ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Schools as Learning Organisations: Assessing the Organisational Learning Practices in West Oromia Secondary Schools of Ethiopia

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which schools displayed practices that promoted the notion of schools as learning organisations. The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the current organisational learning and leadership literature. Cross-sectional survey research design was used to assess and describe the perceptions of respondents on the organisational learning practices. Questionnaire, interview and document analysis were used as data gathering instruments. Twenty seven secondary schools from three Zones were chosen as a data source. Proportional simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed to include 600 participants in the study. To analyze the data, both descriptive and inferential statistics including percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way ANOVA were employed. The qualitative data gathered from open ended items, interview and documents were used to substantiate and triangulate the quantitative data. The findings of the study demonstrated that the schools have low favourable organisational culture and structure required for transformation into a learning organisation. There was a disjuncture between the current leadership practices at schools and leadership approaches favourable for OL and that leadership practices in the school did not play any significant role in supporting collaboration, collective learning, and participation of stakeholders. It is suggested that aspects of teachers' professional development focusing on continuous learning and improvement of instructional practices should be given priority. Similarly, school principals should be consistently exposed to the best theories and practices on school leadership through courses, workshops and seminars. School leaders need to embrace and establish the values of transparency, democracy and participation of stakeholders in the activities of the school.

Key words: Organisational learning, leadership, professional development, culture, system Thinking.

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INTRODUCTION

Now a day changes in economic environments brought on by globalization, government restructuring and the rapid growth and expansion of information and communication technologies has made innovation and change necessary for all types of organizations including schools. Change can be seen as evolutionary and dynamic with an emphasis on continuous learning and adaptation (Fullan, 1991; Fullan and Miles, 1992; Dixon, 1994). Globally, since the 1980's, many change were introduced to the education system. However, available evidences show that many of these initiatives have enjoyed limited success and sustainability, as leaders have failed to recognize that change is a constant and evolving process and not an end in itself. As Sarason (1990: p5) notes, "... by the criterion of impact in the classroom, most educational reform has failed". In the context of this challenge and in the current efforts to increase student performance, school researchers and practitioners are paying increasing attention to schools as learning organizations.

The importance of learning organisations is based on the view that learning organisations develop the capacity to learn and reflect, and also the capacity to innovate. A learning organisation uses these competencies to mobilise and to use resources efficiently, and to achieve the larger task of managing the changing environment inside and outside the school so as to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Williams et al., 2012). It has been established in literature that where schools are perceived to be learning organisations, learner outcomes tend to be high. One of the reasons for that is that in such organisations, everybody is committed to life-long learning and where people continually learn how to learn together (Chan, 2009; Waldy, 2009; Moloi, 2010).

Organisational learning placed emphasis on processes that enable the organization to strive towards continual renewal. Its focus is on learning as a career-long process for all members of the organization, both individually and collectively. Leaders of these types of organizations make learning a priority for the organization and all of its members. When people throughout the organization are constantly learning, the organization is better prepared to handle change and deal with environmental turbulence. This attention to learning can result in a culture that is receptive to continuous incremental change. Organisational learning has been conceptualized as a critical component in school change processes. Accumulating evidence indicates that higher performing schools function as learning organizations (Kruse, 2003; Silins & Mulford, 2002).

Earlier researchers have identified the conditions that foster organisational learning (Senge, 1990; Garvin, 1993). The factors or conditions that are influential to organisational learning process were identified in earlier researches as vision, culture, leadership, system thinking, structure, resource, professional development and others. Normative theorists reason that if these elements or some combination of them are not present in the organization then the organization cannot be a learning organization. These conditions represent a set of prescriptive conditions, or best practices, that function as a template to evaluate the organization.

Discussions about learning organisations concept have been held for the past three decades or so (Moloi, 2010). A major concern then was that while schools were supposed to be learning organisations or not. Therefore, research and debates on learning organisation is important at this stage. Researchers and readers alike have to know if schools have moved from where

they were some years ago given the importance of their role in facilitating change.

Problem statement
In the era of globalisation, an organisation should become more flexible, responsive and capable of adapting to change in order to ensure its survival. Twenty-first-century society places a greater emphasis than in the past on the ability of every individual and organisation to engage in continuous learning, so that they are able to deal with the rapid changes surrounding them. Globalisation, technological change and uncertainty have been identified as challenging elements with which an organisation has to deal and the success of the organisation in surviving change is measured by its capacity to become or remain a strong learning organisation in which the learning of every individual is sustained (Hamzah, et al., 2011).

Governments in many countries have in recent years initiated educational reforms in the hope to improve school management. Such reforms are believed to help schools develop integrated professional development and learning-focused leadership system. It is expected that schools would be more adaptive to internal and external demands of the changing environment, and school management would be more professional and quality-oriented. With the introduction of decentralisation, the roles of school principals and teachers have changed. For example, instead of executing educational policies as they have done in the past, they are now required to lead and contribute to reform efforts.

Despite governments' mandates and initiatives to push for change, many reform efforts have failed to prepare schools for the important transformation as expected. Schools still face criticisms from the public

for their inability to manage themselves. Joyce and Calhoun (1995) have described the reality in many schools as hampered by structural characteristics that make innovation laborious: no time in the workday for collegial inquiry, no structures for democratic decision making, a shortage of information, and absence of a pervasive staff development system. Teachers are found to be isolated in their roles, with little connection among departments and groups and with a very low capacity for joint problem solving (Dalin, 1993). In fact, many school teachers feel themselves to be powerless, under-privileged and of low status, unable to influence their own work environment (Kohn, 1989).

Fullan and Miles (1992) attribute the failure of many educational reforms to the strategies used which do not bring about fundamental change to schools. West-Burnham (1992) argues that the challenges facing schools under educational decentralisation are so profound that traditional approaches to managing schools are no longer appropriate and radical alternatives need to be considered. In response to the failure of reform initiatives, educators have started to look at a new and comprehensive strategy that can foster school-wide change and affect all aspects of the school culture. It is suggested that the adoption of learning organisation principles may be useful in empowering schools to survive in an era of change.

O'Neil (1995) justifies that since education has to face rapid changes in the world, it requires organisational learning in order to improve its capacity for adaptation. Wohlstetter, Van Kirk, Robertson, and Mohrman (1997) argued that decentralized education management works best when there are conditions in place that support organisational learning and integrating processes. According to Hamzah, et al.

(2011), it is the responsibility of school to develop a form of professional organisation in which all members are able to learn new skills and knowledge continuously, so that they are capable of dealing with change and realising the goals of the country's education system.

Apart from the issues of globalisation and change, the Ethiopian education system is also faced with the demands of the country's rapid economic development as well as those of education reforms which aim to improve the quality and standard of the education system through continuous effort.

In line with the needs of education reform in Ethiopia, schools should become more effective learning organisations that ultimately increase the leadership capacity and support the personal development of every individual at the institution including teachers. Teachers have a huge responsibility and as change agents and it is very crucial that they be engaged in professional development. This ensures the improvement of the quality of teaching, which ultimately contributes to school excellence.

Nowadays, school are responsible for implementing school improvement programmes, continuous professional development (CPD) and introducing educational reforms for creating conditions for teaching and learning so that all students reach their educational goals. The education and training policy requires the school leaders to act as pedagogical leaders with focus on the curriculum and instruction to increase teachers' capacity in relation to teaching and learning and to create a learning environment. However, studies have highlighted difficulties in bringing about learning and sustainable school improvement in school

organisations (Daniel, Desalegn and Girma, 2013).

Many reform movements were introduced since the introduction of the education and training policy (ETP) of 1994 to Ethiopian school system, but they have not delivered on the major reform that many believe is needed if schools are to keep pace with changes in society.

The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which schools displayed practices that promoted the notion of schools as learning organisations. It attempts to assess the conditions that fosters or hinders organisational learning in West Oromia secondary schools in order to determine the status of schools as learning organisations. To this end, this study is guided by the following basic questions:

1. To what extent current organisational learning practices promote schools into strong learning organisations?
2. What are the conditions that influenced (stimulated or hindered) schools' development into strong learning organisations? What are the potential difficulties for schools?
3. What steps can be taken to overcome these barriers and transform a school to a learning organisation?

Conceptual framework of the study

Schools that can be classified as learning organizations possess some combination of the following learning aspects (see Figure 1 below). Collectively these learning aspects should help to assess the level of readiness of a school as learning organisations. This profile will be useful in prescribing and designing improvement and growth initiatives. The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in the current organisational learning and leadership literature (Duke & Leith wood, 1994).
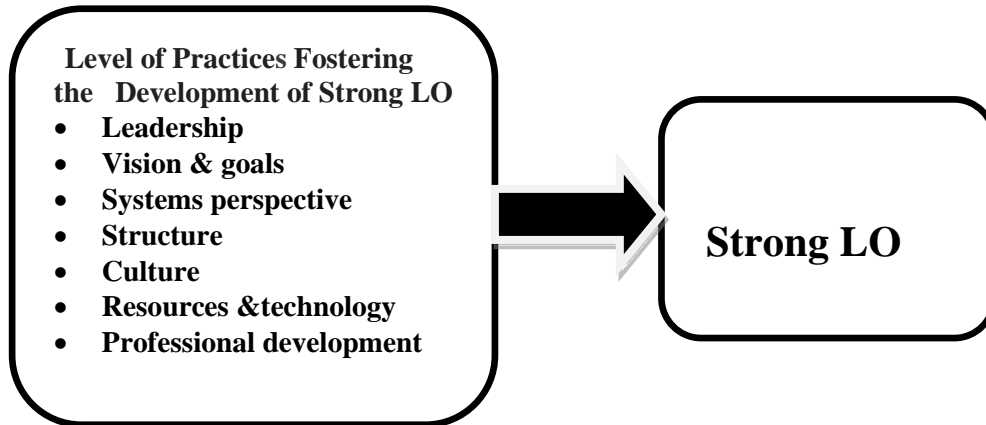
Figure 1: Conceptual frame work of the study

The concept of schools as learning organizations has evolved in response to the difficulties experienced in bringing about school reform. Schools that function as learning organizations in a context of rapid global change are those that have systems and structures in place that enable staff at all levels to collaboratively and continuously learn and put new learning to use. From an examination of the literature, seven dimensions that characterise schools as learning organisations were identified and operationalised as follows:

Leadership: refers to the extent to which leaders involved in new learning initiatives, articulate a vision, participate in its implementation, interact with organisational members and become actively involved in the learning process (Nevis, DiBella and Gould, 1995). In schools that behave as learning organizations leadership is transformational and members are encouraged to take responsibility for self-management (Leithwood and Aitken, 1995; Van Den Berg and Sleegers, 1996). Leaders in learning organizations will need to move from controlling to empowering, from being a commander to being a steward and

from being a transitional manager to a transformational leader.

Vision and Goals*:* The extent to which the principal works toward whole staff consensus in establishing and communicates organization-wide vision, school priorities and goals, creates the recognition and commitment to a coherent and an agreed upon sense of direction to guide a school's everyday actions and decisions as well as shape long term planning. The principal helps clarify the specific meaning of the school's mission in terms of its practical implications for programs and instruction.

Systems perspective: This refers to the ability to focus on both the "big picture" and the "small picture" simultaneously. A systems perspective enables organisational members to see the interdependence of organisational parts and their relationship to the organization as a whole as well as the organizations relationship to the larger community.

Continuous professional development: refers to the extent that encouragement, opportunity and resources are provided to enable all school staff to learn, develop and

implement the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to improving the school's performance as a whole. It is the extent to which staffs keep up with best practice and are encouraged and given time to develop professionally; developing skills to work in teams and sharing knowledge is seen as important.

Structure: refers to the extent to which school leaders promotes participative decision making, delegating and distributing leadership to encourage teacher autonomy for making decisions, support free flow of knowledge that is essential for growth, support experimentation; empower teachers to make decisions, and teachers feel valued and rewarded for taking the initiative. The extent to which staff feels empowered to make decisions and feel free to experiment and take risks; the school structures support teacher initiatives, and the administrators promote inquiry and dialogue and are open to change.

Culture: refers to the extent to which school leaders promotes an atmosphere of caring and trust among staff, sets a respectful tone for interaction with staff and demonstrates a willingness to change his or her practices in the light of new understandings, the extent that learning is valued within the organization and people are able to collaborate with one-another to enhance learning opportunities, and supports collaborative work, sharing of information, and open communication

Resources for Learning: refers to the extent to which the human and non-human resources that are made available to enhance learning opportunities. It pertains to the degree that the organization takes a system-wide approach to new learning initiatives and allocates adequate resources (time, money, technology, personnel)

dedicated to enhancing learning within the organization. It refers to the extent to which the school use new and emerging technologies and share information to facilitate new learning.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY
Research Design
Cross-sectional survey research design was used to assess and describe the perceptions of respondents on the organisational learning practices. The method also enables the researcher to assess and describe the current enabling and hindering factors of OL in secondary schools in a broad and wider magnitude (Cohen and Manion, 1994). In undertaking the study both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. To conduct the study, both primary and secondary data sources were used. The use of multiple sources of data is quite important to explore the research problems from different angles (Cohen and Manion, 1994). It also enables the researcher to generate rich data and believed to enhance the validity of the study. Primary data were collected from school leaders (principal, vice principals, unit leaders and department heads) and teachers of secondary schools of the sample schools. Secondary data were gathered from various documents pertaining to the problem under study.

Sample and sampling methods
In West Oromia, there are seven Zones. Out of these seven Zones, three (43%) of them namely Jimma zone, Ilu Aba Bora zone and south west shewa zone were selected using simple random sampling. In the sample Zones, there are 90 secondary schools (OEB, 2013, 158). Out of these, 27 (30%) of them were selected using proportional, simple random sampling technique. All principals, vice principals, unit leaders and department heads were

purposively included in the study. Proportional simple random sampling method was employed to select sample teachers. In general, a total of 600 respondents were selected from three Zones and questionnaires were distributed for sample respondents. Out of these, 433 (72.2%) questionnaires were filled and returned for analysis.

Instruments

Questionnaire, interview and document analysis were used as data gathering instrument. The same questionnaires, which consist of both closed and open ended items was developed and distributed for all respondents to gather data for the study. In addition, relevant document were consulted. A questionnaire which consists of Likert type items was prepared and pilot tested in one of non-sampled secondary school in Jimma town. The reliability and validity of the instruments was checked and corrected before administered to the respondents. The results showed that the reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) for the questionnaire ranges from 0.790-0.843 which is considered good for the purpose of this study. The survey is also required to be valid. Developing the questionnaire involved some stages. The first stage involved the use of literature reviews to develop the items of the questionnaire. The second stage was where academics constructively criticise the questionnaire. This process was used to establish the face validity of the questionnaire, eliminating linguistic ambiguities, reducing the ambiguity of questions and analysing the adequacy of the questionnaire to ensure that it would be suitable for capturing the data required for the study.

One set of questionnaire, consists of 94 items that assessed seven dimensions and three levels of organisational learning practices, were designed and employed. Besides, eight to twelve items corresponded to each scale dimension were designed and used. Using a five-point Likert-type response scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, respondents evaluated the school readiness for organisation learning against ten key measures: vision, culture, leadership, system thinking, structure, resource, professional development as well as individual, team and system-wide learning in the secondary schools. In order to determine the extent to which these ten learning dimensions stimulated OL in the schools, respondents were asked on five point scale to rate their level of agreement. The value 3 or "neutral" is considered as a hypothesized mean against which the mean rating of respondents are checked for their significance using the independent sample t-test. This means that if the mean ratings of the respondents are significantly higher than the hypothesized mean (the neutral), then it can be assumed that the level of practice is high with the particular issue and vice versa.

Data analysis methods

The data gathered through closed ended questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20 computer software. The collected data was coded, entered, cleaned and analyzed. Both descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, mean scores, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way ANOVA were used. The qualitative data gathered from open ended questionnaire and documents were used to substantiate and triangulate the quantitative data.

Ethical considerations

The process of getting access to the schools began by requesting permission formally, in writing, through the official channels. The first step the researcher took regarding this matter was to write and explain in

detail the purpose of the study and the data-collection methods to be used to the target schools to get permission to conduct the research. After the permission was obtained, individual respondents were identified and informed consent was made with each respondent participating in the study. Participants were informed as the data are used only for academic purposes and the anonymity of respondents is maintained.

RESULTS

This section deals with results and discussion of the data gathered from sample respondents. The section begins with discussing the general background information of sample respondents and then proceeds to the presentation and discussions of results of the study on organisational learning practices in secondary schools of west Oromia. In order to gather adequate data for the study, a total of 600 questionnaires were distributed to sample respondents. Out of these, 433 (72.2) sample respondents filled and returned the questionnaire from the three Zones. Specifically, 122 (28.2%) were from South west shewa zone, 146 (33.7%) from Jimma and 165 (38.1%) were from Ilu Abba Bora zone.

Table 1: Sample Profile

Items	Category	Respondents	
		Count	**%**
Sex	M	367	84.8
	F	66	15.2
Age	20-25	38	8.8
	26-30	187	43.2
	31-35	90	20.8
	36-40	37	8.5
	> 40	81	18.7
Educational Background	Dip	33	7.6
	First Degree	380	87.8
	MA/MSC	18	4.2
	Other	2	0.9
Work experience	< 5 years	50	11.5
	5-10	178	41.1
	11-15	68	15.7
	16-20	43	9.9
	> 20	94	21.7
Current position	Teacher	307	70.9
	School Leaders	126	29.1

A total of 433 employees responded to the survey questionnaire. Most respondents (70.9 percent) were teachers. School leaders composed 29.1 percent of the sample. More than three-quarters (88.4 percent) of the employees had been employed at their respective schools for five year or more. This indicates that respondents have adequate experiences to provide relevant information on the organisational learning practice of secondary schools.

Vision

Vision guides organisations in the right direction. It provides a compelling goal that galvanizes and aligns the behaviour, actions and contributions of employees across all levels and functions of the organization. Senge (1990) argues that shared vision is vital to organisational learning as it provides the focus and energy for learning.

In schools that behave as learning organizations, members develop a clear and shared understanding of the school's mission and goals (Leithwood and Aitken, 1995).

In line with assumption, an attempt was made to assess the extent to which the school leaders works toward establishing and communicating organization-wide vision, setting school priorities and goals, and creating an agreed upon sense of direction to guide a school's everyday actions and decisions as well as shape long term planning. To this end, eight items were aggregated (as if measuring the same thing) based on results of inter item correlation and factor analysis of data and an independent t-test was computed. The result is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test for the mean ratings of respondents regarding the practices fostering the development of strong learning organisations

Independent sample t-test							
Vision	**Position**	**Mean**	**SD**	**df**	**t**	**sig**	**Mean difference**
	Teachers	2.60	.824	411	.626	.531	.056
	School Leaders	2.55	.851				
Structure	Teachers	2.42	.500	412	-.746	.456	-.040
	School Leaders	2.46	.499				
System Perspectives	Teachers	2.89	.654	392	-.778	.437	-.055
	School Leaders	2.94	.615				
Leadership practice	Teachers	2.48	.518	392	-1.73	.084	-.095
	School Leaders	2.58	.463				
Culture	Teachers	2.66	.550	402	1.04	.297	-.060
	School Leaders	2.72	.483				
Professional development	Teachers	2.42	.469	389	2.49	.013	-.132
	School Leaders	2.55	.479				
Resource & Technologies	Teachers	2.48	.566				
	School Leaders	2.59	.489	406	1.90	.057	-.112
	School Leaders	2.30	.345				

As indicated in the Table 2 above, the low mean ratings of teachers (M=2.60, SD =.824) and school leaders (M=2.55, SD =.851) shows that the vision and mission of the school was not shared by most of the school community. The sample schools were characterised by low understanding of school vision and strategy, inconsistence of leadership actions with the stated vision and lack of commitment to the school vision. There is no statistically significant difference between perception of teachers and school leaders regarding school vision, t (411) = .626, p > 0.05.

Further analysis was carried out to examine if there were differences in the staff's responses among the three Zones. To this end, eight items were aggregated (as measuring the same thing) based on the results of inter-item correlation and factor analysis of data. Then, a one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to examine the differences in perceptions of the staff across the three universities (see Table 3 below).

The ANOVA result in Table 3 showed that significant difference existed among the three Zones regarding effectiveness of school vision, F (2, 410) =3.509, p < .0.05. The Tukey *post hoc* comparisons of the three Zones showed that the attempts school leaders made to establish and communicate organisational-wide vision and goals were relatively lower in South west Shewa (M=2.42, SD=.754) than in Jmma (M=2.62, SD=.844) and Illu Aba Bora Zone (M=2.68, SD=.831).

Structure
The form or structure of many organizations often facilitates organisational learning. For instance, flat organisational structure allows participative decision-making and collaboration among the school community. This provides opportunities for the development of policies that ensures the full capacities of the organizations' members can be used, to move the organization forward (Leithwood and Aitken, 1995). In line with this, the appropriateness of school structure for organisational learning was assessed. The responses of the two groups of respondents (teachers and school leaders) are summarized in the Table 2.

There is general agreement between group of teachers (M=2.42, SD= .500) and school leaders (M=2.46= .499) that the school structure is less appropriate to support and promote OL in the schools under study. There is no statistically significant difference between perception of teachers and school leaders regarding the appropriateness of the school structure, t (412) =-.746, p > 0.05. The interview data also supports this result. It was reported by the staff that decisions were not made at the level where they have an impact, participative decision making was less practised in the schools and school structure did not provide an appropriate level of autonomy for teachers.

The ANOVA result indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the staff perception across the three Zones regarding the support of school structure for organisational learning, F (2,411) =2.831, P>0.05). The *Tukey Post hoc* analysis revealed no significant difference among the mean ratings of the three Zones, South West Shewa (M=2.47, SD =.577), Jimma (M =2.48, SD =.511) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.36, SD =.418) (see Table 3 below). Thus, it can be argued that the schools have no favourable organisational structure required for transformation into a learning organization.

System perspectives

Schools do not operate in a vacuum – they function as part of a larger social system, including the school district and the local community in which they are embedded. Senge (1990) claims that a systems perspective offers a conceptual framework to help show the interconnectedness of organisational systems as well as the insight necessary to change patterns of behaviour in an effective manner. It helps to focus on both the "big picture" and the "small picture" of the organization simultaneously.

In order to determine the extent to which the school system, policy and procedures promoted OL, an independent sample t-test was conducted. As the result in the above Table 2 shows, both the mean ratings of teachers (M=2.89, SD=.65 4) and academic mangers (M = 2.94, SD =.615) confirm that the school system, policy and procedures did not support change, innovation and organisational learning. There is no statistically significant difference between perception of teachers and school leaders regarding school system perspectives, t (392) = -.778, p > 0.05).

One way ANOVA was computed to examine the extent to which the organisational learning is guided by system perspective. It was identified that significant difference exists among the three Zones as perceived by the staff respondents, F (2,391) =3.984, p <0.05). The results of *Post hoc* analysis showed the difference existed between South West Shewa (M =2.77, SD =.624), in one hand and Jimma (M =2.91, SD =.679) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.99, SD =.610) on the other hand (see Table 3). In general, the findings indicate that the system perspective did not support organisational learning in the schools across the three Zones.

Leadership practices

The role of the school as learning organisation can only be furthered by teachers if school leaders are committed to transforming their schools into better learning organisations. The role of the school leaders in a learning community is to promote opportunities for learning to teachers and students alike. School leaders should show a very strong commitment to teachers' continuous learning by giving them opportunities to develop personally and professionally, building a collaborative learning culture, embracing a collective vision and forming a committed team dedicated to achieving school objectives (Barnett, McCormick and Conners, 2001).

An independent sample test analysis was carried out to examine the extent to which the leadership practice supports organisational learning (see Table 2 above). It was identified that the mean rating of both the teacher and school leaders respondents was found to be low, (M=2.48, SD =. 518) and (M =2.58, SD =.463) respectively. There was no statistically significant difference between perception of teachers and school leaders related to school leadership practice, t (392) =-1.733, p < 0.05).

School leadership play a vital role in supporting the learning and development of teachers, encouraging experimentation and innovation and facilitating organisational change. To this end, one way ANOVA was computed to test the staff perception difference existed among the three Zones regarding the support provided by the school leadership to facilitate organisational change (see Table 3 below). The result indicates that there was no statistically significant differences among the three Zone in the leadership practice, F (2,391) =2.521, p < 0.05). The Tukey post hoc mean comparison did not show

significant differences in man ratings of respondents across the Zones (South West Shewa (M =2.53, SD =.505), Jimma (M =2.58, SD =.521) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.45, SD =.481). This implies that the school leadership in all Zones were not in a better position in facilitating and supporting organisational change.

Culture

The nature of learning and the manner in which it occurs in an organization are determined to a large measure by the culture of that organization. Culture refers to the extent that learning is valued within the organization and people are able to collaborate with one-another to enhance learning opportunities and at the same time, feel comfortable doing so. For example, the degree to which intelligent risk-taking and experimentation are encouraged as a way of organisational life and the degree to which organisational members are able to engage in professional dialogue with a view to discovering new ideas and perspectives. In schools where learning is prevalent there is an intellectually stimulating environment and a strong collaborative culture. Individuals in such schools took responsibility for and contributed to each other's learning as they engaged in their daily work. Also, when there was a truly collaborative culture, individuals are more likely to utilize teams to solve problems and analyze complex issues.

In light of this, an independent sample t-test was conducted to assess whether the organisational culture stimulated OL in the schools under study. The result is presented in Table 2 above. As the result of the independent t-test shows, teachers (M=2.66, SD =.550) and school leaders (M=2.72, SD = .483) did not believe that the organisational culture supports OL in the sample schools. There is no statistically significant difference on the perception of teachers and school leaders, t (402) =-1.044, p > 0.05). The qualitative data also established this claim. The respondents agreed that sharing of information, open communication, a culture mutual support, sprit of collegiality, trust and commitment were absent among teachers. Besides, lack of ongoing professional dialogue, lack of sprit of openness & trust, low professional sharing & collaboration among teachers and low innovativeness were used to describe the sample schools' culture.

Table 3: One way ANOVA on the differences of staff perception regarding the practices fostering the development of strong LO across the three Zones

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Vision	Between Groups	4.796	2	2.398	3.509	.031
	Within Groups	280.160	410	.683		
	Total	**284.956**	**412**			
Structure	Between Groups	1.404	2	.702	2.831	.060
	Within Groups	101.955	411	.248		
	Total	**103.359**	**413**			
System Perspective	Between Groups	3.246	2	1.623	3.984	.019
	Within Groups	159.295	391	.407		
	Total	**162.541**	**393**			
Leadership	Between Groups	1.269	2	.635	2.521	.082
	Within Groups	98.445	391	.252		
	Total	**99.715**	**393**			
School Culture	Between Groups	.743	2	.372	1.314	.270
	Within Groups	113.348	401	.283		
	Total	**114.091**	**403**			
Professional Development	Between Groups	2.176	2	1.088	4.907	.008
	Within Groups	86.018	388	.222		
	Total	**88.194**	**390**			
Resource & Technologies	Between Groups	1.580	2	.790	2.666	.071
	Within Groups	119.993	405	.296		
	Total	**121.573**	**407**			

An analysis of ANOVA was computed to examine if there were differences in the staff perceptions with regard to the existence of intellectually stimulating environment and a strong collaborative culture across the Zones. Significant differences were not found in staff's responses across the three Zones, $F_{(2, 401)} = 1.314$, $p > 0.05$. This implies that the effectiveness of the school culture to

stimulate OL was generally low in the three Zones (South West Shewa (M=2.6661, Jimma (M=2.7395, SD=.58622) and Ilu Aba Bora (M=2.6394, SD=.51629, as evaluated by the staff respondents (see Table 3 above).

Professional Development
What is critical about learning organisations is not that learners are learning but, more importantly, it is that everybody in the organisation is learning new knowledge and skills (Williams, et al., 2012). Such knowledge and skills should enable them individually and collectively to stay relevant for current demands of the environment (Hamzah, et al., 2011). To determine the degree to which the professional development activities were implemented in sample schools, an independent t-test was used.

As indicated in Table 2 above, the two groups of respondents (teachers, M=2.42, SD =.469) and school leaders (M=2.55, SD =.479) evaluated that the practices of professional development in schools was not effective. However, significant different existed between the mean ratings of teachers and school leaders demonstrating that the existence of professional learning was relatively rated high by the school leaders as compared to the teacher respondents, t (389) =-.132, p < 0.05).

An analysis of ANOVA was computed to examine if there were differences in the staff perception concerning the effectiveness of professional development across the Zones (Table 3 above). Significant differences were found in staff's responses across the three Zones, F (2, 388) =1.088, p=.008. The *Tukey post-hoc* multiple mean comparisons showed that the significant difference was between South West Shewa (M=2.56, SD=.460) on

the one side, and Jimma (M=2.46, SD=.559) and Ilu Aba Bora (M=2.38, SD=.390) on the other. This implies that the practice of the professional development was relatively better in South West Shewa than in the two other Zones, as reported by the staff.

Resources and Technology for learning
Organisational resources that promote individual learning are contributing factors to organisational learning. Leithwood, et al., (1995) and Sharratt (1996) found that providing time for professional development and professional growth along with access to sources of expertise had a positive effect on organisational learning. In schools that behave as learning organizations, teachers rely on the resources and experiences of other teachers in the school as an important source of professional development (Stoll and Fink, 1996). In addition, organizations that know how to harness technology to enhance their learning capacity will possess a decided advantage in the future (Marquardt, 1996). Marquardt (1996) think new technologies promise to foster new collaborative links and eliminate many of the barriers that have hindered communication and organisational learning in the past. Schools that function as learning organizations invest in and utilize these new technologies. As the technology becomes integrated into all facets of the schools' organization, the technology itself becomes an impetus for change (Goldberg and Richards, 1995; Leonard, 1996).
In line with above argument, an independent sample t-test was computed to examine whether resource and technologies were diverted to OL in the schools under investigation (see Table 2 above). The mean ratings of both teachers (M=2.48, SD =.566) and school leaders (M=2.59, SD =.489) was found to be low. The result indicated that technologies and other

resources were not sufficiently utilised to support learning in the schools. It was learned during the field work observation that schools have no ICT facilities and the staff have no opportunity to apply the technologies to their teaching & learning; effective documentation procedures were in place and key information were not readily available for use in the school system.

One-way ANOVA was calculated to identify any differences in terms of the staff perceptions in respect to the availability and adequacy of resources and technologies to support learning across the three Zones (Table 3 above). The one-way ANOVA test confirmed that there was no significant difference in the perception of staff across the three Zones regarding the organisational resources to promote individual, team and organisational learning, F (2, 405)=2.66, p > 0.05. The Tukey *post-hoc* mean comparison also depicted no significant differences in the mean ratings of the respondents across the Zones.

Individual Learning Practices in the schools

Individual learning is the foundation of team and organisational learning. It enables the school to increase the learning capacity of individuals through providing continuous learning opportunities for teachers. Individual learning enables the schools to build a critical mass of learners which challenge the status quo and respond to the emerging challenge. Individual learning helps to continuously learn and use their knowledge to improve their performance and contribute for team and organisational learning capacity (Fullan, 1993). In line with this, an attempt was made to assess (see Table 4 below) the perceptions of teachers and school leaders regarding the individual learning behaviour in schools under study. Hence, both the teachers (M=2.34: SD= .411) and school leaders (M=2.47: SD= .448) perceived that the individual learning practice was generally low.

Table 4: Independent sample t-test for the mean ratings of respondents regarding the levels of organisational learning practices

Independent sample t-test							
	Position	**Mean**	**SD**	**df**	**t**	**sig**	**Mean difference.**
Individual Learning	Teachers	2.34	.411	399	2.80	.005	-.129
	School Leaders	2.47	.448				
Team Learning	Teachers	2.35	.426	400	-1.57	.116	-.072
	School Leaders	2.42	.405				
Whole school learning (OL)	Teachers	2.21	.321	401	-2.56	.011	-.092
	School Leaders	2.30	.345				

Teacher respondents admitted that they demonstrate low level of competency in their work and were not encouraged by the school leadership to share their new ideas with others. The respondents agreed that teachers were defensive to accept negative

feedback. The findings indicate that teachers were not encouraged and supported to innovate and experiment that enables them learn and generate new ideas.

The ANOVA result showed statistically significant difference among the three Zones relating to individual learning (F (2,398) =8.76, P < 0.05) (see Table 5). The *post hoc* test shows significant difference in the mean scores of the staff respondents, South West Shewa (M =2.52, SD =.428), Jimma (M =2.33, SD =.437) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.32, SD =.394). From the above result it was learned that the individual learning practice was generally low in the schools in the sample Zones.

Team learning/ collaborative learning
Collaborative efforts which, are the hallmark of professional learning community concept, include strategies that open practices in ways that encourage sharing, reflecting and taking risks necessary to change (Vescio, et al., 2008; Robinson, 2010). The use of teams in

schools has become more and more important for establishing a dynamic learning community in schools. Recently, schools recognized the importance of teams to improve their performance. The increased focus on decentralization of the school system encourages the use of teams work to solve school problems becomes a necessary reality for schools. As a result, schools need have skilled at collective learning to effectively deal and cope with the dynamic working environment.

As indicated in Table 4 the main ratings of teachers (M = 2.35, SD = .426) and school leaders (M =2.42, SD =.405) was very low regarding the practice of team level learning in the sample schools. The above finding shows that in secondary schools, employees were not encouraged to learn on the job which improves their performance. The study established that most of the school community were not skilled in team learning practices and team learning tends to be a highly advocated (especially by district officers) yet poorly practiced.

Table 5: One way ANOVA on the differences of staff perception regarding   the levels of organisational learning practices across the three Zones

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Individual Learning	Between Groups	3.068	2	1.534	8.760	.000
	Within Groups	69.697	398	.175		
	Total	**72.765**	**400**			
Team Learning	Between Groups	2.225	2	1.113	6.428	.002
	Within Groups	69.067	399	.173		
	Total	**71.293**	**401**			
System wide learning	Between Groups	.076	2	.038	.346	.707
	Within Groups	43.963	400	.110		
	Total	**44.039**	**402**			

As indicated in the Table 5, there was significant differences in the response of staff in the three Zones concerning the practice of team learning, F (2,399) =1.11, P < 0.05). In order to determine which zone staff perceptions differs significantly from which, *Tukey post hoc* multiple comparisons methods were employed. The results indicated that a significant difference exist between South West Shewa and the other two Zones suggesting that the practice of system wide learning is relatively better in South West Shewa (M =2.48, SD =.446) than Jimma (M =2.36, SD =.448) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.30, SD =.360). However, in general, it can be concluded from the study that the degree of team learning in the schools under investigation was very low.

Whole school learning practices

An environment that supports and facilitates new learning can result not only in increased capacity for individual learning but in an increased capacity for organization-wide learning. In schools where these fertile environments exist, new learning moves beyond the individual to become the collective property of a group or the entire organization. Accordingly, the teachers and school leaders were required to assess the degree to which the OL was generally practiced in the schools under investigation. The result of independent sample t-test was presented in the Table 4 above.

The mean ratings of both group of respondents (teachers (M=2.21, SD =.321), and school leaders (M=2.30, SD =.345) was found to be low signifying that the OL practises in the sample secondary schools was generally ineffective. Schools were not skilled at organisational learning that focus on transformational as well as incremental learning initiatives and that

enable efficient movement through multiple iterations of the learning cycle.

The ANOVA result showed that no statistical significant difference among the three Zones regarding the practice of system wide learning (F (2,400) =.346, P > 0.05). The *post hoc* test shows no significant difference in the mean scores of the staff respondents, South West Shewa (M =2.26, SD =.344), Jimma (M =2.23, SD =.363) and Ilu Aba Bora (M =2.23, SD =.290) (see Table 5 above). From the above finding it was learned that the system wide learning practice in the schools under study was generally ineffective.

DISCUSSIONS

As normative elements, the above-discussed ten learning dimension represent the conditions or practices that stimulate OL to take place. In effect, they provide the reasons or incentives for organisational learning. Each of the ten levels of practices for strong OL that were identified in this study has the potential to create an environment that stimulates learning at the school level. This levels of practices *vis a vis* the study results are discussed as follows.

The study highlighted that school leaders had low commitment to the school missions and visions. This contradicts with the principle of the importance of leadership which argues that leaders should possess a clear and shared vision so that they can have a clear direction and be able to channel energy towards achieving the vision. The majority of teachers indicated their school leadership was grounded in ineffective organisational practices. They argued that school leadership does not support the learning & development of teachers, encourages experimentation and continually dissemination of new knowledge that change in their school. In

the schools, a majority of teachers believed that school leaders did not collaborate with staff on matters pertaining to both pedagogical and policy matters.

Leadership is one of the most critical factors in OL as a vehicle for school improvement. As Leithwood and Aitken (1995), Seashore Louis (1994), Van Den Berg and Sleegers (1996), Leithwood, Leonard, and Sharratt (1997) and Leonard (1996) found in their work on OL in schools, visionary school principals and transformational leadership are influential factors for facilitating OL in schools. Consequently, if schools are to become skilled at organisational learning, school principals should possess transformational leadership skills and ensure that processes and procedures are in place to facilitate ongoing organisational learning.

The nature of learning and the manner in which it occurs in a school are determined in a large measure by the culture of the school (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1995; Rait, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Fullan, 1996; Leithwood, Leonard and Sharratt, 1997; Van Den Berg and Sleegers, 1996 and Prestine, 1994). It was identified in the study that in some schools the culture was one of non-learning or maybe even anti-learning. The staff believed that school culture did not support creativity, innovation and professional collaboration among teachers. The study showed that the schools had weak culture of collegiality, trust and commitment.

Shared vision is capable to provide focus and energy for learning in an organisation. Contrary to this, the study established that leadership has not developed a clearly shared vision and the schools were characterised by low understanding of school vision & strategy, inconsistence of leadership actions with the stated vision and lack of commitment to the school vision. According to Leithwood, Jantzi and

Steinbach (1995), Leithwood and Aitken (1995), Chapman (1996) and Leithwood, Leonard and Sharratt (1997), in schools where there is a clearly communicated and shared vision of learning, new learning initiatives are more inclined to be followed. These authors argued that the shared vision must be meaningful, widely held and pervasive in professional dialogue and decision-making throughout the school.

The impact of globalization and interactive communication technologies dictates the necessity for schools and other educational institutions to be ever cognizant of the "big picture" and recognize the interconnectedness of the school with the larger community. Senge (1990) refers to this as systems thinking, one of the cornerstones of a learning organization. Both Stoll and Fink (1996) and Leithwood and Aitken (1996) note that when principals lack a systems perspective robust OL is unlikely to occur. In schools where organisational members are unaware of the interconnections between the school and its communities, learning systems are developmentally delayed. These schools are generally defensive to organisational change. Despite its importance, a systems perspective was relatively lacking in most schools addressed in this study.

Flattening the organisational structure and empowering teachers to make decisions is important in that it increase the credibility of change and improvement initiatives. In schools where there is a dynamic approach towards change, members are able to break down many of the traditional structures familiar to schools and create opportunities for the development of strategies to ensure that the organization moved forward. In such schools, decision-making is decentralized to the point that decisions are made by teachers who are closest to the impact point of the decision. This was not the case in schools under study.

In the schools studied, there were four obvious obstacles to organisational learning: holding on to the status quo, lack of resources and support, no time for reflection/learning and intellectual isolation. As Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1995) and Leithwood, Leonard and Sharatt (1997) pointed out, schools cannot commit to OL and increasing OL capacity unless resources are made available. Technologies improve the ability of people to communicate with one another and provide people with real-time access to knowledge and information – when they want it, where they want it, and how they want it. It is important that if organisational learning is to occur, teachers must be provided with quality time to reflect on their daily practices. The essential element of reflection in action is a missing requirement in most of the schools. Under such circumstance, teachers miss out on the opportunity to interact with their colleagues on a professional level, and to openly question and debate existing practices and methodologies.

Scholars argued that in schools (Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Marquardt, 1996; Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1995) where individual learning is promoted and supported there is an understanding that learning involved an integration of formal and informal learning approaches. Individual level learning such as action learning projects, performance appraisal, and new job assignments will promote individuals working less in isolation and working more in partnership with others both within and outside the organization.

Several researchers have outlined team learning or teamwork as one of the strategic building blocks in creating a strong learning organisation. As a result of the many complex problems associated with educational reform and restructuring initiatives, the use of teams in schools has become more and more important for establishing a dynamic learning community. It was identified that, whereas team learning is a relatively new concept for schools, most organisational members (i.e. teachers and school leaders) were not skilled in team learning practices.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to understand the extent to which schools displayed practices that promoted the notion of schools as learning organisations. The analyses of the research findings demonstrate that the school has low favourable characteristics for transformation into a learning organization. The analyses of the data revealed that the school has no favourable organisational culture and structure required for transformation into a learning organization and that the vision and mission of the school was not shared by most of the school community. Most of the staff believed that the strategies implemented for the transformation of the school into a learning organization are not sufficient.

The first conclusion is that there was a disjuncture between the current leadership practices in schools and leadership approaches favourable for OL and that leadership practices in the school did not play any significant role in making it a learning organisation. In a very limited scale, individual and team learning occurred in the schools under study. However, leadership in the school did not play any meaningful role in supporting collaboration, collective learning, and participation of stakeholders in shaping the future of the school.

Another conclusion is that the understanding of the concept learning organisation was inadequate. Therefore, it is not surprising that some organisational learning activities in the school were not

translated into tangible action. For instance, teachers in the school did not feel welcome to take part in the deliberations regarding continuous professional development (CPD), action research projects and the like. While the school engages in activities that are directed at learning, it has not moved towards becoming a learning organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has confirmed the view that while all schools are supposed to be learning organisations, the schools that participated in this study are still far from that reality. It is therefore recommended that leadership development programmes are intensified and that the concept of learning organisations should be entrenched and also that leadership practices that are aimed at turning schools to learning organisations should be emphasised. It is evident that if the school has to change to become a learning organisation, the school leaders need to embrace the values enshrined in the concept of learning organisation and collaborative learning. More importantly, school leaders need to embrace and entrench the values of transparency, democracy and participation of stakeholders in the activities of the school.

Efforts at school reform require more than a focus on students – it requires that school community work together in new and different ways, ways that promote and reinforce inclusiveness, collaboration, innovation, and support for one another. Rumberger (2004) noted that promising interventions to increase student performance should focus not only on students, but also on changing the institutions in which students are embedded. Thus, it is important for the school leadership to design creative interventions for promoting the operation of schools as learning organizations, such as, training and coaching teachers in the principles of organisational learning, establishing learning teams under the auspices of the principal.

As referenced by Rumberger (2004), schools do not operate in a vacuum – they function as part of a larger social system, including the school district and the local community in which they are embedded. Consequently, working to promote the operation of schools as learning organizations requires a focus beyond any single school. Therefore, it is suggested that the nature of the interface between the school and the larger system should be assessed, especially those issues that pose hurdles in the efforts by the school to function in new and creative ways.

The more opportunities that schools created for learning, the more learning that occurred and the better quality it is. Schools that are skilled at OL inspire their teachers to learn, create opportunities for such learning to occur and demonstrate a culture where organisational members have high expectations of each other (Rait, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 1996 and Chapman, 1996). Thus, aspects of teachers' professional development focusing on continuous learning and improvement of instructional practices should be given priority. Similarly, school principals should be consistently exposed to the best theories and practices on school leadership through courses, workshops and seminars.

Because individual learning is critically linked to OL (Leithwood and Aitkens, 1995; Kim, 1993; Watkins and Marsick, 1993; Senge, 1990; Argyris and Schon, 1978) there are many implications for schools seeking to increase their OL capacity. For individual learning to be continuous it should evolve beyond single, isolated events to the point where it becomes a natural part of work. Successful

individual learning initiatives should be integrated into the daily routines of everyone within the organization. In essence this calls for continuous learning, and planning for learning.

Finally, it is recommended that the school has to determine strategies for individual, team and institutional learning besides improving the conditions for transformation into a learning organization.

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