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The effect of Covid-19 on primary education in Ethiopia: Perspectives of school principals and teachers

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Version 1

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Overview

Designing effective and appropriate responses to education following the COVID-19 pandemic, is challenging, especially due to the fact that timely and accurate information is limited. As schools in Ethiopia prepare to reopen there is an urgent need to secure information on the impact that the school closures have had on the education system and to identify appropriate measures so that schools can open safely. Too often, the perspectives of school principals and teachers are missing from this planning, yet they are best placed to provide information on the challenges faced. As part of the Research for Improving Systems of Education (RISE) research study, we undertook phone surveys with primary school principals and teachers to understand the response of the education system to COVID-19 in Ethiopia across seven diverse regional states and city administrations (Addis Ababa, Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia, SNNP, Somali, Tigray), in both rural and urban locations. The perspectives of 127 school principals and 316 teachers were included in the study. We sought to identify how school principals and teachers are responding to the crisis, and how they are supported by the education system; if and how school principals and teacher are supporting parents and students during the school closures and the priorities of school principals and teachers once schools reopen.

Overall Key Findings

1. The findings have shown the importance of ensuring that all school principals and teachers have access to timely information and guidance to support students, particularly in rural and more remote aeras. Information and guidance are found to flow in a cascade manner from the Woreda (district) Education Office (WEO), to school principals, to teachers and parents, with some evidence of information lost along the way. The WEO is the main source of support for school principals, while school principals are the main source of support for teachers. The level of support that school principals receive, impacts the level of support that teachers receive, which subsequently impacts the level of support that teachers provide to teachers and students.
2. From the perspectives of school principals and teachers, the findings indicate that while some distance learning support has been provided to students during the school closures, both from their teachers and through the provision of radio broadcast, the level and nature of this support has been limited. Differences

across rural-urban location and region are found in the level and nature of support provided by teachers to students, which is perhaps impacted by their confidence to deliver distance learning and also in the different access that they have to resources, infrastructure and facilities across regions. Radio lessons have reached some but not all students, especially those who are disadvantaged, including students from low-income families and rural students. In Benishangul Gumuz (which is a disadvantaged region with several minority languages and Somali (which is a largely pastoralist region). These students are also least likely to benefit from teacher support during school closures. A number of actionable ways in which these radio transmissions could be improved have been suggested such as making the content more engaging and providing lessons on a more frequent basis.

3. School principals and teachers have identified a number of challenges which may be present when schools reopening including increased student dropout, losses to student learning, and the lack of access to the necessary resources to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Students from low-income families, girls and rural students are groups believed to be most at-risk of dropping out of school. As such, strategies to encourage all students to return to school were called for, in particular through sensitisation by school management committees and local authorities to encourage parents to send their children back to school. Ensuring hygiene and safety is one of the greatest concern of teachers in relation to schools reopening, with evidence that many schools have limited physical infrastructure to enable them to do so, including limited classrooms and inadequate handwashing facilities.
4. School principals and teachers have mixed opinions about the Ethiopian Government's plan to automatically promote students to the next grade. Many understand that it is necessary in the context of COVID-19 and may have a positive impact for the morale of better-performing students. However, many have concerns about how it may disadvantage lower-performing students and have a negative impact on their overall learning. This in turn may lead them to drop out after schools reopen. As such, school principals emphasised the importance of the planned additional tutorial classes in helping to cover content that has been lost. Suggested alternative strategies to automatic promotion included providing

tutorials followed by an exam and considering students' results from the first semester.

Key Findings: Information flow and support during school closures

- **Access to electricity and communication devices**
  - The majority of school principals and teachers have access to electricity and different communication devices including a phone, radio and television, with those in urban areas more likely to have access to these resources. Very few school principals or teachers had access to a computer/tablet or the internet.
  - At the local level, the main modes of communication amongst school principals and teachers included face-to-face communication and phone call.
  - School principals in Benishangul Gumuz and the Somali regions were often the least likely to have access to resources compared with other regions.
- **Information about COVID-19**
  - Almost all school principals and teachers indicated that they had received information about COVID-19 and this was received mainly through the television, but also through face-to-face communication, from the radio and by phone. The types of information they received included practical information about hand washing, physical distancing and staying at home and wearing a facemask.
  - Three quarters of school principals indicated that they had to report information about school activities to the government since the beginning of school closures.
- **Support and guidance received by school principals and teachers**
  - School principals who reported receiving guidance about how to keep education going during school closures were, in turn, significantly more likely to report supporting teachers. Over two-thirds of school principals indicated that they had received guidance on how their school can keep education going during the school closures, mainly from the Woreda

Education office. A slightly lower proportion of school principals indicated that they were supporting teachers during school closures.

- However, less than half of teachers reported having received guidance on how to support students' learning during school closures, mainly from their school principal.
- School principals are more likely to have had contact with the parents of students than teachers and this was more likely to be face-to-face and included information about hand washing, physical distancing, staying at home and wearing facemasks.

Key Findings: Supporting students' learning during COVID-19

- **Supporting students' distance learning**
  - Around half of teachers in this study reported supporting students during the school closures.
    - Teachers support to students was mostly provided face-to-face and included guidance and counselling, and providing support to others who have responsibility for students (e.g. parents/guardian).
    - Teachers in urban areas are more likely to be supporting students than rural teachers (57% of urban teachers compared with 45% of rural teachers).
    - Teachers who had received support and guidance (mainly from school principals) were more likely to report supporting students.
  - Almost three-quarters of teachers suggested that parents/guardians would not be able to support the learning of their children effectively, due to their heavy work demand, low literacy levels and low value for education.
- **Additional supports students may miss out on**
  - School principals and teachers also drew attention to the additional support that students may have missed out on as a result of school closures, including peer-to-peer support, physical/material support and emotional/psychological support, especially those who are disadvantaged - students from low-income families were likely to miss

out on school feeding and physical/material support, while girls were more likely to miss out on emotional/psychological support and physical/materials support.

- Only around one-quarter of schools who reported having a school feeding programme prior to the school closures said that this was continuing during the school closures. In some cases, such as in Benishangul Gumuz, food was provided by the community through home visits.

- **Radio Lessons**
  - The majority of teachers indicated that radio lessons were broadcast in their region, although this was much less likely to be the case in Benishangul Gumuz and Somali.
    - School principals and teachers mostly reported these radio lessons as being either *somewhat effective* or *effective* and believed that the main strategy for improving radio lessons could be making the radio lessons more engaging for students.
    - Students from low-income families and rural students were the two groups who school principals and teachers expected to be least likely to benefit from radio lessons.

Key Findings: School reopening

- **Student Dropout**
  - Increased student dropout is one of the biggest challenges school principals and teacher expect to face when schools reopen, especially in Addis Ababa and the Somali region. Students from low-income families, girls and rural students were identified as the groups of students that are perceived to be most likely to drop out and are the groups that were also identified as needing the most support to return to school.
  - Almost two-thirds of school principals indicated that their school was making preprations to support children who are less likely to return to school to be able to return to school and important strategies for helping students to return suggested by school principals and teachers include sensitisation to

encourage parents to send their children back to school by school management committees and local authorities.

- **Supporting students when they return**
  - Decreased student performance is another significant concern of school principals and teachers and ensuring students have the adequate academic support when they return to school is highlighted as very important, especially in Benishangul Gumuz, and in urban areas.
  - Motivation for learning, mathematics skills and reading were selected as the areas that would be most affected by the school closures by both school principals and teachers.
  - The adoption of 6-day weeks was seen as the best strategy for catching up on lost learning during the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Supporting Teachers to return**
  - The ability to monitor learning and motivation for teaching were two of the greatest challenges for teachers during the school closures.
  - Teachers suggested that the most important support that they would need in returning to school would be how to ensure the health and safety of the students, and support on aspects of the curriculum to cover to help children catch up.
- **Preventing the spread of COVID-19 in schools**
  - Ensuring hygiene and safety is one of the greatest concerns of teachers in the majority of regions, particularly in rural areas.
  - School principals and teachers identified the lack of adequate classrooms as a significant challenge for schools reopening. As such, the three most common strategies opted for by school principals and teachers were rearranging the classroom layout, building additional classrooms and implement a half-day shift cycle.
  - Both school principals and teachers indicated that their schools did not have the necessary handwashing facilities especially in rural areas.
  - Many school principals and teachers agreed that it would be practical for students and staff to wear facemasks, however, school principals and teachers in Addis Ababa, Amhara and Oromia the less likely to believe it would.

1: Introduction

Background

While most immediately a health crisis, the outbreak of COVID-19 has affected all aspects of society, including education systems. In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, 192 countries closed schools leaving approximately 1.6 billion students affected by school closures.[i] Across countries, Ministries of Education have put in place a range of different strategies for continuing education including distance learning and remote support for learners.[ii] Given the unprecedented nature of the current crisis, the short, medium and long terms effects of the virus on schooling are currently not entirely known. However, the impact will undoubtedly be greater in Southern country contexts and, within countries, those who are most disadvantaged may face the most severe consequences.

Following the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in Ethiopia on 13th March 2020, the government acted swiftly and announced - among other measures - the suspension of schools for 15 days. A five-month State of Emergency was subsequently implemented with schools currently planning to reopen in 2020/21. Over 26 million students from over 37,000 primary schools and over 500,000 primary school teachers across Ethiopia have been affected by the closures. During the school closures, the Ministry of Education together with the regional bureaus of education provided distance learning through available media lessons broadcast through radio and TV media (Ministry of Education, 2020). However, the extent to which these lessons reached all students, particularly those who are disadvantaged is not clear, especially given the unequal access to resources and infrastructure in Ethiopia by wealth, rural-urban location, and regions within the country.

Existing inequalities are likely to have been exacerbated as a result of the pandemic especially children from poor families, girls and children with disabilities and those living in rural areas and in disadvantaged regions. For example, children from poor families may not have access to radio and TV and their parents may be less equipped to support their learning at home. In addition, they are likely to face greater economic shocks, increasing the likelihood they will enter into paid labour and making it less

likely they will return to school. They may also miss out on school feeding which has stopped since the outbreak of COVID-19.[iii] Girls, who often bear the brunt of domestic labour, may have even less time for study and may have unequal access to limited resources. Furthermore, due to school closures girls may be more at risk of entry into early marriage, exposure to sexual violence and unwanted pregnancy and violence from family members. In addition, girls may miss out on important support that they would receive in school including peer group support, access to sanitary items, and life skills training. Although children with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged groups in terms of access to school in Ethiopia, those in school receive additional support which families may struggle to provide. Strategies for distance learning may not be accessible for those with physical or sensory (hearing and visual) disabilities. Thus, it is unclear what support schools will be able to provide for children with disabilities, while the impacts for this group are likely to be significant.

Designing effective and appropriate responses to education during a time of crisis, such as in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, is challenging, especially due to the fact that timely and accurate information is limited. Up-to-date information is crucial for planning the short- and medium-term education response to COVID-19. As schools in Ethiopia prepare to reopen there is an urgent need to secure information on the impact that the school closures have had on the education system and to identify appropriate measures so that schools can open safely. Understanding the impact of the crisis on students learning will be important but also how existing inequalities become more entrenched, and/or how new inequalities emerge in this period of time is a pressing issue. The longer children remain out of school, the more difficult it is likely to be for them to return, and thus measures are needed to ensure all students, especially those who are disadvantaged, return to school and are supported when they do. Changes are also needed to mitigate the effects of future outbreaks, for example ensuring water, sanitation and health (WASH) facilities are available.

More generally, responses are needed to ensure that the notable achievements that have been made in the education sector in recent decades are not lost. Ethiopia has experienced a rapid expansion of education which has opened up opportunities of access to many who were previously excluded from education. While the government has been working consistently to improve both equity and quality, these efforts are

likely to be significantly hampered as a result of the current crisis. Informal reports from donors (including DFID and the World Bank) have indicated that education reforms efforts are largely at a standstill. This includes the support that donors have been giving via the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP-E). As governments and donors work to respond to the crisis, having access to contextualised and on the ground, experiences will be vital in helping the education system plan for the re-opening of schools, while also learning lessons for future crises.

Current Study

Building on the Research for Improving Systems of Education (RISE) programme, we undertook phone surveys to understand the response of the education system to COVID-19 in Ethiopia across seven diverse regional states and a city administration (Addis Ababa), Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia, SNNP, Somali, Tigray), in both rural and urban locations.[iv] We sought to identify how school principals and teachers are responding to the crisis, and how they are supported by the education system; if and how school principals and teacher are supporting parents and students during the school closures and the priorities of school principals and teachers once schools reopen. In particular we sought to identify the effects of COVID-19 in particular on groups who are disadvantaged including those living in poverty, girls, children with disabilities and children in rural and remote locations. Too often planning is undertaken without sufficient understanding of the constraints that both school principals and teachers face, and their views on what needs to be done. This report aims to fill that gap, drawing on the perspectives of a sample of 443 respondents (i.e., 127 school principals and 316 teachers).

The data collected complements and extends the ongoing RISE Ethiopia research, which has been tracking the implementation and impact of large-scale government reforms, aimed to improve equitable learning since 2018. The programme is being undertaken by the Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University and the Policy Studies Institute in Ethiopia in collaboration with the Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre at the University of Cambridge. RISE Ethiopia adopts a longitudinal and mixed methods approach to follow the implementation and impact of a large-scale government education reforms aimed to improved equitable

learning in Ethiopia, to help to understand how school system can deliver better quality education for all, especially those who are most disadvantaged. To date RISE Ethiopia has collected extensive and rich data (2018-2020) including a large-scale education survey in 168 school and community sites (2018/19),[v] in-depth case studies in five communities in February-March 2020, immediately prior to the school closures, and a system diagnostic of the education system at multiple levels (federal, regional and *woreda* (district)[vi].

This particular study uses phone surveys that aims to inform the Ethiopian government's immediate response to COVID-19, to share our findings within the wider academic and policy community. In addition, the findings will have relevance for the next stages of the RISE Ethiopia research project.

2. Phone Survey Design Process

While face-to-face data collection has not been feasible during the COVID-19 crisis, phone surveys have offered an alternative means of data collection. In the current study, phone surveys have allowed for the rapid collection of high-quality data collection related to what is taking place on the ground in response to COVID-19 from the perspectives of both school principals and teachers (Ballivian et al., 2015; Etang et al., 2016; Hoogeveen et al., 2014). Most importantly, the phone surveys allowed for data collection to take place without risking the safety of either the fieldworkers or the participants included in the study (Etang et al., 2016).

The instruments used in the phone surveys were developed by the authors of this paper, in wide consultation with RISE Ethiopia team members. An iterative process of instrument development was followed for the phone surveys for school principals and teachers, and the instrument was adapted slightly for each group, with a number of common questions across instruments. In addition, a number of questions were included that allow comparison with other surveys, such as one being carried out by some RISE Ethiopia team members in Rwanda, which were developed in parallel and also the Early Learning Programme research project in Ethiopia. The team also consulted with the phone survey being developed at the time by the Young Lives Study who were preparing a related survey with school principals in Ethiopia and India.

While phone surveys are suitable for both quantitative and qualitative data collection, in the current study we predominantly included close-ended questions, with a small number of open-ended questions at the end of the instrument. This strategy was chosen in order to be able to reach a relatively large number of respondents, as well as being mindful of the length of the survey. In addition, as the use of phone surveys are not regarded as suitable for lengthy interviews (Etang et al., 2016; Hoogeveen et al., 2014), the instruments were designed to last a maximum of 45 minutes. Efforts to ensure that all questions could be easily understood by participants and we also avoided the collection of sensitive information. We included a mixture of different types of close-ended questions including binary questions (i.e. yes/no), degree questions and questions where participants had to rank responses (e.g. 1-3), to allow for different types of information to be collected and help to make the phone less monotonous for the respondent.

The initial school principal and teacher instruments were revised a number of times based on the iterative approach, and then pre-piloted to determine if there were any issues with the instrument and what types of information was elicited. The pre-pilot was conducted by the RISE Ethiopia research team based at the Institute of Education Research at Addis Ababa University[vii] and the instruments were administered to eight participants (four principals and four teachers). Following the pre-pilot, a further stage of instrument development was undertaken and this near-finalised version of was translated into Amharic and programmed into the tablets that were used for data collection.[viii] A pilot study was then carried out by eight fieldworkers[ix] for the main data collection who were hired through Addis Ababa University in consultation with RISE Ethiopia administration team at the Policy Studies Institute. The pilot study was used to test the administration of the instrument using the tablets and to identify any other issues.

Prior to conducting the phone surveys, ethical clearance was obtained from the ethical review board of Addis Ababa University and from the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. The main phone survey took five days to complete and were carried out in August 2020 in seven school and communities across the diverse regions in Ethiopia. As the phone survey took place as part of the existing RISE Ethiopia study, a substantial benefit was the availability of an existing database from

which to sample participants. The database also included phone numbers of those who had participated in previous rounds of the RISE surveys. The research assistants were provided with a protocol for contacting the participants - which outlined a number of potential scenarios and how to respond in each case. All participants provided informed consent and were then provided with the option to conduct the phone interview immediately or to arrange a suitable time for the researcher to call back. Open ended questions were included at the end of the interview and additional consent was sought for these questions. The open-ended questions were recorded with the participants consent and later transcribed. Participants received compensation (100 ETB phone credit) once the interview was complete, drawing on best practice from within Ethiopia and in line with ethically sound procedures (Morrow, 2009).

Around 85% of respondents with whom the research assistants made initial contact agreed to participate in the research.[x] The fact that we had previously conducted face-to-face interviews with a large portion of the sample through other RISE Ethiopia research, may have contributed to the high response rate in this study. Where the interview did not take place, this was most commonly due to the failure to reach the respondent, failure to acquire the correct contact details of the participants or, in a smaller number of cases, because the participant declined participation. Some of the reasons given for participants non-participation included having a meeting in the woreda, or because they recently had given birth. The research assistants reported that the majority of the calls were uninterrupted, a few were interrupted but subsequently continued/completed while a very small number were interrupted and continued at a different time or were interrupted and not resumed. A poor network connection was also the reason for some of the interrupted calls.

A total of 443 participants were included in the school-level phone surveys, including 127 school principals and 316 teachers from 127 schools. In line with the 2018/19 RISE Ethiopia School and Community Survey, teachers from the first cycle of primary school, specifically grades 1 and 4, were included. The breakdown of school principals and teachers included in the study is presented in Table 2.1 and Table 2.2. Two-thirds of school principals were from rural areas and one-third from urban areas, while 61% of teachers were from rural areas and 39% of teachers were from urban areas. Only

6% of school principals were female, while 55% of teachers were female. The sample is reflective of the distribution of the population across the different locations (region and rural-urban), and of the proportion of female school principals and teachers in primary schools, due to the design of the quantitative RISE survey, it is not representative of regions.

All data were captured through tablets and was uploaded directly to the designed online storage system and then anonymised. Data analysis was assisted by STATA software. The data presented in this report mainly draws on the information garnered from the close-ended questions, with some insights from the open-ended questions.

Table 2.1: School principals included in the RISE Ethiopia phone survey

Region	Participants (No.)	Participants (%)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Addis Ababa	16	13	0	100	94	6
Amhara	17	13	71	29	94	6
Benishangul Gumuz	17	13	75	25	100	0
Oromia	31	24	77	23	94	6
SNNP	14	11	93	7	93	7
Somali	15	12	79	21	93	7
Tigray	17	13	71	29	94	6
Total	127	100	67	33	94	6

Table 2.2: Teachers included in the RISE Ethiopia phone survey

Region	Participants (No.)	Participants (%)	Rural (%)	Urban (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Addis Ababa	47	15	0	100	42	58
Amhara	40	13	65	35	42	58
Benishangul Gumuz	41	13	69	31	41	59
Oromia	83	26	75	25	51	49
SNNP	28	9	89	11	82	18
Somali	37	12	65	35	52	48
Tigray	40	13	70	30	24	76
Total	316	100	61	39	45	55

3: Information Flow and Networks for Support During Covid-19 School Closures

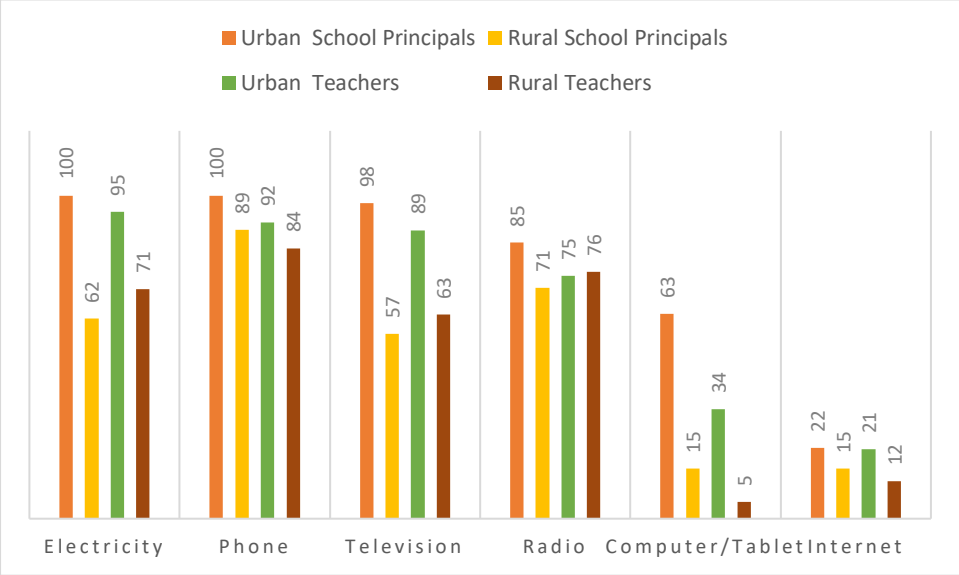
Information Flow during COVID-19 School Closures

In this section we focus on the flow of information to the local level during the school closures. We first explore the access of school principals and teachers to electricity and communication devices before then exploring if participants have received information about coronavirus, from who they received this information, what information they received and how they received this information.

Access to Electricity and Means of Communication

We asked school principals and teachers whether they had electricity as well as means of communication including radio, television, phone, computer/tablet and internet. This was important to understand whether they would have the facilities to receive and share information during the coronavirus pandemic, and the types of resources they had access to in order to support students' learning during the school closures. ***We found that almost all school principals and teachers had access to a phone, around three quarters of the school principals and teachers had access to electricity, radio and television, but very few had access to a computer/tablet or the internet***. School principals were more likely to have access to a computer/tablet than teachers. There were striking differences across rural and urban location***. Urban school principals and teachers are more likely than their rural counterparts to have access to electricity and communication devices*** (phone, television, radio, computer/tablet and internet), although slightly more rural teachers had access to the radio than urban teachers. The largest differences between rural and urban school principals and teachers were found in terms of the access that they had to the television and computer/tablet (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. School Principals' and Teachers' access to electricity and communication devices (%)



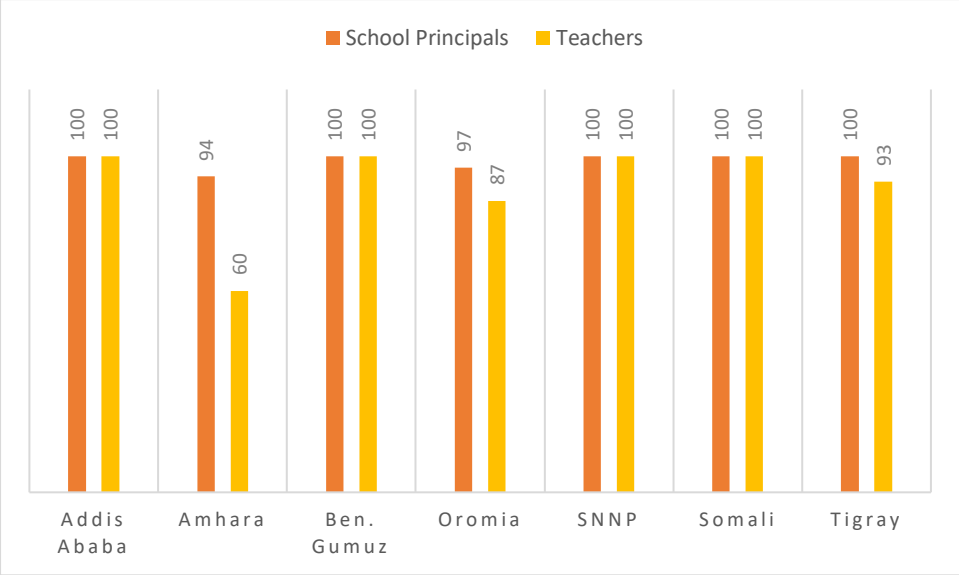
We also found large differences across the different regions and city administration in terms of the access of school principals and teachers to these resources. School principals in the Somali region were often the least likely to have access to resources compared with other regions, with none of those interviewed having access to the internet or computer/tablet, and very few having access to electricity (12%) or a radio (27%). In addition, no school principals or teachers had access to the internet in Benishangul Gumuz and Tigray. In contrast, school principals and teachers in Addis Ababa and Amhara were those who were most likely to have access to electricity and different communication devices.

We also explored whether there were participants who did not have access to either radio, television or internet, as this would mean that they would have limited opportunities to receive information about COVID-19. We found that 9% of school principals and 4% of teachers had no access to any of these, however this varied considerably across regions. School Principals and teachers in Somali, SNNP and Benishangul Gumuz most likely to report not having access to either television, radio or internet.

Information Received about COVID-19

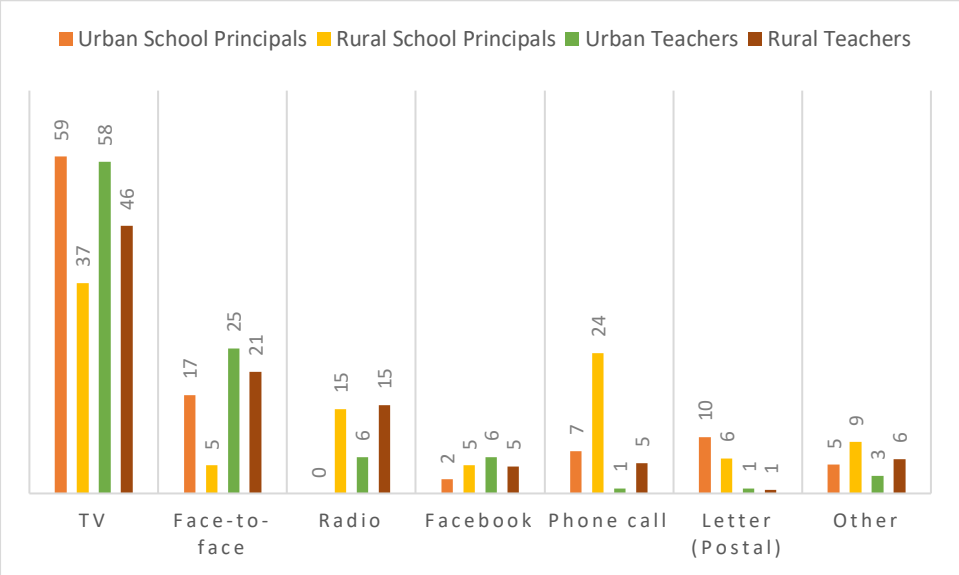
The vast majority of school principals and teachers had received practical information about coronavirus, mainly from the ***television (44% school principals, 51% teachers)***.All school principals and teachers had received information about coronavirus in Addis Ababa and the Benishangul Gumuz, SNNP and Somali regions. A small number of school principals had not received information about coronavirus in the Amhara and Oromia regions. A few teachers in the Oromia regions and 40% of teachers in the Amhara region said they had not received such information (Figure 3.2). No differences were found across rural-urban location or gender in terms of the information that school principals or teachers received about coronavirus.

Figure 3.2. Information received about coronavirus (%)



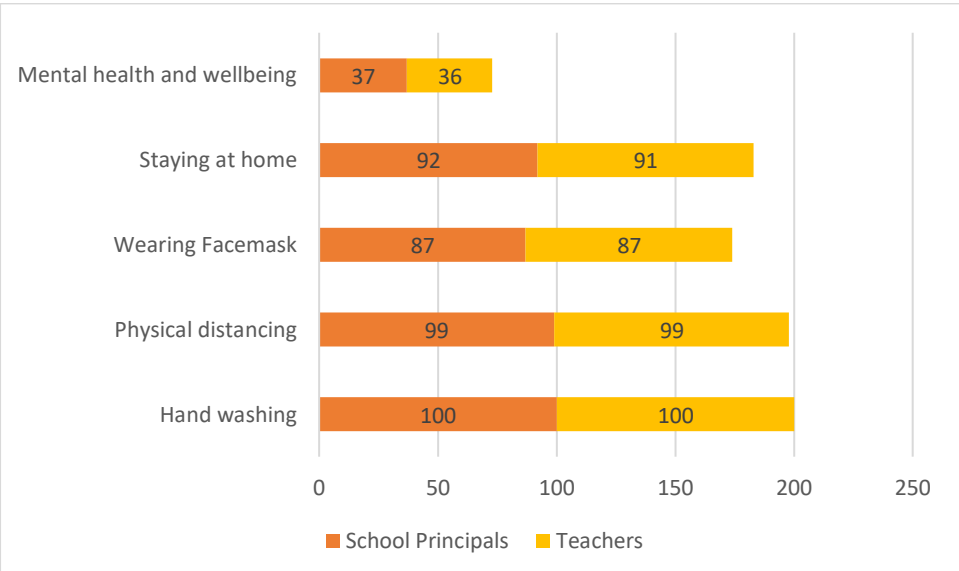
Urban school principals and teachers were more likely to receive this information from the television than those in rural schools. This is not surprising, given the greater access to the television in urban locations. Face-to-face was also a common source of information, particularly for teachers in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, radio and phone calls were also important sources of information, although these sources are less important in urban locations (see Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Main source of information about coronavirus (%)



In terms of the types of information that school principals and teachers had received about coronavirus, all participants had received information about hand washing, and the majority of participants had also received information about physical distancing and staying at home. About 87% of school principals and teachers alike received information about wearing a facemask. Only 37% of school principals and 36% of teachers had received information about mental health and wellbeing (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Main types of information received about coronavirus (%)



School principals were also asked to indicate whether they were required to report information about school activities to the government since the beginning of school closures***. Three quarters of school principals indicated that they had to report information to the government*** including information about contact between the school and the parents (80%), the number of students who received learning materials (77%), teachers' engagement with distance learning (55%) and the number of students submitting their assignments (36%). Statistically significant differences[xi] were found between rural and urban school principals, with 88% of urban school principals indicating that they had reported information compared with 69% of rural school principals.

Support Network during COVID-19 School Closures

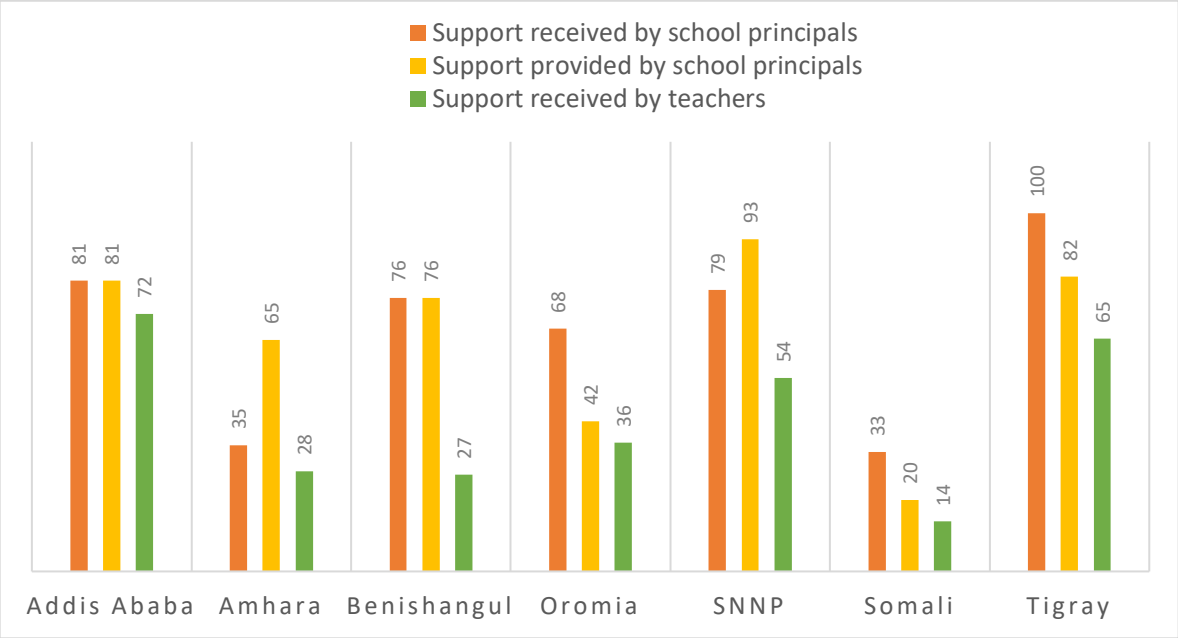
In this section we consider support networks during the COVID-19 school closures for school principals and teachers. In particular we consider whether school principals and teachers received any support or guidance, from where they received it, what type of support and guidance they received, and what support they provided to others.

Support received during COVID-19 school closures

The 127 school principals included in this study were asked to indicate whether they had received any guidance on how their school can keep education going during the COVID-19 school closures. Around two-thirds ***of school principals indicated that they had received guidance, and almost three-quarters of school principals indicated that they had received their information from the woreda education office,*** while a few school principals had also received information from regional education bureau or the Ministry of Education. Statistically significant differences[xii] were found across rural and urban locations, with 83% of urban school principals reporting having received support compared with 61% of rural school principals. No differences were found by gender of school principals. All school principals in Tigray were indicated that they had received guidance, with the majority in Addis Ababa, SNNP, Benishangul Gumuz and Oromia. By comparison, only around one-third of school principals indicated that they had received guidance in Somali, Amhara (Figure 3.6). Almost two-thirds ***of school principals also indicated that they were supporting teachers. School principals who reported receiving guidance about***

how to keep education going during school closures were, in turn, significantly more likely to report supporting teachers[xiii]. Urban school principals were significantly more likely to report that they were supporting teachers than rural school principals (78% urban school principals vs. 56% of urban school principals).[xiv] Regional differences were apparent, with school principals more likely to indicate that they were supporting teachers in SNNP, Tigray and Addis Ababa (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: Support received/provided by school principals across regions (%)

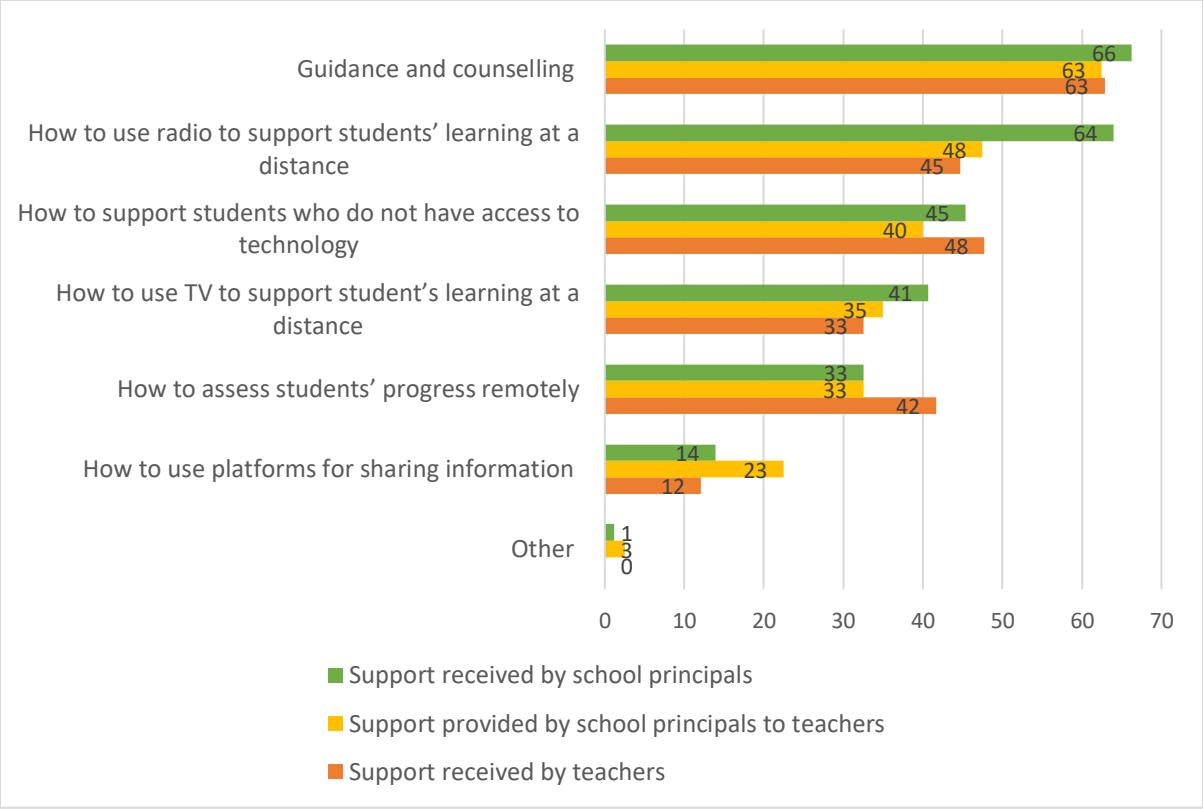


In order also to get the perspective of teachers, we asked teachers about the support that they had received on how to support education going during the COVID-19 school closures. ***Only 42% of teachers reported having received guidance on how to support students' learning during school, and this support was mainly provided by their school principal (91%).*** Urban teachers were significantly more likely to have received support.[xv] Teachers were more likely to reporting having received support in Addis Ababa, SNNP and Tigray. They were less likely to report having received support in the Amhara, Benishangul Gumuz, Oromia and Somali regions (Figure 3.6). In summary, school principals who had received support were more likely to report supporting teachers, and these patterns were reflected across both region and rural-urban locations.

What type of support was provided?

The main type of support received by both school principals and teachers alike included guidance and counselling, how to support students' learning at a distance, and how to support students who do not have access to technology. Teachers were also likely to receive support about how to assess students' progress remotely (Figure 3.6). ***The main types of support that school principals provide to teachers broadly reflect the main types of support that they receive***.

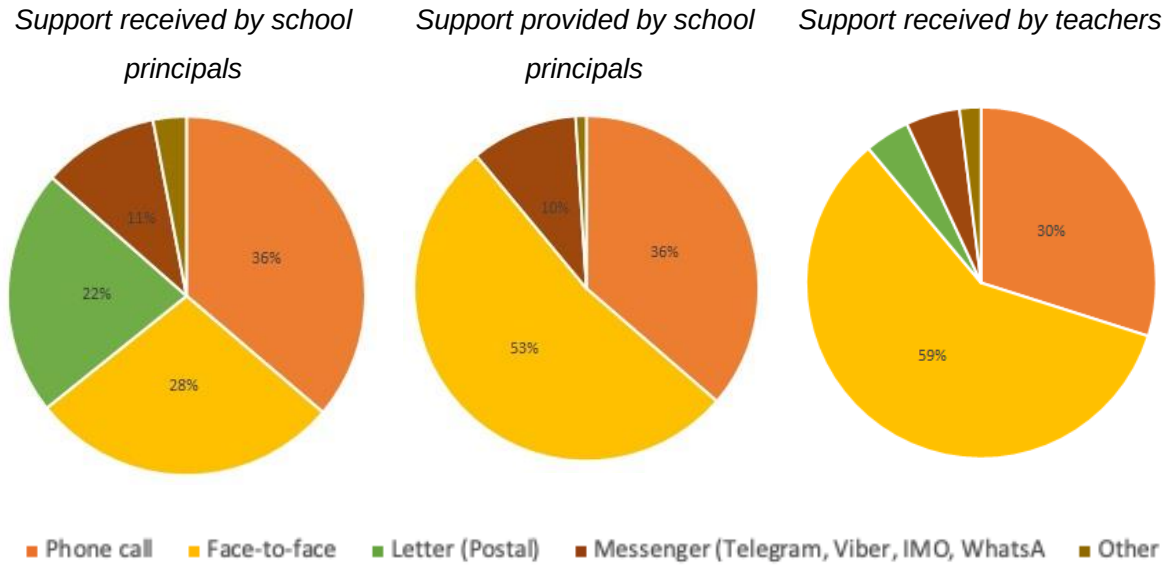
Figure 3.6: Types of support received/ provided by school principals across regions



How support was provided

The main modes of communication through which school principals received support and guidance was through phone (36%), face-to-face (28%) or letter (22%). In contrast, the main modes of contact between school principals and teachers was face-to-face, followed by phone call as reported by both school principals and teacher alike (Figure 3.7).

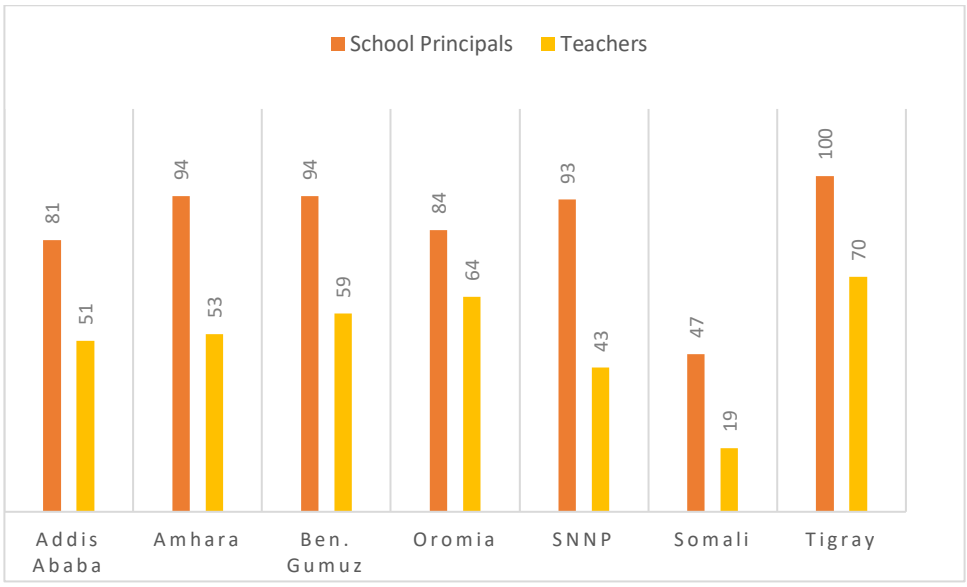
Figure 3.7. Main medium through which support is provided at the local level



Contact with parents

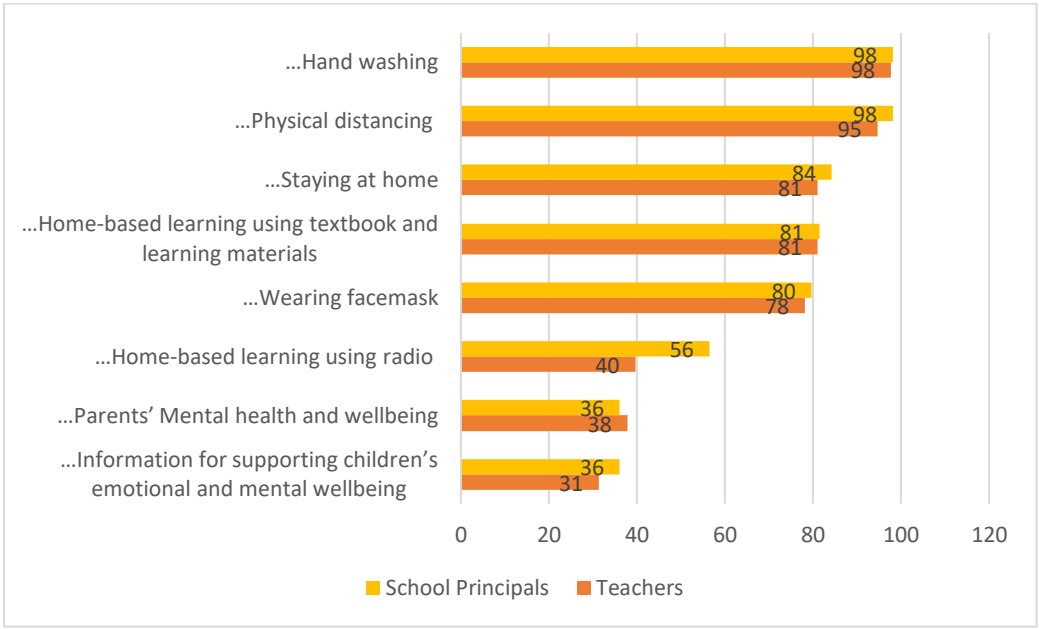
School principals and teachers were asked whether they had any contact with the parents of students in their school since the beginning of school closures. ***More school principals than teachers reported having contact with parents of the students,*** with 85% of school principals compared with 53% of teachers reporting having made such contact. The highest level of contact with parents amongst both school principals and teachers was reported in Tigray, followed by Benishangul Gumuz and Amhara. School principals and teachers alike were least likely to have had contact with parents in the Somali region (Figure 3.8). No statistically significant differences were found across rural-urban location or gender in terms of the contact that school principals or teachers had with parents.

Figure 3.8: Reported contact with parents of students (%)



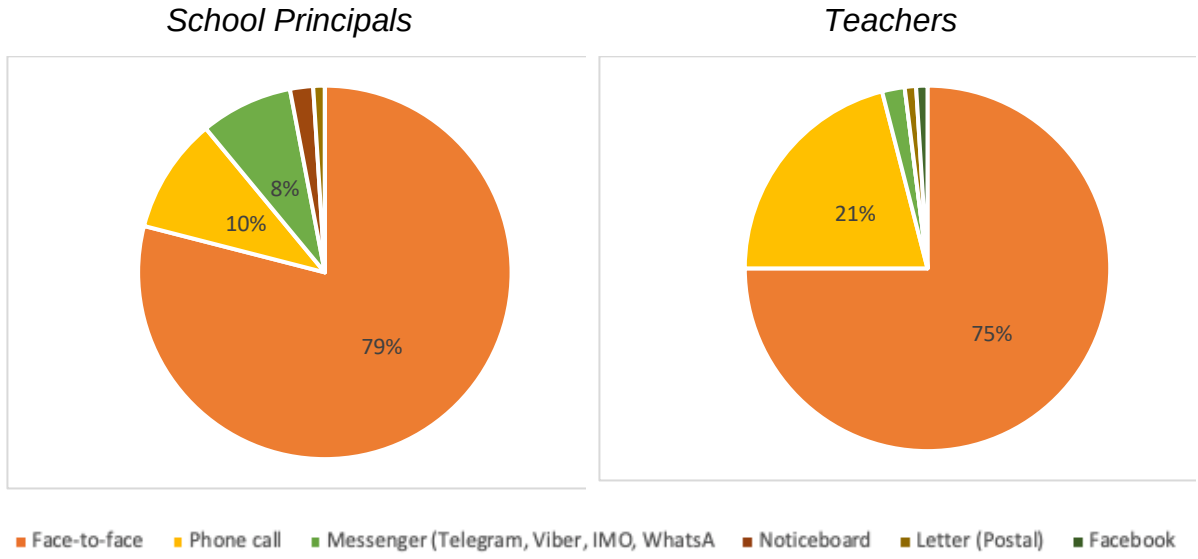
The pattern of information that school principals and teachers report having shared with parents of students, is broadly similar to that which they received, which includes hand washing, physical distancing, staying at home and wearing facemasks. A large portion of both school principals and teachers also report sharing information about home-based learning using textbook and learning materials (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Information shared with parents (%)



Both school principals and teachers mainly communicated with parents face-to-face, followed by phone call and then messenger. Patterns were broadly similar for both school principals and teachers (Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10. Mediums of communication with parents

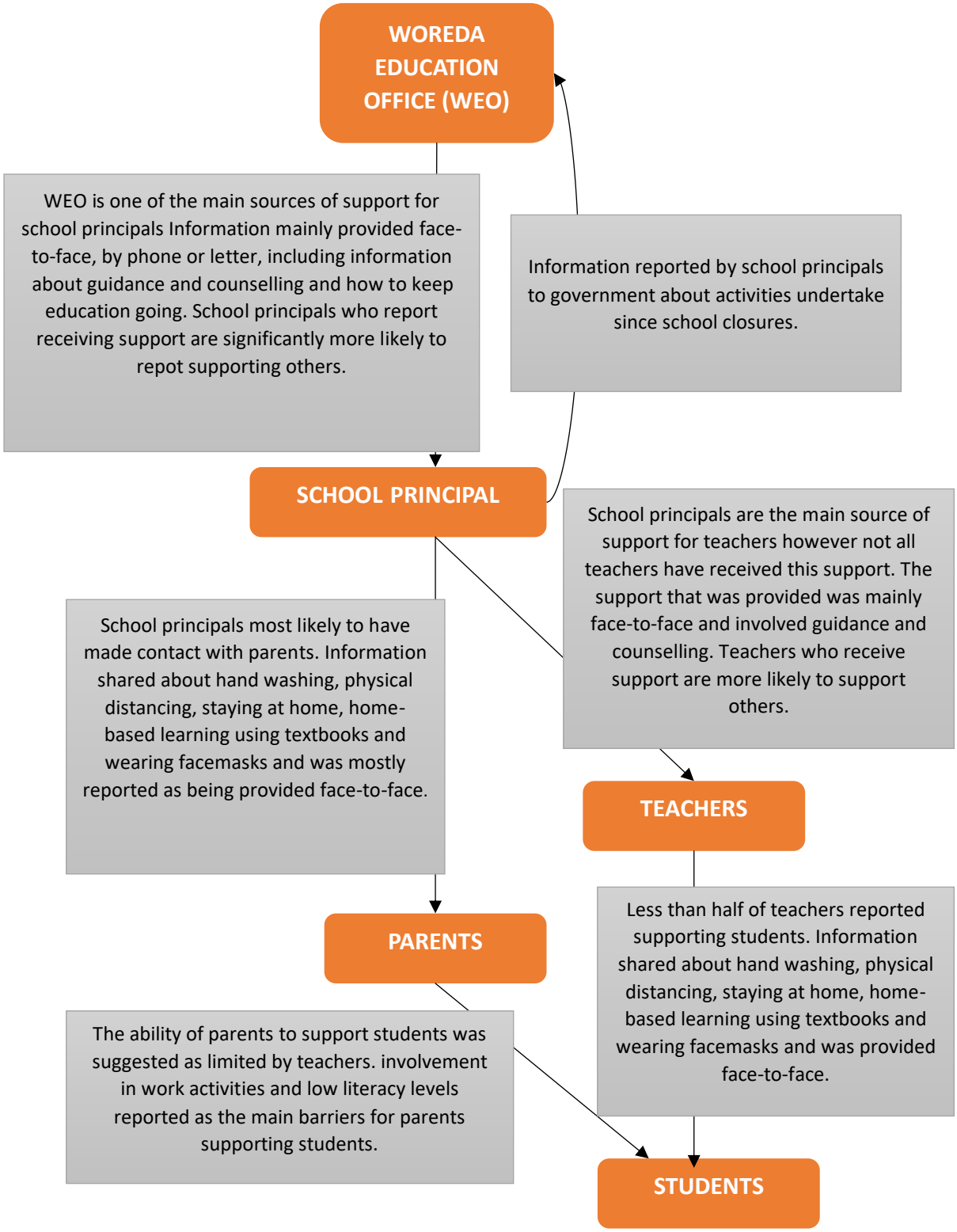


Summary

The initial findings have shown the cascade nature of information flow at the local level (see Figure 3.11). Specifically, information is found to flow from the Woreda Education Office (WEO) to school principals, and then from school principals to teachers and parents. This demonstrates the importance of WEOs being well informed about COVID-19 and appropriate responses. We find that the level of access that school principals and teachers have to electricity and means of communication effects how they received and transmit information to others about coronavirus. General information about coronavirus seems to be most commonly transmitted via television and this seems to have been quite comprehensive, however limited information about mental health and wellbeing has been received. However, differences exist in the type and level of access to different means of communication across region and rural-urban location, which in turn seems to impact the level of information that can be shared. School principals in the Somali region seem to be particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to different means of communication, with almost half of teachers in Somali having no access to either radio, television or internet. When it comes to information sharing at the local level, face-to-face seems to be the preferred method. The fact that

information is mainly shared face-to-face at the local level, may mean that those who are living in more remote areas are less likely to have access to important information. These findings point to the need for greater efforts for information sharing, support and guidance at the local level, which seems to be particularly important due to the fact that those who have received information and support are in turn more likely to support others. Indeed, it may also be that the information flow to the woreda education office is also insufficient.

Figure 3.11: Schematic representation of the flow of information and support during the school closures



4: Supporting Students' Learning During Covid-19 School Closures

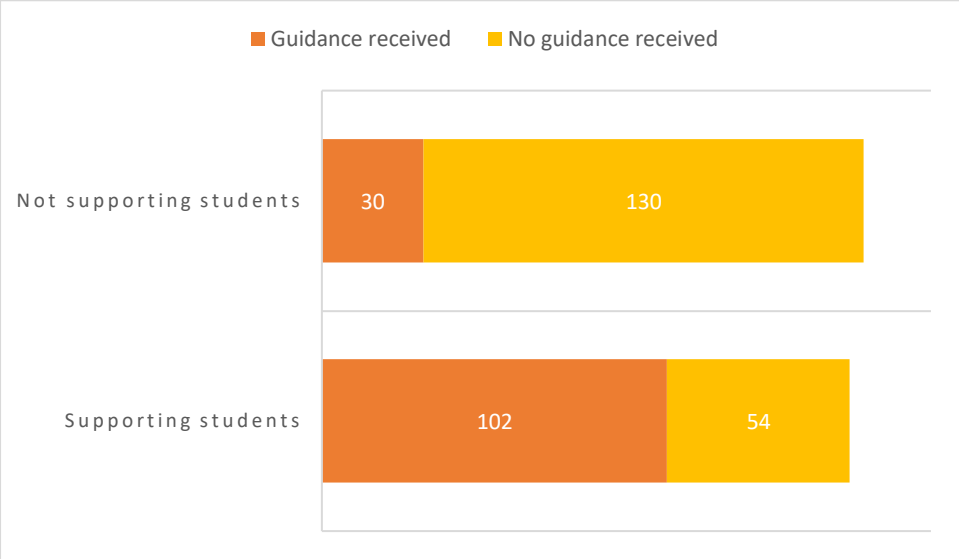
Introduction

During the COVID-19 school closures, a major concern for education systems globally has been how to support student learning at a distance. In this study, we sought to understand what support students have been receiving at the local level from the perspectives of school principals and teachers, including if students have been support, what this support has involved, how effective this support is perceived to be and what the main barriers have been to effectively support students learning. In addition, we asked school principals and teachers about their perspectives on the effectiveness of the radio transmissions broadcast by the government which have been one of the main ways in which the government has sought to provide distance learning. In particular, we consider how distance learning has been provided for disadvantaged groups, as well as any additional support – beyond learning – which students may be missing out on as a result of the school closures.

Supporting Learning During COVID-19

We found that less than half of teachers in this study had been supporting students during the school closures with stark differences across the rural-urban divide, with teachers in urban areas were significantly more likely to be supporting students than rural teachers.[xvi]***.*** When considering the difference between teachers who were supporting students during the school closures and those who were not support students, we found that ***teachers who had received support and guidance (mainly from school principals) were significantly more likely to report supporting students*** (Figure 4.1).[xvii]

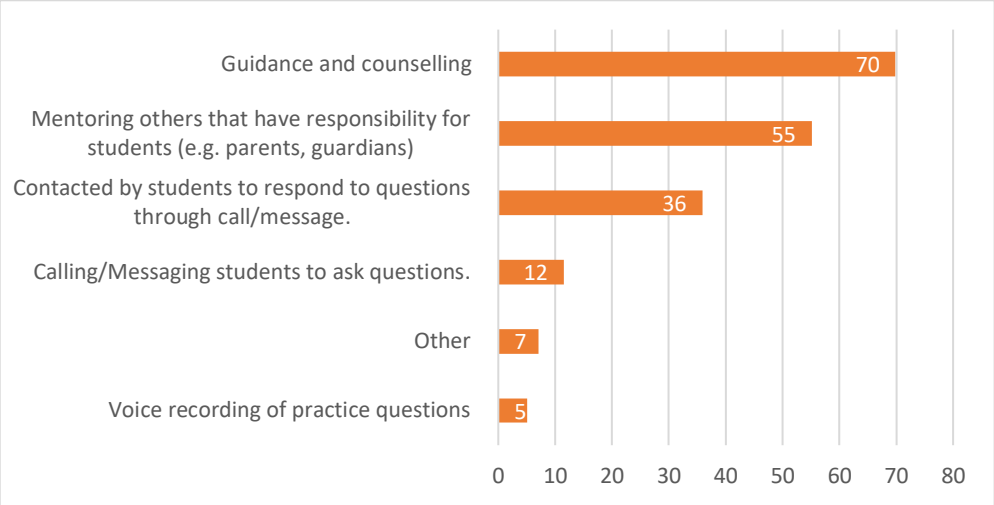
Figure 4.1: Teachers support for students based on level of support received



In terms of differences across regions, we found that teachers in Addis Ababa (70%) and Tigray were more likely than teachers in other regions to report supporting students, while teachers in the Amhara (40%) and Somali (30%) regions were less likely than teachers in other regions to report supporting students.

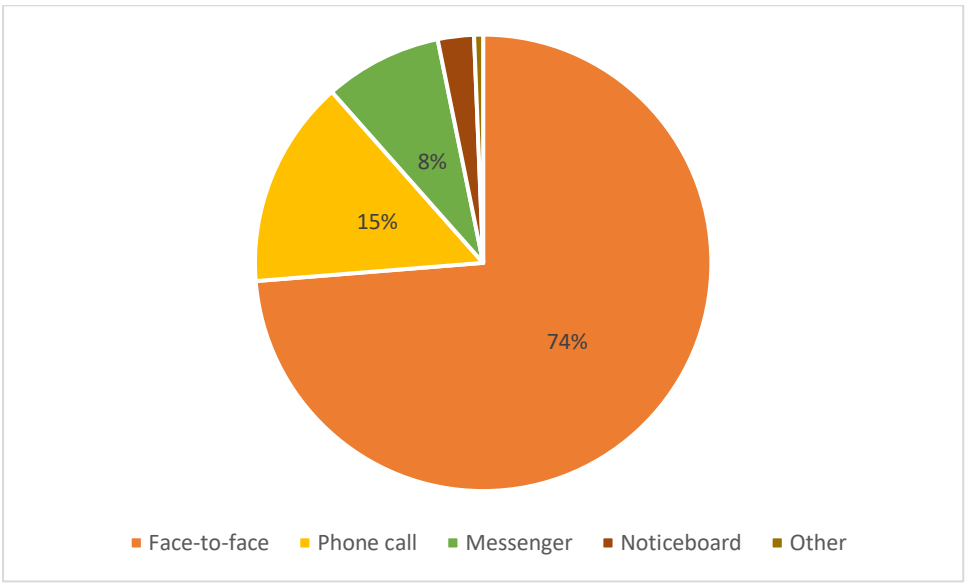
The main types of support that teachers reported as having provided to students included guidance and counselling, and monitoring others that have responsibility for students (e.g. parents, guardian). Very few teachers indicated that they had called or messaged students to ask questions (12%) or had voice recorded practice questions (5%) (Figure 4.2). In responding to this question, some teachers indicated other types of support that they have provided to students, such as food and financial support and preparing worksheets and handouts for students to complete.

Figure 4.2: Support provided by teachers to students (%)



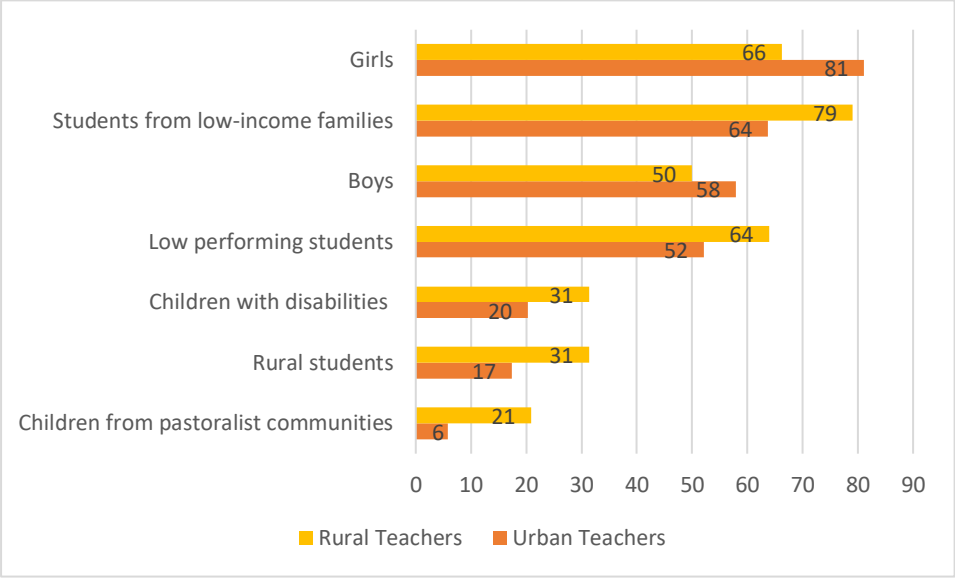
Similar to the main methods of communication between school principals and teachers as reported above, teachers indicated that the support that they had provided to students had mostly been face-to-face. In rural areas, teachers were even more likely than urban teachers to report the support they provide to students as being face-to-face (84%). A smaller proportion of teachers indicated that the support that they had given had been by phone (15%), with support by phone more common in urban locations (22%).

Figures 4.3: Mediums through which teachers provided support to students



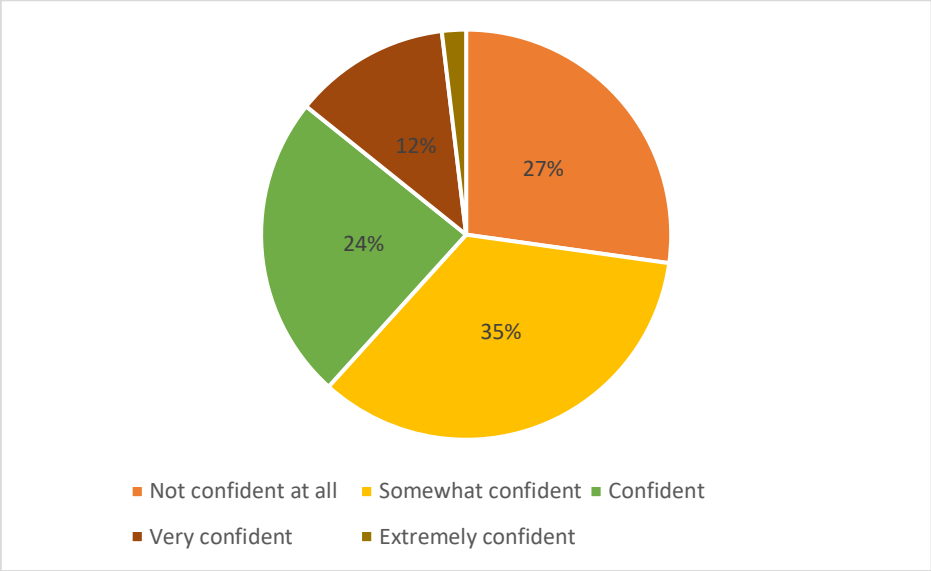
For those teachers who had been supporting students during the school closures, we asked if they had adapted the information or support that they had provided for any particular group (Figure 4.4.). Around three-quarters of teachers indicated that they had adapted the information or support for girls, with a similar proportion indicating that they had adapted the information or support for students from low-income families. Urban teachers were more likely to report adapting the material for girls, while rural teachers were more likely to report adapting the material for students from low-income families.

Figure 4.4: Groups of students for whom teachers report adapting information and support (%)



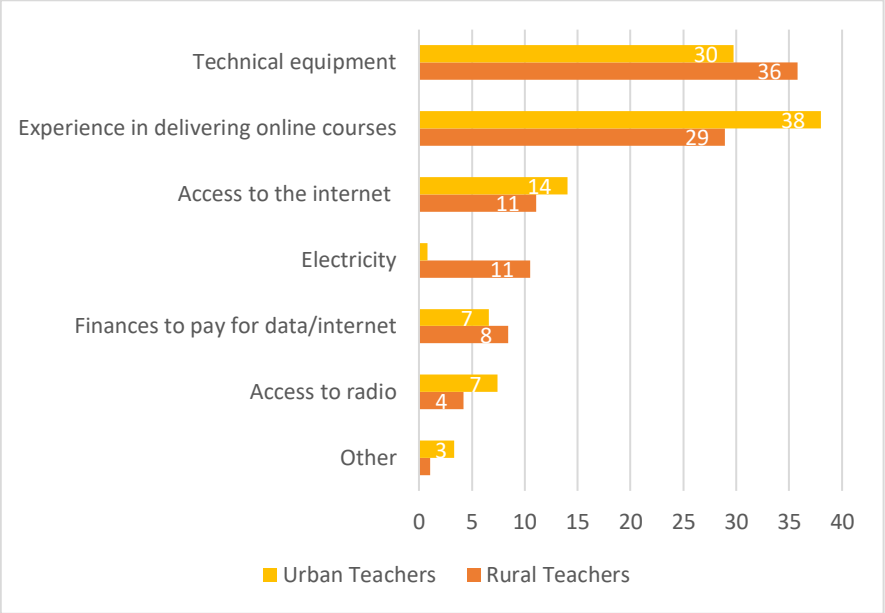
The majority of teachers were not overly confident in their ability to effectively deliver distance learning (Figure 4.5). Only 2% of teachers indicated that they were *extremely confident* in delivering distance learning, with the majority of teachers indicating that they were either *somewhat confident* (34%) or not *confident at all* (27%). While less than half of teachers were supporting students learning, there was a relationship between the level of support teachers had received, teachers' level of confidence in supporting learning and whether they were providing support to student. Just over three-quarters of those who reported that they were *not confident at all* had not received support on how to support learning, while only around one-quarter of teachers who reported *not being confident at all* reported supporting students during school closures.

Figure 4.5: Teachers' reported confidence in delivering distance learning



In addition, we asked teachers to list the potential barriers that they fact for effectively delivering distance learning. ***The main barriers that teachers chose included their lack of technical equipment and their lack of experience in delivery online courses.*** Slight differences were apparent across rural and urban location, with urban teachers more likely to report the lack of technical equipment as a barrier and rural teachers more likely to indicate that their lack of experience was a barrier. Beyond the options provided in this question, other barriers raised by a few teachers included only being able to help those who lived in close proximity, the lack of instruction/guidelines to help students and the lack of engagement from parents (Figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6: Potential barriers for teachers in delivering online learning (%)

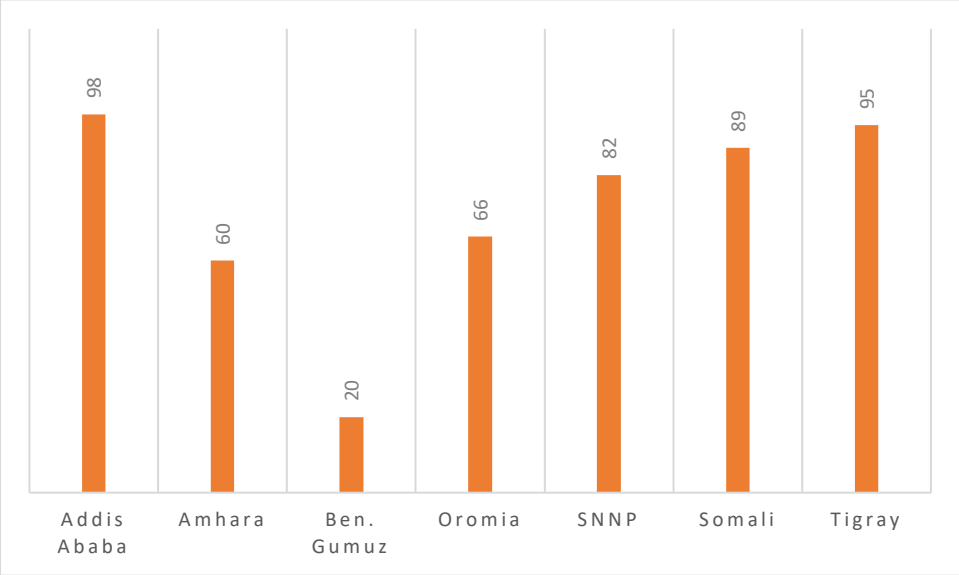


In summary, the lack of support that teachers received during the COVID-19 school closures, their reported lack of confidence in delivering online learning and their lack of access to the necessary resources and equipment all seem to be potential barriers in supporting students learning during school closures.

Other Forms of Support

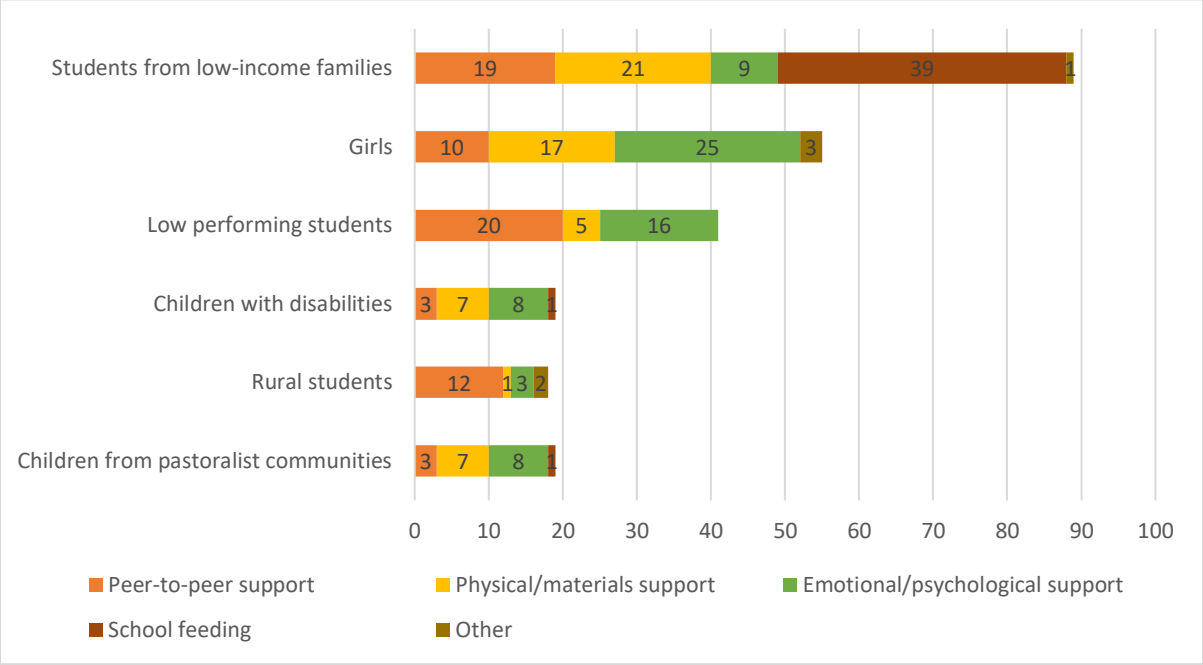
In order to understand what other types of support students were missing out on as a result of school closures, we asked teachers what *additional support* they believed that students might be missing. ***Almost three-quarters of teachers indicated that they believed that students were missing out on other essential support beside learning, including peer-to-peer support and emotional/psychological support***. The responses of teachers varied considerably across rural-urban locations and regions, ***with urban teachers more likely to believe that students were missing out on additional supports than rural teachers*** (79% of urban teachers compared with 67% of rural teachers). ***In terms of region, almost all teachers in Addis Ababa*** agreed that students were missing out on additional support compared with only 20% of teachers in Benishangul Gumuz (see Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7: Additional support children may miss outs as a result of school closures (%)



In terms of who in particular would miss out on these forms of support as a result of school closures, students from low-income families were identified by 59% of urban teachers as the group most likely to miss out on support, while girls were identified by 31% of rural teachers as the group most likely to miss out on these support. We then asked teachers what types of support these particular groups were likely to be missing out on. ***Teachers indicated that students from low-income families were likely to miss out on school feeding and physical/material support, while girls were more likely to miss out on emotional/psychological support and physical/materials support*** (Figure 4.8).

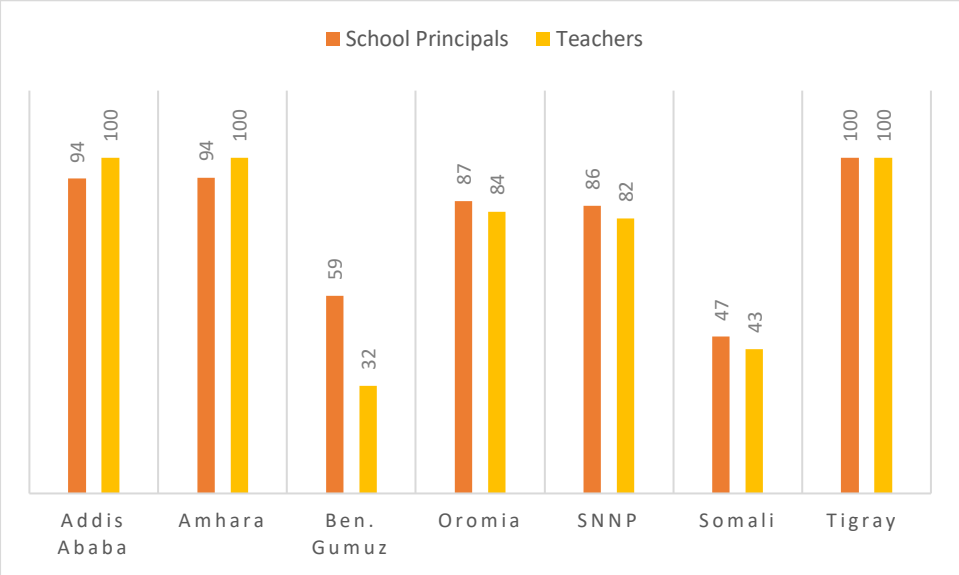
Figure 4.8: Types of support that students are likely to miss out on as a result of school closures



Radio Lessons

During the phone surveys, we asked both school principals and teachers about their knowledge and opinion on the radio lessons broadcast by the government. This included whether school principals and teachers knew if radio lessons were broadcast in their region, the perceived effectiveness of the radio lessons, who school principals and teachers believe might not benefit from the radio lessons and suggestions as to how radio lessons might be improved. ***The majority of school principals and teachers indicated that radio lessons were broadcast in their region***, however it should also be noted that only 76% of school principals and teachers reported having access to a radio, and therefore it could be the case that some had not heard the radio lessons. More urban school principals (78%) and teachers (88%) indicated that radio lessons were broadcast in their region than rural school principals (56%) or rural teachers (75%). In terms of regional differences, the response patterns of both school principals and teachers across regions was broadly similar with both school principals and teachers more likely to indicate that radio lessons were broadcast in Addis Ababa, Amhara and Tigray, and less likely to indicate that radio lessons were broadcast in Benishangul Gumuz (which is a disadvantaged region with several minority languages) and Somali (which is a largely pastoralist region) (Figure 4.9).

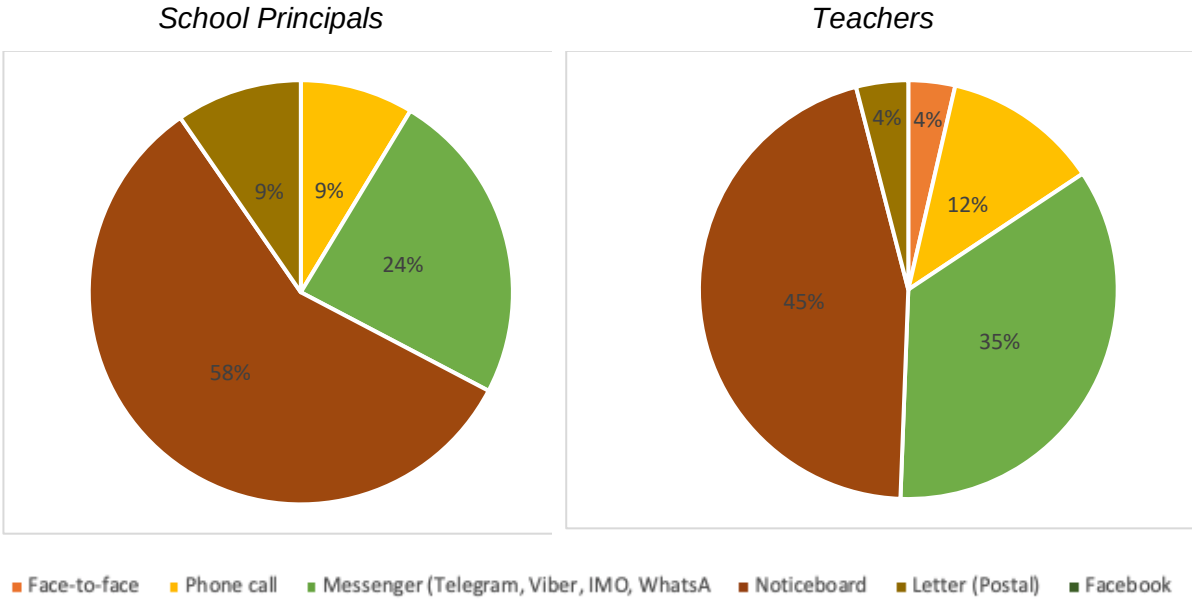
Figure 4.9: Radio lessons broadcast across region (%)



Perceived effectiveness of radio lessons

In terms of the perceived effectiveness of radio lessons, school principals (58%) and teachers (45%) were more likely to agree that the radio lessons were either somewhat effective or effective (Figure 4.10). No school principals and very few teachers (4%) suggested that the radio lessons were *very effective*. At the same time, very few school principals or teachers were likely to indicate that the lessons were not effective at all. Compared with other regions, school principals and teachers were more likely to suggest that that lessons were *very effective* in the Oromia while, compared with other regions, school principals were more likely to suggest that the lessons were not effective at all in Addis Ababa, Benishangul Gumuz and Somali.

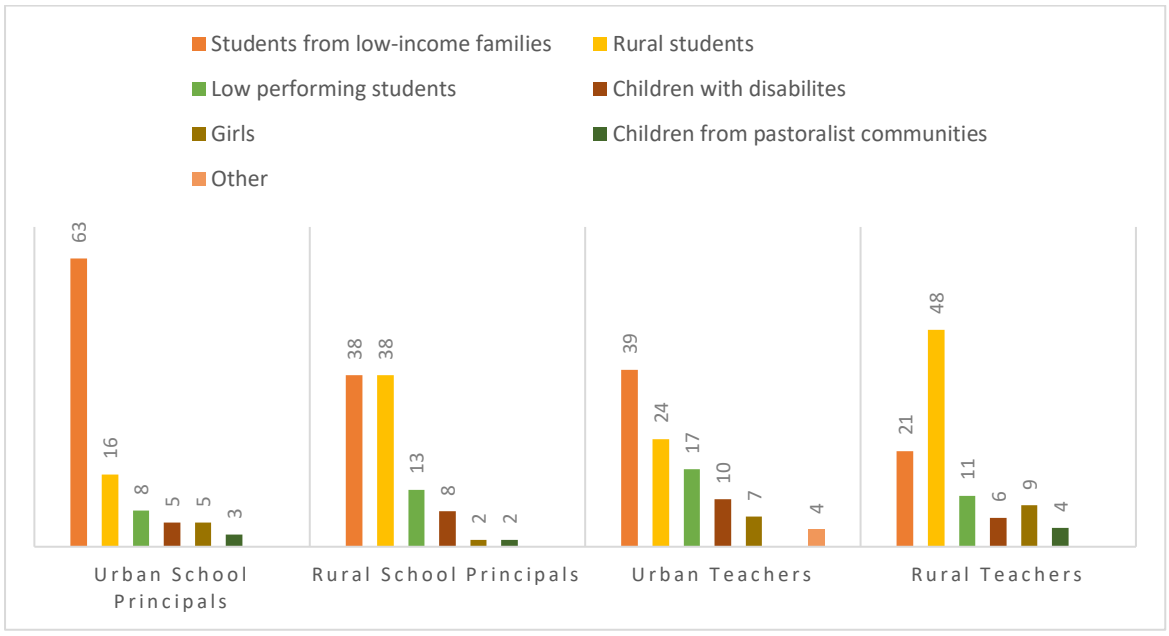
Figure 4.10: Perceived effectiveness of radio lessons



Which students will benefit least?

From the perspective of both school principals and teachers, students from low-income families and rural students were the two groups least likely to benefit from radio lessons. Almost half of school principals were likely to identify those from low-income families as least likely to benefit, while just over one-third of teachers were more likely to believe that rural students would be less likely to benefit (Figure 4.11).

Figure 4.11: Students least likely to benefit from the radio lessons broadcast (%)



How can radio lessons be improved?

School principals and teachers were asked to select from a number of strategies for improving radio lessons (see Table 4.1). ***Around one-third of school principals and teachers agreed that the main strategy for improving radio lessons could be making the radio lessons more engaging for students.*** In addition, 17% of principals suggested that the radio lessons could also be more effective while 19% of teachers believed that the radio lessons could be made more relevant to students. Some differences were found across rural-urban locations. School principals and teachers offered a range of other suggestions for improving radio lessons including varying the time of the radio lessons and providing the schedule in advance, providing more detailed lessons, making sure all content was comprehensible and raising awareness of the radio lessons among parents.

Table 4.1: Strategies for Improving Radio Lessons (%)

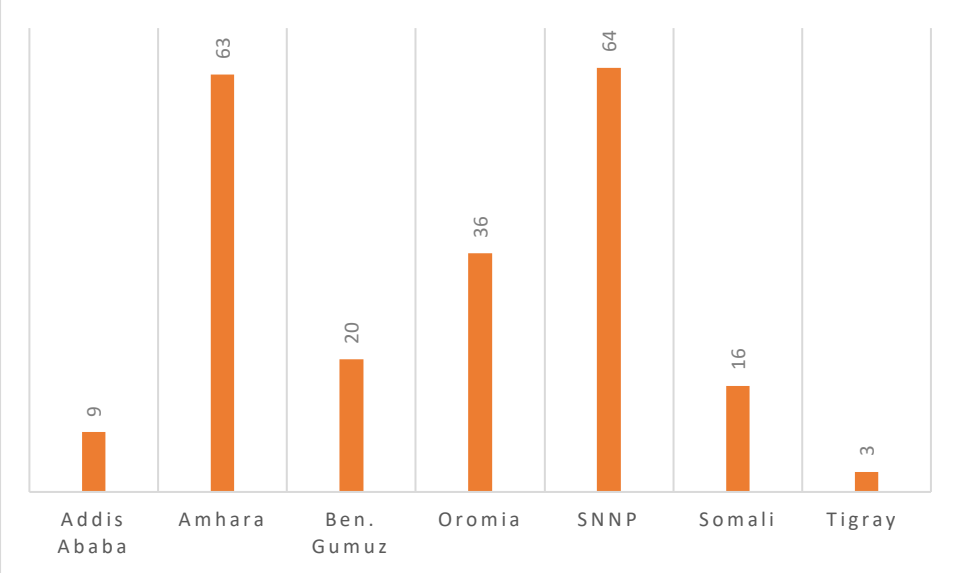
	School Principals		Teachers	
	Urban	**Rural**	**Urban**	**Rural**
The content could be more engaging	37	31	22	48
They could be more frequent	16	19	12	10
They could be more relevant to students	11	17	24	16
They could be more interactive	8	20	14	17
Nothing needs to be done	8	9	14	8
Other	21	3	14	1

Parents' ability to support students' learning

We asked teachers whether they believed that parents and guardians would be able to support the distance learning of their children. ***Almost three-quarters of teachers suggested that parents and guardians would not be able to support the learning of their children effectively.*** No significant differences were found across rural-urban location in terms of the perceived ability of parents and guardians to support students' distance learning, and the level of contact that teachers had with parents did not seem to affect this belief either. However, teachers' perceptions on the ability of parents to support their children's' learning varied substantially across region (Figure 4.12). Teachers were most confident of the ability of parents to support students learning in

SNNP and Amhara, while very few teachers believed that parents could support students learning in Addis Ababa or Tigray. A number of factors were selected by teacher in this study as potentially contributing to the inability of parents to support students' learning including work demand (87%), low literacy (71%) and low value for education (46%).

Figure 4.12: Teacher perceptions of the ability of parents to support children's' learning by region (%)



Summary

From the perspectives of school principals and teachers, the findings indicate that, while some support has been provided to students both from their teachers and through the provision of radio broadcast, the level and nature of this support has been limited. Substantial differences across rural-urban location and region are found in the level and nature of support provided by teachers to students, which seems to have been impacted both by the flow of information and support that teachers receive, their confidence in their ability to effectively deliver distance learning and also differences in access to resources, infrastructure and facilities across regions.

Face-to-face communication appears to be the main means of providing support to students, which raises concerns about health and safety and also about the level and nature of support that students in more remote areas receive. It seems that there is more scope for supporting teachers in their ability to provide distance learning, both

by providing them with access to the necessary technical equipment but also by additional training. Radio lessons have reached some students, but there are a number of actionable ways in which these radio transmissions could be improved, particularly in making the content more engaging and making the radio broadcasts more frequent. Among those who are most disadvantaged in terms of distance learning, students from low-income families seem to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in urban locations, while girls in particular seem to be more disadvantaged in rural locations. Attention should be given to the additional way in which those from disadvantaged groups are missing out on supports beyond learning as a result of the school closures.

5: School Reopening after Covid-19 School Closures

Introduction

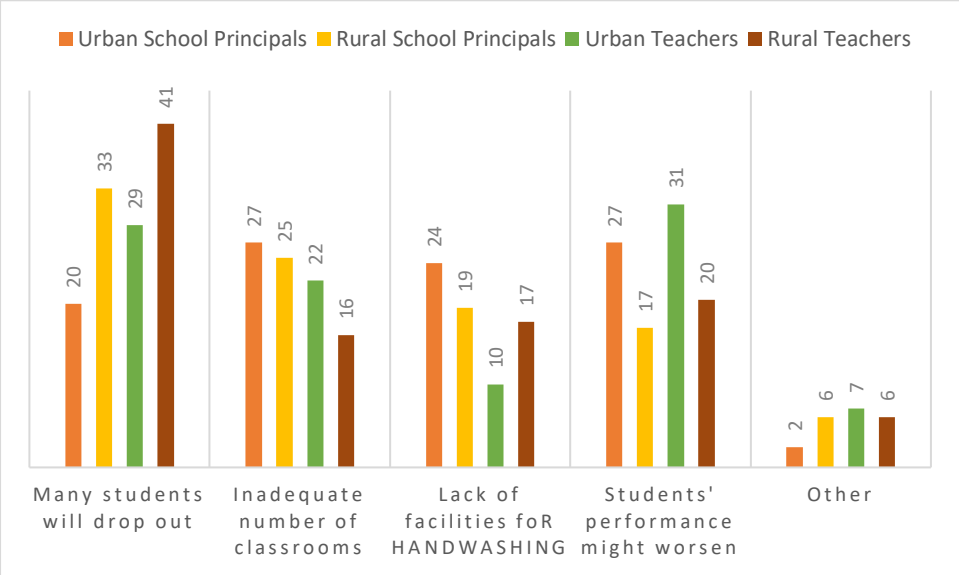
As the opening of schools in Ethiopia during the month of October seems imminent, gathering information from the perspectives of school principals and teachers is imperative in order to be able to effectively plan for the effective and safe reopening of schools. In the current study, school principals and teachers were asked a range of questions related to their expectations and opinions about school reopening, including the main challenges they would face when school reopen in relation to students' learning and progression, as well as the infrastructure and facilities available to prevent the spread of the coronavirus in schools when schools reopen.

Returning to School

Main Challenges

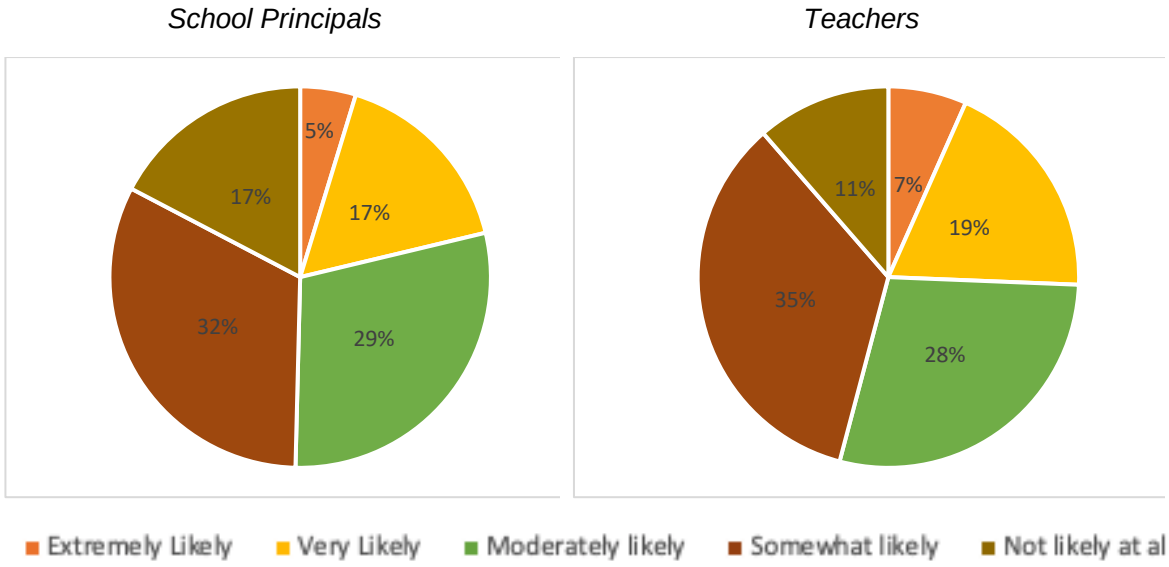
School principals and teachers identified similar main challenges when schools reopen, including that many students would drop out, that students' performance might worsen, that there would be inadequate classrooms and that there is a lack of facilities for handwashing (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: Main perceived challenges that would be faced when schools reopen (%)



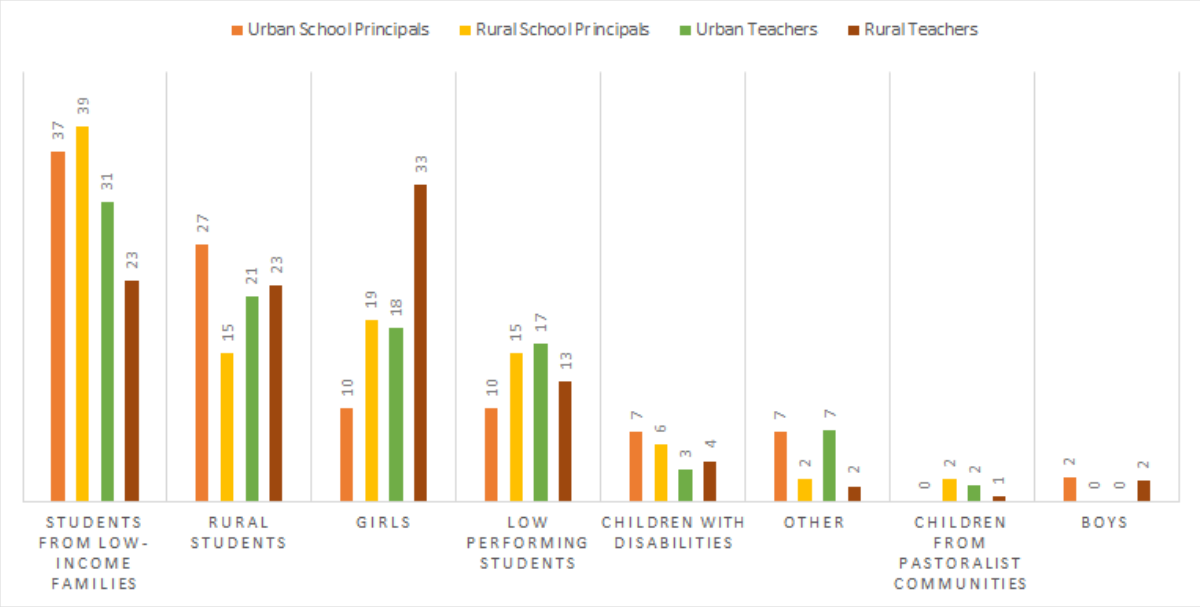
The risk that *many students will drop out* was identified as the greatest challenge amongst rural school principals (33%) and rural teachers (41%). For urban school principals, inadequate number of classroom (27%) and students' performance (27%) were the biggest perceived challenges, while for urban teachers, students' performance (31%) was the biggest challenge. Both school principals and teachers were more inclined to suggest that it would be somewhat likely (32% school principals, 34% teachers) or moderately likely (29% school principals, 28% teachers) that students would drop out of school.

Figure 5.2: Perceived likelihood of student dropout when school reopen



In terms of the students perceived as most likely at-risk of dropout, school principals suggested that students from low-income families were more likely to drop out (39%) while teachers suggested that girls were more likely to drop out (28%) (see Figure 5.3). Rural students were perceived as the third most likely group to drop out of school by both school principals and teachers.

Figure 5.3: Students perceived as most at-risk of drop-out when schools reopen (%)

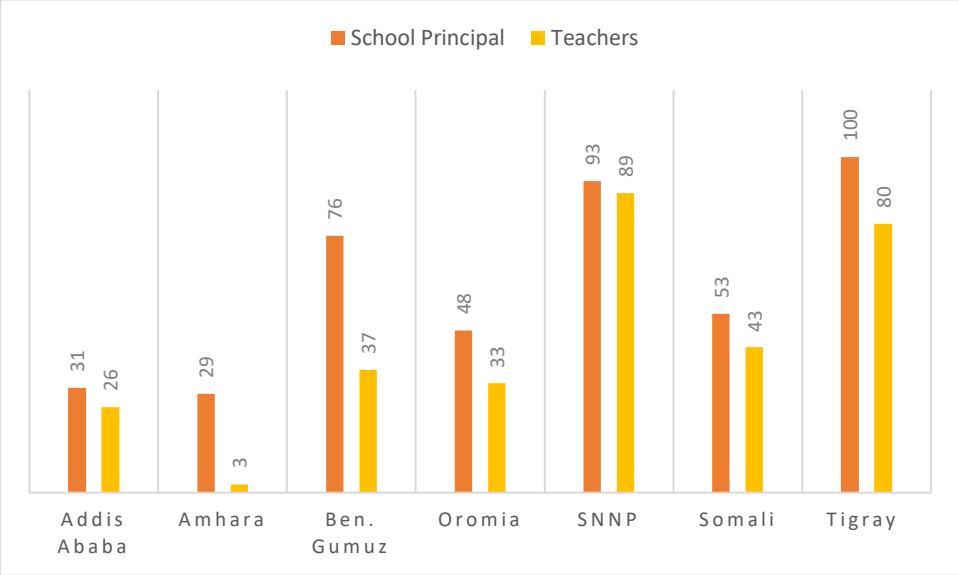


Supporting Disadvantaged Students to Return to School

Preparations to support disadvantaged students to return

60% of school principals and 41% of teachers indicated that their school was making preparations to support children who are less likely to return to school to be able to return to school. No differences were found for either school principals or teachers across rural-urban locations. However, differences were found across regions, with all school principals interviewed in Tigray suggesting that their school was making such preparations compared with 29% in Amhara. Similarly 89% of teachers in SNNP indicated that their school was making preparations for disadvantaged students to return compared with 3% in Amhara. The largest discrepancies between the responses of school principals and teachers were found in Benishangul Gumuz and Amhara (see Figure 5.4).

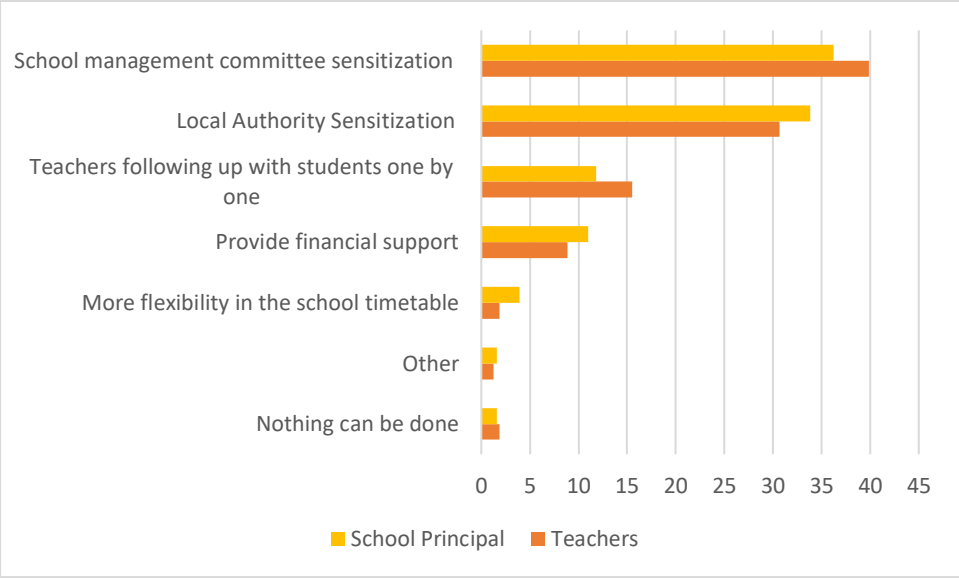
Figure 5.4: Preparations for supporting disadvantaged students to return to school (%)



Strategies for supporting disadvantaged students to return to school

From the closed-ended questions, the main actions that school principals and teachers believed could help students who more likely to drop out, to return to school included *school management committee sensitisation* (36% school principals, 40% teachers) and *local authority sensitisation* (34% school principals, 31% teachers) (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.5: Types of support need for disadvantaged students to return to school (%)



In addition to the closed-ended questions, we also included open-ended question related for both school principals and teachers with regard to supporting disadvantaged students to return to school. Similar to the open-ended questions, school principals and teachers stressed the importance of awareness-raising activities and providing students with material support. Awareness-raising was identified as something that all stakeholders at the community level should be involved in, and something that should take place in "*every villa*ge", including through local organisations such as *Idir* (a community-level association that is established to raise funds that will be used during emergencies).

> *The school principal should take the lead in organizing the different stakeholders such as school management committee, development groups, teachers, and local authorities. With a concerted effort from these groups these students can be encouraged to return to school (**Teacher, SNNP**).*

In addition, teachers also stressed the importance of identify the needs of disadvantaged students and tailoring support for these groups, especially in Addis Ababa, while a few were also raising this issue in Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz. In addition, the provision of psychological support for students was emphasised as important, particularly in Addis Ababa.

Material support was identified as important by many school principals and teacher, especially in Benishangul Gumuz, Somali and Amhara. Material support included exercise books and school uniforms, but also protective material to prevent the spread of COVID-19 such as facemasks and hand sanitiser.
Different support for different groups of students were also emphasised such as wheelchairs for students with disabilities, and school feeding for children from low-income families.

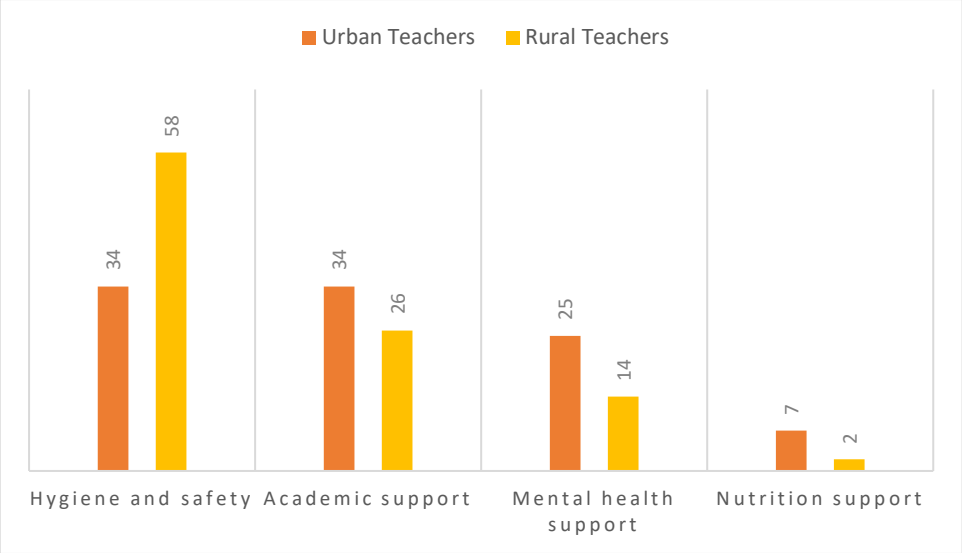
Supporting Students when they Return to School

Strategies for supporting students

***Teachers believed that the best ways to support students when they returned were ensuring hygiene and safety in the school* and *academic support* (Figure**

5.6). *Ensuring hygiene and safety in the school* was a particularly important strategy for teachers in rural areas (58%) while more urban teachers were concerned with students' *academic support* (34%).

Figure 5.6: Strategies for supporting all students to return to school (%)

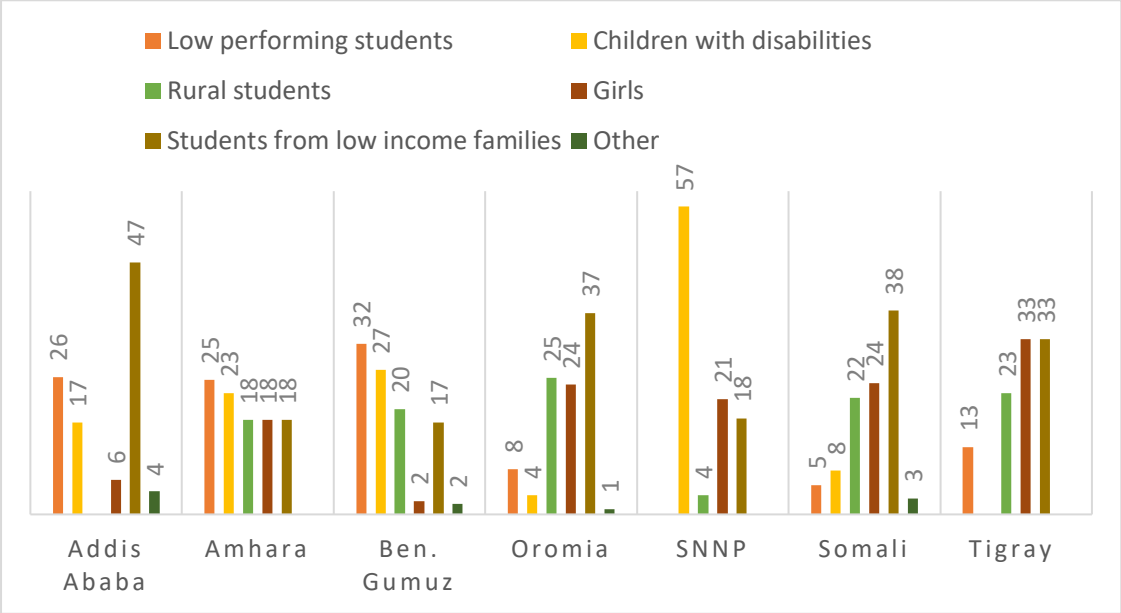


Ensuring hygiene and safety in the school was also the greatest concern across the majority of regions (45% in Amhara, 66% in Oromia, 54% in SNNP, 78% in Somali and 40% in Tigray). Academic support was regarded as the most important strategy in Benishangul Gumuz, while mental health support was the most important support for teachers in Addis Ababa (38%).

Students who need the greatest support

The groups that would need the greatest support when schools reopened as identified by teachers were students from low-income families (31%) followed by girls (19%) and rural students (17%). However, this varied by region with teachers citing students from low-income families as the group that needed the most support in Addis Ababa (47%), Oromia (37%), Somali (39%) and Tigray (33%), low performing students in Amhara and (25%) and Benishangul Gumuz (32%) and children with disabilities in SNNP (57%) (Figure 5.7).

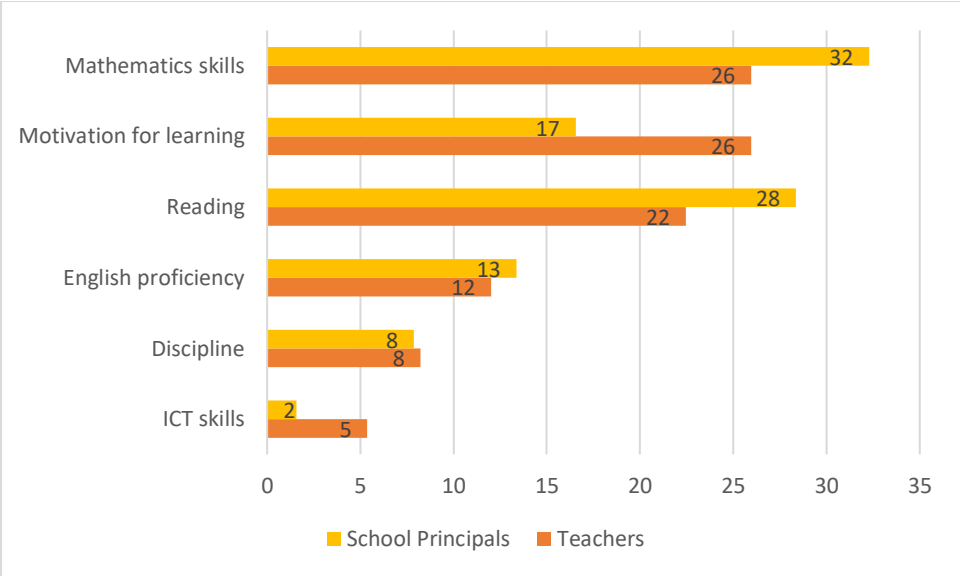
Figure 5.7: Students perceived as needing the most support to return to school



Areas of learning that will be most affected

Motivation for learning, mathematics skills and reading were selected as the areas that would be most affected by the school closures by both school principals and teachers (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8: Perceived areas of learning that will be affected by school closures (%)



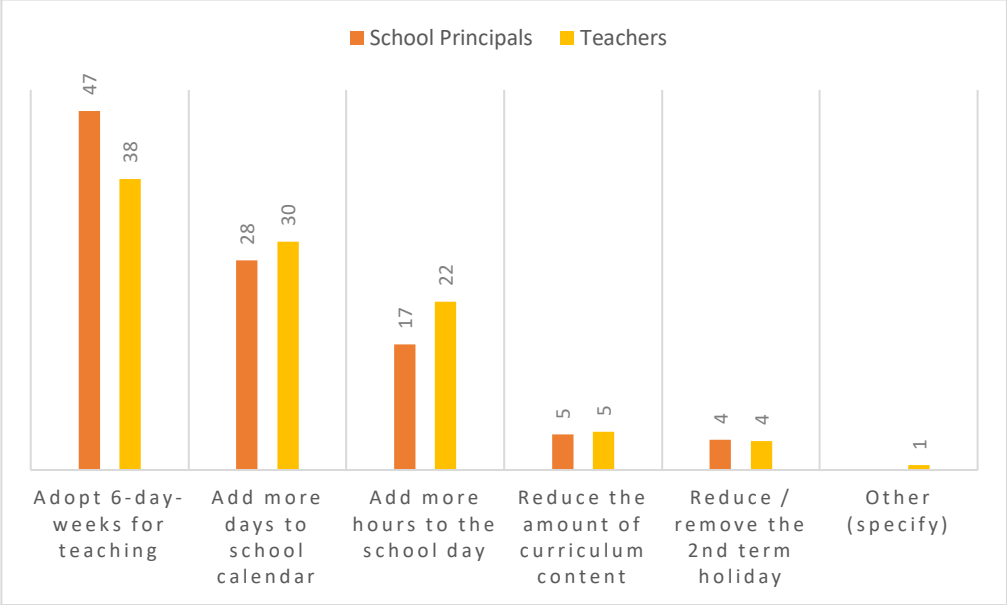
Some differences were found between school principals and teachers and across regions. School principals (56%) and teachers (47%) in Addis Ababa believed that

students' motivation for learning would be most affected, while students' motivation was also a concern for teachers in Amhara (30%) and SNNP (54%). Mathematics skills was a concern for around half of school principals in Amhara, Oromia and Somali.

Catching up on missed content

School principals and teachers alike were most likely to choose the adoption of 6-day weeks as the best strategy for catching up on lost learning during the coronavirus pandemic (Figure 5.9). Other strategies chosen included *adding more days to the school calendar* and *adding more hours to the school day*. Very few school principals or teachers (5% of school principals and teachers alike) chose *reducing the amount of curriculum content* or *reducing/removing the 2nd term holiday* as a preferred strategy for catching up on lost learning.

Figure 5.9: Suggested strategies for catching up on missed content (%)

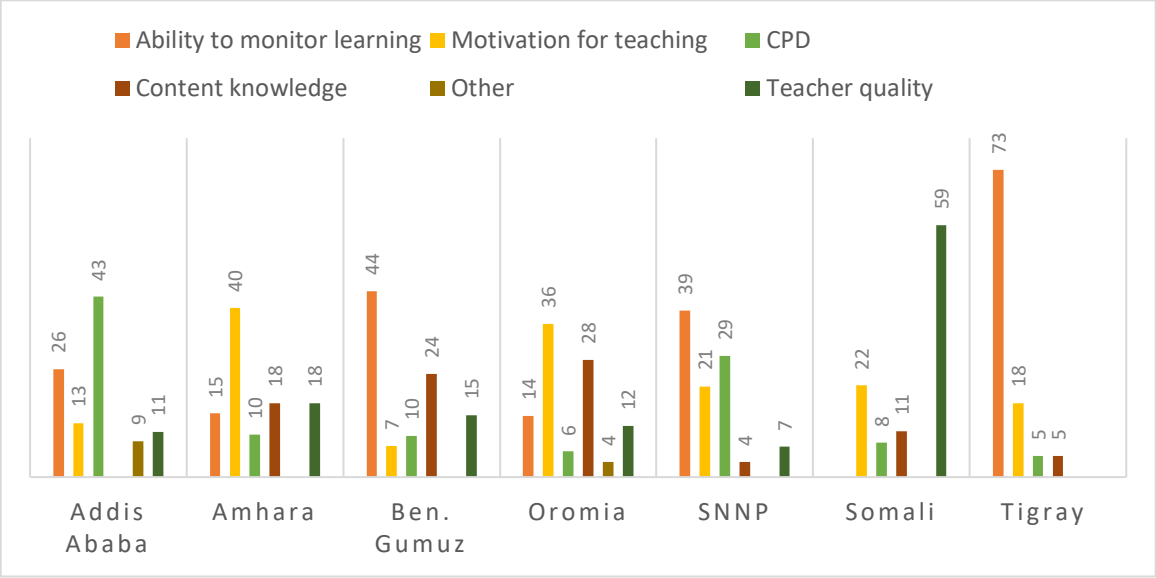


Impact of COVID-19 on Teaching

We asked teachers a number of questions related to the impact of COVID-19 on teaching including what aspects of teaching would be most affected by school closures and the support that teachers would need when schools reopen. ***The two main concerns selected by teachers in this study included the ability to monitor learning (28%), motivation for teaching (24%).*** Differences across regions were

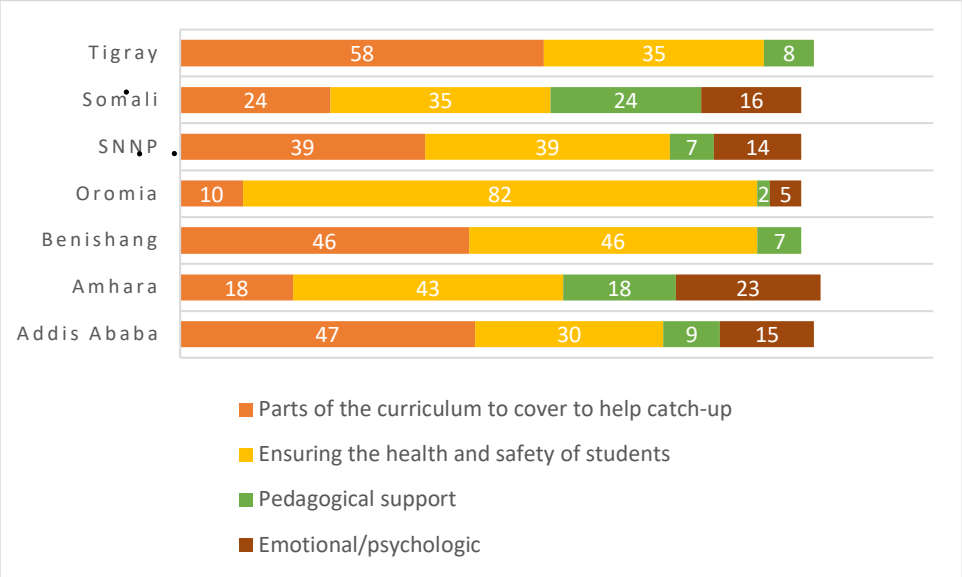
found in terms of the aspects of teaching that would be most affected. *Teaching quality* was the biggest concern in Somali (59%), while teachers' *continuous professional development* was the biggest concern in Addis Ababa (43%). *Motivation for teaching* was a particular concern in Amhara (40%) and Oromia (36%) (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10: Aspects of teaching like to be most affected by school closures (%)



The main support that teachers suggested would be needed when they returned to school was support on how to ensure the health and safety of the students (49%) and supporting on aspects of the curriculum to cover to help children catch up (31%). Differences were found in the types of support that teachers would need across regions (see Figure 5.11). Support on how to ensure the health and safety was a concern of teachers in most regions, especially in Oromia (82%). In Addis Ababa (47%) and Tigray (58%), teachers were concern with receiving support on aspects of the curriculum to help children catch-up.

Figure 5.11: Support teachers may need when schools reopen by region (%)



Automatic Promotion

School principals and teachers expressed mixed opinions with regards to the introduction of automatic promotion by the government as schools reopen in Ethiopia. Under this approach, all students would pass to the next grade once schools re-open without having to complete an examination. A 45-day tutorial class would be provided for students to catch up on the content that they had missed during the school closures. About half of school principals and teachers believed that in the context of COVID-19 the policy of automatic promotion was necessary and would have both positive and negative impacts. The other half of school principals and teachers suggested that this strategy was inappropriate and would have a range of negative impacts on the education system.

Negative impact on students' learning and education quality

One school principal in Addis Ababa raised concerns that the views of the main stakeholders, including teachers and school management, had not been included in the decision on automatic promotion. Both school principals and teachers alike were concerned with the negative impacts that automatic promotion would have on education quality and students learning. Whether they agreed or disagreed with the policy of automatic promotion they believed that it would have negative impacts on education quality.

> *The decision is appropriate. By giving revision classes they should be promoted to the next grade. However, it could have negative effect on decreasing students' performance and quality of education in general. (School Principal, Amhara)*

I didn't expect this. The automatic promotion is just nominal. It adds to the deterioration of quality of education. The promotion policy has problems at least it should have excluded those students who have low achievement in the first semester. Besides they didn't send us detailed directives on how this is going to be implemented. (School Principal, Addis Ababa).

There was a feeling amongst participants that given that education quality was already a concern in Ethiopia, the introduction of automatic promotion would lead to the further deterioration of education quality. One teacher suggested that due to automatic promotion, this year would be a 'wasted year', raising questions as to how students would be able to learn appropriate in the following grades if they did not have the foundational skills needed.

I am disappointed. It really deteriorates quality of education; they have been promoted without having knowledge, altitudes, and skill. I think it is going to make us pay dearly in the future. I consider this as a wasted year (Teacher, Addis Ababa).

It is inappropriate. There is a huge emphasis on coverage at the expense of quality. For example, at grade 4 if students do not identify alphabets how would they benefit going to the next grade (Teacher, Amhara).

I don't think the decision is appropriate. In the first place the quality of education in Ethiopia has been deteriorating and the effect of Corona Virus along with this automatic promotion would further deteriorate it (Teacher, SNNP).

Different impact on different students

A particular concern of school principals and teachers in this study was that the policy of automatic promotion was undertaken with a one-size-fits-all approach and did not take account of the different needs of different students. School principals and teachers were concerned that the "*all-inclusive promotion policy"* would have different impacts on low- and high-performing students.

I don't understand why such one size fits all kind of decision was made. It is not clear why it is required. Among the students who are now granted the free promotion, there were students with low achievement; there were students with little or no motivation to learn. Detailed selection criteria should have been in place (School Principal, Addis Ababa).

Both school principals and teachers recognised that the automatic promotion policy would have positive impacts on the moral of high-performing students, who would likely be able to catch-up on the content that they had lost.

> *This automatic promotion has differential effects for students with good and bad results. For those with good results we know they are going to make it again in the subsequent grade. On the other hand, for the students with low performance it is going to be a problem in the next grade (Teacher, Somali).*

For low-learning students however, school principals and teachers suggested that the automatic promotion policy would be a significant challenge. Teachers stressed that many low performing students were not ready to pass to the next grade and therefore would be even more burdened with their workload the following year.

> *If it is done to protect students from being stressed and maintain their morale, that is good. But I don't think they are qualified to pass to the next grade as they missed the second semester portion (Teacher, Somali).*

A few teachers in Addis Ababa pointed to the fact that even before COVID-19 there was already evidence that the policy of automatic promotion from Grade 1-3 was a failure, as many students failed in Grade 4. For teachers, the automatic promotion of low learners was anticipated to be a significant burden for teachers to help them to catch up on what they had lost but also to keep up their morale.

Alternative strategies

Given the likely challenges that were expected as a result of the policy of automatic promotion, alternative strategies were suggested by both school principals and teachers instead of the policy of automatic promotion. These included a tutorial class included a tutorial class followed by an examination at the beginning of the year in order to decide who would be promoted to the next grade, or alternatively the promotion of students to the next grade based on their first semester examination results. In particular, the emphasis was on adapting the approach to take account of the needs of different groups of students.

> *The decision lacks clarity on the detailed criteria. It should have at least base on the students' first semester results. Otherwise granting free promotion to all is not fair*

because this would put in a disadvantageous position for the students in understanding lessons in subsequent grades. (School Principal, Amhara).

I didn't expect such a decision. At least the first semester result should have been considered as criteria for the promotion. Besides they could have done a two- or three-months tutorial before siting for final exam. What has been done has serious negative implications on the quality of education. It will also create great burden for the teacher. (School Principal, Ben. Gumuz).

I don't think this is right. I would rather prefer if we could teach compensating revision class followed by exam. But if they pass missing the portions of the second semester, they would be challenged in the next grade (Teacher, Somali).

I don't think it is appropriate in grade four there are student who can't read due to the automatic promotion police they are going to join grade 5. How are they going to cope? It is going to be burden for them. Instead I would have preferred if they were given exam following the worksheet & revision and promotion decided based on the results of the exam. (Teacher, Addis Ababa).

I don't think this is appropriate. The quality of education is under question mark when students learn the whole year, to make things worse they are being promoted with only one semester and even including the low performing students. I would rather prefer if the promotion is based on the results of the first semester (Teacher, Amhara).

It will be imperative to catch up on lost learning

Regardless of whether school principals believed that this approach was necessary or not school principals and teachers stressed the need to catch up on the material that had been lost, while also providing psychological support for students and teachers.

Had it not been for the current pandemic situation, this would have been inappropriate. However, as health is the primary issue, we have no option. As the result it has brought a lot of burden ahead of us. To make up for what has been lost, we have discussed with our teachers where they get prepared for the tutorial service they are going to provide once students are back. (School Principal, SNNP).

It will be challenging for the students in the next grade as they missed significant portion. They should be supported psychologically and educationally. Let alone going to the next grade their performance in the current grade is minimal (Teacher, Amhara).

What is important is what we can do to help these students in the upcoming academic year. We need to provide a lot of support to make up for what was missed…Moreover, teachers should also be provided with capacity building trainings so that they can effectively support these students (Teacher, Somali).

6. Conclusion

In this report, drawing on the perspectives of 127 school principals and 316 teachers across seven diverse locations in Ethiopia, we have provided information that we hope will be informative as schools reopen in the country, including with respect to the impact that school closures have had on the education system and what is needed to ensure that schools open safely.

The findings have shown the importance of ensuring that school principals and teachers have access to timely information and guidance about COVID-19 and how to provide support to their students particularly in rural and remote areas. In particular, this information should be communication through the forms of technology that they have access to. This will be important given that the level of support that school principals receive influences the level of support that teachers receive which, in turn, subsequently affects the level of support that teachers provide to teachers and students.

The nature and level of support that students have received during the school closures has been limited. In particular, students from low-income families and students living in rural areas area less likely to have access to this support than their rural counterparts. Strategies that are aimed at helping students to catch-up on lost learning will need to tailor strategies to support the needs of disadvantaged students. Attention will also need to be paid to the additional supports that students have missed out on during school closures including peer-to-peer support, physical/material support and emotional/psychological support and the impact that this has had on students' wellbeing.

As school reopen, it will be important to put in place strategies to ensure that all students return to school, especially students from low-income families, girls and rural students. whole-community responses, including sensitisation by school management committees and local authorities to send their children back to school were called for. Ensuring hygiene and safety is one of the greatest concern of teachers in relation to schools reopening, with evidence that many schools have limited physical infrastructure to enable them to do so, including limited classrooms and inadequate handwashing facilities.

Important consideration should be given to the Ethiopian Government's plan to automatically promote students to the next grade. Many school principals and teachers have raised important concerns about the impact that this policy may have on students. While the participant understand that this approach may be necessary in the context of COVID-19 and may also have a positive impact on the morale of better performing students, many have concerns about the impact it will have on lower-performing students. The importance of ensuring that all students receive adequate support to help them catch up on the content that they have missed will be imperative.

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Endnotes

[i] https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse

[ii] https://www.cgdev.org/blog/more-our-database-school-closures-new-education-policies-may-be-increasing-educational

[iii] This includes school feeding for approximately 1 million children across seven regions that were targeted for humanitarian action and a government school feeding programme in the urban capital Addis Ababa, which was providing school meals for almost half a million children (UNICEF, 2020).

[iv] Funding for the phone surveys was provided by Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund COVID-19 Emergency Award.

[v] For information on the RISE Ethiopia sampling and identification strategy please refer to: Hoddinott, J., Iyer, P., Sabates, R., & Woldehanna, T. (2019). *Evaluating Large-Scale Education Reforms in Ethiopia.* RISE Working Paper (19/034).

[vi] For further information about the system diagnostic see: Asgedom, A. et al., (2019).

[vii] The RISE Ethiopia research team based at the Institute of Education Research at Addis Ababa includes Prof. Amare Asegdom, Prof. Belay Hagos, Prof. Darge Wole, Prof. Girma Lemma and Prof. Tirussew Tefera. Programming of the tablets was conducted by Amanuel Asefa and Mengistu Woldehanna.

[viii] The Ethiopian members of the team indicated that it is not necessary to translate the instrument into any further languages, since all teachers in Ethiopia will be able to speak Amharic, the working language of the government.

[ix] Andualem Habtamu, Adiwaye Berhe, Berhanu Lemma, Kedir Gensaedo, Kibrom Tadesse, Shume Biratu, Tsegaye Hagos, and Yosef Weldemariam.

[x] Based on information from six out of eight research assistants as not all research assistants provided this information.

[xi] t (123) = 2.31, p = < 0.01

[xii] t (123) = 2.54, p = < 0.01

[xiii] Chi2(1) = 21.61, p = < 0.01

[xiv] t (123) = 2.44, p = < 0.01

[xv] T (309) = 1.66, p = < 0.05

[xvi] t (309) = 2.03, p = < 0.05

[xvii] chi2(1) = 70.63, p = < 0.01

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