Highlighting research on the challenges and implications of some selected educational issues

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Abstract

This editorial highlights the manuscripts published in the January 2024 edition of the Bahir Dar Journal of Education. Written by a total of 24 scholars from six universities and one international non-governmental organization, the manuscripts provide valuable insights into some fundamental educational issues in two African countries, namely, Ethiopia and Somaliland. The editorial outlines the main themes of the manuscripts and the valuable contributions the authors made to the field of education. Focusing on the African context, the editorial also featured paragraphs on some key educational challenges and the vital role scientific research and researchers can play in alleviating the challenges.

Nowadays, more than ever before, education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and a powerful tool for individual empowerment and societal development. Nevertheless, many education systems in Africa are entangled with a myriad of challenges that are profoundly hindering the continent's development.

One of the key challenges, in this regard, is access to education. As numerous studies (e.g., Bold, et al., 2017; Krzykawska & Żur 2020) point out, many children in Sub-Saharan Africa still do not have the opportunity to attend school due to factors such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, cultural barriers, conflicts, and wars. This challenge not only hinders individual opportunities for growth and success but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality in a number of African countries.

Low quality of education is another key problem in many African countries. The quality of education in the continent is often compromised by overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, poorly trained teachers, and inadequate budget (Evans & Acosta, 2021; Krzykawska & Żur 2020). This educational challenge has serious implications for the future of the continent as skilled and educated workforce is a critical factor for sustainable development. Without proper education, African countries are less likely to compete in the global economy and respond to such complex challenges as climate change, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

In Africa, there is also lack of inclusivity and diversity in the curriculum. Many educational systems in the continent fail to adequately address the diverse cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds of students (Kamwendo & Seretse, 2015; Mengistie & Worku, 2020). This leads to a disconnect between what is taught in schools and the lived experiences of learners. The curriculum which barely responds to inclusivity and diversity not only limits educational opportunities for students but also perpetuates stereotyping and biases that can hinder social cohesion and unity in diverse African societies.

As our editorial team repeatedly asserted (see Worku, 2023a, 2023b) and many prominent scholars (e.g., Tseng & Nutley, 2014; Welsh, 2021) unanimously underscored, educational research and researchers play a crucial role in addressing these and other educational challenges. For instance, by conducting rigorous scientific studies, researchers can identify barriers to education and develop evidence-based interventions to improve educational access. By generating innovative solutions, researchers can impact policy decisions to ensure education is available to all students in Africa.

Researchers also play a vital role in examining the factors that contribute to the low quality of education in Africa. Through rigorous studies and evaluations, researchers can propose innovative teaching strategies, suggest curriculum reforms, provide professional development programs, and recommend policies to enhance the quality of education (Welsh, 2021). Monitoring and evaluating the impact of various programs and interventions that aimed at improving educational quality is also another key role that researchers can play.

Moreover, scientific research can address issues of inclusivity and diversity in education by investigating representation, stereotypes, biases, and gaps in curriculum materials. By conducting research on multicultural education, gender equality, indigenous knowledge systems, and inclusive pedagogies, researchers can contribute to developing curricula that are more representative and responsive to the diverse needs of learners in Africa (Kamwendo & Seretse, 2015; Mengistie & Worku, 2020).

Having said this about the key challenges of education in Africa and the role that educational research and researchers play in alleviating these challenges, now let us briefly introduce you with the scholarly works that we publish in this issue.

The January 2024 issue of Bahir Dar Journal of Education presents a diverse array of research articles and a book review that investigate some key issues of education. Excluding this editorial note, the current issue has included 10 manuscripts (nine research articles and one book review). Authored by 24 scholars from six universities and one international non-governmental organization, the articles featured in this issue offer valuable insights into selected educational issues focusing on the context of two African countries (Ethiopia and Somaliland).

From exploring the ethical dilemmas faced by secondary school teachers and examining the impact of lesson study on teacher professional development to assessing the effectiveness of professional development programs and curriculum implementation, the articles not only illuminate the state of some key educational problems but also recommend evidence-driven solutions that need to be considered by various stakeholders. The following paragraphs highlight the main themes of each manuscript and the authors' contributions to the field of education.

The first research article focuses on the ethical dilemmas faced by secondary school teachers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Authored by Tigist Wuhib Tsega, this article highlights the various challenges teachers encounter in their day-to-day work and explores different approaches to resolving ethical dilemmas. The findings suggest the need for professional development plans and training to help teachers address these complex ethical issues effectively. This research sheds light on the importance of ethics in education and the need for adequate support for teachers facing ethical dilemmas.

Moving on to the challenges of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) teacher education in Ethiopia, the article written by Amarech Kebede and Amare Asgedom examines the barriers hindering the preparation of competent technical and vocational teachers. The researchers identified several challenges such as weak student admission criteria, lack of training resources, and limitations in relation to teacher educators that need to be addressed to improve the quality of TVET teacher training. The researchers underscore the importance of attracting high-caliber candidates, setting competency standards, and enhancing the curriculum to meet the needs of TVET students and teachers.

Another important study in the present issue examines teachers' utilization of Inclusive Education Resource Centers in primary schools in the Gamo Zone, Ethiopia. The research reveals that teachers did not satisfactorily utilize the centers and significant barriers were hindering their effective use of resources. Lack of special equipment, low provision of educational services, and shortage of grant budgets are identified as major challenges. In the study, the researchers (Sewalem Tsega and Solomon Sapo) recommend some actions that aimed to enhance teachers' utilization of the centers and address the barriers identified.

In addition, the present issue includes a historical study of technical education in Ethiopia, focusing on the Polytechnic Institute from its establishment in 1963 to its transformation into the Faculty of Engineering in 2000. Authored by Fantahun Ayele, this study provides a detailed analysis of the institute's history, highlighting its role in preparing world-class technologists and the impact of international collaborations on technical education in Ethiopia. This study contributes to a proper understanding of the evolution of technical education in the country and its relevance in a global context.

Moreover, the January 2024 issue features an evaluation of an online professional development program for health professional educators at Jimma University, Ethiopia. The study conducted by Tefera Tadesse, Endris Mekonnen Yimer, Addisalem Taye Hailu, and Shewatatek Gedamu assessed the implementation and effectiveness of the program and offer insights into the challenges and opportunities of virtual platforms for teachers' continuous professional development. The findings suggest the need for collaborative efforts to address implementation challenges and improve the quality of online professional development programs in higher education settings.

Furthermore, an article on recent policy reform attempts in Ethiopia and the role that the university of education needs to play to alleviate the unresolved educational challenges in the country is included. In this study, the authors (Berhanemeskel Tena and Fisseha Motuma) examined some selected educational reforms and highlighted the pervasive educational problems the new university of education needs to emphasize. The researchers also call for a renewed focus on indigenous knowledge, skills, and educational philosophies to drive meaningful reform in the country's education system.

Additionally, an assessment of primary and middle schools' learning of post-1994 instructional reforms in the Amhara regional state of Ethiopia is presented. The researchers (Animaw Tadesse Bayih and Ambissa Kenea Boru) examined the perceived level of Organizational Learning in selected schools and offer insights into the effectiveness of instructional reforms in the regional state. The findings underscore the need for aligning schools' standardization guidelines and prioritizing the constructs and characteristics of a learning organization to improve organizational learning in primary schools.

Moreover, the current issue covers a study about the impact of lesson study on teachers' professional development in Bahir Dar city, Ethiopia. Using a quasi-experimental design, the researchers, i.e., Mulualem Abie Mengistu, Mulugeta Yayeh Worku, and Tadesse Melesse, examined the impact of lesson study in improving teachers' professional development. The study reports the positive impact of a well-planned and implemented lesson study program on teachers' professional development. The findings emphasize the importance of collaborative professional development initiatives for enhancing teaching practices and student outcomes.

Furthermore, a study on technology usage in English language curriculum implementation in Somaliland higher education institutions is included. The researchers (Mustafe Khadar, Tadesse Melesse, Yilfashewa Siyoum, and Garkebo Basha) explored instructors' and students' perceptions and practices towards technology-supported education. The findings revealed a strong correlation between technology usage and curriculum implementation suggesting the importance of integrating technology into the teaching-learning process. The study stressed the need for awareness creation and capacity-building training to students and instructors to enhance the effective implementation of English language curriculum.

Moreover, the current issue includes a book review. The review is conducted on the book titled "The Dimensions of an Instructional Design Knowledge Base: Theory, Research, and Practice" authored by Richey, Klein, and Tracy. The reviewers (Turuwark Zalalam Warkineh, Abiy Menkir Gizaw, and Asrat Dagnew Kelkay) provide a brief account on the book's comprehensive coverage of instructional design theory, research, and practice. Besides, they attempt to appraise the book's strengths and relevance. In doing so, the reviewers praised the book for its clarity, readability, and relevance to both academics and practitioners in the field of instructional design.

Overall, the January 2024 issue of Bahir Dar Journal of Education offers a rich collection of research articles and a book review that contribute to the ongoing discourse on education in the two Eastern African countries (Ethiopia and Somaliland) and beyond. The diverse topics covered in the issue reflect the complexity and diversity of educational challenges and opportunities in the region, highlighting the need for innovative solutions and collaborative efforts to improve educational outcomes for students and educators. By addressing key issues such as ethics in teaching, teacher training, higher education, inclusive education, organizational learning, technical education, technology usage and professional development, the research articles in this issue offer valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, educators, and researchers working in the field of education.

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