The Status of School Learning Environment in Public Secondary Schools of Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative Zones in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The study on which this paper reports was sought to identify status that were encountered in the School Learning Environment in Public Secondary Schools of Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones in Ethiopia. A mixed-methods approach with high priority on quantitative data and less priority on qualitative data was used. Data were collected from 12 secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. In total, 363 participants were selected for the study through the use of random and purposeful sampling. Participants comprised of school principals, education experts, school supervisors, members from the Parent–Teacher Association and members of the learner council. The findings indicated that with regards to the quantitative data analysis, the performances of the school improvement programme aggregate of the four domains summary of the mean values and standard deviations 287 (mean = 2.7697; SD = 0.70219) showed that the indicators of practices among the school learning environment indicators were low in performance. The qualitative results as well confirmed the quantitative results. In this case, the mean value was above average and the standard deviation value was more tightly clustered around the mean. This means that the results were concurrent of each other and thus reliable. The findings revealed that, even though secondary schools put a lot of effort towards averting the challenges in school to improve learning environment in the schools, it could hardly bear fruit due to insufficient supplies of inputs and processes. This resulted in the learning environment indicators performances lagging behind the set goals and targets. Thus, in the study it was noted that the school learning environment is labelled unsuccessful due to the absence of well-built strategy directions, absences of well equipped libraries and science laboratories that benefits both teachers and students, students' disciplinary problem, the school compounds were not attractive, lack of contented classroom which support active learning rules and regulations in secondary schools to make schools attractive for learning. In addition, there are no clear procedures to address safety issues in the schools and the absence of essential facilities lead to poor performance. Thus, the study acclaims the provision of facilities like internet services, well equipped laboratories, libraries, comfortable classroom for better academic performance, chairs, desks, recreational equipment's, water and toilet facilities, and sanitation of the physical environment should be part and parcel of the school system. Moreover, consider appropriate location and compound within the secondary schools premise, allocate adequate space for indoor, outdoor play and learning activities; and provide safe and learners' friendly facilities such as water pipes and toilets. Make sure that the existing schools have the necessary

infrastructure and services for running proper teaching and learning process and get a better learning environment.

KEYWORDS: school learning environment; implementation; School Improvement Programme, and sanitation.

1 Introduction

School improvement is a concept that focuses on bringing positive change to the school learning environment by providing learners with an environment that is characterized by good teaching and learning techniques, well-trained teachers, good leadership and parental involvement, among other factors, so as to produce well-disciplined and academically excellent learners. In other words, school improvement is about bettering schools so that they offer better services to learners, leading to learner success. Cornell and Mayer (2010:1) explain that the characteristics of a nurturing, healthy learning environment for learners include psychological safety, a positive self-image, and feelings of belonging, purposeful behaviour and a sense of personal competence. Therefore, in order for learners to succeed in their studies, they have to be supported not only academically, but also psychologically and emotionally.

Commenting on the academic development of learners, Cornell and Mayer (2010:2) state that the academic success of learners begins with a trusting and mutually respectful relationship between learner and teacher, extends to classroom order, and culminates in a safe and supportive school climate. This means that the rapport in the classroom and discipline techniques that are used at school have an influence on whether learners pass or fail. This means that teachers have to consider not only how they teach learners, but also how they treat them. In addition, the general outlook or appearance of the school, in terms of cleanliness and upkeep, has the capacity to affect the morale of the learners, making it necessary for school managers to maintain clean grounds and classrooms. Clarke (2012: 6) captures this concept succinctly: learners need a clean, bright and organised space to strengthen learning experiences.

From the above, it is apparent that there is a strong relationship between what occurs on the school grounds and in the classroom and learner success. The same conclusions were reached by UNESCO (2013:12–14) that the interrelationships between different areas of school improvement, such as teaching and learning, the school learning environment, leadership and management, play a critical role in enhancing or constraining learners' learning and outcomes. With regard to the classroom environment, where learners learn, how they learn, why they learn and from whom they learn are integral to their success. Michael (2004:17) states that in the classroom, preparing and organising the materials and framing lessons in a logical and coherent manner are vital to create an attractive learning environment for the learners, in other words, preparedness and delivery of content contribute to the comprehension and success of learners. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010:14–17) furthers this argument by stating as follows:

> The learning environment should be acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners in it, including their prior knowledge; demand hard work and challenge from all without excessive workload; operate with clarity of expectations and deploy assessment strategies consistent with these expectations, where there is strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning; and strongly promote horizontal connectedness across areas of knowledge subjects as well as to the community and the wider world.

Teachers are leaders and therefore have the mandate to create an attractive environment for learning where learner diversity, principles of fairness, learner responsibility and subject knowledge are promoted. More to the point, as stated by Cornell and Mayer (2010:1) and Clarke (2012:7), an effective school leader and teacher should provide a well-managed, safe and orderly environment that is conducive to learning and encourages respect for all learners, which consists of a classroom management structure and climate that support academic achievement. This involves creating an atmosphere of respect for learners and sharing responsibilities with them, such as the responsibility for maintaining a high-quality learning environment. The above principles identified by OECD and other education scholars substantiate that for a learning environment to be judged as truly effective, all the principles should be present in the school improvement context, as they are interdependent.

2. Statement of the problem

Derbessa (2009) and Clarke (2012:6–7) explain that creating a positive learning environment in the school allows learners to feel restful, safe and engaged. This means that learners are able to focus more on learning than on external factors. John (2010:2), Cornell and Mayer (2010:1) and Clarke (2012:8) also elucidate that in a school where values and roles remain constant and focus is placed on the positive aspects of learning, learners will be more open to actively participating in the school. When learners are given an opportunity to become responsible for their own learning, they benefit from the school (Clarke, 2012:7; Cornell and Mayer, 2010:1) and are more likely self-motivated. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) (2010:12) also affirms that improved and effective schools are known for quality teaching, and teaching is executed in a positive, learning environment, with well-planned learning and instructional programmes.

In light of all these positive attributes, it is apparent that school improvement is a necessity. Stoll and Fink (1996:2, cited in MoE, 2010:13) state that school improvement should be the activity of each school. However, it has to be noted that school improvement is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process that requires the commitment of all stakeholders such as teachers, principals, district officers, the MoE and parents, among other parties, for it to be a success. Firdissa (2008:108) and the MoE (2010:15) explain that district and state policies must help school leaders to create a safe, orderly learning environment that allows teachers and learners to focus on teaching and learning, meaning teachers and principals are not solely responsible for the success of learners.

Although school improvement is a necessity and contributes positively to the academic excellence of learners, as shown above, the practice or implementation of school improvement programmes (SIPs) is fraught with many challenges, which vary from region to region, district to district and from school to school. These challenges make it necessary to investigate how SIPs are implemented in different districts, so that tailor-

made solutions are identified in relation to these challenges. Research by the OECD (2009:7), Clarke (2012:9) and other scholars proves that there are many challenges associated with improving schools, including lack of adequate equipment and instructional support, negative aspects of teacher behaviour such as absenteeism and lack of pedagogical preparation and lack of professional development, which contribute negatively to the functioning of schools. They also cite lack of suitable development opportunities, loss of learning time due to disruptive learner behaviour and administrative tasks as other variables affecting the school environment negatively. The presence of these challenges prompted the researchers to investigate the challenges that are encountered by educators in implementing the SIP in secondary schools in the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones so that tailor-made solutions may be identified. The study also explored how successful the SIP was in improving the learning environment of secondary schools. The following variables were investigated: relationships among school staff, learners and families; learner support; learners' behaviour; learner facilities; and sanitation and hygiene in secondary schools. The following section presents a brief background on the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones in order to give a picture of the area under investigation.

A recent tendency 0m the issue of poor academic performance of students of secondary schools in the National Examination of 10th and 12th grades were the major concern has centered on the quality of teachers and non-commitment of the students to their studies due to distractions that hamper learning but very little attention has been given to the learning environment. But the environment in which the students learn such as classrooms, libraries, technical workshops, laboratories, play grounds, conveniences, sanitation, maintenance culture, aesthetics among others are variables that affect students' learning and academic performance. Hence, the learning environment remains an important area that should be studied and well managed to enhance students' academic performance.

According to the national standard, secondary school teachers should be university graduates in their respective fields of specialisation and should possess adequate pedagogical knowledge and skills (MoE, 2010:23); however, this is not always the case in the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones. There are 24 secondary schools in the administrative zones with a total of 917 (male teachers = 886; female teachers = 131 (Illubabor Zone Education Office, 2016:21). The learner–teacher ratio of 40: 1 is frequently used as a quality signal in the country; however, in the public secondary schools of the Illubabor zone, the learner–teacher ratio is 1: 57.

The number of learners in the secondary schools (grades 9–10) in the Illubabor administrative zone was 4 080 (male = 2 351; female = 1 729) at the time of research (2016). Pertaining to efficiency, in grades 9–10 the dropout rate was 15.02% for male learners and 10.39% for female learners. The repeating rate was 15.6% for male learners and 15.6% for female learners in public secondary schools of the Illubabor administrative zone (Illubabor Zone Education Office, 2015:13). In addition, the Regional Education Bureau and National Education Assessment results showed that learner achievement remains very low due to poor learning environments in secondary schools (MoE, 2010:9–10). These statistics point to a need to investigate why learners are failing; hence this study explored the challenges that are encountered in the learning environment in secondary schools in the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones. Besides, the

strategic plan emphasises the need to create attractive learning environment that can bring committed leadership and a systematic management system to each school (zone Education Office, 2015:2-3). Thus, factors such as school facilities, class size, school location and school plant planning, aesthetics, maintenance culture, sanitation, conveniences would be examined to know their impact on learning and performance of secondary school students. The implementation activities related to school learning environment points to a need to examine the challenges in the learning environment that arise in secondary schools, focusing on its ability to address the ills that was identified by the zone Education Office hindrances to learning environment. Thus, the question that the researcher seeks to answer is as follows:

Basic Research Question

What are the major challenges of school learning environment   in the secondary schools of the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones?

The sub-research questions are as follows:

- How successful is the school improvement programme in improving the learning environment of secondary schools?
- To what extent does learning environment contribute to academic achievement of secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones?

Specific Objectives

- To assess the success rate of the school improvement programme in improving the learning environment of the selected secondary schools.
- To examine the degree to which learning environment contributes to academic achievement of secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones?

Significance of the Study

 This study aimed to identify challenges in the areas the school learning environment so as to recommend possible solutions to the challenges facing the school learning environment in secondary schools grades (9-10) that hopefully contribute to better implementation and management of school improvement programmes with regards to the school learning environment. The study will also help to explore challenges and pave ways for improving secondary school reform to influence school principals, school governing bodies, teachers, students, parents and other partners to take on their roles in an effective and efficient way that will inevitably improve the secondary school quality of education. Finally, it will also serve as a springboard for other researchers to carry out in-depth studies in the field.

Limitations and Delimitation of the Study

The study has the following limitations first the study considered only grades 9-10 secondary school learning practices like learner empowerment, learner support, the relationship between school staff, learners and families, learner behaviour in schools, learner facilities in schools, and sanitation and hygiene. The study was also delimited to assess the challenges of the school learning environment in secondary schools   in terms of inputs, processes and outcomes. In the study, the data collected was limited to 12 secondary schools (grades 9-10) only out of 24 secondary schools in the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones.

Operational Definition of Key Terms
  A. **Learning environment**: The term refers to the physical environment of the school and has an important influence on the behaviour of both teachers and learners. The environment of the school can help to establish and maintain a sound culture of learning and teaching (UNICEF, 2010:13).
  B. **Parents and community involvement** – is a partnership where the parents, community and the school work together towards the success of their children and sharing the responsibility for school improvement (UNICEF, 2010:23).
  C. **School governing bodies**: refers to those responsible for working with schools to ensure the schools deliver good quality education. Together with the school principals, the school governing bodies are responsible for the day-to-day management of the schools, that is, they participate in setting the aims, policies and strategies of the schools (MOE, 2009:34).
  D. **Status**: The term is used in the study to indicate problems encountered in the process of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement programme in secondary schools.

3. Methodology and design

This study relied on quantitative and qualitative methods and procedures to collect and analyse data. Priority was given to quantitative data with qualitative data used to elucidate the quantitative findings. Data were collected from 12 secondary schools through the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. From these schools, 12 principals, 12 vice-principals, 12 supervisors, 4 zone education officers and 251 teachers were selected to participate in the study, giving a total of 287 (53%). In addition, 21 members from the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA) and 21 learner council members were selected through purposeful sampling techniques from three clusters of geographical locations of the secondary schools for focus group discussions. Finally, document analysis was used to analyse SIP documents that were obtained from the Zone Education Office. The study adopted the checklists and questionnaire developed by the Ethiopian MoE at national level for similar purposes to assess learning environments in secondary schools of the Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones. The data collected through the questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data collected through questionnaires were analysed using statistical software package SPSS version 21 in terms of descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentiles, mean values and standard deviations. The data are presented in tables and qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions are used to elaborate on the issues under discussion.

4. Data analysis and interpretation

The status of public secondary Schools Learning Environment in Secondary Schools of Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones

This section investigates the problems associated with learning environment in secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones. In other words, this section answers the question: How successful is the School improvement programme   in

improving the learning environment of secondary schools? The following section discusses learner empowerment as a variable in the learning environment.

Learner empowerment

Learner empowerment is the process where learners have to develop the habit of taking responsibility and leading a disciplined life (MoE, 2010:20). Empowerment can be achieved through giving learners a voice through forums for learners' feedback, giving learners' decision making power in curriculum development, encouraging meaningful technology to use in the classroom and involving learners in real issues (MoE, 2010:21). In the study, the questionnaire sought to determine whether learners have developed the habit of taking responsibility and leading a disciplined life. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Learner empowerment

Table 1: The system of school student empowerment

The system of school student empowerment	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students have developed the habit of taking responsibilities and leading a disciplined life.	287	2.61	1.135
Students provide teachers with constructive feedback about the teaching and learning.	287	2.76	1.192
Student teamwork, responsibility and self-discipline are fostered.	287	2.82	1.089
Students are able to express the purpose of their learning, are motivated to learn and actively participate in lessons.	287	2.65	1.105

The results (mean = 2.61; SD = 1.135) indicate that insignificant effort is made to empower learners in secondary schools. The results of the mean and standard deviation regarding learners' provision to teachers of constructive feedback about the teaching and learning revealed a mean of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 1.192, which proves that even though the result was above the average cut-off point, the practice of providing constructive feedback by learners in the teaching and learning process is insignificant.

With regard to whether learner teamwork, responsibility and self-discipline are fostered, the results (mean = 2.82; SD = 1.089) show that the practice is minimal in secondary schools. On whether learners are able to express the purpose of their learning, are motivated to learn and actively participate in lessons, the results (mean = 2.65; SD = 1.105) disclosed that even though the result was above average, the learners are not fully expressing the purpose of their learning, and are not motivated to learn and actively participate in their learning. These results show that Learners are not yet fully empowered, which is a major challenge that needs to be addressed in the administrative zone. Data collected through the qualitative open-ended questionnaires support the above results. Of the study participants, 54 (18.81%) revealed that there are problems in the schools and that learners are frustrated or in despair regarding future job opportunities. Reference was made to the poor background in mathematics and English language of learners and the absence of learner council participation in decision making in the school

management system. The challenges that learners face in the learning environment need to be addressed if learners are to succeed in their studies. The next section discusses learner support in secondary schools.

Learner support

Learner support is a process of creating chances for learners to develop into self-regulated learners. In addition, it refers to teaching methods that teachers use to meet learners' needs, providing sufficient learning materials, making assistive devices available and building collaborative support for children with special needs (MoE, 2010:32). Table 2 below presents the results with regard to schools' learner support, particularly regarding the schools creating chances for learners to develop into self-regulating learners within and beyond the classroom.

Table 2: Student support

Student support	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Schools create opportunities for students to develop into self-regulating learners within and beyond the classroom.	287	2.83	1.113
Teachers use various teaching methods in order to meet the diverse student needs in the classroom.	287	3.10	1.063
Sufficient learning and teaching materials are available.	287	2.28	1.099
Assistive devices are available and in use.	287	2.23	1.032
There is collaborative work at the school and community level to support learners with special needs.	287	2.22	1.144

The results (mean = 2.83; SD = 1.113) in Table 2 indicate that the practice concerning this outcome is not promising even though the result was above average. In connection with the teachers' use of various teaching methods in order to meet the diverse learner needs in the classroom in secondary schools, the mean value was 3.10 and the standard deviation 1.063. The results show a good performance, and the effort made in schools is encouraging. Regarding the existence or availability of sufficient learning and teaching materials, the results (mean = 2.28; SD = 1.1) substantiate that the outcome is less than average, meaning additional effort is needed to change the current situation in the schools. On whether there is collaborative work at school and community level to support learners with special needs, the results (mean = 2.22; SD = 1.144) indicate that there is not sufficient collaborative work at the selected schools and at community level to encourage and support learners with special needs in secondary schools. The results point to a need to develop services that are supportive of learners with special needs as they continue to face challenges in their educational journey that may hamper their success.

Data collected from the qualitative open-ended questionnaire concur with the above results, as 39 participants (13.59%) disclosed that the community does not provide appropriate educational services for secondary learners with disabilities/special needs and that there is also a lack of well-established, on-the-spot tutorial sessions for learners who are low achievers. In addition, it came to light that parents and the community do not participate actively in transforming the learning environment in the schools, pointing to a

need for more community and parental involvement in the school, as the two variables are central in school improvement. The next section discusses the relationship between school staff, learners and families.

The relationship between school staff, learners and families

According to the documents GQEIP (2008:6) and ESDP IV (2010:19), school polices, regulations and procedures have to be effectively communicated and followed, the schools' decision-making and administrative processes (including data collection and analysis, and communicating with parents) have to be carried out effectively and teachers have to meet with parents when necessary – and at a minimum twice per semester – to provide quality reports and to discuss their children's learning achievements This means that parents, learners and the community have to work together to better schools so that a conducive environment is created for learners' learning. The results in Table 3 show how teaching staff, learners and parents relate in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones secondary schools:

Table 3: Relationship between school staff, learners and families

Relationships among school staff, students and families	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
School policy and guidelines focusing on the creation of a learning-friendly environment are developed, implemented and promoted throughout the school community.	287	2.78	1.103
Positive and trusting relationships exist among staff, students and families.	287	2.90	1.115
Interactions among all members of the school community reflect a sense of justice, dignity and respect.	287	2.91	1.137
Academic success, attendance, and other aspects of positive behaviour are recognized and celebrated school-wide to promote positive relationship building.	287	2.96	1.094

Concerning secondary school policy and guidelines focusing on a learning-friendly environment being created, developed, implemented and promoted throughout the school community, the results (mean = 2.78; SD = 1.103) show that the result was above the middling point, but still there is no concerted effort to transform this practice in the selected schools. With regard to the existence of positive and trusting relationships among staff, learners and families, the results (mean = 2.90; SD = 1.12) indicate low performance, and a concerted effort is required to transform the current situation.

Regarding whether there are interactions among all members of the school community to reflect a sense of justice, dignity and respect, the results (mean = 2.91; SD = 1.137) indicate that interactions between members of the school community and schools are strong, which is commendable. In relation to whether academic success, attendance and other aspects of positive behaviour are recognised and celebrated school-wide to promote positive relationship building, the results (mean = 2.96; SD = 1.01) show that considerable work is necessary to transform the current situations in the schools. In support of the above results, 45 (15.68%) participants who filled in the qualitative open-ended questionnaire disclosed that there is weak collaboration between teachers and parents. If nearly half the participants are of the view that the relations between the

schools and communities are weak, then this is a challenge that must be tackled so that community and parental involvement is improved. The next section explores learner behaviour in schools.

Learner behaviour in schools

Every teacher has to deal with learners who display undesirable behaviour in the classroom and beyond school. These behaviours can range from learners who engage in behaviours such as talking with their friends during class, chewing gum and being rowdy to truly negative behaviour such as harassment of other learners (MoE, 2010:29). How teachers discipline learners influences their success at school. The table below presents the results on learner behaviour in the selected secondary schools.

Table 4: Learner behaviour in schools

Student behaviour in school	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a behaviour code for students that emphasises respect, self-discipline, positive relationships, and the prevention of inappropriate behaviour.	287	3.66	1.242
Students' behaviour rules, regulations and expectations are understood and communicated to parents, students, teachers and all staff.	287	2.86	1.093
The school's policies and practices are followed to ensure that coordinated and consistent practices exist within classrooms and across the school.	287	2.84	1.034
Teachers establish clear expectations of students and deal promptly, fairly and respectfully with behaviour issues.	287	3.10	1.264
Students demonstrate an understanding of the school's behaviour policy and act accordingly.	287	2.76	1.130
The school is free from external threats and has an orderly, purposeful atmosphere, free from the threat of physical harm.	287	3.52	1.292
Teachers have a common understanding of learning strategies that develop positive behaviours.	287	3.45	1.148
Teachers establish and maintain orderly and workable routines to create a learning environment where student time is spent on learning tasks.	287	3.13	1.129
Students are affirmed and rewarded for positive behaviours.	287	2.71	1.191

The table above shows a mean value of 3.66 and a standard deviation of 1.242 for positive relationships and the prevention of inappropriate behaviour in secondary schools. This is very good and shows there are behaviour codes for learners in secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones. On whether learner behaviour rules, regulations and expectations are understood and communicated to parents, learners, teachers and all staff, the results (mean = 2.86; SD = 1.1) indicate that the result is above average, which means effort is required to improve the outcomes. With regard to whether

the school's policies and practices are followed to ensure that coordinated and consistent practices exist within classrooms and across the schools, the results (mean = 2.84; SD = 1.034) reveal that strong effort is still required in implementing policies and practices to ensure coordination in the SIP. Concerning whether teachers establish clear expectations of learners and deal promptly, fairly and respectfully with behaviour issues, the results (mean = 3.10; SD = 1.264) confirm that the performance of teachers is promising in the establishment of clear expectations of learners with behavioural issues. With regard to whether the school was free from external threat and has an orderly, purposeful atmosphere, free from the threat of physical harm, the results (mean = 3.52; SD = 1.3) show that there are no external and internal threats hindering learners in the secondary schools from learning.

Pertaining to whether teachers have a common understanding of learning strategies that develop positive behaviours, the results (mean = 3.45; SD = 1.148) show that there is a relative common understanding of learning strategies that develop positive behaviour among teachers in the secondary schools. In connection with whether teachers establish and maintain orderly and workable routines to create a learning environment where learners' time is spent on learning tasks, the results (mean = 3.13; and SD = 1.13) show that teachers make an effort to establish and maintain orderly learning in secondary schools. Lastly, regarding whether learners are affirmed and rewarded for positive behaviours, the results (mean = 2.71; SD = 1.1) indicate that considerable effort is needed from the school leadership to upgrade the existing performance in the schools.

The results from the questionnaires expand on the findings by revealing that 34 (11.85%) participants were of the view that there were problems in the schools such as learners being irresponsible and careless in their learning, learner discipline problems and lack of practicing learner disciplinary guidelines to maximise learners' learning in the schools. The next section discusses the learner facilities in the schools.

Learner facilities in schools

Secondary schools have to provide quality school facilities that enable all staff to work well and all learners to learn, as well as structures and processes to support shared leadership in which everyone has collective responsibility for learners' learning (GQEIP, 2008:6). The results below indicate whether this mandate is fulfilled in secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones .

Table 5: Learner facilities in schools

Student facilities in schools	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Schools provide quality school facilities that enable all staff to work well and all children to learn.	287	2.59	1.187
Rules concerning cleanliness are consistently applied in the school to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning.	287	2.76	1.144

In response to the question whether schools provide quality school facilities that enable all staff to work well and all learners to learn, the results of the mean value and standard deviation were 2.59 and 1.19 respectively, showing an above average cut-off point. This

illustrates that the condition of school facilities is below the expected standard, pointing to a need to work harder in providing adequate and up-to-standard facilities. In connection with rules concerning cleanliness in the school so as to provide an atmosphere that is conducive to learning, the results (mean = 2.76; SD = 1.144) demonstrate that strong effort is required from the school leadership and school governing bodies to create an attractive learning environment in the schools.

Adeyemo (2012: 21) Lawrence (2012:210)   argue that the availability and quality of educational facilities such as school buildings, classrooms, chairs, tables, laboratories etc. have positive impacts of the academic performance of students. This means that the school environment determines how much learning and teaching will be possible. However, the availability of the facilities must be mixed with a skilful usage of them so as to aid teaching and learning.

The summary results of which each and every one of the indicator practices in the school learning environment, the mean value and standard deviation 287 (Mean = 2.7697; SD = 0.70219) confirmed that the results were above the middling point, and that there was no significant progress to secure and build attractive learning environments in the schools. The standard deviation value (SD = 0.70) with no wider distribution of spread among the school respondents revealed that standard deviation was a good measure of reliability of the mean value. Thus, the summary result from the respondents confirmed that the school learning environment did not improve during the implementation of the school improvement programme in the administrative zone as planned and implemented in the last five years.

Accordingly, to minimize the current challenges with regard to the learning environment, the researcher suggests that the school principal and school governing bodies need to work harder in order to create a safe and orderly learning environment. Again, student council members should be involved in decision-making in the schools' management structure to give them an opportunity to influence decisions made for them. The next section presents the sub-basic research question: to what extent does community participation improve as result of implementing the school improvement programme.

The data collected from the questionnaires show that 62 (21.6 %) participants were of the view that absence of learners from school is a result of poor sanitation and hygiene, as school latrines are not convenient for use because they are full of flies and smelly (not appropriately ventilated). Most schools also lacked facilities attached to the latrine floor for washing hands and appropriate school waste-collection and disposal systems. Learners also have poor personal needs and there is a lack of adequate infrastructure such as water, electricity, internet, information and communication technologies centres secondary school who was interviewed said the following with regard to the resources facilities:

> The schools do not have sufficient budgets even to provide basic materials and facilities sometimes the school says there [is] not enough [in the] budgets for school improvement activities.

This means there is consensus in the results regarding the state of facilities at Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones   secondary schools, as the results from the

questionnaires and interviews concur. In fact, two school principals, two supervisors and two vice-principals confirmed that the state of the school's physical facilities does not invite learners or provide a safe place for existing staff and learners. With regard to office space, some of the interviewed teachers stated that they do not have sufficient space to perform their administrative duties in schools, while two vice-principals said there are insufficient classrooms, leading to overcrowding and over-utilisation of facilities such as school furniture in their respective schools. In addition, two supervisors also verified that there are no sufficient and well-maintained school grounds for all learners or sporting and recreational activities for providing vital interaction with fellow learners. The same views that schools are not properly maintained were presented by PTA members who partook in the group discussions. Fourteen learner council members also concurred that not much effort is made to keep schools clean, neat and well maintained to make them pleasant for everyone in the school.

The document analysis supported the above views on the state of school facilities by proving that the physical facilities of some secondary schools, for example buildings, fences around the school grounds, playing areas for learners and a teacher's room including desks and storage, were poorly managed. In addition, in some schools there were untidy buildings and other school facilities that negatively affect the teaching and learning activities (Illubabor Zone Education Office, 2014:10–14). The document analysis of annual reports also confirmed that due to a lack of water facilities in all secondary schools, sanitation and hygiene facilities are still at a low stage. Also, clean and safe water for drinking and washing is also not sufficient for teachers and learners. In addition, the documents in the Zone Education Office also disclosed that secondary schools have no appropriate waste-collection and disposal systems (Illubabor Zone Education Office, 2014:4). These results point to an urgent to need clean and maintain the grounds, ablution facilities and classrooms in the secondary schools.

With regards to fun events being organised for each grade and/or the whole school to build a sense of belonging through shared experience, seven PTA members confirmed that there are no rewards for positive behaviour for learners and there is poor organisation of fun events for Grade 9 and 10 learners to build a sense of belonging in the schools. This proves that there are many challenges that hinder positive learning in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones   secondary schools and action is required to solve these.

Conclusion

Learning environment which include classroom spaces planning, administrative places planning, circulation spaces planning, spaces for conveniences planning, general infrastructure planning, the teachers as well as the students themselves are essential in teaching-learning process. The extent to which students' learning could be enhanced depends on their location within the school compound, the structure of their classroom, availability of instructional facilities and accessories. It is believed that a school with adequate learning environment contributes to stir up expected outcomes of learning that will facilitate good academic performance, by encouraging effective teaching and learning.

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the learning environment in secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones have significant relationship with academic performance of secondary school students. So the public secondary school suffers from infrastructural neglect as the principal do not control any budget even to maintain the existing structure.

The study on which this paper reports, sought to identify challenges in implementing the SIP in selected secondary schools in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyse data, which involved the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Data were collected from education officers, school leadership, teachers, learner leaders and parents through random and purposeful sampling. The results (mean = 2.7697; SD = 0.70219) confirmed that there is no significant progress in building a secure and attractive learning environment in the selected schools. This applies to the investigated variables, namely learner empowerment; learner support; relationships among school staff, learners and families; learner behaviour in school; and learner facilities.

The results from the questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis concur that they are many challengers hindering learning in the secondary schools, which include teachers working with no rewards or recognition for their efforts; school principals in secondary schools lacking innovative instructional leadership styles; absence of collaboration between school communities, teachers, learners and parents; lack of safe study sites/places, separate restrooms for boys and girls, clean drinking water, reading rooms and teachers' offices and lounges; broken fences; lack of recreational places for learners; poorly stocked libraries; and unhygienic toilets. The schools are affected in varying degrees, but the general is true of many.

These challenges negatively affect the performance of the schools and it can be concluded that the learning environment did not improve to the expected standard during the implementation of the SIP in the administrative zone as planned and implemented in the last five years. Besides, The interview and focus group discussions results revealed that the recent poor academic performance of secondary school students in Iluababor and Buno Bedele administrative zones has been of much concern to the parents, teachers and even student themselves. But the quality of education not only depends on the teachers performing their duties, but also in the effective coordination of the school's learning environment.

The way forward

In the light of the above-stated challenges, this paper recommends that the school principals of secondary schools should adopt a stronger instructional leadership role, promote more collaboration between school communities, build systems of providing recognition for teachers for innovative teaching practices and place more emphasis on creating conducive learning environments for Grade 9 and 10 learners in secondary schools. In addition, school principals and school governing bodies should work harder in creating a safe and orderly learning environment. With regard to sanitation and hygiene, learner-led school sanitation and hygiene have to be practised, whereby learners are actively involved in implementing sanitation strategies. In order to create a positive environment with positive morale, incentives have to be given to teachers and learners who excel at their work. While in strengtheining the existing student behaviour policy

guidelines the study confirmed that secondary schools did not make sure that all students should know what the school expects of them and spells out what will happen if students do not meet the expectations. Thus, it is recommended that schools should constantly practice student disciplinary governed by guidelines to maximise student learning and to enhance the best learners' achievements in line with government stipulations and guidelines. The paper also recommends that learner council members should be involved in decision making in the schools' management structure to give them an opportunity to influence decisions made for them. Lastly, parents should be actively involved in the education of their children by participating in improving school learning environment.

Hence, the study acclaims provision of facilities like modern laboratories, functional libraries, and comfortable classrooms for better academic performance; in addition to effective maintenance or renovation of old buildings, chairs, desks, recreational equipment among others should be part and parcel of the schools system. In the study area public secondary school should pay more attention to education by providing the necessary funds to secondary schools to not only provide necessary learning facilities but maintain existing school systems and reform the concerned administrative bodies at all levels should established to regulate public schools to ensure that standards are maintained.

Moreover, consider appropriate location and compound within the secondary schools premise, allocate adequate space for indoor, outdoor play and learning activities; and provide safe and learners' friendly facilities such as water pipes and toilets. Make sure that the existing schools have the necessary infrastructure and services for running proper teaching and learning process and get a better learning environment.

In this article the objectives and basic research question of the study have addressed in the sections above that help to improve the practices of the school learning environment of Iluababor and Buno Bedele Administrative zones in Ethiopia (grades 9-10) secondary schools. Finally, further in-depth research has to be conducted to manage and reform the present status of school learning environment of secondary schools systematically by other researchers.

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