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## Practices and Challenges of School Improvement Program (SIP) in Secondary Schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of school improvement program (SIP) in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone. The challenges encountered during SIP implementation in the study area were dully emphasized. The study employed descriptive survey design. It was carried out in selected secondary schools of the Zone. Accordingly, 250 teachers were selected through simple random sampling and 50 School Improvement Program committee members were included using census technique. Questionnaire, interview, document analysis, and observation were used to gather data from respondents. Percentage, mean, standard deviation, and an Independent sample t-test were employed to analyze the quantitative data and narration was used to analyze the qualitative data. The results of the study revealed that the preparations made for SIP implementation was satisfactory, but it was inadequate in enhancing student achievement and reducing educational wastage. Furthermore, shortage of budget, inadequate skill of school principals in monitoring and evaluation, weak support from the community, lack of participatory decision-making, and shortage of facilities were major hindrance of proper implementation of the SIP. From the results of the findings, it was concluded that there was gap between policy implementation strategies and its actual practices. Finally, providing training opportunities on school improvement program for stakeholders, developing school level policy guidelines, promoting participatory decision-making, and maintaining formal monitoring and evaluation to enhance the school improvement program and student achievements were recommended.
*Keywords:* /Practice and challenges/School Improvement/SIP Domains/School Improvement Program/

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Education can be viewed as a key instrument for the overall development of nations. It is a means for change and development. It enables individuals and the society to participate in the development process as they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills (MOE, 1994 E.C, 2002). Education is a cornerstone of economic and social development (Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991). It improves the productive capacity of societies and their political, economical, and social institutions (Reynolds, 1993). In addition, it plays a role in promoting respects for human rights and democratic values, creating the condition for equality, mutual understanding, and cooperation among people. Quality education is the backbone for all rounded development of nations. Million (2010) suggests that schools are formal institutions where citizens are developed. The author also notes that schools are the formal agencies of education where the future citizens are shaped and developed. In this regard schools prepare citizens for the future; teach them the skills needed to be successful in life and also motivate them to read, write, and think critically.

School Improvement Program (SIP) is a national program developed in 1999E.C (2007GC) by the Ministry of Education aiming at improving students' academic achievement both at primary and secondary schools. The objectives of the program focus on improving the capacity of schools by prioritizing needs and developing school improvement plan, enhancing community participation in school affairs, improving government's capacity to deliver significant amounts of school grants at the 'Woreda'(District) level, and improving the learning environment by providing basic operational resources to schools (MOE, 2008).

The school improvement has targeted to improve students' learning outcome (Hopkins, 2005). It has distinct approach to educational changes raising students' learning outcome. Similarly, Hopkins et al. (1994) considers school improvement an overall approach to specific application of an innovation. Such an approach has two meanings: sensing common and general efforts to make schools better places for learning and developing technical skills that enhance students learning outcomes.

Therefore, school improvement can contribute a lot to the efficiency and the quality of educational provision (MOE (2007). It assumes to enable teachers respond to the diverse needs of students in the teaching-learning processes. By treating historical development of school improvement, Reyonald (cited in Dimmock, 1993) argues that the approach is influenced by the paradigm Shifts from top-down (the orientation in the 1960's) and bottom-up approach (in the 1980's); however, there is disagreement (Fullan in Peterson, 1995) about the degree to which change should occur, top-down versus bottom-up.

The school improvement program (MOE, 2007) primarily needs to conduct self-enquiry about the current performance. The self-enquiry is an essential means for schools to create a sense of responsibility for students' learning and to assess the extent to which they are satisfying the needs of their students. Those in charge of preparing and putting school improvement into action need to feel that they are working in a state of relatively stable environment. This requires schools to develop ways of working to celebrate human diversity in promoting learning for all (Durrant and Gary, 2006). Similarly, Frost and Durrant (cited in Durrant & Gary, 2006) suggest that schools should aspire to create learning community that needs 'collegial decision-making' in the notions of capacity building. Hussen and Postlwaite (1994) also argue that there are internal and external factors that challenge school

improvement implementation.  Some of these are: lack of schedules that permit teachers to meet and work together, the demanding nature of teachers work, increased number of students at school, less preparation to deal with new events, and the frequent demands for change that come from the family and central authorities.

Moreover, the continuous transfer and/or turnover of teachers, principals and educational administrators at the local level also put pressure on the program implementation (Plan International Sudan, 2006).  Duffie and Balkon (cited in Marzano, 2003) also suggest that, in South Africa the initiatives of SIP faced the same problems discussed above.  Similarly, Harris (cited in Hopkins, 2002) and Havelock and Huberman (cited in Rondinelli *et al*., 1990) have noted that changing school management and its working culture are among the difficulties of SIP implementation in developing country.  In Ethiopia, the commitment to improve access to education has been launched aiming at improving the quality of education (MOE, 2007).  Unfortunately, the process of translating policy in to practice is so difficult to achieve due to lack of commitment on the part of community and other stakeholders.  The challenges also exist in Ilu Aba Bor Zone where SIP is under implementation.  Therefore, making an assessment of practices and challenges of SIP seems to be essential in secondary schools of the zone.

## 1.2 Statements of the Problem

Successful school improvement requires establishing a shared educational vision and mission.  Therefore, to be successful in school improvement program, teachers, parents, community members and business partners, administrators, and students should share leadership practices.  Similarly, the role of leadership should change from that of top-down approach of supervisory to facilitator and instructional leader (Senge, as cited in Peterson, 1995).  Whenever new program such as SIP is introduced, the challenges may stem from different sources such as fail to put the program in to practice due to financial and technical constraints.

The appointment of secondary school principals in Ethiopia is much more based on experience rather than on qualification (MOE, 2006) and performs less than satisfactory in the areas of technical management and in building positive school culture.  In this regard, the UNDP (2010) argues that one of the most important challenges of General Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) implementation in Ethiopia is how well schools are able to integrate all the various components of the program and align them to the key performance indicators of the program.

Similar studies were conducted by Kalayou (2011), Lemmesa Abdi (2016), and Berhan Hailu (2010).  For instance, Lemessa focused on SIP implementation in primary schools of the same zone whereas, Berhanu emphasized on the achievements, challenges and prospects of the school improvement program in Addis Ababa City Administration.

However, this study has focused on specific aspects of SIP planning and implementation in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone in which the secondary schools assumed to be less effective in the program implementation.  Though, the access to education increased, students' achievement has not yet improved as expected.  By analyzing school supervision reports and panel discussions made by key stakeholders on SIP implementation, the Regional Education Bureau of Oromia has also identified poor planning and its implementation (Oromia REB, 2010E.C).

Furthermore, to the best knowledge of the researchers, there is scarcity of published studies which focused on the issues of SIP implementation in secondary

schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone.  All these and others have initiated them to conduct this study. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following basic research questions.

1. To what extent the SIP plan preparation has got due consideration in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone?
2. To what extent SIP domains have been implemented in secondary schools of the Zone?
3. What are the major challenges affecting the proper planning and implementation of SIP in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to assess the practices and challenges of SIP implementation in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor zone.  The specific objectives were:

a. To describe the extent to which SIP preparation has got due consideration in Ilu Aba Bor Secondary schools,
b. To investigate the extent to which SIP domains are being implemented in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone, and
c. To identify the major challenges that hindered the implementation of SIP in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone.

## 2. Review of Related Literature

### 2.1 The Concept of School Improvement

The basic idea of school improvement is to emphasize on enhancing the school capacity for change as well as implementation of specific reforms.  Its ultimate goal is to increase student's academic achievement (Hopkins, 1994).  It is about strategy for improving schools for providing quality of education through strengthening schools' organizational capacity for educational reform (Hopkins as cited in Dalin, 1998).  School improvement is a continuous activity of fulfilling different inputs, upgrading school performance and bringing better learning outcomes at school level (MOE, 2005).  Plan international (2004) also suggests that school improvement means making schools for learning which in turn depends on commitment of schools to fulfill the expectations of children and their parents.

### 2.2 Rationales of School Improvement Program

As mentioned by Cheng (2005), policy-makers, education leaders, and practitioners often ignore the deeper implications of paradigm shift in education system.  They usually overlook the nature of emerging changes and dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs.  These changes direct towards accomplishment of new educational goals (Husen & Postlwaite, 1994).  The rationale of school improvement program is to make comprehensive analysis and create deep understanding of the changing environment and complex nature of educational reforms.  Therefore, consideration of rationale of school improvement can be viewed as important aspect of school system.  As suggested in MOE (2007) document, school

improvement helps to create learning environment that welcomes all learners. The program often supports the initiatives of government and others to achieve goals of education (Plan International, 2004). Consequently, educationalists have developed reform programs that aimed at strengthening the schools' capacity to provide quality education (Hopkins, 2002). The whole improvement program should be made on the basis of a positivistic and quantitative evaluation of efforts (Reynolds, 1993).

## 2.3 The Phases of School Improvement

School improvement is the process of change that depends on an understanding of the problem of change at the level of practice and the development of corresponding strategies for bringing about beneficial reforms (Fullan,bas cited in Stoll, and Dean Fink, 1996). Hopkins *et al.* (1994) also pointed out that the school improvement is a changing process that has three over lapping phases such as *initiation, implementation,* and *institutionalization*. *Initiation* is a decision to start an innovation and develop commitment. There are a number of factors related to initiation phase. These are: pressures from within and without the school, the availability of resources and consultancy support, and the quality of the school's internal conditions and organization (Reynolds, *et al*., 1996). During *implementation*, skills and understanding of change are needed and responsibility is delegated to working groups like teachers. Activities under implementation phase include the carrying out of action plans, the developing and sustaining of commitment, the choking of progress, and the overcoming of the problems. In *Institutionalization* phase, innovation and changes stop to be considered as something new and became part of the school's usual work.

## 2.4 Framework for School Improvement

Theoretically, the school improvement has a framework that supplies the schools with a structure for raising quality, achieving excellence and delivering better schools for better futures. The framework assists schools to undertake self-assessment, which is context-specific, evidence-based and outcomes focused (ACT, 2009). Effective implementation of the framework depends on the progress of four domains of school improvement namely: teaching-learning, leading and managing, safe learning environment, and community involvement. The domains represent structure with which schools can review, question, and analyze their systems and processes. School improvement relies on having sound monitoring and measuring of reporting processes in place for each of the domains. The MOE (2007) has developed school improvement program focusing on making intervention to improve students' learning outcomes. The MOE has also developed school improvement cycle which enables schools to conduct self-enquiry, develop strategic plan, implement the plan, monitor and control the progress and report to the stakeholders for necessary feedback. Implementation of school improvement program needs relatively stable environment for sustainable approaches to build internal and external capacity for improvement (Durrant & Gary, 2006). The writers also suggest that the implementation of the program requires knowledge about the complex relationship between students, professional and organizational learning about the process of changes. Scholars like Hussen and Postlwaite (1994) also identified internal and external contexts of the school as factors that influence any educational change in general, and the school improvement program in particular.

## 2.5 Challenges of School Improvement Program

School improvement program often faces a lot of challenges such as complexity of the program, mobility of teachers and principals, ineffectiveness of leadership and lack of sustainable commitment, low support from top level officials and lack of involvement of the stakeholders (Stoll & Fink, 1996). The degree of challenges may also vary in accordance with the variations with the unique features of schools and external environment (Hussen & Postlwaite, 1994). Moreover, the continues transfer of teachers, principals, and educational administrators at the local level commonly puts pressure on the program to continuously train new staff who may not serve in schools for long time (Plan International Sudan, 2006). For instance, the practice in South Africa shows that lack of material resources, limited capacity of educational leaders, poor participation of stakeholders, and lack of safe environment are among the challenges of SIP implementation (Duffie & Balkon in Marzano, 2003). The difficulty to change school management and working culture is also among the problems of SIP implementation in developing country (Harris, as cited in Hopkins, 2002); because, most of them lack infrastructure and experienced skilled professionals who are expected to assure successful implementation. In Ethiopia, the school improvement program has been launched aiming at improving the quality of education through enhancing students' learning achievement and outcomes (MOE, 2007); however, translating policy in to practice and achieving the required results have been challenged with similar factors mentioned above.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1 The Setting of the Study

The study was conducted in Ilu Aba Bor Zone which is located in Oromia Regional State-South West Ethiopia. The study area, Mettu Town (Capital), is located far away from the center, Addis Ababa, nearly about 600 kms. Ilu Aba Bor Zone is bordered by Jimma Zone in the East, Gambella regional State in the West, East and West Wollega Zones in the North, and Sheka Zone of Southern Nationalities Peoples Region (SNNPR) in the South. The study was geographically delimited to 8 woredas in the zone. The study was conducted from 2016-2017 (2008-2009 E.C.) focusing on grades 9-10 in the Zone.

### 3.1 The Research Design and Methodology

To identify and clarify the current practices of SIP, descriptive survey research design was employed, because it helps to draw valid and general conclusion in its natural setting and gives a better and deeper understanding of phenomenon. Moreover, it helps to gather data at particular points in terms of the intensions of describing the nature of existing condition (Best and Kahn, 2003; Jackson, 2009). In this study, the research method used was mixed approach with more due consideration of quantitative aspect. The qualitative approach was incorporated in the study to validate and triangulate the quantitative data.

### 3.2 Sources of Data

Data for this research have been collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were school principals, cluster supervisors, School Improvement Committee (SIC), Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, teachers and students' representatives, as well as zone education expert. The decisions made to use these subjects as sources of data were based on the expectations that they have better information about the implementation of SIP in schools.

### 3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Out of 39 secondary schools in Ilu Aba Bor Zone, 10 (25.6%) were taken as sample with due consideration of north-south, east-west and central locations of the schools and simple random sampling was employed to determine particular school. Census sampling technique was used to determine 50 School Improvement Committee (SIC) members and 10 school principals because the size was sufficiently manageable. In addition to this, 199 teachers were selected using simple random sampling technique. Furthermore, purposive sampling technique was employed to select 20 students' representatives (2 from each secondary school), 10 PTA members, 10 cluster supervisors (one from each school) and one education expert from zone, and a total of 300 respondents were participated in the study.

### 3.4 Instruments of Data Collection

The data gathering tools were questionnaire, interview, observation and document analysis. These tools were assumed to be appropriate to collect data for survey study. Pilot test was conducted to validate the clarity of the instruments and the final version of the questionnaire was administered to sample schools. The interviewees were considered from each school and one expert from Zone Education Office.

### 3.5 Methods of Data Analysis

The data were collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively based on the nature of instruments of data collection (questionnaire, interview, observation and document analysis). The questionnaire was developed using five likert scale. The collected data were filled into SPSS version 20 and interpretation was made with the help of percentage, mean, standard deviation and inferential statistics (Independent Sample t-test). The percentage was used to analyze the background of the respondent, whereas, the mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the data in simple and understandable ways (Aron *et al*., 2008). Inferential statistics was also used to investigate opinion differences between groups of participants. Furthermore, the mean values of each item were interpreted as 0-1.49 very low, 1.5-2.49 low, 2.50-3.49 moderate, 3.50-4.49 high, and 4.50-5.00 very high. On the other hand, the data obtained from observation and document analysis, as well as open ended questions and interview were analyzed qualitatively and triangulated with the quantitative data.

# 4. Results and Discussions

## 4.1 Results

This part of the research consists of two sections.  The first section deals with the characteristics of respondents and the second section presents the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Table1: Characteristics of Respondents

| N o | Items | | Respondents | | | | Total | |
|-----|-------|---|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|-------|---|
| | | | Teachers, Principals, students, PTA, zone expert and cluster supervisors (Tea +) | | School improvement committee (SIC) | | | |
| | | No | % | No | % | No | % | |
| **1** | Sex | Male | 213 | 85.2 | 40 | 80 | 253 | 84.3 |
| | | Female | 37 | 14.8 | 10 | 20 | 47 | 15.7 |
| | | Total | 250 | 100 | 50 | 100 | **300** | 100 |

As indicated in Table1, among 300 respondents (Teachers, Principals, students, PTA, School Improvement Committee (SIC), zone expert and cluster supervisors), males 253 (84.3%) and females 47 (15.7%) were involved in the study. The result shows that the number of female participants was minimal as compared to male counterpart and implies females' role in SIP preparation and implementation was weak.

*Preparations made for School Improvement Program (SIP) implementation.* To implement the SIP, teachers, principals, students, PTA, zone level education expert and cluster supervisors, and SIC members were asked to rate the degree to which the preparation was made for SIP implementation as indicated in SIP framework manual of MoE ( 2007), because they are expected to know the essence and contribution of SIP in solving teaching and learning problems.

Table 2: Preparation for Implementation of SIP Domains

| N o | Items | Respon dents | N | Independent sample t-test | | |
|-----|-------|--------------|---|------------------|------|---------|
| | | | | Mean ($\bar{x}$) | S.D | P-Value |
| 1 | The degree to which shared vision has been created | Tea+ | 250 | 3.48 | .928 | .847 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.00 | .833 | .844 |
| 2 | The extent to which the purpose was communicated | Tea+ | 250 | 3.44 | .835 | .390 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.12 | .773 | .409 |
| 3 | The degree of transparency in planning among actors | Tea+ | 250 | 3.44 | 1.021 | .147 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.04 | .856 | .150 |
| 4 | The extent of clarity on the strategies to be used | Tea+ | 250 | 3.47 | .986 | .566 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.74 | .828 | .585 |
| 5 | Stakeholders participation in planning | Tea+ | 250 | 3.32 | .916 | .197 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.40 | .833 | .213 |
| 6 | The extent to which monitoring and evaluation system were created | Tea+ | 250 | 3.42 | .979 | .483 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.56 | 1.033 | .531 |

Key: Tea+ =teachers and others (see Table 1); SIC= School Improvement Committee; t = t-test for equality of means; df = degree of freedom (3.04); significant at α =.05 level; N= number of respondents; SD= standard deviation; and p-value = Sig.

It can be seen in item 1 of Table 2 that, the rating mean of teachers and others (tea+) and SIC members mean values ($\bar{x}$=3.48 and $\bar{x}$=4.00) disclose the degree to which shared vision has been created. The average mean is high ($\bar{x}$=3.74 at α= .05) showing that there is no significant opinion difference among opinion of respondents.

As depicted in item 2 of Table 2, the rating mean for tea+ and SIC members with mean values ($\bar{x}$=3.44 and $\bar{x}$=4.12) reveals the extent to which the purpose of SIP has been communicated to stakeholders. The average mean is high ($\bar{x}$=3.78 at α= .05) and indicates there is no significant opinion difference among the respondents.

Item 3 of Table 2 also deals with the degree of transparency of planning among the actors. The mean score of teacher+ and SIC members mean values ($\bar{x}$=3.44 and $\bar{x}$=4.04) show high transparency and imply no significant opinion difference among the actors with (p =.043<3.04 at α= .05).

Item 4 of Table 2 is concerned with the degree to which the strategies used are clear and easily understandable. The rating of tea+ and SIC members with mean values ($\bar{x}$= 3.47 and $\bar{x}$= 3.74) show there is high concern in setting clear and understandable strategies. Similarly, the average mean value ($\bar{x}$=3.61 at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant opinion difference between respondents.

With regard to item 5 of Table2, respondents were requested to rate the degree of participation of stakeholders in school level planning. Accordingly, the mean values of teachers and SIC members with man values of ($\bar{x}$=3.32 and $\bar{x}$=3.40) indicate that stakeholders' participation in school planning was moderate. The data obtained from open ended and interview questions also suggested that the participation of stakeholders in school planning was not sufficiently practiced. On the other hand, the analysis of independent sample t-test (p .834 < 3.04 at α= .05) shows that there is significant difference among the study groups.

As it is observed in item 6 of Table 2, the two groups of respondents replied that monitoring and evaluation systems that has been created at school level operate moderately with mean values ($\bar{x}$=3.42 and $\bar{x}$=3.56) for tea+ and SIC members respectively. The mean values indicate that teachers and others (tea+) have been rated moderate while response of SIC members has been rated high indicating variation in opinion. Similarly, the data gathered through observation indicates that majority of secondary schools in the study area did not prepare clear parameters to judge the level of progress in the implementation of SIP. The findings are also consistent with the MoE (2010) tracer study results indicated in ESDP IV. The independent sample t-test (p .091<3.04 at α= .05) likewise demonstrated that there is no significant opinion difference among the respondents. Furthermore, the interviews held with cluster and Zonal supervision coordinators confirm the above result. Accordingly, the summarized opinion of the interviewees has indicated that schools often do not use different mechanisms to evaluate themselves as well as teachers' performance.

*Teaching learning process domain.* The school improvement framework of MoE (2007b) suggests that teachers need to adjust their teaching approach to the needs of students. Teachers and others (Tea+) as well as SIC members were asked about the extent to which the teaching and learning activities were practiced in secondary schools as envisaged in the SIP framework. As can be observed in item 1 of Table 3, the rating mean for teachers and SIC members mean value ($\bar{x}$=3.76 and $\bar{x}$= 3.74) unveiled that schools mutually lay down foundations for quality teaching-learning processes. The analysis of independent sample t-test (p-value 3.04) at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the study groups. Respondents' perception seems that this activity was not suitably practiced in the schools.

Table 3: Respondents' View on Teaching-Learning Process Domain

| No | Items | Respondent | N | Mean ($\overline{x}$) | S.D | p-value |
|----|-------|-----------|---|----------|-----|---------|
| 1 | The school mutually lay down foundations for quality teaching-learning process | Tea+ | 250 | 3.76 | .869 | .160 .214 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.74 | .803 | |
| 2 | The school designs strategy for teachers to acquire new teaching skills | Tea+ | 250 | 3.56 | .900 | .684 .714 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.12 | .746 | |
| 3 | The school puts mechanisms to support academically weak students | Tea+ | 250 | 3.74 | 1.145 | .481 .523 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.08 | .853 | |
| 4 | Teachers consider individual differences between students | Tea+ | 250 | 3.72 | .982 | .431 .469 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 4.02 | 1.040 | |
| 5 | Teachers provide necessary support for their students | Tea+ | 250 | 3.97 | .896 | .818 .814 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.76 | .822 | |
| 6 | Teachers use the comments to improve their performances | Tea+ | 250 | 3.78 | .837 | .265 .252 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.86 | .808 | |

Key:  Tea+ =teachers and others; SIC= School Improvement Committe; Table value of t at 2.298 degree of freedom is 3.04. The mean difference is significant at α=.05 level.

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement (item 2 of Table 3) on the extent to which the schools design strategy for teachers to acquire new skills that helps them to be effective in teaching.  Consequently, teachers and SIC members expressed their agreement with mean values of ($\overline{x}$= 3.56 and $\overline{x}$=4.12) which imply no significant difference between the study groups.  The schools understudy has tried to design strategies to help teachers acquire innovative and effective teaching strategies. The result of independent sample t-test (p .684<3.04 at α= .05) also shows that there is no significant opinion difference among respondents.

In responses to item 3 of Table3, majority of respondents have casted doubt on issues of giving support for academically weak students.  The mean scores for tea+ and SIC members mean value ($\overline{x}$=3.74 and $\overline{x}$=4.08) has been rated high and implies no opinion difference among the two groups.  The data obtained from responses to open ended and interview items also indicate that the majority of the schools have support mechanisms for academically weak students.  But the independent sample t-test value (p .704<3.04 at α= .05) shows that there is no significant opinion difference among the two groups and the support is not as effective as expected.

In item 4 of Table 3, respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement on efforts made by teachers in recognizing individual differences among students.  The mean scores for the two groups of respondents mean value ($\overline{x}$=3.72 and $\overline{x}$=4.02) indicate high degree of agreement.  The independent sample t- test result (p .070 < 3.04 at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents.

The mean scores of the responses on item 5 of Table 3 indicate that both tea+ and SIC members with mean value ($\bar{x}$=3.97 and $\bar{x}$=3.76) have rated high on that teachers in secondary schools of the zone implying normally they provide the necessary support for their students.  Likewise, the data obtained from open ended questions and interviews reveal that some teachers rarely provide support for their students.  The analysis of independent sample t-test (p .618<3.04 at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the opinion of the two groups of respondents.

As it has been shown in item 6 of Table 3, tea+ and SIC members reported their degree of agreement with mean values ($\bar{x}$= 3.78, and $\bar{x}$=3.86) which indicate that school teachers use comments given to them for improving their performances.  The analysis of variance (p .073<3.04 at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the opinion of respondents.  Thus, based on the result given above, it is possible to conclude that there are noticeable practices of utilizing feedbacks by the teachers.

*Safe and Health School Environment*. Maintaining safe and health school environment is necessary for students to be empowered to participate in decision-making pertaining issues of the school.  Thus, tea+ and SIC members were asked to rate their degree of agreements to determine the practices of maintaining safe and health school environment in their respective schools.  The results presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Respondents' Views about Safe and Healthy School Environment

| No | Items | Respondents | N | Mean ($\bar{x}$) | S. D | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | The school has established guidelines to manage students' activities | Tea+ | 250 | 3.61 | .952 | .743 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.46 | 1.164 | .761 |
| 2 | Classrooms are conducive for students' learning | Tea+ | 250 | 3.37 | 1.169 | .138 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.22 | 1.200 | .143 |
| 3 | The school has library with adequate reference books | Tea+ | 250 | 3.24 | 1.198 | .204 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 2.86 | 1.325 | .231 |
| 4 | The school has laboratory with adequate equipments | Tea+ | 250 | 2.86 | 1.279 | .388 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 2.88 | 1.223 | .369 |
| 5 | The school  play-ground is conducive for students | Tea+ | 250 | 2.95 | 1.205 | .898 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.58 | 1.295 | .905 |
| 6 | The school has adequate and separate toilet for boys and girls students | Tea+ | 250 | 3.65 | 1.191 | .455 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.42 | 1.032 | .487 |

Key:  Tea+ =teachers and others; SIC= School Improvement Committee; Table value of p at 2 .298, degree of freedom is 3.04. The mean difference is significant at α=.05 level.

In item 1 of Table 4, respondents were asked whether or not schools have well established guidelines to manage students' activities.  Accordingly, the mean scores of tea+ and SIC members ($\bar{x}$=3.61 and $\bar{x}$=3.46 respectively) were rated relatively high and moderate revealing that there is slight difference among the two groups in establishing guidelines for managing students' activities.  But the summary of interview results confirmed that secondary schools in Ilu Aba Bor Zone are not sufficiently versed in establishing guidelines to manage students' activities.  The

result of the analysis of independent sample t-test (p 1.080<3.04 at α= .05) also shows that there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents.

As shown in item 2 of Table 4, the mean values of the responses indicate that tea+ and SIC members ($\overline{x}$=3.37 and $\overline{x}$=3.22) are moderately rated on what is going in schools. Similarly, the data obtained from open ended questions and observations indicate that majority of the secondary schools have inadequate facilities which helps to create positive environment for their students' learning. Moreover, the result of independent sample t-test (p .707<3.04 at α= .05) implies that there is no significant difference among the opinion of the study groups.

With regard to item 3 of Table 4 above, respondents were requested to rate the degree of adequacy of reference books in school libraries. Accordingly, tea+ and SIC members rated the results moderately with mean values of ($\overline{x}$=3.24 and $\overline{x}$=2.86) which reveal secondary schools in the zone have libraries with inadequate reference books. The data obtained from observation also indicates that majority of the secondary schools did not furnish their libraries with adequate reference books. Furthermore, the result of independent sample t-test (p 1.753<3.04 at α= .05) also indicates that there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents.

As it has been shown in item 4 of Table 4, the response of both tea+ and SIC members ($\overline{x}$= 2.86 and $\overline{x}$=2.88) have rated moderate and verifies there is no adequate laboratory equipments in schools. The independent sample t-test (p .441<3.04 at α= .05) also indicates that there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents. The data obtained from observation also confirms that some secondary schools have no laboratory while others are poorly equipped.

As it is illustrated in item5 of Table 4, respondents were asked whether schools' playgrounds are conducive for students or not. Tea+ and SIC members ($\overline{x}$= 2.95 and $\overline{x}$=3.58) have reported that they moderately agree on the issue raised. Moreover, the data obtained from observation indicates that the schools' playgrounds are not conducive for students. The result of independent sample t-test (p .059<3.04 at α= .05) also shows there is no significant difference among the study groups.

As indicated in item 6 of Table 4, tea+ ($\overline{x}$= 3.65) and SIC members ($\overline{x}$= 3.42) were uncertain about the availability of adequate and separate toilets for boys and girls. However, the data obtained from observation indicates that almost all secondary schools have separate toilets for boys and girls but not adequate for the required service. The result of the analysis of independent sample t-test (p 1.384<3.04 at α= .05) also pointed out that there is no significant difference.

*School Leadership and Management Domain*. Leadership and management play a great role in implementing the school improvement program. Each group was asked to rate its level of agreement in determining the practices of school leadership and management in schools. The results are displayed in Table 5 below.

Item 1 of Table 5 below, respondents were asked to rate the level of schools in developing strategic plan on self-evaluation. Tea+ and SIC members ($\overline{x}$= 3.42 and $\overline{x}$=3.34) have rated schools with moderate level in developing strategic plan to make self-evaluation. The result of independent sample t-test (p 1.273<3.04 at α= .05) also indicates that there is no significant difference among the study groups.

Table 5: Respondents' Views Concerning School Leadership and Management

| No | Items | Respondents | Mean ($\overline{x}$) | S.D | P-value |
|----|-------|-------------|------------------------|-----|---------|
| 1 | The school prepares strategic plan for school self evaluation | Tea+ | 3.42 | 1.016 | .035 .019 |
|  |  | SIC | 3.34 | .939 |  |
| 2 | There are professional appraisal in line with the school's vision | Tea+ | 3.30 | .929 | .113 .097 |
|  |  | SIC | 3.66 | .798 |  |
| 3 | People in leadership play roles and act with Integrity | Tea+ | 3.62 | .839 | .975 .975 |
|  |  | SIC | 3.72 | .784 |  |
| 4 | Leaders hold staff accountable for improving student learning | Tea+ | 3.73 | .853 | .465 .446 |
|  |  | SIC | 3.56 | .760 |  |
| 5 | Team work and collaboration have been developed | Tea+ | 3.56 | .790 | .177 |
|  |  | SIC | 3.80 | .881 | .172 |

Key: Tea+ =teachers and others; SIC= School Improvement Committee; Table value of p at 2.298 degree of freedom is 3.04. The mean difference is significant at α=.05 level.

As it can be observed from item 2 of Table 5, the two groups of respondents (tea+, $\overline{x}$=3.30 and SIC members, $\overline{x}$=3.66) have replied that professional appraisal in line with school vision was rated moderately and implies that the mechanisms used are not in place to evaluate school improvement activities. The independent t-test (p .993<3.04 at α= .05) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents. The data obtained from document analysis also indicates that the evaluation of stakeholders has not been standardized due to application of different styles of performance appraisal system to evaluate the current practices of teachers, school principals, and cluster supervisors in line with SIP objectives.

One can see from item 3 of Table 5 that tea+ and SIC members with mean values of $\overline{x}$=2.2 and $\overline{x}$= 2.18 show low level of agreement for both groups and implies people in school leadership act with low integrity. They may have doubt on individuals involved in the school leadership lack strong moral commitment. The computed independent sample t-test value (p .210<3.04 at α= .05) reveals that there is no significant difference among the groups of respondents.

Item 4 of Table 5 investigates how far secondary school leaders encourage staff to be accountable for improving students learning. Accordingly, tea+ and SIC members with mean values ($\overline{x}$= 3.73 and $\overline{x}$=3.56) show high level of agreement which implies similar opinion among the respondents. The independent sample t-test (p1.669<3.04 at α= .05 level) also reveals there is no significant opinion difference.

With item 5 of Table 5, respondents were asked to rate the extent to which teamwork spirit and collaboration has developed in schools. In this regard, tea+ and SIC members with mean values of ($\overline{x}$=3.56 and $\overline{x}$=3.80) have rated high showing similarity of opinion among the two groups. The calculated p-value (1.006<3.04 at α= .05) also indicates there is no significant difference among the two groups of respondents. Similarly, the summarized data obtained from the interview reveal that majority of secondary school leaders did not have leadership capacity to develop the spirit of teamwork among the school community for the success of the SIP implementation.

***Community participation domain.*** Developing partnerships with parents and community around enables schools to provide quality education. Consequently, tea+

and SIC committee members were asked to give their opinion on the level of community participation in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone. Results from the analysis have been presented in Table 6 below.

As shown in item 1 of Table 6, respondents were asked to rate the extents to which schools have a structure that participates the local community. Accordingly, tea+ and SIC members have rated with high degree of agreement (mean values $\overline{x}$=3.69 and $\overline{x}$=3.64) and implies the existence of high level of openness and transparency of the schools to the local community. Moreover, the result of independent sample t-test (p-value 2.298) = 1.735>3.04 at $\alpha$= .05 level) reveals there is no significant opinion difference among the study groups.

Table 6: Respondents views about the community participation

| N o | Items | Respo- ndents | N | Mean ($\overline{x}$) | S.D | P-value |
|-----|-------|---------------|---|------------------------|-----|---------|
| 1 | There is structure that enable community participation | Tea+ | 250 | 3.69 | .934 | .676 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.64 | .875 | .675 |
| 2 | Parents are encouraged to participate in school affairs | Tea+ | 250 | 3.58 | .847 | .182 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.50 | .814 | .187 |
| 3 | The participation of parents in the management of the school has increased | Tea+ | 250 | 3.42 | .818 | .925 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.50 | 1.074 | .929 |
| 4 | Parent teacher association has been very active in school | Tea+ | 250 | 3.40 | 1.080 | .566 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.44 | .972 | .583 |
| 5 | Parents have been providing both financial and material support to the school | Tea+ | 250 | 3.34 | 1.003 | .642 |
| | | SIC | 50 | 3.54 | 1.054 | .653 |

Key: Tea+ =teachers and others; SIC= School Improvement Committee; Table value of p at 2.298 degree of freedom is 3.04. The mean difference is significant at $\alpha$=.05 level.

In item 2 of Table 6, respondents were asked to rate their degree of agreement on parents' participation in school affairs. In view of that, the mean scores of tea+ and SIC members ($\overline{x}$=3.58 and $\overline{x}$=3.50) show nearly moderate level of encouragement for parents to participate in issues of schools. The computed value of variance (p .153<3.04 at $\alpha$= .05) at the same time also reveals that there is no significant opinion difference among the two groups. However, the interview result shows schools are weak in encouraging the community to participate in school affairs.

The data corresponding to item 3 of Table 6 shows that tea+ and SIC members have rated the degree of participation of parents in the management affairs with mean values of $\overline{x}$=3.42 and $\overline{x}$=3.50 respectively which show moderate level. The analysis of independent sample t-test (p 1.003<3.04 at $\alpha$= .05 level) also suggests that there is no significant difference among the opinion of the two groups.

As can be seen from item 4 of Table 6, the two groups of respondents replied with nearly similar mean scores ($\overline{x}$=3.40 and $\overline{x}$=3.44) on active participation of PTA members in school affairs. The result shows that no significant differences in opinion between the groups. The independent sample t-test (p .188<3.04 at $\alpha$= .05level) also reveals that there is no significant difference.

With item 5 of Table 6, respondents were asked to rate the extent of Parents participation in providing financial and material supports for schools. Accordingly, they have rated moderate with mean values of x̄=3.34, and x̄=3.54 which indicate no significant opinion difference among the respondents. Moreover, interview results have confirmed that the participation of community in providing resources to secondary schools is inadequate. The independent sample t-test result (p 1.067>3.04 at α= .05 level) also reveals that there is no significant difference among the opinion of respondents.

### 4.2 Discussions

This part of the research focuses on the implications of the study and presents interpretation of the data in more condensed form or summarized ways.

*The preparation phase of the SIP.* The findings revealed that stakeholders have an opportunity to get clear understanding of the key purpose and objective of SIP and its importance to achieve better results. The findings on preparation phase imply that the efforts made so far by secondary schools in creating public awareness about the school vision and mission was high. Majority of the schools' strategy plans have incorporated goals, values, ethics, and guiding principles. The secondary schools have good experience in conducting survey (Self-enquiry) which is one of the basic constituents of the school improvement program. In line with this, MoE (2007) commented that self-enquiry is an essential means to create a sense of responsibility for students learning and to assess the extent to which they satisfy the needs of their students.

Hence, one can recognize from the discussion that the experience of secondary schools in identifying their problems and setting priorities is significantly observable. At first glance, the differences between the mean scores for the two groups may be due to differences in experience of making decision on school issues. By virtue of their position in schools, tea+ and SIC members have considerable chances to involve in practical decision making on school affairs. However, their participation in school level decision making process is low regarding school improvement planning in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone. This implies that they do not properly monitor and evaluate the progress of school improvement program. The data acquired from observation also indicates that majority of secondary schools in the study area had not well-prepared plan to judge the progress of SIP implementation.

The study has shown that the school leadership and management have made less effort to get adequate support from different stakeholders for effective implementation of the program. The findings have also aligned with the MoE (2010) document that traced in ESDP IV. It is observed that the SIP monitoring and evaluation system has not yet well established in secondary schools of the zone because these schools have insufficient capacity to carry out monitoring and evaluation of the SIP practices. The efforts made by the schools in developing willingness and commitment among key actors also found to be low. Moreover, the issue of transparency among school level actors was undermined.

*The teaching-learning domain*: The findings that address the teaching-learning domain issues indicate that the schools were poor in setting guiding principles upon which they run quality teaching-learning process. The secondary schools in the zone pay less attention in designing and implementing strategies to improve the teaching and learning activities. The findings also disclosed that the supports given to academically weak students were weak. However, subject teachers

make noticeable efforts to look into students' individual differences. On this issue, Harris (2005) stated that teachers of successful schools are well organized to provide support for academically better performing students. Moreover, the report of MoE (2007) suggests that teachers need to timely conduct continuous assessment, record students' results, and give feedback. Teachers' lesson plans had been prepared ahead of time and the objectives had been communicated to students. However, the continuous assessment was not considered an integral part of the learning process in providing timely feedback for students.

*Safe and health school environment domain.* Educational environment needs to be safe and inclusive for all learners regardless of their individual differences. According to Epstein (2001), healthy school environment for teaching and learning process creates confidence, trust and mutual respect for cooperation among staff, students, parents and the wider community for purposeful efforts and achievements. However, the efforts made by the schools in setting guidelines to create safe and healthy school environment for effective students' learning in the study area was poor. The majority of the secondary school principals and teachers poorly encourage students to be active participants in the teaching-learning process. Students themselves were waiting for spoon feeding support rather than making their own efforts to acquire the necessary knowledge. Focusing on active participation of students, Baldwin (as cited in Gamage, 2006) determines that, when students are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning and become involved in decision-making at the school level, they are likely to develop more positive attitude toward the school. The guidance and counseling service given to the students was ineffective in the secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone. Furthermore, the efforts made by schools in fulfilling materials were found weak. Regarding issues of facility, Williams (cited in BEN-E, 2010) suggests that children whose schools characterized by inadequate library and other facilities show lower test scores and higher-grade repetition. Hence, it is possible to deduce that majority of the secondary schools in Ilu Aba Bor Zone have poor libraries with insufficient facilities.

*The school leadership and management domain.* The practices used by teachers, school principals, and cluster supervisors to enhance school leadership capacity to mobilize pupils, parents, and others to support school, needs due attention (Hopkins, 1994). Because, when learning communities are engaged in practices, the participants gradually can be absorbed in a 'culture of sharing common vision and can develop sense of belongingness (Lave & Wenger cited in Harris, 2005). The findings on the effectiveness of school leadership in the study area reveal that there is no standardized measurement of performance evaluation of leadership effectiveness due to lack of utilization of modern techniques. School leaders in secondary schools of the zone are doing their jobs with low determination and commitment to improve staff accountability for students' academic performance. The structure of the school also encourages less the participation of the community in the study area. This implies that the practice of secondary schools in encouraging parents to participate in school affairs was not as expected. The school leaders are less committed in managing change and innovation in schools. The trainings given to school leaders for effective implementation of SIP were found inadequate.

*Community participation domain.* The findings on community participation reveal that the existence of structure in the school encourages participation of the community in school affairs. Participation of parents in the school management shows improvement from time to time. Besides, parent-teacher association (PTA)

members actively participate in the school management and there is transparency between school management and the local community.

*Challenges to SIP implementation.* Schools are facing a lot of challenges in SIP implementation. Some of the major challenges of SIP implementation in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone include poor dissemination of timely information, inadequate resources allocation as per SIP guidelines, poor utilization of budget at schools and *woreda* levels, absence of participatory planning, and weak leadership capacity to mobilize parents and the local community. Furthermore, lack of clarity of school level policy, lack of support from local authorities, schools' poor capacity in communicating and coordinating, and the loss of consensus and commitment are among the school level challenges of effective implementation of the SIP.

*Significance of the study.* In general, the results of the study expected to have the following benefits. Firstly, it reveals the strength, weaknesses and/or real challenges of SIP implementation in secondary schools of Ilu Aba Bor Zone. Secondly, the essence of the study may enforce generating alternative approaches for the implementation of the program. Thirdly, it may encourage the PTA, teachers, principals, cluster supervisors, woreda education office experts, and Zone education department to take actions against the problems identified so far. Moreover, it may also help as kindle light for other researchers interested to conduct further study on similar issue.

*Limitation of the study.* The sample schools in the study area were limited due to the scarce resources, communication problems to access all secondary schools in the study area. Therefore, the study lacks to generate sound results that could address the overall SIP practices and implementation problems in the zone. In addition, the facts of the findings cannot be generalized to all schools in Oromia Regional State due to environmental variations.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based upon the findings and discussions made so far, the following conclusions and recommendations are forwarded.

## 5.1 Conclusions

The efforts made by secondary schools in creating public awareness about the school vision were high. There were strategies placed at the school level to show the presence of due consideration to SIP preparation and its implementation in secondary schools of the zone. However, the extent of SIP domains implementation can be evaluated in its partial ways. Structurally, there was participation of the community in school affairs because PTA members were actively involved in school management but SIP monitoring and evaluation mechanisms were weak and not yet well established in most secondary schools of the zone. Schools had insufficient capacity to carry out monitoring and evaluation in accordance with the guidelines for implementation.

Teachers were also not providing the necessary support for academically weak students. Students were not obtaining satisfaction from the schools' environment. The majority of secondary schools in Ilu Aba Bor Zone had poor libraries with insufficient reference materials. Regarding the challenges of planning for SIP and its implementation, it is possible to conclude that school leaders in the secondary schools

of the Zone were performing low.  School leaders did low efforts in making staff more accountable to improve students' academic achievement.  Collaboration and teamwork spirits were not properly built in the secondary schools of the Zone.

The practices of secondary schools in encouraging parents to participate in school affairs and their involvement in providing financial and material supports had been rated moderate and seems inadequate.  Poor dissemination of timely information, inadequate resources allocation and utilization, and weak capacity of leadership are among major challenges of SIP planning and its implementation in the study area.

## 5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations have been forwarded.

1. School improvement program (SIP) implementation needs to have the necessary attention on how to prepare strategic plan.  Therefore, it is advisable that, the school principals, teachers, *Woreda* education office, Zone education department, and other stakeholders should work collaboratively by organizing trainings on (SIP) planning and implementation.
2. Secondary school leaders should work in collaboration with stakeholders to ensure sustainable development of the program for school effectiveness.  Above all, attention should be given to increasing participation of the community in all domains of SIP through awareness development mechanisms like seminars and symposiums.
3. School principals in collaboration with teachers, students, and PTA's should develop school level policy and guidelines for effective management of SIP.  On top of this, secondary schools and *Woreda* education offices should create and maintain schedules to monitor and evaluate the achievement of the program.
4. As can be seen from the findings, the existence of professional appraisal in line with SIP objectives was not satisfactory due traditional way of performance evaluation system of the current practices of teachers, school principals, and cluster supervisors.  Thus, it is advisable that Professional appraisal mechanisms in line with SIP implementation should be introduced.
5. It was found out that budget allocation by government for secondary schools was insufficient to improve school infrastructure and facilities.  Therefore, the lower organs of the government should strongly mobilize the community to take the lion-share responsibilities in allocating adequate resources for schools.
6. Finally, best practices of secondary schools on SIP implementation should be extracted and shared across secondary schools in the zone by joint efforts of school principals, cluster supervisors, *Woreda*, and Zone education offices.

**Authors' contributions**
**Author 1:** Developed the title, designed the study, reviewed literature, defined the research problem, analyzed data and prepared the manuscript. He has conducted fieldwork, analyzed data and edited the manuscript.
**Author 2:** Approved the title, modified the design of the study, commented on the reviewed literature, modified the research problem and its objectives, he decided on the research methodology, adjust to the format of the Journal. He has edited and approved the manuscript.

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