	2	3	4	5
2	Recruits qualified, interested and competent teachers to support achieving goals	1	2	3	4	5
3	Encourage teachers to consider and use new technologies for their teaching	1	2	3	4	5
4	Advocate for high levels of learning for all students, including students with special educational needs.	1	2	3	4	5

5	Participates actively in review, selection and preparation of curricular materials workshops	1	2	3	4	5
6	The school principal understands, promote and share relevant research.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Ensures teaching-learning practices are effective for students with special needs.	1	2	3	4	5

c. Lead and Manage teachers' capacity development opportunities

N	Practices	Responses				
1	Encourage teachers to attend professional development activities that are aligned to school goals	1	2	3	4	5
2	Plan for professional development around teacher needs and wants	1	2	3	4	5
3	Broadens teachers' knowledge and skills by inviting education experts to give lectures in schools	1	2	3	4	5
4	Supporting teachers in planning and implementing research-based professional development	1	2	3	4	5
5	Recognizes the accomplishments of individual teacher and teaching staff equitably	1	2	3	4	5
6	Plan and develop individualized and team professional development networks to support individuals and team	1	2	3	4	5
7	Schedule in-service training and develop collaboration among teachers	1	2	3	4	5

d. Lead and managing the school development and engages community

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Participate and connect the school with parents and community members in the educational process	1	2	3	4	5
2	Involve parents and community members in improving student learning.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Mobilize, allocate and utilize resource to support teaching- learning	1	2	3	4	5
4	Discuss regularly with students and stakeholders how to improve their academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Establish and maintain safe school security, ensuring the smooth progress of teaching-learning	1	2	3	4	5
6	Distribute resources in ways that are closely aligned with the school's improvement priorities	1	2	3	4	5
7	Use community resources successfully for students' academic achievement improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Nurturing learning environment that addresses the physical and mental health needs	1	2	3	4	5
9	Establish the structure of teams and groups who works together on problem solving.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Establish expectations for the use of culturally responsive practices that acknowledge and value diversity.	1	2	3	4	5

e. Allocate resources and manage school operations in order to ensure a safe and productive learning environment.

No	Practices	Responses				
1	Mobilize, allocate and utilize resources, including technology, to support student and staff learning. *(Allocate Resources)*	1	2	3	4	5

2	Understand, uphold and model professional ethics, policies and codes of professional ethics.	1	2	3	4	5
3	For academic achievement improvement discuss regularly with PTAs and teachers. *(Communicate)*	1	2	3	4	5
4	Systematically Establishes evaluation system and assess to ensure students' classroom academic achievement for more improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Treats all students in ways which emphasis success and potential rather than failures and shortcomings	1	2	3	4	5
6	Promote the values and challenges of the diverse school community. *(Trust Building)*	1	2	3	4	5
7	Discuss with the community and stakeholders to mobilize school resources for students' school performance improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Motivate teachers to monitor students' achievement to keep track of improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Provide report to the community and stockholders on effective and efficient use and management of school resources.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Working on Development of School Autonomy and academic freedom to ensure the smooth progress of students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Major Challenges/Factors Experienced on Practices of School Principal Leadership

2.1 What are your perceptions on challenges of school leadership as leader face when supporting students' academic achievement? How strongly do you agree or disagree that the following factors hider effective execution of leadership functions in the school? *Response: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=I have no Detail 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.*

No	Challenges	Responses				
1	Lack of capacity building training on leadership and management	1	2	3	4	5
2	Lack of the required standard facilities in the school, which enable teacher to perform their tasks & allow students to properly attend their education	1	2	3	4	5
3	Teachers low qualification and their high turnover	1	2	3	4	5
4	Absence of attractive teaching - learning environment in the school which empower and support students in the learning situations.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Lack of school leadership and management policy and guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
6	Lack of sufficient resources (human resource, financial, material, facilities) and facilities	1	2	3	4	5
7	High workload of school leaders and shortage of time	1	2	3	4	5
8	Inactive participation of parents in school affairs of their children	1	2	3	4	5
9	Lack of interest of teachers towards teaching profession due to incentives	1	2	3	4	5
10	Poor students' desire and motivation to do well & high dropout rate	1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Please mention some additional challenges that school leaders face during their secondary school leadership in relation to improving students' academic achievement in your secondary school/s? ----------

2.3 What do you think of the strategies that will help to tackle the above-mentioned challenges for the improvement of students' academic achievement? (you can write in Amaharic or English) ----------

3. Perceptions on leadership style(s)/type(s), gender type, work experience and education used for leadership effectiveness with respect to students' academic achievement. Please encircle your perceptions

3.1 Leadership Styles or types

No	Leadership styles	Responses				
1	**Laissez–faire education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
2	**Authoritative/ Autocratic education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
3	**Democratic education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
4	**Transactional style education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
5	**Transformational/ Relational education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
6	**Instructional/ Pedagogical education** leadership style has positive impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5
7	**Combination (Integration)** of Democratic, Transformational and Distributive education leadership style has higher impact on students' academic achievement	1	2	3	4	5

3.2 Perceptions on gender type, work experience and education

No	Items	Responses				
1	Gender man performs more than female and he has significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Principal with higher work experience related to secondary school leadership has higher significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Principal who has a post graduate education in management/leadership profession has significant impact on students' academic achievement.	1	2	3	4	5

Part - III: STUDENTS' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT/RESULTS RECORDS

NB: T*o be field by Academic Deputy Principal of the schools)*

Instruction: For questions (1-2) you required to consult school records which may require you to secure the assistance of another staff member. It is important that you get the correct records, so that the information provided reflects the circumstances in your school as accurately as possible.

i. Please, write for each year the number of students who enrolled for grade 12 EHEECE.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
No. (Students)					

2. Indicate for each year, the number of students who scored a pass mark (≥50%) in grade 12 students' model EHEECE and EHEECE result.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Model					
EHEECE					

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

Annexure I: A Letter Requesting Permission to Conduct Research

Re: Request for permission to conduct research at Secondary Schools of Sidama National Regional State Education Bureau

Title of the title of your research: The effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia.

Date: 27/03/2024

Name of the person to who you address the request: Mr. Million Yosa Sambe
Department of the person: Deputy, Education Bureau and Head for Teachers Development Affairs SNRS, Ethiopia.

Contact details of the person: Tele (Mobile): +251 (0) 913 323 9289 (928 87 8187)
E-mail address: millionyosa@gmail.com

Dear Mr. Million Yosa Sambe

I, Million Mamo Gonesso am doing research under supervision of Nyoni Jabulani a Professor in the Department of educational leadership and management, towards a Doctor of Philosophy of Education at the University of South Africa. I am to request you to have permission letter and to do this research in secondary schools of the region and let the principals to be informed and voluntarily to participate free of fee cost from the researcher, since the research is thesis towards a PhD.

The aim of the study is to investigate Variables related to the effectiveness of secondary schools principal leadership and its contribution on students' academic achievement SNRS, Ethiopia.

Your region secondary schools have been selected because it has direct authority to give permission and direct order to secondary schools of the region and to those selected secondary school to conduct the research.

The study will entail two phases during which I will interact with principals, deputy principals, unit leaders and HODs of secondary schools. The first phase will involve distributing questionnaires to all the principals, deputy principals, unit leaders and HODs of sample selected secondary schools in the region. The second phase will involve structured interviews with fifteen principals and for FGDs six groups of principals with five in a group will be sampled in purposive simple random sampling method from sampled schools which start grade 12 national examinations for their students from 2019 to 2023.

The benefits of this study are to make policy for improvement of secondary schools leadership effectiveness, and your employing authority, education bureau to improve students' academic performance and helps to improve education quality by showing the new paradigm direction in secondary schools leadership.

This study has no foreseeable potential risks associated.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. Feedback procedure will entail, after the completion of the study, an electronic summary of the findings of the research will be made available to you on request.

Yours sincerely



Million Mamo Gonesso (Researcher)

Contact address: Telephone: 0916582065; email: 13392123@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Hawassa College of Health Sciences,
P.O.Box 84
Hawassa, Ethiopia

Annexure J: Participant Information Sheet (letter for consent/ assent)

Date: 27/03/2024

Title: The effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of SNRS, Ethiopia.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Million Mamo Gonesso and I am doing research under the supervision of Nyoni Jabulani, a professor in the department of educational leadership and management towards a Doctor of Philosophy of Education (PhD in education management) at the University of South Africa. We have funding from bursary for this research study. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled the effectiveness of secondary schools principal leadership on students' academic achievement SNRS, Ethiopia.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could help to investigate the variables related to the effectiveness of schools principal leadership and their contribution to the achievement of students in the ESLCE. This study is prompted due to the decline in EHEECE results in SNRS, Ethiopia governmental secondary schools.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you as an individual or as a group are professionally an appropriate representative for my study area populations and your genuine information will help to solve the problem of this research set by the researcher. I obtained your contact details by requesting permission official written letter, after having the ethical clearance approval from the university of South Africa to do practical research in Sidama national regional state on 74 simple randomly selected secondary schools, 61 secondary schools principals, 97 HODs, 294 senior teachers and school unit leaders will participate accordingly, and for this as a researcher I obtained your contact from the regional education bureau (for school principals) and from your school principal (HODs, senior teachers and unit leaders).

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

This is to describe the participant's actual role in the study.

The study includes questionnaires, videotaping during those who will participant for the focus groups discussion and semi-structured interviews, and school observation checklist. For each participating one there is a sort of questions will be asked and they are attached as appendices in this document. The most expected duration of time for participation needed to complete specific research activities for questionnaires is 30 minutes, focus groups or interviews 45 minutes and 30 minutes for school observation.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign

a written consent/ assent. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. But you are kindly requested to participate thoroughly since my research involves the submission of non-identifiable material such as questionnaires, and also I want to inform you that it will not be possible to withdraw once you have submitted the questionnaire.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefits of this study are it will help by showing the gaps on effectiveness of the principal's instructional leadership and helps to make policy for improvement of instructional leadership effectiveness, and to set which type of instructional leadership is most appropriate for schools and benefits the education bureau to improve students' academic performance and helps to improve education quality by showing the new paradigm direction in secondary schools leadership, and also it will give recommendations for further study at large.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There will no reasonably foreseeable risks of harm or side-effects to the potential participants [outlining likely incidence and severity].

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes, for the sake of your confidentiality, you have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research OR Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give (this measure refers to anonymity). Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

If relevant, the transcriber might have access to the data and the (I) researcher will make agreement by signing with this individual to maintain the confidentiality agreement. And this confidentiality agreement should be submitted to the Research Ethics Review Committee for consideration. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

And also I want to inform you that your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Your privacy will be protected in any publication of the information. (E.g. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but your identity as participants will not be identifiable in such a report). But, for who you will participants in focus groups discussions, please keep in mind that it is sometimes impossible to make an absolute guarantee of confidentiality or anonymity. While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard or soft copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in Hawassa College of health sciences library institutional repository data base system, where I am working in, for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. If necessary, the information will be destroyed according to the rules of unisa's CEDU research ethics. (E.g. hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme).

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in this research and also no cost you will incurred except your time.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the CEDU RESEARCH ETHICS, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact the researcher Million Mamo Gonesso on +251(0)916582065 or email 13392123@mylife.unisa.ac.za website www.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for December, 2024. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact by phone number +251(0) 916582065 or Fax 0462207884 or email 13392123@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor prof. Jablani Nyoni by his phone number 0124294474 or email: **nyoni@unisa.ac.za**.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Million Mamo Gonesso, (Researcher)

Annexure K: Research Participants' Consent Form

I understand the overview given to me on the study ***"The effectiveness of school principal leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of Sidama National Regional State, Ethiopia."***

It is my understanding that:
The study focuses on effectiveness of school leadership on students' academic achievement in secondary schools of Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. My identity will remain confidential and my name or the name of my institution will not be used in the study or in reporting its findings at any point.

The purpose of this study is not to judge me on the issue or type of responses I give during the study.

I hold the right to decline to answer any question;
I hold the right to withdraw from the study at any point in time;
I will be audio recorded when I am interviewed.
I express willingness to participate in the study by signing this form.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Annexure L: Interview & Focus Group Consent/Assent and Confidentiality Agreement

I _____ grant consent/assent that the information I share during the focus group may be used by **Million Mamo Gonesso** for research purposes.

I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant consent/assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected.

I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the video during interview and FGDs.

Participant's Name (Please print): _____
Participant Signature: _____
Date: _____

Researcher's Name: **Million Mamo Gonesso**

Signature: _____ Date: 27/03/2024

Annexure M: Request for Permission to Secondary School Principal

Request for permission to conduct research at your secondary school of _____ SNRS, Ethiopia.

Name of the Secondary School Principal _____ (person's title and name),
Principal _____ Secondary School
Tel _____
Email address _____

Dear _____ (person's title and name), I, Million Mamo Gonesso am doing research under supervision of Professor J. Nyoni, a Professor in the Department of educational management and leadership towards a Doctor of Degree of (PhD) in Education Management at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled as the effectiveness of secondary schools principal leadership on students' academic achievement SNRS, Ethiopia.

As an educational professional, your participation is very valuable and thus, you are kindly requested to complete this survey questionnaire honestly and frankly based on your views and experience. The findings and recommendations will help the government's effort of improving the quality of education.

As a researcher, I assure you that, your response will only be used for this research and no harm is associated. You are not required to indicate your name and all information obtained from this questionnaire will be used for the aims of the research only and will remain confidential. Your participation in completing the questionnaire is voluntary and you have full right to omit any question or to withdraw at any time.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Yours sincerely



Million Mamo Gonesso (the researcher) Date: 27/03/2024

Annexure N: The Participants Response Consent/Assent Letter (Return Slip)

I _____ , confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I fully acknowledge that this information should be used solely for PhD studies and not for commercial purposes and thereby give consent to the researcher to use this information.

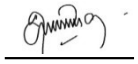
I agree to the recording of the video during interview, focus group discussion and to fill and return the questionnaire. I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Sur Name (Please Print)_____

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) **Mr. Million Mamo Gonesso**



Researcher's signature

27/03/2024

Date