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## Teachers' Perceptions of Junior Secondary Education and Student Academic Performance in Central Ethiopia

Mulugeta Haile  
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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Junior Secondary Education and Student

Academic Performance in Central Ethiopia

by

Mulugeta Haile

MPhil, Walden University, 2021

MA, Daystar University, 2005

BA, KAG East University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

May 2021

## Abstract

Despite Ethiopia's rapid economic growth and its attempts at different educational models, there is a significant problem with junior secondary school education and student academic performance. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perceptions of junior secondary school education in central Ethiopia and what innovative academic approaches are necessary to increase student academic performance. The study used self-determination theory as its foundation. The main research question was focused on junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performance. A nonprobability purposive sampling method was used to select 10 teachers from two schools. The study used semi structured interview questions and observations for the data collection. The findings of a five-step thematic data analysis method revealed a gap in junior secondary education. The results indicated that the key factors in low student academic performance include weak educational policies, teachers' incompetence, lack of educational resources, students' low motivation, lack of parents' involvement, unproductive school leadership, unhealthy relationships, inconducive school environment, and absence of school support. The study has implications for positive social change as the knowledge of effective educational approaches is helpful to policymakers due to its emphasis on students, teachers, parents, and school leaders. The findings may be used to develop new educational strategies to increase students' academic performance and support teachers and school leaders in central Ethiopia.

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## Dedication

To my wife, Shewaye, and our children: Bethel, Nathanael, and Victory.

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I give God the glory and honor, for it is through Him that all things are possible. I am very grateful to my family members: Shewaye, Bethel, Nathanael, and Victory, without whom this study would not have reached this stage. My special appreciation goes to my main advisor, Dr. Frances Goldman, for her invaluable scholarly advice and support. I also extend my sincere gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Karel Kurst-Swanger, Dr. Mark Gordon, a substitute chair, Dr. Meena Clowes, the University Research Reviewer, Samuel Herrington, Form and Style Editor, and Jacqueline Cook-Jones, Student Success Advisor, for their priceless academic guidance and support.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Education is one of the main factors in a country's development. A government that invests in current and innovative educational policies prepares a better future for its people. An educated society places itself in an advantageous position to utilize all its resources and increase its revenues (Dagneu, 2017). As a result, the country will become globally competitive and nationally capable of overcoming its present and future economic, social, political, and environmental challenges. As many scholars agree, Ethiopia is one of the African countries that has shown rapid economic growth in the last 3 decades (Bright & Huby, 2015; Coulibaly, 2017; Mills & Herbst, 2012; The Economist, 2011, as cited in Khisa, 2019). Despite the country's recent economic development, studies have indicated that junior secondary school students' academic performances are low, causing a high rate of school dropout (Ahmed et al., 2019; Eyasu, 2017; Fredriksen & Fossberg, 2014; Gbre-eyesus, 2017; Joshi & Verspoor, 2012; Kim, 2015).

The past communist regime, the current government, concerned international bodies, and the United Nations (UN) have made efforts to improve Ethiopia's education sector. For instance, the Dakar Education for All movement initiated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) has made a notable growth in students' school enrollment in sub-Saharan African countries (Gbre-eyesus, 2017). However, student registration in junior secondary school classes and already-enrolled students' academic performance remains low in Ethiopia (Gbre-eyesus, 2017). Therefore, it was imperative to conduct a study that explores teachers' perceptions of current education and students' academic performances in junior secondary schools to

find answers and develop innovative educational policies and viable strategies to overcome the gaps.

In the next sections, I present the background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, and theoretical foundation. I also provide definitions of key concepts, assumptions, and the study's scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. Finally, I close the chapter with a summary of the main points.

### **Background**

Education is essential for a country's economic, social, political, and cultural development (Joshi & Verspoor, 2012; Kim, 2015; Mengistu & Kahsay, 2015).

Ethiopia's economic growth endeavors are globally recognized; however, many unsolved challenges to student academic performance still need attention (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017). Scholars have argued 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 (Dagnew, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017; Haile & Haile, 2012). This study explored teachers' perceptions of the current junior secondary school education and students' academic performance using a generic qualitative inquiry guided by self-determination theory (SDT), which embraces intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Whereas intrinsic motivation is the core of one's motivation, different extrinsic factors that include parents' involvement, teachers' competence, educational resources, school leadership, and effective educational policies also contribute to academic success.



Parents' involvement in their children's education plays a vital role in achieving satisfactory academic performance in school. Many researchers have concluded that parents' taking part in their children's education creates a common ground where all concerned parties (viz., students, parents, and teachers) can see things through similar lenses (Bradley et al., 2019; Dagneu, 2017). Similarly, parents' involvement in students' education enables parents to monitor their children's day-to-day behavior closely. As a result, parents will quickly help students if a change of behavior occurs or provide positive encouragement (Dagneu, 2017).

Teachers' professional development has equal importance to students' academic performance and the educational policymaking process. Teachers need to continually develop their profession to provide quality and innovative education, which helps students be critical thinkers and become competent members of society (Kaur & Debel, 2019). Teacher professional development facilitates teamwork, mutual understanding among school staff, and healthy learning environments (Kaur & Debel, 2019).

School resources' usefulness for students' learning improvement has been a debatable subject among scholars (Chudgar et al., 2015). The importance of a school's resources differs from school to school, city to city, and country to country; hence, this study focused on exploring student academic performance based on the available and needed educational resources in central Ethiopia. Although scholars agree that teachers' professional development is essential to increase teaching quality, studies have reported that considering teachers' perceptions is not well practiced in Ethiopia (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012; Melese et al., 2019). Teachers monitor students' class activities. Hence, it was

beneficial to explore teachers' perceptions of the current education system to improve the academic policies and, thereby, increase student academic performance.

### **Problem Statement**

This study addressed the current junior secondary school education, policies, and student academic performance problems, which have been a concern for educational policymakers in Ethiopia (Regasa & Taha, 2015). High rates of student dropout, weak academic performance, and low rates of students pursuing a postsecondary education were indicators for the existing challenges of junior secondary school education in Ethiopia. The country is one of the emerging African countries with a vision of becoming an industrialized nation (Melese et al., 2019). Although Ethiopia has shown a radical change in the expansion of education with high elementary school enrollment rates, the junior secondary school admission rate is low (Gbre-eyesus, 2017). The lower high school's gross enrollment rate (GER) has been 38.4%, with a net enrollment rate (NER) of 9.5%, compared to the lower-middle-income countries' average rates of 72% and 45%, respectively (Gbre-eyesus, 2017).

Different studies, including the Ministry of Education (MoE) Annual Statistic, have pinpointed factors in high school education challenges in Ethiopia (MoE, 2017). First, Fredriksen and Fossberg (2014) noted the disproportion between students' number and educational resources. Second, students' class retention rate has been increasing due to their incompetence to meet class expectations (Eyasu, 2017). Third, in the past, the boys' enrollment rate was much higher than that of the girls (Gbre-eyesus, 2017). However, the result of this study indicated that gender bias does not exist in central

Ethiopia. Fourth, teachers' proficiency levels are reported to be low (Kim, 2015). Fifth, parental involvement in children's wellbeing is limited (Bireda & Pillay, 2017). Lastly, constant changes within Ethiopia's school system show a weakness in planning and executing effective educational policies (Melese et al., 2019).

Ethiopia's endeavor toward economic growth has been a commendable task. However, it will be challenging for the country to achieve its vision without resolving its high school education problems. Therefore, it was necessary to study the current junior secondary school education to explore these root causes of low student academic performance. An innovative educational policy that addresses the current high school challenges would enable students to have better academic achievement and make them competent in the workforce (Gbre-eyesus, 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this generic qualitative research was to explore teachers' perceptions of the secondary education system, current educational policies, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. In line with this purpose, I gathered data from teachers about students' academic and non academic activities. The existing educational resources and policies were assessed based on teachers' perceptions to determine the junior secondary school curriculum's effectiveness. Parents' involvement at school was studied to understand their contribution to student academic progress. Teachers' professional competence and the schools' leaderships were examined to explore the teaching and leadership qualities. Further, the study gathered teachers' perceptions on gender bias to crosscheck with the reviewed literature. The study used the data as a

steppingstone to recommend innovative educational approaches and strategies to address issues that affect student academic performance and to lay a foundation for social change.

### **Research Question**

A research question is a crucial part of a study. As such, one needs to give careful attention to it. In a study on generic qualitative research, Strauss and Corbin (1998, as cited in Liu, 2016) argued that the way a researcher asks a research question defines the research method's choice. I used one central research question to obtain the necessary data for this study: What are teachers' perceptions of junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia? From the main research question and the study's theoretical foundation, 10 interview questions were developed to obtain information on different topics. The interview questions allowed me to obtain data to describe the scenario adequately (Creswell, 2007). The detailed and rich information enabled me to understand teachers' perceptions of the existing school curriculum, policies, and students' academic experiences in central Ethiopia.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It has been argued that a generic research approach is flexible, easy, and perhaps appropriate to the qualitative student's research (Kennedy, 2016). Generic qualitative inquiries must not adhere to a specific research methodology: ground theory, ethnography, case study, phenomenology, or narrative (Caelli et al., 2003, as cited in Kennedy, 2016). However, the generic inquiry will not deny the inevitability of a philosophical viewpoint; hence, one needs to lay a framework that guides the study (Kennedy, 2016). To this end, this study used SDT as its guide. SDT focuses on an

individual's motivation that springs from basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT has been widely used by researchers in various disciplines, including management, psychology, business, and educational sectors (Van Doorn, 2015).

SDT considers competence, relatedness, and autonomy as the three primary psychological needs, which, when satisfied, increase an individual's motivational level (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Competence refers to an individual's feeling of achievement without outside pressure. Deci and Ryan (2000) agreed that receiving positive feedback for work enhances intrinsic motivation. Relatedness is associated with attachment. The more a person feels like part of a group, the higher their motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Studies carried out outside of Africa indicate that students' relatedness increases their academic performance (Carmona-Halty et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2016). To this end, I examined teachers' perceptions of students' relationships within the schools.

Autonomy is another crucial factor that plays a role in motivation. Autonomy relates to having the freedom of choice or one's ownership of a task or activity. Deci and Ryan (2013) argued that facilitating external support without controlling a person or denying an individual's preference increases motivation. Based on SDT's notion of autonomy, the study explored the extent of students' privilege and liberty in practicing their personal choices related to education.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was a qualitative methodology and used a generic approach. Qualitative research enables the researcher to explore why a circumstance has happened in the past from a single person's or group's standpoints. The generic inquiry

enables one to explore an individual's direct experience of a setting and the meaning that they attach to it. A generic inquiry helps to understand people's perceptions and views of a phenomenon (Askins, 2017). This study used a semi structured interview to explore teachers' perceptions of current junior secondary education and students' academic performance and observations to assess educational resources at the selected two schools in central Ethiopia. Qualitative research uses the words of people in a real-world context. Hence, the method was appropriate for this study to gather data on junior secondary school education and students' academic performances from teachers. Since qualitative research explores people's experiences and views, perceiving interviewees' sentiments through nonverbal language also allowed me to understand teachers' insights deeply. The data were analyzed using a thematic method and supported by NVivo software, which was used to store and organize the gathered information.

### **Definitions**

*Academic performance:* Refers to students' demonstration of academic knowledge as appears on test results (Banos et al., 2019).

*Annual educational statistics report:* An annual statistical report prepared by the Ethiopian MoE based on research (MoE, 2017).

*Cultural expectations:* An attitude, which springs from one's way of life, when positively satisfied, members of the culture approve a situation (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018).

*Educational facilities:* Educational resources such as computers, library, laboratory equipment, desks, whiteboards, and other school materials (MoE, 2017).

*Experimental curriculum:* The principle of launching school programs, which spring from a study that explores learners' needs from their cultural, social, and geographical perspectives (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

*Foreign school systems:* Educational models that were adapted to Ethiopia's curriculum from Western countries (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

*Innovative learning environment:* The culture of teachers' cooperation through sharing of experiences and knowledge, which, in turn, increases the degree of student learning (Busman et al., 2006, as cited in Kaur & Debel, 2019).

*Junior Secondary School:* Refers to Grades 9 and 10, according to Ethiopia's revised secondary school curriculum.

*Parents' involvement:* Refers to a collaboration of parents, teachers, and students to develop, plan, and execute mutually agreed-upon goals that help students succeed in their education and develop a healthy lifestyle (Reschly & Christenson, 2009, as cited in Bradley et al., 2019).

*Pedagogical practices:* Approaches or methods that teachers use to teach students. Teachers use these approaches based on their views and students' needs.

*Students' educational challenges:* High school students' educational struggles provided by different reports and studies (Dagneu, 2017; Dixon & Humble, 2017; MoE, 2017).

### **Assumptions**

As I carried out this study, I had the following assumptions. First, I would get approval from the two schools' principals to undertake the study. Second, the selected

teachers would be professionally experienced and willing to provide me with valuable and rich information. Third, I assumed that teachers would honestly provide me with their negative and positive perceptions of current junior secondary school education, policies, and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia. To this end, I reminded participants of their information's confidentiality to encourage them to engage in the discussions openly and freely.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The study's first delimitation was that it focused on exploring junior secondary school education, policies, and students' academic performances in central Ethiopia. Research indicated the challenge of students' class repetitions, particularly in junior high school (Eyasu, 2017). Also, the change in the medium of teaching, from native languages in elementary school to the English language in high school, is one of the educational challenges this group of students encounters. The second delimitation of the study is that only two junior secondary schools from central regions of Ethiopia were selected for the data collection as it was challenging to include secondary schools from all regions. The third delimitation was that only 10 teachers who obtained at least a bachelor's degree and had 5 or more years of teaching experience participated in the study. All other individuals such as school administrators, parents, and students were excluded from participation. The study was linked to SDT so that readers may relate the results to broader scholarly works (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).



### **Limitations**

The study was geographically limited to two schools in central Ethiopia. As a result, the study's findings may not be generalized to the broader populations due to the small sample size and the significant variations between schools. Often, a researcher takes note of ideas that make sense to themselves, and this creates a bias. However, I took an objective researcher's position or a self-controlled subjectivity throughout the study's process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Further, teachers were the only participants in the study. However, the selection strategy enabled me to obtain a direct and breadth of teachers' viewpoints on the topic.

### **Significance**

The study was essential as it revealed factors for the existing junior secondary school educational problems and students' low academic performance in central Ethiopia. The research was distinctive as it attempted to shed light on implementing innovative and student-centered high school educational approaches that would overcome the existing junior secondary school curriculum challenges in central Ethiopia (Egne, 2014). Based on the findings of the study, I propose new educational policies. The new methods would expose students to various career and academic choices and, ultimately, bring about positive social change.

### **Summary**

This qualitative study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of current junior secondary school education and students' academic performances in central Ethiopia. The study used a generic research inquiry. SDT was used as the theoretical foundation. In

this chapter, I discussed the study's background, which provided general information on Ethiopia's junior secondary education. I also provided definitions of key concepts that I used in the study. Further, I presented the study's problem statement based on various scholars' arguments. The study's findings confirmed a gap in secondary education and student academic performance in central Ethiopia.

In Chapter 2, I present the literature review, expounding on the usefulness of sound educational policies, effective school leadership, parents' involvement in student education, and the importance of students' autonomy toward their academic performance. I also discuss different contributing factors that play a role in building a positive learning environment.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Education is one of the fundamental contributors to the development of a country. An educated society can tackle its social, economic, and environmental challenges, thereby increasing its revenues and competitiveness on the global stage. Researchers have raised concerns about the decline of student academic performance and the provision of junior secondary education in Ethiopia (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017; Kim, 2015).

Despite Ethiopia's recent economic growth, scholars have argued that students from low-income families and girls are still underprivileged regarding high school education (Eyasu, 2017; Fredriksen & Fossberg, 2014; Gbre-eyesus, 2017; Kim, 2015). The major factors for the decline of high school education in central Ethiopia include (a) a lack of resources to meet the demand for high school education (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017), (b) an increase in student class retention rate due to students' academic failure (Eyasu, 2017), (c) the existence of gender inequality in Ethiopia (Joshi & Verspoor, 2012), and (d) low levels of teachers' professional competence (Kim, 2015). Therefore, this study aimed to explore the leading causes and develop innovative approaches to mitigate the problem.

In Chapter 2, I present the literature review, which provides further background information on the high school educational problems mentioned in Chapter 1. I also discuss the importance of parents' involvement in students' education, teachers' professional competence, and educational resources for students' academic performances. Further, my discussion includes government and the history of secondary school curriculum development in Ethiopia, international organizations' involvement in

secondary school education, students' educational challenges, educational policies, culture and academic achievement, school leadership, and a conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Although most of the reviewed literature was accessed through Walden University library's database, a few hard copy books were also reviewed. The sources visited included Public Administration Abstracts, EBSCO host, Policy Studies Journal, SocINDEX, Education Source, ERIC, Social Sciences Citation Index, Complementary Index, Teacher Reference Center, Public Administration Abstracts, Expanded Academic ASAP, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, and some internet sites. Also, I used the libraries at the University of Calgary and Addis Ababa University. The literature reviewed included 66 peer-reviewed articles, eight books, seven internet sources, and three encyclopedias. The publication dates of sources were as follows: one from 1999 and older, four from 2000–2004, three from 2005–2009, 12 from 2010–2014, 59 from 2015–2019, and four from 2020–2021.

The search terms used included *high school educational policies, high school education in Ethiopia, the government of Ethiopia and secondary education, school leadership and administration, high school education in central Ethiopia, international support to secondary education in Ethiopia, high school students, School non academic policies, junior secondary school, secondary school teachers' competence, teachers' professional development, academic achievements, parents' involvement in children's education, high school education in Africa, student academic performance, student*

*achievement in Africa, and educational resources.* During the literature review, the scope was expanded to Africa to review broader resources.

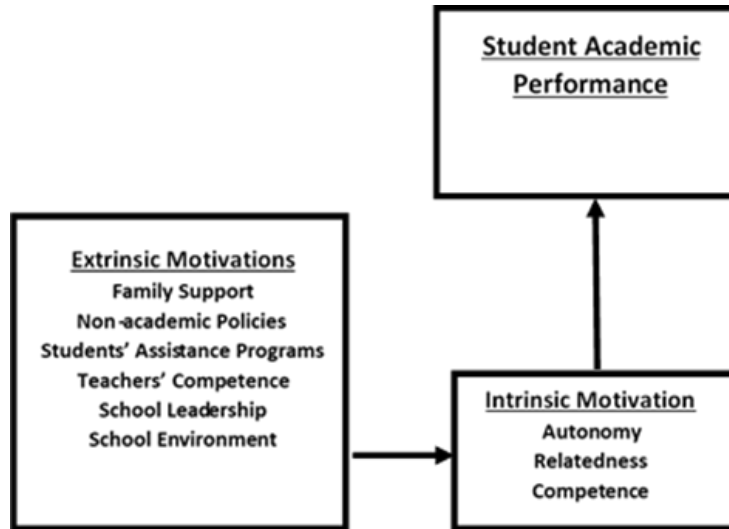
### **Theoretical Foundation**

The process of learning new things or doing a continuous task requires motivation. Over the years, scholars have developed different theories related to human motivation, each shedding light on a specific field such as social psychology, behavioral psychology, and educational psychology (Shuman, 2018). This study used the SDT as its base to explore teachers' perception of current high school education and student academic performance (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The central concept of SDT is that people's physiological needs are crucial to self-motivation and personal accomplishment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT identifies three inborn basic psychological necessities (i.e., intrinsic motivation): competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). All external (i.e., extrinsic) motivation must be first internalized through an informative approach to increase self-driven motivation. The satisfaction of these primary needs and advancement of the self-regulated approach heightens motivation in an individual's life (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Figure 1 shows the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and academic performance.

**Figure 1**

*The Relationship Between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation and Academic Performance*



Competence is the ability to do a challenging task using one's capabilities effectively. A personal feeling of accomplishment creates a sense of power, which, in turn, builds self-confidence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A student's academic fitness feeling makes them committed to the task (Covington & Dray, 2002). Relatedness denotes the connectedness of a person within their social circle. A person's feelings of acceptance within their groups will produce a sense of belonging and increase personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy refers to the tendency of one's independence to function in a way that suits a person's preference or choice (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The absence of autonomy makes the person feel controlled by external forces, which leads to demotivation.

Any external contribution (i.e., extrinsic motivation) must be supportive of the person's inclination in such a way as to maximize their inner potential (Deci & Ryan, 2013). Over time, studies have used SDT to investigate education in high schools. For

instance, Smit et al. (2014) applied SDT to explore the rate of absenteeism and learning achievement and concluded that students' autonomy increases motivation. The promotion of autonomy at school helps students to perform well and to maintain their academic momentum.

Additionally, researchers used SDT to study the relationship between parents' support towards autonomy and students' mental health, and they found that parents' involvement in education circles also plays essential roles in an intervention (Emery et al., 2017). Parents' involvement can be used as a venue where schools can educate parents on positively raising their children (Emery et al., 2017). Similarly, schools can elicit parents' information about students' behavior outside of school and develop intervention strategies accordingly.

Scholars have introduced different theories to study motivation and academic performance. For instance, goal theory considers achievement motivation as an outcome of a person's endeavor for validating ability or one's interest in acquiring knowledge and skills (Dweck & Elliott, 1983, 1988; Maehr, 1989; Nicholls, 1984; Spence & Helmreich, 1983, as cited in Molden & Dweck, 2000). Goal theory does not emphasize people's relatedness, which is one of the main aspects of SDT. Also, scholars have suggested that goal theory must consider a "meaning-based approach" (Molden & Dweck, 2000, p. 127).

Attribution theory is another approach that researchers have used to explore achievements (Molden & Dweck, 2000). Attribution theory allows researchers to explore people's cognitive and emotional behavior resulting from their interpretation of

experiences; however, the theory fails to show the motivational factors to people's actions (Molden & Dweck, 2000). In other words, attribution theory helps to understand the meaning that people attach to their environment, but it does not provide insight into causes that prompt individuals to work hard for achievement. On the contrary, SDT allows researchers to study student achievement from intrinsic and extrinsic motivational perspectives (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Skinner's operant theory, based on Thorndike's law of effect, is another possible approach that helps to study the change in behavior during the presence or lack of outside reinforcement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, the operant theory does not consider intrinsic human motivation, which is one of the key aspects of SDT. For this study, I considered SDT the right premise to use as its theoretical foundation. SDT enabled me to explore the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on student academic performance.

### **Government and Ethiopian High School Education**

Ethiopia has been recognized as one of the fastest developing regions of Africa in the last three decades. The education sector is one of the main areas that the government has emphasized to realize its recent economic growth dream. Formerly, local and religious educational practices have been used as the primary vehicles for expanding education in the country. However, the progress has been slow due to the then regimes' interests, limiting education only to the noblemen's families (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

The history of Ethiopia's modern educational development goes as far back as 1906 during the reign of Emperor Menelik II, who tried not only opening the first school in the country but also partnering with other governments to attract foreign teachers to



build relationships with other nations (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). After the Italian invasion, which lasted for 5 years (1936-1941), different foreign countries, including France, British, and the United States, began to show interest in supporting the country's education sector. However, these countries' primary objective was to promote their languages for international political interest (Melese, 2015, as cited in Melese et al., 2019). On the other hand, the then Ethiopian government's mere agenda was to use the languages to communicate with the rest of the world and maintain political power (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

Following the removal of Italian colonialism from Ethiopia, the British began their involvement in the education sector and significantly influenced the formation of a new curriculum (Melese et al., 2019). Afterward, as the British influence slowly diminished, the Americans started supporting Ethiopia's education until the emperor's regime was overthrown by the communist party (Melese et al., 2019). The communist government started controlling the education system and played a vital role in policymaking and teachers' training development. During this era (1974-1991), the expansion of education exploded throughout the country. However, Melese et al. (2019) argued that the quality and focus of education both in the imperial and the communist governments were on political ideologies rather than social, economic, and cultural developments.

Ethiopia has used different educational approaches since the inception of modern education. In the beginning, the 4-4-4 structure (i.e., 4 years formation education: Grades 1-4; 4 years middle classes: Grades 5-8; and 4 years high school: Grades 9-12) was

introduced into the school system. However, the 4-4-4 system was disapproved by teachers, parents, and students due to its shorter formational education period and salary cuts for some educators (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). Later, the 6-6-4 system, which is 6 years of elementary classes, 6 years of junior secondary classes, and 4 years of senior secondary classes, was implemented in 1947 (Tesfay & Taylor, as cited in Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). However, the curriculum was considered unrealistic because it was a duplication of foreign school systems. Further, the textbooks were translated from other languages without considering Ethiopia's language, culture, and social necessities (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

The experimental curriculum was another approach practiced in the Ethiopian school system. The curriculum gave attention to students' cultural, social, and environmental needs. In addition, the national language, which is Amharic, was selected to be the official medium of communication in schools beginning in 1957 (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). Based on a sample project's results, the fourth curriculum was introduced in 1963 (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). During this curriculum model, Amharic continued to be the primary communication medium at the elementary level, and academic and non academic subjects were introduced into the school system (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). However, shortly after that, parents and teachers criticized the fourth approach as it only focused on academics rather than on the workforce and was gender and urban biased.

Ethiopia's school system went through two school curriculums under the current government. The first one, which was 8-2-2 (i.e., 8 years of elementary school, 2 years of general secondary school, and 2 years of secondary preparatory school), was introduced

two decades ago (Dagneu, 2017). Nevertheless, the MoE reintroduced the 6-2-4 system in September 2019. Under the new system, students are expected to take a regional exam in Grade 6, a national exam in Grade 8, and a high school diploma examination in Grade 12. The former national exam in Grade 10 has been removed from the system.

### **International Organizations' Role in Educational Development**

Over the years, the international community and the UN have contributed considerably to educational expansion in Ethiopia (Gbre-eyesus, 2017). According to Shibeshi (2005), many international NGOs and foreign governments, such as the African Development Bank, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), European Commission, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, Save the Children, and others, play an important role in the expansion of education in Ethiopia. However, a higher percentage of educational support, particularly to rural regions, comes from Ethiopia's government. Even though each donor organization focuses on supporting a specific sector such as health, poverty reduction, family, infrastructure, or agriculture, the aid still indirectly contributes to educational development. Nevertheless, scholars have argued that international bodies must develop policies that involve local NGOs, and that emphasis should be given to equipping and preparing students for the global stage (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012).

### **Ethiopia's New Educational Policy**

Ethiopia enacted a new educational policy that emphasized competence, access to education, transformation, equitability, and innovation in 1994 (Melese et al., 2019). The new policy standardized the high school education system and introduced the same syllabus to both government and private schools, apart from the community ones. However, all regions were given the right to localize textbooks and use the ethnic language as a medium of instruction (Melese et al., 2019; UNESCO & IBE, 2011).

Although the new policy is theoretically appealing, a study criticized its practicality (Oumer et al., 2018). The Education for All report of 2015 indicated that there is only one high school for every 15 elementary schools (Ahmed et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2015). For instance, students who reside in rural regions will be forced to travel a long distance to access high school education. As a result, this challenge will place an additional burden and risk on girls as they will be exposed to harassment and sexual abuse due to the insecurity of traveling alone (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018). The 1994 education and training policy came up with an all-rounded strategy for academic and non academic education; however, it did not consider rural regions (Shibeshi, 2005).

The quality of high school education is another critical issue in Ethiopia's curriculum. According to Ahmed et al. (2019), the increase in student enrollment will not guarantee effective learning, mainly in rural regions, because there exists an unfair provision of educational resources. Educational matters are not merely the responsibilities of local governments; instead, a study concluded that they had become burning issues in national policy agendas (Henig 2013, as cited in Galey, 2015). Two of

the best examples of federal governments' involvement in educational policymaking are Bush's 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and Obama's 2009 Race to the Top initiative (Galey, 2015). In this respect, it is imperative to deeply understand the interplay of Ethiopia's current educational system and students' academic performance to identify the gaps. Consequently, policymakers from all government levels might develop new approaches that bring about reform in the school curriculum and help students excel in their education.

### **Students' Educational Challenges**

There is a significant variation of enrollment rates from region to region. The 2016/2017 school statistics report shows a change (i.e., from 140% to 74.4%) in the national GER for Grade 1-4 and Grade 5-8, respectively, which means many students repeat a class or drop out of elementary school (MoE, 2017). Also, the national GER of Grade 9-12 has been 30.01%, which indicates that many students are not progressing to high school education (MoE, 2017). Statistical reports reveal that students decide to take shorter programs to quickly join the workforce as they find it challenging to proceed to higher education. Hence, it would be meaningful to argue that students have low academic performances in junior secondary school grades and no earlier educational interventions that mitigate students' academic needs exist.

The disproportionality of student and teacher ratio is another factor for students' low academic performance in Ethiopia. A study advised that making students' and teachers' ratios consistent plays a vital role in academic performance (MoE, 2017). Educational policies, teaching methods, teachers' motivation, and educational resources

are also essential factors in achieving a satisfactory academic result. Student interest in education is also a critical factor in academic achievement. Many public high school students are either from low or middle-income families in Ethiopia. Thus, they have a financial struggle to meet their basic needs and, in turn, lose their academic motivation. In line with this argument, research indicated that student academic performance would be affected when their attitude decreases (Dagneu, 2017).

Ethiopia's political unrest also accounted for students' low academic performance in the past. The country has passed through different political clashes in the last many decades. Whenever an internal civil fight breaks out, schools are forced to close due to riots and property destruction and protect students (Dixon & Humble, 2017; Fantahun, 2020). As a result, learning is interrupted, and students remain in the same grade upon returning to school. Students' detachment from educational activities for an extended period substantially affects their academic progress.

### **Culture and Academic Achievement**

Culture is a way of life that distinguishes one person from another. Cultural behaviors are learned social norms that are developed over time. These cultural views shape society's expectations, by which a particular action is measured for approval or disapproval. Likewise, students, as members of families and communities, hold unique values influenced by their cultures. For instance, sexuality is a common topic to discuss in modern education, whereas a traditional Ethiopian family will condemn to talk about it publicly (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018).

Culture is the core of human value and embedded in one's deep consciousness. Hence, it can influence student academic performance because students tend to observe things appealing to them and reject those against their cultural beliefs. To this end, teachers must take into consideration students' cultural backgrounds in a classroom. In a country like Ethiopia, with many sub-cultures, understanding students' worldviews is vital to incorporate culture with education to achieve a satisfactory academic result. In the past, parents and teachers refused to adapt to foreign educational models because the overseas educators excluded Ethiopia's culture (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). For example, an older child is responsible for taking care of younger siblings if both parents must go out to attend to matters such as a burial. Since there are no childcare centers, especially in many rural regions, students might miss class more than one day. Accordingly, schools should place some mechanisms to help students catch up on missed class activities due to home commitments.

Teachers are responsible for exploring the class cultures to easily relate with their students and effectively impart the necessary knowledge. According to Rooney (2018), motivating students to practice their culture, rather than ignoring them, will produce a positive educational outcome. Although it is impossible to prepare different curriculums for students who belong to the same grade, teachers' embracing students' cultures will enable them to develop models that would increase school learning.

### **Other Contributors to Student Academic Performance**

Various internal and external contributors influence student academic performance. Factors that play a role in student academic performance include parent

involvement, teacher professional competence, educational resources, innovative teaching and learning curriculum, financial capability, and student mental and physical health. The attention schools give to these contributors builds a healthy school environment and helps students excel academically.

### **Parents' Involvement**

Research shows that the absence of parent support negatively impacts student academic performance (Ogbonnaya et al., 2016). On the contrary, parents' interactions and involvement at school constructively influence students' emotional wellbeing and academic performance (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Everri et al., 2015). Parents' participation in their children's education influences students to focus on learning because students feel that their education concerns their parents. Parents can be involved in their children's academic life in different ways; for instance, volunteering at school, participating in school meetings, spending time with their children, and helping with homework at home (Mphafe et al., 2014).

Parents' participation in school also encourages teachers and provides resourceful information and insights on students' academic and non academic activities outside of school. Consequently, parents' participation in school plays a vital role in student academic achievement and education development (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Mphafe et al., 2014). Parents will often be closely involved in children's education during elementary school to monitor student activities at home and school. Gonida and Cortina (2014) argued that parents' involvement at an early age positively contributes to students' performance. However, as children grow up, they will begin to exercise their own



choices. As a result, parents either withdraw themselves or change their approach to one that might not impact students' academic achievement.

Parents' lack of involvement in their children's education and their creation of a gap between themselves and students gives way to students' isolation, school dropout, drug abuse, hopelessness, lack of confidence, and immoral and deviant behavior (Erol & Turhan, 2018). Scholars studied that students who are given autonomy over school education by their parents show increased motivational levels (Gonida & Cortina, 2014). This study explored approaches that help students' academic performance in junior secondary school without denying their emotions, educational, and career choices.

### **Teacher Competencies**

Teacher competence has a significant contribution to student academic performance. In today's global world, where technology and information rapidly grow, researchers recommend that teachers obtain knowledge through innovative professional development in a continuous fashion (Akalu, 2016; Bubnys & Kauneckiene, 2017; USAID Teacher Education Project, as cited in Robi, 2017). Competence is one's commitment, experience, and understanding that enables the person to perform a specific job (Ismail et al., 2018). Other scholars define competence as a deep understanding, ability, and characteristics which an individual possesses to accomplish a task (Main & Hammond, 2008, as cited in Ismail et al., 2018). Studies advise teachers to nurture their knowledge through professional development obtained individually and collectively (Bubnys & Kauneckiene, 2017).

Teachers begin developing their professional competence from the time they engage in training. A recent study, which focused on teachers' training, recommended creating a public education policy that promotes a pedagogical residence program to enable teachers to connect theory with practice while taking the course (Feitosa, 2020). The practical exposure will give opportunities to teachers so that they may become familiarized with the real world. Upon completing their study, teachers will be able to fully engage in the field without needing a lengthy orientation period.

Teachers' professional training is critical for the development of quality school education. Ethiopia's MoE recommends elementary and secondary school teachers obtain at least a diploma or a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, the Annual Education Statistics Report informs that there are many teachers without proper qualifications (MoE, 2017). Professional development enables teachers to receive new ideas on various topics, including digital technology, culture and globalism, education and research, art, health, politics, gender and equality, environment, and security. A timely knowledge will empower teachers to prepare students for becoming competent locally and internationally. A skilled teacher obtains current information, educates students using modern technologies and teaching approaches, identifies all students' intellectual stages, and assists each student appropriately (Murphy et al., 2007, as cited in Ismail et al., 2018).

Teachers' continuous professional development directly influences students' secondary school academic performance (Akalu, 2016). According to Abie and Serpa (2019), teachers' and educational leaders' attitudes towards policy reform and innovative

professional development play a vital role in improving teaching. The Ethiopia Statistic Annual Abstract of 2016/2017 indicates that 56% of male and 46% of female teachers left the teaching career to change the profession (MoE, 2017). Based on this report, the education sector's attention to motivational strategies and new teaching policies would be an inevitable task.

Teachers' professional ethics will also play an essential role in student academic performance. Thompson (2018) noted that teachers' positive, warm, and respectful attitudes build excellent student and teacher relationships. For instance, the way teachers interact with the opposite gender and with students who have low academic performance levels reflects their professional conduct. Teachers' behavior will be manifested in their attitude both inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers' professional ethics bring students to perform well in their academics or push them away from education and eventually drop out of school.

### **Educational Resources**

Another cause of students' low academic performance is a lack of educational resources within schools. Students merely sitting in class will not assure academic achievement. Instead, schools need to provide and use all educational resources necessary to maximize student academic performance. Scholars reported that many high schools in Ethiopia do not have adequate educational resources such as books, classrooms, laboratories, sports equipment, electronic tools, medical facilities, and assistive devices (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017; Wirtu, 2017).

Educational facilities such as water supply and electricity are also some of the limitations in different secondary schools in Ethiopia. Another study indicated that secondary schools in central Ethiopia had only 67% internet connection between 2016 and 2017 (MoE, 2017). Lack of educational resources decreases motivation, leading to low academic achievement. Wirtu (2017) noted that the physical environment's quality equally influences academic achievement. Schools with good and eye-catching structures influence students to achieve better academic performance (Wirtu, 2017). On the contrary, schools with ruined and downgraded buildings and unclean premises demotivate students to learning. Eyasu (2017) stated that when the absence of motivation persists, students have low performance and become negligent to their education.

### **The Role of Educational Leadership in Student Academic Performance**

School leadership is pivotal for educational reform and academic excellence. Teachers' competence levels and personal endeavors will more likely be withered unless supported and cultivated by the school leadership. Harris (2017) discussed that policymakers are looking for new approaches to introduce an effective system change and that leadership takes a central place. Besides administering the budget, staffing, and pupils, school leadership plays a crucial role in developing teachers' capacities, impacting learning, and, thereby, increasing student academic performance.

An effective leader develops realistic strategies, assists subordinates, and rewards their dedications (Northouse, 2013). Leaders with a social transformation agenda are keen on the organization's day-to-day activity and will look for a solution whenever any issue arises. Accountable leaders feel that they have a responsibility for increasing

students' academic achievement. As a result, they will be committed to exploring innovative approaches and policies to overcome challenges at regional and national levels.

### **Summary**

Ethiopia has shown rapid economic growth in the last 30 years; however, its education sector still requires attention. Researchers argue that the educational policies and approaches need to be revisited because the current curriculum's relevance and accessibility are in question (Melese et al., 2019). This study explored teachers' perceptions of the current junior secondary school educational system and its effectiveness to students' academic performance.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the importance of parents' involvement in students' education, teachers' professional competence, and educational resources for students' academic performances. Further, my discussion included government and the history of secondary school curriculum development in Ethiopia, international organizations' connections with secondary school education, students' educational challenges, educational policies, culture and academic achievement, non academic policies, gender equality, and school leadership. In Chapter 3, I present the research's method, including research design and rationale, the researcher's role, the methodology, which comprises participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment and participation procedures, and data collection and analysis. I also discuss the procedures that I used to maintain the study's trustworthiness and integrity as a scholarly work.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

In this qualitative study, I explored teachers' perception of junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia. Limited research has been carried out on a similar topic in the region. There is a gap in addressing the current educational policies and student academic performance problems in central Ethiopia. In Chapter 3, I present the research design and the rationale for choosing the generic research inquiry. I provide an argument that a researcher's role is as the primary research instrument in a qualitative study. I also discuss other subtopics, including the study's methodology (participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment and participation, data collection and analysis), trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

Research can be a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the academic fields contributing to qualitative research development include anthropology, sociology, and humanities. Given (2008) noted that many disciplines such as history, medicine, communication, politics, and feminism have also contributed to the advancement of qualitative research design. Ravitch and Carl (2016) considered qualitative research as an active method that enables researchers to understand the way people perceive their world, interact within it, and give meaning to their experiences.

Unlike quantitative experimental research, a qualitative design will not attempt to manipulate the case under study. Instead, qualitative research describes social phenomena

as they occur naturally. The qualitative design focuses on people, their experiences, and their views about their environment; hence, it has a subjective nature (Taylor et al., 2016). Recent scholarly works advocate that qualitative research is crucial for program improvement, teachers' career advancement, teamwork, and strategic planning (Bretschneider et al., 2017).

The nature of this study was a qualitative inquiry and used a generic study approach. The study's research question was "what are teachers' perceptions of the junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia?" A qualitative design was appropriate for finding teachers' perceptions of the existing junior secondary school education and student academic performance. The generic methodology enabled me to explore interviewees' notions, perceptions, and justifications about factors that play a role in junior secondary school students' academic performance and the causes for the decline in high school education in central Ethiopia.

### **Role of the Researcher**

A researcher's role takes the central place in qualitative research because the individual is the main instrument of data collection, unlike in quantitative research, which uses numbers and surveys (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In a qualitative study, there will be a close relationship between the researcher and the participants. As a result, ethics is a critical matter that needs attention. To this end, a researcher must disclose relevant issues, biases, experiences, and assumptions and explain how these barriers will be overcome without compromising the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Often a researcher takes note of things appealing to themselves, and this creates a bias. To overcome this weakness, I took an objective researcher's stance or a self-controlled subjectivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One of the researcher's roles is to obtain the necessary permissions to protect the participants' rights and freedoms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Hence, I obtained written permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University (10-16-20-0299178) and from the schools' principals to show that the research before conducting the study. Further, Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised that a researcher must take notes about personal feelings, views, and insights without overemphasizing them during the data collection process. To this end, I prepared a research journal to record some thoughts, which I used to widen my understanding during the data analysis.

### **Methodology**

In this section, I discuss the methodology I used to carry out the study. First, I present the criteria I followed in selecting participants and their numbers. Second, I discuss the instruments used for data collection. The third subsection includes discussion of the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Finally, I present the study's data analysis plan.

#### **Participant Selection**

Before data collection procedures, a researcher must identify the participants from whom they want to generalize the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This study used a purposeful and key knowledgeable sampling strategy to select the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A purposeful and key knowledgeable sample enables one to choose



participants who are presumed to be resourceful for the desired information (Creswell, 2007; Robson, 2002). The study included teachers who teach mathematics, science, information technology, language, history, physical education, geography, art, social, and ethics in junior secondary school.

Because it would have been challenging to involve all junior secondary schools in the study, I identified two public secondary schools from central Ethiopia. The central region was purposefully selected to pick long-established schools. It was expected that these forerunner high schools obtain extensive pedagogical experience and are desirable to provide rich information. A total of 10 teachers, who obtained a minimum of a bachelor's degree and had 5 years of teaching experience, were selected from the two schools using a purposive sampling procedure.

After I identified the two long-established schools, I visited the principals to express my interest in carrying out the study. As planned in the proposal, I used unique identifiers (School A and School B) to mask the schools' names, and "central region" was used to protect the schools' exact locations. I handed formal requests in person to the schools' principals for permission to perform the study. After granting permission for the study, the principals announced an invitation for voluntary participation during staff meetings. I selected teachers who met the selection criteria. Following teachers' confirmations for participation, I provided individual orientations to participants to inform them about the overall goal, the confidentiality of their information, and their voluntary rights for participation. The interviews took place in a meeting room based on

the availability of the participants. I provided additional information on participant selection under the Procedures for Recruitment and Participation section.

### **Instrumentation**

Data collection can be done using different methods. Marshall and Rossman (2011) noted that qualitative research often depends on four primary data collection methods: observational, participatory, interview, and document analysis. To Ravitch and Carl (2016), the in-depth interview is the core of qualitative studies as it enables the researcher to gather rich information that will give answers to the research questions. Also, the in-depth interview helps the researcher be flexible in scheduling meetings, unlike a focus group interview, which requires identifying a specific time for all participants. Therefore, this study used in-depth interviews as its primary data collection instrument.

In a generic descriptive inquiry, the interview helps a researcher explore participants' perceptions that spring from their opinions, experiences, and feelings (Liu, 2016). Additionally, the study used a pragmatic approach, which enabled me to utilize multiple data collection resources. Hence, I used observation as a secondary source to increase my understanding of junior secondary school education by observing bulletin boards, libraries, laboratories, classrooms, sports grounds, and the schools' physical surroundings. I used SDT to develop the in-depth interview questions and the observation guide from two perspectives: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

## **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

I approached the principals and requested their permission and cooperation to perform the study after identifying the two schools. I registered teachers who were interested in participating in the study after I received the principals' approvals. Teachers with the most years of teaching experience and a minimum of a bachelor's degree were selected to participate in the study. After obtaining each teacher's consent for participation, I had an individual orientation session with the participants to clarify the topic, the study's goal, and their identity confidentiality. The necessary health guidance, such as physical distancing, washing of hands, and covering the mouth, were properly practiced to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

There was enough flexibility in scheduling the interviews based on the teachers' availability. I also informed participants that they could withdraw from the interview at any stage if they decided to do so. I used a member check as my strategy to validate participants' responses. A member check, also known as respondent validation, is a procedure of sending the interview's results back to participants to verify the data's accuracy (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A member check is a valuable process to let the participants know that the researcher values their ideas and protects against researcher bias (Robson, 2002). Hence, I started conducting the member check as I carried out the interviews in the form of probing questions such as "please elaborate this point" or "Is there anything that I am missing?" (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 198). Later, I communicated the transcribed data with the participants through phone calls to conduct

the member check. As such, there was not any interpretation or transcription error identified by the respondents.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected from teachers in central Ethiopia. I carried out the study between November 05, 2020, and November 13, 2020. I considered all the necessary measures not to disrupt the participants' personal and professional time. For instance, participants were given different timeframe options: morning, afternoon, evening, weekday, or weekend. I used a semi structured and open-ended interview method for data collection. Semi structured interview questions allow a researcher to guide the discussion (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open-ended questions help flexibility, explore more in-depth, achieve broader perspectives, and encourage connection (Robson, 2002). This approach also enabled me to use the probe method to ask additional questions to elicit more information from teachers until I reached the saturation stage (Robson, 2002).

There were ten questions that I asked each participant. The interviews were conducted in Amharic and English languages because I speak and understand both languages. Therefore, the participants were permitted to switch between the two languages as they answered the interview questions, which they found convenient to express their views in their native language. A debriefing moment followed each interview to engage in the final conversation. In the end, I gave each participant an Ethiopian Birr equivalent to CA \$10 as a sign of appreciation. I recorded all the interviews with a voice recorder. The data were transcribed by Qual Transcribe, a

professional company, with the permission of the IRB office of Walden University. The data are saved in a password-protected personal external hard drive and will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis is organizing and sorting raw information to come up with themes, which become the findings that help the researcher answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Generic qualitative inquiry attempts to find one's meaning of an event from the individual's perspective (Kennedy, 2016). In line with this effort, the study used a thematic analysis approach and followed five sequential steps to analyze the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Step one, the data were planned and arranged for analysis, including transcribing interviews and preparing the journals in such a way as to make them easily accessible and manageable to start the process. In step two, I repeatedly read the data in its entirety as I noted interviewees' key ideas and insights. Step three, I started coding the data based on the main thoughts of participants using NVivo software. In the last six decades, qualitative researchers have been widely using computer-based software to analyze their data (Cypress, 2019). Accordingly, I used NVivo software to store, systematize, and reprocess the data, which I found invaluable to saving time and energy and rigorously supporting the study's findings with proof (Cypress, 2019). Step four, I generated themes that described the findings of the study. Step five, I presented the themes that emerged from the interviews and the secondary data source in narrative format and communicated the results in Chapter Four.

## **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the precision of a study. A study gains trust when its methods, data collection, and interpretations maintain quality or rigor. As opposed to quantitative research, which depends on quantifiable measurements, qualitative research can demonstrate its rigorousness through describing four major aspects: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Credibility**

Credibility denotes the trustworthiness of a study. Research is credible when a researcher uses a suitable method to understand a scenario (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As such, I used a carefully designed qualitative research method. I asked each participant the same interview questions without distorting the central point and received their responses. Further, I obtained approval from the participants for the correctness of data interpretation to confirm that all responses correctly reflect their perceptions. I used this strategy in two ways. One, during the data collection in the form of probing questions such as “Is there anything that I am missing?” or “Is this how you would categorize this idea/concept/comment?” (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 198). Two, I communicated the final translation and transcription to the participants to get their feedback and approval.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the research findings’ appropriateness in other settings (Solomon & Amankwaa, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One approach to show the study’s transferability is linking the study to a theory so that readers may relate the results to previous scholarly works (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this manner, I connected the study to

SDT to use the approach in other situations. Also, the study provided evidence to researchers that its findings could be applicable to a different context, sceneries, and populations.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency of research in all its stages through time (Connelly, 2016). This study is dependable as it maintains its argument from the planning phase to choosing the design and methods to the interpretation of the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Also, I provided detailed information on its methods and showed coherency from one part to another to be used as a dependable academic resource to future scholars.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability signifies bias freeness of research and that the same findings would be achieved if the research were to be repeated (Connelly, 2016). Although a researcher is the central human instrument in qualitative research, high care must be taken to avoid any prejudgments that might misinterpret the findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Therefore, I held an objective researcher stance to bring this study to the level of scholarly work (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I recorded all interviews and used a professional transcriber, which I found helpful to avoid bias. I also used different strategies that include reflexivity, triangulation, operational journals, and feedback to achieve the findings' conformability (Connelly, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical consideration is an essential part of the research that distinguishes it as a quality scholarly work. To this end, I used different measures to maintain the ethical

quality of the research. These actions included obtaining approval from the IRB of Walden University, gaining access to participants, and getting participants' informed consent before the data collection. Similarly, I maintained participants' dignity, personal boundaries, and confidentiality at all stages of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

With the guidance provided by the IRB and the research advisory committee, I examined each step of the research before the actual data collection to ensure that the research qualifies as a scholarly work. An official request for gaining access to the research participants was submitted in writing to the school principals. I handed in the request in person as it was difficult to communicate via email due to the country's internal conflict at the time of data collection.

Informed consent refers to accessing a site where the researcher is considered an outsider, getting permission to access documents that are not publicly available, and obtaining information from participants of their own free will through interview or other data collection methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Hence, all participants signed a consent form to participate in the study, and no participant withdrew from the study. The participants are humans; hence, respecting their dignity and boundaries was an essential matter to me. Therefore, I maintained appropriate boundaries between myself and the participants. Also, I was mindful of participants' gender, culture, religion, or other differences so that any hindrance might not arise in the data collection process due to these variations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The data obtained from participants and observations will be saved on my external hard drive and will be protected by a password. I will keep the data for 5 years in



my home. The study used unique identifiers to protect the participants' and schools' names. After the data was analyzed, the raw data and other materials were placed in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after 5 years. I will communicate the study's findings in its condensed form to the schools' principals once I received final approval from Walden University.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this generic qualitative inquiry was to explore teachers' perceptions of current high school education, policies, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. The research aimed to come up with innovative educational approaches and policies to improve students' academic performance. The research took place in central Ethiopia, and two junior secondary schools were identified for the data collection. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 junior secondary school teachers with a bachelor's degree and teaching experience of 5 years or more. The study used a semi structured interview as its primary data collection method, and observation was used as a secondary data source. The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. NVivo software was used to organize and systematically manage the data. After the raw data was coded, I generated themes that became the study's findings. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the data analysis.

## Chapter 4: Results

This generic qualitative research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the current secondary school education and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia. The study instruments include a semi structured in-depth interview and observation. The central RQ that the study used was, "what are teachers' perceptions of the junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performances in central Ethiopia?" Ten subsequent interview questions were used to elicit data focused on the school system, educational resources, educational policies, teachers' competence, school leadership, parent involvement, and student-teacher relationships to understand student academic performance.

In this chapter, I present the data analysis with its pertinent answers to the research questions. Following this introduction part, I describe the setting. Next, teachers' and student enrollment demographics are discussed, followed by the data collection procedure described in the study's methodology section. The chapter provides the data analysis of teachers' perceptions of the current secondary school education and student academics. Finally, I describe the evidence of the trustworthiness of the study. I conclude the chapter with a summary that connects the section to Chapter 5.

### **Setting**

The setting of this generic qualitative study was two secondary schools in central Ethiopia. Five teachers from each school, a total of 10 teachers, participated in the study. The study focused on current junior secondary education and student academic

performance. No known personal or organizational conditions influenced participants during either the data collection or the data analysis.

### **Demographics**

The data was obtained from teachers with a minimum of BA degree and 5 years' experience teaching junior secondary students in central Ethiopia. Table 1 shows the teacher's demographics and each interview duration, while student enrollment demographics are presented in Table 2.

**Table 1**

*Demographics of Participants*

Teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Education level	MA	BA	MA	MA	BA	MA	MA	BA	MA	MA
Years of teaching experience	10	7	5	5	6	29	33	11	33	28
Duration of interview (in minutes)	40	25	30	26	54	30	28	22	44	25

**Table 2**

*Student Enrollment Demographics*

School	Number of students
A	2966
B	3000

### **Data Collection**

This study used a semi structured interview as its primary data collection method. This approach enabled me to guide the discussion and ask additional questions when

necessary until I reached the saturation stage (Bleiker et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Each participant was asked 10 questions. The minimum interview time was 22 minutes, while the maximum was 54 minutes. I observed the two schools within 2 hours. After receiving approval from Walden University's IRB and the two schools in Ethiopia, I conducted all the interviews. The interviews were conducted in the Amharic language and partly in English, and all the interviews took place in a meeting room. The participants were allowed to switch between the two languages as they answered the research questions to communicate their ideas fully. There was a debriefing moment where each participant could ask any questions and make additional comments. I gave a CA \$10 honorarium to all participants as an appreciation for participating in the study. The interviews were voice recorded, and the data were transcribed and translated into the English language by a professional company. There were no unusual circumstances that hindered the data collection. Providentially, the schools were just opening after closure due to COVID-19; hence, teachers were readily available for an interview.

### **Data Analysis**

This section provides the study's data analysis method, which followed a thematic approach guided by five sequential steps (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used NVivo software for the data analysis. In Step 1, the transcribed data and notes from the observations were arranged to make them manageable and accessible for analysis. In Step 2, I read the transcription multiple times to familiarize myself, as I noted each participant's main ideas. In Step 3, I went through each participants' responses and started to move their main concepts to codes developed from SDT and the research

question using NVivo software. For example, Teacher 2's response, "in general, it is better to say there is no field trip that students are exposed to," was coded under "Extracurricular Activities." For Step 4, I generated themes based on patterns and relationships between different codes. For instance, the above Teacher 2's sample feedback, which was coded under extracurricular activities, was compared with other codes such as *educational resources*, *student interest-centered curriculum*, and the theme Extra Support generated to represent all other related concepts.

New codes that included *school leadership*, *school environment*, *teacher and student assistance programs* were developed to represent new ideas and listed under a subfolder named New Themes. I assigned a new theme, Healthy School Community Policies, to represent the emerged codes. In Step 5, the themes that emerged from the interviews and the secondary data sources were represented in narrative format to communicate the research results.

## **Results**

In this section, I provide the results of the data analysis. The section is subdivided into the following themes and subthemes: Educational Policies, Student Academic Performance, Interest, Relationship, Family Support, Nonacademic Policies, Educational Resources, Extra Support, Teacher Professional Competence, Professional Development, Gender Equality, School Environment, School Leadership and, Teacher and Student Assistance Programs. The themes were identified to answer the main research question, "what are teachers' perceptions of the junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performance in central Ethiopia?" as well as the

subsequent interview questions. A unique identifier was given to each participant to protect their identity. For instance, “T1” is assigned to the first teacher, “T2” represents the second teacher, and, in this manner, “T10” was given to the tenth teacher. I present these themes with definitions, number of files, and references in Table 3 followed by a discussion of each theme.

**Table 3***Names of Themes with Number of Files, References, and Definitions*

Name	Files	References	Definitions
Educational policies	12	37	The principles and policies of the government in the educational circle. Also, it refers to all regulations that govern the school systems.
Student academic performance	10	38	The educational measurement of students' academic achievement on different subjects.
Educational resources	12	41	All school resources, including teachers, administrative supports, leaders, learning materials, and facilities used to educate students.
Family support	10	30	Refers to parents' contributions to student academic performance and personal development.
Interest	10	26	Students' individual choice and inclination around education.
Non academic policies	10	15	Policies and principles that guide staff and students to make the school environment healthy and conducive for learning.
Relationship	10	25	The interaction of students between themselves, teachers, parents, and the school community.
Extra support	12	22	Extracurricular activities that expose students to various fields to increase their knowledge and understanding of a discipline.
Teacher competence	10	22	Teachers' skill and knowledge of a subject, ability to educate students, and professional conduct practice.
Professional development	10	13	The upgrading of teaching knowledge and practices through exposure to new ideas and information.
Gender equality	10	13	The practice of equal privileges and responsibilities regardless of gender differences.
School environment	6	9	The physical location, structure, and appearance of the school, including its outside surroundings.
School leadership	6	34	The process of guiding and managing teachers, administrative staff, students, and parents to achieve educational purposes.
Teacher and student assistance programs	7	22	The provision of school support to enhance students' and teachers' mental, physical, social, and financial health.

### **Educational Policies**

Participants were asked how they see the current educational policies in central Ethiopia. All participants pointed out the ineffectiveness of the current educational policies. T1 commented that the educational policymakers “should take teachers’ perspectives into account while revising curriculum” during policy development. T2 argued that the education policy should give equal emphasis to “I.T. courses” and that students must be exposed to computer knowledge “in their early ages.” During my observation, I also noticed that art classes are not given attention. For instance, there is no music class in either school.

T3 and T4 stated that the current education is focused on theoretical knowledge rather than practice and that its standard is low. According to T5’s perspective, “activities like biological experiments using microscopes or demonstrating cultures are not experienced. But there is capacity, there is interest, there are people. What we lack is the system.” T6 reported that the “policy is not considering the students’ current state; they are just focused on adding content.” T6 went on to mention that, despite teachers’ input in the development and execution of new educational policies, their ideas are often ignored by educational policymakers. T7 believed that there is a bias in school policymaking as the higher body hears only those who belong to the same political party.

T8 felt that the “free promotion educational policy” must be removed as students should be evaluated and, if not successful, there must be a system to support students academically. T9 discussed that the MoE announced that a new curriculum, which existed before the current one, will replace the present one; however, schools are still



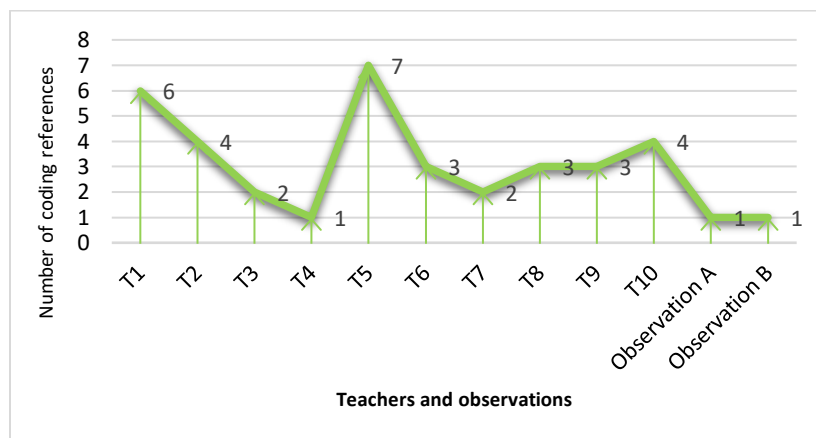
using the old one. T10 stated that the current curriculum is not realistic and reported the following:

We teach our students about European history but not our own. What good is it if he [a student] knows about the American Revolution and Industrial Revolution without knowing about Ethiopia's north and the south nations and nationalities?

The number of coding references by teachers and observations is provided in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Educational Policies – Coding References by Teachers and Observations*



### **Student Academic Performance**

All 10 teachers shared their perception of the contributing factors to students' good or poor academic performances. T1, T3, T5, and T10 reported that teachers are responsible for students' academic performance, as they are not adequately and responsibly teaching students. T3 added that "lack of a comfortable classroom, bad environment, and lack of resources are also factoring for students' bad academic performance." T3 reported that the fulfillment of the hereinbefore mentioned school

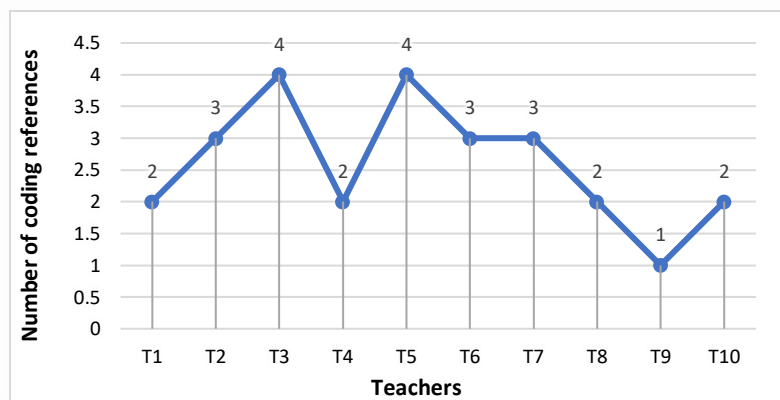
necessities would bring about an excellent academic achievement. T2 and T8 looked at bad academic performance from a family perspective.

According to T2, some households live with “5 or 6 children; hence, they do not afford to cover their children’s educational expenses,” which forces the “student to work to get money.” Eventually, this affects their school performance. T4 believed that low academic performance is the outcome of the “parents’ attitude towards education.” Because many parents give low credit to education, their children will also be reluctant to it. T6 reported that transportation shortage is the cause of students’ poor education as some students arrive at school 2 hours after classes start.

T7 and T10 connected weak leadership as the factor to the decline of student academic performance. T7 further explained that “there needs to be an effective leader.” A person with a passion for education ... and professionally trained for the position.” T9 felt that focus should be given to early age education where students begin developing knowledge. Figure 3 showed the number of coding references by teachers.

**Figure 3**

*Student Academic Performance – Coding References by Teachers*



### **Educational Resources**

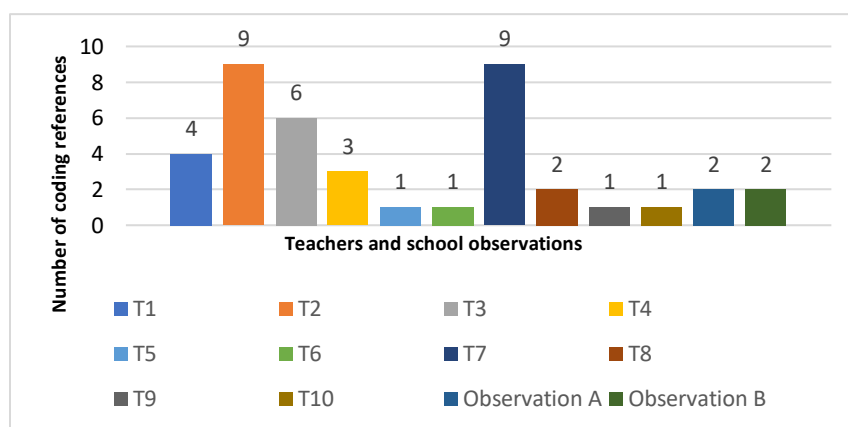
Participants were asked to share their views regarding the availability of the necessary educational resources in each school. T1, T3, T4, T7, T8, and T9 considered textbooks and guidebooks to be the primary educational resources. T8 added classrooms, blackboards, and whiteboards to be essential resources. While T7 reported that no reference materials are available in the library. T4 mentioned that most books have errors. T4 acknowledged that the school receives some computer donations and funding from overseas; however, monetarily, “there is nothing we would see that are down to earth in relation with those funds.”

T1 and T3 believed that teachers are vital academic resources. T2 and T3 discussed that plasma is another supportive resource; however, T2 reported, “plasma is only applied for high school students. Nevertheless, for junior secondary school, it is not implemented yet.” T5 stressed the absence of library resources and teaching aids in high

school. T6 raised the concern of the dysfunctionality of laboratory facilities in high schools. T10 believed that there are no “supportive materials to students other than the typical educational materials to make them more efficient and effective.” Upon observing the schools, I was informed that School A's library could accommodate 7% of the student population; however, the library’s condition is poor. Similarly, I observed the insufficiency of books and poor library condition in school B. Figure 4 presented the number of coding references by teachers and observations.

**Figure 4**

*Educational Resources: Coding References by Teachers and Observations*



### Family Support

All participants agreed that parent involvement in the school environment significantly impacts students’ academic performance. T1 estimated that only “20–30% of parents attend their children’s activity.” Also, T1 reported the following:

Some students do not report their daily activities to their parents. I remember there was a student whom I told to bring his parents to the school. And he did not

attend a class for about a month. But their parents did not know what was happening.

To T2, parent involvement is at a minimal percentage. Parents show up only during school closure day to discuss the academic progress of their children. T3 related parents' negligence about their children's academic life due to student misbehavior and raised the following: "Most parents are tired of their children's behavior. So, they get relieved when they bring their children to school. So, they do not care about what is going on here." T4 shared that "most parents know that their children wear uniforms and go to school in the morning but do not know where they spent the whole day."

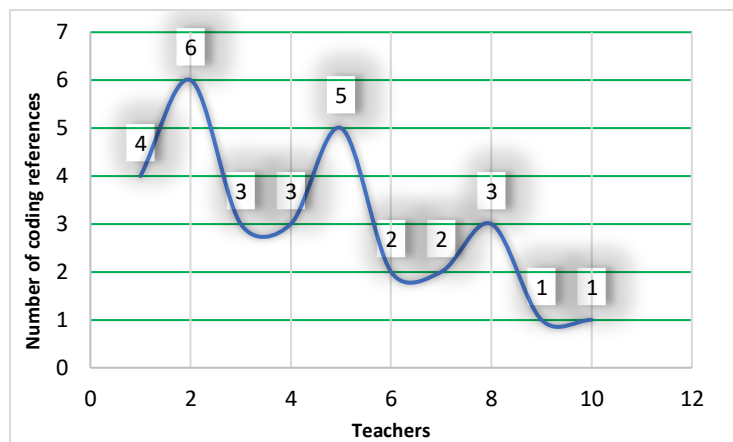
T5 and T8 mentioned that the cause of parents' detachment from their children's education is due to financial hardship and that parents give priority to putting bread on the table rather than spending time to come to school. T5 reported further that parents' educational level and communication problems are also other factors. T6 concluded that there is a problem, but "nothing ... has been done so far."

According to T7, "even when a student is given a notice that says he/she will be expelled unless they bring their parents, they show up after a week or two." Similarly, T9 mentioned that when the school invites parents for a meeting, "most of them are not willing to come, but some of them come and motivate" the students. T10 added that only a few parents "keep an eye, but some of them do not know their child—this is very sad."

Figure 5 presented the number of coding references by teachers.

**Figure 5**

*Family Support: Coding References by Teachers*



### **Interest**

One of the questions that participants were asked was to share their perceptions of whether student interest is safeguarded and cultivated. T1 reported that the MoE policies are “completely different from a student’s interest,” and as a result, students face the challenge of choosing the right field of study when they join higher education. To T2, the textbooks are not “application-based”; therefore, students cannot get practical exposure at the right grade. T3 stated,

I believe more successful students will emerge if we handle them according to their interests. But our education policy forces us to handle all students in the same way. There is no policy, which considers a student’s capacity and interest.

According to T4, “student’s interest is decreasing from time to time” because the education curriculum is not prepared in this manner. T5 reported, “teachers cannot handle students only with their degree knowledge. They should try to assess what the student’s

interest is. It requires research. And the government is not working on this issue.” T6 reported that students learn content which “they would find in freshman year.”

T7 stated that current educational policy does not use a bottom-up approach and that the “top people will not accept or approve most of the ideas that come from below.”

T7 felt that the Ethiopian school curriculum began to decline some 30 years ago.

Similarly, T8 added that policy comes from top to bottom without considering student interests, and all other things follow the same approach. T9 discussed that after joining

and graduating from university, students “stay for two or three years...without a job,”

which indicates Ethiopia’s educational policy’s weakness. T10 reported that teachers

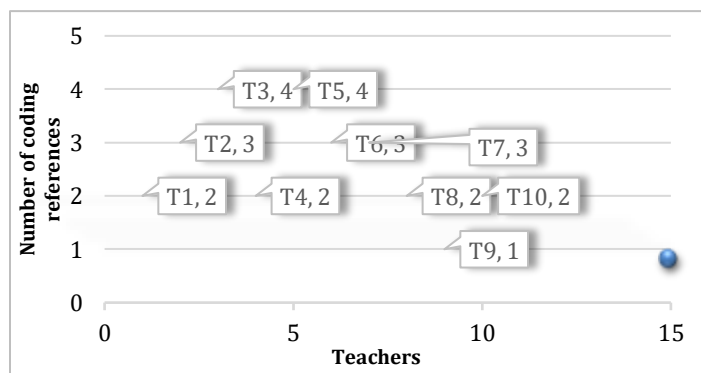
sometimes hear about educational policy revision through media as the public does,

which means teachers’ and students’ interests are not being considered. Figure 6

displayed the number of coding references by teachers.

**Figure 6**

*Interest: Coding References by Teachers*



### **Non Academic Policies**

Non academic school policies have a role to play in the life of students.

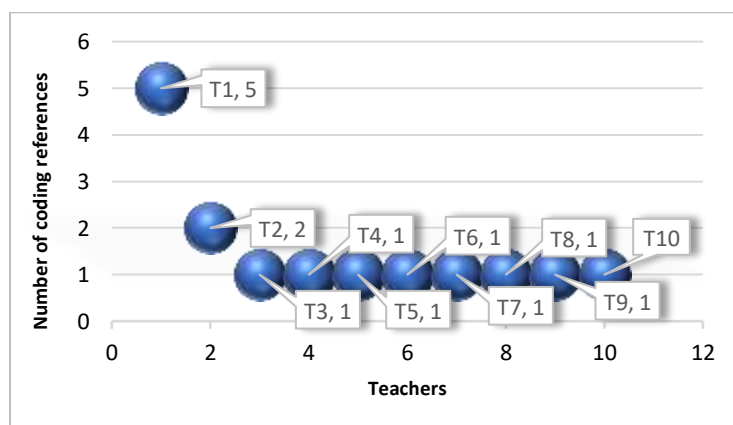
Participants shared their experiences and views regarding non academic policies from

different angles. T1 reported that nonacademic rules and regulations differ from one school to another. For instance, some schools start classes at 8:00 AM, while others at 8:30 AM, which is a challenge, particularly to schools located side by side. Also, T1 felt that “the discipline policy is not strict” as students fight within the school compound, and the administrators will take no action.

T2 considered voluntary services as the only nonacademic activity in the school. T3, T7, and T8 regard nonacademic policy as programs or clubs that support students in some way; however, such activities are currently inactive. T4, T5, T6, and T9 reported that nonacademic policies are no longer given the school’s attention. T6 reported that the school needs to develop effective nonacademic policies as students take drugs around the school environment. T10 suggested that nonacademic policies are essential to tackle social problems. Generally, there are no active non academic policies, or the existing ones are not operational in schools. Figure 7 presented the number of coding references by teachers.

**Figure 7**

*Non academic Policies: Coding References by Teachers*





## Relationship

A positive relationship is essential for both the personal development of students and their academic achievement. Participants reported their perception of students' interactions within the school grounds from different perspectives. T1 and T3 shared that there is disrespectfulness both from the teachers and students. Younger and new teachers do not professionally approach the students. Likewise, students do not respect teachers, especially younger ones, and mock them. T2 added that they "laugh" at disabled teachers. T3 reported that "female students bring their muscular boyfriends to threaten us" when there are disciplinary cases and that the "government must work to improve this." T4 brought up the following:

We were afraid to ask or have fun with our teachers in the old times. We did not get that opportunity. We could not get close to them to get some advice. But currently, there is a close relationship between students and teachers. Today's students are fast in communication.

T5 commented,

When students see how their teachers eat or wear, or live, they start to disdain their teachers. They start to disrespect them. Some teachers have bad relationships with their students. They drink alcohol together; they take drugs; sometimes, they are also involved in immoral activities.

However, T5 stated that "some teachers have a good relationship with their students" due to, perhaps, their "classroom management" abilities. T6 suggested that fixing the relationship between students and teachers at school requires willingness; nevertheless,

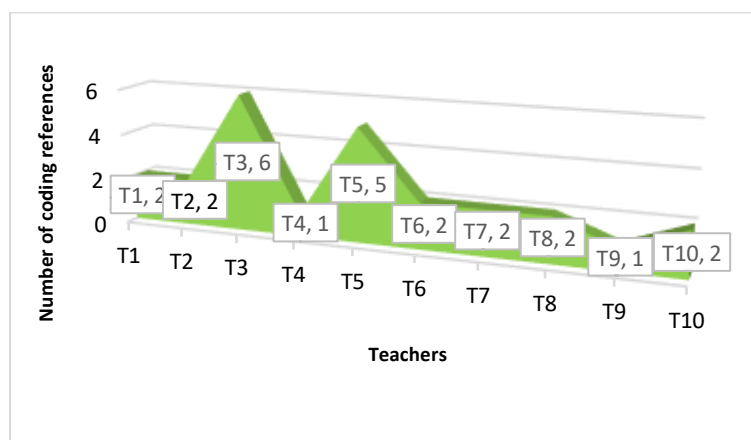
“there is nothing that has been done so far.” T7 saw the student-teacher relationship problem from the student number perspective and said,

One of the main things about classrooms is the number of students. If you are going to do good work, if you are going to evaluate each student’s exercises and homework and personally know the students, the number of students must be lowered.

T8 felt that there is a “distance” in the teacher-student relationship. T8 went on and reported, “let us take physical education, for example, it is given once a week to 5 different classes it is not only hard to know their names it is also hard to distinguish them by face.” T9 considered the reluctance of school administration or educational government departments to make the necessary effort to improve the student-teacher relationship. Because the necessary measures are not taken, T10 observed that student and teacher relationships are “getting worst.” Figure 8 showed the number of references by teachers.

**Figure 8**

*Relationship: Coding References by Teachers*



## **Extra Support**

Students are not only gain knowledge from class teaching but also through exposure to various activities and the real world. Extra support, which is typically called extracurricular programs, plays a vital role in providing such opportunities to students. Teachers were asked to share their views regarding the extra support students receive from schools. T1 acknowledged the importance of additional support for students to explore their preferences. T1 discussed further,

Last time, the Science and Technology Minister called us and told us to send students to participate in some activities immediately. They called us in the morning, and we sent them in the afternoon. But there is no organized and consistent field activity.

In line with government assistance and initiative for extra support, T3 shared the following experience:

For example, I want to take my students to meteorological stations. There are many experiments made there. My fellow workers and I are interested in doing that. But the government does not give attention to such kinds of practices.

T2, T5, T8, and T9 reported that extracurricular activity is no longer actively practiced in schools. T4 said, "I teach a chemistry course. But students do not get any chance to visit chemical laboratories or industries. They did not get the chance practically to see what they learned in theory."

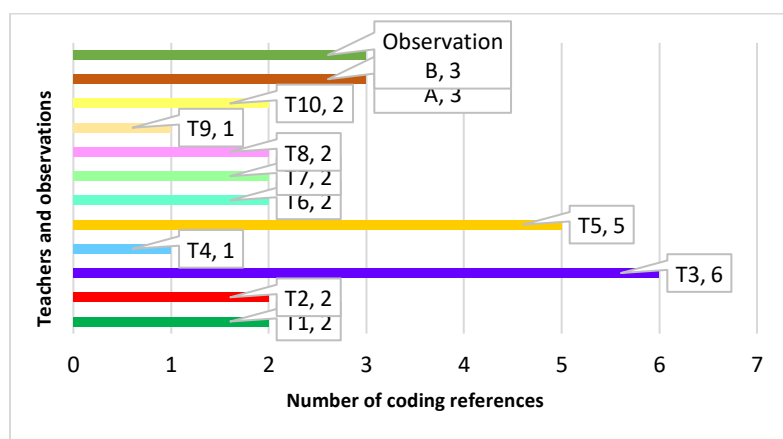
However, T6 saw the extracurricular activity as the teacher's responsibility and said, "for example, the lab assistant should be able to show the students the chemicals

used, and the main teacher must be willing.” T7 called the past and mentioned that extra support used to be the schools’ practice but is no longer “available” now. T10 affirmed that extracurricular activities “help to build students and especially become a multi-aspect thinker.”

During my school observations, I noted that there are various trophies in the two principals’ offices. I noticed that the sports facilities and the School A environment are not convenient for sports activities or events, although the school exposed students to medical and student traffic practices. As per School B, the sports ground is small enough to run different sports activities. I observed noticeboards, pictures, and class posters, and I noticed no information regarding social clubs or art activities. Figure 9 displayed the number of references by teachers and observations.

**Figure 9**

*Extra Support: Coding References by Teachers and Observations*



### Teacher Competencies

All participants agreed that teacher professional competence has a considerable impact on student academic performance and expressed their concerns about some issues

that need to be addressed. According to T1, some teachers with MSc join the teaching profession. However, those already in the profession and with a bachelor's degree do a better job. Also, T1 suggested that there must be an assessment for "quality assurance" to ensure that teachers are up to the teaching standard. Similarly, T5 said that "quality assurance has been implemented before some years," but currently is not functional. T2 and T7 commented that each teacher must be evaluated and confirmed to meet the profession's requirements. While some hold teachers accountable to the teaching profession, others, like T3, expressed their concern in this way:

In previous years, I checked many references and additional materials before getting to class. But I have now lost my appetite to teach. I do not want to continue in this area. Even if I continue, I will be careless. I did not get any reward or compensation for my performance. Not only me but also most of the teachers are planning to change their field.

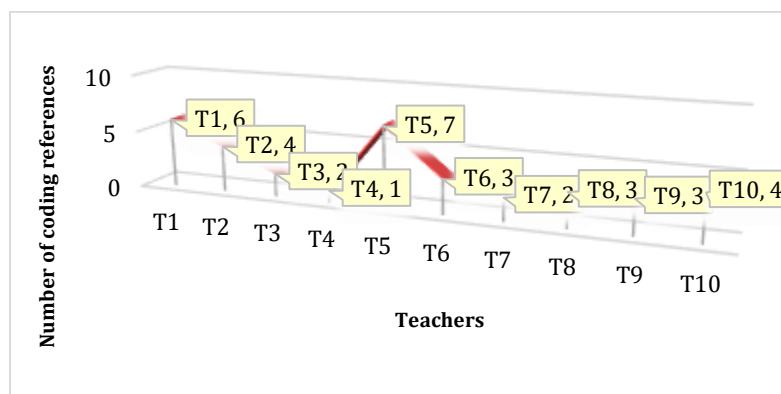
Most participants shared their worries about the teaching profession's decline due to the infiltration of politics in the school system, low salary, and ineffective policy. Despite the ongoing challenges, T4 mentioned that teachers "try to refer additional materials to equip themselves for the class."

Also, T8 and T9 stated that teaching performance differs from department to department, and some teachers are committed to doing a professional job. While preparing oneself for daily activity is the teachers' responsibility, there should be some effort from the MoE to help teachers become competent and maintain the teaching standard. T6 reported that the teaching profession is often the last option that one takes

when all other career paths are impossible to achieve. Likewise, T10 explained that the teaching profession is a “shelter” until teachers achieve their dream jobs. I presented the number of references by teachers in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

*Teacher Competence: Coding References by Teachers*



### **Professional Development**

Learning should be continuous in the teaching profession as the world is rapidly changing; teachers need to obtain current knowledge to educate their students effectively. All 10 participants expressed their frustrations with professional development at schools. To T1, “the biggest challenge is lack of English language,” and there is no such support at the school. Similarly, T3 stated that “there is no pedagogical center in this school.” T2 reported that teachers take courses that do not align with their interests, but they do it simply because the “government forced us” to learn a second degree.

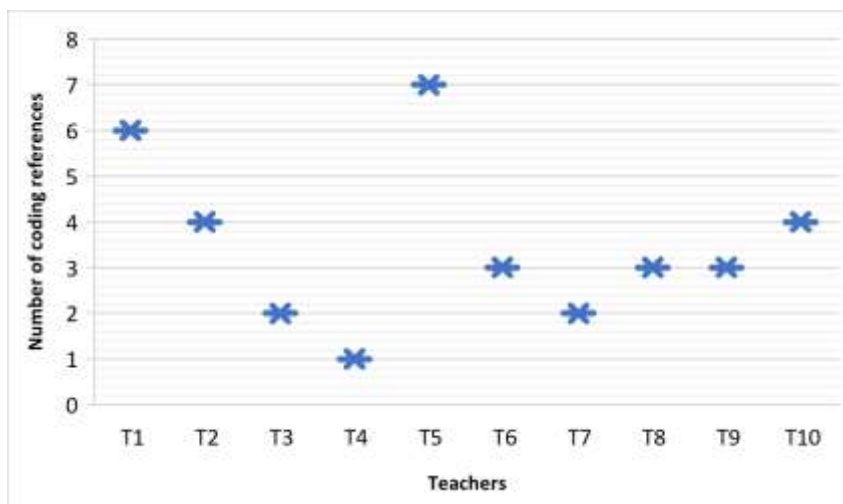
According to T4, teachers take their initiative and try to update their knowledge by accessing different sources. T9 mentioned that some teachers work different jobs to satisfy their desire, and, in the end, they will burn out in class. T5 felt that “training

should be given to teachers. Not useless training but potential training that can change people's attitude." In line with this concept, T8 said that "there is no continuous professional development in our specific profession." T10 pointed out that there is a bias in the training opportunities because "progress education was not given to those of us who learned in the old curriculum."

People's worldviews can only be changed through information and imparting of knowledge. Most teachers were working without professional development, which plays a vital role in their profession. T6 reported that people from different universities would deliver training earlier; however, it does not encourage teachers much. T7 appreciated a former coordinator of training and said that teachers would receive a certificate for participating in the workshops, and they were happy about it. However, "after he passed away" and the successor moved to another school, the program was discontinued. The number of references by teachers showed in Figure 11.

**Figure 11**

*Professional Development: Coding References by Teachers*



### **Gender Equality**

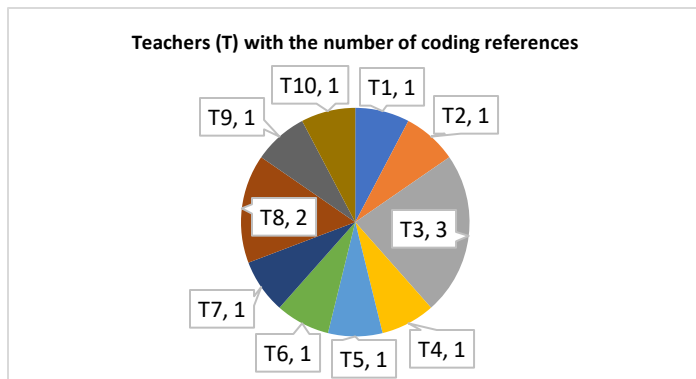
Despite gender, ethnicity, color, or language differences, equal student treatment is crucial for student development and academic performance. T2, T4, T5, T6, T7, T9, and T10 believed that gender inequality does not exist in schools. T10 said, “much should be done in rural regions” regarding gender inequality; however, it is not the case in the central region. All perceived that the government played an essential role in educating society regarding gender equality; thus, the same should be reflected in the schools. Nevertheless, T1 said, “I believe gender equality is not well implemented. There are points which should be addressed. It is not perfect yet.”

T3 agreed with eradicating gender inequality but commented that “girls may not be free to participate actively. That may come from their family or how they grow up.” T3 discussed further and said, “gender-based attacks exist in the community.” T8 supported the others’ views and said, “in many countries’ curriculum ... Muslims are banned from exercising but, in our curriculum...they should wear sports trousers and attend the exercise. They can throw a skirt on top to feel comfortable.” Figure 12 shows the number of references by teachers.



**Figure 12**

*Gender Equality: Coding References by Teachers*



### **New Themes**

New themes emerged from the data as I developed codes. I used a semi structured interview; hence, I had the opportunity of guiding the conversation without distracting participants so that they might get the central point of the questions. Participants comfortably provided their perceptions of the current junior secondary school education, the existing policies, and student academic performance. I included the emerged themes in the data analysis because they equally impact learning and academic performance. The new themes, including School Leadership, School Environment, and Student and Teacher Assistance Programs, emerged from codes such as Educational Policy, Teachers' Competence, and Academic Interest. I assigned a new theme, Healthy School Community Policies, to represent the emerged ones.

### **Healthy School Community Policies**

In this section, I present the new themes developed during the data analysis. The new themes were obtained from teachers' answers to the research questions. Teachers provided their views about student academic performance, junior secondary education,

and school policies based on their perceptions of students' academic life, school leadership, teachers' professional life, and school community. The new themes, including School Environment, School Leadership, and Student and Teacher Assistance Programs, are listed under Healthy School Community Policies.

### **School Environment**

Most participants expressed their concerns concerning an unsafe school environment in the past many years. All reported in some way that a positive school environment is essential to the school community. For instance, T1 said, "the school atmosphere has a big impact on the teaching-learning process." T1 went on and mentioned, "after I teach students here, I always go to School X. The environment is refreshing there." T2 stated that "alcohol and other drug houses are all around the school; closing them can help students perform well." I observed that the schools' physical conditions, mainly school A, were also not conducive to learning, as there were various businesses in the area. T5 and T7 raised concerns that political infiltration creates a toxic environment and division in school communities.

### **School Leadership**

One of the new themes that emerged during data analysis was leadership issues in the schools. T1 was concerned about "students' trying to pay for teachers so they can allow their promotion." Also, T1 mentioned that the last leadership team did not often show up in the office, and it was challenging to locate them when needed. T2 and T3 added that school leaders abuse their power and mistreat teachers with different political affiliations. According to T5, schools are administered by leaders who have no proper

educational background. T5 went on to mention that “reports at zone level will be falsely interpreted when they go to the regional and federal level.” As T9 mentioned, academic misconduct is a common practice because students will be promoted from one class to the next by “copying” from classmates.

### **Student and Teacher Assistance Programs**

All participants expressed their desperation in the teaching profession. Most of them mentioned that there is no moral, social, or financial support for them. Upon providing feedback on the school environment, T1 mentioned that “teachers who were depressed due to personal cases, the atmosphere helps them refresh themselves,” indicating schools have no teacher-centered support. T3’s statement, “some teachers are so tired of the students,” shows no program that helps teachers cope with daily challenges. T5 stated that teachers are not paid equivalent to the energy that they channel towards the teaching profession. T6’s comment that school leadership should encourage teachers through a written letter is another sign of the necessity of assistance to teachers.

Similarly, participants shared their perceptions of the need for students’ personal development and academic support. T2 stated that students consume drugs and alcohol during class time around the school. T5 mentioned that effort should be made to tackle peer pressure and mental health. All participants expressed their views that students do not respect teachers or school policies. During school observations, I was notified that there are school counselors and psychologists; however, they were not actively engaged in their services. A healthy school environment plays a pivotal role in both teachers’ motivation and students’ academic achievements. All participants believed that there is a



I used the member checking method and sent out the final translation to the participants to receive their comments and approvals. Therefore, the study's data were drawn directly from the participants' perceptions, and the interpretations correctly reflect their views.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the reliability of a study at any stage and time (Polit & Beck, as cited in Connelly, 2016). A study is dependable when its various sections maintain coherence, and other researchers could replicate the same result (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The study provided detailed information to provide enough evidence to scholars interested in undertaking similar research.

### **Confirmability**

The study used participant validation and data triangulation methods to uphold its confirmability (Polit & Beck, as cited in Connelly, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I employed a member checking method and sent out the interview translations to participants to receive their approval. I cross-examined the data using an additional data source. With Walden University's IRB's permission, I used a professional translator who provided a confidentiality statement. A professional translator service was found to be valuable to remove my bias in the translation process. The study followed all its procedures, from data collection to analysis, as planned in its research method. I used a voice recorder and NVivo software to process and store the data. Therefore, the data and all the research procedures are well documented, and future scholars can follow or review every aspect of the study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the degree to which the study's findings can be transferred to a different setting with other participants (Solomon & Amankwaa, 2016; Irene & Albine, 2018). I linked the study to SDT to relate the finding to larger scholarly works (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The study provided a sufficient description of participants' demographics, the study's scope, findings, interpretations, and recommendations so that readers will understand, in a meaningful way, in its entirety.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I used different measures to maintain the study's ethical standard and quality. I obtained IRB approval for data collection and, later, for using a professional translator. I followed the necessary ethical procedures as I approached the research sites. I sought permission from the two schools to allow me access to participants and other data sources. I officially requested participants' written consent to participate in the study. I provided an orientation to give participants detailed information about the study and to accommodate their questions before the actual interview.

I was mindful of participants' gender, religion, political affiliation, and other differences to protect their dignity, personal boundaries, confidentiality, and privacy. During the orientation, I informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Participants were allowed to use both the Amharic and English languages so that they might be comfortable expressing their views. The interviews were audio-recorded and saved, along with transcribed data, on a password-protected personal computer stored at my residence. Once I receive final approval from Walden University,

I will communicate the study's findings to the two schools' principals. The data and all other materials will be destroyed after 5 years.

### **Summary**

This generic qualitative study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions of junior secondary school education, policies, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. This chapter provided the study's setting, participants' demographics, data collection, and analysis procedures. I used a thematic data analysis approach, and I presented the participants' fundamental perceptions of secondary school education and student academic achievement. Further, I described the study's four strategies of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability used to increase its trustworthiness. I also provided the ethical considerations that I employed in the data collection procedures and the steps I will be taking with data administration in the future. The next chapter presents the study's discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this generic qualitative study by describing teachers' perceptions of junior secondary school education and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. In the past, different studies raised concern about the decline of junior secondary school education in Ethiopia and indicated that the problem had not been adequately addressed (Eyasu, 2017; Wirtu, 2017; Yayeh, 2017, as cited in Melese et al., 2019). Therefore, this study was carried out to understand the underlying causes of low student academic performance and the junior secondary school education system's ineffectiveness to suggest innovative educational policies and approaches that overcome the challenge. To gather the needed data, I used one central research question: What are teachers' perceptions of junior secondary school education, current policies, and students' academic performances in central Ethiopia? The research question was supported by 10 interview questions focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation based on SDT.

The study identified insufficiency of educational resources, teachers incompetence, unhealthy teacher-student relationships, low student interest, ineffective educational policies, absence of extracurricular activities, weak non academic policies, lack of parent involvement, unfavorable school environment, lack of student and teacher assistance programs, and unproductive school leadership as the major factors for the decline in secondary education and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. In the previous chapter, I presented the results of the study. In this chapter, I interpret the



findings and discuss the study's limitations and implications. Finally, the chapter provides recommendations and a conclusion.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

SDT guided the study, and the findings identified the following 14 themes: (a) educational policies, (b) student academic performance, (c) gender equality, (d) educational resources, (e) family support, (f) interest, (g) nonacademic policies, (h) relationship, (i) extra support, (j) teacher competence, (k) professional development, (l) school environment, (m) school leadership, and (n) teachers' and students' assistance programs. Table 4 shows the classification of themes followed by discussions of each finding connected to the research literature.

**Table 4**

*Classification of Themes Concerning Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations*

Motivation	Themes
Themes that answered interview questions centered on intrinsic motivation	Educational Policies (from competence perspectives) Student Academic Performance Gender Equality Educational Resources (from competence perspective) Interest Relationship Extra Support (from competence perspective)
Themes that answered interview questions focused on extrinsic motivation.	Family Support Non academic Policies Teacher Competence Professional Development School Environment School Leadership Teachers' and Students' Assistance Programs

## **Educational Policies and Student Academic Performance**

All secondary school educational policies that are methodically studied, planned, and executed contribute to student academic performance and personal development. Despite teachers' continuous efforts to inform policymakers about the current junior secondary school educational policies' ineffectiveness, their voices have not been heard for many years. Most participants expressed their experience that educational policies typically come from top to bottom without consulting or considering the frontline educators' perspectives.

Further, participants shared their observations of bias in educational curriculum planning, where some subjects are given much more emphasis than others. For instance, there are no music classes in either school. Other participants have also opposed the free promotion school policy as it allows a student with deficient academic performance to move to the next class without upgrading. As a result, the student struggles in the next grade and will eventually lose their educational interests. Recent studies have revealed that educational matters had become the main issues in national policy agendas because of the ongoing public concerns about students' academic performance at schools (Henig, 2013, as cited in Galey, 2015). Likewise, this study's finding unveiled that Ethiopia's junior secondary school system requires policymakers to reform the educational policy and improve student academic performance.

## **Gender Equality**

Ethiopia implemented a new national educational curriculum and adapted international policies such as the Dakar Agenda of Education for All and the Beijing

Platform for Action to tackle gender inequality in secondary schools (Debalke, 2018; UNESCO, 2015). Current studies have reported that gender bias still exists in Ethiopia (Altinyelken & Le Mat, 2018; Debalke, 2018; Gbre-eyesus, 2017); however, eight participants stated gender inequality does not occur in junior secondary schools located in central Ethiopia. One participant reported that gender bias does exist in the community and rural regions, but not in schools. Another participant claimed that the gender issue is not “well” addressed at schools in central Ethiopia. On the one hand, this study extends knowledge about current teachers’ perceptions of gender inequality in central Ethiopia. On the other hand, based on most participants’ voices, this study disconfirmed the findings of Debalke (2018), Gbre-eyesus (2017), Altinyelken and Le Mat (2018), who reported the presence of gender bias, with particular consideration of secondary schools in central Ethiopia.

### **Educational Resources**

Educational resources play a crucial role in student academic performance. Previous studies reported that teaching materials, water, electric supply, and other necessities are critical factors for student academic performance in junior secondary school education (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017). All participants asserted that the school resources’ disproportionality to the number of students was a concern for educators. The provision of sufficient educational resources such as a library, laboratory, reference books, computers, and other equipment increase student performance (Wirtu, 2017). This study confirmed that lack of instructional materials is one of the main factors for students’ low academic achievements in junior secondary schools in central Ethiopia.

Participants expressed their worries about the shortage of school supplies and the government's irresponsibility to mitigate the gap.

### **Family Support**

Family involvement plays a pivotal role in student academic achievement. However, the study revealed that parent involvement in junior secondary schools in central Ethiopia is minimal. According to most participants, economic hardship, student deviant behavior, and lack of strategy to involve parents in school activities contribute to the family's disassociation. According to Ogbonnaya et al. (2016), the absence of parent support in students' education negatively affects academic performance. Similarly, this study's findings found parent detachment from the school environment as one of the critical factors for low academic performance in central Ethiopia.

### **Interest**

Students' academic achievement is highly dependent on their interests. According to SDT, student motivation heightens when they can exercise autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In line with this theoretical concept, participants reported that considering student interest is not a regular practice either at school or policymaking levels. Students are expected to learn an already tailored lesson. Each teacher reflects the same material in class without emphasizing student interest. This study's findings complement SDT in that the absence of student autonomy is one of the key barriers to student academic achievement.

## **Relationship**

The 7th theme was about the student-teacher relationship, which plays a vital role in student academic performance. Deci and Ryan (2000) revealed that one's feeling of acceptance within a group creates a sense of belonging, which, in turn, increases personal growth. However, my study found the student-teacher relationship as weak in junior secondary schools in central Ethiopia. Based on participants' responses, there are two main factors for negative student-teacher relationships. First, students come to class through various challenges, including abusive parents, economic challenges, an ineffective educational system, and an unfavorable school environment. Second, teachers teach with different problems such as burnout, financial struggle, and the influence of bad leadership.

Thompson (2018) reported that teachers' caring heart and respectful behavior build a healthy teacher-student relationship. Contrary to Thompson's concept, some participants shared their observations of inappropriate student-teacher friendships, which reinforced disrespect between them. This study confirmed that unhealthy student-teacher relationships are one of the factors for low students' academic achievement.

## **Non Academic Policies**

A non academic school policy plays a vital role in cultivating student behavior and upbringing socially, ethically, and intellectually responsible citizens. According to Ngwokabuenui (2015), the absence of effective non academic policy in schools causes lateness, absenteeism, academic cheating, drug consumptions, aggressiveness, sexual harassment, and disrespectfulness. Similarly, Dejene (2021) revealed that cheating had

become an everyday practice in Ethiopia due to schools' negligence in taking the necessary actions. As a result, a significant number of students display misbehaviors in schools (Debele, 2018). This study's findings confirmed that the non academic policies are merely theoretical concepts, and schools do not practice them in central Ethiopia.

### **Extra Support**

Extra support is a theme that represents school extracurricular activities. Literature indicates that the 1963 secondary school curriculum was changed because its focus was on academics without considering the workforce (Bishaw & Lasser, 2012). According to a recent study, part of the current academic policy focuses on competence and student engagement in diverse academic disciplines (Melese et al., 2019). However, this study's findings dispute that claim and show that extra educational support is almost nonexistent in central Ethiopia, and students are limited to theoretical knowledge only.

### **Teacher Competencies and Professional Development**

Teacher competence and professional development are the two interconnected themes that the study identified as crucial findings. Teachers' professional competence plays a pivotal role in learning and student academic achievement. From ethical practices to class management to instructional delivery, teacher knowledge of the subject matter and their excellence in the profession are essential to cultivating students academically and lays a strong foundation for building a healthy society. A recent study recommended launching an educational policy that enables teachers to get practical experience on the actual work while still in training (Feitosa, 2020). In that way, teachers may trial what will be expected of them when they start the teaching careers.

Previous studies indicated that teachers' competence levels are low, and there is no continuous professional development program in secondary schools (Akalu, 2016; MoE, 2017). Likewise, most of this study's participants reported that the young teachers' competence levels are below the normal teaching standard in a junior secondary school in central Ethiopia. This study's findings uncovered that teacher incompetence starts at the beginning of a teacher's career. Therefore, the study's result confirms former literature concerning teachers' incompetence in various forms, including poor class management, unhealthy student-teacher relationships, corruption, and a barrier to professional development.

### **School Environment**

The 11th theme that the study generated was the school environment, impacting student academic achievement. Participants' responses regarding the school environment were not encouraging. First, school structures vary across the central region. Some schools' cleanliness and others' poor physical amenities indicate either unbalanced budget allocation or the school's weakness in money management. Also, participants are concerned about different business operations such as bars and drug stores around the schools as students are quickly reinforced to develop undesirable behaviors, thereby affecting their academic performance. Therefore, this study confirmed other scholars' insights that the school environment plays a vital role in motivating students (Wirtu, 2017).

### **School Leadership**

Another factor for low student academic performance that most participants raised was school leadership problems. The findings of the study indicate the existence of unprofessional conduct such as bribery and unethical decision-making processes. The schools' leadership tend to be reluctant to exercise their power to straighten wrongdoings, such as promoting academically failed students to the next class. Further, some participants shared their observations of former leaderships abusing their power, for instance, leaving the school during office hours for personal reasons. This study's findings agree with previous studies that school leadership is vital in planning, strategizing, and executing innovative ideas to promote student academic performance (Harris, 2017).

### **Teachers' and Students' Assistance Programs**

The last new theme the study found is the need for teachers' and students' assistance programs. Many participants expressed their worries about continuing in the teaching profession. Most participants lost their passion due to handling too many students in a single class, absence of professional development, underemployment, and lack of school support during stressful and personal challenges (Akalu, 2016). Similarly, participants mentioned that there are no active student assistance programs in schools. Students pass through various life challenges, including mental health, family, financial, academic, peer pressure, and joblessness (Dagnew, 2017). However, the schools do not provide adequate support for students to cope with their personal lives and academic demands. The study's insight into teachers' and students' need for assistance programs



creates awareness in the school circle and extends knowledge in academia (Banys, 2016; Evans et al., 2015; Wiens et al., 2019).

### **Interpretation Based on Theoretical Framework**

This study used SDT as its foundation. This study's findings align with the notion of SDT, which claims physiological necessities (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are essential intrinsic motivational factors for achievement (Deci & Ryan, 1985). All other external aspects must be internalized first through information to increase self-motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). To this end, I assigned the first group of themes (educational policies, gender equality, interest, educational resources, relationship, and extra support) to analyze the intrinsic aspect of the data. Similarly, I used the second group of themes (family support, non academic policies, teacher competence, professional development, school environment, school leadership, and teachers' and students' assistance programs) to analyze the study's extrinsic perspectives.

Intrinsic motivation is a demonstration of one's natural initiative and tendency to learn (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The study revealed that students at both schools display low interest in their education. The three main reasons for the decline of students' academic achievement based on intrinsic motivation are: first, students' inability to exercise their inherent choices, which SDT calls autonomy. The study revealed that current education does not incorporate or give attention to student interest. Students are expected to be spoon-fed predetermined material in class. Second, students' desire to become competent in their class activities encourages them to achieve good academic performance (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Klaijnsen et al., 2018).

In contrast, students' negligence towards their education showed the absence of inspirational approaches that the school may use to increase students' ambition for competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Relatedness is the third physiological necessity that, when satisfied, increases intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In this respect, the study identified an unhealthy relationship between students and teachers and between teachers and schools' leadership as factors that affect student academic performance.

A previous study acknowledged extrinsic motivation's effectiveness in the absence of innate interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Accordingly, this study discovered family support, non academic policies, teacher competence, professional development, school environment, school leadership, and teachers' and students' assistance programs as factors that play an important role in extrinsically motivating students. For instance, a deviant student's misbehavior can be shaped by posting thoughtful words such as *respect others* or *think positively* around the school, rather than focusing only on exercising disciplinary actions.

Equally, the teacher's ability to identify students' intrinsic motivation and discern when to use extrinsic parameters requires teacher competence, which will be continually nurtured through professional development. Comparably, schools' leadership styles and the way they function in the schools' environment impact motivation. The degree of school leaderships' control over the school body determines the students' and teachers' motivation. Correspondingly, the school's physical environment and students' and teachers' assistance programs play an essential role in extrinsically motivating learning.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research was aimed to study junior secondary school education, policies, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. Hence, it was limited to the selected location. Although I previously assumed that the data could be generalized, after interacting with the two schools and seeing their variations in many respects, I suggest using the findings as a steppingstone and carrying out a study that includes different regions to arrive at accepted generalizations. The study was limited to 10 teachers with at least 5 years of experience, but it did not include the perceptions of students, other school staff, parents, community members, and the MoE.

Researchers are human beings; they will choose concepts meaningful to themselves, and this creates a bias. However, I took an objective researcher's position in the data collection and analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also informed each participant that their identity would not be disclosed at any stage of the study to encourage participation without reservations and bias. Further, I used multiple sources for triangulation and data saturation to maintain the trustworthiness of the study.

### **Recommendations**

This generic qualitative study indicated that various factors caused the existing problems of junior secondary school education and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. The study revealed that policymakers, school leaders, and teachers need to develop, plan, and strategize innovative educational approaches to help students obtain positive academic achievement and overcome other behavioral challenges. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

- The high school education policy needs to give attention to student academic interests. Students will only be successful when they are engaged in an academic area of their choice. Therefore, efforts and strategies should be made to provide educational options to accommodate students' academic preferences.
- Parents play a vital role in students' success (Erol & Turhan, 2018; Everri et al., 2015). It is advisable to develop programs and activities that involve parents, for instance, volunteering at sports events or in the library, attending mandatory teacher-student-parent meetings, and participating in parent councils. Besides, schools need to organize workshops on various topics to educate and empower parents to assist their children based on parents' best practices.
- One of the problematic issues that the study found was business operations, including bars and drug shops around the schools. The study results show that many students are absent from class to spend time at such places. The MoE, the City, and concerned government bodies must act in relocating these business activities to different locations so that students might not be exposed to inappropriate behaviors.
- The study identified professional development as another central concern of teachers. Teachers need to receive current knowledge to incorporate timely information in their teachings (Murphy et al., 2007, as cited in Ismail et al., 2018). Therefore, the study recommends schools develop plans to help teachers upgrade their education or polish their knowledge.

- According to the study's findings, the junior secondary schools need student and teacher assistance programs within their premises. The study indicated that many teachers work with anxiety, burnout, and hopelessness. Also, many students live with different deviant behaviors and life challenges. Some conduct requires discipline actions, while others need counseling support. Therefore, the schools must develop programs to counsel, restore, heal, and refresh students and teachers with personal problems.
- Another gap that the study identified was the absence, or scarcity as in school A, of extracurricular activities in schools. The nonexistence of additional educational support blocks students' opportunities to explore their surroundings and future professions. On the contrary, students' visualizing the real-world beyond theory increases their knowledge and shapes their career choices earlier. For this reason, schools need to exercise extra support activities that expose students to a variety of professions.
- The study revealed the practice of unethical behaviors across the schools. These misconducts include abuse of power, time mismanagement, disrespectfulness, and political interference. As a result of these wrongdoings, I recommend schools develop a code of conduct policy and establish a strong ethics committee that will function independently within the schools to cultivate a positive environment.
- This study's findings identified that both schools require allocating sufficient budgets to equip the schools with necessary teaching and learning materials. For instance, the gym facilities are below standard, the libraries stock few reference

books, the laboratories are outdated, and the buildings require renovations. The educational resources and the physical facilities are critical to support and motivate students in their academic work. Hence, I recommend that the government plan and distribute sufficient funding for this cause.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The study advances invaluable insights to policymakers, school leadership, researchers, teachers, parents, and students. However, I recommend undertaking a study with a broader sample size to arrive at generalizations. In this respect, the inclusion of various schools both from central and other regions enables one to deeply understand the current junior secondary school education and student performance in Ethiopia (Johnson et al., 2020).

The study's findings indicate that the schools' leaderships are unproductive, the educational policies are ineffective, parents' involvement is low, and students' exhibiting misconduct are everyday phenomena. Although this study used multiple sources for the data collection, the primary informants were teachers. To this end, I recommend future research to incorporate school leaders, parents, and students' perceptions. The data from different demographics will allow researchers to understand the underlying factors for the education system's ineffectiveness and the decline of student academic achievement.

Further, most participants mentioned that educational policy often comes from top to bottom and that teachers' perspectives are often ignored during the decision-making process. For this reason, future researchers may consider using a focus group discussion

that involves members from the MoE, researchers, school leaders, and teachers to explore better approaches that accommodate frontline educators and principals' voices.

### **Implications**

Previous studies raised concerns about student academic performance and the quality of secondary school education in Ethiopia despite the country's recent economic development (Eyasu, 2017; Gbre-eyesus, 2017). In the same way, this study explored the current junior secondary school education, policies, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia and confirmed the gaps. In this regard, the study's findings play an important role in promoting positive social change by extending knowledge to different parties, including individuals, families, organizations, policymakers, and society.

### **Individuals**

Different individuals, including students, teachers, and school leaders, may benefit from this study as it gives insight into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, ultimately shaping their attitude, approach, and communication skills at school.

### ***Students***

Traditionally, educators and policymakers plan and execute curriculum and policies without considering the learner, the student. However, a well-structured and organized educational system will place students into perspective, thereby increasing student satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Jang et al., 2016; Li et al., 2018). The findings of this study lend knowledge about the current education and student academic performance in central Ethiopia. These findings may support a student to achieve positive

academic performance. Students satisfying their inherent needs will make them competent in their school life and eventually help them succeed in their careers.

### ***Teachers and School Leaders***

Teachers are key players in the transformation of knowledge in class. Similarly, school leaders play a pivotal role in planning and executing effective school administration. Deci and Ryan (1985), for instance, noted that teachers highly monitor the class environment. To this end, teachers must be equipped with the necessary knowledge to educate, motivate, and empower students in daily class activities. Further, teachers have different pressures: personal life, students' issues, and school leadership (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Likewise, principals regularly interact and work with teachers. Everyday communication requires leaders to understand teachers' motivational behaviors to lead and perform the school's agenda effectively. Therefore, this study provides the dynamics of individual motivational drives that teachers and principals may find helpful to prepare themselves better as they carry out their duties.

### **Organizations**

As an educational entity, schools embrace various actors. Hence, it is imperative to learn the behavior of each player for successful interactions. For example, a recent study argued that the process of school policy change would be simple when leaders' innate physiological needs are satisfied (Ittner et al., 2019). To this end, this study may create understanding in the school workforce's minds so that effective communication may flourish among them. Further, the findings give insights into leaders' internal and



external motivations and how considering others' perspectives during the decision-making process will facilitate effective communication.

### **Families**

Families are another party that plays a role in student academic performance. This study revealed that the educational background of most Ethiopian parents is low. Therefore, there is a need to educate parents to utilize different approaches to increase motivation. For instance, a study highlighted that mothers need to coordinate a caring and organized family atmosphere so that students may distinguish autonomy and competence in their lives (Tang et al., 2018). In this respect, this study provides invaluable guidance to parents on supporting students to achieve increased academic performance.

### **Policymakers**

As this study's findings indicate, most teachers are concerned about policymakers ignoring frontline educators' views on students and school curriculum. From the SDT perspective, one's innate need's satisfaction promotes motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Consequently, this study informs legislators that incorporating teachers' ideas encourages teachers and helps policymakers to see things through teachers' eyes.

### **Society**

Lastly, this study's findings may empower other people involved in the education circle with knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to monitor these behavioral ingredients as they interact with one another. The insight that this study renders to educators, policymakers, and leaders may be used to develop different educational

workshops, seminars, and programs that may benefit the broader citizen and ultimately contribute to social change.

### **Conclusion**

This study revealed that junior secondary education, school policies and practices, and student academic performance in central Ethiopia are at an alarming stage. The study identified different factors, including inadequate educational resources, teacher incompetence, unhealthy teacher-student relationships, ineffective educational policies, absence of extracurricular activities, weak non academic policies, lack of parent involvement, unfavorable physical environment, lack of student and teacher assistance programs, and unproductive school leadership contributing to the decline of student academic performance. I recommend carrying out a study with a larger sample that will embrace different demographics to obtain broader perceptions, thereby leading to innovative educational policies that may positively change student academic life.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions to Junior Secondary School Teachers

### Teachers' Perceptions of Junior Secondary Education and Student Academic Performance in Central Ethiopia

Interview Time Schedule: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

My name is Mulugeta Haile. Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

The purpose of this interview is to understand current junior secondary school education and students' academic performance from your experience and perception.

Please note that your personal information will not be disclosed to any person or organization. You have the right to withdraw yourself at any stage of the interview. You can also skip any question if you do not want to answer.

1. What academic resources are available to junior secondary school students based on your experience?
2. What non-academic policies are in place to support students in schools based on your knowledge?
3. How the current educational policies support student's academic interests from your perspective?
4. What are some of the main factors that will lead to poor academic performance based on your experience?
5. If you happen to change the secondary school policies, which one will you remove, and which one will you keep? Why?
6. What are your thoughts on the student-teacher relationships in junior secondary school?
7. What are some of the field activities that students exposed to outside of schools?
8. To what extent are parents involved in the school environment?
9. What are some of your perceptions of teachers' competence and professional development practices?
10. What are some of your perceptions of gender equality in junior secondary schools?

Please do not hesitate to contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXX or [XXXXXXXXXXXX](mailto:XXXXXXXXXXXX) if anything comes in your mind after this interview.

Thank you very much for taking your time to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Mulugeta Haile