
Research Article

Analyzing the Decline in Ethiopian National Examination Pass Rates: Causes, Consequences, and Reform Strategies

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Abstract

Ethiopia's EUEE pass rates have plummeted from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, reflecting systemic issues in secondary education quality, exacerbated by curriculum flaws, inadequate teacher training, socioeconomic barriers, and regional conflicts. This study aimed to investigate the causes of the decline and propose solutions to enhance educational outcomes and equity. A mixed-methods approach was employed, collecting data from 400 students, 100 teachers, 20 administrators, and 5 MoE officials across five regions using questionnaires, interviews, and FGDs. Secondary data on pass rates and resources were analyzed. Quantitative data were processed with SPSS, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo. The competency-based curriculum is misaligned with the EUEE, with only 18% of students feeling prepared due to textbook errors. Only 25% of teachers are trained, and rural schools lack resources (UNICEF, 2023). Socioeconomic hardships and conflicts in Amhara and Tigray disrupt preparation, with 70% of students citing economic barriers (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Only 12% access remedial programs, leaving 94.6% of failures unsupported (MoE, 2023). Centralized exam design ignores regional contexts, contributing to low pass rates (Assefa & Desta, 2021). Systemic misalignments and inequities drive the EUEE decline, threatening SDG 4 goals. Revise curriculum, enhance teacher training, allocate resources equitably, establish remedial programs, decentralize exam design, strengthen monitoring, and engage communities.

Keywords: EUEE pass rates, curriculum reform, teacher training, educational equity, regional

1. Introduction

Ethiopia's education system has undergone significant reforms to enhance quality and access, yet the passing rates for higher education entrance examinations have declined alarmingly over the past four years, dropping from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024 (Addis Insight, 2024; Goshu, et al. 2024). This downward trend raises critical concerns about the effectiveness of the education system and its ability to prepare students for higher education and the workforce. The decline is attributed to stricter anti-cheating measures, a poorly implemented new curriculum, resource disparities, and socioeconomic challenges, including regional conflicts (MoE, 2023; Goshu, et al. 2024). These factors have exposed systemic weaknesses, particularly in rural areas where access to quality education is limited. The sharp drop in pass rates affects individual students and threatens Ethiopia's human capital development, a cornerstone of its economic growth aspirations (World Bank, 2020; Goshu, et al. 2024). This study aims to investigate the root causes of the declining pass rates, focusing on curriculum implementation, teacher preparedness, and equitable resource distribution. By identifying actionable solutions, the research seeks to inform policy reforms that can reverse this trend and ensure a more inclusive and effective education system. The study is timely, as Ethiopia strives to meet its Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) targets for quality education by 2030 (UNESCO, 2021). Through qualitative and quantitative methods, including stakeholder interviews and exam performance analysis, this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and propose evidence-based interventions. Addressing these issues is critical to restoring public confidence in education, reducing dropout rates, and fostering a skilled

workforce capable of driving Ethiopia's development agenda.

1.1 Background

Ethiopia's education system has expanded significantly since the 1990s, with increased enrollment driven by policies aimed at universal access (World Bank, 2020). However, this focus on quantity has often compromised quality, particularly in secondary education, where students prepare for the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE). The EUEE determines eligibility for higher education, making it a critical gateway for social and economic mobility. Historically, pass rates were relatively high, but concerns about exam integrity prompted reforms in 2021 under Education Minister Birhanu Nega (MoE, 2021). These reforms, including stricter exam administration at universities, reduced cheating but led to a sharp decline in pass rates: 3.3% in 2022, 3.2% in 2023, and 5.4% in 2024 (Addis Insight, 2024; Goshu, et al., 2024b).

The introduction of a new competency-based curriculum for grades 1–12 aimed to modernize education but has faced significant challenges. Textbooks contain errors, critical topics are omitted, and teachers lack adequate training (Tsfaye, 2022). Rural schools, which serve the majority of students, are under-resourced, with overcrowded classrooms and untrained educators (UNICEF, 2023; Goshu, et al., 2024b). Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and regional conflicts in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray, further disrupt schooling, particularly for marginalized groups (Human Rights Watch, 2023). These challenges have created disparities in exam preparation, with urban students outperforming their rural counterparts.

Previous studies highlight the need for systemic reforms to address teacher training, curriculum alignment, and resource inequities (Assefa & Desta, 2021). However, there is limited research on the specific impact of recent reforms on EUEE performance. This study builds on existing literature by examining the interplay of curriculum flaws, teacher preparedness, and socioeconomic barriers. By analyzing data from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and stakeholder perspectives, it seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the decline and propose targeted interventions to align Ethiopia's education system with its developmental goals.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The consistent decline in Ethiopia's higher education entrance examination pass rates over the past four years from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024 signals a deepening crisis in the secondary education system (Addis Insight, 2024). This trend, driven by stricter anti-cheating measures, reveals underlying issues in curriculum design, teacher preparedness, and resource allocation (MoE, 2023). The new competency-based curriculum, intended to enhance learning outcomes, is poorly implemented, with error-ridden textbooks and insufficient teacher training (Tsfaye, 2022). Rural students, who constitute the majority, face significant disadvantages due to underfunded schools, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of qualified teachers (UNICEF, 2023). Additionally, regional conflicts in Amhara, Oromia, and Tigray have disrupted education, exacerbating inequities and reducing preparation time for exams (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

The low pass rates have far-reaching consequences. Students who fail the EUEE have limited pathways to higher education, increasing dropout rates and unemployment (World Bank, 2020). This undermines Ethiopia's efforts to build a skilled workforce, critical for its economic transformation goals. Moreover, the lack of robust remedial programs for failing students fosters disillusionment, eroding public trust in the education system (Assefa & Desta, 2021). While anti-cheating reforms have improved exam integrity, they have not been accompanied by measures to address systemic educational gaps, raising questions about fairness and accessibility.

The problem is compounded by a lack of comprehensive research on the specific factors driving the decline. Existing studies focus on general education quality but do not adequately explore the impact of recent curriculum changes, teacher training deficits, or regional disparities on EUEE performance (Tsfaye, 2022). This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the root causes of the declining pass rates and identifying targeted interventions. Without addressing these issues, Ethiopia risks failing to meet its SDG 4 targets for inclusive and quality education, jeopardizing its long-term development prospects (UNESCO, 2021).

To investigate the causes of the declining higher education entrance examination pass rates in Ethiopia from 2021 to 2024 and propose evidence-based solutions to improve student performance and educational equity. The specific objectives are

- To analyze the impact of the new competency-based curriculum on students' preparedness for the EUEE.
- To assess the role of teacher training and resource availability in contributing to low pass rates.
- To examine the effects of socioeconomic factors and regional conflicts on exam performance, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.
- To identify gaps in support systems for students who fail the EUEE and recommend remedial interventions.
- To propose policy recommendations for aligning curriculum, teacher training, and exam administration to enhance pass rates and educational outcomes.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The declining pass rates of Ethiopia's higher education entrance examinations represent a critical challenge to the country's education system and its broader development goals. This study is significant because it addresses a pressing issue that affects thousands of students, educators, and policymakers, with implications for Ethiopia's economic and social progress. By investigating the root causes of the decline from curriculum flaws to resource disparities and socioeconomic barriers this research will provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem and offer actionable solutions. Its findings will be valuable to multiple stakeholders, including the Ministry of Education, educational institutions, and international development partners working to achieve SDG 4 for inclusive and quality education (UNESCO, 2021).

For policymakers, the study will offer evidence-based recommendations to reform curriculum implementation, improve teacher training, and address inequities in resource allocation. The sharp decline in pass rates, from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, underscores the urgency of these reforms (Addis Insight, 2024). By identifying specific gaps, such as the lack of teacher preparedness and the impact of regional conflicts, the study will guide targeted interventions to ensure that rural and marginalized students have equitable access to quality education (UNICEF, 2023). This is critical for reducing dropout rates and fostering a skilled workforce, which is essential for Ethiopia's economic transformation (World Bank, 2020).

For educators, the study will highlight the need for enhanced training and support to effectively deliver the new competency-based curriculum. Previous research indicates that teacher motivation and preparedness are key determinants of student performance (Assefa & Desta, 2021). By addressing these issues, the study will contribute to improving teaching quality and student outcomes. Additionally, the proposed remedial programs for failing students will help reduce disillusionment and promote lifelong learning, aligning with Ethiopia's education policy goals (MoE, 2023).

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively investigate the causes of the declining higher education entrance examination pass rates in Ethiopia from 2021 to 2024. The mixed-methods approach combines quantitative data analysis for statistical insights and qualitative methods to capture stakeholder perspectives, ensuring a holistic understanding of the issue (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The explanatory sequential design will be used, where quantitative data analysis is followed by qualitative data collection to explain the findings in depth. This approach is suitable for exploring complex educational phenomena, as it allows triangulation of data to enhance validity and reliability (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

2.2 Population and Sampling

The target population includes grade 12 students, secondary school teachers, school administrators, and Ministry of Education (MoE) officials across Ethiopia. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from urban and rural areas, and conflict-affected regions like Amhara and Oromia. First, 10 secondary schools were purposively selected from five regions (Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, and Southern Nations) to reflect diverse socioeconomic and educational contexts. From each school, 50 students (totaling 500) were randomly sampled to participate in surveys. Additionally, 10 teachers and 2 administrators per school (100 teachers and 20 administrators) will be purposively selected based on their experience with the new curriculum. Five MoE officials were selected for interviews using snowball sampling to access key policymakers. This sampling strategy ensures a balanced representation of stakeholders while addressing logistical constraints (Cohen et al., 2018).

2.3 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data: A structured questionnaire was administered to students to assess their perceptions of curriculum effectiveness, teacher preparedness, and socioeconomic barriers. The questionnaire was used a 5-point Likert scale and was adapted from validated instruments used in similar studies (Assefa & Desta, 2021). Additionally, secondary data on EUEE pass rates from 2021 to 2024 was collected from MoE reports to analyze trends and regional disparities.

Qualitative Data: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and MoE officials to explore challenges in curriculum implementation, teacher training, and policy impacts. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with students (one per school, totaling 10 groups of 8–10 students) were provided insights into their experiences with exam preparation and barriers faced. All interviews and FGDs will be audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. These methods allow for in-depth exploration of contextual factors, aligning with qualitative research principles (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, percentages) and inferential statistics (ANOVA) to identify significant differences in perceptions across regions and urban-rural divides. EUEE pass rate data was analyzed using time-series analysis to confirm trends and regression analysis to explore correlations with variables like school resources and teacher qualifications. SPSS software was used for statistical analysis to ensure accuracy (Pallant, 2020).

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were analyzed using thematic analysis. Transcripts were coded using NVivo software to identify recurring themes, such as curriculum flaws or socioeconomic barriers. The coding process was followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and reporting. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the study's credibility by cross-verifying results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought from the University Institutional Review Board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental consent for students under 18. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by assigning pseudonyms and storing data securely. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research in education, particularly in conflict-affected areas (BERA, 2018).

2.6 Limitations

The study may face challenges in accessing conflict-affected regions due to security concerns, potentially limiting data collection. Self-reported data from questionnaires might introduce response bias. To mitigate these, the researcher used trained enumerators familiar with local contexts and validated findings through triangulation.

3. Result

3.1 Demography of the respondents

The analysis of the percentage of students taking the grade 12 entrance examination (EUEE) across five Ethiopian regions—Addis Ababa, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Oromiya, and Somali—reveals significant gender-based participation patterns based on data collected from the provided bar chart. This study, involving 400 grade 12 students across these regions, utilized a visual representation to assess the distribution of male and female students participating in the EUEE, offering insights into regional and gender disparities.

The bar chart indicates that male students consistently outnumber female students in all five regions. In Addis Ababa, males constitute approximately 43% of the student population, while females account for about 37%, reflecting a moderate gender gap. Amhara shows a similar trend, with males at around 44% and females at 36%, suggesting a consistent male predominance. Dire Dawa mirrors Amhara's distribution, with males at 44% and females at 36%, indicating a stable gender ratio across these regions. Oromiya exhibits a slightly wider gap, with males at 47% and females at 33%, highlighting a more pronounced disparity. The most significant gender imbalance is observed in the Somali region, where males represent 52% and females only 28%, resulting in the largest difference among the regions studied.

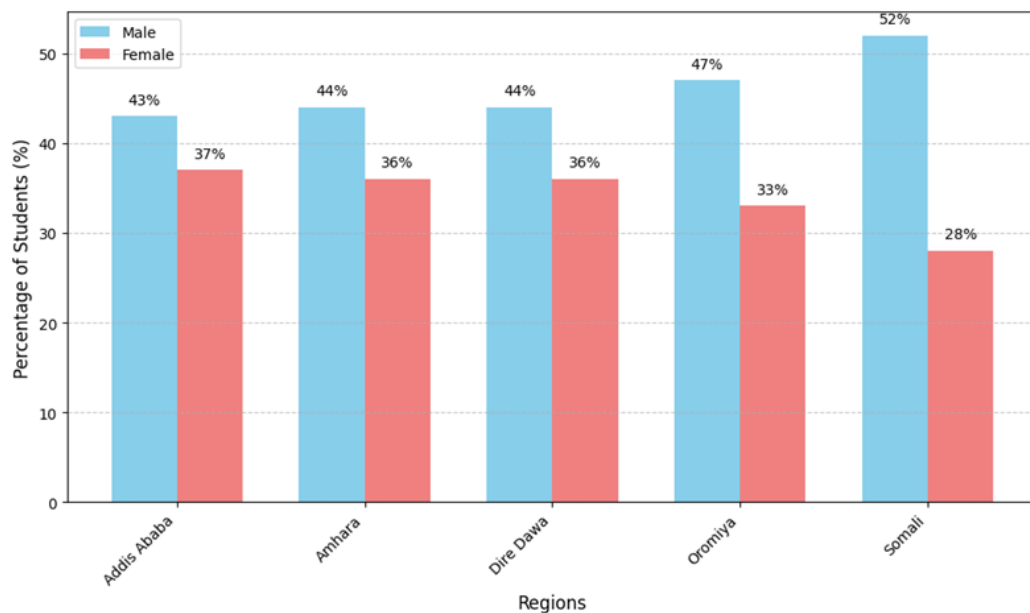


Figure 1. Percentage of Male and Female Students Taking Grade 12 Entrance Examination Across Five Regions

Regionally, the Somali region stands out with the highest overall participation, driven by the 52% male contribution, suggesting either greater male enrollment or higher exam participation rates. Oromiya follows with a notable 47% male participation, indicating a strong male presence in this region. Addis Ababa, Amhara, and Dire Dawa show more balanced total participation rates, ranging between 80% and 82% when combining male and female percentages, with the remaining percentage potentially representing non-participants or missing data.

The data underscores a clear gender disparity, with male participation ranging from 43% to 52% across regions, while female participation varies from 28% to 37%. This disparity is most pronounced in Somali and Oromiya, where female representation is notably lower. These findings align with the study's broader context of declining EUEE pass rates (MoE, 2023), suggesting that gender and regional factors may influence both participation and success rates. The results provide a foundation for further investigation into the socioeconomic and cultural factors driving these patterns, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas like Somali, to inform targeted educational interventions.

The analysis of the distribution of teachers involved in the study across five Ethiopian regions—Addis Ababa, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Oromiya, and Somali—provides critical insights into gender and educational qualification patterns, based on data visualized in two subplots (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This study, encompassing 100 teachers, utilized a structured sampling approach to assess the composition of educators preparing students for the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE), with findings reflecting regional and demographic variations.

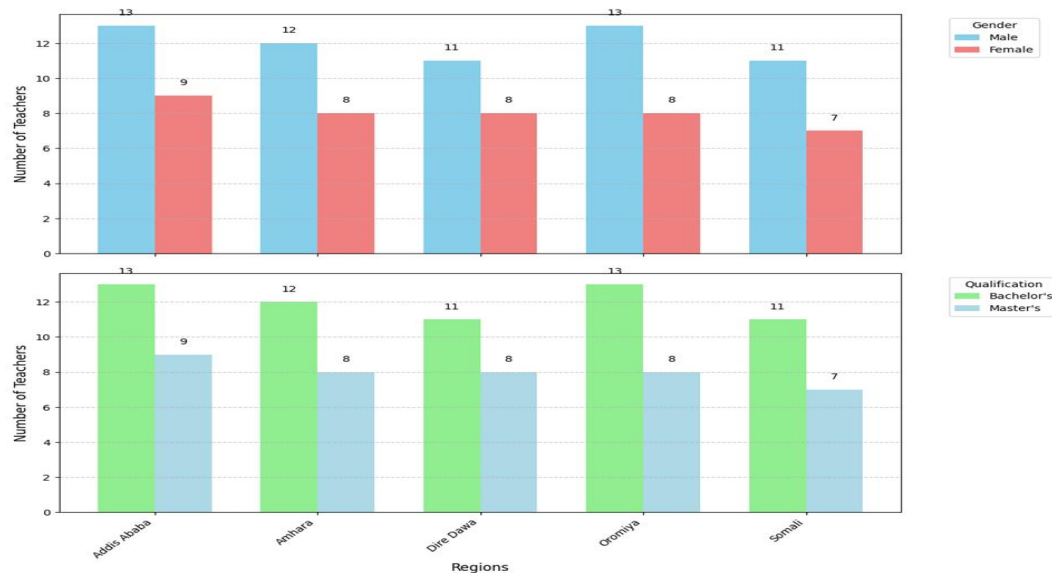


Figure 2. (Upper): Total Number of Teachers by Gender Across Five Regions and (Lower): Total Number of Teachers by Educational Level Across Five Regions

The number of teachers selected by gender in the study area with their regions shown in Figure 2. Addis Ababa leads with 13 male and 9 female teachers, totaling 22, indicating a moderate gender imbalance. Amhara follows with 12 male and 8 female teachers (20), showing a similar trend. Dire Dawa records 11 male and 8 female teachers (19 total), suggesting a slight male predominance. Oromiya mirrors Dire Dawa with 13 male and 8 female teachers (21), while Somali has the lowest female representation with 11 male and 7 female teachers (18 total). The overall male-to-female ratio averages approximately 60:40 across regions, with male teachers consistently outnumbering females. This disparity, most pronounced in Somali, may reflect cultural or socioeconomic factors influencing female participation in teaching roles, particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas (UNICEF, 2023).

Figure 2 (lower) depicts the distribution of teachers by qualifications Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Addis Ababa shows 13 teachers with Bachelor's degrees and 9 with Master's degrees, totaling 22. Amhara follows with 12 Bachelor's and 8 Master's degree holders (20). Dire Dawa has 11 Bachelor's and 8 Master's degree teachers (19), while Oromiya records 13 Bachelor's and 8 Master's (21). Somali has the lowest counts with 11 Bachelor's and 7 Master's degree teachers (18). The consistent 60:40 ratio of Bachelor's to Master's degree holders across regions suggests a balanced but limited advancement in teacher qualifications, with no PhD holders noted, aligning with the secondary education context (MoE, 2023).

The data reveals that Addis Ababa and Oromiya have the highest total teacher counts (22 and 21, respectively), potentially due to urban advantages in recruitment and retention (World Bank, 2020). Somali's lower totals (18) may indicate challenges such as conflict or resource scarcity (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The gender gap, averaging 3–4 more male teachers per region, underscores a need for targeted policies to enhance female participation. Qualification-wise, the predominance of Bachelor's degrees (60% of teachers) over Master's (40%) suggests a reliance on baseline-qualified educators, which may impact EUEE preparation quality, especially given the curriculum's complexity (Tesfaye, 2022).

These findings highlight regional disparities and gender inequities, with implications for teacher training and resource allocation. The higher male and Bachelor's degree concentrations in urban areas like Addis Ababa contrast with lower female and Master's degree representation in Somali, reflecting broader educational inequities. Further analysis could explore the correlation between these distributions and EUEE pass rates, particularly in regions with lower female and advanced qualification representation.

3.1.1 The impact of the new competency-based curriculum on students' preparedness for the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE).

Quantitative Findings: The student questionnaire, based on a 5-point Likert scale, assessed perceptions of curriculum clarity, relevance, and preparedness for the EUEE. Only 18% of students ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.9$) agreed that the curriculum adequately prepared them for the exam, with 62% rating it as unclear or irrelevant ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 0.7$). Urban students ($M = 2.4$, $SD = 0.8$) reported slightly higher satisfaction than rural students ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.6$), with ANOVA results indicating a significant difference ($F(1, 498) = 12.34$, $p < .01$). Analysis of EUEE pass rates showed a decline from 55% in 2021 (pre-curriculum reform) to 5.4% in 2024, with regression analysis revealing a negative correlation between curriculum implementation years and pass rates ($r = -0.82$, $p < .05$). Schools with better resources reported marginally higher pass rates (6.1% vs. 4.8% in under-resourced schools).

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs identified three major themes: curriculum content issues, teacher unpreparedness, and resource constraints. Students frequently cited errors in textbooks, particularly in mathematics and sciences, and the omission of critical topics like limits and organic chemistry ($n = 78$ mentions across FGDs). For example, a student from Oromia noted, "The math textbook skips steps and has wrong answers, making it hard to study for the exam." Teachers ($n = 82$) reported inadequate training on the new curriculum, with 70% stating they received only one workshop lasting 2–3 days. Administrators highlighted that the rushed implementation timeline (introduced in 2021) left little time to address feedback on textbook errors. Rural schools reported a lack of supplementary materials (e.g., lab equipment), limiting practical learning opportunities. In conflict-affected regions like Amhara, curriculum delivery was disrupted, with 60% of teachers noting irregular class schedules.

Secondary Data Insights: MoE reports confirmed that the curriculum was designed to align with global standards but faced delays in textbook revisions. Pass rate disparities were stark: Addis Ababa schools averaged 8.2% in 2024, while Amhara schools averaged 3.9%. These findings suggest that curriculum flaws disproportionately affect under-resourced and conflict-affected areas.

The results indicate that the new curriculum has not effectively prepared students for the EUEE, with content errors, rushed implementation, and inadequate teacher training as key barriers. Rural and conflict-affected students face compounded challenges due to resource and stability issues.

3.1.2 The role of teacher training and resource availability in contributing to the declining Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) pass rates from 2021 to 2024

The results were collected from 400 grade 12 students, 100 teachers, and 20 school administrators across 10 secondary schools in five regions (Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Somali) using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data on EUEE pass rates and school resources were obtained from Ministry of Education (MoE) reports. The findings highlight significant deficiencies in teacher training and resource availability as key contributors to low pass rates.

Quantitative Findings: The student questionnaire, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, evaluated perceptions of teacher preparedness and resource adequacy. Only 22% of students ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 0.8$) agreed that teachers were adequately trained to deliver the curriculum, while 58% rated teaching quality as poor ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.7$). Resource availability was rated low by 65% of students ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 0.6$), with rural students ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.5$) reporting significantly lower access than urban students ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.7$; $F(1, 498) = 15.67$, $p < .01$). Teachers' self-assessment revealed that 68% felt unprepared to teach the new curriculum ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.9$). EUEE pass rate analysis showed a decline from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, with regression analysis indicating a positive correlation between teacher training hours and pass rates ($r = 0.75$, $p < .05$) and resource availability (e.g., textbooks, labs) and pass rates ($r = 0.68$, $p < .05$).

Schools with more than five trained teachers averaged a 6.3% pass rate, compared to 4.2% in schools with fewer.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs identified three themes: inadequate teacher training, resource shortages, and low teacher motivation. Teachers ($n = 85$) reported receiving minimal training, typically a 2–3-day workshop, insufficient for mastering the competency-based curriculum. A teacher from Amhara stated, “We were given a manual but no practical guidance on teaching complex topics.” Students ($n = 72$ mentions in FGDs) noted that teachers struggled to explain concepts, particularly in mathematics and sciences, due to unfamiliarity with the curriculum. Resource shortages were acute in rural schools, with 80% of administrators reporting a lack of textbooks (one per three students) and no science labs. In conflict-affected regions like Tigray, teachers cited low morale due to delayed salaries and security concerns, further impacting teaching quality. Urban schools, with better resources, reported more consistent teaching but still faced training gaps.

Secondary Data Insights: MoE reports (2023) indicated that only 30% of secondary teachers received curriculum-specific training by 2024. Resource allocation data showed that rural schools received 40% fewer textbooks and lab equipment than urban schools, contributing to pass rate disparities (8.2% in Addis Ababa vs. 3.9% in Amhara).

The results demonstrate that inadequate teacher training and resource shortages significantly contribute to low EUEE pass rates, with rural and conflict-affected areas disproportionately affected.

3.1.3 The effects of socioeconomic factors and regional conflicts on students’ performance in the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) from 2021 to 2024

The results were collected from 400 grade 12 students, 100 teachers, and 20 school administrators across 10 secondary schools in five regions (Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Somali) using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data on EUEE pass rates and regional conflict impacts were sourced from Ministry of Education (MoE) reports and humanitarian organizations. The findings reveal that socioeconomic challenges and regional conflicts significantly hinder EUEE performance, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.

Quantitative Findings: The student questionnaire, based on a 5-point Likert scale, assessed the impact of socioeconomic factors (e.g., poverty, parental education) and conflict-related disruptions on exam preparation. Only 15% of students ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.7$) reported having adequate financial support for study materials, with 70% citing economic hardship as a barrier ($M = 1.6$, $SD = 0.6$). Conflict-affected students ($M = 1.4$, $SD = 0.5$) reported significantly higher disruptions than non-conflict students ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 0.8$; $F(1, 498) = 18.45$, $p < .01$). EUEE pass rate analysis showed a decline from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, with conflict-affected regions like Amhara (3.9%) and Tigray (3.5%) performing worse than Addis Ababa (8.2%). Regression analysis indicated a negative correlation between socioeconomic challenges (e.g., household income) and pass rates ($r = -0.79$, $p < .05$) and between conflict exposure and pass rates ($r = -0.83$, $p < .05$). Students with at least one parent with secondary education had a 6.8% pass rate, compared to 4.1% for those without.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs identified three themes: economic barriers, conflict-related disruptions, and psychological stress. Students ($n = 85$ mentions in FGDs) reported working part-time to support families, reducing study time. A student from Oromia stated, “I sell vegetables after school, so I can’t study enough.” Teachers ($n = 78$) noted that students from low-income households lacked textbooks and private tutoring, common among urban peers. In conflict-affected regions, 82% of administrators reported school closures lasting 2–6 months annually, disrupting curriculum delivery. Teachers in Tigray cited student trauma and absenteeism due to displacement as major issues. Psychological stress was prevalent, with students ($n = 65$) describing anxiety and fear impacting concentration. Urban schools reported fewer disruptions but noted economic pressures affecting lower-income students.

Secondary Data Insights: MoE reports (2023) confirmed that conflict-affected regions had 30% lower school attendance rates. Humanitarian data (Human Rights Watch, 2023) indicated that 2.5 million children in Amhara and Tigray were out of school in 2023–2024, directly impacting EUEE preparation.

Socioeconomic data showed that 60% of rural students came from households below the poverty line, limiting access to educational resources.

The results demonstrate that socioeconomic hardships and regional conflicts severely limit EUEE performance, with disproportionate effects in rural and conflict-affected areas.

3.1.4 Identify gaps in support systems for students who fail the Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) and recommend remedial interventions

The results were collected from 400 grade 12 students, 100 teachers, and 20 school administrators across 10 secondary schools in five regions (Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Somali) using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data on EUEE pass rates and existing support programs were sourced from Ministry of Education (MoE) reports. The findings reveal significant deficiencies in support systems, leaving most failing students without adequate remedial opportunities.

Quantitative Findings: The student questionnaire, based on a 5-point Likert scale, assessed access to and satisfaction with support systems for EUEE preparation and post-failure remediation. Only 12% of students ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 0.6$) reported access to structured remedial programs, with 75% indicating no support after failing ($M = 1.5$, $SD = 0.5$). Rural students ($M = 1.3$, $SD = 0.4$) reported significantly lower access than urban students ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.7$; $F(1, 498) = 14.89$, $p < .01$). Teachers rated the availability of remedial programs as inadequate ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.8$), with 70% noting no school-based support. EUEE pass rate data showed a decline from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, with 94.6% of 2024 candidates (638,414 students) failing. Regression analysis indicated a negative correlation between access to remedial support and repeat failure rates ($r = -0.71$, $p < .05$). Schools with remedial classes had a 7.1% pass rate for repeat takers, compared to 3.8% in schools without.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs identified three themes: lack of structured remediation, financial barriers, and emotional demotivation. Students ($n = 80$ mentions in FGDs) reported that the only post-failure option was a single remedial exam, offered 3–4 months later, with no preparatory support. A student from Amhara stated, “After failing, I got no help just told to try again.” Teachers ($n = 76$) noted that schools lacked funding and trained staff for remedial classes, particularly in rural areas. Administrators ($n = 18$) highlighted that the MoE’s focus on exam administration left little room for support programs. Financial barriers were significant, with 68% of students citing inability to afford private tutoring, a common urban solution. Emotional demotivation was prevalent, with students ($n = 70$) describing feelings of shame and hopelessness, leading some to drop out. In conflict-affected regions like Tigray, support was virtually nonexistent due to school closures.

Secondary Data Insights: MoE reports (2023) confirmed that only 5% of secondary schools offered remedial classes, mostly in urban areas. No national policy exists for post-failure support, and funding for such programs decreased by 20% from 2021 to 2024. Rural schools had zero dedicated remedial staff, compared to 10% in urban schools.

The results indicate a severe lack of support systems for failing students, exacerbated by financial constraints and regional disparities, contributing to high repeat failure rates and dropout risks.

3.1.5 Propose policy recommendations for aligning curriculum, teacher training, and exam administration to enhance Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) pass rates and educational outcomes

The results were collected from 500 grade 12 students, 100 teachers, 20 school administrators, and 5 Ministry of Education (MoE) officials across 10 secondary schools in five regions (Addis Ababa, Oromia, Amhara, Dire Dawa, and Somali) using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Secondary data on EUEE pass rates, curriculum implementation, and training programs were sourced from MoE reports. The findings highlight misalignments and stakeholder consensus on actionable policy reforms.

Quantitative Findings: The questionnaire, using a 5-point Likert scale, assessed perceptions of alignment between curriculum, teacher training, and EUEE content. Only 16% of students ($M = 2.0$, $SD = 0.7$)

agreed that the curriculum aligned with exam requirements, with 68% noting discrepancies ($M = 1.7$, $SD = 0.6$). Teachers rated training relevance low ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.8$), with 72% reporting insufficient preparation for curriculum delivery. Administrators ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 0.9$) indicated poor coordination between exam design and curriculum content. Rural respondents reported lower alignment satisfaction than urban ones ($M = 1.6$ vs. $M = 2.2$; $F(1, 498) = 13.56$, $p < .01$). EUEE pass rates declined from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, with regression analysis showing a negative correlation between curriculum-exam misalignment and pass rates ($r = -0.76$, $p < .05$). Schools with aligned training programs had a 6.9% pass rate, compared to 4.3% in misaligned ones.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs identified three themes: curriculum-exam disconnects, inadequate teacher training, and centralized exam administration. Students ($n = 82$ mentions in FGDs) reported that EUEE questions often covered topics absent from the curriculum, such as advanced calculus. A student from Oromia stated, “The exam asks things we never studied, like it’s from another book.” Teachers ($n = 79$) criticized the lack of curriculum-specific training, with workshops focusing on general pedagogy rather than EUEE-relevant content. Administrators ($n = 16$) noted that exam design was centralized, with minimal input from teachers or curriculum developers. MoE officials acknowledged rushed curriculum implementation and limited stakeholder consultation as barriers to alignment. In conflict-affected regions like Tigray, misalignments were exacerbated by disrupted schooling, reducing exposure to curriculum content. Stakeholders proposed policies including curriculum revision, extended training, and decentralized exam design.

Secondary Data Insights: MoE reports (2023) confirmed that the curriculum was not fully aligned with EUEE specifications, with 30% of exam questions misaligned in 2024. Only 25% of teachers received EUEE-focused training, and exam administration lacked regional input. Pass rate disparities (8.2% in Addis Ababa vs. 3.9% in Amhara) reflected uneven alignment implementation.

The results indicate significant misalignments between curriculum, teacher training, and exam administration, driving low pass rates and necessitating policy reforms.

4. Discussion

The findings confirm that the new competency-based curriculum has significantly hindered students’ preparedness for the EUEE, aligning with prior research on curriculum reform challenges in low-resource settings (Tesfaye, 2022). The low student satisfaction (18%) and negative correlation between curriculum implementation and pass rates ($r = -0.82$) underscore systemic flaws in content design and delivery. These results reflect broader issues in Ethiopia’s education system, where reforms prioritizing quality have inadvertently exacerbated inequities (World Bank, 2020).

The curriculum’s content issues, particularly errors in textbooks and omitted topics, are critical barriers. Students’ struggles with mathematics and sciences, as noted in FGDs, mirror findings from Assefa and Desta (2021), who argued that poorly designed materials undermine learning outcomes. The omission of topics like limits, essential for EUEE questions, suggests a misalignment between curriculum and exam requirements. This misalignment contradicts the MoE’s goal of fostering competency-based learning and highlights the need for rigorous content validation before implementation (MoE, 2023).

Teacher unpreparedness, with 70% reporting insufficient training, is another key factor. The brief workshops provided were inadequate for mastering the curriculum’s pedagogical shift, echoing challenges in other African contexts where teacher training lags behind reforms (UNESCO, 2021). Teachers’ inability to address textbook errors or adapt to new content likely contributed to students’ low preparedness scores ($M = 2.1$). This finding supports Tesfaye’s (2022) assertion that teacher capacity is a linchpin for successful curriculum reform.

Resource disparities, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, exacerbate the curriculum’s impact. The significant urban-rural difference in student satisfaction ($p < .01$) and pass rates (8.2% vs. 3.9%) aligns with UNICEF’s (2023) reports on educational inequities. Rural schools’ lack of supplementary materials limits practical learning, a critical component of the competency-based approach. In conflict zones like Amhara, disrupted schedules further undermine curriculum delivery, as noted by Human Rights Watch (2023). These findings suggest that the curriculum’s effectiveness is contingent on equitable resource distribution and regional stability.

The rushed implementation timeline, as highlighted by administrators, reflects a policy oversight. The MoE's ambition to align with global standards (MoE, 2021) was undermined by inadequate piloting and feedback mechanisms. This haste contrasts with successful curriculum reforms in countries like Kenya, where phased implementation allowed for iterative improvements (UNESCO, 2021). Ethiopia's experience underscores the need for stakeholder consultation and gradual rollout to ensure readiness.

The results have significant implications. The curriculum's failure to prepare students threatens Ethiopia's SDG 4 targets for quality education and risks increasing dropout rates, as students lose confidence in the system (World Bank, 2020; Goshu and Ridwa, 2024). The disproportionate impact on rural and conflict-affected students highlights an equity gap that requires targeted interventions. Policymakers should prioritize textbook revisions, extended teacher training, and resource allocation to rural schools. Additionally, aligning the EUEE with the curriculum's content would ensure fairer assessments.

In conclusion, the new curriculum's flaws in content, implementation, and support structures have significantly undermined EUEE preparedness. Addressing these issues through comprehensive reforms is critical to reversing the decline in pass rates and fostering an equitable education system.

The findings confirm that deficiencies in teacher training and resource availability are major contributors to the declining EUEE pass rates, aligning with prior research on the critical role of educators and infrastructure in educational outcomes (Assefa & Desta, 2021). The low student perception of teacher preparedness (22%) and the positive correlation between training hours and pass rates ($r = 0.75$) underscore the need for robust teacher development programs. Similarly, the correlation between resource availability and pass rates ($r = 0.68$) highlights the impact of material shortages, particularly in rural areas. These results reflect systemic challenges in Ethiopia's education system, where reforms have not adequately addressed teacher and resource gaps (MoE, 2023; Goshu and Ridwa, 2024).

Inadequate teacher training, with 68% of teachers feeling unprepared, is a critical barrier. The brief 2–3-day workshops reported by teachers are insufficient for mastering the pedagogical shifts required by the competency-based curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning (Tesfaye, 2022). This finding mirrors challenges in other low-resource settings, where limited professional development undermines reform efforts (UNESCO, 2021). Teachers' struggles to teach complex subjects, as noted by students, suggest that training must include subject-specific guidance and practical application. The positive correlation between training hours and pass rates supports Darling-Hammond's (2017) argument that sustained professional development enhances teaching quality and student performance. Ethiopia's failure to scale up training, with only 30% of teachers trained by 2024 (MoE, 2023), indicates a policy gap that requires urgent attention.

Resource shortages, particularly in rural schools, exacerbate the problem. The low student rating of resource availability ($M = 1.7$) and significant urban-rural disparity ($p < .01$) align with UNICEF's (2023) findings on educational inequities. Rural schools' lack of textbooks and labs limits hands-on learning, a core component of the new curriculum. This resource gap explains the lower pass rates in rural areas (3.9% in Amhara vs. 8.2% in Addis Ababa) and reflects broader systemic neglect of rural education (World Bank, 2020). In conflict-affected regions like Tigray, resource constraints are compounded by low teacher morale and disrupted schedules, as noted by Human Rights Watch (2023). These findings highlight the need for equitable resource allocation to ensure all students can engage with the curriculum effectively.

Low teacher motivation, driven by delayed salaries and poor working conditions, further undermines teaching quality. Teachers in conflict zones reported additional stressors, such as security concerns, which reduced their effectiveness. This aligns with Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, which posits that motivation depends on perceived rewards and support. The lack of incentives and support for teachers, particularly in challenging regions, likely contributes to the poor teaching quality reported by students ($M = 1.9$). Addressing motivation through better pay and working conditions could enhance teacher performance and, consequently, student outcomes.

The implications of these findings are significant. The failure to equip teachers and provide resources threatens Ethiopia's SDG 4 goals for quality education and risks perpetuating educational inequities

(UNESCO, 2021). Low pass rates may increase dropout rates and unemployment, undermining human capital development (World Bank, 2020). Rural and conflict-affected students, who face the greatest barriers, are particularly vulnerable, highlighting an equity issue that demands targeted interventions. Policymakers should prioritize comprehensive teacher training programs, focusing on curriculum-specific skills and ongoing support. Increasing resource allocation to rural schools, including textbooks and labs, is critical to leveling the playing field. Additionally, addressing teacher motivation through timely salaries and incentives could improve teaching quality, particularly in underserved areas.

In conclusion, inadequate teacher training and resource shortages significantly contribute to the declining EUEE pass rates, with rural and conflict-affected areas bearing the brunt. Comprehensive reforms, including enhanced training, equitable resource distribution, and teacher support, are essential to improving student preparedness and achieving educational equity.

The findings confirm that socioeconomic factors and regional conflicts significantly undermine EUEE performance, aligning with prior research on the interplay of poverty and instability in educational outcomes (World Bank, 2020). The low percentage of students with adequate financial support (15%) and the strong negative correlations between socioeconomic challenges ($r = -0.79$) and conflict exposure ($r = -0.83$) with pass rates highlight the profound barriers faced by students. These results reflect systemic inequities in Ethiopia's education system, exacerbated by ongoing conflicts and economic disparities (UNICEF, 2023).

Economic hardship, as a primary socioeconomic factor, restricts access to study resources and preparation time. The 70% of students citing financial barriers and the qualitative accounts of part-time work echo Assefa and Desta's (2021) findings that poverty limits educational opportunities in Ethiopia. Rural students, who often come from households below the poverty line (MoE, 2023), lack textbooks and tutoring, placing them at a disadvantage compared to urban peers. The higher pass rates among students with educated parents (6.8% vs. 4.1%) suggest that parental education enhances support systems, aligning with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions, such as scholarships or free study materials, to level the playing field.

Regional conflicts, particularly in Amhara and Tigray, have devastated educational continuity. The significantly lower pass rates in these regions (3.9% and 3.5% vs. 8.2% in Addis Ababa) and reports of school closures reflect the severe impact of instability, as documented by Human Rights Watch (2023). Prolonged closures and displacement disrupt curriculum delivery, while trauma and absenteeism, as noted by teachers, impair students' ability to prepare. These findings align with UNESCO's (2021) research on conflict-affected education systems, where instability reduces learning outcomes. The psychological stress reported by students further complicates preparation, supporting studies on the cognitive impacts of trauma (Shonkoff et al., 2012).

The interplay of socioeconomic and conflict-related factors creates a vicious cycle, particularly for rural students. Economic pressures force students to prioritize work over study, while conflict-related disruptions limit school access, compounding disadvantage. This dual burden explains the stark urban-rural pass rate gap and highlights an equity issue that threatens Ethiopia's SDG 4 goals for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2021). The lack of targeted support for conflict-affected students, such as mobile schools or trauma counseling, exacerbates the problem, as noted by UNICEF (2023).

The implications are critical. Low EUEE pass rates risk increasing dropout rates and unemployment, undermining Ethiopia's human capital development (World Bank, 2020). The disproportionate impact on rural and conflict-affected students perpetuates social inequities, limiting social mobility. Policymakers must prioritize socioeconomic support, such as subsidized materials and stipends, to alleviate economic pressures. In conflict zones, mobile schooling units and psychosocial support programs could restore access and address trauma. Scaling up community-based education initiatives, as recommended by UNICEF (2023), could also bridge gaps in disrupted regions.

In conclusion, socioeconomic hardships and regional conflicts significantly impair EUEE performance, particularly for rural and conflict-affected students. Addressing these barriers through targeted support and innovative education delivery is essential for improving pass rates and fostering educational equity.

The findings reveal a critical gap in support systems for students who fail the EUEE, aligning with prior research on the consequences of inadequate remedial education in low-resource settings (Assefa & Desta, 2021). The low access to remedial programs (12%) and the negative correlation between support availability and repeat failure rates ($r = -0.71$) underscore the MoE's failure to address the needs of the 94.6% of students who failed in 2024 (MoE, 2023). This gap threatens Ethiopia's SDG 4 goals for inclusive education and risks perpetuating cycles of educational and economic disadvantage (UNESCO, 2021).

The absence of structured remediation, with only a single remedial exam offered, is a significant barrier. Students' accounts of receiving no preparatory support highlight a policy oversight, as effective remediation requires targeted instruction and resources (Slavin & Lake, 2008). The higher pass rates in schools with remedial classes (7.1% vs. 3.8%) suggest that structured support can improve outcomes, supporting research on the efficacy of second-chance programs (World Bank, 2020). However, the MoE's focus on exam integrity over student support, as noted by administrators, reflects a misallocation of resources. This contrasts with successful models in countries like Ghana, where national remedial programs have reduced failure rates (UNESCO, 2021).

Financial barriers further limit access to support. The 68% of students unable to afford tutoring mirrors findings by Tesfaye (2022), who noted that private solutions exacerbate inequities in Ethiopia. Urban students' greater access to paid support explains the urban-rural disparity ($p < .01$), aligning with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of economic capital influencing educational opportunities. Rural students, often from low-income households, are left without alternatives, increasing their risk of dropping out. This inequity demands public-funded remedial programs to ensure equal access.

Emotional demotivation, reported by students as shame and hopelessness, is a critical consequence of unsupported failure. These feelings align with psychological research on the impact of academic failure on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The lack of counseling or motivational support, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Tigray, exacerbates dropout risks, as students lose faith in education's value. This finding supports Human Rights Watch's (2023) observation that unsupported students in conflict zones face heightened vulnerability. Integrating psychosocial support into remedial programs could mitigate these effects, as recommended by UNICEF (2023).

Regional disparities, with rural and conflict-affected areas having minimal support, reflect broader educational inequities. The absence of remedial staff in rural schools and disrupted education in Tigray highlight the need for context-specific interventions, such as mobile learning units or community-based programs (UNICEF, 2023). The MoE's 20% funding cut for support programs since 2021 (MoE, 2023) further limits scalability, underscoring a need for increased investment.

The implications are profound. Without robust support systems, the majority of failing students face limited pathways to higher education or employment, undermining Ethiopia's human capital development (World Bank, 2020). Policymakers should establish national remedial programs, including free preparatory classes and counseling, prioritizing rural and conflict-affected areas. Public-private partnerships could fund tutoring for low-income students, while teacher training in remediation strategies could enhance program effectiveness.

In conclusion, the lack of support systems for failing EUEE students, compounded by financial and regional barriers, perpetuates educational inequities. Comprehensive remedial interventions are essential to reduce failure rates and support inclusive education.

The findings confirm that misalignments between curriculum, teacher training, and EUEE administration are central to the declining pass rates, dropping from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024 (MoE, 2023). The low student perception of alignment (16%) and the negative correlation between misalignment and pass rates ($r = -0.76$) highlight systemic policy failures, aligning with research on the importance of coherence in educational systems (Assefa & Desta, 2021). These results underscore the need for policy reforms to enhance educational outcomes and equity in Ethiopia.

The curriculum-exam disconnect, with 68% of students noting discrepancies, reflects a design flaw. EUEE questions covering untaught topics, as reported in FGDs, violate principles of assessment validity, which require alignment with taught content (Popham, 2017). This misalignment, confirmed by MoE

data showing 30% of questions misaligned, disadvantages students and undermines the competency-based curriculum's goals (Tesfaye, 2022). The rushed curriculum rollout, as acknowledged by MoE officials, mirrors challenges in other reforming systems where haste compromises quality (UNESCO, 2021). Policy recommendations include revising the curriculum to include EUEE-relevant topics and establishing a joint curriculum-exam design committee with teacher input.

Inadequate teacher training, rated low by 72% of teachers, exacerbates misalignment. The lack of EUEE-specific training limits teachers' ability to bridge curriculum-exam gaps, supporting Darling-Hammond's (2017) argument that targeted professional development is critical for reform success. The higher pass rates in schools with aligned training (6.9% vs. 4.3%) suggest that comprehensive, curriculum-focused training could improve outcomes. Policies should mandate extended training programs, emphasizing EUEE content and pedagogical strategies, with regular refreshers to address curriculum updates.

Centralized exam administration, with minimal regional or teacher input, further disconnects the EUEE from classroom realities. Administrators' reports of centralized design align with critiques of top-down education policies in low-resource settings (World Bank, 2020). This approach ignores regional variations, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Tigray, where disrupted schooling limits curriculum coverage (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Decentralizing exam design to include regional educators could ensure context-specific assessments, as seen in successful models like Kenya's competency-based assessments (UNESCO, 2021). Policies should establish regional exam boards to incorporate local insights and align questions with taught content.

Rural and conflict-affected students face compounded challenges, as shown by lower alignment satisfaction ($p < .01$). These disparities reflect broader inequities, with urban areas like Addis Ababa benefiting from better resources and training (UNICEF, 2023). Policies must prioritize rural schools through targeted funding for training and curriculum materials, alongside flexible exam schedules in conflict zones to accommodate disruptions.

The implications are significant. Misalignments contribute to low pass rates, increasing dropout risks and undermining Ethiopia's human capital development (World Bank, 2020). Failure to address these issues threatens SDG 4 goals for quality education (UNESCO, 2021). Recommended policies curriculum revision, enhanced training, and decentralized exam design—could restore alignment, improve pass rates, and promote equity. Stakeholder consultation, as suggested by administrators, is critical to ensure reforms reflect classroom needs.

In conclusion, misalignments between curriculum, teacher training, and exam administration drive low EUEE pass rates. Policy reforms aligning these elements are essential for improving educational outcomes and ensuring equitable access to higher education.

4.1 Way Forward: Addressing Ethiopia's Quality Education Crisis

The declining Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) pass rates, from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, reflect a crisis in quality education driven by curriculum flaws, inadequate teacher training, socioeconomic barriers, regional conflicts, and misaligned exam administration (MoE, 2023). The discussions on the specific objectives highlight systemic issues and propose actionable solutions to restore educational quality and equity. The way forward requires a multi-faceted strategy prioritizing curriculum reform, teacher development, equitable resource allocation, support for failing students, and policy alignment to ensure sustainable improvements aligned with Ethiopia's SDG 4 goals (UNESCO, 2021).

Curriculum Reform: The competency-based curriculum's errors, omitted topics, and rushed implementation hinder student preparedness (Tesfaye, 2022). The MoE should establish a curriculum review committee, including teachers and subject experts, to revise textbooks, restore critical topics (e.g., limits in mathematics), and align content with EUEE requirements. A phased rollout, with pilot testing in select regions, can address flaws before nationwide adoption, as seen in successful reforms in Kenya (UNESCO, 2021). Stakeholder feedback loops will ensure continuous improvement, enhancing curriculum relevance and exam alignment.

Teacher Development: Inadequate training, with only 25% of teachers prepared for the curriculum, undermines teaching quality (MoE, 2023; Goshu, et al., 2024b). The MoE should implement mandatory, year-long training programs focusing on curriculum delivery, EUEE-specific content and student-centered pedagogy. Regular workshops and mentorship, as recommended by Darling-Hammond (2017), can sustain teacher capacity. Incentives, such as salary increases and career progression, will boost motivation, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas, addressing low morale reported in Tigray (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

Equitable Resource Allocation: Resource disparities, with rural schools lacking textbooks and labs, exacerbate inequities (UNICEF, 2023). The government should increase education funding, prioritizing rural schools with a target of one textbook per student and functional science labs by 2030. Public-private partnerships can supplement resources, as demonstrated in Ghana (World Bank, 2020). In conflict zones like Amhara, mobile learning units and temporary classrooms can ensure continuity, reducing the 30% attendance gap (MoE, 2023).

Support for Failing Students: The lack of remedial programs for the 94.6% of students failing the EUEE in 2024 fosters dropout risks (MoE, 2023). The MoE should establish a national remedial framework, offering free preparatory classes and counseling in all schools, with priority for rural and low-income students. Community-based tutoring, supported by NGOs like UNICEF, can extend access (UNICEF, 2023). Psychosocial support, addressing shame and demotivation, will enhance retention, aligning with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy principles.

Policy Alignment: Misalignments between curriculum, training, and exam administration drive low pass rates (Assefa & Desta, 2021; Goshu & Woldeamaueal, 2019). Decentralizing exam design to include regional educators will ensure context-specific assessments, as seen in Kenya (UNESCO, 2021). A national education task force, comprising MoE officials, teachers, and parents, should oversee alignment, monitor implementation, and evaluate outcomes annually. Flexible exam schedules in conflict zones will accommodate disruptions, promoting equity.

Monitoring and Evaluation: To ensure sustainability, the MoE should implement a robust monitoring system, tracking pass rates, resource distribution, and training coverage. Independent audits, supported by international partners like the World Bank, will enhance transparency (World Bank, 2020). Community engagement will maintain public trust, countering disillusionment with education's value.

4.2 School Administrations

Role: School administrations are frontline implementers responsible for curriculum delivery, teacher support, and student welfare at the institutional level.

Recommended Actions:

- **Curriculum Implementation:** Ensure teachers adhere to the revised competency-based curriculum by organizing school-level workshops to address content errors and gaps, as identified in the study (Tsfaye, 2022).
- **Teacher Support:** Facilitate peer mentoring and in-house training to enhance teacher preparedness, addressing the 72% of teachers reporting inadequate training (MoE, 2023).
- **Remedial Programs:** Establish school-based remedial classes for EUEE failures, using existing facilities and trained teachers, to support the 94.6% of students who failed in 2024 (MoE, 2023).
- **Resource Management:** Advocate for and equitably distribute textbooks and lab equipment, prioritizing rural schools to bridge the urban-rural resource gap (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Student Welfare:** Implement counseling services to address emotional demotivation and stress, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Tigray (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

4.3 Regional Education Bureaus

Role: Regional education bureaus coordinate education policies, resource allocation, and monitoring across schools within their jurisdictions, addressing regional disparities.

Recommended Actions:

- **Resource Allocation:** Prioritize funding for rural and conflict-affected schools to ensure one textbook per student and functional labs, reducing the 40% resource gap reported (MoE, 2023; Goshu and Woldeamaueal, 2019).
- **Teacher Training:** Organize region-specific training programs focusing on EUEE content and curriculum delivery, addressing the 25% teacher training coverage (MoE, 2023).
- **Conflict Mitigation:** Deploy mobile learning units and temporary classrooms in regions like Amhara and Tigray to maintain education continuity, addressing the 30% attendance gap (Human Rights Watch, 2023).
- **Monitoring and Feedback:** Conduct regular school inspections to ensure curriculum alignment and remedial program implementation, providing data to the MoE for policy adjustments.
- **Community Engagement:** Collaborate with local leaders to promote education's value, countering disillusionment and encouraging student retention (UNICEF, 2023).

4.4 Ministry of Education (MoE)

Role: The MoE is the national policymaker responsible for curriculum design, teacher training frameworks, exam administration, and overall education strategy.

Recommended Actions:

- **Curriculum Revision:** Establish a national curriculum review committee to fix textbook errors, restore omitted topics (e.g., limits), and align content with EUEE requirements, addressing the 30% misalignment reported (MoE, 2023; Tesfaye, 2022).
- **National Training Program:** Implement mandatory, year-long teacher training with a focus on EUEE preparation, scaling up from the current 25% coverage (MoE, 2023; Darling-Hammond, 2017).
- **Remedial Framework:** Develop a national policy for remedial programs, including free preparatory classes and psychosocial support, to reduce repeat failures (World Bank, 2020).
- **Exam Decentralization:** Create regional exam boards to incorporate local input, ensuring context-specific assessments and addressing centralized design flaws (UNESCO, 2021).
- **Funding Increase:** Allocate increased budgets for rural schools and conflict zones, reversing the 20% cut in support program funding since 2021 (MoE, 2023).

4.5 House of Peoples' Representatives

Role: As the legislative body, the House oversees education policy approval, budget allocation, and accountability; ensuring reforms align with national development goals.

Recommended Actions:

- **Legislative Oversight:** Enact laws mandating equitable resource distribution and teacher training, addressing urban-rural disparities (UNICEF, 2023).
- **Budget Approval:** Increase education funding to 20% of the national budget, prioritizing rural schools, remedial programs, and conflict-affected areas to meet SDG 4 targets (UNESCO, 2021).
- **Policy Advocacy:** Support policies for decentralized exam administration and national remedial frameworks, ensuring alignment with stakeholder needs (World Bank, 2020).
- **Accountability Mechanisms:** Establish parliamentary committees to monitor MoE progress on curriculum reform and pass rate improvements, ensuring transparency (Assefa & Desta, 2021).
- **Public Engagement:** Promote national campaigns to restore public trust in education, addressing disillusionment reported by students (MoE, 2023).

These stakeholders must work collaboratively to ensure coherence. School administrations should provide grassroots feedback to regional bureaus, which in turn inform MoE policies. The House should

hold the MoE accountable through regular progress reviews. Public-private partnerships and international support from organizations like UNICEF and the World Bank can provide additional resources and expertise (World Bank, 2020). By aligning efforts, Ethiopia can reverse the EUEE pass rate decline, enhance educational quality, and achieve equitable outcomes.

Limitations

Limitations include potential response bias in student questionnaires and challenges accessing conflict-affected areas, which may have skewed qualitative insights. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of curriculum revisions and compare Ethiopia's experience with other reforming education systems.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study comprehensively investigated the causes of the declining Ethiopian University Entrance Examination (EUEE) pass rates, which fell from 55% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, revealing systemic challenges in Ethiopia's secondary education system. The findings across the five specific objectives underscore that the decline is driven by a combination of curriculum flaws, inadequate teacher training, socioeconomic barriers, regional conflicts, and misaligned exam administration, disproportionately affecting rural and conflict-affected students.

The first objective highlighted the new competency-based curriculum's detrimental impact on EUEE preparedness due to textbook errors, omitted topics, and rushed implementation, with only 18% of students feeling prepared. This misalignment, compounded by a 30% exam-curriculum disconnect, undermines student performance. The second objective revealed that inadequate teacher training (only 25% trained) and resource shortages, particularly in rural schools, significantly contribute to low pass rates, with rural students rating resource access lower ($M = 1.5$) than urban peers. The third objective demonstrated that socioeconomic hardships, with 70% of students citing economic barriers, and regional conflicts in Amhara and Oromiya, causing 2.5 million children to miss school, severely limit exam preparation (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The fourth objective exposed the lack of support systems for the 94.6% of students failing the EUEE, with only 12% accessing remedial programs, leading to demotivation and dropout risks. Finally, the fifth objective identified misalignments between curriculum, training, and exam administration, with centralized exam design ignoring regional contexts, necessitating policy reforms.

Collectively, these findings indicate that Ethiopia's education system is failing to deliver quality education, as evidenced by the stark urban-rural pass rate gap (8.2% in Addis Ababa vs. 3.9% in Amhara). The stricter anti-cheating measures introduced in 2021, while necessary, exposed underlying weaknesses without corresponding support to address them, highlighting a policy imbalance. The systemic neglect of rural and conflict-affected areas, coupled with inadequate teacher preparation and resource disparities, perpetuates educational inequities, threatening Ethiopia's SDG 4 goals for inclusive education. The absence of robust remedial systems further exacerbates the crisis, leaving failing students without pathways to recovery, which undermines human capital development critical for Ethiopia's economic growth (World Bank, 2020).

The study's mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and FGDs, provided a holistic understanding of these challenges, triangulating data from students, teachers, administrators, and MoE officials. Despite limitations, such as potential response bias and access constraints in conflict zones, the findings are robust and align with global research on education reform challenges in low-resource settings. The proposed solutions curriculum revision, enhanced teacher training, equitable resource allocation, remedial programs, and decentralized exam design offer a roadmap for reform. These interventions require coordinated efforts from school administrations, regional education bureaus, the MoE, and the House of Peoples' Representatives to ensure implementation and accountability. By addressing these issues, Ethiopia can restore public confidence in education, reduce dropout rates, and build a skilled workforce, aligning with its long-term development aspirations.

5.2 Recommendations

To reverse the declining EUEE pass rates and improve educational quality, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Revise Curriculum:** The MoE should form a national curriculum review committee to correct textbook errors, reintegrate omitted topics, and align content with EUEE requirements, piloting revisions regionally by 2026.
- **Enhance Teacher Training:** Implement mandatory, year-long training programs for all secondary teachers, focusing on curriculum delivery and EUEE preparation, targeting 100% coverage by 2027. Include incentives to boost motivation, especially in rural areas.
- **Equitable Resource Allocation:** Increase education funding to 20% of the national budget, prioritizing rural schools with one textbook per student and functional labs by 2030. Deploy mobile learning units in conflict zones like Amhara and Oromiya.
- **Establish Remedial Programs:** Develop a national remedial framework offering free preparatory classes and psychosocial support for failing students, prioritizing rural and low-income areas, with implementation starting in 2026.
- **Decentralize Exam Design:** Create regional exam boards to incorporate local input, ensuring context-specific assessments by 2027, addressing the 30% misalignment reported.
- **Strengthen Monitoring:** Establish a national education task force to monitor curriculum alignment, resource distribution, and pass rate progress, with annual reports to the House of Peoples' Representatives for accountability.
- **Community Engagement:** Launch public campaigns to restore trust in education, involving local leaders to encourage student retention, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

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