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Causes of Inter-Ethnic conflict between Afar and Somali Communities: A Case Study of Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas in Zone Three, Afar Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in the Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas of the Afar Regional State has been ongoing. This study examines the root cause such as historical, political, and socio-economic factors. Using qualitative methods, we gathered data from primary and secondary sources, with thematic analysis employed to identify key patterns. The findings reveal that relations between the Afar and Somali communities were generally peaceful before 1991, despite occasional confrontations over grazing rights and cattle raiding. However, the introduction of ethnic federalism in 1991 led to increased competition and conflict. Key drivers of violence include competition over natural resources such as pasture, water, and land, politicization of ethnicity, territorial disputes, and the spread of small arms and light weapons. The study emphasizes the need for inclusive, culturally tolerant national dialogue to achieve lasting peace between the two communities.

Keywords: Afar, Amibara, conflict; Mille, Somali

1. INTRODUCTION

Inter-ethnic conflict among Ethiopian pastoralists is not a recent phenomenon; it has persisted in various forms for ages. However, over the past decade, several factors have intensified and transformed these ethnic disputes (Tigist, 2014). Different pastoral communities have a long history of inter-ethnic violence, often pitting clans, tribes, and ethnic groups against one another. In the past, pastoral conflicts primarily utilized traditional weapons such as spears, bows, and arrows, resulting in less destructive encounters. However, the lethality of these intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts has dramatically increased due to the widespread availability of small arms and light weapons. Recent patterns of violent inter-ethnic conflict in pastoral areas suggest that these confrontations now involve extensive livestock raiding, the military occupation of adjacent ethnic groups' lands, and what has effectively devolved into warfare (Yaynshet, 2004).

Ethiopia serves as a compelling case study for understanding the dynamics of inter-ethnic conflict influenced by these factors. The country has experienced numerous intra- and inter-ethnic conflicts over time, characterized by varying intensity, scope, causes, and actors (Abrha, 2012). Numerous pastoral communities have a long history of inter-ethnic conflict, pitting different ethnic groups, tribes, and clans against one another. Examples of recurring inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia include the Guji-Burji conflict, the MedaWelabu-Kersa-Dula pastoralist conflict, and the Afar-Issa conflict (Asnake, 2013; Abrha, 2012; Bekele, 2010). The inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities is driven by factors such as the politicization of ethnicity, the practice of cattle raiding, intense competition for resources, and the gradual decline of the pastoral resource base due to state land confiscation for development (Bekele, 2010).

The Afar-Issa/Somali conflict is one of the longest-running inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, dating back to the nineteenth century (Yasin, 2010; Mu'uz, 2009; Mesfin, 2006; John, 2003). This conflict's complexity, involving numerous stakeholders, is well documented. Geographically, it spans over three hundred kilometers in the middle of the Awash basin and has a transnational dimension, with political actors from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia/Somaliland, and Djibouti participating (John, 2003). The conflict between the Afar and Somali communities is both frequent and enduring, with its causes, claims, and nature evolving over time. Initially, the sources of conflict were rooted in traditional cultural practices, such as the quest for recognition, the display of bravery, and competition over water and pasture, which were often resolved through traditional conflict resolution mechanisms (Yasin, 2010). However, following the adoption of ethnic federalism in Ethiopia in 1991, which divided the country into nine administrative states along ethnic lines, the nature of conflicts changed. The boundary disputes between the Afar and Somali communities became increasingly contentious. This situation has fostered enmity and confrontation between the two communities, leading to conflicts that have escalated in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas of the Afar Region.

Since 1991, the face of inter-ethnic conflicts between the Afar and Somali communities has shifted from resource competition to territorial disputes and claims of self-governance. Both ethnic groups compete over territorial claims, land, and self-governance, as well as access to pasture and water, with livestock raiding remaining a significant cause of conflict. Each group strives to control or gain access to critical resources, reflecting a shift from cultural to territorial conflicts (Bekele, 2010; Yasin, 2010).

Several scholars have investigated inter-ethnic conflicts in Ethiopia, identifying various factors contributing to these tensions. Abbink (2006) highlights that competition over scarce resources, such as water and grazing land, often triggers conflicts between pastoralist communities, including the Afar and Somali groups. He notes that historical grievances and territorial disputes exacerbate these tensions, complicating resolution efforts. Similarly, Markakis (2011) emphasizes the role of state policies and political marginalization in fueling ethnic conflicts in the Horn of Africa, arguing that the central government's uneven development policies and lack of effective conflict management strategies have intensified local grievances and rivalries, particularly in peripheral regions like Afar.

Dejene and Abdurahman (2002) focus on the socio-economic dimensions of inter-ethnic conflicts, highlighting how poverty, unemployment, and a lack of infrastructure development contribute to persistent tensions. Their study suggests that improving economic conditions and ensuring equitable access to resources could mitigate some root causes of these conflicts.

Additionally, [Hussein \(1998\)](#) explores the cultural and identity aspects of inter-ethnic conflicts, noting that deeply rooted cultural practices and the need for ethnic identity preservation often drive groups into conflict. He argues that any conflict resolution strategy must consider these cultural dimensions to be effective.

While substantial research has been conducted on inter-ethnic conflicts between the Afar and Somali communities in Ethiopia, there is a noticeable lack of recent studies post-2012 that address the evolving nature of these conflicts in specific areas like Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas in Zone Three of the Afar Region. Previous studies, such as those by [Kassa \(2001\)](#) have not provided a comprehensive, up-to-date analysis that considers new developments such as changes in local governance, demographic shifts, and the impact of climate change, which may have altered the conflict dynamics. Furthermore, these studies often generalize the conflict dynamics across broader areas without delving into the unique socio-economic and cultural factors specific to the mentioned woredas.

Most studies on inter-ethnic conflicts between the Afar and Somali people in Ethiopia were conducted before 2012, creating a gap in our understanding of the current situation. In the past decade, various factors that could affect relations between the two groups, such as political changes, environmental issues, and population dynamics, have not been thoroughly studied or documented. Consequently, our knowledge of these conflicts may not fully reflect the challenges and realities that the Afar and Somali communities face today, particularly in specific areas such as Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas.

Understanding the ongoing changes in inter-ethnic conflicts in the Afar and Somali Regions necessitates filling the information gap since the last comprehensive studies. Significant events may have altered the conflict dynamics, including changes in governance, infrastructure projects, and economic shifts. These developments impact resource distribution and inter-ethnic relations. By addressing this gap, the research aims to provide current data and insights that reflect the present situation, thereby enhancing academic knowledge in conflict management and supporting informed decision-making, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding efforts tailored to the regions' specific needs.

The findings of this study significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge in conflict management and ethnic relations by providing a pioneering and detailed examination of inter-ethnic conflicts between the Afar and Somali communities in the Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas of Zone Three, Afar Region, Ethiopia. This study is the first comprehensive analysis of this topic since 2012, marking a groundbreaking contribution to conflict management. It offers novel perspectives on the unique historical, social, political, and economic forces that underlie these conflicts. By examining local dynamics that previous or broader studies may have overlooked, this study provides an in-depth understanding of the situation.

Moreover, the study explores the experiences and viewpoints of the communities involved in the conflict, shedding light on the human aspects, such as personal grievances, differences in identity, and resource-related disputes. By offering specific insights into the situation, this case study not only enhances the understanding of the issue but also provides practical information for policymakers, organizations, and researchers working toward conflict resolution and peacebuilding in similar cross-cultural settings.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1. Concepts and Definitions of Conflict and Inter-Ethnic Conflict

There is no universally accepted definition of conflict recognized by all scholars and societies, as various schools of thought offer differing perspectives on this social phenomenon. This diversity has led to considerable debate among experts. Societies around the world hold different views regarding conflicts; some interpret them through theological or spiritual lenses, while others perceive them as social phenomena arising from everyday social interactions. Consequently, the term “conflict” encompasses multiple definitions (Jeong, 2008; Abdella, 2002). However, several commonalities among the definitions can be identified.

According to Galtung (1996), a notable authority in peace and conflict studies, conflict is defined as an evolving process in which involved parties recognize irreconcilable goals, needs, or interests. Galtung (1996) emphasizes the structural and cultural facets of conflict, introducing the concept of “structural violence,” which highlights how societal frameworks and institutions can adversely affect individuals by obstructing their ability to meet basic needs. He proposes a conflict triangle that includes attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions, suggesting that conflicts become apparent when these components interact negatively.

Abdella (2002), posits that conflict arises when parties encounter disagreements or interests that cannot coexist, resulting in tension or opposition. He identifies competition over scarce resources, power, and status as root causes of conflict. Communication breakdowns and misunderstandings also exacerbate disputes, suggesting that effective conflict resolution must address both substantive issues and relational aspects between conflicting parties. Similarly, Ho-Won Jeong (2008), defines conflict as a situation in which two or more parties perceive their interests, goals, or values as mutually exclusive, leading to contests for power, resources, or social recognition. Ho-Won Jeong (2008) considers the psychological, social, and structural dimensions that contribute to the emergence and escalation of conflict, advocating for holistic approaches to conflict resolution that address both immediate concerns and underlying systemic challenges.

For this study, conflict is defined as an unavoidable feature of social change, characterized by the pursuit of conflicting interests and goals by distinct groups. Inter-ethnic conflict specifically refers to confrontations between two or more ethnic groups over power, resources, identity, and social status. It encompasses situations in which individuals mobilize against others based on their ethnicity.

2.2. Theoretical Perspective of Conflict

Numerous theories attempt to explain the causes of inter-ethnic conflict, and no single theory can fully encapsulate the complexities of inter-ethnic relations and conflict (Muhabie, 2015). The multifaceted nature of conflict causes creates challenges in analyzing specific situations (Abdella, 2002). However, the inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali community groups can be understood through three primary theoretical perspectives such as the structural theory, the economic theory of conflict and the frustration-aggression theory.

2.3. Structural Theory of Conflict

This theory aims to elucidate how tensions arising from competition for limited resources lead to inter-ethnic conflict. Its central claim is that inter-ethnic conflict results from the specific structural arrangements within communities (Oakland [Institute, 2014](#)). The theory asserts that conflicts between ethnic groups stem from inequities embedded in social structures. Competition for control of essential resources—such as water, grazing land, and farming areas—often generates tension, as both communities rely on these resources for their livelihoods. Ethno-political dynamics, where one ethnic group feels politically privileged over others, further exacerbate frustrations stemming from exclusion. Historical and economic factors also intensify these tensions, as processes of dominance and submission become entrenched. Additionally, weak state structures and poor governance hinder the resolution of existing disputes, prompting communities to resort to violence to achieve their goals, thereby fostering intolerance and impunity.

2.4. Economic Theory of Conflict

This conflict theory explains the economic underpinnings of inter-ethnic conflict. Scarcity and political competition (for power, resources, or social value) are closely intertwined. People pursue power to achieve their goals, often financial in nature. Disputes arise when communities contest the government's distribution of resources or wealth, particularly over farmland, grazing areas, and water resources. Fear of scarcity or the actual deprivation of needs frequently motivates conflicts over resource control and political power. Therefore, during times of acute fear or the threat of scarcity, conflict becomes plausible. The looming specter of famine, deprivation, and mismanagement of limited resources can lead to fraud or corruption, just as the fear of poverty and hardship might. This theory enables the researcher to view conflict through the lens of scarce resources, particularly in the context of communal conflicts over grazing land and water in the study area.

2.5. Frustration-Anger-Aggression Theory

According to the psychological Frustration-Anger-Aggression Theory, aggression often results from frustration, typically stemming from blocked goals or unmet needs. When individuals or groups perceive their goals as thwarted, they experience frustration. This frustration can lead to anger, which may subsequently manifest as aggression. When applied to the emotional and psychological dimensions of the Afar-Somali communities conflict, this theory elucidates the drivers of aggression. Historical injustices, economic hardships, and social exclusion can cultivate chronic frustration among members of the Afar and Somali communities. Such chronic frustration can escalate into expressions of anger and aggression towards perceived sources of frustration, often the opposing ethnic group. This study utilizes the Frustration-Anger-Aggression Theory to investigate how unmet needs, perceived injustices, and emotional responses contribute to the cycle of violence between the Afar and Somali communities.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper utilized a qualitative research approach to explore the causes of inter-ethnic conflicts between the Afar and Somali ethnic groups in the Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas of Zone Three in the Afar Region. A qualitative methodology was chosen for its capacity to provide detailed and deep insights into the complexities of social phenomena ([Denzin, 2005](#)).

This method allows for a comprehensive understanding of inter-ethnic conflicts by uncovering the underlying reasons and patterns through detailed insights into individual situations and personal experiences. Such an approach is crucial for analyzing the intricate social, cultural, and historical factors influencing these conflicts, which is essential for identifying their root causes and developing effective resolutions.

The research design involved a case study approach focusing on the specific contexts of Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas in Zone Three of the Afar Region. This design was selected for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics and context of inter-ethnic conflict in these areas. With this methodology, the author can engage with and understand the complexities involved in the Afar-Somali communities conflict, making it particularly suitable for exploring the multi-layered and deeper nature of social issues affecting these two ethnic groups.

Data collection instruments for this study included semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and document analysis. Semi-structured interview guides were developed prior to the fieldwork. These guides facilitated initial informal conversations with key informants, including community leaders, elders, and local government officials, to gather information on the causes of the conflict, the experiences of the communities, and potential conflict resolution mechanisms. Respondents were also invited to provide feedback on the data collection instruments. The semi-structured format allowed interviewers the flexibility to explore specific topics of interest, seek clarification for deeper understanding, and address emerging data during interviews.

To capture diverse community perspectives on the conflict, FGDs were conducted with members of both the Afar and Somali communities. FGDs effectively capture group interactions and discussions, offering valuable insights into community dynamics and collective perspectives. This approach also facilitates the identification of shared experiences and common themes within both ethnic groups. Additionally, document analysis provided contextual background information, allowing for the triangulation of data and enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings through the incorporation of government and local reports, historical sources, and other previous studies.

The data collected from interviews, FGDs, and documents were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data to identify significant themes and patterns related to the causes of the conflict. Thematic analysis is a multi-stage process, beginning with familiarization with the data through repeated readings of interview transcripts, FGDs, and observational notes. Throughout the study, ethical considerations were paramount, ensuring the dignity and privacy of participants. Participants were fully informed about their rights, the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, and any associated risks. To protect participant privacy and ensure anonymity, all personal and sensitive information was stripped of identifiers during analysis. Given the sensitive nature of the conflict-related topics addressed in this study, additional measures were implemented, including integrated safeguarding protocols and clear communication regarding potential psychological or social risks faced by participants. The study adhered to ethical guidelines and procedures, ensuring a respectful approach that prioritized participants' rights and well-being.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The causes, nature, and patterns of inter-ethnic violence in Eastern Ethiopia are diverse and multidimensional. Various factors contribute to violent inter-ethnic conflict, and these factors often reinforce one another. Traditionally, inter-ethnic conflicts among pastoralists were relatively straightforward in their causes and manifestations, being localized both in terms of the protagonists and their overall impact. As such, these conflicts could often be resolved through community procedures. However, contemporary inter-ethnic conflicts are increasingly complex and multifactorial, involving a wider range of parties, some of whom may be situated far from the conflict zones. This complexity is evident in the inter-ethnic disputes between the Afar and Somali communities.

4.1. Territorial Claim and Self-Governance

The Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) came to power after the overthrow of the Derg, the ruling military junta, on May 28, 1991. Following this event, Ethiopia underwent a restructuring into new administrative units, resulting in the establishment of nine ethnically-based regions. Prior to this restructuring, the Afar and Somali communities coexisted within the same province (Mesfin, 2006), intermarrying and sharing resources over the years. However, the adoption of federalism along ethnic lines led to the division of these communities into separate regions, creating intra-boundaries and dividing commonly shared resources. The once mutually shared lands have become focal points of competition and conflict (Mu'uz, 2009).

Today, inter-ethnic conflict arises over administrative boundaries among regional states. In the case of the Afar and Issa/Somali, the establishment of ethnic-based regional boundaries from 1991 to 2000, particularly the formation of the Somali Regional State, has led to ongoing conflicts over resource control and access to the Awash River (Yasin, 2010). According to interviews with some Afar respondents, the border between Afar Zone Three and the Somali Shinile Zone remains unclear, with the Issa community claiming control over the settlements of Adaytu, Undufo, and Gedamaytu along the Djibouti main road. The occupation of these three settlements has become a contentious point between the two regional governments, which continue to negotiate border demarcation without reaching an agreement on designating the contested territories along the Djibouti road as a "special woreda" under the Afar Region.

Lack of clear demarcation has fueled inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali ethnic groups, aligning with the economic theory of conflict. An elder from the Somali community, Shukeri, stated,

"The main cause of interethnic conflict is related to the claim over the contesting territories of Adaytukebele in Mille Woreda, Undufokebele in Gewane Woreda, and Gedamaytukebele in Amibara Woreda. Both communities historically inhabited these areas together until the EPRDF government came to power. After 1991, the adoption of ethnic-based federal state structures exacerbated land-use conflicts, as the Somali community claims these towns as their historical homeland, while the Afar community asserts these towns are traditionally theirs."

The rationale behind the establishment of federalism in Ethiopia was to foster healthy relationships within a multicultural and multi-ethnic society. Unfortunately, it has failed to achieve its intended objectives, resulting in increased ethnic clashes (Mesfin, 2006). Data gathered from other respondents indicate that the territorial claims over Adaytukebele in

Mille Woreda, Undufokebele in Gewane Woreda, and Gedamaytukebele in Amibara Woreda are primary drivers of the conflict. The mixed settlement of people from the border areas of Afar and Somalia has created administrative boundary demarcation issue. Consequently, the absence of clearly defined administrative borders contributed to the outbreak of violent inter-ethnic conflict in 2014.

Colonel Ephrem Lema, an Eastern Command and Security Officer with the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), noted,

“Both Afar and Somali communities of the regions assert historical claims to land and territorial boundaries, yet neither party agrees on the border. They have created contradictory borders, with the Somali community not recognizing the administrative boundaries designated by the Afar. This disagreement over land demarcation exacerbates the rivalry between the two groups, creating competition even among woreda officials and regions. Thus, the lack of clearly defined boundaries is a significant factor in this inter-ethnic conflict.”

According to data collected from many Somali respondents, the towns of Adaytu, Gedamaytu, and Qundafoo were historically Somali land, taken during the Derg regime. They argue that this land should be returned to the Somali people. Conversely, Afar interviewees assert that the contested towns were traditionally used for grazing their camels and are part of Afar’s historical territory. “Before the recent settlement, this land was our property. We will never relinquish our land to the Somali regional government,” stated one Afar respondent.

Overall, both interviews and literature indicate that the contested territorial boundary is a major cause of conflict in the study area. The absence of clearly demarcated borders between Adaytukebele in Mille Woreda, Undufokebele in Gewane Woreda, and Gedamaytukebele in Amibara Woreda has contributed significantly to tensions between the two ethnic groups. Both communities believe that disputes are inevitable unless clear boundary demarcation is established, particularly concerning the boundaries between the two Zone Three Afar regions, and specifically within the Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas.

4.2. Competition for Socio-economic Resources

In addition to the previously mentioned factors of territorial claims and self-governance, economic factors significantly contribute to the inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in Adaytukebele in Mille Woreda, Undufokebele in Gewane Woreda, and Gedamaytukebele in Amibara Woreda. According to Mu’uz (2009), the root cause of conflict between these two eastern pastoralists in Ethiopia lies in competition for scarce resources. The scarcity of vital resources such as water and grazing land has led to prolonged clashes between the two ethnic groups, exemplifying the economic theory of conflict. Both communities depend on livestock rearing, prompting them to seek grazing land and water for their herds. Their seasonal migrations often lead to confrontations with local populations.

Mohammed Ahmed, an elder from the Afar community residing in UndufoKebele, elaborated:

“The inter-ethnic conflict is also fueled by competition over land resources, including forests and farmland. The eastern Ethiopian region is particularly vulnerable to environmental scarcity and insufficient rainfall. Consequently, due to this environmental scarcity, the Afar and Somali communities vie for control

over grazing land, water, and farmland resources, culminating in violent conflict in 2014” (INKI4 and NKI2, Gewane, April 28, 2022).

Most respondents indicated that the inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas primarily stems from resource struggles. The livelihoods of these communities are heavily reliant on land for agriculture, as well as for water and pasture for livestock (Asnake, 2013). This scarcity of land is exacerbated by environmental degradation and population pressure, especially in the aforementioned woredas. Thus, conflict over natural resources is virtually inevitable.

Both pastoral groups lead mobile lifestyles dependent on seasonal rainfall. As they search for pasture, water, and land, they inevitably clash with neighboring communities. The Afar are particularly known for their large herds of camels, while the Somali community relies on camels, goats, and cattle as primary economic resources. This overlap in resource needs intensifies competition between the two ethnic groups for grazing land, water sources, and limited agricultural land along their shared borders (Yasin, 2010).

Documented evidence reveals that inter-ethnic conflicts frequently arise from competition over grazing land and water resources, especially during the dry season when rainfall is scarce, leading to prolonged droughts and inadequate water for livestock. During these drought conditions, conflicts between the two groups tend to escalate. An elder noted that competition for resources has become a deeply ingrained tradition, complicating conflict resolution. These findings align with previous studies by Tigist (2014), Mu’uz (2009), Kebede (2005), and which highlight that struggles over natural resources are fundamental causes of inter-clan conflicts among these communities. Therefore, the ongoing clashes over limited water sources and grazing land exemplify the economic theory of conflict, illustrating how resource scarcity intensifies tensions between the Afar and Somali community groups.

4.3. The Existence of Interest Groups

Data gathered from interviews indicate that the existence of interest groups significantly contributes to the conflict between the Afar and Somali communities. Various interest groups have exacerbated tensions in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas, leading to the escalation of conflict. According to respondents, political actors, particularly from the other ethnic groups, have aggravated hostilities between the Afar and Somali communities. This reflects a shift in the conflict’s dimensions and complexities. As Sebsibe Alemu, a lecturer at Addis Ababa University, stated:

“This conflict is exacerbated by various interest groups competing for political power. The presence of both Afar and Somali regional states special forces, as well as business and political entrepreneurs, has contributed to the escalation of tensions. These groups engage in political manipulation, resource exploitation, and media manipulation, exacerbating land disputes and involvement in weapon trafficking” (AcKI-1, Addis Ababa, June 20, 2022).

Both interviews and literature highlight that the conflict between different ethnic clans in Afar and Somali communities evolves due to the interests of various groups, which serve as triggering factors. For instance, the actions of interest groups pursuing their agendas in the region have a profound impact on the dynamics of the conflict. Both Afar and Somali regional

states militants often employ political tactics to strengthen their territorial claims while excluding other ethnic groups (Mesfin, 2006).

4.4. Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment has emerged as a major driver of ethnic hostility between the Afar and Somali communities in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas from 2014 to 2021. Insecurity has led to the formation of vigilante groups, which can easily transform into criminal gangs due to adverse economic conditions and youth unemployment. These groups may resort to extortion for survival. The combination of poverty and idleness among youth makes them vulnerable to recruitment as mercenaries or participants in criminal activities, contributing to the overall insecurity in Ethiopia (Asnake, 2013).

Many key informants and FGD participants confirmed that unemployment, especially among the youth, is a primary cause of conflict between the two groups. High unemployment rates and low literacy levels contribute to a cycle of conflict. Respondents highlighted that unfair employment practices are significant contributors to inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas. During FGDs, many unemployed youths noted that, despite their qualifications, they remain jobless due to ethnic favoritism in hiring practices. They lack clan representation in government, limiting their job opportunities and access to resources, thereby exacerbating tensions between the communities.

Participants from both sides indicated that when mobilized for violence, youths were often promised payment for their involvement. Many also took advantage of looting during chaotic situations to enrich themselves. This dynamic illustrates how youth unemployment negatively impacts both communities. Beyond engaging in raids, unemployed youth serve as a ready force exploited by politicians during political transitions. They are often used in campaigns and directed against perceived adversaries, all while political elites benefit from their actions. These motivations aim to create wealth and maintain status within society, contributing to the continuation of inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities during 2018-2019.

The interviews result and previous studies indicate that the conflict-affected communities are pastoralists reliant on livestock. A large population of unemployed youth serves as a readily available force (morans) for cattle raids and battles. Many youths are uneducated due to high school dropout rates, leaving them with ample time to tend to their livestock instead of pursuing education. Respondents argue that unemployment is a root cause of conflict. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Muhabie (2015), which suggests that the lack of employment opportunities drives youth to engage in illegal activities as a means of survival.

4.5. Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons

The unrestrained spread of small arms and light weapons, coupled with the deliberate arming of individuals without regard for communal security, serves as a significant trigger for inter-ethnic conflict in many pastoralist areas of the Horn of Africa (Mkutu, 2005). Pastoralist communities today represent a substantial market for illicit firearms sourced from local and neighboring countries, including Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, and Eritrea. The widespread availability and circulation of small arms and light weapons have exacerbated long-standing violent disputes and contributed to societal collapse among pastoralist and other social groups competing for

resources and power. This situation is also evident among the B-Gumuz communities within the research area, where carrying firearms has become a prevalent practice (Admasu, 2016; Bantayehu, 2016; Muhabie, 2015; Mu'uz, 2009). Since 1980, the prevalence of small arms has been linked to an increase in interethnic conflict and warfare across sub-Saharan Africa (Yasin, 2002).

Field reports indicate that easy access to small arms has intensified inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities. The proximity of the region to the borders of Djibouti and Somalia facilitates the use of firearms among conflict perpetrators. One respondent noted that the availability of light weapons exacerbates mistrust and heightens tensions between neighboring ethnic groups. The presence of firearms, combined with high poverty levels, has escalated incidents of cattle rustling and increased fatalities in disputes over pasture and water resources. FGDs result revealed that both adults and youth in the region are keen to obtain firearms for several reasons:

“The possession of small arms and automatic and semi-automatic rifles is perceived as essential for claiming contested territory and asserting dominance over rival ethnic groups. Additionally, owning a weapon is viewed as a symbol of power, prosperity, and manhood, as well as a means of self-defense” (FGD-2, Addis Ababa, February 8, 2022).

In pastoral cultures, owning small arms and light weapons is regarded as a valuable asset. Consequently, both the Afar and Issa communities possess automatic rifles, such as Kalashnikovs, which they acquire through local arms dealers or from demobilized soldiers of the Derg government. The proliferation of automatic weapons has contributed to a rise in interethnic conflict. This assertion supports Homer-Dixon's (1994) claim that local conflicts can have global roots. In the context of the Afar-Issa conflict, the widespread manufacture and distribution of small arms and light weapons act as a catalyst, exacerbating local intergroup tensions. Key informants from both the Afar and Somali communities highlighted the impact of militia training and the proliferation of small arms on creating security dilemmas:

“The presence of Somali militia training and the proliferation of small arms among the Afar community have instigated insecurity between the two communities. Both groups harbor fears of one another, leading to a major attrition of their historical mutual trust. The spread of firearms among the Afar community instills fear in the Somali community, while the training of Somali militias creates apprehension among the Afar” (AKI-5, Addis Ababa, September 11, 2022).

According to Semir (2019), efforts by some groups to enhance their security can inadvertently create insecurity for others. Intense competition can lead to violent conflicts, with no guarantees that peaceful resolutions will hold long-term. Moreover, the accumulation of small arms and light weapons has fundamentally undermined social order, leading to a decline in traditional authority and disrupting cultural institutions that historically ensured community peace and tranquility. The presence of various firearms, including AK-47 and G3 rifles, as well as an assortment of crude weapons among youths in the study area, is concerning. These findings aligned with Helen's (2018) study, which posits that communities under weak institutional governance struggle with scarce natural resources, particularly in ethnically divided political contexts. In scenarios where access to weapons is limited to certain groups, violence becomes the norm.

4.6. Politicization of Ethnicity and Ethnic Mobilizations

In the inter-ethnic conflict between the Afar and Somali communities, ethnicity serves as a powerful basis for group mobilization, providing a fertile ground for local elites to compete along ethnic lines. Politicians often incite their communities against one another to gain political and economic advantages for themselves and their groups. Many respondents acknowledged that political incitement remains common in both regions and is a major catalyst for inter-ethnic conflict (Asnake, 2013).

According to respondents, manipulation of ethnic identity has been a primary driver of the conflict between Afar and Somali communities. Numerous conflict entrepreneurs, including local leaders, national politicians, and educated elites, exploit ethnic divisions for personal gain. In various instances of violent inter-ethnic conflict, elites have exacerbated tensions by manipulating ethnic differences, transforming interpersonal disputes into ethnic conflicts. Thus, the politicization of ethnicity involves preserving ethnic identities and utilizing them for political conflict (Mesfin, 2006). One focus group participant noted:

“Elite politicians and community leaders have exploited ethnic differences, perpetuating the conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in Mille, Gewane, and Amibara Woredas. Politicians seeking political positions have rallied their ethnic groups against others, fueling conflicts for their own benefit by encouraging their ethnic group members to distinguish themselves from others. This stems from the belief that political, social, and economic benefits are best allocated by ethnic affiliations” (FGD-2, Addis Ababa, February 8, 2022).”

Moreover, the interviewees results indicated that Somalis have mobilized due to a history of discrimination and oppression during their interactions with the Afar. Similarly, Afar local elites encourage their community members to protect and preserve their ancestral lands. From the Somali community side, the interviewees results noted that Afar elites have mobilized their ethnic group members by portraying themselves as defenders of their land and heritage against perceived encroachments. Consequently, both Afar and Somali elites exploit ethnic sentiments to further their agendas, resulting in violent conflict from 2018 to 2022.

Besides, the interviews results indicate that both social media and mainstream media have played a considerable roles in exacerbating tensions between both communities. Political elites and other agents employ various ideologies to propagate hate speech, inflaming tensions and deepening divisions through biased reporting and the dissemination of rumors across both traditional and social media platforms. Ethnic entrepreneurs exploit social media to amplify hostility and division, particularly among youth, who are often more susceptible to biased information and, subsequently, more likely to engage in violent inter-ethnic conflicts.

Overall, these narratives illustrate how the elites from both communities instigate conflict to further their agendas for political and economic dominance. Communities are effectively utilized as proxies in the pursuit of these agendas, leading to an expansionist approach adopted by both ethnic groups, while elite strategies focus on consolidating power and control over resources in the Afar and Somali regions.

4.7. Absence of Effective Policing and Security Measures

According to interview results, a weak government presence is a fundamental cause of conflict between the Afar and Somali pastoralists in Ethiopia. Both federal and local governments have struggled to establish control over the disputed Woredas of Amibara, Gewane, and Mille, particularly in areas where violence has erupted. Many regions in Eastern Ethiopia are remote, lacking adequate government institutions, which have led residents to self-govern, often resulting in decisions that escalate violence. Some of the Somali interviewees noted that since 2018, the government security presence in the region has been minimal. Only a few military personnel are stationed at garrisons, and they are often reluctant to patrol towns after dark due to poor equipment that leaves them outgunned by local militias (Asnake, 2013).

The inadequate governmental response has allowed conflicts to escalate and persist. Commander Mohamed Ahmed, the Security Office Head, remarked:

“The government has been slow and inadequate in responding to the conflicts between the Afar and Somali communities. This delayed response has allowed conflict to escalate, and state authorities have sometimes exacerbated insecurity rather than promoting peace. Consequently, inter-ethnic conflict between Afar and Somali communities has continued throughout 2018–2019” (SKI-2, Dire Dawa, February 8, 2022).

Lack of effective policing and security measures has led to various issues, such as unresolved disputes and vendettas, prompting individuals to seek revenge. A local government official described this cycle of violence by stating, “Crime is like the start of an electric chain; when one ring blows, it begins.” The aggrieved community reacts, causing violence to spiral out of control. One distinguished community elder expressed that without intervention, disputes over resources and territories could escalate into violent, deadly conflicts. Without authorities to enforce peace, even minor disagreements can result in bloodshed. Another elder from the Afar community added, “There is no single policeman to patrol our areas. Those who steal our cattle or attack our people go unreported, meaning we must take matters into our own hands.” A Somali community elder, who requested anonymity for security reasons, concurred, stating, “Insecurity prevails because we cannot move freely within our camps. Bandits operate with impunity, knowing that law enforcement is absent.”

4.8. Absence of Good Governance

Good governance is defined as the institutional capacity to develop and implement sound policies that mobilize citizens to enhance their quality of life (IFAD, 1999). When the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, its primary objective was to empower ethnic groups and decentralize authority as a remedy for historical grievances. However, barriers to effective governance have emerged at multiple levels due to capacity limitations faced by leaders and public officials across various administrative tiers. Regional and municipal government officials often lack the necessary knowledge and skills to implement good governance effectively. Consequently, they frequently prioritize the ruling party’s political agenda over addressing community needs and development goals.

As Mohammed Ahmed stated:

“The lack of competent governance is the fundamental cause of the continuous inter-ethnic animosity between Afar and Somali communities in Adaytu, Gedamytu, and Qundafoo towns (2018–2021). The absence of public engagement, rule of law, transparency, equity, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency has negatively impacted inter-ethnic relations in the study area. The lack of effective governance significantly fuels inter-ethnic conflict” (SKI-3, Jigjiga, March 16, 2022).

The fragile nature of state politics often exacerbates hostile identities among competing groups. Many Afar and Somali interviewees, along with senior FGD informants, confirmed that the main causes behind the May 2018/19 violent inter-ethnic conflict can be attributed to the state’s inability to promptly apprehend and prosecute those involved in the violence. Local government officials demonstrated limited knowledge of effective conflict management strategies, leaving interpersonal conflicts unaddressed. Rather than taking necessary measures against wrongdoers, these officials sometimes support their communities by arming local militias or police forces materially and ideologically.

The analysis indicates that dissatisfaction with the legitimacy of both federal and regional governments—stemming from a lack of public accountability and failure to uphold the rule of law—leads to grievances that ultimately result in violent inter-ethnic conflict. Particularly at the zonal and woreda levels, government officials appear more focused on advancing the ruling party’s interests and corrupt political agendas, rather than adhering to accountability or the rule of law. Such unaccountability enables to escalate the conflict in the area. Many zonal and woreda officials and police forces lack impartiality during conflicts, which is exacerbated by ineffective governance in the area. Thus, such conditions are believed to aggravate the conflict, significantly contributing to the violence between the two ethnic groups.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the conflict between the Afar and Somali ethnic groups can be traced back to the late 1950s, with violent inter-ethnic clashes mainly escalating in 2014 within Zone Three of the Afar Regional State. The data collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis indicate that the root causes of the conflict include disputes over political and administrative boundaries, competition for control and access to natural resources such as pasture, water, and land, the absence of good governance, the proliferation of small arms, ethnic rivalries, communal revenge attacks, and cattle raiding. Among these factors, competition for natural resources emerges as the most notable cause of inter-ethnic conflict, while territorial claims, particularly following the adoption of ethnic federalism in 1991, have further intensified rivalries. Additionally, the findings highlight that the establishment of arbitrary borders by the TPLF-dominated EPRDF, often without considering historical or socio-cultural contexts, has exacerbated identity conflicts and territorial claims. This has created an environment rife with longstanding grievances, allowing external forces to intensify tensions for strategic purposes.

5.2. Recommendations and Policy Implications

To mitigate the ongoing conflict between the Afar and Somali communities in Amibara, Gewane, and Mille Woredas, various levels of government—national, regional, zonal, and local—should play a proactive role. It is crucial that they are not only work to reduce conflicts but also facilitate their transformation into peaceful coexistence. This can be achieved by focusing on issue-related attitudes and contradictions while fostering sustainable peace among the two communities. By promoting dialogue and understanding, governments can help to bridge the divide that has been exacerbated by historical grievances and territorial disputes.

Establishing regular forums for dialogue is essential for promoting understanding and resolving conflicts. These forums should include representatives from the Afar and Somali communities, as well as government officials and community groups. Open communication and inclusivity of all sectors of the community—women, youth, elders, and vulnerable groups—are representation. By capturing diverse perspectives and fostering cooperation, these dialogues can help build trust, facilitate conflict resolution, and create a collaborative atmosphere conducive to lasting peace.

In addition to fostering dialogue, there is a pressing need to prioritize shared economic projects that benefit both Afar and Somali communities. Initiatives focused on infrastructure, market access, and resource management can create shared interests and dependencies, thereby reducing resource-based competition and conflict. Furthermore, implementing targeted vocational training and employment opportunities for youth from both groups can directly address unemployment and prevent their involvement in conflicts. Socio-economic development initiatives should be emphasized along shared borders to promote mutual prosperity and cooperation between the communities.

Improving law enforcement visibility and effectiveness is crucial for creating safer and more equitable conflict zones. Security forces must be impartial, well-trained, and accountable to the communities they serve. This will help to build trust and prevent misconduct. Strengthening laws that govern land ownership, resource rights, and property disputes is also critical to ensure clarity, fairness, and consistency in their enforcement. Additionally, both federal and local governments should impose stringent penalties on individuals inciting prolonged conflicts to deter further violence and unrest.

Focusing on economic and social development is vital to resolving the inter-ethnic conflict in the study area. A long-term strategy aimed at advancing the welfare of both ethnic groups must be implemented. Acknowledging the historical and cultural contexts of all communities involved can help to promote a sense of global citizenship and social cohesion. Establishing an independent organization tasked with investigating border issues, compensating for damages, and fostering harmonious relationships within diversity will also be instrumental in creating lasting peace.

Lastly, to effectively combat the proliferation of small arms and light weapons among pastoralist communities in the Horn of Africa, stricter gun laws, disarmament initiatives, and heightened border security are essential. Collaboration among regional nations—such as Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea—will be crucial for dismantling arms trafficking networks. Engaging local leaders and communities in disarmament efforts, coupled with educating them about the dangers of small arms, will promote alternative livelihoods and reduce reliance on armed conflict.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of disarmament initiatives, along with partnerships with international organizations specializing in arms control and conflict mediation, will further support sustainable peace and security in conflict zones.

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National dialogue as an avenue for national consensus and sustainable peace: reflections from some selected Districts of Sidama Region, Southern Ethiopia.

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Abstract

National dialogue is proposed as a strategy to foster cooperation and sustain peace. With multiple conflicts ongoing in Ethiopia, plans are underway for a national dialogue aimed at achieving national consensus and lasting peace. This article examines the feasibility of the Ethiopian national dialogue by focusing on one ethnic group—the Sidama people. Through key informant interviews, group discussions, and informal conversations, the study identifies conditions that can facilitate or hinder national dialogue, challenges during the preparation and process phases, and anticipated obstacles in the implementation phase. The success of the national dialogue in Ethiopia largely depends on the participation and inclusion of diverse stakeholders in the political process. Within Sidama, while there is considerable variation in awareness and understanding of the national dialogue, the majority support the initiative and is committed to its success and implementation. Ensuring broad participation, a diverse agenda, trusted conveners, and a clear plan for implementing recommendations are critical factors that will determine the dialogue's effectiveness. Local ownership and the involvement of a respected national facilitator are crucial to producing meaningful results.

Keywords: National dialogue, prospects and challenges, sustainable peace

1. INTRODUCTION

National dialogues are increasingly recommended as mechanisms to overcome internal divisions and rebuild relations between states, institutions, and various groups in conflict-torn societies. Their aim is to design a new social contract between the conflicting parties. UNESCO (2022) highlights that 89% of current conflicts occur in countries with low levels of intercultural dialogue, emphasizing the need for both national and intercultural dialogues to foster cooperation and sustain peace.

Over the past decade, national dialogues have gained importance as platforms for peaceful transformation (Marike et al., 2017). In fragile or post-conflict environments, political settlements are crucial for addressing conflicts over interests, ideologies, and power through nonviolent means. National dialogues provide an opportunity to address the root causes of conflict, particularly when previous constitutions have failed to provide an inclusive social contract that satisfies citizens' needs (Getahun, 2023).

According to Zambakari (2016), national dialogues are powerful tools for peacebuilding, widely implemented across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Recent efforts to initiate national dialogues are evident in countries such as Libya, Sudan, Somalia, Mali, Lebanon, and Myanmar. These dialogues bring together major stakeholders when political institutions collapse or lose legitimacy. They are also commonly used in transitional societies to collectively deliberate on key issues critical to progress (Zambakari, 2016). Ethiopia is the most recent case where a national dialogue has been proposed to reconcile differing opinions and seek national consensus. Historically, Ethiopia has been portrayed as a nation where various ethno-linguistic groups coexist harmoniously. Many observers have used Ethiopia as an example for other parts of Africa, referring to it as a "land of gods," a "bastion of African independence," an "ethnic museum," and a "mosaic of peoples" (Levine, 2000). However, recent history stands in stark contrast to this image. Ethno-nationalist political narratives have intensified ethnic polarization, intercommunal intolerance, and violence, threatening the country's unity.

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the authoritarian military regime in May 1991 and ruled for nearly three decades, until 2018. Under Meles Zenawi's leadership, divisions within Ethiopia were largely controlled, but his death in 2012 led to the unraveling of the political settlement. By 2014, protests began, calling for new political arrangements. In 2018, a reformist coalition emerged, offering early hope for political openness. However, concerns grew over a perceived return to a unitary state and the continuation of imposed political settlements by the ruling elite (Adem, 2021). Before 1991, Ethiopia was a centralized state that promoted national unity as a political doctrine. Following the military regime's fall, the country was restructured as a federal entity, granting ethnic groups significant autonomy. This decentralized system, however, created boundaries between ethnic groups, resulting in certain ethnic groups dominating and oppressing others (Yohannes, 2022). Discontent grew, especially among minority groups, who demanded greater access to power.

When Abiy Ahmed assumed office in 2018, his government initially sparked hope for a transition toward a more equitable political order, human rights protections, and societal harmony. However, widespread grievances soon emerged, leading to political instability and violent conflict. Ethiopia is currently marked by numerous violent conflicts, intercommunal divisions, and large-scale human rights violations. Ethiopia's political transitions have historically been turbulent. The 1974 revolution that overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie, the 1991 defeat of the Derg military government, and the 2018 political shift were marked by significant unrest (Emebet et al., 2021). While the 2018 transition was relatively peaceful, the consequences were severe, leading to ongoing political chaos and violence (Meressa and Dawit, 2020). Ethiopia's instability is rooted in long-standing state-building deficits, including divergent interpretations of its political history, a lack of social cohesion, and the absence of national consensus on major state symbols and institutions (Meressa and Dawit, 2020).

In light of these deep-seated divisions and ongoing crises, a national dialogue has been recommended as a means to foster unity (Yohannes, 2022). The Ethiopian National Dialogue

Commission, established in January 2021 (FDRE Proclamation No. 1265/2021), has a three-year mandate to address the root causes of past violence, investigate historical injustices, and promote peace and reconciliation (Kinkino, 2023). As inclusive national dialogue is a new concept in Ethiopia, little research has been conducted on its preparation, process, and implementation from an anthropological perspective. Previous discussions have been largely political, with limited attention given to how citizens perceive the proposed dialogue. This article offers insights into the national dialogue by engaging with grassroots reflections from the Sidama people in the Aletawondo, Hula, and Daraotlicho districts in southern Ethiopia. It explores what national dialogue means to the people of Sidama, examines the conditions that enable or constrain its success, and identifies challenges in the preparation, process, and implementation phases. While this article provides a view from the Sidama region, similar research in other parts of Ethiopia is necessary to capture broader perspectives and set the stage for a truly national dialogue.

2. UNDERSTANDING NATIONAL DIALOGUE

2.1. What is National Dialogue?

National dialogue is a tool for political transformation and conflict resolution, aimed at rebuilding a nation divided by deep-rooted historical conflicts. It addresses issues of national importance, including long-standing causes of conflict that often resurface due to political protests or armed revolts. Designed as inclusive, multiparty negotiations, national dialogues manage political transitions during times of crisis and state fragility. They typically focus on political reforms, constitution-making, and peacebuilding (Tura, 2023). Formally mandated or authorized by the state, national dialogues have a clear structure that outlines rules and procedures for discourse and decision-making. They provide an opportunity for meaningful conversations about the underlying drivers of conflict and how to transform them comprehensively (Marike et al., 2017).

National dialogues have been held in various contexts under different labels. Examples include national conferences in Benin, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Togo, Mali, Niger, and Chad; multiparty negotiations in South Africa; roundtables in Poland and Germany; constituent assemblies in Bolivia and Afghanistan; and national dialogues in Bahrain, Yemen, Tunisia, and Lebanon (Marike et al., 2017; Getahun, 2023). The U.S. Constitution-making process of 1787 could also be seen as a form of national dialogue, involving representatives from all states to negotiate the nation's future. Similarly, political reforms, transition processes, and constitution drafting in southern Europe (Portugal, Spain) and Southeast Asia (South Korea, the Philippines) in the 1970s and 1980s were facilitated by processes akin to national dialogues (Abyssinia, 2022).

2.2. Phases of National Dialogue

National dialogues typically unfold in three phases: preparation, process, and implementation (Marike et al., 2017; FDRE Proclamation No. 1265/2021).

2.2.1. Preparation Phase

The preparation phase is essential for building support for the dialogue. This stage includes mini-negotiations to foster confidence among parties, elites, and the public, particularly in

environments with high levels of distrust. Agreements during this phase focus on preventing violent conflict, restoring trust between the state and society, and rebuilding political order after a conflict. A timeline for the negotiation process is established, along with frameworks for the dialogue. Substages include exploration, consultations across party lines, mandate setting, the official announcement of the dialogue, and the creation of a planning framework. Additionally, participants are identified, and inclusive methods of participation are determined, alongside an awareness of the positions and perspectives of various stakeholders.

2.2.2. The process phase

The process phase is where the dialogue takes place. The national dialogue process phase is the most well publicized, and all stakeholders become involved. The key tasks of the process phase are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Tasks in the process phase of national dialogue

No	Tasks	Issues covered
1	Setting the agenda	Laying out the agendas that will be discussed in order. The sub phase aids in fostering and generating among the populace a common understanding of positions and vision.
2	Finding a trusted and credible convener	Selecting numerous reliable conveners from various societal and institutional groups that can be accepted by all stakeholders.
3	Determining size	Deciding/projecting sizes of the groups participating in the discourse.
4	Selecting participants	Identifying participants of the dialogue. A complex, multistep process is frequently used to choose participants, and it should be planned to reflect the sociological makeup of the society in relation to the issue(s) at hand.
5	Setting guiding principles and ground rules	Ensuring that the ability to watch the process and engage effectively is supported by procedural fairness, which is a crucial component in building legitimacy.
6	Developing decision-making and consensus building modalities	This encourages legitimacy and a strong commitment from a wide variety of actors to the process and its results when done correctly.
7	Engaging the public	Public outreach and consultation are required to ensure that the procedure will be accepted by wider society. Public support and buy-in are increased when people can participate in the process and follow it while offering comments at various points.
8	Creating support structures, deadlock breaking mechanisms and safety nets	Frameworks need to be specifically created to aid in breaking through impasses, deadlocks and stalemates and to maintain the fundamental discourse and negotiation process. It is crucial to make use of national customary methods and tools that have been employed to forge agreements and end impasses.

Source: Marike et al, 2017; Tura, 2023

2.2.3. The Implementation Phase

The third and final phase of a national dialogue is the implementation phase, where the agreements reached are put into action. This phase involves mechanisms for achieving both short-term and long-term results, which can be either tangible or intangible. Tangible outcomes include constitutional changes, security transitions, strategies for addressing past conflicts, and transitional justice. Intangible outcomes involve relationship building and civic education. The

implementation phase may also include the creation of infrastructure, guarantees, monitoring systems, and follow-up dialogue forums to ensure accountability.

For sustainable outcomes, it is essential to foster an open and participatory approach during implementation, adhering to the spirit of the dialogue process. Managing expectations is crucial, and the process must include all stakeholders, promote transformation, and remain open to further dialogue.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the southern¹ Sidama zone, focusing on three woredas—Hula, Aletawondo, and Daraotilicho—out of the 37 woredas in the Sidama region². Purposive sampling was used to select informants from these woredas. Fieldwork took place between February and September 2023, with informants selected to represent a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and political perspectives. Participants included farmers, merchants, religious leaders, government officials, and opposition party members, both in the study area and in Addis Ababa. A total of 18 key informant interviews (including 5 women), four in-depth interviews, and three focus group discussions (one with a women's group) were conducted. Secondary data was gathered from academic and grey literature, government proclamations, and media reports. All research participants provided informed consent for the interviews and had the option of being anonymized in the analysis. The research adhered to ethical protocols. The data was coded and analyzed thematically.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Key Principles of the Ethiopian National Dialogue

The preamble of the Ethiopian National Dialogue Commission Establishment Proclamation acknowledges differences and disagreements on fundamental national issues. It further states that resolving these differences is a necessity, not a choice. The proclamation recognizes that broad-based, inclusive public dialogue is the only way to resolve these variances, with the ultimate goal of building national consensus and fostering a culture of trust (FDRE Proclamation No. 1265/2021). The Ethiopian national dialogue is guided by several key principles: inclusivity, transparency, credibility, tolerance, mutual respect, rationality, context sensitivity, the need for an impartial facilitator, depth and relevance of agendas, democracy and the rule of law, national interest, and the use of traditional knowledge and values (FDRE Proclamation No. 1265/2021).

Key informants from the study area appreciate the federal government's commitment to the national dialogue, as demonstrated by the establishment of the National Dialogue Commission. The release of political prisoners, including opposition leaders, at the outset of the Prosperity Party's government was seen as a positive step towards reconciliation, justice, and inclusivity. However, informants also noted that any government that fails to prioritize political solutions over military action risks protracted armed resistance and insurrection. As [Mehari \(2020\)](#) argues, a "war of visions" can only be resolved through a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue, as military solutions are insufficient. This section also explores the perceptions of each key

¹ There are 10 woredas in southern Sidama zone: Hula, Chirone, Titicha, Bursa, Aletawondo, Aletachuko, Dara, Dara-otilicho, Aleta-wondo town, and Aleta-chuko town. Aleta-wondo is the capital town of southern sidama zone.

² Sidama region is divided into four zones. These are northern sidama, central sidama, southern sidama, and eastern sidama zones. Hawassa, Yirgalem, Aletawondo, and Bensa-daye are the capital towns of northern, central, southern, and eastern sidama zones, respectively.

principle—its importance, relevance, and the government's commitment to upholding these principles.

4.1.1. Inclusivity and Participation

The National Dialogue Commission has categorized Ethiopians into nine groups to ensure diverse participation: people with discernible livelihoods, women, youth, self-help organizations, community leaders, public servants, teachers, artisans, and the business community (Tegbaru, 2022). Informants from the study area reported attending a one-day zonal-level conference with two commissioners of the national dialogue at the Aletawondo Center. Approximately 4,500 people participated, including teachers, religious leaders, merchants, government employees, farmers, youth, women, and pensioners. However, some informants from Agereselam revealed that the selection of participants was biased in favor of Prosperity Party members, with opposition party members excluded. This exclusion raised concerns about the dialogue's legitimacy, as inclusivity is critical to maintaining the public's trust in the process.

4.1.2. Transparency and Public Participation

While 4,500 residents attended the zonal conference at Aletawondo, some informants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of awareness activities at the woreda and kebele levels. The one-day conference was deemed insufficient for ensuring widespread public participation, especially in rural areas where knowledge of the national dialogue is limited. Informants suggested that increased media coverage, particularly on FM radio (which has a wider audience than national television), could improve transparency and public engagement in the dialogue process.

4.1.3. Credible Conveners

Informants stressed the importance of having credible conveners to enhance the legitimacy of the national dialogue. These conveners should come from diverse backgrounds and should not have political aspirations that could lead to conflicts of interest. However, in some woredas, Prosperity Party members were the main actors in the dialogue process, which undermined its credibility. Informants recommended involving respected community figures such as elders, religious leaders, teachers, and agricultural or health extension workers as conveners to increase trust and legitimacy.

4.1.4. Clear Agenda and Key National Issues

A well-defined agenda is crucial for ensuring focused and inclusive dialogue. Agenda items should be agreed upon before the dialogue commences, often requiring pre-negotiations. Focus group discussants in Aletawondo and Agereselam expressed concern about delays in setting the agenda and selecting participants, noting that two years had passed since the commission was established with little progress. They argued that national issues like constitutional reform, identity, border disputes, and federalism are well-known and should have been addressed more swiftly. Additionally, participants in Sidama raised local issues, such as conflicts between the Sidama of Chire woreda and neighboring Oromia woredas, as topics requiring attention in the dialogue. They also highlighted broader concerns, such as the national flag and the rising cost of living, which, though not directly related to the dialogue, impact public focus and engagement.

4.2. Prospects and Challenges

While many community members are hopeful that the national dialogue will lead to national consensus, they also expressed concerns about its challenges, including the impartiality of conveners, ongoing conflicts in Amhara, and the exclusivity of the process. Tura (2023) argues that addressing these challenges is essential for the national dialogue to enhance peace, democratization, and constitutionalism, and to serve as a catalyst for nation-building. Some informants were optimistic about the dialogue's potential to address key issues like identity conflicts, governance, and contested national symbols. However, others expressed concerns about the exclusion of armed groups like the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), fearing it could undermine the dialogue. Yet, others believed their exclusion could help the dialogue succeed by focusing on peaceful stakeholders.

4.2.1. Prospects

There is wide anticipation that the national dialogue will address a range of issues, including recurrent conflicts, the rule of law, identity-related matters, corruption, governance, and border disputes. Focus group participants emphasized that forgiveness and reconciliation are critical to achieving lasting peace. They argued that forgiveness, though difficult, is essential for healing and coexisting peacefully.

4.2.2. Challenges

Despite the optimism, numerous challenges could impede the national dialogue's success. These include the lack of public awareness, the overriding focus on the cost of living, a lack of transparency, and concerns that the dialogue may be a Prosperity Party endeavor rather than a truly national effort. Informants in Agereselam reported that opposition party members were excluded from the selection process, which contradicted the proclamation's principle of inclusivity. Moreover, some informants criticized the national dialogue for being initiated during a state of emergency in the northern region, when political and democratic rights were suspended. They feared that this undermined the legitimacy of the dialogue and its capacity to resolve deep-rooted issues.

4.2.3. Procedural Fairness and Inclusivity

Procedural fairness and inclusivity are critical to the success of any national dialogue (ENDC, 2022). However, some informants expressed concerns about the transparency of the process, particularly in selecting the 11 commissioners. They questioned whether merit, integrity, or political affiliation played a role in the selection, fearing this lack of transparency could undermine the dialogue's credibility.

4.2.4. Implementation Strategy

The success of the national dialogue will depend not only on the process but also on the implementation of its recommendations. Since the countrywide plenary has yet to be held, the commission must develop clear strategies for implementing the dialogue's outcomes. Deadlock-breaking mechanisms should also be established to address potential disputes during the dialogue process and keep the process on track. Some informants suggested that an independent body, such as a human rights commission or civil society organization, should

monitor and evaluate the commission's and the government's activities to ensure the effective implementation of dialogue outcomes (Zerihun, 2023).

5. CONCLUSION AND KEY REFLECTIONS

5.1. Conclusion

Despite varying levels of awareness regarding the upcoming national dialogue, informants in the study area strongly support the initiative and emphasize the importance of adhering to the timeframe set by the commission to maintain momentum. While the establishment of the National Dialogue Commission is promising, its success hinges on transparency and inclusivity, as outlined in the Proclamation. Ensuring broad participation, a diverse agenda, trusted conveners, and a clear plan for implementing recommendations are critical factors that will determine the dialogue's effectiveness. Local ownership and the involvement of a respected national facilitator are crucial to producing meaningful results.

5.2. Key Reflections

5.2.1. The Federal Government

The federal government should not view the national dialogue as an end goal but as part of a broader transitional roadmap that includes economic, political, and judicial reforms. Ensuring the rule of law and the safety of citizens across regions is critical, as informants raised concerns about rampant violence, detention, and insecurity, particularly in regions like Amhara and Oromia. To achieve a successful dialogue, the government must work toward peace and stability by engaging armed groups and opposition parties in discussions. Additionally, economic challenges, particularly inflation, must be addressed to ensure public focus on the dialogue. A consistent public update on the dialogue through diverse media outlets would enhance transparency and accountability. An independent body should monitor the process to ensure adherence to the Proclamation and report to the House of Representatives.

5.2.2. The Commission

National dialogue commissioners must remain free from ethnic, religious, or political biases and be accessible. They should devise an inclusive communication strategy to ensure the public is informed about the dialogue's objectives and outcomes. Media campaigns, particularly radio broadcasts, should target all sectors of society, including rural communities, minorities, and the diaspora. The dialogue process will take time and must align with local values such as trust, mutual respect, and reconciliation. The commission should request an extension of its term if necessary and clarify that the dialogue is not about "resolving" conflicts but transforming differences into constructive discussions for nation-building.

5.2.3. Opposition Parties

Opposition parties should reconsider their boycott politics and engage in negotiations with the government and the commission to reconcile differences and contribute to the national dialogue's success.

5.2.4. *The Public*

The wider public must actively participate and support the commission and the government in achieving the goals of the national dialogue. They should prioritize this national issue, take ownership of the process, and ensure that the dialogue's recommendations are implemented.

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8. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Does human capital competency affect the performance of Ethiopian Coffee cooperatives?

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Abstract

A nation's ability to generate income and expand is largely dependent on its human capital. Ethiopia, the fourth-largest coffee exporter and the fastest-growing coffee market, relies heavily on its human capital and coffee cooperatives. Numerous empirical studies have investigated the performance of coffee cooperatives in relation to the effective utilization of human capital. The existing literature has emphasized the impact of optimizing coffee cooperatives' performance through human capital, particularly using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). This paper employs generalized Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and SEM approaches to explore this relationship. The empirical findings demonstrate a significant connection between the performance of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives and human capital competency. Additionally, the study challenges the prevailing notion that the development of human capital within coffee cooperatives has stagnated. According to the SEM analysis, the performance of a coffee cooperative can increase by 70.3% with a one standard deviation improvement in human capital, assuming other independent variables remain constant. Consequently, the study recommends that policymakers prioritize the development of human capital to enhance the performance of coffee cooperatives.

Keywords: Coffee Cooperatives, Economy, Financial Services, Human Capital

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a major global coffee producer, making the prosperity of its cooperatives crucial to the international coffee market (Omer et al., 2016). For these cooperatives to become more innovative, efficient, and competitive, effective management of human capital is essential. This management directly impacts both the quantity and quality of coffee produced and traded internationally (Nusa, 2021).

The concept of human capital, initially introduced by economists like Adam Smith and further developed by scholars such as Gary Becker, refers to the knowledge, skills, and expertise individuals possess within an organization or industry. These factors significantly influence economic development and productivity (Mohammed & Lee, 2015).

While human capital theoretically enhances the performance of coffee cooperatives, empirical studies present inconsistent findings. Some research indicates a significant positive correlation between human capital proficiency and cooperative performance (Czyżewski et al., 2021; Tilahun, 2007). However, other studies (Ployhart, 2021; Omer et al., 2020; AlQershi et al., 2021) suggest less important or even negative effects. It is vital to identify and address these discrepancies for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship.

The resource-based approach, social capital theory, and human capital theory provide theoretical frameworks that illuminate how human capital proficiency can impact coffee cooperative performance (Shumeta & D'Haese, 2016). These frameworks emphasize the importance of investing in human capital, building networks, and leveraging knowledge and skills to achieve strategic goals and sustainable competitive advantage (Ployhart, 2021). Practical challenges in examining the relationship between human capital and cooperative performance in Ethiopia include data availability, difficulties in measuring human capital proficiency, lack of research resources, and the complexity of factors influencing cooperative performance in a diverse and changing market environment (Omer et al., 2016).

To address these challenges and resolve conflicting evidence, this study conducts a comprehensive empirical investigation into the relationship between human capital proficiency and the performance of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives. By employing meticulous research techniques, superior data collection, contextual analysis, and stakeholder engagement in the coffee industry, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how human capital affects cooperative performance. Furthermore, it seeks to offer valuable insights for policymakers, cooperative members, and other stakeholders to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of coffee cooperatives in Ethiopia and beyond by integrating theoretical frameworks with practical implications.

The efficiency of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives and the relationship between human capital and their performance require further research. Despite previous studies on this topic, there are numerous methodological errors, theoretical gaps, knowledge deficits, and contextual inconsistencies that need to be addressed. While some studies demonstrate a positive correlation between skilled and educated personnel and higher performance (Czyżewski et al., 2021; Kant et al., 2022), others indicate a lack of significant association or even negative effects (Omer et al., 2020; AlQershi et al., 2021). Given these conflicting results, additional investigation is necessary to fully comprehend the underlying dynamics.

Ethiopian coffee cooperative performance is poorly monitored concerning the impact of human capital due to a lack of reliable and consistent approaches (Emana, 2019). The variety of measurement methods, sample sizes, and data collection processes used in previous studies makes it challenging to compare and generalize findings (Omer et al., 2020). Therefore, developing a rigorous framework for studying this relationship constitutes a methodological gap. Additionally, the theoretical foundations explaining the relationship between human capital and Ethiopian coffee cooperative performance remain underdeveloped (AlQershi et al., 2021).

Previous research has often relied on general conceptions of human capital, such as education and training, neglecting the unique characteristics and dynamics of Ethiopia's cooperative coffee sector (Czyżewski et al., 2021). In the absence of specific theoretical frameworks, our understanding of how human capital fosters cooperative performance is limited. It remains unclear which specific human capital attributes are most relevant to Ethiopian coffee cooperatives (Kant et al., 2022). While some studies focus on the formal education levels of cooperative members (Emana, 2019), additional factors—such as leadership qualities, prior experience in the coffee industry, and vocational skills—should also be explored (AlQershi et al., 2021). Understanding these factors will facilitate the development of targeted interventions and policies.

According to Omer et al. (2020), Ethiopia's cooperative coffee industry operates within a unique institutional and socioeconomic context. The relationship between human capital and cooperative performance may be influenced by various factors, including market dynamics, government regulations, resource accessibility, and cultural norms (Czyżewski et al., 2021). However, these contextual factors have not been extensively investigated in previous research. Addressing these context gaps can enhance our understanding of the unique opportunities and challenges facing Ethiopian coffee cooperatives.

Ultimately, further study is required to fully understand how human capital influences the performance of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives given the existing gaps in evidence, methodology, theory, knowledge, and context. By addressing these gaps, we can improve our comprehension of the relationship between cooperative performance and human capital, aiding academics, practitioners, and policymakers in developing strategies and programs that will enhance the performance and sustainability of Ethiopia's coffee cooperatives.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Social Capital Theory: This theory posits that social networks, linkages, and trust are essential for fostering cooperation and achieving collective goals (Ployhart, 2021). In the context of coffee cooperatives, strong social ties, mutual trust, and efficient communication among cooperative members can enhance information sharing, resource mobilization, and group decision-making, ultimately improving cooperative performance (Yadete et al., 2023).

Human Capital Theory: Proposed by economists Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker, this theory suggests that investing in education, training, and skill development increases individuals' earning potential and productivity (Nazari et al., 2017). In the context of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives, investments in member education and training programs can enhance productivity, skills, and knowledge, thereby improving cooperative performance (Nusa, 2021).

Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory: This concept emphasizes the unique assets and capabilities of an organization as sources of competitive advantage (Nusa, 2021). In coffee cooperatives, human capital—defined by the skills, knowledge, and life experiences of cooperative members—can differentiate cooperatives from competitors. Effective utilization of human resources can lead to improved performance and sustainability.

Agency Theory: Agency theory examines the relationship between agents, such as cooperative managers, and principals, like cooperative members, highlighting how information asymmetry can lead to conflicts of interest (Kant et al., 2023). Human capital influences the alignment of

members' interests with managers' decision-making processes. Strong human capital, which includes managerial and leadership skills, enables cooperative managers to effectively represent members' interests, leading to improved decision-making and higher cooperative performance (Nusa, 2021).

Institutional Theory: This theory focuses on how broader social, cultural, and regulatory norms impact organizational behavior and performance (Ployhart, 2021). In the case of Ethiopia's coffee cooperatives, the institutional environment—comprising laws, regulations, and cultural norms—shapes cooperative performance (Adula et al., 2023). This theory underscores the importance of aligning human capital development programs with the institutional environment to enhance cooperative performance.

Stakeholder Theory: This theory emphasizes the need to consider the interests of various stakeholders—such as consumers, employees, cooperative members, and the community—when making decisions within an organization (Nusa, 2021). Investments in human capital for coffee cooperatives should encompass the broader social and economic implications for stakeholders (Kant et al., 2023). By addressing the needs and interests of various stakeholders, coffee cooperatives can achieve sustainable performance and contribute to community development (Ployhart, 2021).

Human capital competence significantly impacts the efficacy of coffee cooperatives (Boson et al., 2023). Members of cooperatives with highly competent human capital likely possess specialized knowledge and skills relevant to the industry (Ployhart, 2021). This competence can enhance efficiency in various operations, including planting, harvesting, processing, marketing, and quality control. Cooperatives with strong human resources tend to foster a more innovative workforce (Gupta & Raman, 2021). Members with training and experience can contribute creative ideas and solutions that lead to the development of new products, processes, and strategies, thereby enhancing the cooperative's success (Tuncdogan et al., 2021).

Competent human capital within the cooperative enables improved decision-making. Members with high levels of knowledge can assess information and make decisions that promote the cooperative's growth and long-term viability. Adaptability is essential for success in the competitive, fast-paced coffee industry. A cooperative with skilled human capital can stay ahead of the curve by swiftly adapting to changing consumer preferences, market conditions, regulatory requirements, and technological advancements. With highly skilled and competent human resources, a coffee cooperative can operate more efficiently (Shiferaw et al., 2023), leading to increased output, cost-effectiveness, and overall performance, thus enhancing competitiveness and success (Gobena & Kant, 2022).

Human capital competence also affects customer interactions and satisfaction (Tuncdogan et al., 2021). Cooperative members possessing the necessary skills and knowledge can adeptly handle challenges, build strong customer relationships, and provide exceptional service. These actions foster consumer loyalty and goodwill. Effective human capital management is crucial for enhancing customer relations, productivity, creativity, adaptability, and efficiency, all of which directly influence the cooperative's performance and commercial success (Panigrahi et al., 2023). **Hypothesis 1 (H1):** The performance of coffee cooperatives is impacted by human capital competencies. Education, training, and awareness are utilised as stand-ins for human capital. The BSC model, which is used to measure business performances, provides the basis for

the usage of proxies for coffee cooperative performance, including non-financial performance, financial performance, and employee happiness.

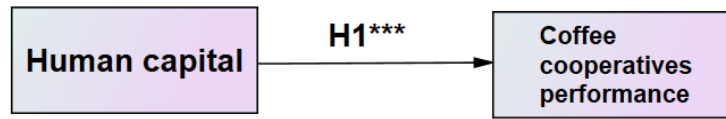


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Researchers Own construct, 2023

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Description of the Study Area

Oromia, one of Ethiopia's largest regions, produced 3,101,927.33 quintals of coffee on 489,799.36 hectares of land during the current fiscal year, with an average yield of 6.33 quintals per hectare. The Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU) was established in 1999 and has since seen substantial growth. It now represents 250 cooperatives with a total membership of 250,000 coffee farmers. Among the coffee-growing areas, the Guji administrative zone stands out for its facilities, which are well-suited for the cultivation and export of coffee.

3.2. Study Population, Sample Size, and Data Sources

The study collected primary data from 425 members of coffee-producing cooperatives through a standardized questionnaire. The target population comprised 33 coffee farmers' unions that have operated for more than five years in six coffee-producing districts within Ethiopia's West and East Guji zones. Though the study does not specify guidelines for sample size, previous studies suggests a 10:1 event-to-independent variable ratio for multiple regression analysis. This is deemed adequate for reflecting a homogenous population, while larger samples are necessary for more heterogeneous groups.

Secondary data consisted of 10 years' worth of balanced panel time series data, sourced from audited financial records.

3.3. Sampling Techniques and Procedures

A systematic random sampling method was employed to select cooperatives from multiple clusters. Cluster sampling is especially useful when dealing with large and geographically diverse populations, as it enhances sampling efficiency and reduces costs. In cases where the number of clusters varies significantly, a probability proportional to size technique was applied to ensure fairness in the selection of clusters, addressing any potential imbalance.

3.4. Data Analysis Tool

Data were analyzed using SPSS AMOS version 26, incorporating univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistical techniques. These softwares are instrumental in performing the necessary statistical analyses to evaluate the relationship between human capital and cooperative performance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Assessment of normality

The assessment of normality involves evaluating the skewness and kurtosis of the data, which are indicators of the symmetry and tail-heaviness (or lightness) of the distribution compared to a normal distribution. Skewness measures the asymmetry of the data around the central point, where a perfectly symmetrical data set has a skewness of zero. Positive skewness indicates a distribution with a long tail on the right, while negative skewness indicates a long tail on the left. Kurtosis, on the other hand, reflects the presence of heavy or light tails compared to a normal distribution. High kurtosis suggests heavy tails, which means a higher likelihood of extreme values, while low kurtosis suggests light tails with fewer extreme values. In this study, education, training, and awareness are used as proxies for human capital. To assess the performance of coffee cooperatives, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) model is employed. This model provides a comprehensive framework by integrating various performance metrics, including: (1) Non-financial performance: This includes aspects such as customer satisfaction, internal processes, and innovation. (2) Financial performance: Evaluates the cooperatives' profitability, revenue growth, and cost management. (3) Employee satisfaction: Focuses on the overall well-being, motivation, and productivity of cooperative members. The analysis explores how human capital, represented by these proxies, impacts both the financial and non-financial performance of the coffee cooperatives. The results of the normality test showed acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis, indicating that the data is sufficiently normal for further statistical analysis.

Table 1: Normality test

Variable	Min	Max	Skew	c.r.	kurtosis	c.r.
NONFIN_Mean	2.333	5.000	.054	.434	-.339	-1.356
FIN_Mean	2.333	5.000	-.044	-.352	-.683	-3.136
EMSAT_Mean	2.000	5.000	.051	.407	-.491	-1.968
EDU_Mean	1.000	5.000	-.163	-6.109	.101	.403
TRAN_Mean	1.000	5.000	-.159	-7.681	.674	3.900
AW_Mean	1.000	5.000	-.110	-5.687	.671	3.888
Multivariate					3.672	4.679

Note: NONFIN=non financial performance; FIN= financial performance; EMSAT= employee satisfaction; EDU= education; TRAN=training and AW=awareness

To also display an even univariate distribution, the asymmetry and kurtosis criteria have been set between -2 and +2. Because the skewness and kurtosis measurements fell between 2 and +2, and between 7 and +7, respectively, the data is considered normal.

4.2. Data Reliability

To assess the reliability of the data and determine whether factor analysis was appropriate, the research team conducted a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test for sampling adequacy. The KMO test evaluates whether the data set is suitable for factor analysis by examining the proportion of variance among variables that might be common variance. A higher KMO value (closer to 1) indicates that the data is well-suited for factor analysis. In addition to the KMO test, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was used to test the null hypothesis that the variables in the population correlation matrix are uncorrelated. By rejecting this null hypothesis, Bartlett's test

confirms that there is sufficient correlation among the variables to justify factor analysis. The combination of both tests ensured the robustness and reliability of the data for further analysis.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.792
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	690.440
	Df	15
	Sig.	.000

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was determined to be 0.792, which falls within the acceptable range of 0.6 to 1. This value indicates that the data set is sufficiently compact and that factor analysis is appropriate for identifying reliable and distinct determinants. A KMO value greater than 0.5 suggests that the sample is adequate for conducting factor analysis. The analysis focused on two components of the latent variable related to performance appraisal: technique and the human capital plan. The KMO test indicated that the data exhibited sphericity, a prerequisite for factor analysis, as confirmed by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. Bartlett's test coefficient of 0.792 supported the KMO findings, demonstrating that the data were suitable for factor analysis. The explained total variation for these components is presented in the table below.

Table 3: Cumulative Explained Variance

module sum	Initial Eigenvalues			Squared Loadings Extraction Total			Squared Loadings Rotation Total			
	% of discrepancy	collective %	Sum	% of inconsistency	collective %	Sum	% of discrepancy	Total %		
Aspect	1	2.990	49.829	49.829	2.990	49.829	49.829	2.243	37.381	37.381
	2	1.044	17.407	67.236	1.044	17.407	67.236	1.791	29.855	67.236
	3	.623	10.379	77.615						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

The Total Variance Explained was determined to be 67.236% using Varimax rotation and Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Seven factors were identified with initial Eigenvalues greater than 1, indicating their significance and relevance as proxies for future research. The total variance of 67.236% suggests that these seven components collectively account for 67.236% of the variance in the dependent variable's behavior. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to test and validate the identified components based on their underlying structure and observed correlations between variables. This analysis allows researchers to confirm hypotheses related to the factor structure and ensure the robustness of the identified components (Luong & Flake, 2022).

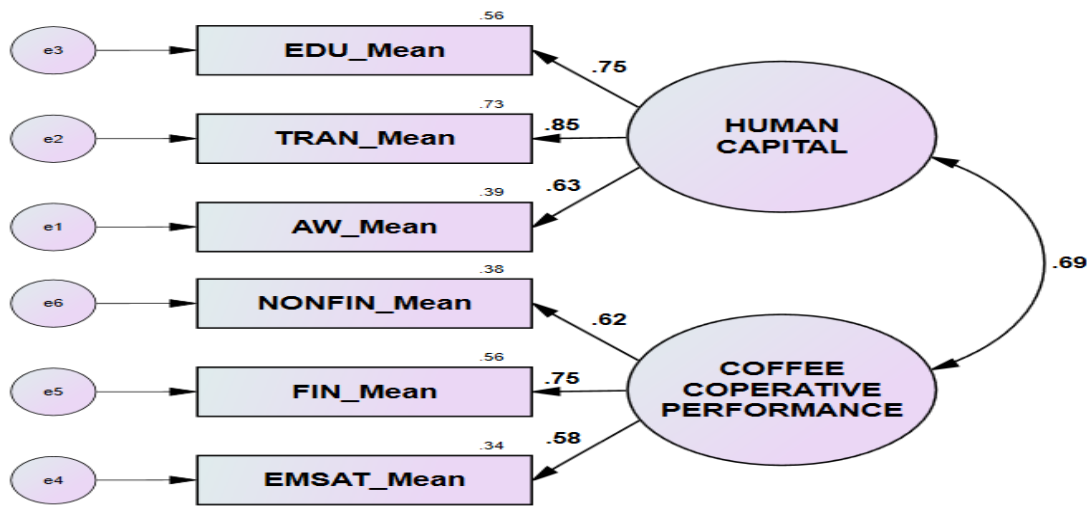


Figure 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Note: NONFIN=non financial performance; FIN= financial performance; EMSAT= employee satisfaction; EDU= education; TRAN=training and AW=awareness

The CFA results in Table 4 indicate a correlation between human capital (H1) and coffee cooperatives. The estimated covariance of 0.122 suggests a relationship close to a normally distributed random variable, with a standard error of 0.018. Any critical ratio exceeding 1.96 (such as 6.647) is considered significant, assuming the “distribution” assumptions for the AMOS model hold. The standard error of the covariance is 0.017, and since the critical ratio exceeds 1.96 at the 0.05 significance level, the covariance between the variables is statistically significant.

Table 4: Covariances

		Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
Human Capital	<--> Coffee Cooperative Performance	.108	.016	6.647	***	H1

4.3. Discriminant Validity

The lack of significant correlations between indicators of concepts that theoretically should not be correlated provides evidence of discriminant validity. In practice, discriminant validity coefficients should be smaller in magnitude than convergent validity coefficients, as demonstrated by the data in the Table 5.

Table5: Validity for Discriminant issue

	Critical Ratio	Avg. Vari.Ex.	MSV	Max-R(H)	Human Capital	Coffee Cooperative Performance
Human Capital	0.737	0.589	0.582	0.779	0.769	
Coffee Cooperative Performance	0.729	0.681	0.569	0.741	0.711	0.759

Discriminant validity was confirmed as the square root of the AVE for Coffee Cooperatives Performance was higher than the absolute value of its correlations with other components. Additionally, the AVE for Coffee Cooperatives Performance exceeded the MSV, further demonstrating discriminant validity. No issues with convergent validity were found in the dataset.

4.4. Structural Equation Model

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a multivariate statistical technique used to examine structural relationships between measured variables and latent constructs. This method combines multiple regression analysis with factor analysis to explore the relationships between observed and unobserved variables.

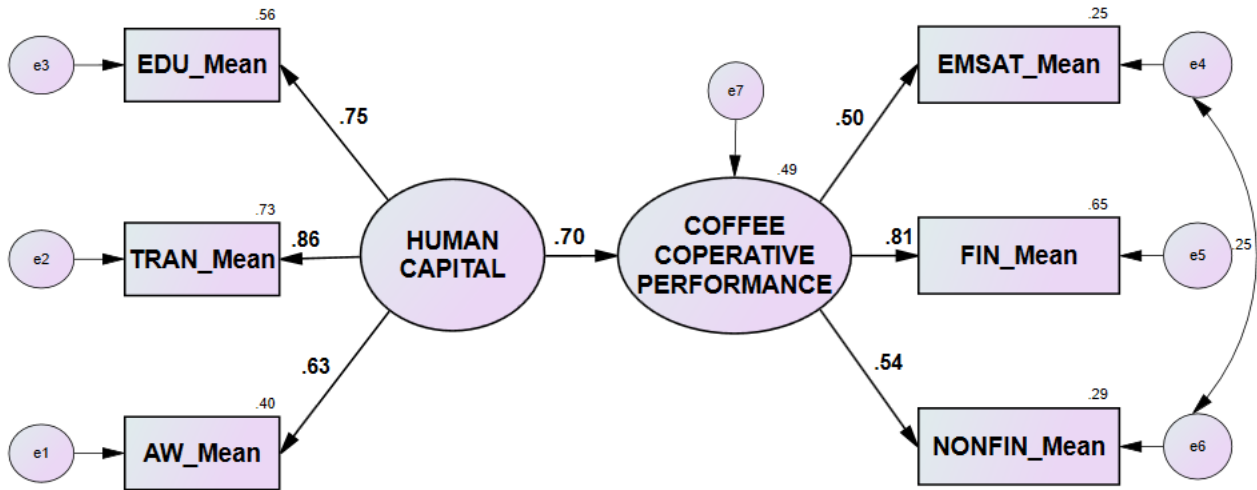


Figure 3: Structural equation model

Note: NONFIN= non-financial performance; FIN= financial performance; EMSAT= employee satisfaction; EDU= education; TRAN=training and AW=awareness

The factor loading represents the relationship between human capital and its observed items (proxies) and a factor. It indicates the amount of variance in the observed item that can be explained by the factor. Generally, a factor loading of 0.5 or higher suggests that the factor has adequately accounted for the variation in the variable. In the structural equation model (SEM), the performance of coffee cooperatives increases by 70% when human capital improves by one standard deviation, assuming other variables remain constant. Standardized regression weights were calculated for the data, showing that the 70% change in coffee cooperative performance corresponds to a one-unit change in human capital.

4.5. Model fit indices

A satisfactory model fit is shown by the CMIN/DF value of 2.774, which is below the value of 3, as per the findings displayed in the above table. The root mean square error of approximation is 0.068 less than 0.080, the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.982 more than 0.90, the goodness fit index (GFI) is 0.983 greater than 0.95, and the p value is 0.007. This leads to a good overall fit of the model. The number that matters in this case is 0.983, which is higher than 0.95 and shows that the researchers' suggested model differs from other models. This is the GFI for the default model. The amount of variation in the dependent variable that can be attributed to a change in the predictor variable equal to one standard deviation unit is represented by the standardised regression weights.

Table 6: Goodness of Fit (GOF) indices

Measurement Category	Fit Indices	Model Value
Chi-Square	CMIN	19.417
	P-Value	.007
	CMIN/DF	2.774
Absolute fit measurement	GFI	.983
	SRMR	.0229
	RMSEA	.068
Incremental fit measurement	CFI	.982
	IFI	.982
	RFI	.940
	TLI	.961
parsimony fit measure	PNFI	.454
	PCFI	.458

According to standardized regression weight measurements, a one-unit change in human capital resulted in a 70.3% change in the coffee cooperative's performance, measured in standard deviations. The beta weight, or regression coefficient for standardized data, was 70.3%. This means that the performance of coffee cooperatives typically increases by 70.3% when human capital improves by one standard deviation, assuming all other independent factors remain constant.

Table 7: Standardized Regression Weights

			Estimate
Coffee Cooperative Performance	<---	Human Capital	.703
Awareness	<---	Human Capital	.631
Training	<---	Human Capital	.856
Education	<---	Human Capital	.746
Employee satisfaction	<---	Coffee Cooperative Performance	.499
Financial Performance	<---	Coffee Cooperative Performance	.809
Non-Financial Performance	<---	Coffee Cooperative Performance	.541

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, the success of Ethiopian coffee cooperatives is significantly influenced by human capital competencies. The skills, experience, and knowledge of cooperative members play a critical role in enhancing creativity, productivity, and competitiveness in the global coffee market. Theoretical frameworks highlight the importance of human capital in fostering cooperative performance; however, empirical findings can sometimes be inconsistent, posing practical challenges in fully understanding this relationship. The study's findings are consistent with previous research by [AlQershi et al. \(2021\)](#), [Omer et al. \(2020\)](#), [Kant et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Czyżewski et al. \(2021\)](#).

To address the challenges and uncertainties surrounding the relationship between human capital and Ethiopian coffee cooperative performance, further research and empirical analysis are needed. Robust research methodologies, comprehensive data collection, theoretical frameworks, and stakeholder engagement can help clarify how human capital directly impacts cooperative outcomes. The study's findings align with the core assumptions of the Resource-Based View (RBV) and human capital theories.

5.2. Recommendations

Ethiopian coffee cooperatives should prioritize investments in human capital development by focusing on member education, training, and skill-building. Enhancing members' skills and knowledge will lead to improvements in creativity, productivity, and overall performance. Encouraging members to actively contribute their ideas and expertise can foster collaboration, innovation, and the exchange of best practices, all of which will strengthen cooperative performance. Additionally, building effective communication channels within cooperatives will enable the flow of information and the development of new ideas that drive growth.

Strengthening leadership and management within coffee cooperatives is also essential for long-term success. By investing in leadership development and training, cooperatives can improve decision-making processes and enhance organizational performance. Successful management, supported by strong leaders, is crucial for ensuring cooperatives' sustainable growth. Furthermore, establishing reliable partnerships with stakeholders across the coffee value chain, such as other cooperatives, government agencies, NGOs, and corporations, can facilitate market access, information sharing, and coordinated efforts that increase the cooperatives' reach and impact.

Finally, coffee cooperatives should regularly assess their performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of their human capital initiatives. Setting clear goals, monitoring progress, and making necessary adjustments will ensure continuous improvement. Cooperatives should also take advantage of supportive government policies and programs that promote market access, sustainable practices, and human capital development. Encouraging favorable legislation will help create a conducive environment for cooperative growth and productivity, contributing to their competitiveness and sustainability in the global coffee industry.

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8. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Human resource management (HRM) practices and quality of work-life (QWL): Analysis of Nigeria financial organisation

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Abstract

Effective management of human resource (HR) practices is key to enhancing employee quality of work-life and organizational productivity. This study examines the impact of HR practices on employee work quality in a Nigerian financial organization. A descriptive research design was employed to survey 127 randomly selected managers and employees. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between various HR practices and work-life quality. The findings reveal that favorable working conditions, welfare packages, fringe benefits, and flexible work hours positively influence employee work-life quality. Training, development, coaching, and mentoring also contribute significantly. Additionally, employee performance appraisals were found to have a strong positive effect on work-life quality. The study concludes that achieving organizational goals and enhancing employee satisfaction depend on the strategic implementation of HR practices, leading to improved performance without excessive effort.

Keywords: coaching and mentoring, employee motivation, employee relations, human resources practices, performance, training

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's organizations, effective human resource management is crucial for achieving corporate objectives. This highlights the importance of motivation and addressing individual needs within the organization efficiently. The success in customer satisfaction, profitability, and delivery of quality services and products is largely attributed to how well human resources are managed in a company. Human resource management practices are aimed at creating an effective organizational structure.

Numerous studies have shown that implementing high-performance work practices can significantly improve an organization's overall performance. These practices include thorough employee recruitment and selection processes, incentive programs, competitive compensation packages, robust performance management systems, employee involvement initiatives, and comprehensive training programs (Akinwale & Akerele, 2024). These practices can enhance the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) of both current and potential employees. They also serve to boost employee morale, increase motivation, reduce absenteeism, and improve retention of high-quality staff. Additionally, these practices can encourage underperforming employees to seek opportunities elsewhere, thereby maintaining a high-performing workforce (Martín-Alcázar, Ruiz-Martínez & Sánchez-Gardey, 2024).

Effective human resource management enhances employees' quality of work life by boosting productivity, which in turn contributes to the organization's revenue growth. The human resource management approach aims to create value for both the organization and its customers. In formulating and implementing a company's strategy, human resource management plays a vital role. Research by Hamadamin & Atan (2019) demonstrates that human resource practices are integral throughout an organization's lifecycle and are considered a key component of its overall strategy. The growing importance and influence of human resource practices in strategy development and execution have led to the inclusion of human resource managers in companies' decision-making processes (Alam & Dewi, 2024). This evolving role highlights how human resource management has become a strategic partner in organizational success, moving beyond its traditional administrative functions. By aligning human resource practices with business objectives, organizations can create a more engaged workforce, foster innovation, and maintain a competitive edge in the market.

Globally, in the recent business environment, it is widely acknowledged that personnel decisions are among the most critical in corporate settings. These decisions encompass a range of activities, including recruitment, job placement, ensuring the right fit for each position, employee promotion, motivation, and effective performance evaluation. However, even with meticulous recruitment processes, employees may underperform if they're not appropriately positioned within the organization. It's crucial to align an individual's skill set, knowledge, and capabilities with their role to ensure effective performance (Ferreira et al., 2024). Regardless of how innovative or strategic top management's decisions may be regarding business operations, products, or services, a company cannot progress if these decisions aren't aligned with human resource practices that effectively support the organization's goals (Bartram et al., 2024). Indeed, an organization's workforce stands out as one of its most valuable resources and a key source of competitive advantage (Olawale et al., 2024). This underscores the importance of integrating human resource strategy with overall business strategy to maximize organizational performance and achieve long-term success. By recognizing the centrality of human capital and implementing thoughtful, strategic human resource practices, companies can cultivate a workforce that not only executes current business objectives but also drives innovation and adaptability in an ever-changing business environment.

In Nigeria's current business environment, employee turnover has become a prevalent issue. It is not uncommon for individuals to change jobs multiple times within a short period, often moving between two or three companies within six months. This job-hopping trend is driven by employees seeking better working environments, including more favourable organizational cultures, structures, motivation systems, improved welfare packages, and more supportive work climates. Employee demotivation has become a widespread problem across virtually all sectors

of the Nigerian economy, leading to daily frustration among workers. Many organizations fail to recognize human resources as a strategic business partner, which exacerbates the issue. A growing trend among Nigerian firms is the outsourcing of core HR functions, particularly recruitment and selection processes. This practice is primarily motivated by cost-cutting measures, with companies hiring personnel through third-party agencies to whom the employees are directly accountable. This approach allows organizations to reduce expenses associated with hiring and personnel management, often resulting in the absence of pension benefits or comprehensive welfare packages. The rise of non-standard work arrangements, commonly referred to as “casual staff,” has become the norm in Nigeria. As a result, employees are experiencing deteriorating working conditions. Work-life balance is frequently overlooked by management, with workers often expected to work extended hours for minimal compensation. This situation highlights a significant shift in the Nigerian employment landscape, where short-term cost savings are prioritized over long-term employee well-being and organizational stability. The consequences of these practices may include reduced employee loyalty, decreased productivity, and potential long-term challenges in attracting and retaining skilled workers.

Even among those fortunate enough to secure proper employment, there’s widespread dissatisfaction with diminishing welfare packages. The situation is further exacerbated by the prevalent trend of downsizing across all economic sectors. Organizations, citing cost-cutting measures, are increasingly compromising job security, leading to a significant decline in the quality of work life. Recently, some financial companies have reduced their workforce, opting instead to hire less-skilled individuals who receive minimal training before being assigned to roles typically requiring highly skilled professionals. In Nigeria’s banking sector, call centre operations are often outsourced to recruitment agencies. These agencies hire individuals indirectly and assign them to major financial providers, offering low wages and minimal motivational incentives. This practice is reflected in the subpar performance of call centre staff, evidenced by their poor handling of customer issues and network-related problems. Many of these employees lack adequate training in customer service, often displaying rudeness and insufficient knowledge about the network provider’s products. Despite Nigeria boasting a large labour force, there’s a scarcity of skilled and talented individuals capable of performing specialized jobs effectively. The pursuit of high-performing employees is no longer driven by effective human resource management practices. The perception of an oversaturated labor market has led many employers to adopt a cavalier approach towards employee management, believing that there’s always a surplus of job seekers available. These practices represent significant challenges that many organizations have created for themselves by neglecting sound human resource management principles. Consequently, many of these companies are losing ground to their competitors. This situation highlights a critical need for a re-evaluation of human resource practices in Nigerian businesses. The short-term cost-saving measures currently in place may lead to long-term negative consequences, including decreased productivity, poor customer satisfaction, and ultimately, a loss of market share to more employee-focused competitors. However, there is a paucity of studies on the need to cascade the significance of human resources management practices and quality of work-life in Nigeria like this current study. To the best of the researcher’s knowledge, there is no study that investigated the practices of HRM and QWL as this present study. Against this backdrop, this study would like to demystify the influence of human capital development on the employee quality of work-life in Nigeria’s financial industry and empirically demonstrate how it has an impact on employee performance in the commitment delivery of their services. This study is driven by the following objectives:

- To examine how working conditions and a motivated work environment influence the quality of work-life among employees of financial firms in Nigeria.
- To investigate the impact of quality welfare packages, fringe benefits, and flexible working hours on the quality of work-life of employees in financial firms in Nigeria.
- To establish whether there is a significant impact of training and development, coaching, and mentoring on the quality of work-life of employees in financial firms in Nigeria.
- To examine the significance of employee relations and performance appraisal on the quality of work-life among employees of financial firms in Nigeria.

To achieve these objectives, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

- **Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between working conditions and a motivated work environment influencing the quality of work-life among employees of financial firms in Nigeria.
- **Ho2:** Quality welfare packages, fringe benefits, and flexible working hours have no significant impact on the quality of work-life of employees in financial firms in Nigeria.
- **Ho3:** There is no significant impact of training and development, coaching, and mentoring on the quality of work-life of employees in financial firms in Nigeria.
- **Ho4:** Employee relations and performance appraisal have no positive influence on the quality of work-life among employees of financial firms in Nigeria.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Resource-Based Theory

The resource-based view (RBV) of the firm has significantly shaped the study of human resource management. The foundations of this theory can be traced back to the works of scholars like Gerhart & Feng (2021) and Polyhart (2021), who emphasized the importance of resources and their impact on organizational outcomes. However, it was Barney (2021) who popularized the theory more widely. Originally emerging from the field of strategic management, the resource-based view was not initially connected to human resource management. Nevertheless, it has played a crucial role in the development of strategic human resource management. This is primarily because the RBV shifted the focus in strategy literature from external factors, such as industry position, to internal firm resources as sources of competitive advantage (Barney & Ketchen, 2021). The growing recognition of internal resources as key to competitive advantage has lent support to the argument that employees are strategically vital for achieving a firm's goals (Barney et al., 2021). The theory posits that for an organization to remain competitive and relevant in its industry, it must possess resources that are unique, valuable, and difficult for competitors to imitate or substitute. The core premise of the RBV is that to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, a firm must acquire and control resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable (or unique), and non-substitutable. Furthermore, the management of such firms must be prepared to effectively utilize and apply these resources (Beamish & Chakravarty, 2021). This perspective is also related to the concepts of a firm's dynamic capabilities

and core competencies, which contribute to enhancing the quality of work life for employees. By focusing on developing and leveraging unique internal resources, particularly human resources, organizations can create a more engaging and fulfilling work environment, thereby improving employee satisfaction and performance. The resource-based view (RBV) of the firm has influenced the study of human resource management in great measure. Retrospectively, the proponents of the resource-based view could be found in the works of (Gerhart & Feng, 2021; Polyhart, 2021), where they all emphasized the essence of resources and their consequences for organizational outcomes. However, the theory was more popularized by Barney (2021). The proponent of resource-based theory was from the field of strategy, otherwise called strategic management. The area of strategic human resource management was not related to a resource-based view but has largely been influential in its growth and development. This is mainly because the resource-based view changed its emphasis in the strategy literature to external variables, like industry position to internal firm resources as sources of competitive edge (Barney & Ketchen, 2021). The growing acceptance of internal resources as the basis of competitive advantage lends credibility to human resources' argument that employees are strategically significant to a firm's goal accomplishment (Barney et al., 2021). The theory holds that for the organization to be competitive and remain relevant in the industry the firm must have a resource that is not matchable by any other firm and not imitable. The central ideology of the theory is that for an organization to accomplish a sustainable competitive advantage, it must acquire and control valuable, rare, inimitable or unique and un-substitutable resources and capabilities and the management of such a firm must be ready to absorb and apply them (Beamish & Chakravarty, 2021). The view is in another perspective as the dynamic capability of a firm and core competence which elevates employee quality of work-life.

The relevance of the resource-based view (RBV) theory to this study lies in its ability to demonstrate how an organization's human resources can serve as a foundation for sustainable quality of work life and competitive advantage. When a company provides motivation to its employees that surpasses industry standards and fosters exceptional symbiotic employment relationships, it creates a rare and valuable environment that competitors find difficult to replicate. In such circumstances, the firm develops a sustainable competitive edge, potentially becoming an employer of choice within the industry. This attractive work environment can lead to reduced employee turnover intentions, as workers are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. Moreover, employees in such a supportive and motivating environment are likely to exhibit higher productivity levels. As they become more engaged and develop unique skills and experiences within the organization, these employees become increasingly difficult for competitors to imitate or replace. This application of the RBV theory highlights how investing in employee well-being and creating a superior quality of work life can transform human resources into a strategic asset. By nurturing a workforce that is not only satisfied but also highly skilled and deeply integrated into the organization's culture, companies can create a sustainable competitive advantage that is rooted in their human capital. Ultimately, this approach can lead to a virtuous cycle where improved quality of work life enhances employee performance, which in turn strengthens the organization's competitive position, further enabling it to invest in its workforce. This theory underpinned this study as resources are human being which needed to be carefully motivated and treasured to profit the organisation.

2.1.2. *Soft Theory of Human Resource Management (Harvard Model)*

The Harvard model, also known as the soft theory of human resource management, was developed by [Beer et al. \(1984\)](#) at Harvard University. This approach, rooted in human relations, emphasizes communication, teamwork, and leveraging individual skills ([Dubey et al., 2024](#)). It aims to unlock human potential through enhancing employee commitment, participation, and involvement. Research suggests that firms without strong employee commitment struggle to achieve competitive excellence ([Aust et al., 2024](#)).

The soft theory of human resource management recognizes the presence of diverse stakeholders within an organization, including shareholders, various workforce groups, government agencies, employees, unions, creditors, suppliers, and the broader community. It asserts that employees, like other stakeholders, significantly influence the firm's outcomes. The theory emphasizes that the interests of all these groups must be considered when formulating human resource management strategies and overall business strategies. Linked to the human relations movement of Elton Mayo, Herzberg, and McGregor, this theory is also known as developmental humanism ([Erdélyi, 2024](#)). It underscores the integration of human resource policies with business objectives, valuing the workforce as crucial assets essential for competitive advantage through their commitment, adaptability, high-quality skills, and productivity. Thus, this also resonates with this study appropriately.

2.2. Conceptual Framework

2.2.1. *Employee Motivation, Working Conditions and Quality of Work-life*

Motivating employees has become increasingly crucial in human resource management, as it directly impacts workforce morale and enhances their quality of work life ([Anggraini, 2024](#)). Motivated employees tend to display positive behaviours at work, leading to improved work-life quality and higher organizational performance ([Rahmawati & Oktaviannur, 2024](#)). According to [Abboh et al. \(2024\)](#), organizations can enhance employee quality of work life and cultivate favourable attitudes and behaviours by implementing motivational strategies derived from HRM practices. Key approaches for HRM practitioners to boost employee performance in corporate settings include enhancing skills, fostering motivation, creating a supportive work environment, and involving employees in decision-making processes. These strategies aim to steer employee behaviour in a positive direction, fostering a strong commitment to work and thereby increasing organizational performance.

Creating a positive work environment for employees is a foundational concept in Herzberg's two-factor theory, which discusses satisfiers and dissatisfiers ([Lee et al., 2022](#)), along with competing theories such as Theory X and Theory Y. Satisfiers, such as promotions, a supportive work environment, job nature, and social connections among colleagues, contribute positively to motivation. On the other hand, hygiene factors like company policies and salary are essential to prevent dissatisfaction; their absence can lead to demotivation. Theory X and Theory Y offer contrasting views on employee motivation. Theory X suggests that employees are inherently lazy and need supervision and external incentives to perform, while Theory Y posits that employees are self-motivated and thrive on job satisfaction, needing minimal supervision. Theory X managers prefer a strict approach with rewards and punishments, akin to the carrot-and-stick method, to influence behaviour. Conversely, Theory Y managers believe in fostering job satisfaction to inspire intrinsic motivation and encourage employees to excel independently.

These theories form the basis for different managerial styles, with Theory X emphasizing control, external motivation, and the use of rewards and punishments, whereas Theory Y promotes autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and employee satisfaction as drivers of performance.

2.2.2. Training and development, Coaching and Mentoring on employee Quality of Work life

Training is recognized as a strategic tool that shapes employees' behaviour and instils the right attitude towards performance. It addresses performance gaps by enhancing productivity within organizations. Training primarily targets employees or subordinates, whereas development focuses on management and corporate executives. Training is pivotal in creating a positive organizational impact, boosting productivity, and improving the quality of work life (Steeple, 2024). Jones and Smith (2022) underscore that training equips employees with the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities crucial for optimal workplace performance. Effective training and development, along with coaching and mentoring, are key factors in achieving maximum productivity and efficient workforce performance (Scandiffio et al., 2024). Scholars in strategic human resource management (SHRM) affirm that these practices significantly influence employee behaviour, enhance work-life quality, and ultimately impact organizational performance (Hovarth et al., 2024; Suravi, 2024).

Febrian and Solihin (2024) contend that the imperative for organizations to enhance the skills and knowledge of their workforce is crucial due to the escalating pace of technological advancement, globalization, and increasing customer expectations. In light of these factors, the central focus of training and development, coaching, and mentoring is to enhance employee quality, improve work-life quality, bolster organizational adaptability, foster diversity, stimulate creativity, and enhance dynamic capabilities. It is pertinent to highlight that these concepts are pertinent to objective three of this study, which explores the relationship between HRM practices and employee and organizational performance within Nigeria's financial industry. Moreover, they align with research hypothesis three and the resource-based theory outlined in this study.

2.2.3. Employee Relations, Performance Appraisal and Quality of Work life

Effective employee relations in the workplace significantly contribute to enhancing employees' quality of work life and driving robust performance in business organizations (Curzi, Fabbri, & Pistoresi, 2020). Performance appraisal, another cornerstone of human resource practices, involves systematically evaluating individual employees' performance against predefined standards within a specific timeframe. However, conducting appraisals without providing feedback is insufficient. The process of assessing employees' job performance and communicating this information to them is crucial for maximizing their potential and improving their quality of work life (Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024). Performance appraisal impacts various HR practices such as recruitment, selection, training, development, compensation, and employee relations. Studies show that performance appraisal influences salary increases, promotions, and training opportunities, significantly impacting employee job satisfaction and, consequently, their quality of work life (Ambilichu et al., 2024). Additionally, Pebble & Ambilichu (2024) argue that effective performance appraisal motivates employees to contribute meaningfully to the workplace by aligning dynamic work behaviours with realistic goals, providing constructive feedback, and conducting fair evaluations (Memom & Ghani, 2023). Furthermore, performance

appraisal serves as a tool for human resource management to address undesirable employee behaviours and foster positive and productive work behaviours.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between human resource management practices and employee quality of work life in financial organisation of Nigeria. This approach allows for simultaneous data collection from both employees and management at a single point in time. The cross-sectional design is chosen for its effectiveness in analysing population characteristics, exploring relationships between variables, and assessing the prevalence of specific factors. It enables the concurrent study of multiple outcomes and exposures, making it well-suited for investigating the complex interplay between HR practices and quality of work-life in the organizational context (Sedgwick, 2014).

3.2. Study Population

The research focused on the staff of financial organisation, with particular emphasis on managers and human resource professionals within the organization. Both the general employees and the management team of the financial firm constitute the study population. Consequently, the sample was drawn from this diverse group, encompassing both rank-and-file workers and leadership personnel of financial organisation. According to Ajala (2024), the total population size for this study is 6,250 individuals.

3.3. Sample Technique and Sample Size

This study employs probability sampling techniques. The choice of this approach is driven by the desire to ensure an unbiased representation of all elements and characteristics within the financial organization (Bell et al., 2022). To determine the sample size, the research utilizes the formula developed by Yamane (1967), which remains a relevant and widely accepted technique for sample size calculation. This method has stood the test of time, proving to be an objective and reliable tool for determining accurate and practical sample sizes. The formula provides a statistical basis for sample size determination, eliminating subjective judgments in the process.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N \cdot e^2}$$

Where n = Required Sample Size

N = Element of population in this study which stands at 6250

e = degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion or margin of error or confidence interval (7% Or 0.07)

$$n = \frac{6250}{1+6250 \cdot 0.07^2} \approx 204$$

3.4. Data Analysis Strategy

For this study, multiple linear regression serves as the primary statistical technique for data analysis. This method is chosen due to the presence of multiple variables of interest in the research. Multiple regression analysis is particularly suited for evaluating relationships between

several variables simultaneously. It quantifies the associations between two or more variables, enabling valuable predictions about future values of the variables under investigation. The rationale for using multiple regression is that two variables was selected for each of the hypothesis and that is why it is suitable to use it on each of the hypothesis. The regression model estimates the value of the dependent variable (Y) (Quality of Work life) based on the values of one or more independent variables (X) (Plonsky & Ghanbar, 2018). The selection of regression analysis is justified by its robust capability to generate reliable predictions and support informed decision-making.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the respondents' demographic profile, including gender, age, marital status, education, work experience, annual salary, job position, and department. From 204 questionnaires distributed to Financial organisation employees, 127 (62.3%) were returned and deemed valid for analysis. The remaining 77 (37.7%) were excluded due to response errors, damage, or unclear answers.

Table 1. Employees and Human Resource Management Practices Demographic Characteristics

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex			Position/Hierarchy		
Male	74	53.8	Management Trainee	27	21.3
Female	53	41.7	Middle-level Managers	74	58.3
Education			Senior Managers	26	20.5
ND/HND	8	6.3	Work Experience (Years)		
Bachelors	58	45.7	1-5	20	15.7
Masters	50	39.4	5-10	40	31.5
Professionals	11	8.7	10-15	44	34.6
Age			15-20	20	15.7
22 – 25 years	21	16.5	20 above	3	2.4
25 – 30 years	49	38.6	Department/Unit		
30 – 35 years	53	41.7	Brand Management	4	1.6
35 – 40 years	3	2.4	Technical Training	4	1.6
Marital Status			Revenue Assurance	13	10.2
Single	31	24.4	Customer Experience	10	7.9
Married	91	71.7	Human Resources	10	7.9
Separated/Divorced	45	14.5	Finance & Planning	3	2.4
Income Status (Naira)			IT/IS	45	35.4
< 2 million	8	6.3	Corporate Treasury	6	4.7
2- 4 million	15	11.8	Corporate Marketing	5	2.0
4 – 7million	39	30.7	Talent/Career Mgt	9	7.1
7 – 10 million	43	33.9	Attraction/Recruitment	4	3.1
10 million above	22	17.3	& Reward		
			Customer Billing	11	8.7
			Network Service/	3	1.2
			Network Access optimization		

Source: Field Survey, 2024 NB: n = 127 IT/IS (Information Technology/Information

4.1. Test of Hypotheses: Analysis of Data in Line Research Hypotheses

The analysis is conducted and categorised in two parts, both null hypotheses and alternate hypotheses were concurrently tested together to make a valid conclusion about

Hypothesis One

1. Ho1: There is no significant relationship between working conditions and motivated work environment influencing the quality of work-life employees

of financial firm in Nigeria

Table 2. Data Evaluation for Hypothesis One

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Constant	1.855							
Motivated Work Environment	.220	.217	2.619	.010	.434	.189	14.413	.000
Work Condition	.409	.331	3.989	.000				

Source: Field Survey: 2024. Dependent Variable: Quality of Work life (P < 0.05)

Table 2 presents a multiple regression analysis of the first research hypothesis, examining the relationship between work motivation, workplace conditions, and employee quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria. The key findings are R = 43.4%, indicating a moderate relationship between the variables. R² = 18.9%, suggesting that work motivation and workplace conditions account for 18.9% of the variation in employee quality of work-life. ANOVA results show a significant relationship (p < 0.05) between the variables. Individual variable analysis; work motivation: Weak relationship with quality of work-life (b = 0.217, p = 0.10), not statistically significant. Workplace conditions: Significant relationship with quality of work-life (b = 0.331, p = 0.00). Regression equation: Quality of work-life = 1.855 + 0.220 (motivate work environment) + 0.409 (work condition). In conclusion, the analysis supports a significant relationship between motivated work environment, working conditions, and quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria, with workplace conditions showing a stronger individual influence than work motivation.

Hypothesis Two

Ho2: Quality welfare package, fringe benefits and flexible working hours have no significant impact on the quality of work-life employees of financial firm in Nigeria

Table 3: Data Evaluation for Hypothesis Two

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Constant	4.103							
Fringe Benefits	.178	.222	2.467	.045	.507	.694	6.448	.002
Flexible Work-Hours	.128	.182	2.071	.040				
Quality Welfare	.150	.208	2.365	.020				

Source: Field Survey: 2024. Dependent Variable: Quality of Work life *P < 0.05, N = 127

Table 3 analyses the relationship between fringe benefits, flexible work hours, quality welfare packages, and employee quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria. It shows the following key findings, R = 50.7%, indicating a moderate combined relationship between the variables. R² = 69.4%, suggesting that the three independent variables account for 69.4% of the variation in employee quality of work-life. Standard error of estimate: 0.875, and ANOVA results: p = .002 (< 0.05), indicating statistical significance. On the individual variable analysis; fringe benefits have a weak but significant relationship (b = 0.222, p = 0.045), flexible work hours a weak but significant relationship (b = 0.182, p = 0.040), and quality welfare package a weak but significant relationship (b = 0.208, p = 0.02). The regression equation shows that quality of work-life = 4.103 + 0.178 (fringe benefits) + 0.128 (flexible work hours) + 0.150 (quality welfare package). In conclusion, the analysis supports rejecting the null hypothesis, indicating that quality welfare packages, fringe benefits, and flexible working hours have a positive significant impact on employee quality of work-life in financial organisation in Nigeria.

While the individual relationships are weak, they are statistically significant, and collectively, these factors explain a substantial portion of the variation in employee quality of work-life.

Hypothesis Three

Ho3: There is no significant impact of training and development, coaching and mentoring on the quality of work-life employees of financial organisation in Nigeria

Table 4. Data Evaluation for Hypothesis Three

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F-Value	P-Value
Constant	3.945								
Training & Dev.	.036	.058	0.600	.550	.575	.541	.427	10.175	.000
Coaching & Mentoring	.276	.344	3.548	.001					

Source: Field Survey: 2024. Dependent Variable: Quality of Work life *P < 0.05, N = 127

Table 4 presents an analysis of the study's third hypothesis, showing the relationship between training and development, coaching and mentoring, and organizational performance. The analysis reveals a moderate correlation of 57.5% between these factors and employee quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria. The R-square value of 54.1% indicates that training and development, coaching and mentoring collectively account for 54.1% of the variation in employee quality of work-life. The adjusted R-square of 42.7% reflects the degree of variability when accounting for the number of variables in the regression model. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) yields an F-statistic of $F(126, 7.381) = 61.409$, which is statistically significant at $p < 0.00$. This suggests a good model fit. Given that the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. This provides evidence that training and development, coaching and mentoring significantly impact the quality of work-life for employees in the Nigerian Financial firm.

The coefficients of variation in Table 4 describe the individual relationships between each factor and quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria. While all relationships are positive, they vary in strength. Training and development show a weak, non-significant relationship of 5.8% ($p > 0.05$). Coaching and mentoring demonstrate a stronger, albeit still weak, correlation of 34.4%, which is significant at the 1% level. The linear regression equation derived from this analysis is: $Y(\text{organizational performance}) = 3.945 + 0.036(\text{training and development}) + 0.276(\text{coaching and mentoring})$. In conclusion, this study finds that training and development, coaching and mentoring have a significant impact on the quality of work-life for employees in the Nigerian Financial firm, though the individual effects of these factors vary in strength and significance.

Hypothesis Four

Ho4: Employees' relations and performance appraisal have no positive influence on the quality of work-life among employees of financial firm in Nigeria.

Table 5. Data Evaluation for Hypothesis Four

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	ΔR ²	F-Value	P-Value
Constant	3.259								
Employee Relations	.279	.334	4.100	.000	.502	.252	.240	20.849	.000
Performance Appraisal	.169	.278	3.527	.001					

Source: Field Survey: 2024. Dependent Variable: Quality of Work life *P < 0.05, N = 127

Table 5 presents the analysis for testing the fourth hypothesis of this study. The model summary indicates a 50.2% correlation (R) among employee relations, performance appraisal, and quality of work-life, suggesting a moderate relationship between these variables. This implies that employee relations and performance appraisal are predictors of the quality of work-life in financial organisation in Nigeria. The R-square value of 25.2% represents the proportion of variability in the quality of work-life explained by this model for financial organisation in Nigeria. The adjusted R-square of 24% accounts for the number of variables in the regression model. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) in Table 5 shows a significant model with $F(126, 13.175) = 20.849$ and a p-value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Based on the decision rule to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) when $p < 0.05$, the study accepts the alternative hypothesis (H_1). This leads to the conclusion that there is a significant relationship between employee relations, performance appraisal, and organizational performance.

The coefficient of variations in Table 5 provides important information through the beta standard coefficients. These standardized regression coefficients show the relationship strength between each independent variable and the dependent variable. Employee relations have a weak but highly significant relationship with quality of work-life, with a coefficient of 33.4% ($p = 0.00$). Performance appraisal also shows a weak but significant relationship with organizational performance, with a coefficient of 27.8% ($p = 0.01$). The t-statistics and significance levels (0.00 and 0.01 respectively) indicate a good model fit. Based on these results, the study concludes that there is a significant relationship between employee relations, performance appraisal, and quality of work-life, although the individual relationships are relatively weak.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

This research has yielded positive significant results across all proposed hypotheses. The findings demonstrate a strong connection between a motivated work environment, working conditions, and quality of work-life. In this study, employee quality of work-life encompasses performance, productivity, commitment, and customer satisfaction. The research indicates that a motivated work environment and favourable working conditions are strong predictors of enhanced quality of work-life for financial organisation in Nigeria employees. This aligns with [Abboh et al.'s \(2024\)](#) findings, which emphasized the importance of fostering positive work attitudes and behaviours to improve employee quality of work-life. Additionally, [Rahmawati and Oktaviannur \(2024\)](#) found that motivation catalyses better workplace performance and positive work behaviour, ultimately leading to improved organizational performance.

Another key finding reveals that quality welfare packages, fringe benefits, and flexible working hours positively impact the overall quality of work-life. Prioritizing fringe benefits in HR practices leads to increased employee commitment to organizational goals. Flexible working hours contribute to improved work-life balance, allowing employees to better manage their personal and professional lives. While the correlation between quality welfare packages and

performance is weak, it has still contributed to improved performance at financial organisation in Nigeria. These findings align with Cheese's (2020) study on UK firms, which highlighted the link between flexible work practices and organizational performance.

The third hypothesis confirms that training and development, as well as coaching and mentoring, positively influence the quality of work-life at financial organisation in Nigeria. These practices enhance employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities, while also supporting succession planning. This corroborates Horvath et al.'s (2024) research, which found that various HR practices, including training and development, significantly affect workforce quality of work-life and productivity.

The final hypothesis of this study demonstrates a significant relationship between employee relations, performance appraisal, and quality of work-life. This finding highlights how productive interactions among management, supervisors, and employees can enhance the quality of work-life and foster productive behaviour within an organization. The study reveals that financial organisation in Nigeria's performance appraisal system is perceived as equitable by its employees, suggesting an absence of bias in the evaluation process. This fair appraisal system serves as a tool for employees to identify areas for improvement in their work, potentially leading to increased productivity and, consequently, improved organizational performance. These results align with the findings of Pepple and Ambilichu (2024), who assert that performance appraisals can motivate employees to make meaningful workplace contributions. Their study emphasizes how appraisals can effectively align dynamic work behaviours with organizational objectives by providing constructive feedback and fair evaluations. In essence, this research underscores the importance of maintaining positive employee relations and implementing fair performance appraisal systems as key factors in enhancing the quality of work-life and overall organizational effectiveness.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has yielded positive findings regarding the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on organizational performance in Nigeria's financial sector, specifically focusing on financial organisation in Nigeria. The results highlight the strategic importance of certain HRM elements in enhancing organizational performance. The research demonstrates that financial organisation in Nigeria effectively motivates its staff and cultivates a high-performance culture to boost productivity. It also reveals that cordial superior-subordinate relationships contribute significantly to the organization's high performance. The analysis identifies several HR practices that drive high employee performance, including work motivation, fringe benefits, performance appraisal, training and development, coaching and mentoring, employee relationships, work-life balance, and quality welfare packages. While these factors generally promote outstanding performance, their absence may lead to dissatisfaction. Notably, even though management has implemented these practices, some instances showed only weak correlations with performance. The study concludes that achieving organizational goals and objectives depends on implementing a combination of strategic HRM practices that enhance employee satisfaction and commitment. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends addressing human capital development and investment at both micro and macro levels within the organization.

To foster a sustainable quality of work-life, the study proposes the following recommendations:

1. Design equitable remuneration practices, including competitive compensation and variable payment plans, to stimulate outstanding performance and maintain employee commitment.
2. Implement policies that promote autonomy and control, as these are key elements of job content and context, contributing to the quality of work-life.
3. Adopt diverse and effective work motivation strategies to encourage commitment and high-standard performance.
4. Provide a more conducive workplace environment to enhance job performance.
5. Develop and implement employee-centred policies that balance effective motivation with organizational productivity.

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8. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Awareness and practice of chat generative pre-trained transformers: a new language model artificial intelligence in higher institutions: The Case of Ambo University EFL Instructors

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Abstract

The introduction of ChatGPT has caused a significant upheaval in the education sector. It is altering the method by which educators obtain information for scholarly and investigative endeavors. This study aimed at exploring awareness and practice of Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer: New Language Model Artificial Intelligence in Higher Institutions: The Case of Ambo University EFL Instructors. Sixteen instructors of English Language and Literature at Ambo University were subjects of the study. Questionnaires and interviews were used as data-gathering instruments. Both probability and nonprobability sampling techniques, simple random sampling and availability sampling, were used in order to collect the necessary data. The collected data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings of this study indicated that EFL instructors were not familiar with ChatGPT, a new language model in English language teaching. The study also showed that EFL instructors' practice of ChatGPT was low due to a lack of familiarity with it. Challenges such as lack of awareness about ChatGPT, lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities, lack of technology-related resources, lack of personalization, and lack of time to use ChatGPT in the language classroom affected their use of ChatGPT in their EFL classroom. Therefore, effective integration of ChatGPT technology will likely require on-going professional development and a collaborative approach between teachers, administrators, and educational technology experts.

Keywords: Awareness, chat generative, language model, artificial intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become increasingly prevalent in the field of language learning and teaching in this time of Education 4.0. Education 4.0, also known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution in Education, refers to the emerging trends and transformations in the education sector that are driven by the rapid advancements in technology and the evolving needs of 21st-century learners and the workforce (Puncreobutr, 2016). AI plays a crucial role in the realization of the Fourth Industrial Revolution in education vision (Joonhyeong et al., 2023). Furthermore, the application of AI in education in general and English language teaching got greater attention around the world, especially in developed countries. Huan et al. (2024) used CiteSpace visual analysis software and analyzed countries concerned with AI around the world. Accordingly, they found that the USA, China, and the UK are the leading countries using AI. By integrating AI technologies into language teaching, instructors can enhance the learning experience, improve language proficiency outcomes, and better prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century global workforce, where strong English communication skills are increasingly essential (Li et al., 2024). This technology has the ability to comprehend and produce writing that is similar to that of a person, revolutionizing a wide range of applications in diverse industries. Fundamentally, Chat GPT is an advanced language model that processes and produces text-based responses by utilizing deep learning methods. Its capacity to converse, comprehend context, and generate well-reasoned, contextually appropriate responses distinguishes it from earlier versions. Chat GPT is an adaptable tool for a variety of purposes since it can easily understand linguistic nuances.

There are different types of AI in language teaching. Some of the AI tools that can be utilized are intelligent language tutoring systems, automated language assessment, intelligent language learning assistants, adaptive language learning platforms, intelligent language generation, speech recognition and pronunciation feedback, and multilingual machine translation. To begin with, intelligent language tutoring systems provide personalized, adaptive language instruction to students. These systems use natural language processing and machine learning algorithms to assess a student's proficiency, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and deliver customized feedback and lessons. For example, Chatbots help learners engage in conversational practice and provide real-time feedback (Sinatra et al., 2023). In terms of automated language assessment, AI-based systems can evaluate and provide feedback on language proficiency, such as writing, speaking, and listening skills. This can help teachers save time and provide a more frequent and consistent assessment of student progress. In addition to this, intelligent language learning assistants, as AI-powered virtual assistants, can also support language learners by answering questions, providing translations, and offering suggestions for vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation practice. These assistants can be integrated into language learning apps, websites, or even smart devices to provide on-demand support (Dizon, 2023). The Adaptive Language Learning Platform is also another AI in language teaching. This is used to dynamically adjust the difficulty, content, and pace of language learning materials based on a student's performance and progress. It also personalizes the learning experience, recommends new content, and provides targeted practice exercises to help students improve their language skills (Mukhamadiyeva & Hernández-Torrano, 2024). Another AI technology is intelligent language generation. This can be used to generate realistic, grammatically correct language content, such as news articles, social media posts, or even creative writing. This technology can be leveraged to create authentic language samples for language learners to practice with or to generate personalized language exercises and assessments. Chat Generative Pre-Trained

Transformer (Chat GPT) is a new form of AI language model developed by Anthropic, a leading AI research company, and OpenAI. It was publicly released in November 2022. In 2022, OpenAI introduced ChatGenerative Pre-trained Transformer (ChatGPT) (OpenAI, 2022). This Chatbot, which is based on artificial intelligence (AI), underwent intensive training using datasets totaling 570 terabytes (Tan et al., 2023). Its other name is Chat GPT. It represents a significant breakthrough in the field of artificial intelligence (AI). Chat GPT is a major advancement in AI-driven conversational capabilities. When Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (ChatGPT) was introduced on November 30, 2022, it caused a huge stir around the world. Surprisingly, in just two months, the network added over 100 million active users worldwide, a rate that was far quicker than previous platform improvements. Starting from its introduction, it has gained significant attention and widespread use due to its impressive capabilities in natural language processing and generation (Fahim, 2024). A wide range of enterprises, academic institutions, law firms, and publishing houses were among the users, all of whom have begun to take advantage of the technology's potential (Shabsigh & Boukherouaa, 2023). Its adaptability and capacity to produce writing that resembles that of a human have allowed it to have a significant effect quickly (Tseng et al., 2023). Its characteristics and adaptability have made it extremely popular; by the beginning of 2023, there will be 100 million active users per month (Wu et al., 2023).

Almost every aspect of life, including education, has been greatly impacted by ChatGPT (George & George, 2023; Kalla et al., 2023; Raza, 2023). Of all the educational degrees, higher education seems to be the most widely utilized. It is used for a variety of tasks by both university instructors and students, including coming up with new ideas, writing tasks and assignments, summarizing, creating multiple-choice questions and their answers, creating PowerPoint presentations, providing feedback on written assignments, and creating course outlines (Lo, 2023). It can also help to increase the quality of work and save time in this way (Huang et al., 2021). It does not, however, come without certain worries and difficulties.

Various studies showed that the use of ChtaGPT in language teaching has been receiving great attention nowadays since it has the capacity to redefine traditional language teaching paradigms (Pavlik, 2022). Huan et al. (2024) used CiteSapce visual analysis software and analyzed countries concerned with AL around the world. Accordingly, they found that the USA, China, and the UK are the leading countries using AI. This technology has the ability to comprehend and produce writing that is similar to that of a person, revolutionizing a wide range of applications in diverse industries. Fundamentally, Chat GPT is an advanced language model that processes and produces text-based responses by utilizing deep learning methods. Its capacity to converse, comprehend context, and generate well-reasoned, contextually appropriate responses distinguishes it from earlier versions. Chat GPT is an adaptable tool for a variety of purposes since it can easily understand linguistic nuances.

One of the century's most important innovations has been identified as the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education (Becker et al., 2018). Though the field of AI in education has grown quickly, little is known about AI by the EFL instructors in teaching English based on the researcher's personal experiences. Even though many study findings appreciated it for giving immediate feedback to assist students, Limna et al.'s (2023) study in Thai found that ChatPGT reduced students' daily routine and responsibilities. In a similar way, Mhlanga's (2023) study revealed that students might delegate their jobs to ChatGPT because it rapidly generates huge texts. Among the 60 articles reviewed by Sallam (2023), several errors were found, such as

plagiarism, incorrect text generation, and wrong citations. However, [Halleem et al. \(2022\)](#) advised that scholars should maximize advantages and minimize weaknesses.

Since its emergence in 2022, ChatGPT has helped in every sector. Nevertheless, its impacts are not known, and studies were not conducted on its impacts in Ethiopia. Unlike other AI tools, ChatGPT operates on diverse text-based requests. Similarly, according to Roumeliotis and [Tselikas \(2023\)](#), the aim of designing this system was to improve interactive and dynamic interactions by offering responses that are both engaging and contextually appropriate.

The use of ChatGPT in Ethiopian higher education has also been rising. Its use and influence on higher education have been recognized by numerous studies ([Iftikhar et al., 2024](#); [Kanwal et al., 2023](#); [Raza, 2023](#)). From the experiences of the researchers in this study, although ChatGPT is not formally used in an academic setting, Ethiopian academic communities do use this artificial intelligence software for their learning. According to [Kanwal et al. \(2023\)](#), many university instructors thought it might have a favorable effect on the process of teaching and learning. For instance, there is a positive association between its use and perceived academic success, according to a correlational study conducted on Pakistani postgraduate STEM students ([Khan et al., 2024](#)).

In local contexts, [Subaveerapandiyan et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted a study on student satisfaction with artificial intelligence Chatbots in Ethiopian academia. Their study showed that students from different regions used chatbots for research purposes. [Shumiye \(2024\)](#) conducted a study on the implementation of artificial intelligence programs in STEM education: Cases of the Ethiopia STEM Center. His study indicated that instructors saw notable gains in their students' performance, particularly in the areas of critical thinking and sophisticated problem-solving. One important aspect is AI's capacity to offer real-time feedback and modify course materials based on students' success.

There are a number of issues and problems with ChatGPT, including over-reliance, the rise in plagiarism, the creation of phony and unauthentic data, and the deterioration of writing abilities. As a result, numerous scholars have advocated for the creation and execution of appropriate laws and moral guidelines in order to stop its improper usage ([Zeb et al., 2024](#)). The goal of this study was to investigate higher education instructors' awareness and practice of AI-generated information, or ChatGPT, in teaching English.

The objectives of this study were to explore instructors' awareness about ChatGPT in teaching English and to investigate their practice of ChatGPT in teaching English. It also investigated the challenges of AI-generated information, or ChatGPT, in teaching English.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Design

A descriptive research design was used in this study to achieve the purpose of this study: awareness and practice of chat generative pre-trained transformers: a new language model for artificial intelligence in higher institutions: the case of Ambo University EFL instructors. To investigate English instructors' awareness, practices, and challenges of integrating ChatGPT into the English classroom, a descriptive research design would be well-suited, for it can be

used to investigate the multifaceted aspects of English instructors' awareness, practices, and challenges related to integrating ChatGPT in the classroom (Chu, 2024).

2.2. Subject and sampling techniques

Ambo University English teachers were the subjects of this study. Among the 34 EFL instructors, 16 were selected to fill out the questionnaires using a simple random sampling technique. Out of 16 instructors who filled questionnaires, five were selected for the interview using availability sampling techniques. This means both probability and nonprobability sampling were used in this study.

2.3. Instruments of data collection

In order to collect the necessary data for this study, questionnaires and interviews were used. Questionnaires were used to collect data about awareness, practice, and challenges of AI-generated information, or ChatGPT, in teaching English. An interview was conducted to collect data about instructors' awareness of ChatGPT in teaching English.

2.4. Methods of data analyses

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to achieve the purposes of this study. Data collected by questionnaires were analyzed using tables, frequencies, and percentages. However, interview data were analyzed qualitatively.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Table 1 presents data about instructors' familiarity with GenAI. Accordingly, all of the instructors were not familiar with alpha code, dall-e, midjourney, bard, synthesia, you chat, jukebox, stable diffusion, Claude, and chat sonic as new forms of a new language model of artificial intelligence. However, 75% of them were somewhat familiar with GP-4, and half (50%) of them were somewhat familiar with GrammarlyGo as new language models of AI. This implies that Ambo University instructors were not familiar with the GenAI tools of the new language model in English language teaching.

Table 1: Instructors' familiarity of GenAI tools

No	GenAI tools	Not at all familiar		somewhat familiar		highly familiar	
		F	P	F	P	F	P
1	Alpha code	16	100%				
2	DALL-E	16	100%				
3	ChatGPT	1	12.5%	14	75%	1	12.5%
4	Midjourney	16	100%				
5	Bard	16	100%				
6	ChatSonic	16	100%				
7	YouChat	16	100%				
8	JukeBox	16	100%				
9	GP-4	8	50%	4	25%	4	25%

10	Stable Diffusion	16	100%		
11	Claude	16	100%		
12	Synthesia	16	100%		
13	GrammarlyGo	8	50%	8	50%

Higher education can benefit from the specific and intentional usage of Chat GPT. Table 2 demonstrates participants' experience with Chat GPT technology. A noteworthy majority of participants (100%) reported using these tools for information searches. In a similar way, an equal percentage (100%) reported using them for paraphrasing self-learning. In addition, 6% of respondents said they had used Chat GPT products for conservation or general chats, while 47.5% said they were entertaining for content generation. Furthermore, 12.5% of the technology users utilized it for playing around with tools, and 95% used it for assignments. A 100% of them used it for paraphrasing, whereas 25% of them said they used it for leisure. Finally, 47.5% used Chat GPT products for other purposes.

Table 2: Instructors' use of Chat GPT

	Purposes of using Chat GPT	F	P
1	Information search	16	100%
2	Self-learning	16	100%
3	Conservation/General Chats	1	6%
4	Content generation	3	47.5%
5	Playing around with tool	2	12.5%
6	Assignment	7	95%
7	Paraphrasing	16	100%
8	leisure	4	25%
9	Other	3	47.5%

Table 3 shows the majority of the instructors (50%) showed a strong aversion to future use; 25% expressed their likely future utilization of Chat GPT. It is important to note that 6.25% of respondents did not send in their answers. Similar percentages, 6.25%, said unlikely, another 6.25% very unlikely, and further 6.25% of them they are not sure of their future use.

Table 3: Instructors' future use of ChatGPT

R.N	Items and alternatives	Responses	
	My future use of Chat GPT	F	P
A	Very likely	8	50%
B	Likely	4	25%
C	No response	1	6.25%
D	Unlikely	1	6.25%
E	Very unlikely	1	6.25%
F	Unsure	1	6.25%

F is frequency and P is percentage

Table 4 presents the challenges instructors face in integrating AI tools into their English classrooms. Accordingly, the majority of them (69%) strongly agreed that a lack of awareness about ChatGPT was a challenge they faced in integrating it into their English classrooms, and the rest (31%) agreed that a lack of awareness about ChatGPT was a challenge they faced

in integrating it into their English classrooms. In item 2, 81% of the instructors agreed that lack of time to use ChatGPT was one of the challenges they face in order to integrate it into their classrooms. About 19% strongly agreed that lack of time to use ChatGPT was one of the challenges they face in order to integrate it into their classrooms. Similarly, 81% of them strongly agreed that a lack of technology-related resources was one of the challenges they face in integrating ChatGPT into their classrooms. The remaining 19% of them agreed that a lack of technology-related resources was one of the challenges they face in integrating ChatGPT into their classrooms (see item 3). In item 4 concerning the item, 'because I struggle to ensure that student work is their own and not generated by AI tools like ChatGPT,' half of them (50%) agreed that they struggled to ensure that student work is their own and not generated by AI tools like ChatGPT. In the same item, similar percentages (13%) disagreed and strongly disagreed on how they struggled to ensure that student work is their own and not generated by AI tools like ChatGPT.

Table 4: Challenge of integrating AI tools into their classrooms

R. No	Challenges	1		2		3		4	
		F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
1	Lack of awareness about ChatGPT	-	-	-	-	5	31	11	69
2	Lack of time to use ChatGPT in language classroom	-	-	-	-	13	81	3	19
3	Lack of technology related resources	-	-	-	-	3	19	13	81
4	Because I struggle to ensure that student work is their own and not generated by AI tools like ChatGPT	-	-	2	13	8	50	2	13
5	Bias and Inaccuracies (AI language models can sometimes produce biased or inaccurate content, particularly when it comes to regional variations, idiomatic expressions, or cultural nuances in the English language)	5	31	4	25	4	25	3	19
6	Limitations in language complexity	7	44	3	19	3	19	3	19
7	Lack of personalization (not fully address the individual learning needs and proficiency levels of student)	3	19	6	38	13	81	5	31
8	Lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities	-	-	-	-	11	69	5	31

1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree 4= strongly agree

In item 5, which was intended to investigate instructors' agreement if language models produce biased or inaccurate contents, 31% of them disagreed that bias and inaccurate contents were not challenges they face in integrating ChatGPT into their classroom. The remaining percentages, 25%, 25%, and 19%, responded as disagreeing, agreeing, and strongly agreeing, respectively. In a similar way, the interview results support this result. Some of them reported that AI tools can generate fluent and grammatically correct text; EFL teachers have noted that the language produced may lack the nuance, creativity, and depth of expression that they expect from their students. This implies that bias and inaccuracy were not challenges they faced in integrating ChatGPT into their classroom. The majority of the instructors (44%) strongly disagreed that limitations in language complexities were not challenges instructors face in integrating ChatGPT into their English classroom. The same percentages, 19%, said disagree, agree, and strongly disagree (see item 6). In item 7, the majority of the respondents agreed that a lack of personalization was a challenge, while 38% disagreed that a lack of personalization was a challenge in integrating ChatGPT into their English classroom. The rest, 19% and 31%, responded as strongly agreeing and strongly disagreeing.

Most of the interviewees also reported that ChatGPT may not fully address the individual learning needs and proficiency levels of their diverse student populations. Finally, this study found that lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities was one of the challenges instructors face in integrating ChatGPT into their classroom. About 69% of them agreed, and 31% of them strongly agreed that there was a lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities (see item 8 in Table 4). This implies that a lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities can also be a barrier to effective implementation.

3.1.1. Analyses of interview

The main purpose of this study was to investigate awareness and practice of chat-generative pre-trained transformers: a new language model for artificial intelligence in higher institutions: the case of Ambo University EFL instructors. One of the aims of this study was to explore instructors' awareness of Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer as a new language model for artificial intelligence. Awareness in this study refers to the state of being conscious of or informed about Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer. Knowledge of the existence and capabilities of ChatGPT is one aspect of awareness. The other key aspect of ChatGPT is to uncover the ways it could be used by students appropriately and for academic dishonesty, and anticipating how it may affect teaching, learning, and assessment practices. Having direct experience using and experimenting with ChatGPT themselves is another aspect.

One of the aims of the interview was to explore instructors' understanding of the potential applications of AI in their teaching of English. First of all, they were asked whether they recognized the benefits of AI or not. All of them reported that they recognized the benefits of AI, but they did not practice it to enhance their language learning experience. In addition to this, they did not stay informed about the latest developments in AI. For instance, I 5 said, "I could not keep myself updated on the ongoing advancements in AI-powered language learning technologies and their potential impact on teaching practices since it is a new version of education." They were not aware of the role of AI in language learning. Additionally, they could not provide guidance on how to effectively utilize AI-powered tools and resources.

Interview results indicated that all of the instructors reported that integrating AI-powered tools and technologies enhanced learners' English language. However, they did not explore and incorporate appropriate AI-based applications into their teaching practices, such as using chatbots for conversational practice or adaptive learning platforms for personalized instruction. For instance, they can leverage AI for assessment and feedback by utilizing AI-powered automated assessment systems to provide timely and consistent feedback on students' language proficiency, writing, and speaking skills. For example, I 3 said, "I did not create any lesson plans and learning activities that leverage AI capabilities, such as using AI-generated language samples for grammar, vocabulary exercises, and AI for assessment and feedback.

The use of new technology requires collaboration with AI experts. Regarding this, data collected through interviews indicated that the instructors were asked whether they did not work with AI experts to explore new ways of integrating AI into English language teaching and provide feedback on the effectiveness of AI-powered tools. When teaching essay writing, instructors can use automated essay scoring as a new AI technology. This is an effective AI-powered tool to evaluate and provide feedback on student essays and written assignments. These systems use natural language processing and machine learning to assess the quality, structure, and content

of student writing (Zechner & Evanini, 2019). Still, none of the interviewed instructors use this technology in the essay writing classroom.

Awareness of AI practice also involves understanding its ethical and privacy concerns. Accordingly, all of the interview instructors were not aware of the ethical and privacy implications of using AI in language teaching and ensured that the implementation of AI-based technologies aligned with institutional policies and student data protection regulations. For the interview question “Do you know that information generated by AI should be cited like other sources?”, all of them reported that they thought the data or information taken from AI-powered or AI-generated texts should be cited like the materials taken from different sources.

There are some AI systems being used in teaching and education, such as intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), conversational agents (chatbots), adaptive learning platforms, automated essay scoring, intelligent content recommendation, virtual classroom assistants, and learning analytics and predictive modelling (Mukhamadiyeva & Hernández-Torrano, 2024; Zechner & Evanini, 2019). For instance, the following extracts were taken from their interview sounds:

I 2 said, “I haven’t heard about intelligent tutoring systems. I heard today how it can provide personalized, adaptive instruction to students; and that it helps to assess a student’s knowledge, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and provide customized feedback and learning materials.”

In addition to this, I 3 reported “adaptive learning platforms, automated essay scoring, which is new for me, and conversational agents that are AI-powered, which I have not practiced before. However, literature supports the idea that if teachers use these technologies in English language teaching, they can make easier ways of teaching. For example, conversational agents (chatbots) can answer questions, provide explanations, and even guide students through learning activities. In addition to this, chatbots can be used for academic advising, student support, and facilitating discussions in online courses (Subaveerapandiyane et al., 2024). Adaptive learning platforms use AI to dynamically adjust the content, difficulty, and pacing of learning materials based on a student’s performance and progress. Intelligent learning management systems (LMS) and adaptive e-learning platforms are examples of adaptive learning platforms (Mukhamadiyeva & Hernández-Torrano, 2024).

One of the interviewees was worried that ChatGPT would reduce students’ self-learning opportunities. He (I 4) said, “Some students over-rely on ChatGPT as an AI tool. Then they might miss out on important learning experiences. It may sometimes provide inaccurate information or not related culture.” The other instructor (I3) reported, “All of our students do not have access to technology, and their proficiencies in technology are not good enough. This affects our practice of using ChatGPT or other AI tools in language teaching.”

One of the interviewees worried about ChatGPT reduce students’ self-learning opportunities. He (I 4) said, “Some students’ over-reliance on ChatGPT as AI tool. Then they might miss out on important learning experiences. It may sometimes provide inaccurate information or not related culture.” Other instructor (I3) reported as “All of our students do not access to technology and they their proficiencies in technology not well enough. This affect our practice of ChatGPT or other AI tools practice in language teaching.”

The results of this study indicated that none of the instructors used AI tools in their lessons, using them as a starting point for further exploration, analysis, and critical thinking. This

might be because they were not aware of ChatGPT as a new technology in AI tools. Some EFL instructors are worried that over-reliance on AI-generated content may hinder students' language development. There are concerns that students may become too dependent on AI tools, reducing their own language production and practice opportunities. However, some teachers see potential in using AI tools to provide personalized feedback, scaffolding, and language practice for students.

Teachers feared that if students began utilizing ChatGPT for most of their writing assignments, their writing abilities would deteriorate. Even computers and the internet have presented problems, according to I3. I mean, if I give assignments to the students, who then copy, print, and turn them in to me, However, if I ask them to give me homework that is handwritten, at least they are reading it, even if they are copying.”

3.2. Discussions of Results

Most of the instructors were not only with ChatGP but also with other GenAI, namely alpha code, dall-e, midjourney, bard, synthesisia, you chat, jukebox, stable diffusion, Claude, and chat sonic, as a new form of a new language model of artificial intelligence. However, some of them were somewhat familiar with GP-4 and GrammarlyGo as new language models of AI. [Zahri et al. \(2023\)](#) also found that there were a few teachers who were still not very proficient in their general functions.

Even though many study findings appreciated it for giving immediate feedback to assist students, [Limna et al.'s \(2023\)](#) study in Thai found that ChatPGT reduced students' daily routine and responsibilities. In a similar way, [Mhlanga's \(2023\)](#) study revealed that students might delegate their jobs to ChatGPT because it rapidly generates huge texts. Among the 60 articles reviewed by [Sallam \(2023\)](#), several errors were found, such as plagiarism, incorrect text generation, and wrong citations. However, [Halleem et al. \(2023\)](#) advised that scholars should maximize advantages and minimize weaknesses.

EFL instructors' use of ChatGPT was low because of their lack of awareness about it. The results of this study indicated that none of the instructors used AI tools in their lessons, using them as a starting point for further exploration, analysis, and critical thinking. This might be because they were not aware of ChatGPT as a new technology in AI tools. Additionally, some EFL instructors are worried that over-reliance on AI-generated content may hinder students' language development. There are concerns that students may become too dependent on AI tools, reducing their own language production and practice opportunities. However, some teachers see potential in using AI tools to provide personalized feedback, scaffolding, and language practice for students.

According to [Kovacic \(2009\)](#), nations with strong individualistic cultures are more likely to have favorable opinions on the use and adoption of technology. In a similar way, according to [Sun et al. \(2019\)](#), nations with high levels of individualism and short-term orientation are less likely to have favorable opinions about technological advancements than those with high levels of collectivism and long-term orientation. Additionally, some of the instructors were concerned that ChatGPT might promote plagiarism because students could easily create assignments using it. Research has already demonstrated that plagiarism has increased as a result of the widespread use of computers, the internet, and digital technologies ([Malik et al., 2021](#)). Concerns of a similar nature were raised when chatbots and AI-based technologies were

introduced. For instance, I1 predicted that students use only technology, which makes it easier to produce writing or plagiarize it.

This study also found some challenges instructors face in integrating ChatGPT into their English classroom. These challenges were: lack of awareness about ChatGPT, lack of time to use ChatGPT in the language classroom, lack of technology-related resources, instructors struggling to ensure that student work is their own and not generated by AI tools like ChatGPT, limitations in language complexity, lack of personalization, and lack of familiarity with the tools and their functionalities.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

4.1. Conclusion

ChatGPT, a sophisticated chatbot, has gained attention for its ability to produce high-quality prose in seconds, akin to human-written text, and its ability to converse with users in a natural and intuitive manner, causing potential doomsday predictions. The goal of this study is to help researchers better understand the possible benefits and limitations of implementing AI-based conversational bots like ChatGPT in Ethiopian schools. The study aims to inform educational stakeholders about the potential and limitations of incorporating AI technology into English practices. This will help them make informed decisions and promote effective integration of technology in language learning contexts.

A few of the difficulties are highlighted in the paper, including worries about cultural appropriateness, incorrectness, and over-reliance on AI technologies. Furthermore, the research delves into the consequences of ChatGPT implementation in ELT classrooms and beyond for teacher preparation, curriculum design, and pedagogical practices.

The integration of AI in education is one of the current issues used to prepare generations for the future and 21st century skills. The potential of ChatGPT, an AI-powered chatbot, to revolutionize the education sector has garnered significant interest in the academic community. Despite all of ChatGPT's advantages, many instructors do not use it to teach English in language education. By investigating teachers' awareness of ChatGPT and practice, this study seeks to close the research gap.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) will find the study's conclusions useful in developing rules that guarantee the proper and efficient use of ChatGPT. In order to facilitate the seamless adoption of ChatGPT among teachers, the study will offer recommendations to ChatGPT service providers, allowing them to concentrate on motivating factors and address inhibiting problems.

4.2. Recommendations

Instructors should be aware of the various AI-powered tools and technologies that can be applied in English language teaching, such as intelligent tutoring systems, chatbots, automated assessment, and adaptive learning platforms. They should be aware of Chat GPT and modify it to fit the needs of their unique teaching style.

Effective integration of these technologies will likely require on-going professional development, clear policies, and a collaborative approach between teachers, administrators, and educational technology experts.

This study found that EFL teachers are grappling with the challenges and potential benefits of integrating ChatGPT and other AI tools in their classrooms. On-going professional development, clear institutional policies, and collaborative efforts are key to navigating this evolving landscape and ensuring that AI technologies are used in a way that supports language learning and academic integrity.

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7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Author Guideline

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As part of the submission process, authors are required to check off their submission's compliance with all of the following items, and submissions may be returned to authors that do not adhere to these guidelines.

1. The submission has not been previously published, nor is it before another journal for consideration (or an explanation has been provided in Comments to the Editor).
2. The submission file is in OpenOffice, Microsoft Word, or RTF document file format.
3. Where available, URLs for the references have been provided.
4. The text is single-spaced; uses a 12-point font; employs italics, rather than underlining (except with URL addresses); and all illustrations, figures, and tables are placed within the text at the appropriate points, rather than at the end.
5. The text adheres to the stylistic and bibliographic requirements outlined in the Author Guidelines.

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Authorship of papers represents authors' (Faculties, Researchers, and Ph.D. Scholars) scholarly contributions in different scope and domain as per their field and relevancy. The authors' names, affiliations, and e-mail addresses along with contact numbers of all authors (corresponding, principal, & co-authors) of manuscript have to be mentioned on first page. Furthermore, authors are encouraged to include their ORCID.

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We ask you to provide editable source files for your entire submission (including figures, tables and text graphics). Some guidelines:

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The title page should include:

- Article title
- Author name(s)
- Affiliation(s)
- Acknowledgements
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The anonymized manuscript should contain the main body of your paper including:

- References
- Figures
- Tables
- Declaration of Interest statement

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Tables must be submitted as editable text, not as images. Some guidelines:

- Place tables next to the relevant text.
- Cite all tables in the manuscript text.
- Number tables consecutively according to their appearance in the text.
- Please provide captions along with the tables.
- Place any table notes below the table body.

We recommend that you use tables sparingly, ensuring that any data presented in tables is not duplicating results described elsewhere in the article.

Figures and images

Figures, images, diagrams and other graphical media must be supplied as separate files along with the manuscript. We recommend that you read our detailed artworks. Some excerpts: All images must have a caption. A caption should consist of a brief title (not displayed on the figure itself) and a description of the image. We advise you to keep the amount of text in any image to a minimum, though any symbols and abbreviations used should be explained.

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Article sections

- Divide your article into clearly defined and numbered sections. Number subsections 1.1 (then 1.1.1, 1.1.2, ...), then 1.2, etc.
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You are required to include the following details in the title page information:

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Abstract

You are required to provide a concise and factual abstract which does not exceed 250 words. The abstract should briefly state the purpose of your research, principal results and major conclusions. Some guidelines:

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- Avoid non-standard or uncommon abbreviations. If any are essential to include, ensure they are defined within your abstract at first mention.

Keywords

- You are required to provide 3 to 5 keywords for indexing purposes. Keywords should be written in English. Please try to avoid keywords consisting of multiple words (using "and" or "of").
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The introduction should clearly state the objectives of your work. We recommend that you provide an adequate background to your work but avoid writing a detailed literature overview or summary of your results.

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Results should be clear and concise. We advise you to read the sections in this guide on supplying tables, figures, supplementary material and sharing research data.

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The discussion section should explore the significance of your results but not repeat them. You may combine your results and discussion sections into one section, if appropriate. We recommend that you avoid the use of extensive citations and discussion of published literature in the discussion section.

Conclusions

The conclusion section should present the main conclusions of your study. You may have a stand-alone conclusions section or include your conclusions in a subsection of your discussion or results and discussion section.

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- Abbreviations which are not standard in the field should be defined in a footnote on the first page of your article.
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Acknowledgements (if any)

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- *This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.*

References

References within text

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This journal does not set strict requirements on reference formatting at submission. Some guidelines:

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Reference to a book:

Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (2000). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). Longman (Chapter 4).

Reference to a chapter in a book:

Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (2020). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281–304). E-Publishing Inc.

Reference to a website:

Powertech Systems. (2022). Lithium-ion vs lead-acid cost analysis. Retrieved from <http://www.powertechsystems.eu/home/tech-corner/lithium-ion-vs-lead-acid-cost-analysis/>. Accessed January 6, 2022.

Reference to a dataset:

Oguro, M., Imahiro, S., Saito, S., & Nakashizuka, T. (2015). Mortality data for Japanese oak wilt disease and surrounding forest compositions [dataset]. Mendeley Data, v1. <https://doi.org/10.17632/xwj98nb39r.1>.

Reference to a conference paper or poster presentation:

Engle, E.K., Cash, T.F., & Jarry, J.L. (2019, November). The Body Image Behaviours Inventory-3: Development and validation of the Body Image Compulsive Actions and Body Image Avoidance Scales. Poster session presentation at the meeting of the Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies, New York, NY.

Reference to software:

Coon, E., Berndt, M., Jan, A., Svyatsky, D., Atchley, A., Kikinzon, E., Harp, D., Manzini, G., Shelef, E., Lipnikov, K., Garimella, R., Xu, C., Moulton, D., Karra, S., Painter, S., Jafarov, E., & Molins, S. (2020). Advanced Terrestrial Simulator (ATS) (Version 0.88) [Computer software]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3727209>.

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