The school principals' role in developing the professional capital of teachers: evidence from principals and teachers

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Abstract

Purpose – Although building professional capital improves student learning and the effectiveness of schools in educating students, it needs to be explored in the area of primary schools in Ethiopia. Thus, this study was conducted to explore the practices of primary school principals to develop the professional capital of teachers and the associated challenges.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study was used to collect data from nine teachers and five principals of Ethiopian primary schools using a maximum variation sampling. Data obtained from interviews and two focus groups were subjected to thematic analysis.

Findings – Principals and teachers reported that to develop the human capital of teachers, principals provided teachers with opportunities to attend training, encouraged informal collaboration for professional improvement and encouraged the practice of continuous professional development programs. For the development of social capital among teachers, the principals also formed various social groups, encouraged frequent interactions between school stakeholders and created a caring school culture to strengthen the interactions between school stakeholders. For building the decision-making capital of teachers, principals promoted an environment in which teachers' professional judgment and wisdom are respected and so forth. The challenges to develop professional capital were related to teachers and principals, schools and education bureaus.

Originality/value – Building teachers' professional capital increases school effectiveness, although primary schools still need to investigate this further. Therefore, by improving knowledge and information on approaches to building professional capital in teachers, this study is important to administrators and other relevant school stakeholders. This also helps principals transform their leadership behavior to be more pedagogical in leading teaching and learning and enhance teachers' ability to build and exercise effective social and professional behaviors towards their students in their daily practices.

Keywords Decision-making capital, Human capital, Primary school, Professional capital, Social capital

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Ethiopia is successful in expanding education at all grade levels; however, the quality of education has become a serious issue for all stakeholders in education. One manifestation of this, for example, in 2022, more than 900,000 Ethiopian students took the entrance exam, but only 3.3% passed. The pass rate for natural sciences was 3.6%, and for social sciences it was only 1.3%. Shockingly, 39.2% of the schools did not have students who passed the national examination (Addis Standard, 2023). Building the professional capital of teachers is considered a basic method of achieving quality education and job performance of employees (Berhanu, 2023a; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Melesse and Belay, 2022).

Teachers' professional capital refers to the collective expertise, knowledge, and capabilities possessed by teachers. It encompasses both individual and collective aspects that contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and the overall quality of education (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

To build professional capital for teachers, school leaders have a prominent role in making capital intensive available (Sergiovanni, 1998). Similarly, a study found that professional development of teachers occurs when school leaders provide favorable and supportive learning environments (mesosytem layer in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology of development) (Julian and Ruiz, 2020). Scholars and researchers are paying more and more attention to pedagogical leadership, which is one of the most effective school leadership styles; however, instructional leadership is detrimental to teachers' efforts to create professional capital (Macneill et al., 2005). According to Alameen et al. (2015), pedagogical leadership is more than just facilitating teaching and learning, as it involves making decisions based on context rather than predetermined standards. Pedagogical leaders base their work on theoretical content and community ecology (Alameen et al., 2015; Male and Palaiologou, 2017).

Enhancing the knowledge and learning of teachers is the main focus and duty of the principals. A principal is responsible for directing their subordinates' knowledge and learning pedagogically as well as acting as the administrative supervisor (Alava et al., 2012). In the United States, school supervisors that employ pedagogical leadership practices have a significant investment in professional development consultants. These consultants work closely with teachers individually (human capital) and in groups (social capital) at school. Human capital in the context of the study refers to the talents, competencies, and knowledge possessed by teachers. Social capital is the total of resources connected to a web of institutionalized connections, according to Bourdieu (1986). In this study, social capital is defined as resources embedded in relationships between school stakeholders.

School leadership and professional capital of teachers

Arlestig and Törnsen (2014) assert that principals of schools must work in collaboration with teachers to improve student performance and school results. Sergiovanni (2001) also argued that there is no school in which student success is high, while teachers' professional capital is low. Therefore, school leaders can build the professional capital of teachers through various strategies, such as developing principles of community of practice. According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice is a collection of employees who are motivated to generate new knowledge or best practices, who communicate with one another and outside of their organizations, and who have a common interest in a certain subject. Using the concept of the school as a community, school leaders can foster a more compassionate and productive learning environment for both teachers and students (Sergiovanni, 2001). Pedagogical principals must also act as "head followers" of the school's common goals, values, and commitments. According to this perspective, leaders serve as examples for their followers. They lead by demonstrating desired behaviors rather than simply issuing orders. The principle of head followers represents a moral contract and transforms the school into a moral community (Heifetz, 1994).

One of the most important ways to increase teachers' professional capital is through ongoing professional development activities (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Melesse and Belay, 2022). To increase professional capital, several nations, including Ethiopia, have created programs for professional learning and teacher development (MoE, 2018; United Nations, 2016). The professional capital of teachers can be enhanced through interactions among teachers from various backgrounds in the form of online learning communities (Ye and Bagwell, 2023). Teachers can pull toward each other by gaining knowledge from each other's experiences and finding motivation from one another's practices (He and Bagwell, 2022;

Ye and Bagwell, 2023). Teachers can also collaborate across disciplines to build individual human capital, group social capital, and complete tasks in their own learning environments, as evidenced by their dialogic exchanges (Ye and Bagwell, 2023). To achieve all these means to develop professional capital, as per Hargreaves (2019), leaders have an obligation to offer teachers with opportunities for both push and pull factors related to professional capital.

Challenges to developing professional capital

The effective development of professional capital of teacher is impacted by a number of institutional and personal issues. Prescribed professionalism, which results in alienated instruction, is one of the first difficulties in developing professional capital (Shirley, 2016). Prescribed professionalism in the school context refers to a set of standards and expectations that educational institutions formally establish to guide the behavior and practices of professionals within a particular field. It often includes a code of conduct, ethical guidelines, and criteria for professional competence that members are expected to adhere to (Shirley, 2016). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2014) stated that prescribed professionalism is determined by national laws and norms. A study by the OECD (2014) Teaching and Learning International survey revealed that approximately 1/3 of teachers noted that they do not choose the curriculum they teach and 1/5 did not select the assessments. This indicates that business capital practices are replacing public education institutions in many nations, giving teachers little control over their working conditions (Verger *et al.*, 2016). Teachers undermine their best professional judgment if they become accustomed to their pedagogy, curriculum, and evaluations following the directives of higher authorities.

The second major challenge in building professional capital is the difficulty in managing professionals. This means that because employees typically have a strong negotiating position with their employer, exceptional professionals can be difficult to manage and retain (Yuliani and Pinnington, 2017). The difficulty of creating an engaged culture is the third obstacle in the process of establishing professional capital (Yuliani and Pinnington, 2017). A dysfunctional organizational culture has been cited as a contributing cause to the recent breakup of multiple organizations in a research conducted by Smith (2009). The fourth obstacle to professional development for employees is associated with the capacity for leaders. Organizations are under great strain due to changes in the workplace, and some of them also lack strong and effective leadership qualities.

The following were also identified as the main challenges in developing professional development: a poor professional development training policy outline and scarce school support (Obiero and Onduso, 2020); lack of institutional strategy and low commitment of decision makers (Brekelmans, 2013); and lack of teacher commitment, teacher resistance, and inadequate need-based trainings (Falk, 2001). For some teachers, the challenges are lack of trusting relationships, poor communication, inadequate organizational structure, lack of resources, and poor relationships among school stakeholders (Kwatubana, 2017). These challenges vary in terms of the type of context and professional development activities offered in schools (Gebre-yesus, 2014; Tulu, 2019). To alleviate these challenges, according to Webb's (2005) research, principals have to practice pedagogical leadership by increasing both teachers' and students' capacity for teaching and learning respectively.

Teachers' professional capital in Ethiopian context and gaps

Building teachers' professional capital as a combination of social, human, and decisional capital is a prominent approach in Ethiopia to improve educational quality and change the teaching profession (Melesse and Belay, 2022). Currently, to integrate education with life,

work, and production, teachers must also possess skills of the 21st century, such as digital literacy, in addition to indigenous knowledge and abilities (MoE, 2022). Research on early childhood education has shown that providing high quality early childhood education requires teachers to develop their professional capital (Melesse and Belay, 2022). School administrators have influence on teaching and learning because they establish guidelines for the institution and promote professional learning of teachers (Moe, 2018; MoE, 2022). Principals of schools are often seen to have a critical role in both the development of professional capital and the psychological empowerment of teachers (Berhanu, 2023b).

However, in Ethiopia, cooperative professional learning of teachers did not meet expectations in terms of enhancing professional capital, productivity, and quality in the system, according to the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030). Insufficient development of professional competence with respect to principles, rationale, and resistance in the implementation of cooperative professional learning within the education system, lack of principals, and teacher dedication were challenges in the development of professional capital (MoE, 2018, 2022). To address these challenges, Shirley (2016) also recommended that future researchers look at the markers of professional capital in different schools and their systems. Thus, first this study will shed light on how principals engage teachers in schools to build their professional capital. Second, there are inconsistencies among scholars on the strategies principals used to develop professional capital and associated challenges (Obiero and Onduso, 2020; Tulu, 2019). This required further studies on this topic. Third, Melesse and Belay (2022) conducted a study that examined the factors that influence the development of professional capital in Ethiopian contexts by relating it to professional education and job satisfaction. However, there is a dearth of data on principals' role to enhance teachers' professional capital. As a result, the current study examined at the methods used by primary school principals to build professional capital and associated challenges. The following research questions are posed in light of the justification given previously and the body of current literature.

(1) How do school principals develop the professional capital of teachers?

(2) What challenges do primary school principals face when developing the professional capital of teachers?

Theoretical framework

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecology of Human Development theory was used as the theoretical lenses of this study. This theory strongly believes that the events, responsibilities, and interactions of these individuals in any environment make a great contribution to all aspects of development. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model could also be helpful in examining the professional development of teachers (Kiilo and Kutsar, 2013; Widayati et al., 2021). According to this model, the professional capital of teachers is influenced by the environment in which they relate to others (microsystem layer). The microsystem contains the most immediate environmental setting that contains the developing teachers. The interactions the teacher has with these school stakeholders and environments directly affect his or her professional capital.

The phrase "professional capital" was originally used by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) regarding teaching. Professional capital, as described by Adams (2016), is the resources teachers need to change the way they teach and, consequently, the way schools are transformed. Professional capital, according to Shirley (2016), is a dynamic and evolving collection of skills and resources that educators operating at full capacity can exhibit in a variety of ways. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) identified three elements of professional capital: human, social, and decisional capital.

Human capital
Human capital as a dimension of professional capital refers to teacher knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). According to Adams (2016), continuing education and professional development for teachers are the two routes to building human capital. Moreover, to successfully develop human capital, leaders can invest in their social capital by supporting and fostering teachers' cooperation and professional relationships in schools. This was supported by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) who stated that those cohesive organizations with less individual skill are often more successful than groups with more skilled individuals who do not collaborate. This means that cohesive teams are more likely to work together effectively, communicate openly, and have a sense of belonging, leading to greater overall success and productivity.

Social capital
Social capital describes who you know. However, human capital describes what you know (Idil *et al.*, 2014). Social capital explains your own network. On the other hand, knowledge is characterized by human capital (Idil *et al.*, 2014). Meijs *et al.* (2016) claim that social learning is one of the most effective and innovative strategies for fostering social capital. Social capital is the process of creating individual and group knowledge and skills to support practice and student development (Fullan *et al.*, 2015). Teachers who have frequent interpersonal relationships can help create good social capital (Fullan, 2016; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Decisional capital
Wisdom, professional discretion, judgment, and skills that educators accumulate during their careers are called decisional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Decision capital, according to Fullan (2016), is any information, intelligence, or energy required to increase the productivity of social and human capital. Ye and Bagwell (2023) defined decision capital as the ability of educators to evaluate the state of affairs in order to monitor activities or modifications, particularly in the face of uncertainty or difficulty. In the absence of rote procedural answers, decision capital concentrates on the choices made by teachers about their instruction and the learning of their students. This can be developed and improved through introspection and peer review. Building decision capital aims to support and empower educators to make decisions based on their own assessment. In the teaching and learning process, this is a characteristic of being a professional (Hargreaves, 2019). Building human, social, and decisional capital is generally the way school leaders should support teachers' professional capital (Adams, 2016; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Methods
Research design
In this study, a qualitative research methodology was applied. The case study technique enables researcher to preserve the comprehensive and significant aspects of the actual occurrence in a qualitative research design (Yin, 2012). Cause and effect can be established through case study design; in fact, one of their advantages is that they see impacts in actual settings, realizing that context is a key factor in determining both causes and effects. In particular, a multiple-embedded case study was used to determine this effect because the researcher collected data from various subunits (principals and teachers) of different schools (Yin, 2012).

Participants
The province of East Gojjam, in the northern part of Ethiopia, served as the study site. The study's target audience consists of all primary school principals and teachers in the province

of East Gojjam. The East Gojjam province had 929 primary schools. The province of East Gojjam has 929 principals and 14,693 teachers (F-6298 and M-8395). From these, to select samples from the target population, the following procedures were followed: 1) Five schools were purposively selected. These schools are role models at the district and provincial level of education. Purposive sampling is important because it allows the researcher to gather qualitative responses, leading to better insights and more precise research results, and it enables the best researcher to obtain sufficient data to answer research questions. Second, of these five schools, maximum variation sampling was used to gather data from 14 interviews, 9 of which were with teachers and 5 of which were with principals. During the selection of the participants, the expression capacity, age (more than 30 years), and working experience (more than 10 years) were considered objectively. By interviewing these two groups (principals and teachers), the researcher was able to compare and simultaneously find commonalities in their analysis, as well as the distinct and fairly comparable opinions of each group. It is possible to view school administration (principals) as the ones who first propose behavior management rules, with teachers acting as recipients, implementers, and exemplars of these policies. Thus, data from a range of respondents based on their role in school could offer a reasonably balanced set of perspectives and a range of perceptions to examine. Detailed demographic information from the interviewees is presented in Table 1.

As Table 1 shows, 5 of them were principals and 9 of them were teachers. The total length of service of the principals is seen to vary between 11 and 23 years. The duration of the teachers' service varies between 15 and 37 years.

The researcher also held two focus group discussions (FGD) with teachers from two different schools. Seven teachers participated in each FGD. Participants in focus groups were chosen using the maximum variation approach to ensure the greatest possible diversity of people who can contribute to the subject under study (Patton, 2014). Data were collected from teachers of both men and women, of various ages (30+), and of various grade levels from two schools in East Gojjam. Selecting participants for research or educational studies requires careful consideration. As a general rule, teachers over the age of 30 years and with more years of experience are inherently more important to select as samples (Ismail *et al.*, 2018). For example, teachers with more years of experience often bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table. Their insights can enrich the research findings and contribute to a deeper understanding of school practices in developing professional capital.

Participants	Gender	Total length of service	Position	Ever had administrative responsibilities	Involved in any committee	Percentage of students passed
P1	M	15	Principal	Yes	Yes	>98
P2	M	13	Principal	No	Yes	99
P3	M	12	Principal	Yes	Yes	98
P4	M	11	Principal	Yes	Yes	100
P5	M	23	Principal	Yes	Yes	96
T1	M	33	Teacher	Yes	No	>98
T2	F	36	Teacher	No	Yes	95
T3	F	37	Teacher	No	No	95
T4	M	36	Teacher	Yes	Yes	100
T5	M	32	Teacher	Yes	Yes	96
T6	F	15	Teacher	Yes	Yes	96
T7	F	37	Teacher	Yes	Yes	96
T8	F	19	Teacher	Yes	Yes	95
T9	F	21	Teacher	No	Yes	92

Table 1.
Demographic information of the Working Group

Source(s): Table created by author

Instrument
In this study, the interview technique and focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative data. Based on the conceptual model of Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) with three dimensions of professional capital (human, social, and decisional capital), a semi-structured interview form was developed for both the interview and FGD to collect data. Interviews would need to be conducted to acquire more significant or in-depth knowledge on leadership issues (Fonsén and Soukainen, 2020). The FGD is also one of the tools that scholars can use to understand any phenomenon and produce valid information. The interview and FDGs were conducted with the following protocol:

(1) What strategies the principals used to develop the knowledge, competence, and skills of teachers? (Human capital)

(2) How is the frequency of contact and the proximity of interactions among school stakeholders to support teachers socially? (Please provide examples of the networks or techniques you created to enhance social interactions and to exchange information (social capital).

(3) How do principals build trust among school teachers? (Social capital)

(4) What mechanisms principals used to develop the judgment of professional discretion of teachers? (Decisional capital)

(5) What strategies are used to encourage teachers to become autonomous in the pedagogical decisions in the class and in designing the exam papers? (Decisional capital)

(6) What challenges do principals face when developing professional capital for teachers?

Data collection procedure
The procedure for data collection of this study includes: the researcher starts by going over the theoretical and empirical research on the definition and characteristics of professional capital, as well as the principal's approach to fostering teachers' professional capital and the challenges that go along with it. The ethics committee then approved this study first on the basis of ethical considerations. Third, subjects were requested to participate voluntarily in the study. Anonymous names, such as P1 stands for principal, T1 stands for teacher, FGD1 stands for focus group discussion1, etc., were used to maintain confidentiality. Finally, for roughly 25 min, an interview and FGDs were conducted in the participants' workspace to gather data. The researcher recorded voluntarily focus group and semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis
Based on the primary research questions, obtained data were examined. The researcher chose to use Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) three dimensions of professional capital because it allows to create themes, meaning-based patterns, in order to comprehend a qualitative data set (Proudfoot, 2022). The researcher and his assistant conducted interviews in Amharic before translating and transcribing the material. The researcher double-checked those audio recordings to make sure that translation and transcription were accurate because the researcher is also fluent in Amharic. The researcher has familiarized with the entire interview response and identifying themes by listening to audio tapes that correspond to the transcripts. Then a deductive method was applied using the NVIVO version 12 software. First, the researcher used the paragraph style to clean the data. This is used to categorize the

data according to the study questions. The researcher then imported the information into NVIVO. Third, the researcher rearranged the data by grouping the data according to the study questions. Fourth, to identify the words or phrases that address the study questions, the researcher performed a data exploration (using the "Query command". Fifth, the researcher created the themes. Lastly, the researcher used verbal statements from individuals to describe themes based on their frequency.

Trustworthiness
Trustworthiness was ensured in several ways, including by letting each participant know why they were there for the focus group and interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). To ensure that the researcher understood the participants' shared experiences accurately and as intended, the original transcriptions were also distributed after focus groups and interviews. Rich data and detailed participant descriptions were also provided, ensuring transparency. Triangulation was used to ensure the precision of the results (Patton, 2014). This involved using a variety of data sources, such as semistructured interviews and focus groups, as well as a number of participants, including teachers and principals. To determine whether experts agreed on a given theme, interpersonal agreement was assessed using Cohen's Kappa. Twenty percent of the interview data was selected at random by the author, who had the remaining data recorded by independent experts. It is acceptable that 91% of experts agreed on the original coding data and the recoding data (Li and Li, 2020). An audit trail was also kept to verify that the study conclusions are based on participant narratives rather than the author's possible personal narratives (Polit and Beck, 2018).

Results
The qualitative research working group consists of 14 voluntarily employed educators (5 school principals and 9 teachers) and 14 focus group discussion participants.

Principals and teachers' views about principals' the practice of building professional capital
This part also presented the views of principals and teachers about the practice of principals to build professional capital. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

As Table 2 shows, regarding the perception of teachers' practices by principals to develop professional capital, the researcher classified responses to Hargreaves (2019) three main dimensions (human, social and decisional capital) with 13 themes. Details are as follows:

a. Professional capital-Human capital

Regarding strategies to develop the human capital of teachers, the responses of principals and teachers were classified into five main themes. Of the participants interviewed, all indicated that they provided teachers with opportunities to attend training to strengthen their teachers' talents.

Provide teachers with opportunities to attend training: principals and teachers stated that principals provided different trainings with collaboration colleges and universities to develop the knowledge, competence, and skills of teachers. P2, for example, described it as: "Various trainings on different topics were given to teachers, for example, on how to improve handwriting, the way to care for the child, how to improve the child's playing skills, etc."

P4, for example, stated that "In the summer, we provide short-term training on pedagogical decisions such as continuous assessment, test preparation, and assessment techniques." In addition, years ago, we gave training for teachers with the collaboration of the university. In the coming months, we plan to provide in-service training for teachers. '

	Teachers													
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	T7	T8	T9	p1	p2	p3	p4	p5
a. Professional capital Human capital														
Provide teachers with opportunities to attend training	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Encourage informal collaboration with professional improvement	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔			✔			✔	✔
Encourage teachers to continue their education	✔		✔	✔		✔		✔		✔			✔	✔
Encourage practicing a continuous professional development program	✔				✔				✔			✔		✔
Encourage teachers to understand how students learn						✔						✔		
b Professional capital Social capital														
Facilitate the exchange of information	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Create a caring and supportive school culture	✔		✔			✔	✔	✔	✔	✔			✔	✔
Form various social groups or clubs	✔	✔				✔		✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
Foster frequent positive interpersonal relationships among teachers			✔	✔		✔	✔			✔		✔		
c. Professional capital Decisional capital														
Create a school culture that respects teachers' instructional decisions	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
Encourage teachers to make sound instructional decisions						✔	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	
Encourage teachers to assess their instructional decisions		✔	✔			✔								✔
Value teachers' professional judgment and wisdom	✔	✔			✔									

Source(s): Table created by author

P5 also reported it as:

> We provide training with the following steps. First, we require that teachers receive an assessment of what areas they need training, for example, on how to prepare effective media, continuous evaluation, and applied research. Then we report to a school supervisor and, after that, communicate with the college or universities.

Participants in FGD 2 also reported that to develop teachers' knowledge, competence, and skills of teachers, their principals provide training for teachers with the collaboration of the province, regional education offices, colleges, and universities. This indicated that FOR developing professional capital in school, the majority of participants emphasize that offering

teachers the chance to participate in programs or activities that enhance their teaching, skills, and knowledge. This can include a variety of professional development experiences such as workshops, seminars, conferences, online courses, and more. The goal is to equip teachers with the latest educational strategies, technologies, and methodologies to improve their effectiveness in the classroom and ultimately benefit the learning of their students.

Encourage informal collaboration for professional improvement. To develop teachers professionally, three principals reported that they were facilitating teachers to form teams that aim at developing their competence based on the areas of subject. P5, for example, stated that the best way to develop teachers professionally is to have teachers discuss and share their experiences and knowledge. T2 stated what she felt as follows:

> To develop teachers' knowledge, competence, and skills, the principal controls teacher professional improvement training within the school every week. Every week, we (teachers) share our experiences. Sometimes, the teacher who has a good experience gives training to other teachers. Our principal also encourages us to learn from each other.

A principal reported that "We actively learn in the form of collaborative learning to support the achievement of our school's vision and goals" (p2); and "All school stakeholders are enthusiastic about the pursuit of school's collective goals and missions since we have decided them together" (p3). T9 described it as: "Since we actively participated in setting the school goals in the beginning, together, we feel or show great enthusiasm and interest in implementing the school goals."

This shows that the principals in the present study tried their best to create learning communities where teachers can share resources, discuss challenges, and develop solutions together. By investing in the informal professional exchange experiences of teachers, schools can ensure that educators are well equipped to provide the best possible education to their students.

Encourage teachers to continue their education. Even if the number of teachers upgrading their academic status in regular or summer education is few because of financial constraints; the principals stated that they were encouraging them to continue their education by themselves and with the sponsor of the government.

P4 explained it as "As a principal, I advise teachers to upgrade their academic status by attending the teaching profession. However, since the school is new, we have not sponsored teachers to attend their higher education". Teachers in FGD 1 also described how their principals have encouraged them to continue education in university as part of their professional development, career structures and pathways. This reveals that encouraging teachers to continue their education in the summer is essential for their professional growth and development. District education bureaus offer tuition-free opportunities for teachers to study various subjects in locations throughout the country.

Encourage teachers to practice a continuous professional development program - To develop teachers' competence and knowledge, teachers encouraged them to practice continuous professional development programs. For example, a participant (P3) reported that:

> According to the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program, every school stakeholder, such as supervisor, teachers, and the principal, has their own goals. For example, if I have a problem with handling information, I have to plan the means of handling information by allocating 60 hours a year. This means self-empowerment or individual growth as a teacher.

Almost 25% of the teachers and participants interviewed for FGD stated that their principals played a significant role in encouraging them to practice continuous professional development programs. T5, for example, described his principal as: "Our principal encourages us to practice continuous professional development programs by merging the school goals with personal goals."

This participation says that it is important to have a CPD program to better enhance teacher professional capital and quality education. CPD is one of the professional responsibilities of teachers to address problems in the teaching and learning process, as it is one of the six main national programs to address the quality of education. However, despite the fact that most teachers have been involved in the CPD program in various forms; some participants agreed that the program could not bring about a notable enhancement in the professional capital of teachers. In the researcher's interactions with teachers on various occasions we also affirmed that there is still a gap between the anticipated and actual competence of teachers.

Encourage teachers to understand how students learn - P3 stated that he encouraged teachers to understand learning theories, to develop themselves individually in the teaching profession, and to give value for their profession. Only T6 reported that his principal, "My principal encourages me to understand how my students learn to learn different learning theories, to develop myself in the teaching profession vertically and horizontally".

b. Professional capital-Social capital

Regarding social capital, the teachers and principals' responses were classified into five main themes. Of the principals interviewed, the majority of them indicated that they formed various social groups, facilitated informal and professional interaction, and created a caring school culture to strengthen frequent and close interactions of school stakeholders. The details are presented as follows.

Facilitate the exchange of information - P1 expressed his method of exchanging information as 'I bring together the information, skills and knowledge of numerous teachers and students in a school through teacher forms'. P5 also explained his ways to improve the exchange of information within the school as such:

> To improve the exchange of information exchange among school stakeholders and to meet the diverse needs of students, we have many groups such as development teams, a one-to-five structure, and a parent-student-teacher association in each class, Kebele (neighborhood) Education and Training Board. The flow of information, first,1 to 5 structure (5 students share information, help each other), and then they report to the class director, then the class director reports to the unit leader, then the unit leader to the school administrator, and finally we report to the keeled Education and Training board and district education office.

As the teachers stated, their principals encouraged them to exchange information and knowledge in the form of peer supervision, posts, forums, social learning, and meetings. T3 described her principal as follows:

> To improve information exchange among classes, we have groups called forums, which is the association of teachers who teach the same subject and the same grade level. The aim of the forum is to increase the social interaction of teachers, to give the same test, to bring behavioral change to students, and to examine the difficulty level of the tests. Also, we have a department meeting that was used as a means of obtaining information.

Create a caring and supportive school culture - Principals created a family type of institution by greeting warmly school stakeholders. P1 described it as 'The social interaction among school stakeholders is like a family type and we are warmly greeted in each morning.' Five out of 9 teachers also described their principals as playing an integral role in the development of their social interaction by creating a caring school culture. A newly hired teacher (T1) described 'I am a new teacher in this school, and the principal cares about me like a newbie. He cared, helped, and adapted me to the school culture and different norms or social groups of the school".

Form various social groups - The principals stated that they formed good-bye ceremonies, social groups, social committees, social programs, social activities, parent-student-teacher association, teacher meeting, and parent meetings to develop social closeness among school stakeholders. For example, a participant expresses it as: 'Social interaction plays a crucial role in the success of the school.' To develop it, we have different ceremonies and clubs" (P4). T2 also reported that

> Teachers have different traits and behaviors. A teacher or student, for example, may be shy and introvert in his or her personality traits and may stay silent because of his or her bad experience in group discussion; at this time, the principal acts as a catalyst, coordinator, and checker by encouraging them to participate in various social groups such as parent-student-teacher association, clubs, etc. He also acclimates new teachers to different social groups.

Foster frequent positive interpersonal relationships among teachers: Social interaction between school stakeholders was good, as teachers reported. However, T6 described that students' parents have less interaction with other stakeholders in such a way that, from my observation, student-student, student-teacher, teacher-teacher, and teacher-principal have good contact and closeness to interactions, except with parents and other school stakeholders.

This study shows that to develop the dimension of social capital, participants indicated that they formed various social groups, encouraged frequent interactions between school stakeholders, and created a caring school culture to strengthen frequent and close interactions between school stakeholders. Principals indicated that they considered other school stakeholders as trusted people; principals also discussed and worked with other school stakeholders, kept their promises, gave the first place to others, emphasized more action over words, and created a trustworthy culture. This implies that having faith in a leader fosters fruitful interpersonal relationships with them.

c. Professional Capital-Decisional Capital

Regarding the decisional capital of professional capital, the responses of the principals and teachers were classified into three main themes. Of the principals interviewed, 4 principals indicated that they created a school culture that respects teachers' instructional decisions.

Create a school culture that respects teachers' instructional decisions - As principals report, teachers are encouraged to become autonomous in the pedagogical decisions in the classroom and in designing the exam papers, but the exam preparation and evaluation committee confirm it at the department level. P4 also described it as 'We have a good culture that respects the pedagogical decisions of teachers.' Most of the teachers stated that their principals were creating a school culture that respects the autonomy of teachers in making pedagogical decisions and designing examination papers and exercising professional expertise and experience.

T4, for example, reported that:

> The principal encourages teachers to feel autonomous in the pedagogical decision in class and in designing the exam papers; however, after teachers prepare the exam, the exam committee checks whether it prepares based on what the students learned and the students' books. Teachers have discretion authority over choosing activities to support the teaching and learning process.

Encourage teachers to make sound instructional decisions - principals and teachers stated that teachers encouraged teachers to make new and/or different decisions regarding students' needs. To professionally elevate teaching practice, the principal promotes teacher autonomy to make sound instructional decisions based on teacher experiences, practice, and reflection. Teachers reported that their principals gave them the opportunity to exercise the judgment and experiences they accumulated throughout their career and to use

different instructional and assessment methods. For example, P3 described that: "My principal encourages me to use different instructional methods based on students' needs and my experiences."

Encourage teachers to assess their instructional decisions - Just P5 stated that he encouraged teachers to assess their instructional decisions. Three teachers stated that by providing recognition, their principals encouraged them to practice the wisdom, judgment, and expertise they develop throughout the course of their careers. T6 said that her principal gave great value to teachers who make sound and constructive decisions.

Value teachers' professional judgment and wisdom Three teachers stated that by providing recognition, their principals encouraged them to practice the wisdom, judgment, and expertise they develop throughout the course of their careers. T6 said that her principal gave great value to teachers who make sound and constructive decisions.

This implies that teacher decisional autonomy and leadership roles can be a lever for smart retention, offering teachers a way to expand their skills and take on new challenges that help them continue to grow professionally while remaining in the classroom. Cultivating supportive relationships and autonomy among colleagues creates a positive and respectful work environment where teachers feel valued and supported by their peers and the administration. And practicing teacher leadership by valuing and respecting teachers' professional judgment and wisdom promote a school climate built on collective responsibility for all students to succeed, where administrators and teachers work together to make decisions that are best for students.

Challenges in the development of professional capital

Based on the challenges in developing the professional capital of teachers, the responses of teachers and principals to the challenges were classified into six main themes. Some of them (1–3) are associated with principal, school, and education bureaus, and some others (4–6) are associated with teacher-related challenges.

(1) Low commitment and interests of school and education bureaus

Some teachers complained about the low motivation of the school as a challenge to develop the social capital of teachers. P2, for instance, complained: "Education bureau experts have little commitment and interest to appear or avail themselves in a specific meeting even if we announced them early. The saddest event is that even those experts who attended the meeting could not provide the required suggestions and comments."

T2 also offered his complaints and suggestions to the school as follows:

Schools should provide teacher training to improve teacher education, contemporary teaching and learning approaches, classroom management, and overall quality education, which makes them involved in teacher overall learning and development. However, in reality, my school is not interested in learning about the needs of teachers in collaboration with the education bureau.

(2) Information Displacement in Education Bureaus

T6 described the status of the information exchange within the school and with the education office as: "Since the school was built by volunteers, the district education office counts as a private school. So, we have not had much exchange of information with the district education office. However, within the school, we share information". T7 added a reported displacement of information in the provincial and regional education office as follows:

The exchange of information at the lower level is sound and accurate; however, when we report to the above education offices about the number of students who attained at school or passed the exam, and the number of trainings provided they changed the number and made an increment for political purposes.

(3) Poor financial capacity of the school

A participant in FGD 1 also described the involvement of colleges in training as: 'To develop teachers' knowledge, competence, and skills, our principal and school try their best; the school has limited resources in terms of finance.' A discussion in FGD 1, for instance, described it as:

> We have not taken capacity building training due to financial restrictions. However, the management of the school does not interfere with the autonomy of the teacher. The principal also encourages us to use various instructional methods based on the needs of the students.

(4) Lack of motivation and commitment of teachers to participate in continuous professional development programs

In the continuous professional development program, teachers are expected to create their own portfolio by planning two goals on their own and taking one goal from the school's goals. This is important for your career structure. However, P5 reported that *they* are not anxious to participate in continuous professional development tasks. T1 described the importance of continuous professional development programs as: Continuing professional development keeps teachers up-to-date with new research on how children learn, emerging technology tools for the classroom, new curriculum resources, and more. However, some teachers do not take it seriously. P2 also reported that teachers have less commitment to their autonomy in instructional decisions.

> Teachers have the freedom to prepare exams. We encourage teachers to make comments, even generating ideas to improve the curriculum. However, teachers most of the time show less commitment to do so. For example, the grade one English textbook is beyond the students' capacity so that it has to be revised again, although no one was taking the responsibility to improve it, although. Now we have sent it to the education bureau.

(5) Lack of trust and confidence from the teacher's side

It is crucial that teachers have confidence in their abilities and feel trusted by their peers and school leaders. For example, P-2 expressed his views on teacher confidence:

> Teachers may give appropriate punishment to students for their undesirable behavior. However, this type of measure cannot be allowed in a school. Management does not want to stress the students by imposing some actions. Due to the cumulative use of these and other preventions, teachers do not have confidence and academic freedom; thus, in turn, they do not trust principals. But I trust them.

P-3 also explained the suspicion of teachers towards school leaders as follows:

> Most teachers see the supervisor and principal as government, ears, or politicians and do not trust us. In recent years, for example, we have raised the importance of teaching full-day; however, teachers counted me as a politician. They view our decisions with suspicion. If teachers continue to work half day (shifts) and continue to look at our decisions with suspicion, the quality of education will be highly affected and social capital will deteriorate.

(6) Give low value for information

Some teachers stated that their principals are not actively engaged enough to foster informal interpersonal interaction and information among school stakeholders. Some school stakeholders do not value information. For example, P3 described "The exchange of information among school stakeholders is not as wonderful. Generally, we give less value to information. However, I am trying to change this mindset".

Discussion and conclusion

The professional capital model used in this study was created by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), who divided the professional capital of educators into three categories: (1) human capital, or the economic value of a teacher's talent; (2) social capital, or the relational trust that fosters collaboration among colleagues; and (3) the decisional capital, or the capacity of individuals to make wise and autonomous decisions in the face of ambiguous or conflicting information.

In the present study, principals and teachers reported that to develop knowledge, competence, and skills (human capital), principals provided teachers with opportunities to attend training, encouraged informal collaboration for professional improvement, encouraged teachers to continue their education, encouraged practicing continuous professional development programs, and helped teachers understand how students learn. The present finding was in line with several studies (Bevan and Bascope, 2017; Adams, 2016; İdil et al., 2014; Meijs et al., 2016; Sergiovanni, 1998; Wenger, 1998), who unleashed the professional capital of teachers and schools can be developed by cultivating communities of practice, such as encouraging informal collaboration and social learning. Furthermore, in agreement with the present finding, Alava et al. (2012) emphasized the role of school principals in supporting teachers' knowledge and learning professionally in the form of training via consulting agencies from universities, district consultants. Incongruently with the present finding, O'Brien (2005) stated that the professional capital of teachers can be developed through teacher leadership development. This shows that different scholars found various ways of developing professional capital in the school setting.

To develop the social capital of teachers, the participants of the present study indicated that the principals formed various social groups, encouraged frequent interactions between school stakeholders and created a caring school culture to strengthen the frequent and close interactions between school stakeholders. According to Beyramzadegan and Rasouli-Azad (2015) and Coleman (1988), who also supported the current study, organizations could enhance social capital at the individual and micro-to-macro change levels by boosting the frequency and structure of relationships and interactions among workers. The current result is also corroborated by a study of Sergiovanni (2001), Madhavaram and Hunt (2017), and Manen (1991), who highlighted the critical role of leaders in developing effective cultural ties and covenantal contacts, values, standards, and principles for developing social capital. This implies that having faith in a leader fosters fruitful interpersonal relationships in organizations.

The teachers and principals of the present study reported that to help teachers build their decision-making capital, the school principals created an environment in which teachers' professional judgment and wisdom are respected, and they are encouraged to make sound decisions and evaluate their own decisions. Similarly to the current study, Hargreaves (2019) recommended that, in the absence of rote procedural responses, teachers' decisions about their own instruction and students' learning should be recognized.

Based on the challenges in developing the professional capital of teachers, the present study was classified into teacher-related challenges and principal-, school- and education-related factors. Challenges varied in terms of the type of context and professional development activities offered in schools (Gebre-yesus, 2014; Tulu, 2019). For instance, Kwatubana (2017) noted that principals' inability to create adequate communication was a challenge of leaders for developing professional capital. Congruently, unable to create a culture of engagement and mutual trust among the stakeholder (Yuliani and Pinnington, 2017), and the lack of teacher commitment, teacher resistance, and the inadequacy of need-based training (Berhanu and Gobie, 2023; Falk, 2001) are obstacles in the process of establishing professional capital.

Implications and limitations

This article is anticipated to have theoretical importance for the literature by adding knowledge and information to strategies for building professional capital for teachers. Thus, it will be valuable to other scholars who might want to conduct a study in related areas. Practically, the findings of the research will benefit all those responsible for the management of education in Ethiopia at all levels of education. Based on the results of this article, educational policymakers at the federal level can contain capital building as a way to confirm the successful operation of school reform. This also helps principals transform their leadership behavior to be more democratic and pedagogical. This study is also important for school leaders by enhancing their exercise and developing the professional capital of teachers in their daily practice. Administrators and educators at the district, provincial, and regional level must assess the roles and responsibilities assigned to principals by reexamining the obligations related to the professional capital of their teachers. This investment has the potential to improve the instructional practices of teachers, resulting in higher student achievement. Furthermore, district-level, province- and regional-level administrators should encourage teachers and principals to improve themselves professionally by continuing their education at the university or by creating training programs or giving the opportunity to learn from schools having good experiences within or without the city and/or districts. Additionally, education officers at all levels must provide appropriate structures and financial resources in the school management strategy to develop the professional capital of teachers.

It is important that future research is conducted to determine how professional capital of teachers affects the overall goals of schools. This study can be expanded to include secondary and/or high school teachers and principals. Therefore, it would be interesting to see whether high or secondary school principals used various strategies more to develop the professional capital of teachers. This study is qualitative in nature; thus, it is only possible to make an analytical generalization with countries that are almost similar in characteristics to Ethiopia; however, it can be investigated by including more participants and using quantitative research methods. This article was limited by geography. Research on professional capital can be extended to include different provinces and regions with a broader range of demographics.

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