The Status of the Implementation of School Improvement Program in Primary Schools of Ilu Aba Bora Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract

School improvement program is one of the programs that are designed by Ministry of Education to ensure quality of education. The purpose of this study was to assess the implementation of school improvement program in primary schools of Ilu Aba Bora Zone. To conduct this study a descriptive survey method was employed. Cluster sampling, simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques were used to select sample schools and respondents. Accordingly, 10 primary schools, 35% of sample school teachers, school principals, supervisors, parent teacher association, school improvement committee and students' councils and woreda education office experts of the respective schools were selected as samples. Questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, observation, and document analysis were the data collection tools employed. Having pilot tested the instruments data were collected from teachers, principals and supervisors through questionnaire. Data from woreda education office experts were obtained through interview, whereas it was through focus group discussion from members of parent teacher associations, school improvement committees and students' council. Percentage, individual group mean, weighted mean, and One-way ANOVA were employed as statistical tools to analyze data. The findings of this study revealed that the training arranged for teachers, students and parents was inadequate. As a result, they have no adequate awareness on the purposes, objectives, and the implementation process of the program. The involvement of students and parents in planning for school improvement and implementation of the plan was low, whereas it was moderate for teachers. Lack of informed training, lack of awareness, low involvement of stakeholders, limitation of support from local educational authorities, and shortage of materials and financial resources were the major factors that hampered the implementation of the program. Thus, to improve the status of the implementation of the program: professionals who are experienced and qualified in the required field of study should be selected and assigned as leaders at different educational leadership positions; adequate training should be arranged for all stakeholders; and stakeholders should be encouraged and given equal opportunity to involve in the program implementation.

Key Words

School Improvement, Quality Education, Community Participation

1. Introduction

Education is universally recognized as a form of investment in human capital, which yields economic, social, political and cultural benefits (Woodhall, 1992). Moreover, it contributes to a country's future progress by increasing the productive capacity of its people. In this respect, it is believed to have the capacity to facilitate quality of life and provides more opportunities for individuals in the society and for the society as a whole (Shokla and Kaul, 1998:18). Education enables individuals and society to make all-rounded participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, ability, skills and attitudes. This aim of education can be attained both at individual and country level if the education system and its implementation provide pupil education of the required quality.

Ethiopia faced many economical, historical, and cultural impediments that have limited the quality of education for many years. Hence, it was necessary to respond to the consecutively accumulated educational problems at different levels of education related to educational relevance and quality. As a response to the problems, the Ethiopian government had declared the Education and Training Policy to replace the unrelated and copied educational systems, and curriculum that didn't address the need and problems of the society (MOE, 2002). In addition, to identify the shortcomings of the past education system's weaknesses, the 1994 Education and Training Policy gave attention to equity and access of education, restructuring the education system, changing the curriculum to increase relevance of education to the society's problems, making teachers' training relevant, and improving education management so as to improve the quality of education (TGE, 1994). Furthermore, to effectively implement

the policy, Ministry of Education (MOE) continued to develop different strategies and programs. Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs), which have been launched as of 1997 are among the programs issued by MOE. The program intended to provide a sector wide policy implementation framework for the development of education (MOE, 1997).

However the access of education was improved through the implementation of the policy, the quality of education was not improved well (MOE, 2005). Besides the need to increase access of education, the issue of improving quality of education became the focus of the Ethiopian government and the MOE in the field of education. To bring efficient access to quality education, the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP) was introduced in 2007 in the country. The educational package consists of sub-programs; namely; Curriculum Improvement Program; Teachers' Development Program; Education Leadership Performance and Organization Improvement Program; School Improvement Program; Civic and Ethical Education Program; and Information and Communication Technology Expansion Program (MOE, 2007).

In current climate, it is unreasonable for schools to decide to ignore approaches that bring change in schools. These days, school improvement is more recognized as an important process and becomes the dominant approach to educational change which helps to enhance quality of students' learning and strengthen school's capacity for change (Hopkins, 2002:55). School improvement is about strategies for improving the school's capacity for providing quality education by focusing on pupils' learning. In this regard, Reynolds (2010:146) describes school improvement as "a set of processes, managed from within the school, targeted both at pupil

achievement and the school's ability to manage change." School improvement is largely concerned with changing the internal practices of the schools by influencing how people work together by changing the school culture and that cultural change is achieved through changing the internal conditions within the school.

According to MOE (2007), the objectives of this program are to: improve the capacity of schools to prioritize needs and develop the SIP; enhance community participation in resource utilization decisions and resource generation; and improve the learning environment by providing sufficient resources to schools. In Ethiopia, as indicated in the document of SIP, the MOE addressed four major domains to improve schools. The domains are: Teaching and Learning; Learning Environment; Community Participation; and Leadership and Management.

School improvement can be described as an approach to educational change rested on a number of assumptions, among which is a key focus on the internal conditions of a school (Hopkins, 2005:86). This include not only the teaching and learning activities of the schools, but also its organizational norms, professional learning system, knowledge transform process, leadership arrangements and its receptiveness to external learning. Internal conditions for successful improvement include: school wide emphasis on teaching and learning; commitment to staff development and training team work with staff groups (collaborative planning, effective communication) and with stakeholders (involvement of teachers, pupils, parents) in decision making; and time for reflection and research (Ainscow et al., 1994 cited in Reynolds, 2010:147).

Identifying the problems of the quality of education can't solve the problem by itself, unless competent strategies and meaningful implementation have not followed. The program was designed by MOE with different guiding manuals and then disseminated to regions, zones and schools for implementation. Though SIP is designed and suggested for schools to be implemented in line with the GEQIP, school grant was allocated to assist the implementation of the program, different physical indicators and students academic achievement documents indicated that the schools in the study area did not improved as expected and indicated in the SIP guidelines. Hence, conducting research on SIP implementation in schools of the country in general and in primary schools of the study area in particular is crucial to identify how the program is going on. Moreover, the study is aimed at identifying strategies that could contribute for the effective implementation of the program. This can be possible by indicating the major factors that hampered the implementation of SIP. It is believed that the findings of the study will provide the stakeholders relevant information to restore efforts to enhance community participation so as to create conducive and better learning environment that can ensure quality education in the schools.

II. Materials and Methods

Research Design

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Using mixed research method could neutralize or cancel the biases of any single method, and it is used as a means for seeking convergence and integrating qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2009:14). Descriptive survey design was employed on the ground that it was found to be helpful to obtain reliable and relevant information from a variety of groups on the actual implementation of the issue under investigation. Best and Kahan

(2003) noted that descriptive research design helps to describe and interpret the current condition. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on effects that are evident, or trends that are developing.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The target populations of this study were primary school teachers, students, principals, supervisors, Parent- Teacher associations (PTAs) and Woreda education office experts (WEOEs) in Ilu Aba Bora Zone of Oromia regional state. Among 22 woredas, 5 woredas were selected by cluster sampling technique. Two schools from each woreda, a total of 10 schools were selected by simple random sampling technique.

Regarding the respondents, in order to give proportional and equal chance for all teachers, stratified random sampling technique was used. Among 211 male teachers and 120 female teachers with a total of 331 teachers, 62 male and 54 female, a total of 116 teachers were included in the study. There is no opportunity to ignore the response of principals, supervisors, Woreda Education Office experts, parents, school improvement committees (SICs), and students to come up with valid findings. Hence, principals and supervisors were selected by availability sampling method. WEOEs, PTAs, SICs, and Students' Councils' (SCs) were selected by purposive sampling technique because of their position and responsibilities and it was expected that they are partners either in the actual implementation or as facilitators and evaluators of the implementation of the program.

In general, 116 teachers, 10 principals, 15 vice principals, 20 supervisors, 10 WEOEs, 64 members of SICs, 64 members of PTAs, 48 members of SCs, a total of 339 respondents were included in the study.

Instruments for Data Collection

In order to obtain ample information from respondents and the schools environment, both types of data are gathered by using appropriate data collection tools. The questionnaires developed and administered to the three groups of respondents (school principals and vice principals, supervisors, and teachers) included both close ended items and open ended items. Semi structured interview questions were used to collect data so as to get pertinent information from Woreda Education Offices experts of their respected sample schools to assure the comparability of the data obtained from questionnaires.

Focus group discussion (FGD) guided by semi-structured questions was designed to seek in-depth information on the implementation of SIP from SICs, PTAs, and Student Councils of the schools. The purpose of document analysis in this study was to assess availability of plan and other necessary documents related to SIP. Consequently, documents like guiding manual of SIP, school improvement plan and reports, and documents settled by SIC were reviewed. Observation was the other data gathering tool employed in this study to check the availability of different in-school facilities and teaching and learning materials in the schools, and to check the extent to which the school environment is a better place for students and students' learning.

Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed by using SPSS-17 to analyze close ended quantitative data collected through questionnaires. From the descriptive statistic, percentage and frequency counts were used to analyze the personal characteristics

of the respondents and the availability of the teaching and learning materials and in-school facilities. Measure of central tendencies such as mean, standard deviation, and weighted mean scores were used to measure and compare the opinions of respondent groups. One-way ANOVA and Post hoc multiple comparison test are the other statistical tools that were used to check the existence of significant differences in perceptions among the three occupational groups (teachers, principals and supervisors) of respondents on the issue under investigation.

Qualitative data analysis method was also employed as a supplementary data analysis technique for triangulation and justification purpose. As a result, the data collected through FGD, interview, open-ended questions and document review were narrated under quantitative data (items) related to it. Regarding the data obtained through observation, some of the items were analyzed quantitatively under the data collected through questionnaire and some of them were analyzed independently by using percentage.

III. Result and Discussion

Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Qualification and Work Experience

No	Variable	Category	T		P		S		WEOH	
			No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Academic qualification	Diploma	89	78.76	-	-	-	-	3	37.50
		BA/BED/BSC	24	21.24	23	100	16	100	5	62.5
		Total	113	100	23	100	16	100	8	100
2	Work experience (in years)	< 3	16	14.16	14	60.87	10	62.50	7	87.50
		4-7	29	25.66	8	34.78	6	37.50	1	12.50
		8-12	30	26.55	4	4.35	-	-	-	-
		>12	38	33.63	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Total	113	100	23	100	16	100	8	100

Key: T= Teacher; P=Principal; S=supervisor

Qualification and work experience of teachers, principals, supervisors and WEOEs are the important factors to create favorable conditions for implementation of SIP. Accordingly, majority of WEOEs, principals, supervisors and few teachers were first degree holders. This implies that the minimum requirement to be primary school principal and supervisor is almost satisfied in the schools. Regarding work experience of respondents, majority of supervisors and WEOEs have served less than 4 years as a school supervisor. This indicate that there was high turnover of principals, supervisors and WEOEs which might limit the effort they had to guide and coordinate the implementation of the program.

Concerning qualification of principals, supervisors and WEOEs, majority of principals, supervisors and WEOEs were qualified with unrelated field of study to educational leadership/management. Only a small number of principal, supervisor were qualified in Educational Planning and Management/Educational Leadership. This point out that majority of educational leadership positions such as school principal, supervision and WEOE were occupied by those who were not qualified for the position and have not acquired educational leadership skills from the recognized institutions.

Awareness of Stakeholders on School Improvement Program

Awareness creation in SIP implementation is the process of informing people to elevate the level of understanding on the objectives of the program, with the intention of influencing stakeholders' attitudes towards the achievement of implementing the program. Accordingly, the adequacy of the training provided for teachers was medium; however, it was inadequate for students and parents. Thus, one can conclude that the awareness creation

so far done in the schools of the study area was not adequate and was not in a place to adequately aware them the objective of SIP. Consequently, the extent to which students and parents and local community are aware of their responsibilities in the program implementation was low. On the other hand, majority of the school principals have adequate awareness on the program planning and implementation processes where as teachers moderately recognize the objective of the program and its implementation process. The critical analysis of the data show that, though principals and teachers have relatively better awareness than students and parents, it doesn't mean that all principals and teachers have adequate awareness on the program.

Moreover, the data from interview, and the FGDs held with PTAs, SICs and SCs maintained that the training given for teachers, students and parents were not adequate. As a result they have no sufficient understanding on the objectives of the program and their responsibilities in the implementation processes. Members of all SICs reported that they had not given any additional training as a coordinator and facilitator of the program implementation processes. Interview with WEOEs reveal that some of them have no in-depth understanding on the program and what was done in the schools in light of SIP. This may be due to inadequacy of informed training they received or resulted from the high turnover of WEOEs. The above data disclose that there was a gap in arranging and providing trainings for stakeholders. This could be among the factors that limited the involvement of stakeholders in implementation of the program in the schools under investigation.

The Involvement of Stakeholders in Planning for School Improvement

The extent to which school vision was articulated and school leaders were engaged in coordinating stakeholders in planning for school improvement was not to the expected level. The data clearly depict that the school leaders moderately discharged their responsibilities in identifying school goals and in guiding, coordinating and managing efforts in planning for school improvement. Collaborative planning gives chance for every stakeholder to contribute for the effective implementation of the program. However, the involvement of students and parents in planning for their particular school improvement was poor whereas the involvement of teachers was moderate.

Stakeholders' involvement in self-evaluation for scheming 3-years plan was better than their involvement in designing for 1-year plan, but in both cases their involvement was below the recognized level. Hence, it is possible to conclude that in the schools, self-evaluation was conducted and school improvement plans were designed by school leaders and SIC with the involvement of limited number of individuals or groups of individuals. This was the other shortcoming observed that might affected the involvement of stakeholders in the realization and implementation of the plan. The Involvement of Stakeholders in the Implementation of SIP Regarding the responsibility of teachers in achieving the objectives of the program, teachers were actively engaged in teaching and learning in light of the program objectives. However, respondents have shown their disagreement on the active involvement of parents and local community in creating conducive school environment. The findings of the study on the issues revealed that teachers exercised well their responsibility in improving students' achievements. However, parents didn't demonstrate their contribution in the implementation of the program. Similarly, school leaders were not coordinated, evaluated and monitored the program implementation as expected of them.

Table 2: Responses on the Involvement of Stakeholders in the Implementation of SIP

No	Items	Respondents			WM	One-Way ANOVA	
		T(113) M	P (23) M	S (16) M		F-Value	Sig
1	The school leaders frequently evaluated and discussed with stakeholders on the program implementation outcomes	2.95	3.35	3.00	3.01	1.655	.195
2	The SIC have contributed a lot in coordinating, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the SIP	2.96	3.13	2.87	2.98	.297	.743
3	Teachers actively engage in teaching and learning process in light of the objectives of SIP	3.79	3.96	4.00	3.82	.514	.599
4	Parents together with local community are actively involved in creating conducive school environment	2.34	2.48	2.75	2.38	.897	.410
5	There is a strong work team among stakeholders to implement the SIP	2.43	2.61	2.75	2.48	.938	.394
6	Stakeholders frequently discuss on students' achievement and teaching and learning progress	3.26	3.04	2.75	3.19	1.445	.239
7	The principals major task is to improve learning conditions and learning outcome	3.65	3.91	3.62	3.69	1.178	.311
8	Teachers regularly discuss with each others on the nature, selection, and use of instructional strategies to provide quality teaching for pupils	3.44	3.48	3.37	3.44	2.011	.956
9	WEO and ZEO are given professional supports frequently to the school so as to encourage implementation of the SIP	2.28	2.61	2.75	2.36	.045	.879
10	The school supervisor contributes a lot in facilitating the implementation of the SIP	2.41	2.52	2.37	2.43	.129	.138

Key: T = Teacher; P = Principal; S=supervisor, M = mean; WM = weighted mean; SD = standard deviation, WM $\leq$ 2.50 = disagree, 2.50 < WM $\leq$ 3.50 = moderately agree, WM > 3.50 = agree (strongly agree)

The strength of the work team established among stakeholders to implement SIP was weak. Hence, the absence of work team among stakeholders might be one of the causes of the low implementation of SIP. The discussions held by stakeholders on teaching and learning progress and the extent to which teachers were discussing on the nature of teaching strategies might have positively influenced the observed slight improvement of students' achievement. Moreover, the data clearly show that the commitment principals demonstrated in improving learning conditions and learning outcome was in a good position, but local education authorities didn't demonstrate their part in improving the schools as indicated in SIP documents and other related literatures.

Availability of Educational Materials and Facilities

A lively and effective teaching program in a school depends on a well organized library. However, the data from observations portray that reference materials were inadequately available both in kind and in number. This implies that there was shortage of reference books, and libraries were not organized as it could help students to carry out different learning tasks and satisfy their interest. The data from FGDs conducted with SCs also revealed that the availability of library (in schools where the observations

identified as there exist) was nominal; as a result students were not provided adequate service from the libraries.

Concerning availability of pedagogical centers and instructional aids, observations disclosed that in the schools there were pedagogical centers with inadequate and poor quality (made of graph papers) of instructional materials. Among these, the pedagogical center of one sample school gave dual purpose; serve as pedagogical center and staff room. Using effective instructional materials could enhance the retention of what was learned and the active participation of students in teaching and learning processes. However, there was shortage of instructional materials in the schools under investigation. This might negatively affected the academic achievement of students which is expected of the implementation of SIP.

The Implementation of SIP with Respect to School Domains

Teaching and learning process is the heart of education. It is the most powerful instrument of education to bring about desired changes in students. Data show that teachers were engaged in teaching and learning activities so that they can improve students' academic achievement, but the effort they exerted to evaluate curriculum materials was not on a good position. Teachers' engagement observed in using student centered approaches and conducting action research was promising. This doesn't mean that there was no gap in implementing active learning methods during instructions and conducting action research to reduce academic problems.

Creating a safe and welcoming school is a fundamental issue that all schools should take into account in an effort to successfully educating the students. A safe learning environment is focused on academic achievement, maintaining high standards, fostering positive relationships between staff and students, and encouraging parental and community involvement. The learning environment domain of SIP was moderately implemented in the schools.

In any organization including primary schools, effective management is considered as a prerequisite for successful accomplishment of any program and the success of the program is associated with school leadership practices. However, the school finances including school grant were moderately managed so that it could support teaching and learning activities. Thus, the level of the implementation of leadership and management domain was encouraging.

Community participation in schooling is considered as an integral part of recent reforms and a way to increase quality of education. However in the schools of the study area, the involvement of parents and local community in decision making, students' learning, fund raising activities, and discussion held with teachers and school leaders on students' achievement and discipline was low.

In general, the extent to which teaching and learning domain was implemented was in a better position than the others. However, the problem of community participation was not solved. This implies that the school leaders undermined the involvement of parents and local community in improving the schools. On the other hand, learning environment domain and leadership and management domain were moderately implemented and they were on the way to bring desirable change in the schools.

Factors that Hindered the Implementation of SIP

Table 3: Responses on Factors Impeding the Implementation of SIP

No	Items	Respondents			WM	One-Way ANOVA	
		T(113) M	P (23) M	S (16) M		F-Value	Sig
1	Lack of awareness about the SIP among the school community	3.84	3.52	3.87	3.79	.969	.382
2	Shortage of material and financial resources	3.78	3.95	3.87	3.82	.211	.810
3	Absence of collaboration among stakeholders	2.96	2.74	2.87	2.92	.456	.638
4	Absence of participatory self evaluation at the end of each academic year	2.96	2.95	2.87	2.96	.023	.978
5	Lack of follow up and supervision on the implementation of SIP	3.49	3.17	3.25	3.43	1.052	.352
6	High turnover of principals	3.36	3.25	3.25	3.37	.138	.871
7	Teachers resistance to the program	3.01	2.95	3.00	3.00	.022	.978
8	Inability of the school leaders to coordinate efforts for the program implementation	3.44	3.35	3.25	3.41	.152	.859
9	The limitations of professional support from WEO and ZEO	3.85	3.65	3.75	3.79	.257	.774
10	Lack of informed training for stakeholders	3.73	3.43	4.50	3.69	.805	.449
11	Low stakeholders involvement in the program implementation	3.82	3.56	3.87	3.88	.039	.234

Key: M = mean, WM=weighted mean; WM$\leq$ 3.00= minor cause (factor), 3.00 < WM $\leq$ 3.50 = moderate cause (factor), WM>3.50=

major cause (factor)

Lack of awareness of school community on the program highly affected the implementation of the SIP. Similarly, shortage of materials and financial resources, lack of professional supports from local educational authorities, lack of informed training, and the low level of stakeholders' involvement were highly affected the implementation of SIP. Hence, it is possible to infer that these factors were the major causes for the low implementation of the program. On the other hand, absence of collaboration among stakeholders and lack of participatory school self-assessment are among the minor causes of the low implementation of the program. Similarly, teachers' resistance to the program implementation is among the least factor in affecting the implementation of the program in their school.

Lack of follow up and supervision, high turnover of principals and inability of the school leaders to manage, coordinate and use efforts for the program implementation were moderately affected the effective implementation of the program.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

Shortage of informed training was among the major factors that limited the involvement of stakeholders in the planning and implementation processes of SIP. Consequently, stakeholders have not acquired adequate awareness on the purposes of school improvement program and their responsibilities in implementing processes of the program. Data revealed that local educational managers didn't demonstrate their responsibility in supervising, evaluating and monitoring the implementation of the program as expected of them. The human and financial resources were not arranged as it could effectively and efficiently improve the schools.

In the absence of educational leaders who are experienced and qualified in the required field of study, it is difficult to expect effective and efficient management in the implementation of the program. Thus, inability of the school principals and local level educational leaders to manage the implementation of SIP affected the effective implementation of the program.

The schools under investigation were tried to engage in managing teaching and learning activities to improve students' academic achievement. However, they had not exerted much effort to improve school environment, and community participation as it could facilitate the implementation of the program; implying that the schools did not give equal emphasis for the school domains. Lack of awareness and informed training, low involvement of stakeholders, limitation of professional support from local educational authorities, and shortage of materials and financial resources were the serious problems that impeded the effective implementation of the program.

It is advisable to arrange more informed training for stakeholders so as to help them adequately recognize their responsibilities and effectively manage the implementation of SIP. It is expected of local educational leaders to coordinate and support primary schools by working closely with schools and frequently supervise, monitor and giving valuable professional support for schools to improve quality of education through implementation of the program. Moreover, it is valuable to create accessible network and facilitate communication that help the school strongly fastened to the community. Revising the existing criteria to assign those who are experienced & trained in the required field of study (Educational leadership) as school principal and supervisor is crucial.

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