

Full Length Research Paper

An assessment of grade four students learning: The case of Jimma town

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This study aimed at investigating grade four students learning at Jimma town, Ethiopia. A cross sectional survey method was employed. Students, teachers and principals were participants of the study. Standardized tests, questionnaire, interview and observation were the instruments used to collect authentic information from the research participants. The collected data were analyzed quantitatively using various statistical techniques and qualitatively categorizing it in to different themes to substantiate the numerical data. The result indicated that students' learning achievement was inadequate in two key subjects namely English and Mathematics which are the core subjects in all education levels of the country. Moreover, there was immense gap among schools and across subjects in students' performance. The major reasons identified were students' background (family socioeconomic status and educational level and mother tongue), students' interest and attitudes towards key subjects (English, Mathematics, Environmental Science and Mother tongue), availability of learning resources and support from school and the families/guardian. From the factors, the most prominent ones are issues related with their home related problems and utilization of the available resources. Thus, researchers recommended that relentless effort should be exerted by all stakeholders to bring students to the level expected of them as stated in the curricula.

Key words: Assessment, learning assessment, key subjects.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The main purpose of education, especially at primary level, is to enhance economic and social development of a country by creating learning opportunities at individual, community, and national levels, and to expand literacy

and give basis for further training and self-education (MoE, 1994). To attain such major aims, various countries have been designing and implementing different strategies for expanding access and improving quality of schooling.

Cognizant of this, Ethiopia also introduced free primary

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education with the formulation of the new education and training policy in 1994 as a major strategy towards achieving the education for all (EFA) goals. Moreover, in 1997 the government of Ethiopia launched the first five year education sector development program (ESDP-I, 1996) within the framework of education and training policy as part of a twenty-year education sector indicative plan. The main thrust of ESDP-II (2000) is to improve education quality, relevance, equity, and efficiency and to expand access with special emphasis on primary education in rural and underserved areas, as well as the promotion of education for girls (MoE, 2006). Accordingly, under ESDP III (2005), Ethiopia made significant progress in education. Access at all levels of the education system increased at a rapid rate in line with a sharp increase in the number of teachers, schools and institutions. There were important improvements in the availability of trained teachers and some other inputs which are indispensable for a high quality education system. This has led to rapid increase in the net enrolment rate, which currently stands at around 83% of primary school aged children.

The achievements under ESDP III are fundamental to allow Ethiopia to progress towards becoming a middle-income economy by the year 2025. ESDP IV was a historic landmark in making free primary education compulsory in order to give a major boost to education and to reach the remaining about 17%, the most vulnerable children who are still out of school. This is also witnessed by the education sector's vision "to see all school-age children get access to quality primary education by the year 2015 and realize the creation of trained and skilled human power at all levels who was driving forces in the promotion of democracy and development in the country". However, challenges remain in order to realize this long-term vision. Because of the progress made during the previous years and within this long-term vision, the focus of education policies under ESDP IV will shift towards priority programs which address these remaining challenges. At the same time, work will continue on other areas to ensure that the important achievements of the previous years are not lost. Notwithstanding major investments in improving the numbers and the qualifications of teachers and the availability of equipment, student achievement has not yet sufficiently improved (ESDP IV, 2010).

The gains in access are of little meaning if they are not accompanied by improved student learning. This is to mean that, quantitative expansion has brought about serious challenges to its quality. Quality does not mean only what goes into schools, but also what goes in the mental and physical changes of children. It is important to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits of pupils in addition to giving emphasis to input factors. The case in Oromia become serious from time to time and it needs due attention. It is obvious that, if students do not acquire significant knowledge, attitudes and skills, it is

difficult to compete within a global economy in general and national spheres in particular. It is necessary therefore to shift attention to quality concerns and to those processes which lead to improved students' learning.

To check the status and maintain the quality in education, different mechanisms may/might be used. Of these strategies, one is conducting the national and regional learning assessments. The importance of monitoring learning achievement grew rapidly after the 1990 world declaration of education for all (EFA) in Jomtien. This declaration necessitated the introduction of a system of national assessment to determine if children were acquiring useful knowledge, reasoning ability, skills and values that schools promised to deliver. The term assessment in this study refers to the process of gathering, interpreting, and applying outcomes data on programs or entire curricula to improve program effectiveness, particularly as measured by student learning outcomes. It is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning. It involves making expectations explicit; setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards, and using the resulting information to document, explain and improve performance (Angelo, 1999).

Therefore, learning assessment is described as a systematic process of collecting relevant, valid and timely information about the outcomes of schooling used for making decisions about the development and learning of students. According to Kellaghan and Greaney (2001), it is an exercise designed to describe the level of achievement, not of individual students, but of a whole education system, or a clearly defined part of it. In other words, learning assessment is meant to discover how well an educational system is progressing in general and students are acquiring the knowledge, attitudes and skills delivered by the educational system.

In Ethiopia, quality assurance has been an important part of the reform process. So far Ethiopia has conducted around three national learning assessments for primary education in 1999/2000, 2004 and 2008 at grades 4 and 8. The result showed that there is decrease in students' achievement from time to time and this was clearly revealed by the third national assessment conducted in 2008. In addition to these national leaning assessments being carried out, Ethiopia will join regional/international learning assessment organizations to determine the status of quality of education as compared to other countries to ensure and design specific strategies to reach the millions of out of school children in the pastoralist regions and disadvantaged communities. According to Oromia regional education bureau annual performance assessment that was based on the promotion rate of primary school students, Jimma town (special Zone) is at the bottom of all Oromia region administrative zones. This

study was therefore attempted to investigate the level of student's academic achievement in the selected subjects and factors that affect their achievement.

Basic research questions

1. To what extent did grade 4 students achieve the stated curriculum in key subjects (Mother tongue (Afan Oromo), English, Mathematics and environmental science) and to what degree does their performance vary across schools and subjects?
2. What are the factors that influence grade four students' learning achievements in the primary schools of Jimma town?
3. What are the qualitative assessment and judgment of different groups (principals, teachers and students) on the efficiency, problems and solutions concerning students learning in the school?

Objectives of the study

The general intent of this research was to assess grade four students learning in selected key subjects at Jimma town Primary Schools. Particularly this study strived to:

1. Investigate the extent of grade 4 students' achievement as per the stated curriculum in key subjects and their degree of performances across schools?
2. Identify the factors that influence grade four students' achievements in the primary schools of Jimma town?
3. Examine the qualitative assessment and judgment of different groups (principals, teachers and students) on the efficiency, problems and solutions concerning students learning in the school?

Significance of the study

Students learning assessment involves a systematic process of collecting relevant, valid and timely information about the outcomes of schooling up on which decision to be made about the learning and development of students, curriculum, educational programs and educational policy. Students learning assessment provides the necessary feedback and objective evidence required to maximize the outcomes of educational efforts. Such assessment summarizes what learners know, understand and can do in relation to some or all of the learning goals determined in the curricula. Learning assessment focuses on the actual learning and it enables one to find out the extent to which an educational system is effective as a whole. If it is properly integrated in the system of education, students learning assessment can help actors and stakeholders to focus their collective attention, examine

their assumptions, and create a shared academic culture dedicated to auguring and improving the quality of education.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Design

In order to obtain the required and authentic information for the basic research questions and to address our research purposes well, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used. Accordingly, a cross sectional survey method was employed for it describes the current situation of students' learning.

Sampling procedures

For the study, all (13) public primary schools found in the town were taken as a target group. However, six out of thirteen public primary schools in Jimma town were randomly selected. Since the numbers of students across the schools selected were proportional, 40 students were taken purposefully from each school by taking into account their grade four first semester results (high, medium and low achievers) in the key subjects (Mother tongue (Afan Oromo), English, Mathematics and environmental science for grade 4) to sit for the achievement tests. All key subject teachers and all principals of the sampled schools were interviewed since their number was manageable.

Instrumentation

In order to gather authentic data, an achievement test was used to determine the extent to which learning takes place in primary schools of Jimma town. Questionnaire (modified, contextualized and translated (Afan Oromo) version of the national learning assessment) was also administered to collect general background information of grade 4 students, students' attitudes and interests towards the key subjects (Mother tongue (Afan Oromo), English, Mathematics and environmental science for grade 4), students' support and follow up and factors affecting students' learning. Moreover, interview was conducted with principals and subject teachers of the selected six primary schools to supplement the information gathered in quantitative approaches. To maintain the validity and reliability of the instruments, tests prepared at cluster level were selected and used based on the table of specification (test blue print) designed by the curricular experts by considering the syllabi of the core subjects. In addition, questionnaire developed at national level by ministry of education (MOE) was modified and translated to mother tongue (Afan Oromo) to fit in to the context of our study.

Data analysis and reporting

Data were organized in to data file (data file for grade 4) at two levels, i.e. student and school level. Prior to encoding the data in to computer, it was organized by schools, subjects and type of instruments. Then after, it was entered in to SPSS by using double entry method in order to check out whether or not the data are entered correctly. Following this, the data was cleaned, analyzed and reported. The data was analyzed using SPSS with the application of statistical methods such as descriptive and inferential statistics. Least significance difference (LSD) was used to separate

means whenever they are statistically significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As stated earlier, the purpose of the study was to investigate grade four students' learning in Jimma town primary schools. Accordingly, data were collected from different sources through various instruments. Thus, the data were organized and analyzed as follows based on the themes derived from basic research questions.

Background of the respondents

Under this section, the characteristics of the respondents (principals, teachers and students) were discussed in detail based on the data presented in tables 1 and 2. In table 1 below the background information of the principals and the teachers were presented. Accordingly, six principals and six self-contained teachers who were teaching the key subjects under study were selected from the six schools and included under the study. As far as the sex of the respondents concerned, four principals are male and the rest two principals and six subject teachers are females. Regarding their educational levels, all the principals are diploma holders in subject area fields (fields of study apart from school leadership) and all the teachers are certificate holders in teaching. Concerning their work experiences, one principal and two teachers have more than 10 years of work experiences while three principals and one teacher have experiences of 6 to 10 years. The rest principals and three teachers have less than 6 years of experiences (Table 1).

As far as the background information of the students concerned, the detailed background information was elaborated in table 2 below as follows. More than half (52.5%) of the students included in the survey from all the six schools were male while the rest 47.5% were female. About 55.6% of the students replied that the language they use at home and school are different while the rest 44.4% said that it is the same. The majority (65.6%) of the students were mentioned that they are living with their parents (father and mother) while the rest 4.1%, 13.8%, 12.4% and 4.1% replied that they are living with their father only, mother only, relatives, and others respectively. Students were also asked about the family size they came from and 37.6%, 26.1%, 21.6%, 8.7% and 6.0% of them replied that they came from above 5, 5, 4, 3 and 2 family sizes respectively.

Regarding the occupation of their families (father or mother or guardian), 37.7%, 28.3%, 20.4% 6.3% and 7.3% of the students indicated that their father's job is farming, government/non-government employee, trade, jobless and others respectively. Regarding their mother's

job, 19.0%, 22.8%, 20.4%, 31.6% and 6.3% of the respondents respectively mentioned as farming, government/non-government employee, trade, jobless and others. Students were also asked whether they support their family by working different activities or not and more than half (52.5%) of them replied that they are helping their families always after school times. The rest 1.8%, 21.2%, 3.7%, and 20.7% respectively answered it as no, yes on weekends, yes some times by missing schools and yes sometimes after school time.

Family's educational background (availability of other family members who is attending education, fathers as well as mothers educational status) was another issue entertained under backgrounds of students. Accordingly, 32.9%, 32.4%, 25.1%, and 9.7% of them respectively indicated that there are 1, 2, 3 and 4 and above students attending their education from the same family. As to father's educational status, 5.0%, 12.9%, 11.9%, 23.4%, 30.3% and 16.4% of the students replied that their father's educational status is uneducated, reading and writing, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and unknown respectively.

Similarly, mother's educational status was asked and 21.0%, 24.7%, 12.9%, 10.8%, 11.3% and 3.2% of students respectively replied that their mothers' educational background is considered as uneducated, able to read and write, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and unknown. Lastly, 35.5%, 29.0%, 9.7%, 17.7%, 11.3% and 12.9% students living with their relatives/guardians also stated the educational status of their family as uneducated, reading and writing, primary education, secondary education, tertiary education and unknown respectively.

Analysis of students achievement test results

This section deals with the analysis and discussions of students learning achievements by focusing on the extent to which grade 4 students achieve the stated curriculum in key subjects and the degree to which their performance level vary across schools and the key subjects. Accordingly, the achievements of students learning at grade four were examined at town level, school levels and subject levels. The average scores of students of the town for each of the four subjects, along with the composite score, are provided in table 3. The average score for 'A/Oromo' was the highest (68.0) and English (43.7) was the lowest. The results of analysis of variance, table 4 and 5, corroborate that none of the average scores of the four subjects are same. The average scores are put in 4 different categories with 'Afan Oromo' having the highest average score followed by environmental science. The performance of students of the town was the worst for English subject with an average score below 50%.

Table 1. Background Information about the Respondents (non-student respondents)

S.N	Name of School	Characteristics of the respondents (non-student respondents)													
		Occupation	Sex			Education Level				Work Experiences					
			M	F	T	1	2	3	T	1	2	3	4	T	
1	Jiren	Principal	1		1			1				1			1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1				1		1
2	Seto	Principal		1	1			1				1			1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1	1					1
3	Dilfire	Principal	1		1			1		1	1				1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1			1			1
4	Hamle 19	Principal	1		1			1		1	1				1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1	1					1
5	Kito	Principal		1	1			1		1			1		1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1	1					1
6	Jimma primary	Principal	1		1			1		1	1				1
		Teacher		1	1	1			1				1		1
Total			4	8	12	6	6		12	6	3	3		12	

Table 2. Students' background information

Items focusing on Students' Background	Options/Alternatives												Total	
	1		2		3		4		5		6			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Q. 1	115	52.5	104	47.5									219	100
Q. 2	120	55.6	96	44.4									216	100
Q. 3	143	65.6	9	4.1	30	13.8	27	12.4	9	4.1			218	100
Q. 4	13	6.0	19	8.7	47	21.6	57	26.1	82	37.6			218	100
Q. 5	72	37.7	54	28.3	39	20.4	12	6.3	14	7.3			191	100
Q. 6	30	19.0	36	22.8	32	20.3	50	31.6	10	6.3			158	100
Q. 7	4	1.8	46	21.2	8	3.7	45	20.7	114	52.5			217	100
Q. 8	68	32.9	67	32.4	52	25.1	20	9.7					207	100
Q. 9	33	16.4	61	30.3	47	23.4	24	11.9	26	12.9	10	5.0	201	100
Q. 10	39	21.0	46	24.7	8	12.9	20	10.8	21	11.3	6	3.2	186	100
Q. 11	22	35.5	54	29.0	6	9.7	11	17.7	7	11.3	8	12.9	62	100

Note that: the number of students for all items is not the same since elimination was made at item level not at questionnaire level to reduce problems of under representation at all cases. In addition, question 11 is dealing with students who are living with relatives/guardians and that are why the total number of respondents became lower as compared to others.

Table 3. Average scores of key subjects at Town Level.

Subject	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
A/Oromo	223	68.0	23.74
Environmental Science	219	58.6	16.78
Mathematics	217	52.4	18.74
English	208	43.7	14.14
Composite	867	55.9	20.72

Achievements of students by school: A/Oromo

Although, A/Oromo was found to be a favorite subject for students of the town in general, the scores show some degree of variability in their distribution across schools. The average score of students of Hamle was the highest at 88.7%. On the contrary, the score for students of Jimma primary was below the minimum expected (Table

Table 4. Result of ANOVA

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	68278.12	3	22759.37	
Within Groups	303689.26	863	351.90	64.68***
Total	371967.38	866		

*** P-value<0.0001

Table 5. Groups of homogeneous subsets

Subject	N	1	2	3	4
English	208	43.7			
Mathematics	217		52.4		
Environmental Science	219			58.6	
A/Oromo	223				68.0

Table 6. 'A/Oromo' average scores by school

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Jiren	38	75.7	16.70	2.71
Seto	40	66.4	21.90	3.46
Dilfire	41	58.2	21.02	3.28
Hamle	40	88.7	12.68	2.00
Kito	36	69.9	19.18	3.20
Jimma primary	28	42.6	25.49	4.82
Total	223	68.0	23.74	1.59

Table 7. Result of ANOVA, A/Oromo

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	41699.97	5	8339.99	
Within Groups	83387.74	217	384.28	21.70***
Total	125087.71	222		

*** P-value<0.0001

6). A comparison of the average scores of students by school was carried out (Table 7 and 8). A statistically significant difference has been observed among the average score of students of the different schools. The test also produced 4 homogenous school groups whose mean score has no significant difference among schools of same group. According to the grouping, Jimma primary was the least performer and Hamle was in the highest scoring category.

Achievements of students by school: Environmental science

Environmental science was the second preferred subject by grade 4 student of the town. The distribution of average scores displayed in table 9 reveal that the average scores of two schools, Jimma primary and Dilfire were below 50% and the scores of three schools were below 70%. The test of equality of average scores across

Table 8. Groups of homogeneous subsets, A/Oromo

School	N	1	2	3	4
Jimma primary	28	42.6			
Dilfire	41		58.2		
Seto	40		66.4	66.4	
Kito	36		69.9	69.9	
Jiren	38			75.7	75.7
Hamle	40				88.7

Table 9. Environmental science average scores by school

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Jiren	39	62.0	15.16	2.43
Seto	37	58.4	15.99	2.63
Dilfire	39	46.6	13.03	2.09
Hamle	40	64.9	10.31	1.63
Kito	36	74.0	12.45	2.08
Jimma primary	28	42.1	11.65	2.20
Total	219	58.6	16.78	1.13

Table 10. Result of ANOVA, Environmental Science

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	23797.61	5	4759.52	
Within Groups	37609.22	213	176.57	26.96***
Total	61406.83	218		

*** P-value<0.0001

Table 11. Groups of homogeneous subsets, Environmental Science

School	N	1	2	3
Jimma primary	28	42.1		
Dilfire	39	46.6		
Seto	37		58.4	
Jiren	39		62.0	
Hamle	40		64.9	64.9
Kito	36			74.0

the schools tells that the means are not all same. The schools were grouped into three homogeneous subsets based on their achievement. Jimma primary and Dilfire were in the least performing groups whereas Kito and Hamle were grouped in the best performing category

(Table 10 and 11).

Achievements of students by school: Mathematics

The performance of students in mathematics can generally be regarded as less than satisfactory. Three schools had an average score below the minimum desired pass mark (50%). Apparently, none of the schools had an average score above 70% while two of them had an average score above 60% (Table 12). The test of significance for equality of mean scores (as shown in Tables 13 and 14) indicates that the average scores are not all the same. The schools were categorized into three groups with three schools, Dilfire, Jimma primary and Jiren, being poor performers and Seto was in the second group which is considered as an average and Kito and Hamle in the third category as better performance.

Table 12. Mathematics average scores by school

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Jiren	36	43.8	10.47	1.74
Seto	36	55.9	15.98	2.66
Dilfire	38	35.0	12.50	2.03
Hamle	40	69.5	8.91	1.41
Kito	36	66.6	14.91	2.48
Jimma primary	31	40.9	17.02	3.06
Total	217	52.4	18.74	1.27

Table 13. Result of ANOVA, Mathematics

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	37696.11	5	7539.22	
Within Groups	38133.27	211	180.73	41.76***
Total	75829.38	216		

*** P-value<0.0001

Table 14. Groups of homogeneous subsets, Mathematics

School	N	1	2	3
Dilfire	38	35.0		
Jimma primary	31	40.9		
Jiren	36	43.8		
Seto	36		55.9	
Kito	36			66.6
Hamle	40			69.5

Achievements of students by school: English

As described earlier (table 3) the achievement of the students in English was the least score was as compared to other key subjects. The results across schools also corroborate the mean score and none of the schools except Jiren had an average score above the minimum required pass mark (50%) (Table15). The average scores of the schools were classified into three categories as per the magnitude of their average. Jiren, with an average score of 60.9%, stands at the top of the list. Eventhough the average scores were below 50%, the rest four schools were put in two groups as worst and bad performers in English test (Table 16 and 17).

Factors affecting students learning

In this section, factors that can affect students' learning positively and negatively got due emphasis. Accordingly, both quantitative and qualitative data focusing on factors

such as students' attitude and interest towards learning, availabilities of supports and follow up for students at home and school, availabilities of necessary learning facilities, teachers' professional profiles (education level, work experiences, commitment, competences in teaching), adequacy of the processes passed through, principals' capability to monitor students learning and the rest others were presented in detail.

Students' attitudes and interests towards learning

Students' attitudes and interests were surveyed through items presented in tables 18 and 19 respectively. Thus, students were asked to pinpoint the subject they consider as difficult and more than half (57.8%) of the students indicate mathematics as the most difficult subject (Item 1, table 18). Moreover, they were given opportunities to stipulate the extent to which they understand the key subjects during the lesson (through items 2, 3 and 4, table 18) and 63.9%, 57.2% and 64.7% of the respondents respectively replied that English, Mathematics and Environmental Sciences are more understood. Furthermore, students were asked about the importance of learning the subjects through items (5 to 7) of the same table and 72.9%, 75% and 76.7% of them respectively indicated that learning English, Mathematics and Environmental Science have importance in their life.

Questions 1 to 6 (table 19) are focusing on the interest the students have towards learning English, Mathematics and Environmental Science. The first three items requests their level of interest in learning the key subjects and (67.4%, 72.7% and 67.3%) of the students replied that

Table 15. English average scores by school

School	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Jiren	23	60.9	13.97	2.91
Seto	40	37.2	12.64	2.00
Dilfire	40	37.5	11.83	1.87
Hamle	40	41.3	12.21	1.93
Kito	65	46.8	11.64	1.44
Total	208	43.7	14.13	0.98

Table 16. Result of ANOVA, English

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Between Groups	10882.04	4	2720.51	
Within Groups	30483.29	203	150.16	18.12***
Total	41365.33	207		

*** P-value<0.0001

Table 17. Groups of homogeneous subsets, English

School	N	1	2	3
Seto	40	37.2		
Dilfire	40	37.5		
Hamle	40	41.3	41.3	
Kito	65		46.8	
Jiren	23			60.9

they are highly interested in learning English, Mathematics and Environmental Science respectively. In addition, items 4 to 6 (the same table) capitalize on whether the students are enjoying or not while learning the identified subjects. Accordingly, 78.7%, 73% and 75.6% of them respectively said that they are find it interesting while learning English, Mathematics and Environmental Sciences.

Supports and follow ups made for students

In this sub-section, data were secured to identify the supports and follow ups made for the students on their learning. As indicated on item 1 of table 20, students were asked whether they have support in studying at home or not and majority (56.0%) of them mentioned that they get support at home though the duration of time is limited to 1 to 3 days per week (Item 2 of the same table). The respondents were also asked about the availability of adequate meals per-day (item 3) and most of them said that they get meals 3 or more times per day (58.5% said

3 times per day and 24.4% said more than 3 times per day). Availabilities of text books was another concern treated as support and accordingly 83.4%, 81.1% and 83.1% of the students respectively replied that they individually got text books of Mathematics, English and Environmental Science (Items 4 to 6 from table 20).

The second important concern of this sub-section was about the follow ups made for students on their learning both at schools and homes. Items 1 to 8 of table 21 focuses on the follow ups that include availability of taking attendance daily (items 1 and2), provisions and timely corrections of home works for different subjects (Items 3 to 8). About 87.9% of the respondents mentioned that attendance is taken daily though significant numbers (49.1%) of the students said that they were absent from the school for 1 to 3 days per semester while 13.3% and 6.9% of the respondents replied that they were absent from school for 4 to 6 days and 7 to 10 days respectively. The remaining 30.7% were not absent from schools per semester. As far as the provisions and timely corrections of home works concerned, majority (67.0%, and 56.1%) of the students said that home work for English subject is provided and corrected 4 or 5 times per week (Items 3 and 4). For the rest subjects the frequency of providing and correcting home works is less than four times as stated by most of the respondents.

Interview and observation results on the availabilities of the necessary learning facilities

The researchers gathered relevant data focusing on the availabilities of educational facilities through direct observation of the schools facilities and interviews

Table 18. Students' attitudes towards learning

Items	Options/Alternatives							
	English		Mathematics		Environmental Science		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	75	36.8	118	57.8	11	5.4	204	100
	More understood		Somewhat understood		Less understood		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
2	131	63.9	52	25.4	22	10.7	205	100
3	103	57.2	60	33.3	17	9.4	180	100
4	112	64.7	44	25.4	17	9.8	173	100
	Low		Medium		High		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
5	26	14.4	23	12.7	132	72.9	181	100
6	15	9.1	26	15.9	123	75.0	164	100
7	18	11.0	20	12.3	125	76.7	163	100

Note that: the number of students for all items is not the same since elimination was made at item level not at questionnaire level to reduce problems of under representation at all cases.

Table 19. Students' interests towards learning

Items	Options/Alternatives							
	Low		Medium		High		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	26	14.6	32	18.0	120	67.4	178	100
2	25	14.8	38	22.5	106	72.7	169	100
3	26	16.0	27	16.7	109	67.3	162	100
	No		Do not have idea		Yes		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
4	27	16.0	9	5.3	133	78.7	169	100
5	24	15.1	19	11.9	116	73	159	100
6	27	16.9	12	7.5	121	75.6	160	100

Note that: the number of students for all items is not the same since elimination was made at item level not at questionnaire level to reduce problems of under representation at all cases.

conducted with principals and teachers from the schools under study. Accordingly, learning resources such as availabilities of text books, teachers' guides, syllabi, other reading materials (reference materials), teaching aids, and other related resources were checked for their availability through direct observation and interview guide. The result showed that these learning facilities are relatively sufficient as the participants compared with other sub urban and rural schools.

However, the respondents clearly pointed out that there is limitation in using the available resources. Supporting

this idea one of the principal's statement is quoted as follows:

"Though the government is allocating text books and other resources (admitting the scarcity as a developing country) to the schools that are necessary in facilitating students learning, they are not well utilized". He further claimed that availability of resources is not the sole determinant of schools' improvement. Rather, the development of the human capacity in using the resources is the wherewithal of the change we are looking for.

Table 20. Supports rendered to students

Items	Options/Alternatives										Total	
	1		2		3		4		5		f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	96	44.0	122	56.0							218	100
2	69	47.3	32	21.9	45	30.8					146	100
3	37	17.1	127	58.5	53	24.4					217	100
4	176	83.4	6	2.8	1	0.5	23	10.9	5	2.4	211	100
5	159	81.1	9	4.6	2	1.0	17	8.7	9	4.6	196	100
6	157	83.1	6	3.2	5	2.6	16	8.5	5	2.6	189	100

Note that: the number of students for all items is not the same since elimination was made at item level not at questionnaire level to reduce problems of under representation at all cases.

Table 21. Follow ups made on students learning

Items	Options/Alternatives										Total	
	1		2		3		4		5		f	%
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	189	87.9	20	9.3	6	2.8					215	100
2	67	30.7	107	49.1	29	13.3	15	6.9			218	100
3	144	67.0	44	20.5	10	4.7	16	7.4	1	0.5	215	100
4	110	56.1	49	25.0	20	10.2	14	7.1	3	1.5	196	100
5	38	20.0	45	23.7	52	27.4	43	22.6	12	6.3	190	100
6	98	46.9	58	27.8	20	9.6	31	14.8	2	1.0	209	100
7	91	48.7	46	24.6	26	13.9	22	11.8	2	1.1	187	100
8	46	26.0	31	17.5	48	27.1	41	23.2	11	6.2	177	100

Note that: the number of students for all items is not the same since elimination was made at item level not at questionnaire level to reduce problems of under representation at all cases.

Regarding this, all interviewed participants supported what the aforementioned principals said though we took this as a sample. In addition to the aforementioned facilities, classroom facilities like chairs, tables, boards, lighting system, and toilet for girls and boys, play ground's distance from the classroom, and school fences were areas of emphasis in our study since they contribute a lot for students learning. The findings show that these facilities are not well established to support the teaching learning process as educational institutions require hospitable environment for learning to happen. The responses of teachers and principals interviewed also confirm this.

The qualitative assessments and judgments of principals and teachers on the efficiency, problems and solutions concerning students learning in the school

Principals and teachers were asked to reflect on the

efficiency, problems and solutions related to student learning in schools and their views are compiled as follows. One of the principal interviewed replied that:

It is difficult to say that students learning are efficient in the absence of good learning achievement which is accompanied by high investment of the limited resources. Students are considering education as secondary agenda and give less emphasis to their education and that is why most of them achieve less marks. (Principal A's response)

Another interviewed principal also added that:

Nowadays, we are facing difficulties in having well motivated and interested learners who can give due emphasis to their learning. Most of the students are simply coming to the school with less motivations and interests which will have a bearing effect on their learning. Our teachers are also facing these challenges and even some teachers are dissatisfied with their work since the students are not up to their expectations. This clearly shows that

the efficiency of students' learning in our school is in a problem which needs further research based innervations from educational experts and the government as well (Principal B's response).

The above two quotes show the existence of problems on the efficiency of students learning in the schools included under investigation. Supporting this, the teacher interviewed from another school mentioned that the actual situation in which they are currently performing the teaching-learning process does not lead the students to be efficient in their learning. He confirmed his view when he said, "the issue is a complex one, the existing situation is the result of long time economic, social and political manifestations that---the contemporary situation." He further elaborated the seriousness of the issue in that students are seeing their elders who attended education up to university and returning to home without any occupation(lack of important personalities from the area to be a role model) and this is probably one of the major factor that harm students efficiency in learning. However, the views of students as analyzed in table 18 and 19 above show that the students have positive attitudes and good interests towards learning in the key subjects identified.

Regarding the problems associated with students learning, the principals and teachers interviewed mentioned that shortage of classrooms and chairs, insufficiency of well furnished and attractive learning environments, lack of commitment from some teachers, poor educational expectations from students and their family, insufficient support and follow up for students in and outside of the schools, lack of short-term trainings for teachers, principals and supervisors, lack of awareness, lack of standardized and separate play grounds and the rest others are among the major problems observed. As a remedy they suggested that all stakeholders are expected to play their pivotal role to bring the required outcome. For example, the government should give due attention by mobilizing the community and allocating the necessary budget as much as possible and is also expected to ensure resources are committed to school activities. Awareness creation workshops should also be in place for the responsible bodies to make them capable in executing the duties and responsibilities expected of them to bring about positive changes on students learning. In addition they recommended both the students and the teachers to commit themselves to improve their learning achievement which will have a bearing effect on country's future development.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the main findings of the study. That is, the results presented in the previous part are interpreted and discussed in line with contemporary

literature on the issue. As the results indicate, the achievement of grade four students in key subjects is quite different across the schools and subjects. Accordingly, average students achieved the highest result in Afan Oromo and the lowest in English. When we compare students' performance across schools, Jimma primary school is the least and Hamle is in the highest scoring category.

The researchers were wondering the reason behind the difference in achievement of the students across the schools and subjects. The major reasons, as the results show, associated with students' background, their interest towards the subjects, availability of support and follow-ups from home as well as schools. Moreover, availability of learning facilities in the schools is also found to be reasons to see differences in performance. Different research findings show that student background highly affects their academic achievement. Students' background encompasses many components among which educational background, language, family livelihood, and size are the prominent ones. Adeyemo (2010) as cited in national learning assessment (2013), mentioned that the interplay of family factors such as parental educational level, income, occupation, support to the child, and parental relationship with each other greatly determine the child's readiness to learn and performance at school. For instance, broken homes may cause unhappiness that may in turn affect the child's academic achievement. In short, home backgrounds of pupils exert significant influence on their academic achievement.

The finding revealed that significant number of respondents indicated about 41.6% of their parent (fathers and mothers) have tertiary level education. However, interview results show that students are not well concerned about their education. Moreover, many of the respondents replied that they support their family after school by serving as daily laborer, involving in very small businesses and in farming activities. These in turn contribute to their academic achievement. Therefore, even if parents are at a better position in their education level, it shows they are not supporting as expected of them. Another issue entertained under the background of the students was their mother tongue and 55.6% of the student respondents indicated that there is the language difference at home and at school. This might imply the students who are using the same language at home and school may perform better than those who are learning in language other than their mother tongue. Cognizant of this pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) stated that the language of instruction at primary schools should be in mother tongue.

Occupation and size of the family or guardian is also

another important factor entertained as a determinant for students' performance. As indicated in table 2, 37.7% of the students are from family with farming occupation. There are also students with jobless parents which account 6.3%. Moreover, about 37.6% of the student respondents replied that they came from more than five family members. As the number of family increases, the capacity to afford the necessary resources for schooling will diminish which leads to challenges including a dearth of learning resources, difficult learning conditions and poor motivation that negatively affect their academic performance. As stated in Ethiopian national learning assessment report (2013), the students' family size has an influence on their learning achievement. Teacher quality and characteristics such as years of schooling, preparation, in-service training, and verbal proficiency have great influence on students' achievement in developing countries (Fuller, 1985). As Kingdon (1999) states it, pupils learn more from teachers who hold higher degrees in subjects they are teaching because the level of teacher's qualification to a lesser or greater degree affects classroom interaction. Teachers with advanced qualifications and experience are more likely to communicate easily and better, thereby enhancing the performance of their pupils (Bishop, 1996).

The other important factor to influence students learning achievement is learning facilities that include resources that facilitate the learning process. Availability, relevance, and adequacy of educational resources such as textbooks and reading materials used by students and teachers contribute to academic achievement (Hallack, 1990). As stated in the analysis part, text books are available for most students in person. However, the availability of textbooks and reading materials in the school's library and store does not guarantee the quality of schooling, unless they are given to learners on time during a given academic year (Getahun, 2002 in National Learning Assessment, 2013). Furthermore, the school observation and the interview conducted with principals and teachers identified that almost all the schools under the study are characterized by unattractive school building, crowded classrooms, and non-availability of separate playgrounds, and school environment that has no aesthetic beauty. Research findings also show the impacts of school environments on students learning achievement, (Hallack, 1990).

CONCLUSION

From the major findings and discussions, the following conclusions are drawn

1. The extent to which grade 4 students of Jimma town achieve the stated curriculum in key subjects (Mother tongue (Afan Oromo), English, Mathematics and

environmental science) was examined and the study revealed that their achievement is inadequate especially in English (43.7%) and Mathematics (52.4%) though the subjects are considered as fundamental.

2. Regarding the degree of variations in their performances across subjects and schools, there is a huge gap in students' performance among the schools in key subjects. Students performed relatively high in Afan Oromo (Average score for Afan Oromo, 55.9%) as compared to English (Average score for English, 29.8%). Therefore, English as a subject is more challenging to the students of the town than the other three subjects though the performances of students in the rest other subjects is still not promising. In addition to this, their learning performance still varies across the schools. Jimma primary school is the least and Hamle is in the relatively higher scoring category. However, with similar curricula and school setting, the results would have been comparable. This implies that there are problems that need due attention to bring the learners performance to the expected standard across the subjects and the schools.

3. The uncovered reasons for these are related with students' background, interests and attitudes towards learning, availability of supports and follow-ups from home and school and availability of learning facilities. Among the components dealt with under the background, the language difference between home and school and parents socioeconomic status profoundly indicated as major hindrances to students' performance. Albeit the results scored in Mathematics and English language is inadequate, their questionnaire response is marked good interest and positive attitude towards these subjects. This entails that there are myriads of interrelated and complex factors taking down expected student results.

4. The qualitative assessment of different stakeholders (principals, teachers, and students) shows that there is a problem on the efficiency of students learning which is vividly indicated by their learning achievements and the expenditures of educational resources. This is because; efficiency focuses on the cost-benefit analysis of students learning. It is clear that resources are allocated to schools to facilitate the provision of quality education for students which is expected to be resulted in good students' learning achievement. However, since the achievements of students learning is getting lesser and lesser with high expenditures of limited resources it can be concluded that efficiency of one's own learning is in a problem.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions the following recommendations were suggested.

1. The finding revealed that Jimma town students' learning achievement found to be inadequate which needs timely intervention to enhance students' performance.

Therefore, it is better if all the stakeholders' that is, schools, educational officers and experts in the area should work cooperatively and closely.

2. Since the value students have for education is not good as explained by principals and teacher, awareness creation for the students and their parents should be organized regularly by school management in collaboration with other stakeholders.

3. To bridge the performance gap among schools, there should be a forum where they can identify the common problems and ameliorate the accordingly.

4. To solve problems related with English language results, training for teachers as well as students should be given in collaboration with the surrounding higher education institutions.

5. To minimize the impacts of major factors influencing students' achievement, it would be better if the schools and other concerned bodies involve and play their role in curbing the challenges in an informed way.

6. To get the best out of learning, effective and efficient use of scarce resources so as to produce competent citizens in the era of globalization.

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