

Policy Brief

Improving ESSLCE Outcomes in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Executive Summary

The development of robust assessment systems is rapidly becoming a key priority for improving educational quality. These systems measure student performance and track progress across the academic lifecycle using various evaluation techniques, most notably secondary school leaving examinations. This policy brief is drawn from the study *“Comparative Analysis of Ethiopian Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESSLCE) Results between Private and Public Schools in Addis Ababa.”* Recent trends in the ESSLCE reveal a concerning decline in pass rates over the past three years, alongside noticeable performance disparities between public and private schools in the capital. To address this, the study examines the passing rates of these two sectors and analyzes the underlying determinants driving the variation. The findings reveal a statistically significant difference in ESSLCE success rates between private and public school students. This achievement gap is primarily driven by disparities in school infrastructure, teacher motivation, students' socio-economic backgrounds, and policy implementation gaps. Educators, students, and education officials all emphasize that targeted attention must be given to mitigating these factors to boost examination performance, particularly within the public sector. Consequently, this policy brief suggests addressing infrastructural limitations, enhancing teacher motivation through tailored incentive mechanisms, and bridging policy gaps to improve ESSLCE pass rates in public schools.

1. Introduction

One of the major developments that have been made in the education system is the emphasis given to evaluation and assessment. Evaluation is considered an integral part of the education systems, which targets making learners assess their progress and work on improving their academic performance (Agrey, 2004).

The Ethiopian Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESSLCE) serves as a critical gateway to higher education in Ethiopia. However, disparities in performance between public and private schools raise concerns about equity, quality, and access in secondary education. It is concerning to note that the results of the ESSLCE exam have been decreasing steadily over the

last few years, leading to a higher rate of student failures. This decline not only affects the quality of education but also has repercussions on the number of students who are able to pursue higher education.

There are several factors that could be responsible for the decreasing number of students who pass the ESSLCE. Effective teaching practices, qualified teachers, and a supportive learning environment have been associated with improved student understanding and performance (Yan et al., 2021, as cited in Elfneh and Gemechu, 2024). Factors related to school management, leadership, working policies, and guidelines also influence the efficacy of students' performance in their education. Therefore, understanding the significant lowering of students' pass rate in ESSLCE between private and public schools and the factors behind it is significant to designing policies that enhance quality education and the academic performance of students.

2. Policy Implications

The number of students passing ESSLCE has drastically declined nationwide in the last few years. In Addis Ababa, particularly, the number shows a significant variation between private and public students who pass the exam. There are different factors that are responsible for this. Infrastructural variation is one of them, in which private schools, generally, have better access to classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. Public schools face overcrowding and limited facilities. Large class sizes are also identified as negatively affecting learning outcomes, which is more evident in public schools than private ones.

In addition, teacher qualification and motivation create the variation between the two types of schools. Teachers in both sectors have similar qualifications, but the difference in salary and incentives affects the quality of education and learning outcome. Limited pedagogical training remains a challenge in both school types. Furthermore, socio-economic inequalities among students from private and public schools contribute to the disparity in ESSLCE outcomes. Private school students often come from higher-income families, which gives them the opportunity to get access to services and materials that assist their education, including parental involvement and follow-up. However, most public school students lack such opportunities. Policy implementation and school support systems contribute to the variation in results among

students from the two types of schools. The aggressive measure taken by the Ministry of Education towards the whole procedure of ESSLCE also brought stress among students.

In general, disparities between private and public schools reflect systemic inequalities. The education system that public schools follow from the lower grades puts students at a disadvantage. The variation in ESSLCE results between private and public schools is not essentially related to the learning ability of students; rather, it is the outcome of multidimensional factors. Therefore, strengthening and supervising public education is necessary to ensure equity and national development.

3. Policy Recommendations

In order to enhance the performance of students in ESSLCE, particularly the public ones the following policy recommendations have been made

Policy Area	Recommendation	Purpose/outcome
Strengthen School Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in classrooms, laboratories, and libraries. - Reduce class sizes. - Provide continuous tutorials and mock exams. 	Increases students' access to supportive learning aids; and their readiness for the exam.
Increase Budget Allocation and Targeted Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase funding for public schools. - Reform school feeding programs to support high school students in need. 	Tackles familial socio-economic factors that hinder students' exam success.
Enhance Teacher Motivation and Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve salaries and incentives. - Provide continuous pedagogical training. - Introduce performance-based recognition. 	Creates positive working environment which makes teachers contribute fully for the success of their students.
Review and Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuously revise policies 	Identifies the gap in policies

Education Policies	related to ESSLCE. - Address the negative impacts of the current education reform on students.	and make timely revisions as needed.
Expand Counseling and Student Support Services	- Recruit qualified counselors. - Provide stress and time management training to students.	Helps students learn cope up strategies that comes with the exam.

Conclusion

Addressing disparities in ESSLCE outcomes requires a comprehensive, equity-focused policy approach. Strengthening infrastructure, supporting teachers, and addressing socio-economic barriers will improve educational outcomes for all students not only in Addis Ababa but also throughout the country. Taking the leading role, Ministry of Education is responsible to tackle the challenges at the policy level which will be cascaded into programs and guidelines. All stakeholders starting from the Ministry of Education, Education Bureau, School principals, teachers, parents and students need to work in collaboration to improve students' academic performance, exam success and their contribution to national development.

References

- Agrey, Loren (2004) "The Pressure Cooker in Education: Standardized Assessment and High Stakes". In: *Canadian Social Studies*: Vol. 38 No. 3. <http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css>
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