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"EDUCATION IS THE MOST POWERFUL WEAPON WHICH YOU CAN USE TO CHANGE THE WORLD."
NELSON MANDELA

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Original Article

The challenges and strategies to improve psychosocial well-being of unmarried women

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KEYWORDS:

Challenges;
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psychosocial wellbeing;
unmarried women

Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to explore the challenges and strategies to improve psychosocial well-being of unmarried women based on their lived experiences. A qualitative research approach, specifically a phenomenological research design, was employed to investigate the issues under study. This design was appropriate for gaining an in-depth understanding of the life situations of unmarried women in Gondar town. A total of 30 unmarried women were selected using a snowball sampling technique. Individual interviews were conducted to explore the psychosocial challenges they face and the strategies they use to enhance their well-being. Accordingly, the study aimed to: (1) examine the challenges experienced by unmarried women, and (2) identify strategies that help improve their psychosocial well-being. The findings revealed that unmarried women encounter various psychosocial challenges, including frustration, fear of childlessness, loneliness, sexual harassment, discrimination, stigmatization, disrespect, and verbal abuse. These challenges significantly affect their lifestyles and overall well-being. Despite these difficulties, the findings also indicated that the women employ several coping strategies to improve their psychological and social well-being. These strategies include seeking social support, maintaining an active lifestyle, resisting external pressures, and engaging in positive self-talk. Overall, the use of these coping mechanisms contributes to enhancing the psychosocial well-being of unmarried women.

1 Introduction

A person who has not yet married is referred to as "single." The term "single" is an inadequate phrase in a society that idealizes women who are not married since it indicates "not married" (DePaulo, 2007). Well-being among single women can be determined by a number of criteria, such as life satisfaction, good mental health, happiness, or social competence (Wright and Masten, 2005). It is indeed a natural instinct to want to be loved and to love, and though these single women were content with being single, they wanted to pursue partnership and ultimately motherhood (Macvarish, 2006). However, the negative consequences of singlehood in terms of physical, emotional, social, and economic well-being are well-documented (Byrne and Carr, 2005). Women's challenges can be categorized as a variety of psychological and social issues stemming from poverty, illiteracy, disease, violence, harassment, rape, unemployment, and a lack of legal protection. Furthermore, women with disabilities have more psychological and social obstacles. Women

normally grieve psychological and environmental difficulties that prohibit them from participating fully, equally, and actively in society. People with impairments are frequently avoided, isolated, rejected, and segregated by society (Kaufman and Goldscheider, 2007).

A woman is any adult female human being who is unmarried, divorced, separated, widowed, or otherwise lives alone, whether by choice or for any other cause. Due to the patriarchal social order, unmarried women are on the limitations of the margins, which mean that they are especially disenfranchised. They experience a variety of problems or obstacles connected to basic biological, psychological, social, emotional, economical or financial demands and other related psychosocial challenges, which are well-represented in the works under consideration (Rosengren et al., 2009).

Social support, such as emotional bonds, attending social events and family/friends contacts are coping strategies used by unmarried women to increase psychosocial wellbeing of unmarried women. Specifically, women's social support systems seriously influence their psychosocial wellbeing in different ways (Feldman et al., 2000). Social and emotional supports through various forms of relationships such as families and friends were the factors that can increase psychosocial wellbeing of unmarried women. Social support is a strategy to increase the psychosocial wellbeing among unmarried women. This study showed that social support from friends and family increases psychosocial wellbeing and decreases stress among unmarried women (Malinauskas, 2010).

2 Research problem

Singlets reflect the prevalent ideology of marriage and family and are manifested in everyday thoughts, interactions, laws and social policies that favor couples over singles. Marriage and family ideology are described as an unwavering belief that everyone wants to get married. The assumptions associated with "single" are that romantic and sexual collaboration is the only way to achieve intimacy, and therefore those who have a partner are happy (Çelik, 2018).

The growing rates of singleness in most cultures still consider marriage as the most necessary state adults can attain. A single woman is often supposed either as an old maid who could not get a man because she is unpleasant, incompetent or a city single who does not want a man because she is highly educated, striving, single minded and career person. These views on unmarried women are a challenge to the lives of single women (Situmorang, 2007). According to Byrne and Carr (2005), biased beliefs about singles are insufficient to conclude that singles suffer stigma; singles must interpret mistreatment as stigma. This paper builds on previous research by investigating events that older never married women regard as stigmatizing. The study carried out by Williams (2003) have combined a considerable amount of evidence showing that mental health at unmarried women is involved of both positive affect and the absence of distress, those shows that differences in the effect of marriage on mental health, as men tend to externalize and women tend to internalize their mental health problems.

McKendrick et al. (2018) find that there are three most common strategies used by unmarried women namely to accept their destiny, planning, and active coping. Unmarried women are more dependent on themselves than seeking help and advice from others. In addition, women also seek social support to deal with psychosocial challenges at work place.

In Ethiopian, when we see the age at first marriage for women marriage takes place relatively early. Among women age 25-49 who are married 63% married by age 18, and 77% married by age 20. The median age at first marriage among women age 25-49 is 16.5 years (Central Statistical Agency, 2011).

Based on the above studies, the researcher showed a little attention was given to the challenges and strategies to increase their psychosocial wellbeing of unmarried women. Being unmarried is not a problem by itself, but it can be a good cause for different kinds of challenges that unmarried women face as a result of their marital status. To address this gap, this study aimed to: (1) To explore challenges of unmarried women have been experiencing; (2) Explore strategies to improve psychosocial well beings of unmarried women.

3 Theoretical framework

Singlim may be a theory that has been wont to study marriage and singleness is singlim. The idea was employed by DePaulo and Morris (2005) to check singles and their place in society and science. They attain the conclusion that singles are stigmatized. Singlim is unrestricted and unquestioned set of beliefs, ideology of marriage and family. Its premises include the idea that the sexual partnership is that the one truly important peer relationship which folks that have such partnership are happier and more fulfilled than people who do not. As a results of ideology of marriage and family adult unmarried women face many negative perceptions, stigmatization, and discrimination. This theory was utilized by Depaulo and Morris to review how marriage is valued so highly that individuals who seem to be unmarried are perceived negatively. They supply evidence of negative perceptions about unmarried women like, singlehood may be a stigmatized identity, singles are perceived as even more socially immature and maladjusted than married women, and singles were also consistently viewed as more self-centred and envious than married women.

The term "singlehood" refers to the status of not being married. However, because it is typical for people to be in a love relationship but not married, this term can also refer to the lack of a romantic partner. There are some who believe that being single equals being unhappy. The experience of being single, on the other hand, elicits a wide range of reactions. Some people appear to prefer living alone and claim to have a high quality of life. After being divorced or widowed, many people opt to remain single (Stein, 1981). Some evidence suggests that singleness is increasingly viewed as normal; though 18 the never married continue to be marginalized. A new style of singleness represents choice and status characterized by happiness, career, and social mobility. Even though this new acceptance has arisen over the past three decades, never-married women over 30 are still seen as more deviant than their male counterparts (Keith, 2004). A study conducted by Manchik (2014) teaches unmarried women to create a single woman identity, feel good and live properly. They embraced their way of being single and built their own self-identity to find satisfaction in their lives. The study of unmarried women between the ages of 35 and 65 showed that life satisfaction of these single women was significantly correlated with factors such as health, not loneliness, living with roommates, having many casual friends, and investing in work.

4 Research method

4.1 Research design

The research design of this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology research design is a type of qualitative research that looks into people's daily lives and lived experiences.

4.2 Study area

The study was conducted in Amhara region, Gondar town, which is 735 KM far from the capital of Addis Ababa. Gondar town is the oldest town founded by Emperor Fasil around 1636 A.D. It is the capital city of Central Gondar Zone of Amhara Region. In order to achieve the intended objectives, this research mainly focused on Gondar town. The reason why the researcher has selected and interested to conduct research in Gondar town with a particular emphasis on unmarried women because the number of unmarried women has been ever increasing time to time due to different factors such as economic, education and unemployment in the study area. In addition, the researcher's experience of living in the town made the curiosity to know the miracles of women.

4.3 Sampling techniques

The researcher was used snowball sampling technique in order to select participants. This sampling technique is important for identifying potential research participants who have difficulty finding participants. This is a common practice among social researchers who want to work in popular places that are difficult to identify and localize (Brennen, 2013). The researcher expands the sample by starting with a few well-known people knows and asking these early participants to identify others who will participate in the study. In this study, snowball sampling techniques is used to select 30 unmarried women. These participants were used in focus group discussion based on their willingness to participate in a group discussion.

4.4 Data collection instruments

In this study, the researcher employed two types of data collection tools to gather information from the participants: interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The interview and FGD guides were carefully developed by the researcher to address the research questions and specific objectives of the study. These instruments were designed to explore the psychosocial well-being and challenges experienced by unmarried women. The questions were initially prepared in English and then translated into Amharic (the local language) to ensure participants' clear understanding and meaningful responses. To ensure the validity of the instruments, the interview and FGD guides were reviewed by experts in the field of psychology and research methodology. Their feedback helped refine the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions in relation to the study objectives. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of participants who were not included in the main study. Based on the pilot results, necessary modifications were made to improve the consistency and comprehensibility of the instruments. This process enhanced the content validity and ensured that the tools effectively captured the intended information.

4.4.1 Semi-structured interview guide

The data collection techniques are used in qualitative study, interviews, and specifically face-to-face semi-structured interviews, are frequently used by feminist researchers. Even though personal interviews are labour intensive, they are the best way of collecting high quality data. Interviews capture the multitude of subjective views of a theme so that the researcher comes to see the respondents' complex social world (Wambui, 2013). This study employed open-ended interview guide in the process of data collection. These kinds of interview questions help to discover personal concerns and analysis questions to

the informants out of the answer that the interviewees deliver as it allows the researcher to be flexible to some extent. The interview guides would be prepared by the researcher in order to achieve the research questions and specific objectives. The interview guides were prepared in Amharic and English version and face to face interview were conducted by the researcher.

4.4.2 Focus group discussion guide

Focus group discussions would be conducted with unmarried women in two groups that consisting of six participants each group who were purposively selected based on currently living location. During the focus group discussion the researcher used an interview guide to direct dialogue among the participants in order to find out their experiences, perceptions and views in a given ideas or issues. The purpose of the focus group conversations is to understand various ideas and determine psychosocial well-being, and challenges of unmarried women. Therefore, the researcher utilized a tape recorder to capture the conversation and take notes. As a result, the researcher would be captured data or information during the focus group discussions utilizing a tape recorder with the approval of the participants. In order to find out their experiences, perceptions and views in a given ideas or issues. I have tried to be flexible in evaluating the discussions based on criteria set down.

4.5 Data collection procedures

The researcher developed semi-structure interview guide and focus group discussion questions to gather all necessary information from participants related to the objectives of the study. To get the relevant data or information the interview, focus group discussion questions will be prepared in Amharic version. The researcher was collected data by using in-depth interview and focus group discussion as well as use tape recorder by their consent. The researcher confirms to them that the recorded data is destroyed after the completion of the study and finally separated from the participants with great thanks for their cooperation.

4.6 Data analysis

The interview and focus group discussion would be recorded through tape recorder and transcribe by listening repeatedly. The data were gathered from interview, focus group discussion and transcribes in to Amharic and then translated in English language.

During the first phase of analysis the researcher used open coding in order to reduce the data to a small set of themes that appear to describe the phenomenon that was under investigation. During this process the categories and their interrelationship are combined to form a story line that describes what happens in the phenomenon that is being study. Generally, the data analyzed and described through qualitative approaches by themes, subthemes and some opinions of the participants fully quotations. The collected data was analysed in the following ways.

5 Results

5.1 Challenges of unmarried women

The information gathered from the participants suggested that unmarried experiences pose a number of psychosocial challenges among women at the study area. Participants in the interview and focus group discussion reported that they faced a variety of psychosocial challenges, including sexual harassment, stigmatization, loneliness, stress, frustration, and disrespect.

5.1.1 *Psychological challenges*

The information gained from the participants revealed that unmarried experience leads to several psychological challenges. The women stated that psychological challenges are common in unmarried life. They had experienced different psychological challenges such as loneliness, frustration, stress, and verbal abuse.

5.1.2 *Social challenges*

The information gained from the participants revealed that unmarried experience leads to several social challenges. The women stated that social challenges are common in unmarried life. They had experienced different social challenges such as sexual harassment, stigmatization, and disrespect. Now see each one by one as follows.

Sexual harassment During the interview and focus group discussion, some of the participants were sexually harassed by persons at work and around the residence. Participants reported co-workers sexually harassed them without their permission. Someone was offended and threatened to throw unmarried women out. Because they are not married, they face these difficulties. Some participants claimed that they had been sexually harassed by males who intended to rape them or use their single status to force them into sexual relationships in exchange for a favor. Insults and abuse were common experiences of respondents, but some felt that there were “wise people” who understood the status of singles and gave a lot of support to older unmarried women. Sexual harassment of unmarried women is one of the biggest challenges in the study area. The number of harassments is increasing day by day. Also, the work of unmarried women is not safe. Unmarried women face many prejudices at work. Women are considered stigmatized when they begin to find mistakes in unmarried women. As one participant stated, “My co-worker often makes unwanted advances toward me, even when I clearly refuse” (Participant 2, June 2022). Another participant explained, “Someone threatened to expel me from my residence simply because I am unmarried” (Participant 6, June 2022).

Stigmatization According to interviews and focus group discussions, participants should confirm the existence of prejudice and discriminatory treatment of unmarried women in the study area. Most participants experienced some form of stigma. Being unmarried women for a long time to give the impression that a single woman has died and they are not good enough to be attracted to an individual. During the focus group discussion, as one participant stated that:

I am now no longer married; I will say of direction it's now no longer possible. So, I recognize there are such a lot of stigmas. Some people do now no longer supply recognize for me for I am unmarried so, because of this I sense bad. I sense annoyed, there has been a time I was annoyed and I inform human beings see I am actually annoyed (participant 15, June 2022).

Disrespect Many participants experienced some form of disrespect because of their unmarried history. For those who experienced disrespect, it seemed to be the general attitude they had towards being single. Participants said in an interview that some treat you to respect those who are younger and married than you. You see it because they are not married some participants admitted that being a single breed is a contempt, but contempt is an individual behavior rather than unmarried position. As one participant said that:

People still talk to me in ways that sometimes I felt as if it is because I am not yet married. You know that is part of life. Even people that are married, people still talk to them anyhow. There are some individual who do not know how to talk some issues about single women. I feel that I am not respected in my family just because I am single. Just because you are married, you can see that younger brothers and kitchens are respected. I seem to think he likes mischievous things in his family. Everyone comes, says what they want to say, comments and do something like a child (participant 4, June, 2022).

Discrimination The research participants involved in the in-depth interview and focus group discussion indicated that they faced to be discrimination for they were unmarried women. As they explained they felt that the married women did not have confidence in them; Because of this, some participants didn't form friendship with married women or they faced isolated groups. Based on the data gathered from participants, unmarried women reported that they were discriminated from different activities in the study area. As one participant said that: I am unmarried women and I live in Gondar town. The married women of the town have negative attitude towards unmarried women and they also isolated from community in some private issues like ider, I believe that usually the community did not have positive outlook to me and they do not treat as normal human beings (Participant 5, June, 2022)

Verbal abuse Based on the data obtained from participants, verbal abuse was one of psychological challenges resulted from singleness living style. During the interview and focus group discussion session, some of the participants were mentioned that they have experienced upset and worry because some people they call as kumoker. As one participant stated that:

Some individuals expose me by asking questions such as: "why did not marry?" They call me "kumoker" (this is verbal abuse of remain single). However, these expressions are not important to me. Some what these statements are speaking in aggressive ways. The words have spoken by the people that made me worry and upset (Participant 6, June, 2022).

5.2 Strategies they used to increase their psychosocial well being

Participants in the interview and focus group discussion reported that they used different strategies in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing including social support,

active lifestyle, resistance to external pressures and positive outlook.

5.2.1 Social support

Based on information gathered from interviews and focus group discussions, participants emphasized social support as the main strategies to increase psychosocial well-being among unmarried women. Most of the participants stated that they used social support social in order to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing and supports through various forms of relationships such as families and friends were the factors that can increase well-being. Apart from this, they also obtained supports from other unmarried women who share the same difficulties and pressure from other people, kind of like a support group of unmarried women. To sum up, unmarried women used social support coping strategies to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing. During focus group discussion one participant stated as follows:

I come together with unmarried women friends and we talk different kinds of experiences we passed through our life, we come together and make a joke and try to create fun in order to be happy and I develop my psychosocial wellbeing at that time (participant, June, 2022).

5.2.2 Resistance to external pressures

Based on the finding unmarried women used different coping strategies in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing among these resistance to external pressures is to deal with social life, women encountered a reaction from a voice recommending unmarried women to walk the stairs to marriage, but a society in which they had to get married. Participants in this study faced the challenge of being single by resisting external pressure. Unmarried women to reduce challenges and sustained to behave confidently. Based on the finding of the study some participants cannot develop any challenges from the external world, it means no impact from external pressure situations. Participant 8 stated that: "I do not give attention what other people consider of their happiness. There are some dissenting opinions about getting married or being single, but that doesn't really affect me" (participant, June, 2022).

5.2.3 Positive self-talk

Unmarried women used positive self-talk or internal communicate to increase their psychosocial wellbeing through lowering exceptional demanding situations of their lifestyles condition. It additionally allows them to be greater open and accepting in their popularity regardless of what others might imagine of them. Participants used self-talk that allowed them to advantage internal strength, confidence, and optimism in their unmarried popularity. In addition to this unmarried women regarded to be that specialize in how they need to address their psychosocial challenges and this is to be greater type in the direction of them. To sum up, unmarried women used positive self-talk coping strategies to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing. As one participant stated as follows:

I give good reason for myself, I forgive myself for any past mistakes, I communicate to myself and inform myself announcing that I am unmarried women so no any challenges affected me, I attempting to do this took courage and I'm proud of myself for trying. Tomorrow is a chance to get husband, I will married in the future (participant 9, June, 2022).

5.2.4 Religious practices

Unmarried women used for religious practices to remedy their health problems and to reduce feelings of fear, stress, depression and sickness. The study found that unmarried women to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing they used religious coping strategies. Religious coping strategies mean that unmarried women were used spiritual beliefs and practicing religious practices in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing. They are prayer, join the religion class, visiting the house of worship and praying to God. The coping strategies of each person vary depending on the person's background and living situation. However, certain coping strategies cannot be determined by whether it is good or bad because it depends on its suitability. To sum up, unmarried women used religious beliefs coping strategies to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing. As one participant stated that: I give good reason for with myself to enhance my psychosocial wellbeing by reducing different challenges, I express to myself and inform myself announcing that this is not it slow yet, possibly God desires me to look for more than expected things from me and I reduce challenges, I used spiritual belief and practise (participant 10, June, 2022)

6 Discussion

The first and second research question was exploring the psychological and social challenges of unmarried women. Unmarried women were frustrated of possible difficulties and responsibilities that they could not conceive of the marriage. Women concerns associated later childbearing is fear of unmarried women. They are afraid of the responsibility and stress from marriage. It does not mean that they will not get married forever, they are just not mature enough to have money and not ready for marriage. This study is similar with the study conducted by Sharp and Ganong (2007) life acutely aware of the changing reality at their age is mentioned as the biggest fear of unmarried women this include, admitting that the pool of eligible men is changing. Acknowledging risks and concerns accompanying later childbearing is another fear of unmarried women and based on the interview some participants mentioned that they are physically battered by male individuals at work place and around their residence. Sexual harassment was stated by some participants during the interview, this participants were sexual harassed by persons at work and around the residence. Participants reported co-workers sexually harassed them without their permission. Someone was offended and threatened to throw single women out. Because they are not married, they face these difficulties. Some participants claimed that they had been sexually harassed by males who intended to rape them or use their single status to force them into sexual relationships in exchange for a favor. Some participants stated that they were sexually harassed by men who wanted to rape them, or take advantage of their singlehood to intimidate them into sexual relations in exchange for a favor. This study is similar with the research conducted by International Labour Organization (2007), the acts of sexual harassment to be insults, remarks, jokes and insinuations of a sexual nature and inappropriate comments on a person's dress, physique, age or family situation, undesired and unnecessary physical contact such as touching, caresses, pinching or assault, embarrassing remarks and other verbal harassment, lascivious looks and gestures associated with sexuality, compromising invitations, requests or demands for sexual favors, explicit or implied threats of dismissal, refusal of promotion, etc. if sexual favors are not granted. Participants were hopeful that one day they will find their life partners that they could share their lives with. The study is also similar with the study conducted by Gold (2004) sexual harassment in the workplace is any unwelcome sexual advances or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, acceptance of which is explicitly or implicitly made a condition for favorable decisions affecting one's employment, or which has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, abusive or offensive working environment.

The finding on the study showed some participants received a lot of attention, which made them feel lonely. Participants stated that those situations are difficult for them because they do not have their own romantic friends and family. Unmarried women stated that they live far away from their relatives and that they are unable to marry because of this. As a result, they feel inferior about their lives. Unmarried women reported higher levels of loneliness in interviews. Women, particularly those who lived alone, felt lonely and recognized their positions, particularly around the holidays, when individuals are meant to be surrounded by family and friends to share the festive spirit. In Ethiopia, people place a high value on holiday celebrations, and the holidays are traditionally celebrated with families or relatives. The participants stated that those occasions are difficult for them because they do not have their own family. As a result, they experienced a great deal of loneliness as a result of this. Therefore, this causes them to feel very lonely. This study similar with the study conducted by DePaulo and Morris (2005) unmarried women were faced loneliness than married and mothers who had children. Poor health was very strongly associated with greater loneliness in both men and women. Marriage history is important and unmarried and previously married women report more loneliness than married women. The results of the study showed that participants experienced tension, fear, and despair. In the study area, the participants were single and had a frustrating, upset, and upset experience. Some participants grew up frustrated, reflecting the life experience of an unmarried situation, as people were talking about single life. In a focus group discussion, unmarried adult women explained that they were not happy because they were single. The unmarried woman grew up frustrated as she looked back on her life experiences, remained single, and people were rumoured about her single life. In a focus group discussion, participants stated that they were not happy because they are still unmarried. They care about being single now, but living with them frustrates the community. This result is similar with the study conducted by Selamawit (2018) stated that single women grew frustration thinking they are missing an important life transition and also because of the comments, the gossip and the advice they get from people about their single status. The finding of the study contradicted the study conducted by according to Kaufman and Goldscheider (2007) unmarried women are more likely to identify with the view that they can remain satisfied without entering into marriage.

The finding of the study indicated that unmarried women explained that they felt that the married women did not have confidence in them because of this, some participants did not form friendship with married women or they faced isolated groups. Based on the data gathered from participants, unmarried women reported that they were discriminated from different activities in the study area. This result is similar with the study conducted by the DePaulo and Morris (2005) to check singles and their place in society and science. They attain the conclusion that singles are stigmatized. Singlism is unrestricted and unquestioned set of beliefs, ideology of marriage and family. Its premises include the idea that the sexual partnership is that the one truly important peer relationship which folks that have such partnership are happier and more fulfilled than people who do not. As a results of ideology of marriage and family adult unmarried women face many negative perceptions, stigmatization, and discrimination. Based on the data obtained from participants, verbal abuse was one of psychological challenges resulted from singleness living style. During the interview and focus group discussion session, some of the participants were mentioned that they have experienced upset and worry because some people they call as kumoker. The study also similar with the study conducted by Selamawit (2018) noted that at late adolescent age, an unwedded daughter would be stigmatized as an "old maid" (Kumo ker), which is embarrassing to the parents. They might also be labeled as poor, because poor families are not usually in a position to marry off their daughters at an early age.

Many participants experienced some form of disrespect because of their marriage history. For those who experienced disrespect, it seemed to be the general attitude they had towards being single. Participants said in an interview that some treat you to respect

those who are younger and married than unmarried women. This study is similar with the study conducted by A study conducted by [Byrne and Carr \(2005\)](#) reinforces the notion that marriage is still considered the preferred route to women's adult identities and is not the route taken by single women.

Based on the interview and focus group discussion unmarried women reported that they used different coping strategies in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing including social support, active lifestyle, resistance to external pressures and positive outlook. Participants emphasized social support as the main strategies to increase psychosocial wellbeing among unmarried women. Most of the participants stated that they used social support social in order to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing and supports through various forms of relationships such as families and friends were the factors that can increase well-being. Apart from this, they also obtained supports from other unmarried women who share the same difficulties and pressure from other people, kind of like a support group of unmarried women. The finding of this study similar with the study conducted by [Malinauskas \(2010\)](#) social support from friends and family increases psychosocial wellbeing and decreases stress among unmarried women. In addition, numerous parts of significant social support, such as emotional bonds, attending social events and family/friends contacts, related to increase psychosocial wellbeing of unmarried women ([Feldman et al., 2000](#)).

Unmarried women used resistance to external pressures in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing among these is to deal with social life, women encountered a reaction from a voice recommending unmarried women to walk the stairs to marriage, but a society in which they had to get married. Participants in this study faced the challenge of being single by resisting external pressure. Unmarried women to reduce challenges and sustained to behave confidently. Based on the finding of the study some participants cannot develop any challenges from the external world, it means no impact from external pressure situations. The finding of this study similar with the study conducted by [Azlin and Pamilia \(2020\)](#) stated that women allocated with the challenges of singlehood by resisting external pressures.

Unmarried women used positive self-talk or internal communicate to increase their psychosocial wellbeing through lowering exceptional demanding situations of their lifestyles condition. It additionally allows them to be greater open and accepting in their popularity regardless of what others might imagine of them. Participants used self-talk that allowed them to advantage internal strength, confidence, and optimism in their unmarried popularity. In addition to this unmarried women regarded to be that specialize in how they need to address their psychosocial challenges and this is to be greater type in the direction of them. The finding of this study similar with the study conducted by [Gigy \(1980\)](#) women used positive self-talk as a coping mechanism to enhance psychosocial challenges of unmarried life conditions. It also enables them to be more open and accepting of their status despite what others may think of them. Engaging in positive self-talks also allowed them to gain inner strength, confidence, and optimism of their single status.

All most all participants explained that they considered making praying activities as a response to their psychosocial challenges and they increase their psychosocial wellbeing. In focus group discussion session unmarried women explained that they used for religious practices to remedy their health problems and to reduce feelings of fear, stress, depression and sickness. The study found that unmarried women to enhance their psychosocial wellbeing they used religious coping strategies. Religious coping strategies mean that unmarried women were used spiritual beliefs and practicing religious practices in order to increase their psychosocial wellbeing. The finding of this study similar with the study conducted by [Himawan et al. \(2018\)](#) women the strategies in the form of prayers, cognitively trusting in God's will, faith in God. The participants believed that having a good sense of connection with God and increasing one's spirituality will strengthen

their psychosocial wellbeing and will lead to acceptance of oneself and the situation.

7 Conclusions

This study was aimed exploring the psychosocial wellbeing and challenges in Gondar town. Therefore; from this study the following conclusions were drawn.

The results showed that unmarried women have experienced psychosocial challenges these associated with unmarried. Psychosocial challenges of unmarried were affects their living styles at the study area. Psychosocial challenges such as frustration fear of childlessness, loneliness, discrimination, stigmatization, sexual harassment and disrespect. The finding showed that unmarried women have experienced different psychosocial challenges due to unmarried. Among the challenges of unmarried women were fear of childlessness, loneliness stress, discrimination, sexual harassment, stigmatization, frustration and disrespect. However, participants are sexually harassed by some individuals without their permission. The finding of the study showed that participants were used different coping strategies to increase their psychosocial wellbeing. Therefore, social support, active lifestyle, Strong internal attributes, resistance to external pressures and positive outlook were the main strategies to increase their psychosocial well being of unmarried women. This study demonstrates the psychosocial challenges women experience with regards to unmarried women status. A more proactive approach in identifying their challenges would allow for the development of appropriate empowerment and support programs to address their wellbeing.

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Data Availability

Data can be made available on the behavior of the request

Declaration of interests' statement

The author declare no competing interests.

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Original Article

Language learning strategies and Amharic achievement: levels, correlations and predictions among ninth grade students in Gondar, Ethiopia

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KEYWORDS:

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was investigating the levels, relationships, and predictive value of language learning strategies on Amharic achievement among ninth grade students in Gondar, Ethiopia. Stepwise multiple regression, Pearson correlation, and one sample t tests were used to examine the data collected from the 114 (bootstrapped to 2000) participants. The Amharic achievement of the participants was found to be significantly above the test value of 50 ($M = 66.49$). Each of the learning strategies was used extensively, with social strategies being used the most and compensation strategies the least ($p < .001$). Correlation analysis indicated that only social ($r = .200$, $p = .033$) and affective strategies ($r = .195$, $p = .038$) had significant, though weak positive relationships with achievement, while other strategies showed no significant correlation. Regression analysis revealed that social strategies were the only significant predictor ($\beta = .200$, $p = .047$), with affective strategies approaching significance ($\beta = .195$, $p = .052$). However, the predictive power of all strategies was minimal ($R^2 \leq .040$), indicating that factors beyond strategy use account for most of the variance in Amharic achievement. These findings suggest that although students actively use diverse strategies, their academic performance is only marginally shaped by socio affective strategies, with broader instructional and contextual factors likely playing a more decisive role. The results imply that educators should consider integrating explicit social and affective strategy training into instruction, while researchers should investigate contextual variables that may mediate this relationship.

1 Introduction

Language learning is shaped by a range of strategies that influence learners' ability to master linguistic skills. These include cognitive, metacognitive, social, memory, compensation, and affective strategies (A. D. Cohen, 2011; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Cognitive strategies involve analyzing and practicing language structures, while metacognitive strategies include planning and self-monitoring. Social strategies facilitate learning through collaboration, and affective strategies help manage anxiety and sustain motivation. Memory strategies support retention, and compensation strategies enable

learners to address linguistic gaps (Griffiths, 2008; Teng, 2023). Researches have consistently shown that these strategies correlate with language achievement by enabling learners to self-regulate and improve performance (Afshar and Bayat, 2018; Agustín et al., 2021; Wong and Nunan, 2011).

Amharic serves as both the federal working language in Ethiopia and a medium of instruction at elementary school and teacher training colleges level in Amhara & other regions. For academic achievement, Amharic proficiency is consequently crucial. National evaluations, however, show that language instruction continues to face difficulties. Widespread challenges with reading and writing in mother tongues, like Amharic, are documented in the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30) (Ministry of Education, 2018). Numerous kids do not fulfill basic competency levels, according to the Early Grade Reading Assessment (RTI International, 2010) and the National Learning Assessment (Ministry of Education, 2013). Teacher-centered pedagogies and inadequate strategy education are frequently blamed for these shortcomings (Brown, 2007). Local research supports these conclusions: According to Filate (2012) and Mossie (2007), self-regulated strategies improve ninth-grade Ethiopian students' reading and academic performance. Assefa (2021) found that alignment between learning styles and strategies predicts stronger outcomes among Gumuz language speakers, highlighting the importance of context in strategy use.

Despite this evidence, ninth-grade pupils in Gondar continue to exhibit variable accomplishment in Amharic, with many falling short of desired competency norms, according to the classroom teacher's experience. Overcrowding in classrooms, a lack of strategy instruction training for teachers, and a dependence on conventional approaches that don't take into account students' learning preferences are all contributing problems (Ministry of Education, 2018; Shi, 2017). There is an empirical data regarding the frequency with which Ethiopian students, specifically ninth graders in North Gondar, employ these strategies when learning Amharic, despite the fact that international research has demonstrated links between particular strategies and language proficiency (Guan and Liu, 2014; Hou, 2013; Yao et al., 2019). This gap is significant since figuring out how strategies are used can help explain performance differences and guide focused interventions (Biyikli, 2021; Jhaish, 2010; Oxford, 2003).

This study closes these gaps by analyzing the levels, relationships, and predictive value of language learning strategies on Amharic achievement among ninth grade students in Gondar, Ethiopia. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are the nine grade students achieving above the passing threshold?
2. Which learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social, memory, compensation, and affective) are most and least frequently used in Amharic language learning?
3. What is the correlation between these strategies and Amharic language achievement?
4. What are the predict values of learning strategies on Amharic language achievement?

2 Research methods

2.1 Research design

A cross-sectional quantitative design was used in this study. This design was chosen as a suitable method for gathering numerical data to characterize a phenomenon at a certain moment in time and for investigating correlations between variables (Creswell and

Creswell, 2018). Three analytical approaches are integrated into the design: descriptive analysis to evaluate students' achievement levels and strategy use; correlational analysis to investigate the relationships between Amharic achievement and the six learning strategies; and predictive analysis using multiple regressions to ascertain the degree to which these strategies predict achievement. From description to prediction, a thorough inquiry is made possible by this interconnected framework (Pallant, 2010).

2.2 Samples and sampling technique

The study was conducted at Maksegnu Gebeya and Kirakir High Schools, two secondary schools in the North Gondar Zone's Tegedie Districts (Numbers 1 and 2). Convenience sampling was used to choose these schools based on administrative collaboration, accessibility, and proximity, practical limitations in educational research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Using a holistic (complete) sampling technique, all available and willing students from the target grade level were recruited to participate, resulting in a total of 114 ninth-grade students from these two schools. Forty male and seventy-four female students who were enrolled in the 2016 academic year made up the final sample. This sample size ($N = 114$) satisfies suggested limits for statistical power and is sufficient for the intended correlational and regression analyses (Pallant, 2010; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013).

Even though the participants are reasonably representative to the study, it is crucial to recognize that, the results' potential to be applied outside of the particular setting of these two schools is restricted by the convenience sampling method. Therefore, any extrapolation to the larger population of ninth-grade students in the region should be done with the proper caution, even though the results offer great insights into the relationships between language learning strategies and Amharic achievement within this accessible population (L. Cohen et al., 2018).

2.3 Instruments

Two main instruments were employed for data collection: an achievement test document review and a structured strategy questionnaire.

2.3.1 Amharic achievement measure

The objective measure of Amharic language achievement was the students' first-semester final exam results, which were gathered from official school records. Subject teachers created these standardized school-based exams in compliance with the authorized learning objectives and the official syllabus. Multiple stages of evaluation were used to confirm the accomplishment measure's content validity: department heads assessed the tests, the school examination committee reviewed them, and the school supervisor oversaw them to guarantee thorough coverage of all language skills. Vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, writing mechanics, listening comprehension, and speaking ability were all thoroughly evaluated. Midterm and final exams were used to assess the written components (vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing concepts), but the performance-based skills (speaking, listening, and writing) were assessed continuously through classroom activities and homework assignments. The standardized processes for test design, administration, and scoring across both schools improve the consistency and dependability of the achievement measures, even though the schools did not provide a precise reliability coefficient for these tests (Gay et al., 2012).

2.3.2 *Language learning strategy questionnaire*

A structured questionnaire was used to measure students' use of language learning strategies. The instrument was adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Version 7.0 (EFL/ESL), and a widely validated and reliable tool for assessing the frequency of strategy use across six categories: memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never or almost never true of me) to 5 (Always or almost always true of me).

To ensure cultural appropriateness and participant comprehension, the original English version of the SILL was translated into Amharic, the students' native language. The translation process followed established guidelines for cross-cultural instrument adaptation (Beaton et al., 2000). The initial translation was reviewed independently by two language experts, one English teacher and one Amharic teacher, who evaluated semantic equivalence, conceptual clarity, and cultural relevance. Their feedback informed subsequent revisions to ensure that the translated items preserved the original meanings while remaining culturally accessible to ninth-grade students in the study context.

2.3.3 *Construct validity*

To evaluate the construct validity of the adapted instrument, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted on the language learning strategy questionnaire. Prior to factor extraction, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy yielded a value of .640, exceeding the recommended threshold of .60 (Kaiser, 1974), thereby confirming that the sample size ($N = 114$) was adequate for meaningful analysis. Additionally, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 3163.812$, $df = 1225$, $p < .001$), indicating that the correlations between items were sufficiently robust to support EFA (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013). The subsequent EFA revealed factor loadings ranging from .406 to .575 across the extracted factors. These loadings meet the established criteria for practical significance in educational research, confirming that the items effectively measured their intended dimensions of language learning strategies (Comrey and Lee, 2013; Hair et al., 2019).

2.3.4 *Reliability analysis*

The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The overall reliability of the instrument was excellent ($\alpha = .918$), indicating strong internal consistency across all 50 items. As presented in Table 1, the reliability coefficients for the individual strategy dimensions ranged from .690 to .817. While the Social dimension yielded an alpha value of .690, which falls slightly below the conventional threshold of .70, this value is considered acceptable in exploratory research contexts, particularly with relatively small sample sizes and when instruments are adapted for new cultural settings (Hair et al., 2019; Taber, 2018).

Table 1: Reliability of the questionnaire

N	Subgroup	No. items	Item numbers	Alpha values
1	Memory	9	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9	.795
2	Cognitive	14	10,11,12,13,14,15,16	.817
3	Compensatory	6	24,25,26,27,28,29	.747
4	Metacognitive	9	30,31,32,33,34,35,36	.790
5	Affective	6	39,40,41,42,43,44	.804
6	Social	6	45,46,47,48,49,50	.690
	Total	50		.918

2.3.5 Assumption tests

Assumptions for One sample t-test, Pearson correlation and regression (normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity) are tested and reported. The Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests indicated that both language achievement (Shapiro-Wilk $p = .081$, Kolmogorov-Smirnov $p = .200$) and learning strategy (Shapiro-Wilk $p = .063$, Kolmogorov-Smirnov $p = .127$) were normally distributed, as all p -values exceeded the .05 significance threshold.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test the linearity of the relationship between learning strategies and language achievement. The results indicated a significant linear component, $F(1, 2) = 7.729$, $p = .109$, suggesting a linear trend in the data. More importantly, the deviation from linearity was not statistically significant, $F(110, 2) = 5.241$, $p = .173$, confirming that the relationship between the two variables does not depart significantly from linearity. These findings support the assumption that the association between learning strategies and language achievement can be adequately described by a linear model.

Based on the regression analysis, multicollinearity was not a concern in this model. As the analysis included only one predictor variable (learning strategies), the Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were both exactly 1.000, which is well below the common threshold of 10 for VIF and above the 0.1 threshold for Tolerance. Additionally, the collinearity diagnostics revealed a condition index of 17.457, which, while slightly elevated, does not indicate problematic multicollinearity given the presence of only one predictor. These results confirm that the assumption of no multicollinearity was satisfied.

The assumption of homoscedasticity was assessed through visual examination of the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values. The resulting plot displayed a random, evenly dispersed pattern of residuals around zero, with no evidence of systematic funneling or curvature. This was further supported by the Loess fit line, which closely approximated a straight horizontal line, indicating constant variance across all levels of the predicted values. These findings confirm that the assumption of homoscedasticity was satisfied, and no correction for heteroscedasticity was required.

2.4 Procedures

The data collection process followed several stages: (1) preparation and evaluation of the adapted SILL questionnaire for clarity and cultural appropriateness; (2) securing a permission letter from the university department; (3) visiting the schools, meeting with administrators, and providing orientation to the students; (4) administering the questionnaire to all participants simultaneously in their classrooms to ensure consistency; and (5) collecting achievement data from school records with the permission of the officials.

2.5 Data analysis techniques

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Given the sample size ($N = 114$), a bootstrap resampling method (with 2000 samples) was applied to enhance the robustness and reliability of the estimates by generating a sampling distribution and calculating bias-corrected and accelerated confidence intervals. The following analyses were performed: Bootstrap One sample t-test (Mean, Standard Deviation): To answer research question 1 (level of achievement) and research question 2 (level of strategy use). This is because; the Ethiopian Ministry of Education defines 50 as the minimum passing score for the subject. So, a one-sample t-test was conducted to compare the mean achievement score of ninth-grade students against the institutional minimum passing benchmark of 50%. Bootstrap Pearson Correlation: To examine the relationship (research question 3) between each of the six strategy categories and the Amharic achievement score. Bootstrap Stepwise Multiple Regression: To determine the predictive power of the learning strategies (research question 4) and identify which strategy types are the strongest unique predictors of Amharic language achievement. A key limitation of stepwise regression is its reliance on sequential testing, which inflates the probability of Type I errors. Because the algorithm evaluates multiple predictors iteratively, it capitalizes on chance variations within the dataset. Consequently, the model may retain variables that appear statistically significant due to random sampling error rather than a true underlying relationship with the outcome, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings to the broader population.

3 Data analysis

The first basic research question is 'Are the nine grade students achieving above the passing threshold?' The data collected to answer this question is analyzed using one sample t-test. The result is presented in Table 2:

Table 2: Level of Amharic Language Achievement Among Ninth-Grade Students

Variable	M	SD	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Bootstrap CI
Amharic Achievement Score	66.49	14.086	12.500	<.001	16.49	[13.887, 18.964]

Note: df (degrees of freedom) = 113, Test Value = 50. The mean difference is calculated as (Mean - Test Value). $N = 114$. Bootstrap CI is based on 2000 samples.

The result presented in Table 2 shows, the mean achievement score for the sample ($N = 114$) was 66.49 ($SD = 14.086$). The results revealed a statistically significant difference, $t(113) = 12.500$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 16.49 points (95% Bootstrap CI [13.887, 18.964]). These findings indicate that the average Amharic language achievement score among the sampled ninth-grade students is significantly higher than the established passing threshold.

The second basic research question is 'Which learning strategies, cognitive, metacognitive, social, memory, compensation, and affective, are most and least frequently used in Amharic language learning?' The data collected to answer this question is analyzed using one sample t-test. The result is presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Frequency of Learning Strategy Use among Ninth-Grade Amharic Language Students

Strategy Type	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Bootstrap CI
Social	4.061	0.661	17.15	<0.01	1.061	[0.91, 1.19]
Cognitive	3.927	0.553	17.89	<0.01	0.927	[0.86, 1.02]
Memory	3.899	0.672	14.27	<0.01	0.899	[0.71, 1.02]
Metacognitive	3.887	0.599	15.82	<0.01	0.887	[0.77, 0.99]
Affective	3.820	0.750	11.67	<0.01	0.820	[0.60, 0.95]
Compensation	3.790	0.707	11.92	<0.01	0.790	[0.60, 0.96]
Overall Average	3.891	0.471	20.18	<0.01	0.891	[0.81, 0.98]

Note: df (degrees of freedom) = 113; Test Value = 3. The mean difference is calculated as (Mean - Test Value). N = 114; Bootstrap CI is based on 2000 samples.

The results presented in Table 3 shows, the analysis revealed that Social strategies were the most frequently used ($M = 4.061$, $SD = 0.661$) followed by Cognitive ($M = 3.927$, $SD = 0.553$), Memory ($M = 3.899$, $SD = 0.672$), Metacognitive ($M = 3.887$, $SD = 0.599$), Affective ($M = 3.820$, $SD = 0.750$), and Compensation strategies ($M = 3.790$, $SD = 0.707$), which were the least frequently used. All six strategy types demonstrated mean scores significantly above the test value of 3 ($p < .001$ for all strategies). The overall average strategy use was also significantly above the midpoint ($M = 3.891$, $SD = 0.471$, $p < .001$). The rank order of strategy use from most to least frequent was as follows: Social > Cognitive > Memory > Metacognitive > Affective > Compensation.

The third basic research question is 'What is the correlation between the six learning strategies and Amharic language achievement among ninth-grade students?' The data collected to answer this question is analyzed using Pearson correlation. The result is presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Correlation between Learning Strategies and Amharic Achievement

Strategy Type	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value	Effect Size (f^2)
Social	.200*	.033	0.042
Affective	.195*	.038	0.040
Metacognitive	.170	.071	0.030
Compensation	.096	.311	0.009
Cognitive	.009	.926	0.000
Memory	.007	.944	0.000
Total Strategy Use	.131	.165	0.017

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). N = 114.

The fourth basic research question is 'What are the predict values of learning strategies on Amharic language achievement?' The data collected to answer this question is analyzed using Stepwise Multiple Regression. The result is presented in Table 5:

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Predicting Amharic Achievement from Learning Strategies

Predictor	β	p-value	R ²	Effect Size (f ²)
Social	.200	.047	.040	0.042
Affective	.195	.052	.038	0.040
Memory	.007	.936	.000	0.000
Cognitive	.009	.923	.000	0.000
Compensation	.096	.308	.009	0.009
Metacognitive	.170	.122	.029	0.030
Total Strategy Use	.131	.176	.017	0.017

The data presented in Table 5 shows that the regression analysis extended and clarified the correlation findings, revealing minimal predictive power across all strategy types. Social strategies emerged as the only statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .200$, $p = .047$), while Affective strategies approached but did not reach significance ($\beta = .195$, $p = .052$). The remaining predictors, Memory ($\beta = .007$, $p = .936$), Cognitive ($\beta = .009$, $p = .923$), Compensation ($\beta = .096$, $p = .308$), Metacognitive ($\beta = .170$, $p = .122$), and Total Strategy Use ($\beta = .131$, $p = .176$), were not statistically significant. Critically, the individual R² values ranged from 0.0% to 4.0%, indicating that each strategy explained virtually none of the variance in Amharic achievement scores. According to J. Cohen (1988) conventions for effect sizes (f²), all strategies demonstrated negligible to small effects ranging from 0.000 to 0.042, falling below the threshold for practical relevance.

4 Discussion

4.1 The level of Amharic language achievement

The first finding revealed that ninth-grade students achieved a mean score of 66.49 (SD = 14.086) on Amharic language assessment, which was statistically significantly higher than the benchmark value of 50, $t(113) = 12.500$, $p < .001$. This result indicates that, on average, students are performing above the minimum passing standard.

This result aligns with theoretical perspectives emphasizing the critical role of environmental language exposure in successful language learning (De Houwer, 2009; Genesee et al., 2006; Krashen, 1982). In the specific context of the Tegedie districts, where Amharic is a dominant community language, students likely benefit from continuous linguistic reinforcement beyond the classroom, supporting the basic objectives of foundational language instruction (Ellis, 2003; Garbanzo, 2007). This localized finding offers an encouraging contrast to the systemic challenges in mother-tongue proficiency documented in national policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2018).

However, a measured interpretation is caution. A mean score of 66.49, while statistically significant, reflects foundational competency rather than the advanced proficiency required for higher-order academic tasks such as critical analysis and persuasive writing (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001; Bachman and Palmer, 2010). The substantial standard deviation (14.086) further reveals considerable variability in student performance. This dispersion aligns with research indicating that individual differences in literacy exposure, instructional quality, and socioeconomic factors create meaningful disparities in academic language proficiency, even within first-language contexts (Garbanzo, 2007; Huang et al., 2018). The persistent gap between basic proficiency and higher-level competency echoes findings from previous local studies that link performance variations to

factors beyond simple language exposure (Filate, 2012; Wagaw, 2019). Furthermore, the benchmark value of 50 represents a modest standard of minimum competency rather than optimal achievement (Linn, 2000).

In the end, while students in this study are meeting the passing requirements, offering an encouraging perspective on foundational instruction in these specific districts, the results simultaneously underscore the need for continued pedagogical efforts. The goal should be to elevate all learners from basic competency toward the genuine academic mastery necessary for long-term success, thereby reinforcing national aims for equitable, high-quality educational outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2018).

4.2 The levels of learning strategies use

Regarding the frequency of language learning strategies used, students reported employing all the six strategy types at levels significantly above the theoretical test value of 3 ($p < .001$), with an overall mean of 3.891 ($SD = 0.471$). Among the types Social strategies were the most frequently employed ($M = 4.061$), followed by Cognitive ($M = 3.927$), Memory ($M = 3.899$), Metacognitive ($M = 3.887$), and Affective strategies ($M = 3.820$), with Compensation strategies being the last used ($M = 3.790$). The finding suggests that ninth-grade students actively engage with a variety of learning strategies when studying Amharic.

The predominance of Social strategies likely reflects Ethiopia's collectivist cultural context, where community and interpersonal relationships are deeply embedded in daily life (Oxford, 1990). Students appear to preferentially learn through interaction, cooperative peer engagement, and teacher consultation, consistent with observations that social interaction constitutes a primary strategic pathway for many learners (Dmitrenko, 2017; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989). The concurrent high use of Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies indicates that students actively manipulate language through analysis and reasoning while regulating their learning through planning and self-evaluation (Zimmerman, 2001). This finding aligns with Filate (2012) research with Ethiopian learners, which similarly identified metacognitive strategy engagement. However, this pattern contrasts with Anthony and Ganesen (2012) findings among Malaysian learners, who prioritized memory strategies over social strategies. This discrepancy is attributable to contextual differences: their research examined English as a second language in examination systems emphasizing rote memorization, whereas the present study examines Amharic as a first language within a culturally embedded communicative context.

The relatively lower use of Affective and Compensation strategies reveals meaningful gaps in students' strategic repertoires. Affective strategies, techniques for managing emotions, sustaining motivation, and reducing anxiety, are essential for maintaining emotional equilibrium necessary for sustained language learning effort (Krashen, 1982; Oxford, 1990). The lower reported use suggests students may have less developed tools for coping with language acquisition stresses, a noteworthy gap given that emotional regulation influences academic persistence (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). The least frequent use of Compensation strategies, guessing meaning from context, using synonyms, adjusting messages, indicates potential limitations in flexible approaches to language obstacles. Banda and Chauma (2025) found that ineffective use of compensation strategies contributed directly to poor language outcomes in similar educational contexts, a pattern that may reflect instructional practices prioritizing accuracy and memorization over communicative competence (Brown, 2007).

In conclusion, while the overall above-medium frequency of strategy use is commendable, the specific profile, high social and cognitive strategy use alongside lower affective and compensation strategy use provides a nuanced diagnostic picture. These learners are

socially engaged and mentally active but may benefit from developing emotional self-management capabilities and flexible communication strategies. Explicit instruction in affective techniques for managing language anxiety, combined with systematic training in compensation strategies for navigating knowledge gaps, could strengthen students' strategic repertoires and foster more confident, communicatively competent Amharic language learners.

4.3 The correlation between learning strategies and achievement

The correlation analysis revealed a differentiated pattern: while students used all the six strategy types at a significant frequency, only Social strategies ($r = .200$, $p = .033$) and Affective strategies ($r = .195$, $p = .038$) demonstrated statistically significant, though weak, positive correlations with achievement. The remaining strategies, Memory ($r = .007$, $p = .944$), Cognitive ($r = .009$, $p = .926$), Compensation ($r = .096$, $p = .311$), and Metacognitive ($r = .170$, $p = .071$), showed positive but non-significant relationships. The correlation between Total Strategy Use and achievement was also non-significant ($r = .131$, $p = .165$).

The significant correlation for Social strategies reinforces the cultural and pedagogical salience of collaborative learning within the Ethiopian educational context, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that cognitive development originates in social interaction. This finding is consistent with A. D. Cohen (2011) and Afshar and Bayat (2018), who documented that interactive strategies facilitate language development by creating opportunities for meaningful communication and feedback. The significant role of Affective strategies equally warrants attention, supporting theoretical frameworks emphasizing emotion regulation in learning. Baumeister and Vohs (2007) and Wolters (2003) demonstrate that managing anxiety and sustaining motivation constitute fundamental components of self-regulated learning, enabling students to persist through challenges and perform effectively on assessments.

The non-significant correlations for Cognitive, Metacognitive, and Memory strategies diverge from established international research documenting these strategies as reliable language success predictors (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Griffiths, 2008). This discrepancy may be explained by contextual factors: the achievement assessment may not adequately capture skills developed through these strategies if examinations prioritize recall over higher-order thinking (Hayati, 2015); students may lack explicit instruction in deploying these strategies effectively, as Phakiti (2003) notes that implementation quality mediates strategy-performance relationships. The near-zero Memory and Cognitive correlations contrast with Lai (2009) and Lestari and Fatimah (2020), who found significant relationships across multiple strategy types. However, as Sage et al. (2019) observed, memory strategy effectiveness depends on alignment with assessment formats; the Amharic achievement measure may have emphasized comprehension and analysis rather than rote memorization (Oxford, 2003).

In conclusion, the correlational analysis reveals that within this specific educational context, socio-affective dimensions of learning demonstrate stronger associations with academic performance than cognitive-processing dimensions. This finding carries important implications: fostering supportive learning communities and promoting students' emotional self-regulation may be as critical as teaching specific study techniques for improving Amharic language achievement. The absence of significant correlations for cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while initially surprising, likely reflects assessment characteristics and insufficient strategic training rather than the inherent irrelevance of these approaches. These results underscore the need for comprehensive strategy instruction that addresses both cognitive techniques and the affective and social conditions necessary for their effective deployment.

4.4 The predictive power of learning strategies

The regression analysis extended and clarified the correlation findings, revealing that minimal predictive power across all strategy types. Social strategies emerged as the only statistically significant predictor ($\beta = .200$, $p = .047$), while Affective strategies approached but did not reach significance ($\beta = .195$, $p = .052$). The remaining predictors, Memory ($\beta = .007$, $p = .936$), Cognitive ($\beta = .009$, $p = .923$), Compensation ($\beta = .096$, $p = .308$), Metacognitive ($\beta = .170$, $p = .122$), and Total Strategy Use ($\beta = .131$, $p = .176$), were not statistically significant. Critically, the individual R^2 values ranged from 0.0% to 4.0%, indicating that each strategy explained virtually none of the variance in Amharic achievement scores. According to J. Cohen (1988) conventions for effect sizes (f^2), all strategies demonstrated negligible to small effects ranging from 0.000 to 0.042, falling below the threshold for practical relevance.

The marginal significance of Social and Affective strategies echoes the correlation findings and warrants careful interpretation within appropriate statistical parameters. The significant but weak relationship for Social strategies ($\beta = .200$) aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Afshar and Bayat (2018) documentation of interactive learning benefits. Similarly, the near-significant finding for Affective strategies supports Wolters (2003) emphasis on motivational regulation as a component of self-regulated learning. However, the corresponding R^2 values (4.0% and 3.8% respectively) provide essential statistical context: these strategies account for only a minimal fraction of achievement variance. In practical terms, while social interaction may facilitate classroom participation and emotional regulation may mitigate test anxiety, these behaviors alone do not substantively drive performance differences. The f^2 effect sizes of 0.042 and 0.040 confirm that even statistically significant relationships lack meaningful explanatory power.

The non-significant predictive capacity of Cognitive, Metacognitive, Memory, and Compensation strategies presents a finding that diverges from established research documenting these strategies as reliable predictors of language success (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Griffiths, 2008; Soodmand Afshar et al., 2016). Several contextual factors may explain this discrepancy. First, students may report using strategies without quality implementation, as Phakiti (2003) notes that the relationship between strategy use and performance is mediated by implementation quality. Second, the achievement assessment may emphasize recall rather than the higher-order thinking fostered by cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Hayati, 2015). Third, external factors such as instructional quality, prior knowledge, and home environment likely exert stronger influences on academic outcomes than learning strategies in this context (Genesee et al., 2006).

The regression analysis leads to a statistically grounded conclusion with clear practical implications. With over 96% of achievement variance unexplained by learning strategies, these factors are demonstrably not the primary determinants of Amharic language achievement in this population. The negligible effect sizes (f^2 ranging from 0.000 to 0.042) confirm that even the statistically significant findings lack practical predictive utility. This statistical evidence redirects attention toward broader systemic factors likely exerting greater influence on student outcomes. Efforts to meaningfully improve Amharic achievement should prioritize teacher professional development, curriculum reform that aligns assessment with higher-order thinking, equitable resource allocation, and interventions addressing socioeconomic barriers. Learning strategies, while valuable components of learner development, constitute a small piece of a complex educational puzzle. The statistical parameters of this analysis provide the appropriate framework for interpreting their limited role: useful for understanding learner profiles, but insufficient as primary levers for achievement improvement without concurrent attention to the structural and contextual factors that this model reveals as overwhelmingly influential.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study investigated the levels, correlations, and predictive relationships between language learning strategies and Amharic language achievement among ninth-grade students in Gondar, Ethiopia. Four key findings emerged from the data. First, students demonstrated Amharic achievement significantly above the passing threshold ($M = 66.49$, $p < .001$). Second, students reported using all six learning strategy categories at frequencies significantly above the medium level ($p < .001$), with Social strategies most frequently used ($M = 4.061$) and Compensation strategies least used ($M = 3.790$). Third, correlation analysis revealed statistically significant but weak positive relationships only for Social ($r = .200$, $p = .033$) and Affective strategies ($r = .195$, $p = .038$); Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, and Metacognitive strategies showed non-significant correlations. Fourth, regression analysis confirmed minimal predictive power across all strategies, with Social strategies emerging as the only significant unique predictor ($\beta = .200$, $p = .047$) yet explaining only 4% of achievement variance. All strategies demonstrated negligible effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.000$ to 0.042).

Three integrated conclusions synthesize these findings. First, while students employ diverse strategies at satisfactory levels and demonstrate adequate achievement, the direct link between strategic approach and achievement is remarkably weak. Second, socio-affective dimensions show marginally stronger connections to achievement than cognitive and metacognitive strategies in this context. Third, learning strategies account for virtually none of the variance in achievement scores, indicating that factors determining academic success lay predominantly outside measured strategy use.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the relationship between learning strategies and achievement is context-dependent. While international research often positions cognitive and metacognitive strategies as strong predictors of language success, these findings reveal that in this Ethiopian educational context, such relationships are not universal. Socio-affective strategies assume relatively greater importance, while the predictive power of cognitive and metacognitive strategies is suppressed, underscoring the need for culturally situated models of language learning strategy effectiveness.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following pedagogical, educational and research related recommendations are suggested:

First, given that learning strategies collectively explained virtually none of the variance in achievement scores ($R^2 = 0.0\%$ to 4.0%), policymakers should prioritize systemic factors beyond individual learner strategies, including teacher quality, instructional resources, and class size, that the statistical evidence indicates are more influential determinants of student outcomes.

Second, since Compensation strategies were the least frequently used ($M = 3.790$) and showed no correlation with achievement, teachers should provide explicit instruction in flexible communication techniques such as guessing meaning from context, using synonyms, and paraphrasing.

Third, because Social strategies demonstrated the highest frequency of use ($M = 4.061$) and emerged as the only significant predictor of achievement ($\beta = .200$, $p = .047$), ed-

ucators should intentionally incorporate collaborative learning activities to leverage this existing strength.

Fourth, given the discrepancy between moderate strategy use and minimal predictive power, future research must investigate the quality and contextual appropriateness of strategy implementation through qualitative methods, clarifying why frequently used cognitive and metacognitive strategies fail to translate into measurable achievement gains.

Fifth, since over 96% of achievement variance remained unexplained, future studies should incorporate additional variables including socioeconomic status, instructional quality, and home environment to develop more comprehensive predictive models.

Ethical considerations

The University of Gondar's Ethiopian Language and Literature- Amharic Department granted ethical approval for this study. The principals of the participating schools received a formal letter of authorization. Participants were given thorough instructions on the goal of the study, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and their right to withdraw without repercussions prior to data collection. Along with the orientation, the parents of the participants provided written informed consent, and the participants themselves gave their assent. Data were used only for scientific research, and strict confidentiality and anonymity were ensured for all information submitted.

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Author contributions

AS: Conception of the research idea, study design, data analysis and preparing of draft manuscript, and prepared the final manuscript for publication.

WK: Data collection and review of the study.

The author declares no competing interests. No competing of interest.

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Data can be made available on the behavior of the request.

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Original Article

Improving paragraph writing performance and reducing anxiety: the impact of writing strategy training on grade 11 students at Ambo Awaro high school

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KEYWORDS:

Writing Strategy Training;
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Paragraph Writing Performance;
Transformative Power;
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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of writing strategy training in improving paragraph writing performance and reducing anxiety of grade 11 students at Ambo Awaro high school. A quasi- experimental study was employed to compare control and experimental groups. Ninety- nine participants were assigned using lottery sampling technique to experimental (n = 52) and control (n = 47) groups. The experimental group received explicit instruction in cognitive, affective, social, compensation, and metacognitive writing strategies while the control group continued conventional instruction. Data were collected via paragraph writing tests, and a five- point Likert writing- anxiety questionnaire administered pre and post- intervention. The results from independent and paired- samples t- tests depicted, strategy training brought substantial gains across paragraph components: content, vocabulary, grammar, structure, mechanics) and a considerable reduction in writing anxiety. A strong negative relationship indicated that larger anxiety reductions were associated with greater performance improvements. These results underscore the transformative potential of strategy- based instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms by addressing both cognitive and affective dimensions of writing development. To sustain benefits, teachers should include writing- strategy instruction into routine teaching while curriculum developers incorporate it into syllabi and school leaders provide supportive professional development.

1 Introduction

Writing is a cognitively and metacognitively demanding activity that requires the coordination of planning, organizing, monitoring, and rewriting to create meaningful and cohesive texts (Arliyanti and Hapsari, 2023; Teng, 2024). This complexity makes writing one of the most challenging tasks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly at the secondary school level. Despite its challenges, writing remains an indispensable basic language skill for students' academic achievements and effective communication.

The challenges in writing often stem from a lack of explicit strategy- based instruction that supports students in managing cognitive and linguistic complexities. Consequently,

many learners struggle to construct cohesive paragraphs and express their ideas effectively (Chen, 2022; Bai et al., 2021). These difficulties are compounded by inadequate knowledge of key writing techniques, poor organization, and weak linguistic competence (Liu et al., 2022; Arliyanti and Hapsari, 2023). Specifically, in the Ethiopian context, students at schools like Ambo Awaro High School exhibit pronounced weaknesses in grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, organization, and overall paragraph coherence.

Beyond cognitive barriers, affective factors, particularly writing anxiety, are significant obstacles. Writing anxiety manifests as avoidance behaviors and cognitive interference, becoming prominent characteristics of less skilled writers (Yang, 2024). Prasetyaningrum (2025) noted that emotional difficulties frequently interrupt students' ability to plan, arrange, and edit their writing, lowering their achievement and confidence (System, 2024; Tsiriotakis et al., 2017). This anxiety is a severe obstacle in Ethiopian EFL classrooms, where limited exposure to English outside the classroom exacerbates linguistic limitations and underdeveloped writing habits.

Recent international research suggests that the systematic integration of specific writing strategies such as planning, drafting, rewriting, and self-monitoring can effectively reduce writing anxiety (Teng, 2020; Bai, 2020). Furthermore, instruction in cognitive and metacognitive strategies has been shown to improve students' organization, vocabulary precision, coherence, and grammatical accuracy (Graham and Harris, 2019; Ahmed, 2021). Research also indicates an inverse relationship: when students' anxiety levels decrease, their writing fluency and structural control tend to increase (Sabti et al., 2019; Bai, 2020). Therefore, writing strategy training is a potentially transformative tool that can strengthen performance and ease anxiety in the classroom.

2 Research problem

Despite the recognized importance of writing for academic achievement, many Grade 11 students in Ethiopian secondary schools, particularly at Ambo Awaro High School, struggle significantly with paragraph writing. As Anshu and Yesuf (2022) found, learners who lack collaborative practice are likely to produce paragraphs with weak development of ideas, poor logical connections, and insufficient organization. At Ambo Awaro High School, these difficulties are evident in students' poor grammar usage, punctuation, vocabulary use, and overall coherence.

The root of these writing difficulties lies in the absence of explicit training in essential writing strategies (Han, 2024). Without systematic instruction in cognitive, metacognitive, memory, affective, social, and compensation strategies, students lack the ability to plan, organize, monitor, and revise their writing effectively. Consequently, their paragraphs exhibit weak idea development, poor coherence, limited vocabulary, and frequent grammatical inaccuracies. This problem is not merely a reflection of limited linguistic proficiency but also a consequence of the absence of structured opportunities for guided writing practice and feedback (Arliyanti and Hapsari, 2023; Liu et al., 2022).

In addition to cognitive and linguistic challenges, affective factors, particularly writing anxiety, further hinder students' progress. The fear of writing is a severe obstacle that restricts learners' ability to express their ideas confidently, leading to negative emotional feelings, avoidance behavior, lack of motivation, and reduced writing output (Mogesse et al., 2025; Yang, 2024; Prasetyaningrum, 2025). Studies consistently show that high levels of writing anxiety negatively correlate with writing performance, especially in tasks demanding strategic planning, organization, and revision (System, 2024; Tsiriotakis et al., 2017). This anxiety is even more severe in contexts like Ethiopia, where English is rarely used outside the classroom and feedback opportunities are limited.

The Research Gap and Rationale: While international studies have demonstrated the positive impact of writing strategy instruction on improving writing quality and reducing anxiety (Bai, 2020; Teng, 2020), there is a remarkable gap in context-specific evidence within the Ethiopian secondary school setting. Moreover, the majority of existing studies tend to examine writing performance and anxiety as separate constructs, often overlooking the reciprocal relationship between them, and are largely conducted at the university level. This study addresses these significant gaps by investigating how writing strategy training simultaneously and integrally influences both the anxiety levels and paragraph writing performance of Grade 11 students in an Ethiopian secondary school (Ambo Awaro High School). This study is significant as it provides context-specific empirical evidence on the integrated effects of writing strategy training in Ethiopian secondary schools. The findings will equip EFL teachers with practical, emotionally supportive pedagogical tools, guide curriculum developers in incorporating explicit strategy instruction, and fill a critical research gap by exploring the reciprocal relationship between writing performance and anxiety, ultimately contributing to more holistic and effective writing instruction for Grade 11 learners. Investigating this interaction not only fills a crucial research gap but also provides pedagogically valuable insights into how EFL teachers can foster more effective and emotionally supportive writing classrooms for Grade 11 learners. Accordingly, this study was designed to address the research questions:

1. How does strategies training affect the level of writing anxiety among grade 11 students?
2. To what extent does strategies training influence the paragraph writing performance of grade 11 students?
3. What is the relationship between changes in writing anxiety and changes in paragraph writing performance among grade 11 students following strategies training?

3 Literature review

3.1 The nature of writing and its academic significance

Writing is widely recognized as a complex and recursive process involving the generation, organization, and communication of ideas through text (Hyland, 2019). It is not merely a means of linguistic expression, but also a cognitive and metacognitive task that requires planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Basically, the nature of writing is the process of expressing ideas, thoughts, and information in a structured and meaningful way through written language for a specific purpose and audience. This processes require an individual's interests. Particularly in academic contexts, writing skills serve as a fundamental tool for learning, assessment, and scholarly communication (Graham, 2020). For secondary school students, particularly those in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, academic writing is a gateway to higher education and future career opportunities. Despite its importance, writing remains one of the most challenging language skills for learners to master owing to its demand for linguistic accuracy, coherent structure, and critical thinking (Teng, 2020).

3.2 The complexity of writing for high school students

Academic writing is a complex activity that requires the simultaneous deployment of multiple linguistic and cognitive sub-skills, especially in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. Linguistically, it demands mastery over vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, content, mechanics, and register. Cognitively, it involves higher-order skills such as planning,

organizing, evaluating, and revising (Arliyanti and Hapsari, 2023; Teng, 2020). This complexity is further heightened by limited exposure to effective writing instruction, particularly strategy-based approaches that support planning and revising processes (Graham and Harris, 2019). Students must not only generate relevant content but also structure their ideas logically and express them accurately. As Liu et al. (2022) argue, successful paragraph development depends on a writer's ability to manage discourse-level features such as coherence and unity, while applying appropriate syntactic and lexical choices that conform to academic conventions. Moreover, the act of writing engages both cognitive and metacognitive processes; writers must set goals, monitor their progress, and revise drafts to meet communicative and task-specific requirements (System, 2024). EFL learners, in particular, often struggle because their cognitive load is divided between idea generation and managing the complexities of a second language (Teng, 2024). Without adequate instruction on how to coordinate these sub-skills, high school students tend to produce writing that is fragmented, incoherent, and linguistically flawed. This highlights the urgent need for strategy training-based instruction that explicitly supports the integration of linguistic and cognitive skills in academic writing tasks.

3.3 Understanding writing performance in the high school context

In this study, writing performance is specifically understood in relation to paragraph writing. A well-developed paragraph should demonstrate unity and coherence, with clear topic sentences, supporting details, and appropriate transitions (sek yi2024appraisal). In line with this, Orkojo (2025) added that Writing performance, therefore, is evaluated based on several key elements: content (clarity and relevance of ideas), vocabulary (range and appropriateness of word choice), grammar (accuracy of sentence structures and tenses), structure (logical flow and organization), and mechanics (correct use of punctuation, spelling, and capitalization). When students are not adequately trained in these components, their writing lacks clarity, engagement, and effectiveness (Bai, 2020). As a result, assessing writing performance in terms of these subcomponents provides a clearer picture of where support and intervention are most needed.

3.4 Writing anxiety and its effects

A significant factor that negatively influences students' writing is writing anxiety a type of situational anxiety triggered during the act of writing. Writing anxiety among high school students is common and often rooted in fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, and prior failures (Kim and Kim, 2022). This form of anxiety affects students both emotionally and cognitively, leading to avoidance behaviors, reduced motivation, and compromised output. Empirical studies have shown that high levels of writing anxiety correlate with poor writing performance, as anxiety impairs the learner's ability to concentrate, organize ideas, and apply writing rules effectively (Sabti et al., 2019). In EFL contexts, where learners may already struggle with language proficiency, writing anxiety becomes an even more significant barrier to academic success.

3.5 Writing strategy training as a pedagogical response

Given the complexity of writing and the emotional barriers many students face, researchers and educators have increasingly emphasized the role of writing strategy training. This instructional approach involves teaching students cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as planning, organizing, drafting, revising, and self-monitoring. These strategies are believed to enhance learners' control over the writing process, increase their confidence, and potentially reduce anxiety (Teng, 2020). Moreover, writing strategy training is

aligned with the growing recognition that writing is not simply a product to be evaluated, but a process to be supported.

Even though theoretical and empirical studies suggest a possible link between strategy training and improvements in writing performance and anxiety reduction, evidence from the Ethiopian context remains limited. For instance, Mogesse et al. (2025) found that dialogue journal writing significantly reduced EFL students' writing anxiety and improved their attitudes toward writing compared with conventional instruction. In addition, Dinsa and Taddese (2024) reported that Ethiopian EFL students who frequently employed writing strategies demonstrated better writing performance and higher writing self-efficacy, highlighting the important role of strategy use in successful writing development. However, more context-specific research is needed to determine how these relationships manifest in Ethiopian high school settings, particularly among Grade 11 learners. In this regard, the current study seeks to explore these interconnections.

4 Research methodology

4.1 Research design and paradigm

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design supported by the pragmatic research paradigm. The quasi-experimental approach was selected to examine the impacts of strategies training on the students' writing performance, and anxiety. To carry out this, the pragmatic paradigm guided the selection of mixed-method tools and techniques enabling the researcher to draw on both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the phenomenon in its educational context. Furthermore, Pragmatism was selected as the philosophical foundation for this study because it is centred on solving real-world problems and producing findings that are practically useful. This approach avoids strict methodological boundaries, allowing for the combined use of quantitative and qualitative methods where appropriate. It also recognises that participants' experiences are shaped by their specific contexts while still valuing objective evidence. In this way, pragmatism offers a balanced and flexible framework to ensure the research outcomes are both credible and relevant to practice.

4.2 Population and study site

Grade 11 students of Ambo, Awaro high school were the participants of the study. This site was selected due to the researcher's long-term professional experience at the school, which provided contextual familiarity and ease of access to participants and data sources. Grade 11 was specifically targeted because it represents a critical academic stage for students preparing for national exams and academic transitions, and it is where writing challenges are especially evident.

4.3 Sampling techniques

A combination of convenience, purposive, and systematic sampling techniques was employed to identify the study participants. The school was selected through convenience sampling because of its geographical proximity and accessibility to the researcher, which allowed repeated visits for data collection and follow-up. Within the school, purposive sampling was applied to focus specifically on Grade 11 students. This level was chosen not only because it represents a critical stage in preparing for national examinations and

academic transition to higher education, but also because the researcher has long- standing teaching experience with Grade 11, providing deep familiarity with students' needs and challenges in writing. Finally, two intact sections of Grade 11 were selected through systematic sampling in an orderly manner, ensuring fairness and minimizing selection bias. This combined approach made sure that the study was both methodologically consistent and relevant to the context.

4.4 Data collection instruments

The study employed paragraph writing test as data gathering tool that was designed to evaluate students' writing performance. The task required students to produce a complete paragraph within an hour guided by a provided topic sentence. A five- point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to measure students' levels of writing anxiety. The items were slightly adapted from Cheng (2004) with slight adjustments were made to better align with the Grade 11 context. Semi- structured interview guidelines were developed to collect qualitative data from 10 selected participants offering deeper insight into students' experiences with writing and strategy use.

4.5 Methods of data analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical methods of data analysis were employed to analyze the quantitative data. The descriptive statistical analysis includes means and standard deviations that were computed to summarize students' writing scores and anxiety levels. To determine the significance of the intervention, independent sample t- test was conducted to compare the students' performance in control and experimental groups. Additionally, a paired samples t- test was applied for assessing pre- and post- intervention changes within the experimental group. Thematic analysis was used for interview data.

4.6 Validity and reliability

The researcher checked the validity of the instruments by conducting a pilot study with 99 participants from Ambo, Awaro high school prior to the main intervention. The process was essential for confirming the clarity, appropriateness, and relevance of the paragraph writing test regarding content, grammar, vocabulary, structure, and mechanics, as well as the writing anxiety questionnaire administered at both before and after treatment stages. The pilot results indicated that the instruments were well aligned with the intended constructs and suitable for measuring the students' writing performance and anxiety.

Moreover, the researcher confirmed that the reliability of the instruments was strictly applicable. The anxiety questionnaires were acceptable at the internal consistency level of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.78). Furthermore, the inter- rater reliability of the paragraph writing scores was examined by employing two independent raters. Cohen's kappa statistic was computed, which indicated substantial consistency between raters. Collectively, these procedures confirmed that the instruments were both valid and reliable, providing a sound basis for accurately capturing the effects of writing strategy training on students' performance and anxiety levels.

5 Results and discussion

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Results of the analysis prerequisite tests

Table 1: Result of Variance Homogeneity Test of Writing Performance

Levene's Statistic (<i>F</i>)	df1	df2	Sig.
2.49	1	97	.118

Homogeneity test Table 1 indicates that Levene's test examined the assumption that there was equal distribution of writing performance scores across the control and experimental groups. As the results indicated, the variances were not significantly different, $F(1, 97) = 2.49$, $p = .118$. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied as the significance value was greater than .05.

Table 2: Results of Normality Tests on Performance and Anxiety

Variable	Groups	Test	N	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
Writing Performance	Control	Pre	47	4.067	.87
		Post	47	4.200*	.248
	Experimental	Pre	52	5.120	.276
		Post	52	5.200*	.157
Writing Anxiety	Control	Pre	47	4.200*	.720
		Post	47	4.200*	.488
	Experimental	Pre	52	5.200*	.768
		Post	52	5.200*	.312

Normality test * This is the lower bound of the true significance

As shown Table 2, the normality of the data on writing performance and anxiety scores for the control and experimental groups was tested using the Kolmogorov Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk tests. The results indicated that all significance (p) values were greater than .05, showing that pre and post- test scores were normally distributed; therefore, the assumption of normality was satisfied.

5.1.2 Findings on paragraph writing performance on the pre-test

Table 3: Results of Independent Sample t-test on the Elements of Paragraph (Pre-test)

Paragraph Elements	Control			Experimental			df	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i>
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Content	46	1.69	.51	52	1.50	.67	96	1.60	.108
Grammar	46	1.39	.49	52	1.44	.53	96	-.48	.628
Structure	46	1.32	.55	52	1.36	.56	96	-.34	.730
Mechanics	46	1.30	.46	52	1.40	.49	96	-1.02	.308
Vocabulary	46	1.21	.41	52	1.36	.59	96	-1.40	.154

Table 3 shows that students in the experimental group ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .67$) scored almost the same as the control group ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .51$). The independent sample t-test revealed no significant difference between the two groups $t(96) = 1.60$, $p = .10$. The difference in the mean (mean difference = -1.19 , $df = 96$, $t\text{-value} < \text{table value}$, $p\text{-value} > .05$) and the effect size ($d = .25$) were small. This indicates that the control and experimental groups of students showed similar performance in writing content.

Table 3 shows that the experimental group ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .53$) scored as similarly to the control group ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .49$). The independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between control and treatment groups, $t(96) = -.48$, $p = .62$. The difference in the mean (mean difference = $-.05$, $df = 96$, $t\text{-value} < \text{table value}$, $p\text{-value} > .05$) and the effect size $d = .10$ was small. This indicates that the participants in the control and experimental groups showed similar vocabulary performance before training.

As shown in Table 3, the treatment group scored ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .56$) almost the same as the control group ($M = 1.33$, $SD = .55$). Therefore, the independent sample t-test revealed, no significant difference between the control and treatment groups at $t(96) = -.35$, $p > .05$. The difference in the mean (mean difference = $-.03$, $df = 96$, $t\text{-value} < \text{table value}$, $p\text{-value} > .05$) and the effect size Cohen's $d = .05$ was small. This indicates that the participants in the control and experimental groups showed almost the same performance in grammar usage in writing before the training began.

Table 3 shows that control group scored ($M = 1.3$, $SD = .46$) almost the same as the experimental group ($M = 1.4$, $SD = .49$). The results from the independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference between the mean scores of the control and treatment groups $t(96) = -.1$, $p\text{-value} = .3$. The difference in the mean (mean difference = $-.1$, $df = 96$, $t\text{-value} < \text{table value}$, $p\text{-value} > .05$) and the effect size ($d = .2$) were small. Therefore, the results indicates that participants in both groups exhibited relatively the same achievements in writing structure before the training.

As indicated in table 3, the participants in the control group scored ($M = 1.22$, $SD = .42$) which was similar to the experimental group ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .59$). The independent sample t-tests revealed no significant difference between the two groups, $t(96) = -1.4$, $p = .15$. The difference in the mean (mean difference = $-.14$, $df = 96$, $t\text{-value} < \text{table value}$, $p\text{-value} > .05$) and the effect size $d = .28$ were small. The results indicate that the control and experimental groups had the same performance of mechanics usage in writing before the training.

5.1.3 Students' paragraph writing performance on the post-test

Table 4 The Results of Independent Sample t-test on Elements of Paragraph Performances

Table 4: Results of Independent Sample t-test on Elements of Paragraph Performances (Post-test)

Paragraph Elements	Control			Experimental			df	t-value	p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Content	47	1.90	.60	52	3.33	1.10	97	-7.09	.000
Vocabulary	47	1.72	.54	52	3.17	1.09	97	-7.99	.000
Grammar	47	1.56	.54	52	2.96	1.09	97	-7.65	.000
Structure	47	1.50	.59	52	2.88	1.10	97	-7.41	.000
Mechanics	47	1.61	.57	52	2.90	1.06	97	-7.16	.000

As shown in Table 4, an independent samples t- test was conducted to compare how well content was incorporated in paragraphs. The results indicated significant difference, $t(97) = -7.09$, $p < .001$, between the scores of the control ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .60$), and experimental ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.10$) groups. The mean difference (-1.32) and 95% CI: -1.69 to -0.95). therefore, the results indicate that there is a substantial difference between the means of the two groups.

As shown in Table 4, the control group ($M = 1.72$, $SD = 0.54$) scored lower than the experimental group ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.09$) on vocabulary use in writing. The t- test revealed a significant difference between the two groups, $t(97) = -7.99$, $p < .05$. The magnitude of the difference in the mean was substantial with a mean difference of (-1.44) and (95% CI: -1.80 to -1.08) indicating a statistically significant difference.

As shown in Table 4, an independent- sample t- test was conducted to compare the grammar scores, control ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .56$) and experimental ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.09$). The results of the t- test ($t(97) = -7.65$, p value = $.000$) which proved that there was a significant difference in the mean scores. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = -1.39 ; 95% CI: -1.75 to -1.03) was significant. Hence, the alternative hypothesis has been retained.

As shown in Table 4, an independent sample t- test was conducted to examine the mean difference between the control and experimental groups in including an appropriate structure in paragraph writing. The experimental group ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.09$) scored higher than the control group ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .59$). The results of the t- test, $t(97) = -7.41$, $p = .000$. which showed significant a difference between the mean scores of the control and treatment groups as the magnitude of the difference (mean difference = -1.38 , 95% CI: -1.75 to -1.04).

The results presented in Table 4, show that the participants in the experimental group ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1.0$) scored higher than those in the control group ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 0.57$) in their appropriate use of mechanics in writing. The results of the t- test revealed a significant difference between the control and experimental group $t(97) = -7.16$, $p < .05$, and the mean difference was (-1.28) , with a 95% CI of: -1.64 to -0.93 . Therefore, there was a significant improvements in the treatment group in using the correct mechanics in writing.

Table 5: Results on overall writing performance at pre- and post-training

Overall Writing Performance	Group	N	Mean	SD	Mean Diff	Df	t	P
Pre-training	Control	46	6.8	1.57	-.186	97	-.479	.633
	Experimental	52	7.02	2.195				
Post-training	Control	48	8.31	2.18	-6.85	97	-8.39	.000
	Experimental	52	15.15	5.00				

As revealed in Table 5, an independent sample t- test was computed to compare the overall performance in paragraph writing at pre- training for the control and experimental groups. There was no statistically significant difference ($t(97) = -.479$, $p = .633$) in the scores for the control group ($M = 6.89$, $SD = 1.622$) and the experimental group ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 2.195$) with the magnitude of the difference in the means (mean difference = $-.186$, 95% CI: $-.954$ to $.583$). The effect size ($d = 0.1$) was small in this study.

As shown in Table 5, an independent sample t- test was conducted to examine the overall paragraph writing performance of the control and experimental groups. The results indicated that the experimental group ($M = 15.15$, $SD = 5.00$) scored significantly higher than the control group ($M = 8.31$, $SD = 2.18$). on the self- efficacy scale. The t- test

showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(97) = -8.39$, $p < .05$) with a large effect size ($d = 0.86$). The magnitude of the difference was significant (mean difference = -6.85 , 95% CI: -8.49 to -5.21) confirming that it was a significant difference; therefore, the alternative hypothesis was retained.

5.1.4 Results of independent samples t-test on writing anxiety

Table 6: Writing Anxiety Results Before and After Treatment

Time	Control Group			Experimental Group			<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>	95% CI	
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD					Lower	Upper
Pre	47	2.73	.31	52	2.82	.53	-1.00	83.9	.260	0.2	-.26	.08
Post	47	2.79	.34	52	3.07	.31	-4.30	92.5	.000	1.0	-.41	-.15

41 to $-.15$], and the effect size ($d = 1$) was large.

5.1.5 Results of Paired Samples t-test on Writing Anxiety

Table 7: Pre- and Post-training Results of Writing Anxiety for Control and Treatment Groups

Group	Pre-Training			Post-Training			df	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD					Lower	Upper
Control	47	2.73	.31	47	2.79	.34	46	-.80	.420	-.19	-.21	.08
Treatment	52	2.28	.53	52	3.07	.30	51	-2.91	.005	-.03	-.42	-.08

As indicated in Table 7, a paired samples *t*-test was conducted using SPSS version 25 to compare the mean scores of writing anxiety for students in the control group before and after the training. The results revealed that the mean score for writing anxiety in the control group prior to training ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .31$) was nearly identical to the mean score after the usual teaching method was applied ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .34$). At the 0.05 level of significance, the *t*-test results were $t(46) = -.08$, $n = 47$, $p = .42$ with a 95% confidence interval ranging from $-.21$ to $.08$ and $r = -.19$. On average, the post-treatment score was only about $-.06$ points higher than the pre-treatment score, indicating that there was no statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-treatment mean values for the control group; the difference could be attributed to chance.

The results of the paired samples *t*-test presented in Table 9 indicate that the mean score for the experimental group before the treatment was $M = 2.28$, $SD = .53$, while the mean score after the treatment was $M = 3.07$, $SD = .30$. The results were statistically significant at the 0.05 level, with $t(51) = -2.91$, $n = 52$, $p = 0.005$ and a 95% confidence interval ranging from $-.42$ to $-.08$ with a correlation coefficient of $r = -.03$. On average, the post-treatment score was $-.25$ points higher than the pre-treatment score. Therefore, there was a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-treatment mean values for the experimental group, indicating that the treatment was effective in this group.

5.2 Discussion

5.2.1 *The impacts of writing strategies training on writing anxiety*

The study found statistically significant reduction in writing anxiety among students in the experimental group after the intervention, indicating that writing strategy training effectively mitigated students' emotional barriers to writing. This outcome aligns with the 'Control- Value Theory of Achievement Emotions,' which posits that students' perceptions of control and the value they place on tasks significantly influence their emotional responses (Pekrun, 2018).

The results resonate with Cheng (2004) findings that structured writing instruction alleviate anxiety by enhancing students' sense of control. Moreover, Bai (2020) confirmed that strategy- based instruction contributes to lower anxiety and higher confidence among EFL learners. Teng (2020) also reported a longitudinal reduction in writing anxiety through motivational and metacognitive strategy training. In this study, strategies such as planning, outlining, and revising provided students with a clear framework, reducing ambiguity and performance pressure. These findings validate Graham and Harris (2019) meta-analysis, which showed that writing instruction with strategic modeling reduces anxiety by providing students with procedural knowledge.

5.2.2 *The impacts of writing strategies training on writing performance*

The results after the intervention showed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group across all dimensions of paragraph writing such as content, vocabulary, grammar, structure, and mechanics. This supports the process- oriented view of writing which sees writing as a cyclical process involving planning, drafting, and revising (Hyland, 2019). Similar improvements in writing performance following strategy training were observed in Chen (2022) study which found that strategy instruction enhanced clarity and coherence in EFL students' paragraphs. In addition, students develop metacognitive awareness in using writing strategies. Olinghouse and Graham (2009) emphasized that students who receive planning and revision instruction produce higher quality texts, particularly in terms of organization and development.

Moreover, writing performance improvement can be linked to sociocultural theory, which suggests that teacher scaffolding helps students internalize effective writing practices (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). By using think- aloud modeling and peer feedback techniques integrated into the intervention, students likely gained metacognitive awareness, boosting their ability to self- regulate and improve. These findings are echoed in a meta-analysis that found a strong positive correlation between strategy use and writing quality across EFL (Bai et al., 2021).

5.2.3 *The interplay among easing anxiety and improving writing performance*

The third objective revealed an inverse relationship, meaning that as students' writing anxiety decreased, their writing performance increased. As Krashen (1982) suggests, emotional barriers such as anxiety block language input and impede performance.

This conclusion was supported by empirical research by Sabti et al. (2019), who found that EFL learners' capacity to properly organize their thoughts and apply writing rules was negatively impacted by high levels of writing anxiety. Kim and Kim (2022) also found that students' writing abilities were stronger when they had higher writing self- efficacy and

less anxiety. This cognitive- emotional interaction was shown to considerably improve the paragraph scores of the students. Students seem to have devoted more cognitive resources to writing assignments rather than stress management when structured procedures were available to them. Similarly Tsegaye and Haile (2022) found that Ethiopian secondary students with reduced anxiety were more likely to engage in pre- writing and revision behaviors directly associated with higher quality writing.

Overall, the study confirms that training writing strategies has both cognitive and affective advantages for the learners. The intervention addressed crippling emotional elements such as writing anxiety and improved paragraph writing performance by providing students with disciplined procedures. These findings are pedagogically significant, particularly in EFL environments where a lack of language exposure and instructional support exacerbates writing difficulties.

6 Conclusion

This quasi- experimental study showed that teaching pupils writing strategies greatly enhanced their ability to write paragraphs and decreased their writing anxiety in grade 11. After the session, the experimental group's anxiety levels significantly decreased, and they showed significant improvements in all aspects of writing paragraphs, including content, vocabulary, grammar, structure, and mechanics. Lower anxiety is linked to greater writing achievement, as evidenced by a substantial inverse relationship between writing anxiety and performance. The results demonstrated the simultaneous cognitive and affective benefits of strategy- based writing instruction, confirming its effectiveness in helping EFL learners enhance their skills and emotional confidence. Overall, the results support the idea that teaching students systematic writing strategies in high school English instruction can improve their academic writing outcomes in Ethiopian EFL classes by making them more capable, driven, and self- reliant writers.

7 Recommendation

Teachers should incorporate structured writing strategy training into routine classroom instruction using scaffold techniques such as think- aloud modeling and peer feedback to simultaneously address performance and anxiety.

Curriculum developers should redesign writing syllabi to integrate evidence- based strategy training manuals with measurable benchmark settings for teachers to equip them with pedagogical proficiency.

Researchers are encouraged to extend this work by replicating the quasi- experimental design in diverse contexts of age groups or languages, testing complementary interventions (digital writing aids), and evaluating the long- term retention of strategy training effects.

School administrators should allocate targeted resources to writing support programs, such as small- group workshops or peer mentoring, prioritizing students with high baseline anxiety levels identified through pre- intervention screening.

8 Authorship contribution

Lalisa Leta: Investigation, data checking, made formal analysis, and writing original draft.

Dr. Tekle Ferede and Dr. Teshale Tefera: Supervision, writing, reviewing and editing of the study.

9 Declaration

There was no conflict of an interest between the authors.

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Original Article

Exploring reflective teaching approaches among secondary school teachers in Hawassa University's technology villages

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore the extent of secondary school teachers' engagement in reflective practice. It specifically investigated the types of reflection in which teachers participate and the factors hindering their engagement in reflective practice. To address these objectives, a mixed- methods research design was employed. Data were collected from secondary school teachers using questionnaires and focus group discussions. The findings revealed that teachers were generally not engaged in reflective practice. Weak planning and evaluation of lessons prior to implementation hindered their reflection- for- action. Similarly, insufficient focus on lesson effectiveness during implementation impeded their reflection- in- action, while a lack of evaluation of lesson outcomes after implementation negatively impacted their reflection- on- practice. Based on these findings, recommendations were provided to enhance teachers' reflective practices, including strategies for improving lesson planning, in-class reflection, and post- lesson evaluation. These recommendations aim to support teachers in bridging the gap between theory and practice, thereby fostering professional growth and improving instructional effectiveness.

1 Introduction

Reflective practice has long been recognized as a critical element in the professional development of teachers. Rooted in Dewey (1933) concept of reflective thinking, this idea emphasizes the importance of teachers critically evaluating their teaching practices to refine their strategies and enhance student learning. Schön (1983) expanded this concept by categorizing reflective practice into three distinct types: reflection- in- action, reflection- on- action, and reflection- for- action. Reflection- in- action involves making real- time adjustments during teaching, reflection- on- action occurs after the lesson to assess its effectiveness, and reflection- for- action is about planning for future improvements based on insights gained from past experiences. These reflective processes enable teachers to engage with their practice at various stages, continuously improving both their teaching techniques and their students' learning outcomes.

The role of reflective practice in improving teacher effectiveness and student achievement is widely acknowledged in educational research. Teachers who regularly engage

in reflective practices are better able to adapt to diverse classroom contexts, address individual student needs, and refine their instructional strategies (Farrell, 2015; Larrivee, 2008). Furthermore, reflective practice helps teachers to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge acquired during their training and its practical application in the classroom (Zeichner and Liston, 2013). By critically examining their teaching methods and understanding the teaching-learning process, reflective teachers become more attuned to the needs of their students and the dynamics of the classroom.

Despite its recognized benefits, reflective practice faces several challenges, particularly in resource-constrained settings. Teachers often struggle to engage in reflective practices due to time constraints, lack of institutional support, and insufficient training on reflective methods (Korthagen, 2017). In countries like Ethiopia, these challenges are further exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, high student-teacher ratios, and limited opportunities for professional development (Asfaw, 2017; Jita and Mokhele, 2014). As a result, many teachers find it difficult to consistently engage in reflective practices, which limit their ability to improve and adapt their teaching approaches.

While the importance of reflective practice in enhancing teacher development and student learning is well-established globally, there is a pressing need to examine how it is implemented in specific educational contexts, particularly in developing countries like Ethiopia. In these settings, teachers face unique challenges that may hinder their ability to fully adopt reflective practices. This study aims to investigate the current status of reflective practice among secondary school teachers in Ethiopia, focusing on the factors that influence its adoption and the types of reflective practices employed by teachers.

The theory-practice gap remains a persistent issue in education. Although teachers receive training based on research-derived theories, many struggle to apply this theoretical knowledge effectively in their teaching practices (Nuthall, 2004). For some teachers, the theoretical knowledge gained during training is seen as disconnected from their classroom reality. As a result, they often fail to integrate theory into their daily teaching practices, leading to a disconnect between what is taught in theory and what is practiced in the classroom. Reflective practice helps teachers to examine and align their teaching practices with their beliefs, teaching structures, and individual teaching styles. Without such reflection, teachers risk relying on isolated strategies that lack a coherent theoretical foundation, making it difficult to achieve meaningful improvements in their teaching.

Scholars have attempted to conceptualize reflective practice in various ways. Schön (1983) and Clark (2007) distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, emphasizing that reflection is not a one-time activity but a continuous process that involves making real-time adjustments during lessons and analyzing past experiences to inform future practice. Reflection-for-action, according to Van Manen (1999), involves planning for action and preparing for future teaching situations by incorporating insights gained from past experiences. Reflection, in any of its forms, enables teachers to refine their skills, develop greater self-efficacy, and engage in more effective problem-solving (Larrivee, 2000; Kemmis, 1994). It also helps teachers develop a deeper understanding of their students' emotional and educational needs, enabling them to create more supportive and engaging learning environments (Soisangwarn and Wongwanich, 2014; Gill, 2014).

Reflective practice, rooted in the constructivist paradigm, is seen as a tool for professional growth. Constructivism advocates for active involvement in learning, where teachers are not just transmitters of knowledge but facilitators who help students construct their own understanding (Osterman, 1999). This approach requires teachers to engage in ongoing reflection, which is an experiential learning cycle that includes four stages: experience, assessment, re-conceptualization, and experimentation (Osterman, 1999). Through reflection, teachers assess their experiences, reframe their understanding, and experiment

with new strategies in the classroom. This process allows teachers to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and the tacit knowledge they form by integrating theory and practice (Hine, 2002). Schon described this as the theory- practice gap, which reflects the challenge teachers face in applying theoretical knowledge effectively in the classroom.

The different types of reflection reflection- for- action, reflection- in- action, and reflection- on- action play distinct roles in enhancing teaching practices. Reflection- for- action helps teachers plan for upcoming lessons, considering students' backgrounds, classroom dynamics, and learning objectives. Reflection- in- action allows teachers to adjust their teaching strategies in real time, while reflection- on- action focuses on post- lesson evaluation, helping teachers identify strengths and weaknesses for future improvement. However, the lack of reflection in practice is often the primary reason for the persistence of the theory- practice gap. Teachers who neglect to reflect on their practice fail to integrate theoretical knowledge with classroom realities, which leads to routine teaching that lacks intentionality and effectiveness.

This study is thus initiated to explore the extent to which secondary school teachers in Ethiopia engage in reflective practice and identify the barriers they face in bridging the theory- practice gap. Understanding these challenges will provide insights into how reflective practice can be better integrated into teachers' professional development and improve their teaching practices, ultimately enhancing student learning outcomes.

1.1 Research problem

The classroom is the place where educational theory is applied, examined, and assessed. However, theory alone is insufficient without reflection on its practical application. While teachers may possess theoretical knowledge, it is through reflective practice that they refine their teaching methods, assess student needs, and adapt their strategies to improve learning outcomes. The theory- practice gap arises when teachers fail to reflect on their classroom experiences, thus preventing the connection between theoretical knowledge and real- world teaching practice (Schön, 1983).

Reflective practice allows teachers to critically examine and reframe their beliefs, assumptions, and teaching strategies based on their experiences. Teachers who reflect before, during, and after their lessons are better equipped to adapt their methods in alignment with student needs, contextual factors, and educational goals (Clark, 2007; M. Cavanagh and Prescott, 2010). Dewey (1933) emphasized that teachers do not learn solely from experience but from reflecting on it. This reflective process is crucial for professional growth and enhancing student learning. However, in many Ethiopian secondary schools, teachers engage minimally in reflective practice. This lack of reflection inhibits their ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses, preventing them from improving their teaching practices over time.

Despite the increasing recognition of reflective practice in teacher education, there is a notable lack of research on how Ethiopian teachers engage in reflective practice after completing their initial teacher training. Existing studies mostly focus on student teachers' reflective practices during their practicum, yet little attention has been paid to how teachers continue to reflect in the field. Observations of Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) students during their practicum revealed that neither the student teachers nor their mentors engaged in reflective practice. Lesson plans from mentors often lacked completed reflection sections, further indicating neglect of reflection in their teaching routines. The absence of reflection points to a disconnect between theoretical knowledge and classroom reality, leading to routine teaching practices that lack critical evaluation.

Several factors may contribute to the absence of reflective practice among Ethiopian teachers, including time constraints, insufficient professional development opportunities, and a cultural resistance to reflection (Alemayehu, 2019). Without reflection, teachers cannot identify areas for improvement or innovate in their teaching methods, which limit both their professional growth and their students' learning outcomes. Moreover, the absence of follow-up research on how teachers engage in reflective practice post-graduation exacerbates the issue, hindering the evaluation of teacher education curricula.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the engagement of secondary school teachers in Ethiopia with reflective practice. It seeks to identify the barriers they face, examine the types of reflective practices employed, and offer recommendations for improving reflective practices to enhance teaching quality and student outcomes.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the stated problem, this research seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. What types of reflection are secondary school teachers engaged in?
2. What factors hinder teachers' reflective practice in secondary schools?

1.3 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this research is to explore the extent of secondary school teachers' engagement in reflective practice.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

Specifically, this research aims to:

1. Describe the types of reflection in which secondary school teachers are engaged.
2. Identify the factors hindering teachers' engagement in reflective practice.

1.4 Significance of the research

The findings of this research will be significant to:

Hawassa University research and development directorate: By providing baseline data on the status of teachers' reflective practice, this research will help the Directorate in designing intervention strategies or conducting further studies on this topic.

Teacher education institutes: By providing insights into how teachers are equipped with knowledge and skills related to reflective practice, this research will enable these institutions to reassess their curriculum and improve their professional relationships with practicum schools.

Teacher educators: By offering valuable information on the status of teachers' reflection, this research will help teacher educators evaluate and improve their systems of teacher preparation.

Regional education bureau, zone, and woreda education offices: By highlighting the factors affecting teachers' reflective practice, this research will assist these offices in taking appropriate remedial measures and providing the necessary support to teachers.

2 Research design and methodology

2.1 Research design

The purpose of this research was to assess the engagement of secondary school teachers in reflective practice. To answer the research questions, a mixed methods approach was employed. This approach was chosen because it allows for the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell, 2007).

2.2 Source of data and data collection tools

2.2.1 Source of data

The primary source of data for this research was secondary school teachers. Since reflective practice is a tacit process, the most reliable data comes from the practitioners themselves. Therefore, teachers were selected as the sole source of data for the study.

2.2.2 Tools of Data Collection

Questionnaire A questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items, each with a five- point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). The items were designed to assess the types of reflective practices employed by teachers. Specifically, five items were related to reflection- for- action, three to reflection- in- action, and five to reflection- on- action.

Focus group discussion (FGD) Focus group discussions were conducted as an additional tool for data collection. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), a focus group discussion is a "carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non- threatening environment" (p. 5). The focus groups consisted of 5- 10 teachers who were homogeneous in their professional experience. A moderator facilitated the discussions, which lasted no longer than 2 hours. The focus group discussions focused on teachers' reflective practices, including planning and evaluating lessons before implementation, making adjustments during class, and assessing the effectiveness of lessons after they were taught.

2.3 Sample and sampling techniques

Five secondary schools (Addis Ketema, Tabor, Alamura, Gemeto, and Millennium) were selected randomly for the study. From each school, 10 teachers were chosen randomly, resulting in a total of 50 teachers.

For the focus group discussions, participants were selected based on their willingness to engage in the discussion. A total of 10 teachers were selected and participated in the discussions.

2.4 Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using statistical methods. Specifically, the mean scores for each item on the Likert scale and the percentage distribution of respondents' answers were calculated.

The qualitative data collected from the focus group discussions were analyzed using a qualitative approach. The responses were examined for common themes and patterns related to the teachers' reflective practices.

2.5 Ethical considerations

To ensure respect for the participants and maintain scientific rigor, the researchers adhered to fundamental ethical principles. Creswell (2007) recommends that researchers ensure confidentiality and protect participants' rights and privacy. Permission was obtained from all participants before the study commenced, and the purpose of the research was clearly explained.

The focus group participants were selected voluntarily, and to protect their anonymity, their names were not used in the study. Instead, participants were assigned numbers (e.g., T1- T10) for identification purposes when necessary.

2.6 Pilot test

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability, and the results indicated strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.839.

3 Data presentation and analysis

In this research, fifty secondary school teachers (30 male and 20 female) participated. Of these, 10 teachers took part in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with participation being voluntary.

The teachers who participated in the FGDs were assigned codes, as their responses were used in the data presentation and analysis. The table below outlines the profile of the participants and their corresponding codes:

Table 1: Profile of FGD participants

Respondents' code	Sex	Subject	Level of education	work experience
T1	M	Civics	BA	8
T2	M	English	BA	10
T3	F	Biology	BA	10
T4	M	Chemistry	BA	7
T5	M	Physics	BA	12
T6	F	Biology	BA	6
T7	M	Mathematics	BA	14
T8	M	Civics	BA	11
T9	M	English	BA	11
T10	F	Mathematics		12

3.1 Teachers' reflective practices

3.1.1 Teachers' reflection for action

The data presented in Table 2 reflects teachers' engagement in "reflection for action," which involves thinking about the future implementation of lessons. The findings suggest that most teachers are not engaging in this form of reflection. Specifically, 28 teachers (56%) disagreed with evaluating the suitability of their lessons before teaching, and 12 (24%) strongly disagreed. Only 6 (12%) agreed that they evaluate their lessons beforehand.

Writing instructional objectives and designing activities suited to students' backgrounds is crucial for effective teaching. However, the data shows that a large portion of teachers (50% and 28% respectively) did not consider students' backgrounds when writing objectives or activities. The FGD, teachers discussed their engagement in reflection for action, once, one teacher (T5) stated:

I have been teaching for 10 years. With my experience, I no longer emphasize planning lessons. I know the students' behavior, so I don't expect anything unusual in the classroom. The lesson plans are for administrative purposes, and they don't guide my teaching.

Another participant (T2) agreed, pointing out that while teachers plan, they don't evaluate their lessons.

Teachers generally lack anticipation for their lessons, which prevents them from adjusting on the spot.

These comments suggest that "reflection for action" is absent in secondary school teaching. Teachers do not anticipate classroom dynamics and thus fail to critically evaluate their teaching strategies beforehand.

Table 3:

Table 2: Teachers' reflection in action

		N	%	Mean	SD
1	While teaching, I check whether I am implementing the lesson according to my lesson plan	46	42	1.50	.818
2	I make amendments to the lesson if I can't proceed as I planned it	68	-	2.15	.521
3	I check students' engagement and learning	-	54	2.15	.853

“Reflection in action” refers to the process of evaluating and amending lessons while they are being implemented. However, the data in Table 3 suggests that many teachers do not reflect in this way. 22 (44%) of the respondents disagreed with checking the alignment of their lesson with the plan while teaching, and 26 (52%) disagreed with amending the lesson based on real- time evaluation. The absence of reflection in action stems from the lack of reflection for action, as teachers do not have pre- set strategies or objectives to modify during the lesson.

The FGD discussions confirmed this: teachers were unaware of “reflection in action” and reported that they did not evaluate the implementation of their lessons in real- time. One teacher (T5) explained:

I don’t reflect during my lessons. I have no expectations for what will happen in class, so there’s nothing to reflect on.

Another teacher (T4) shared:

The curriculum is content- heavy, and we are judged based on how much material we cover. Reflection during lessons doesn’t happen because we are focused on finishing the syllabus.

These responses show that secondary school teachers are not effectively engaging in reflection in action.

Table 3: Teachers’ reflection on action

		N	%	Mean	SD
1	At the end of the lesson, I evaluate how I implemented my lesson plan as it is planned	35	22	2.71	1.350
2	At the end of the lesson, I try to identify the weakness and strengths of my lesson	25	12	2.81	1.450
3	If I succeed in my lesson, I describe why it was successful	-	8	3.20	1.950
4	If I don’t succeed in my lesson, I describe why it was not successful	-	7	3.21	1.950
5	I use the result of lesson evaluation as a base to plan the next lesson	21	8	2.54	2.610

Reflection on action involves evaluating the success or failure of lessons after their delivery. Table 4 shows that many teachers do not practice this form of reflection. For example, 27 (54%) of respondents disagreed with evaluating how well they followed their lesson plans, and 28 (56%) disagreed with identifying their strengths and weaknesses after lessons.

In FGD discussions, teachers shared that while they informally reflected on previous lessons when preparing for future ones, they did not formally evaluate the success or failure of their teaching. As T2 mentioned:

I don’t formally evaluate my lessons. But when I’m preparing for the next lesson, I think about how well I taught the previous one.

These insights reveal that reflection on action is not a formalized practice among secondary school teachers.

4 Discussion of result

The results of this study suggest that secondary school teachers are not effectively engaging in reflective practices at various stages of their teaching process. The findings from this research resonate with existing literature on reflective teaching and the challenges teachers face in incorporating reflection into their professional practices. Below is a discussion of the results in light of relevant literature and empirical studies.

4.1 Reflection-for-action

Reflection- for- action involves pre- teaching planning where teachers anticipate how to approach lessons, evaluate their suitability, and plan for diverse classroom situations (Schön, 1983). In this study, the results indicate that a significant number of teachers did not reflect on the suitability of their lessons before teaching. More than half of the respondents (56%) did not evaluate whether their lessons would be appropriate for their students' needs. This aligns with findings from previous studies, such as those by Husu et al. (2008) and Korthagen (2004), who argue that reflective practice requires careful consideration of the lesson plan in relation to students' backgrounds and learning styles.

Research by Calderhead (1989) also suggests that while teachers acknowledge the importance of lesson planning, many fail to critically assess the appropriateness of their plans in relation to student needs. This lack of pre- teaching reflection can lead to ineffective lesson delivery, as teachers are not anticipating potential challenges or planning for varied student responses (Schön, 1987). Moreover, the absence of reflection- for- action in this study reflects the findings of Timperley et al. (2007), who highlighted that teachers often focus more on content delivery than on tailoring lessons to meet students' needs.

4.2 Reflection-in-action

Reflection- in- action refers to teachers making real- time adjustments during the lesson based on student responses and engagement (Schön, 1983). The data from this study reveal that the majority of teachers (44%) did not check whether they were delivering the lesson as planned, and more than half (52%) did not amend their teaching approach during the lesson. These findings are consistent with the research of Pultorak (1993), who found that many teachers rarely engage in reflection during lesson delivery, even though it is crucial for adapting the teaching to student responses and creating a more dynamic learning environment.

The literature supports the view that reflection- in- action is essential for teaching practice, particularly when unanticipated situations arise in the classroom (Schön, 1983). However, similar to the results of this study, several empirical studies have pointed out that many teachers either do not engage in real- time reflection or lack the skills to effectively modify their teaching mid- lesson (Meijer et al., 2009). This inability to adjust lessons may be attributed to a lack of reflective training or inadequate time and resources to engage in such practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers, who are not accustomed to reflecting while teaching may find it difficult to adjust their approaches in response to student needs or classroom dynamics.

In their study on reflective practice in classrooms, R. F. Cavanagh and McMaster (2005) also found that teachers' reflections were often limited to post- teaching evaluations and did not extend to real- time classroom adjustments. This reflects the findings in this

study, where teachers were not prepared to reflect on their practices during teaching, limiting the effectiveness of their lesson delivery.

4.3 Reflection-on-action

Reflection- on- action is the process of evaluating one's teaching practices after the lesson has been completed, which involves analyzing what worked well and what could be improved for future lessons (Schön, 1983). The results in this study show that teachers largely neglected this type of reflection. A majority (54%) of teachers did not evaluate their lesson after teaching, and 56% did not reflect on their strengths and weaknesses post- lesson. This lack of post- teaching reflection is supported by earlier research by Dewey (1933) and Schön (1983), who argued that reflection after action is a critical component for professional growth and improvement. Without this reflective process, teachers miss the opportunity to learn from their experiences and enhance their future teaching strategies.

The literature emphasizes that reflection- on- action is vital for teachers to identify areas of improvement and make informed adjustments to their instructional practices. According to Korthagen (2004), teachers who engage in reflection- on- action can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons, which is an essential part of professional growth. However, as this study illustrates, many teachers do not formally engage in such reflective practices. A study by Larrivee (2000) found that while some teachers informally reflect on their lessons, they often fail to document or structure this reflection in a way that leads to measurable improvements.

Moreover, the results are consistent with findings from Klassen et al. (2012), who noted that a lack of systematic reflection after teaching contributes to teachers' professional stagnation. Without formal reflection after lessons, teachers may fail to recognize recurring problems or adjust their teaching methods, which ultimately affect student learning outcomes.

4.4 Factors hindering reflective practice

The study also explored factors that hinder teachers' engagement in reflective practices, including a lack of training, insufficient professional development, and limited support. The teachers in this study cited the absence of specific training on reflective practices as a significant barrier to engaging in reflection. This is consistent with the findings of Korthagen (2001), who noted that teachers often lack the training to engage in deep reflective practices. Moreover, a lack of institutional support and time constraints were cited as additional challenges, echoing the findings of other studies (e.g., Zeichner and Liston, 1996; Timperley et al., 2007), which suggested that teachers often struggle to prioritize reflection due to heavy workloads and a lack of structured time for reflection.

The literature also indicates that teachers who are not supported in their reflective practice, either through training or through a supportive school culture, are less likely to engage in reflective teaching. According to Ross et al. (2012), reflective practice is more likely to be successful when teachers receive ongoing support and professional development that encourages critical thinking and self- reflection.

5 Conclusions

The study reveals that secondary school teachers generally do not engage in meaningful reflective practices at all stages of their teaching process. The absence of systematic reflection- for- action, reflection- in- action, and reflection- on- action limits the teachers' ability to adapt to their students' needs, refine their teaching methods, and improve the overall quality of education. Reflection is critical to fostering professional growth and enhancing teaching efficacy. However, the findings suggest that many teachers lack the knowledge, skills, and habits required to implement effective reflective practices.

In addition, factors such as a lack of training on reflective practices, insufficient professional development, and limited support systems were identified as significant barriers. These barriers inhibit teachers' ability to engage in and benefit from reflective practices, which are essential for improving teaching quality.

6 Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the need for significant improvements in fostering reflective practices among secondary school teachers. To address the identified gaps in reflection- for- action, reflection- in- action, and reflection- on- action, as well as to mitigate the barriers hindering effective reflection, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Teacher training and professional development:** To foster reflective teaching practices, there is a clear need for targeted professional development programs that focus on reflection techniques. Teachers should be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in reflection- for- action, reflection- in- action, and reflection- on- action. Training should emphasize the value of reflection in improving teaching and learning, and teachers should be provided with tools and strategies to integrate reflection into their daily practices.
2. **Curriculum and pedagogical support:** Schools and educational authorities should provide teachers with the time, resources, and support to engage in reflection. This could involve creating opportunities for collaborative reflection, such as peer observations or reflective practice groups, where teachers can share experiences and learn from one another. Additionally, lesson planning formats and school- based structures should be designed to encourage more reflective practices, allowing teachers to reflect both before and after lessons.
3. **Administrative support:** School administrators must actively promote the importance of reflection within the school culture. This includes creating an environment that values continuous improvement and where teachers feel supported in taking the time to reflect on their practices. Administrative support may also involve ensuring that teachers have sufficient time within their work schedules for professional reflection and development.
4. **Encouraging a reflective mindset:** Schools should encourage a culture of reflective practice by making it an integral part of the teaching profession. Teachers should be encouraged to see reflection as an ongoing process that enhances their teaching and positively impacts student learning. A shift in mindset from seeing reflection as an optional activity to viewing it as a professional necessity could help overcome some of the resistance to reflection found in the study.

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Data Availability

Data can be made available on the behavior of the request

Declaration of interests' statement

The author declare no competing interests.

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Original Article

Inclusive education in practice: experiences and challenges of students with orthopedic impairments

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Abstract

The implementation of inclusive education for students with orthopedic impairments (SWOI) remains a significant challenge in many developing countries, including Ethiopia. This study examines the implementation of inclusive education for SWOI in primary schools in Arba Minch City, Gamo Zone of South Ethiopia Regional State, focusing on experiences, challenges, and intervention strategies. A convergent parallel mixed- methods design was employed, integrating quantitative data from 50 teachers via structured questionnaires with qualitative data from focus group discussions, interviews with 15 SWOI, their parents, school directors, and education experts, along with observational studies. The findings reveal that SWOI face what this study terms “passive inclusion”—physical presence in classrooms without meaningful educational participation. Major barriers include inaccessible learning environments, inadequate teacher preparedness, limited use of differentiated pedagogy, and pervasive social stigma. These barriers create a cycle of educational disadvantage characterized by psychosocial distress, restricted academic engagement, and high dropout rates. Systemic failures, particularly the absence of collaborative support teams and assistive technology, underpin these adverse outcomes. Therefore, the study recommends an ecological- systems approach involving infrastructural modifications guided by Universal Design principles, comprehensive teacher training, strategic provision of assistive technologies, and establishment of functional school- based support teams to foster genuine inclusion in low- resource settings.

1 Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right, a cornerstone of personal development, and a primary driver of socio- economic progress (World Bank, 1993; UNESCO, 1948). The international commitment to education for all was further solidified with the advent of the Inclusive Education (IE) movement, championed by the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994). This landmark document advocated for educational systems that are responsive to the diverse needs of all learners, asserting that every child, regardless of ability, has an inherent right to learn in a supportive, non- discriminatory, and inclusive environment. This paradigm shift demands a systemic transformation from segregated special education models to integrated systems where diversity is not merely accommodated but valued and seen as an enriching element of the learning community (Ainscow, 2005).

Globally, children with disabilities continue to face profound and persistent barriers that limit their access to quality education and meaningful societal participation (UNESCO, 2020). Among these, students with orthopedic impairments (SWOI) encounter unique challenges rooted in physical limitations that interact with unaccommodating environments. An orthopedic impairment is defined as a severe physical disability, arising from congenital conditions, disease, or injury (e.g., cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputations, or muscular dystrophy), which adversely affects a child's educational performance and necessitates specialized support services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004). In developing nations like Ethiopia, these challenges are magnified by broader systemic issues such as resource constraints, infrastructural deficits, and deeply ingrained societal attitudes, culminating in widespread educational exclusion and marginalization (Ministry of Education, 2006; Grimes et al., 2021).

Ethiopia has demonstrated a policy-level commitment to inclusive education through its progressive Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education, 2006), which explicitly mandates attention to vulnerable groups and children at risk of exclusion. However, a significant chasm persists between policy rhetoric and classroom reality. Special Needs Education (SNE) services remain scarce, predominantly concentrated in urban centers, and are incapable of meeting the nationwide demand. Consequently, a vast number of SWOI are placed in mainstream "integrated" classrooms—a practice often driven by necessity rather than a well-resourced inclusion strategy. In these settings, they frequently confront a triad of obstacles: inaccessible physical environments (lack of ramps, unsuitable furniture, inaccessible latrines), pedagogical neglect due to untrained teachers, and psycho-social isolation from peers and school activities. These factors collectively contribute to interrupted schooling, poor academic achievement, and diminished social-emotional well-being, effectively undermining the very goals of inclusion (Heller and Swinehart-Jones, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2006).

This study introduces the concept of "passive inclusion" to describe a critical gap in current practice. Passive inclusion refers to the phenomenon where students with disabilities are physically present in mainstream classrooms but lack meaningful educational participation, support, and belonging. Unlike genuine inclusion—which involves valued participation, academic engagement, and social integration—passive inclusion represents a superficial form of integration that fails to address the environmental, pedagogical, and social barriers that prevent SWOI from fully accessing educational opportunities. This concept is defined and operationalized early in this paper to provide a clear analytical lens for understanding the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

Empirical evidence underscores the detrimental impact of these barriers. Studies consistently indicate that orthopedically impaired children often exhibit lower academic performance, reduced self-esteem, and a more negative self-concept compared to their nondisabled peers, outcomes that are largely attributed to environmental and systemic failures rather than the impairment itself (Narimani and Mousazadeh, 2010; Ahmed, 2011). The challenges are multifaceted and interconnected, spanning architectural inaccessibility, inadequate teacher preparation, a dearth of assistive technology, and prevailing attitudinal barriers that stigmatize disability (Mpu and Adu, 2021; Singal, 2019).

To bridge the gap between policy aspiration and educational practice, context-specific research is imperative. This study seeks to provide a granular, evidence-based assessment of the current state of inclusive education for SWOI in a specific Ethiopian context. Focusing on selected primary schools in Arba Minch City, Gamo Zone, it aims to illuminate the lived experiences of SWOI and the operational challenges from the perspectives of key stakeholders. Therefore, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do stakeholders (teachers, parents, school administrators, and education experts) perceive the educational practices and the overall learning environment for

SWOI in integrated primary schools?

2. What are the principal academic, physical, and social-emotional challenges that SWOI face within the integrated classroom setting?
3. What are the adverse effects of these interconnected challenges on the learning outcomes, school retention, and overall educational experience of SWOI?
4. Based on stakeholder insights and empirical findings, what comprehensive, multi-level strategies could be effective in overcoming these barriers and fostering genuine inclusion?

2 Literature review

2.1 Conceptualizing orthopedic impairment and inclusive education

Understanding the educational experiences of SWOI requires a clear conceptual foundation. Orthopedic impairment (OI) is not a singular condition but an umbrella term encompassing a range of severe physical disabilities that affect a child's mobility, coordination, strength, or endurance to such a degree that educational performance is adversely impacted ([Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004](#)). The etiology is diverse, including congenital anomalies (e.g., clubfoot, osteogenesis imperfecta), neurological conditions affecting motor control (e.g., cerebral palsy), diseases (e.g., muscular dystrophy, polio), and injuries (e.g., amputations, spinal cord injuries).

The World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) provides a robust bio- psycho- social framework for understanding disability ([World Health Organization, 2001](#)). It moves beyond a purely medical model—which locates the “problem” solely within the individual—to a model that recognizes the dynamic interaction between a person's health condition, their body functions and structures (impairments), their capacity to perform tasks (activity limitations), and their involvement in life situations (participation restrictions). Crucially, the ICF highlights the role of contextual factors, including environmental barriers (e.g., inaccessible buildings, negative attitudes) and personal factors. For a SWOI, an activity limitation might be difficulty walking. However, this only becomes a participation restriction in education if the school environment has stairs without ramps, desks that cannot accommodate a wheelchair, or a playground with inaccessible equipment. Thus, disability is created by the interaction between the individual and an unsupportive environment ([Shakespeare, 2006](#); [Singal, 2019](#)).

Inclusive Education (IE) is the philosophical and practical response to this understanding. It is defined as “a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education” ([UNESCO, 2005](#)). True inclusion goes beyond physical placement (integration) to encompass valued participation, academic achievement, and social belonging. It necessitates systemic reform encompassing curricula, teaching methods, assessment, and school culture to welcome and support all students, including those with disabilities ([Ainscow, 2005](#)). The ultimate goal is to create an education system where the presence of students with disabilities is anticipated and planned for from the outset, not treated as an exception requiring ad- hoc solutions.

2.2 Challenges facing students with orthopedic impairments

The literature identifies a complex web of challenges that SWOI encounter, which can be analyzed at multiple, interconnected levels.

The first level is environmental and physical barriers, which constitute the most immediate and visible layer of exclusion. This includes a lack of accessible transportation to and from school; architectural barriers such as steps, narrow doorways, and inaccessible washrooms; and classrooms lacking appropriate adaptive furniture such as adjustable desks or supportive chairs (Kett et al., 2019; Ministry of Education, 2006). The physical inaccessibility of school compounds, libraries, and laboratories further restricts participation and enforces dependency, making even basic attendance a daily struggle.

The second level encompasses pedagogical and instructional barriers. Even when physically present, SWOI often face an unaccommodating pedagogical environment. Teachers frequently lack training in inclusive instructional strategies, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, or collaborative learning techniques (Reschly, 1996; Tomlinson, 2001). There is a common reliance on rigid, one-size-fits-all teaching methods, lecture-based instruction, and standardized assessments that do not account for diverse modes of learning and expression. The absence of assistive technology from simple pencil grips and page-turners to more complex communication devices or customized seating—further limits a student's ability to engage with the curriculum and demonstrate learning (Heller and Swinehart-Jones, 2003; Cook and Polgar, 2015). Recent studies in similar contexts confirm that inadequate teacher preparedness remains a critical bottleneck (Mpu and Adu, 2021).

The third level involves attitudinal and social barriers. Negative societal perceptions of disability, often rooted in cultural beliefs and misinformation, can manifest as low expectations from teachers, overprotection or neglect from parents, and stigma, pity, or bullying from peers (Ministry of Education, 2006; Scior, 2011). These attitudes create a psycho-social environment that can be more disabling than any physical barrier. They lead to social isolation, exclusion from group activities and play, and can severely damage a child's self-esteem, motivation, and sense of belonging—all of which are key components of positive educational outcomes and holistic development (Meyer and Cornell, 2020).

Underpinning all the above is a fourth level of systemic and resource barriers. This includes chronic underfunding for special needs education, leading to a scarcity of trained special needs educators, therapists, and resource rooms. There is often a lack of coordinated, multi-professional collaboration between general teachers, special educators, occupational and physical therapists, and parents, resulting in fragmented and ineffective support (Minnesota Department of Education, 2011; Friend and Cook, 2013). Policy implementation is frequently weak, with insufficient monitoring, accountability mechanisms, and budgetary allocation to ensure schools comply with inclusive education guidelines.

2.3 Strategies for effective inclusion

Research from both global and Ethiopian contexts points to a set of interdependent strategies necessary for successful inclusion.

The first foundational strategy is the adoption of Universal Design for Learning principles. UDL is a framework for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (Rose and Meyer, 2002). Proactively designing lessons with such flexibility minimizes the need for later, individual accommodations and benefits all learners.

Complementing UDL is the need for differentiated instruction and collaborative learning practices. Teachers must be skilled in modifying content, process, product, and the

learning environment based on student readiness, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 2001). Techniques like peer tutoring, cooperative group work, and project-based learning can foster academic support and positive social interactions.

The provision and effective utilization of assistive technology is another critical pillar. AT devices and services can be low-tech or high-tech, but their core purpose is to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of SWOI, thereby promoting independence and access to the curriculum (Cook and Polgar, 2015).

Furthermore, effective inclusion requires professional collaboration and systematic capacity building. This includes ongoing, practical professional development for general education teachers on disability awareness and inclusive pedagogy. Establishing functional school-based support teams that include administrators, teachers, parents, and, when available, special educators and related service professionals is critical for collaborative planning and problem-solving (Friend and Cook, 2013; Minnesota Department of Education, 2011).

Finally, sustainable inclusion necessitates genuine family and community engagement. Parents are essential partners in their children's education. Schools must actively engage families through regular, respectful communication, counseling, and training. Concurrently, community sensitization programs are vital to challenge deep-seated stigma and promote a rights-based view of disability (Kalyanpur, 2011). Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa emphasizes the importance of contextually feasible, low-cost adaptations and community involvement for sustainable inclusion (Opoku et al., 2020).

Overall, this literature review establishes that the inclusion of SWOI is a complex endeavor requiring concerted action across all levels of the education system. The present study builds upon this foundation by investigating how these globally identified challenges and potential strategies manifest within the specific context of primary schools in Arba Minch City, Ethiopia.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Research design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive, detailed, and validated analysis of the research problem (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The design is grounded in a pragmatic philosophical paradigm, which prioritizes the research problem and employs pluralistic approaches to derive useful, actionable knowledge. The convergent parallel approach involves collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data strands concurrently during a single phase of research. The two datasets are analyzed independently and then merged during the interpretation phase to compare, contrast, and synthesize findings. This methodological triangulation strengthens the validity and reliability of conclusions by overcoming the inherent limitations of any single method. The quantitative strand provided breadth, identifying patterns and measuring the prevalence of challenges from a teacher's perspective. The complementary qualitative strand provided depth, exploring the rich, contextualized lived experiences, perceptions, and meanings ascribed by students, parents, and educational leaders.

3.2 Study setting and population

The study was conducted in Arba Minch City, the administrative center of the Gamo Zone in the South Ethiopia Regional State. The city has a mix of governmental primary schools, some of which have been identified for implementing integrated education. The target population comprised all key stakeholders involved in the education of SWOI in these schools: students with orthopedic impairments enrolled in grades 1- 8, their parents or guardians, classroom teachers responsible for teaching these students, school directors or principals, and the city education office experts responsible for inclusive and special needs education.

3.3 Sampling procedures

A multi- stage sampling strategy was used to ensure representation and depth. First, five governmental primary schools were randomly selected from a list of all schools in Arba Minch City reported to have enrolled SWOI. Second, within these schools, a complete census was conducted to identify all SWOI. This yielded a total of 15 students (9 male, 6 female), who formed the core qualitative sample. Third, a census approach was also used for the teacher survey. All 50 subject teachers who were currently teaching the identified SWOI across the five schools were included in the quantitative sample to capture the full range of teaching experiences and enhance the representativeness of findings within this specific context. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was employed to select information- rich cases. All 15 SWOI and their corresponding 15 parents or guardians were invited and agreed to participate in Key Informant Interviews. Furthermore, two separate Focus Group Discussions were organized. The first FGD consisted of a mixed group of 5 SWOI and 3 of their parents. The second FGD comprised 5 school directors and 3 education experts from the Arba Minch City Education Office.

3.4 Data collection instruments and procedures

Four primary instruments were developed, piloted, and used to ensure methodological triangulation.

The first instrument was a structured teacher questionnaire designed for self- administration. It contained closed- ended questions utilizing five- point Likert scales to gather quantitative data on teachers' perceptions of challenges faced by SWOI, their own preparedness and practices, availability of resources, and perceived effectiveness of potential solutions. The questionnaire was developed in English, translated into Amharic, and back- translated to ensure accuracy.

Second, semi- structured interview guides were created for the Key Informant Interviews with SWOI and their parents. The guides contained open- ended questions and probes to elicit in- depth narratives about daily school experiences, specific challenges, coping mechanisms, support received, and aspirations for improvement. Interviews were conducted in Amharic or the local Gamo language, based on participant preference.

Third, semi- structured guides were also developed for the two Focus Group Discussions. The guide for the mixed student- parent FGD focused on shared experiences and collective suggestions, while the guide for the director- expert FGD focused on systemic issues, policy implementation, resource allocation, and inter- stakeholder collaboration.

Fourth, a non- participant observation checklist was used to document the objective realities of the school environment. This systematic protocol included items on physical

accessibility, furniture suitability, classroom layout, teacher- student interactions involving SWOI, and the SWOI's level of participation in academic and social activities. Observations were conducted over two weeks in each of the five schools.

Data collection followed a sequential but overlapping process. The non- participant observations were conducted first to gain an unbiased view of the context. Subsequently, the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were held in private, comfortable settings, audio- recorded with prior informed consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The teacher questionnaires were distributed with the help of school liaisons and collected upon completion. All qualitative data collection emphasized building rapport and ensuring confidentiality to encourage open and honest dialogue.

3.5 Data analysis

Quantitative data from the 50 questionnaires were coded, entered into SPSS, and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, and observations were transcribed, translated into English, and analyzed through thematic analysis following the six- phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing the report. Data saturation for qualitative components was determined inductively; data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews and FGDs. Finally, during the interpretation phase, the quantitative and qualitative findings were merged in an integrative process where statistical trends were explained, elaborated upon, and sometimes challenged by the rich, contextual narratives from the interviews, FGDs, and observations. Discrepancies between datasets were treated as valuable points of inquiry, leading to a more highlighting against him." School directors, while acknowledging the problem, often framed it as an issue beyond their control due to a chronic lack of funds and centralised decision- making.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical rigor was maintained throughout the research process. Formal approval was obtained from the Arba Minch City Education Office. Written informed consent was secured from all adult participants. For the minor SWOI participants, a written agreement was obtained from the child alongside written informed consent from their parent or guardian. All participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. They were assured of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence and were informed of the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, such as the use of pseudonyms and secure data storage.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 Stakeholder perceptions and the reality of "passive inclusion"

The quantitative survey revealed that a dominant majority of teachers, specifically 70%, strongly agreed that the physical condition of SWOI adversely affects their educational performance. This perception was powerfully echoed and expanded upon in the qualitative data. Parents in Key Informant Interviews frequently described their children's school day as an exhausting struggle against the environment. One mother poignantly stated, "He comes home more tired from trying to move around than from learning. His mind

is willing, but his body and the school are highlighting against him.” School directors, while acknowledging the problem, often framed it as an issue beyond their control due to a chronic lack of funds and centralised decision- making.

This widespread perception aligns initially with a medical- model understanding, focusing on the child’s impairment as the primary problem. However, a deeper analysis of the qualitative data, particularly from the Focus Group Discussion with education experts, pointed towards a social- model interpretation. Experts highlighted that the “adverse effect” was not inherent to the impairment but was produced by the disabling interaction with an unsupportive environment. The observational data starkly corroborated this theoretical shift: none of the five schools had ramps at all entrances, classroom aisles were too narrow for wheelchair navigation, and latrines were completely inaccessible, presenting not just an inconvenience but a fundamental denial of dignity and participation.

A critical finding was the near- universal report of the absence of functional, school-based educational teams. Over 85% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “There is a collaborative team in this school that plans for the support of SWOI.” The Focus Group Discussion with directors and experts confirmed this systemic gap, revealing ad- hoc, crisis- driven responses rather than proactive, team- based planning and support. This absence explains the pervasive phenomenon of what this study terms “passive inclusion”—SWOI are physically present in the classroom but are not actively engaged, supported, or valued as participating members of the learning community. They are integrated in location but excluded from experience and outcome. This finding resonates strongly with the emphasis placed on collaborative teams as the engine of effective educational programming in guidelines such as the MNPI Manual ([Minnesota Department of Education, 2011](#)), and it exposes a fundamental flaw in the current integration model prevalent in the study context. It also aligns with critiques of superficial integration practices that fail to deliver meaningful participation ([Slee, 2018](#)).

Furthermore, teachers reported a significant deficiency in their own preparedness. A combined 78% felt they had received “inadequate” or “very inadequate” preservice or in-service training to teach SWOI effectively. This self- reported lack of capacity translated directly into observed classroom practice, with 74% agreeing that “classroom management is poor when SWOI are present,” and 68% admitting to using “less varied educational practice” with these students. This admission points to a profound pedagogical gap, not merely a resource gap. As [Reschly \(1996\)](#) argues, effective education for students with disabilities requires deliberate and knowledgeable modifications. The observed and reported reliance on traditional, whole- class, lecture- based instruction represents a failure to implement the differentiated, student- centered approaches that are the hallmark of genuine inclusive pedagogy. Recent studies corroborate that inadequate teacher training is a persistent barrier to inclusion in similar contexts ([Mpu and Adu, 2021](#)).

4.2 The vicious cycle of challenges and their adverse effects

The data painted a clear picture of interconnected challenges creating a vicious, self-reinforcing cycle of educational disadvantage for SWOI.

Regarding academic and physical barriers, over 50% of teachers strongly identified “trouble maneuvering around the classroom” and “limited access to mobility” as major issues. Observations consistently showed students stuck at the back of crowded classrooms, unable to move to group work areas, access learning materials on shelves, or see the blackboard clearly. One student with cerebral palsy shared in an interview, “I spend most of my time watching others do science experiments. I want to touch and do it, but I cannot get to the table, and no one brings the materials to me.” This physical restriction directly

and severely limits access to the curriculum, experiential learning, and peer collaboration, validating the findings of Heller and Swinehart-Jones (2003) on how environmental barriers create participation restrictions.

Perhaps the most poignant findings related to psycho-social and attitudinal barriers. "Low psychological readiness" was rated a high or very high challenge by 62% of teachers. Qualitative data revealed that this "readiness" was not an intrinsic trait but a consequence of a hostile environment. Students spoke of being routinely teased for their gait or their assistive devices. Parents reported their children becoming increasingly withdrawn and reluctant to go to school. A father lamented, "She says the other children call her 'slow walker' and do not choose her for games. Her heart is broken more than her legs." This aligns with the Ethiopian Ministry of Education's (Ministry of Education, 2006) warning about restricted social activities impeding holistic development. The data confirms the assertion that the "greatest barrier" to inclusion is often social rather than architectural, as stigma and social exclusion actively erode self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of belonging. This finding is supported by contemporary research on the strong link between peer victimization and negative educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Meyer and Cornell, 2020).

The systemic resource barriers underpinning these daily challenges were stark. The survey highlighted critical deficits in the support system: 88% of teachers reported a "critically low" availability of special furniture; 92% stated assistive devices were "not available"; and 90% noted the complete absence of multi-professional collaboration with specialists such as occupational or physical therapists. This represents a systemic failure to provide the related services and environmental modifications that are essential components of effective inclusive education. Consequently, the existing problem-solving mechanisms were deemed entirely inadequate. Over half (52%) of teachers disagreed that different teaching strategies were systematically used to support SWOI, and 82% reported a comprehensive lack of counseling or psychological services for these students. This indicates that stakeholders are operating in isolated silos, lacking a coherent, coordinated strategy for support, which is consistent with the earlier noted absence of functional educational teams.

The culmination of these multi-layered barriers was devastatingly clear in the educational outcomes. Teachers rated "school dropout rates" and "poor learning outcomes" for SWOI as "High" or "Very High," with over 70% of respondents selecting these categories for each indicator. This is not an incidental finding but the logical, tragic endpoint of passive inclusion. The high dropout rate is the ultimate indicator of systemic failure, showing that schools are not merely struggling to teach SWOI effectively but are failing to retain them in the education system at all. This finding moves the discussion beyond academic performance to the fundamental issue of educational survival, equity, and the fulfillment of the basic right to education.

4.3 Envisioning solutions: from a deficit to an ecological-systems model of change

Despite the formidable challenges documented, stakeholders across all groups demonstrated a clear, pragmatic, and collective vision for change. There was a strong and consistent consensus on alternative strategies that align remarkably well with international best practices.

First, there was a strong endorsement for strength-based approaches and environmental modifications. The most highly endorsed strategies focused on altering the context, not "fixing" the child. "Paying attention to SWOI's abilities" (74% agreement) and "making appropriate seating arrangements" (74%) reflect a desired shift towards a strength-

based, Universal Design for Learning approach. As one education expert argued in the Focus Group Discussion, “We must stop asking ‘what is wrong with this student?’ and start asking ‘what is wrong with our classroom that this student cannot learn?’” This represents a significant attitudinal shift towards the social model of disability.

Second, stakeholders overwhelmingly highlighted the need for the provision of essential supports. There was a strong, explicit demand for concrete resources: “providing assistive technology” (62% agreement) and “employing occupational therapists” (72% agreement). This indicates a clear awareness among teachers, parents, and administrators that specialized expertise and appropriate tools are not luxuries but fundamental necessities for enabling participation and learning.

Third, the strategy of “assigning responsibilities to peers to care for SWOI” received high agreement (74%) but presents a nuanced challenge. While this can foster empathy and practical help, the qualitative data and observations revealed a significant risk. In practice, peers were often observed performing tasks for the SWOI rather than enabling them to complete tasks independently, a dynamic that can inadvertently foster learned helplessness. The solution, as discussed in the director- expert Focus Group Discussion, is to consciously frame peer support within a broader philosophical framework of building an inclusive community. In such a community, help is mutual, roles rotate, and the primary goal is to foster interdependence and collective responsibility, not one directional care.

Finally, there was a clear call for external expertise and strengthened collaboration. Requests for “guest experts” (such as therapists or disability advocates) and “parental counseling and training” underscored the recognized need for knowledge, skills, and perspectives that extend beyond the current capacities of the regular classroom teacher. This highlights the critical gap in multi- professional collaboration and systematic family engagement that the current system lacks.

Collectively, these stakeholder- proposed strategies advocate for a fundamental paradigm shift: from a deficit- based model, which focuses on student shortcomings, to an ecological- systems model of change. This model, strongly implied by the collective suggestions of stakeholders, recognizes that effective and sustainable inclusion requires intentional, co-ordinated modifications at multiple, interacting levels: the physical environment (architecture, furniture, assistive technology), the pedagogical environment (teaching strategies, curriculum adaptation, assessment), the social environment (peer culture, teacher attitudes, bullying policies), and the wider systemic environment (policy implementation, funding, intersectoral collaboration). It is a comprehensive call for holistic, system- wide reform rather than piecemeal adjustments, aligning with contemporary frameworks for understanding and implementing inclusive education in complex, resource- constrained systems (Singal, 2019).

5 Conclusion

This study provides a detailed, empirical, and context- specific analysis of the state of inclusive education for Students with Orthopedic Impairments in government primary schools in Arba Minch City, Ethiopia. It concludes that the prevailing practice is best characterized as “passive inclusion,” a state where SWOI are physically integrated into mainstream classrooms but are systematically marginalized by a powerful and interconnected web of disabling factors. The barriers identified are not isolated but form a multi-layered system of exclusion: an inaccessible physical environment that creates immediate obstacles to mobility and participation; a pedagogical environment crippled by untrained teachers, rigid instructional methods, and a lack of adapted materials or assistive technology; a psychosocial environment often poisoned by stigma, low expectations, peer

exclusion, and an absence of emotional support; and an overarching systemic environment defined by severe resource scarcity, the absence of collaborative support teams, weak policy implementation, and a resulting fragmentation of effort among stakeholders.

The adverse effects of this dysfunctional system are severe, predictable, and interrelated: profound social- emotional distress, severely limited academic engagement and achievement, and critically high rates of school dropout. The findings robustly underscore that the primary problem is not the orthopedic impairment itself, but the comprehensive failure of the educational system—its structures, practices, and cultures—to adapt, provide appropriate support, and value the participation of all learners.

6 Implications

The study has several important implications. Theoretically, it reinforces and provides empirical support for the explanatory power of the social model of disability and ecological systems theory in analyzing educational outcomes in low- resource settings. It clearly demonstrates that “disability” in the school context is overwhelmingly a product of environmental, attitudinal, and systemic failures. The concept of “passive inclusion” contributes a useful critical lens for identifying and analyzing superficial integration practices that fail to deliver meaningful participation.

Practically, the findings offer a clear, evidence- based, and stakeholder- informed roadmap for actionable change. The recommendations must be multi- pronged, synergistic, and sustained, targeting all levels of the education ecosystem simultaneously.

At the national and regional policy level, the Ministry of Education and regional education bureaus must move beyond policy formulation to ensuring effective implementation, monitoring, and accountability. This includes mandating and funding universal design standards in all new school construction and major renovations; establishing a dedicated, protected budget line for procuring, maintaining, and training staff on assistive technology; scaling up both pre- service teacher education and in- service professional development with mandatory, practical modules on inclusive pedagogy; and developing clear operational guidelines for the formation and functioning of school- based support teams.

At the school administration and leadership level, school directors are pivotal as change agents. They must proactively establish and lead functional Inclusive Education Support Teams that include teachers, parents, and special needs advisors; champion a positive, welcoming school culture that celebrates diversity and rejects bullying; manage existing resources creatively; and facilitate regular professional learning communities where teachers can collaboratively share challenges, strategies, and successes.

At the classroom and teacher practice level, teachers can adopt a mindset of flexible pedagogy and reflective practice. Key actionable steps include employing simple, low- cost differentiated instruction strategies; consciously arranging classroom layouts for optimal physical access and social interaction; consistently focusing on students’ strengths and contributions; and initiating regular, positive communication with parents to build a genuine educational partnership.

At the family and community level, sustainable inclusion requires broader societal understanding and buy- in. Schools should conduct sustained community awareness campaigns to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote a rights- based view of disability; organize regular parent counseling, training, and support group sessions; and actively

foster partnerships with local NGOs, Disabled People's Organizations, and health centers to broker additional resources and expertise.

7 Limitations and future research directions

This study has limitations that should inform future research. Its focus on one City, while providing depth, limits the generalizability of findings to all Ethiopian contexts, which vary widely in culture, resources, and implementation capacity. The cross-sectional design provides a detailed snapshot at one point in time but cannot trace the evolution of challenges or the impact of interventions over time.

Future research should include longitudinal studies to track the long-term impact of specific inclusive education interventions; comparative multi-site studies across different regions and school types in Ethiopia to build a more national picture; and participatory action research designs that directly involve SWOI, their families, and teachers as researchers in designing, implementing, and evaluating inclusive strategies. Furthermore, research is needed on the cost-effectiveness and sustainability of various inclusive education supports in low-resource settings to provide pragmatic evidence to guide policy and budget decisions.

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Data Availability

Data can be made available on the behavior of the request

Declaration of interests' statement

The author declare no competing interests.

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