

Research Article

Assessing Education Quality in Secondary Schools of Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia

Tesmamam Mirre Jobir^{*} , Tadesse Regassa

Department of Educational Planning and Management, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia

Abstract

This qualitative case study assessed the status of education quality in three government secondary schools in the Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia, exploring the perspectives of principals, teachers, and students. The study was grounded in a constructivist paradigm, acknowledging the subjective realities of the participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, analyzed using a deductive thematic approach. Findings revealed that education quality was poor, hampered by a complex interplay of input, process, and output factors. Key challenges identified included a scarcity of teaching and learning resources, such as textbooks, laboratory facilities, and qualified teachers in certain subjects. The teaching-learning process primarily relied on traditional, teacher-centered methods, further hindered by teachers' limited classroom management skills. Students exhibited low academic performance in national examinations, though classroom grades were generally good. Factors contributing to poor education quality encompassed inadequate educational inputs, ineffective teaching practices, and low motivation among both teachers and students. The study recommends urgent interventions, including the provision of essential resources, improvement of teacher training programs, and strategies to enhance teacher and student motivation. These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach to improving education quality, addressing not just assessment outcomes but also the underlying factors influencing student learning.

Keywords

Quality Education, Secondary School, Quality Indicators, Input, Process, Output

1. Introduction

Quality education is pivotal for national development, equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to contribute to economic growth and social progress [7, 16]. In Ethiopia, secondary education serves as a critical transitional phase, preparing students for higher education and the workforce [9, 13, 15]. Recognizing its importance, the Ethiopian government has introduced several initiatives, such as the General Education Quality

Improvement Programme (GEQIP) and the Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP), alongside quality assurance packages aimed at enhancing education quality [6]. Despite these efforts, the outcomes of secondary education remain alarmingly poor, with high failure rates in national examinations, particularly in Yem Zone [10, 5]. This situation calls for an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing these outcomes and effective interventions to address them.

^{*}Corresponding author: tesmamumirre09@gmail.com (Tesmamam Mirre Jobir)

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The Ethiopian government's policies and interventions to enhance secondary education quality have not translated into improved student outcomes. Evidence from national examination results underscores this challenge; in 2022, only 3.3% of students achieved a passing grade, with similar trends observed in 2023 [11, 12]. Yem Zone, in particular, exhibits even lower passing rates, highlighting the severity of the problem in this region. Existing studies have identified factors such as socioeconomic conditions, inadequate resources, teacher shortages, and negative student attitudes as contributors to poor performance [11, 12]. However, these studies often fail to capture the multifaceted and interrelated nature of these issues. This underscores the need for comprehensive research to understand the persistent barriers to quality education and develop targeted strategies for improvement.

Most research on education quality in Ethiopia has focused on isolated aspects, such as input factors (resources), process factors (teaching and learning), or output factors (student achievement), without addressing their interconnectedness [5, 6, 8]. Additionally, there is a scarcity of studies specifically addressing the challenges faced in Yem Zone, leaving a significant gap in understanding region-specific dynamics. This study seeks to fill this gap by adopting a holistic approach, examining the interplay of inputs, processes, and outputs, and incorporating the perspectives of key stakeholders—principals, teachers, and students. By employing a qualitative inquiry within the natural settings of schools, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of education quality in Yem Zone.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions will be answered by this study:

- 1) What is the status of the quality of education from the point of view of input-process and output aspects in selected secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State?
- 2) How do principals, teachers, and students perceive the quality of education from the point of view of inputs, processes, and outputs?
- 3) What are the factors that affected the provision of quality education at secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the status of education quality in secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State.

Specific Objectives

- 1) To assess the status of quality education from the point of view of input, process, and output in secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State
- 2) To investigate how principals, teachers, and students perceive the quality of education from the point of view of inputs, processes, and outputs perspectives in secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Region
- 3) To explore the factors that affect the provision of quality

education at secondary schools in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State

Significance of the Study

The study is essential for addressing the specific challenges affecting education quality in Yem Zone, providing valuable insights from key stakeholders such as principals, teachers, and students who are directly involved in the education system. By offering a region-specific analysis, this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on education quality in Ethiopian secondary schools, addressing a critical gap in the literature. Furthermore, the study will generate practical recommendations for policymakers, educational planners, and school leaders, equipping them to tackle the identified challenges effectively. Additionally, the findings will serve as a foundation for future research on education quality in Ethiopia and similar contexts, fostering a deeper understanding and guiding further investigations in this critical area.

Through these contributions, the study aims to advance educational practices in Yem Zone, enhance student outcomes, and support national development goals.

Analytical Framework and Context

Quality education encompasses various dimensions, typically analyzed using an input-process-output framework of the UNESCO [16, 17]. Inputs include resources such as infrastructure, teaching materials, and qualified teachers, which are foundational for delivering effective education. Processes focus on teaching and learning activities, emphasizing teacher-student interaction, pedagogical methods, and classroom management. Outputs reflect students' knowledge, skills, and competencies, often measured through standardized examinations.

In Ethiopia, the lack of qualified teachers, inadequate teaching materials, and poor infrastructure are major input-related challenges. Teacher motivation, influenced by factors such as low salaries and limited career growth, further exacerbates process-related issues. These challenges culminate in poor student outcomes, as reflected in declining national examination performance.

In Yem Zone, these systemic issues are more pronounced due to region-specific constraints, such as resource scarcity and socio-economic disparities. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that integrates stakeholder perspectives and examines the interdependencies between inputs, processes, and outputs.

2. Literature Review

The concept of education quality is a broad and argumentative concept because the education system involves various education stakeholders with various conflicting interests, each attempting to define quality from their perspective [8]. The indicators used to describe the quality of education may vary depending on who is using the definition. Some people could place more emphasis on the quality of the educational sys-

tems' inputs, whereas others would place more emphasis on their processes and outcomes [2, 1].

The fitness for use and satisfaction of the demands of strategic constituencies (e.g. policy makers, parents, school management committee, teachers, students, etc.) or conformance to strategic constituencies' requirements and expectations are frequently linked to the definition of quality education, regardless of whether it is referring to input, process, outcome, or all of these [2]. Quality education may simply imply the attainment of specified targets and objectives. More comprehensive views are also found, and interpretation of quality may be based on an institution's or program's reputation, the extent to which schooling has influenced change in student knowledge, attitudes, values, and behavior, or a complete theory or ideology of acquisition and application of learning [1, 2].

2.1. Quality Indicators in Secondary Education

It is important to mention that quality of education can be measured from three different viewpoints of quality of inputs, quality of the process, and quality of output [4]. Input reflects the resources committed by the government and society in general for the cause of providing education; these resources include infrastructure (including various physical facilities), teaching resources, curriculum and other support materials. Quality of the process reflects how good the delivery process is, and generally measures what goes on in the classroom as well as in the school in general. The quality of output reflects the conformance of the knowledge and skill levels of students to well established standards, e.g. exam systems and their results are a useful measure of output quality. Improving and sustaining quality of education is ultimate importance in any society round the world. By ensuring quality education the nations can be able to economic, social, mental, psychological and emotional growth of individuals on the right direction.

According to [16], quality of education has a three-dimensional approach comprising quality of human and material resources available for teaching (inputs), teaching practices (process), and results (outcomes). Further, according to them, there are some indicators—repetition, dropouts, promotion, and transition rates which are frequented by planners to arrive at an approximate measurement of quality. Chapman & Adams proposed to analyze education quality in terms of inputs, teaching learning-process, and outputs or outcomes [3]. In most case, in educational industry, to teach systematically teachers must consider input, process and output and decide objectives, contents, methods and assessment [14].

2.2. Methodology

This section explains the methodology employed in the study, encompassing the philosophical foundation, research design, approach, target population, sampling techniques,

data collection instruments, procedures, analysis methods, ethical considerations, and limitations.

2.2.1. Philosophical Foundation

The study is grounded in a constructivist or interpretivist paradigm. This approach acknowledges that reality is subjective and seeks to understand participants' perspectives and interpretations of the phenomenon under investigation – in this case, the quality of education in secondary schools. This paradigm aligns with the study's aim to explore the subjective views of principals, teachers, and students and to identify the challenges hindering quality education.

2.2.2. Research Design and Approach

The study employed a case study design combined with a qualitative approach to explore education quality in Yem Zone, Central Ethiopia Regional State. This design focused on three purposefully selected secondary schools, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon within its natural context [18]. The qualitative approach is particularly effective for understanding subjective perspectives, examining the complexities of educational policies and practices, and interacting with participants in their real-world settings. These attributes facilitate a comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes.

2.2.3. Target Population and Sampling Techniques

The target population comprises students, teachers, and principals from secondary schools in Yem Zone, each offering unique insights into education quality. Students are the primary beneficiaries of educational services, teachers serve as direct providers, and principals oversee school leadership and operations. A purposive sampling method was utilized to select participants who could provide in-depth information. The selection includes three schools representing various establishment periods (old, middle, and new), five experienced teachers from each school based on performance appraisals, one principal per school, and academically strong students from grades 11 and 12. This sampling approach results in a total sample size of 33 participants, including 15 teachers, 15 students, and 3 principals.

2.2.4. Data Collection Instruments

The study employed three main data collection instruments to gather comprehensive data. Semi-structured interviews with principals were conducted to gain insights into their perceptions of education quality, the challenges faced, and potential solutions. Focus group discussions were held with teachers and students separately to explore their shared experiences and perspectives regarding education quality. An observation checklist was also utilized to assess the availability of educational resources, facilities, and performance indicators, such as national examination results, in the selected schools.

2.2.5. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process involved several steps to ensure systematic and ethical data gathering. First, permission and ethical clearance were obtained from relevant authorities, including Jimma University and the Yem Zone Education Department. Next, the purpose and procedures of the study were explained to participants, ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation. Data collection was then carried out through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, with audio recordings and detailed note-taking to ensure data accuracy. Following this, debriefing sessions were held with participants to clarify any misunderstandings and verify the accuracy of the data. Finally, the collected data was transcribed, organized, and securely stored for analysis.

2.2.6. Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis, using a deductive approach guided by pre-determined research questions. The analysis process involves familiarizing with the data, coding meaningful segments, and developing broader themes that capture key insights. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and representativeness. Once finalized, the themes were clearly defined and named. The findings were then presented in a detailed report that includes illustrative quotes and examples to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data.

2.2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were rigorously adhered to throughout the study to ensure participant protection and integrity. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were safeguarded,

and informed consent was obtained by explaining the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of the study. Voluntary participation was emphasized, allowing participants to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Additionally, all data was securely stored and managed to protect participants' privacy and information.

2.2.8. Validation and Reliability

Several strategies were employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Triangulation is achieved by using multiple data sources, including interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, to corroborate results. Member checking was conducted by sharing findings with participants to confirm accuracy and ensure that their perspectives are faithfully represented. Inter-coder reliability was also established by involving multiple coders in the analysis process to ensure consistency in data interpretation.

2.3. Limitations

The study acknowledges several limitations that may affect its scope and generalizability. The specific regional context and small sample size may limit the applicability of findings to other regions or contexts. Resource constraints, such as limited time and budget, may have restricted the depth and breadth of the investigation. Furthermore, limited access to recent local studies and reference materials could constrain the analysis and interpretation of findings. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into education quality in Yem Zone, providing practical recommendations for policymakers and a solid foundation for future research in similar contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Result

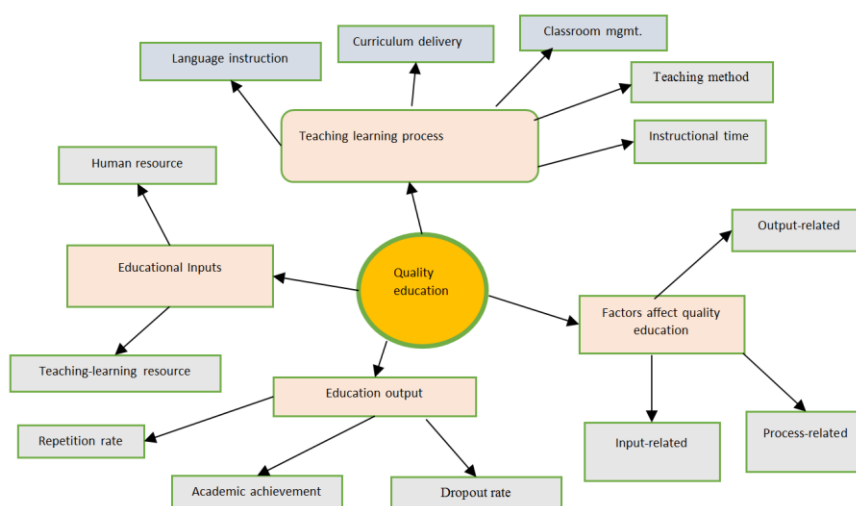


Figure 1. Shows the identified themes for the status of quality education in secondary school.

The figure displaying the developed themes categorized into input, process, and output dimensions. Each theme is placed under its relevant category to illustrate its contribution to understanding the quality of education in Yem Zone.

3.2. Discussion

The study assessed the quality of education in secondary schools in Yem Zone, focusing on inputs, processes, and outputs. The findings of the study revealed several critical challenges affecting the quality of secondary education in Yem Zone. Regarding inputs, while most teachers possess the required qualifications, including degrees and master's degrees, their motivation levels are alarmingly low. Factors such as inadequate salaries, poor working conditions, and lack of career development opportunities contribute to this demotivation, adversely impacting their effectiveness in delivering quality education. Furthermore, there is a severe shortage of teaching-learning resources, including textbooks, laboratory equipment, and ICT infrastructure. Many schools lack even basic resources, forcing teachers and students to rely on outdated or makeshift materials. Physical facilities, including clean toilets, libraries, sports fields, and cafeterias, are either insufficient or entirely absent, creating a challenging environment for both learning and teaching.

In terms of processes, the study found significant weaknesses in teaching practices and classroom management. Teachers frequently rely on traditional, lecture-based methods, which limit student engagement and fail to foster critical thinking skills. Instructional time is often wasted, and holistic student development, such as through extracurricular activities and sports, receives minimal attention. The lack of effective teaching strategies and insufficient classroom management skills further exacerbates the problem.

Output indicators paint a grim picture, with poor academic achievement evident in the national examination results. For example, in 2023, only 0.82% of Grade 12 students in Yem Zone achieved passing scores, highlighting systemic inefficiencies. High dropout and repetition rates further reflect the inadequacies of the education system, as many students struggle to complete their education successfully.

These findings indicate that systemic weaknesses across inputs, processes, and outputs are interrelated, creating a cycle of poor-quality education. Inadequate resources and demotivated teachers lead to ineffective teaching practices, which, in turn, result in poor student outcomes. Addressing these interconnected issues requires a holistic approach targeting each component of the education system.

4. Conclusion

The study concludes that the quality of secondary education in Yem Zone is critically low due to a combination of input, process, and output deficiencies. Inadequate teaching re-

sources, poor teacher motivation, and insufficient training create significant barriers to effective education. Additionally, weak teaching practices and classroom management contribute to limited student engagement and poor learning outcomes. These challenges culminate in low academic achievement, high dropout rates, and underprepared graduates. Urgent interventions are necessary to address these systemic issues and improve education quality in the region.

5. Recommendations

To improve the quality of education in Yem Zone, several key interventions are recommended. First, teacher motivation and training must be prioritized by increasing salaries, providing career development opportunities, and ensuring ongoing professional training focused on pedagogy and classroom management. Second, resources such as textbooks, laboratory equipment, and ICT infrastructure should be provided in sufficient quantities and in a timely manner. Additionally, physical facilities, including clean toilets, libraries, and recreational areas, must be upgraded to create a conducive learning environment.

School leadership also needs to be strengthened by appointing administrators based on their professional qualifications rather than political affiliations. Principals should adopt proactive roles in guiding teaching practices and monitoring student performance. Extracurricular activities and sports programs should be developed to promote holistic student engagement, with special attention given to addressing the unique needs of female students.

Finally, policy and structural reforms are crucial. National examinations should be aligned with classroom instruction to ensure relevance, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented to identify and address quality gaps. By taking these steps, stakeholders can work together to enhance the quality of secondary education in Yem Zone, thereby supporting the broader educational and developmental goals of Ethiopia.

Abbreviations

UNESCO United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Author Contributions

Teslamu Mirre Jobir was the main author. This empirical study, was conducted and written by Teslamu Mirre Jobir, who was responsible for collecting data and analyzing data and drafting the manuscript. Tadesse Regassa was a co-author who made corrections on the works. It was Tadesse Regassa who read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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