

Policy brief

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A Quest for Evidence-based, Interactive, and Context-fit Grade 12 National Examination Management Approach in Ethiopia

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1. Summary

- ❖ The grade 12 national examination management approach is visibly a top national agenda of high school students, their parents and teachers, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Educational Assessment and Examinations Service (EAES), public universities, regional and city administration education bureaus, and the public and government at large.
- ❖ The previous Ethiopian school-based grade 12 national examination management approach fell short of relevance because of the grave examination stealing and cheating it had involved. As a result, a reform was necessitated.
- ❖ University-based approach is tentatively being used as a crises management intervention until a more practical approach is in place.
- ❖ The university-based management approach implemented for the past two years was found to be effective in reducing exam stealing and cheating, but it was inefficient, non-feasible, and full of unbearable multifaceted pedagogical, logistic, administrative, and socioeconomic challenges.
- ❖ Accordingly, findings of our study give clues that the university-based approach in a way it was implemented contributed for the students' mass failure in the exam although more conclusive findings require further studies that specifically focus on identifying factors for the shocking results of the exam. Thus, seeking for an approach which is evidence-based, collaborative, context-fit and functional grade 12 National Examination Management remains an urgent national project for the country that calls for comprehensive intervention.

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2. Policy Recommendations

- A national project like the university-based grade 12 examination management approach needs thorough preparation and deliberation of key stakeholders. For the project to succeed, all stakeholders need to understand and own it. Thus, it is necessary for the MoE and EAES to early communicate the plan so that transparency is insured, clarity is achieved, and the required amendments are made.
- The MoE and EAES, in consultation with the key stakeholders, need to develop awareness-creation plan by which the duties and responsibilities of all stakeholders are clearly identified and actively engaged. They should develop realistic operational manuals and guidelines in advance in collaboration with all key stakeholders for the successful management of the examination. The plan should highlight all the important political, technical, financial, and psycho-social issues.
- The MoE and EAES ought to adopt a bottom-up approach in planning the examination management systems and practices, taking into account the concerns of all stakeholders. They should practice participatory and evidence-based decision-making processes and build interactive institutional collaborations among all stakeholders at all levels.
- Holistic and participatory actions are essential for better grade 12 national examination management in the future. Pressurizing stakeholders to do things they are not ready for and are not convinced about will do more harm than good to the examination processes and beyond.
- The grade 12 national examination management approach ought to be given a fair and proportional attention. Yet, the MoE and EAES should refrain from using oversimplified solutions such as keeping students in isolated environment for the complex factors and consequences of defective examination management approaches.
- While modifying and maintaining the university-based examination management approach, the MoE and EAES ought to take into account the well-being, physical, psychosocial and mental health of the students, along with deterring examination stealing and cheating.
- The MoE and EAES, in consultation with universities, need to come up with technology-supported examination management system. Equivalently, reconsidering the previous school-based exam management with improvement, continuing the current university-based exam management with modifications and shifting to university entrance exam without conducting the ESSLCE are other possibilities.
- Secondary schools ought to seriously work on and orient their students to help them get ready for the examinations, both psycho-socially and academically. Students', parents' and communities' concerns regarding transportation, food services, health issues, and security have to be adequately addressed.
- Maximum efforts should be made to ensure fair treatment of all exam-takers, in all aspects, in the examination management processes.
- As long as the university-based ESSLCE is continued, prospective examinees can substantially benefit from enhanced psychosocial and instructional (e.g. in selected subjects) interventions. Thus, secondary school teachers, university instructors, educational psychology, instructional design, mental health and social work professionals need to make concerted efforts to make such interventions and support services

available for students. To this effect, the MoE and EAES, regional/city administration educational bureaus, and support groups (e.g. development associations) should play the roles of coordinating, financing and resourcing such endeavors.

3. Background

A university entrance national examination is of high importance for students (Nguyen & Yooncheong, 2022) and in education (Zhang et al., 2014); it is a vital phenomenon for a country (Berhanu et al. 2023a; Davey et al., 2007; Jacob & Lar, 2001; Nguyen & Yooncheong, 2022; Yongbo, 2020). Studies have revealed that poor examination preparation, administration, and scoring procedures, and examination malpractices such as stealing and cheating have become major sources of concern in Ethiopia (Berhanu et al. 2023b; 2023a; Lemma & Menna, 2022).

To curb the increasing practice of stealing and cheating in examinations in Ethiopia (Lemma & Menna, 2022; Wondifraw, 2021), the MoE and EAES introduced a university-based national examination management approach in 2022 shifting radically from the previous school-based practice (Berhanu et al., 2023a). The shift is radical because it entails using universities as exam centers and demands students to camp in the universities during the exam period. Successes of such national examination are measured based on several indicators including its relevance and significance, fairness, reliability and validity of its processes of preparation, decision making and administration (Berhanu et al. 2023b; Kinde et al. 2023; Nega et al. 2023). Moreover, communication and collaboration among the key stakeholders—before, during and after the examination as well as the effectiveness, efficiency, and feasibility of the exam management approach—are important parameters of successes (Frew et al. 2023; Getachew et al., 2023).

Accordingly, a multidisciplinary team of researchers appraised the university-based exam management approach of Ethiopia and strongly recommended that moving urgently towards a workable national examination management system is mandatory (Berhanu et al., 2023a). Fisseha et al. (2023) identified major challenges of the university-based exam management approach, and Tekle et al. (2023a; 2023b) examined the key lessons and the prominent issues. Based on the findings and recommendations of these articles (Reference list), we forward this urgent quest for an interactive, context-fit, and functional grade 12 national examination management approach for the policy makers.

4. The Problem: Highlight of the Current Situation

University-based grade 12 national examination management approach that has been implemented since 2022 emerged as a tentative and crises management intervention. The MoE publicly announced that this approach is used until a better approach is designed; yet, it seems that no significant measures of selecting and designing an alternative approach is taken, as far as the researchers' knowledge is concerned. However, the university-based examination management approach has become a highly contested national issue among stakeholders following the students' massive examination failure for the last two academic years and the third one is coming soon. In response to the strong public demand and based on findings of the study summarized below, we urge the MoE, the key stakeholders (mainly EAES, regional education bureaus and universities), and

partners towards taking concrete actions of searching for an interactive, context-fit, and practical examination management approach for the upcoming examination and beyond.

5. Materials and Methods

This policy brief was drawn mainly from findings of a study entitled “An Appraisal of and Lessons from the New Ethiopian Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination Management Processes,” the results of which are disseminated through a short communication and eight journal articles (see the Reference list). This policy brief primarily targets policy makers in the high level, federal and regional/city administration government offices including ministries and bureaus and those who have stakes in education. It specifically focuses on officers at MoE and EAES, and the respective bureaus that are mandated to lead the education sector at the different levels of the government. Secondly, universities and researchers in the field are addressed to play their key roles in providing evidence and advice to the decision makers. Lastly, school leaders, teachers, students, parents and the community are called for their contributions in the efforts of choosing, designing and implementing a workable exam management approach in Ethiopia.

6. Policy Implications and Conclusions

The problems and current situations of the grade 12 national examination management approach is subject to change or revision not only to reverse the shortcomings of the previous examination management approach but also to address limitations of the university-based examination management approach. Otherwise, the country will not be sufficiently benefited from education in its development endeavors. It also implies that establishing or adopting an instrumental exam management approach will improve the quality of students entering universities and graduates leaving for job markets. Failure to urgently and seriously respond to such policy gaps will likely compromise fate of the future generation and the country.

The existing examination management approach has failed to address the interest of controlling exam malpractices without compromising examination principles and standards, students’ well-being and health, key stakeholders’ routine activities and the country’s sustainable development agenda. Above all, the MoE and EAES have not devised strong and workable strategies that balance the competing interests of students, parents, high school teachers, education bureaus, regional states, universities and other stakeholders which have stakes in the process. Thus, it is urgent and illuminating to come up with workable grade 12 national examination management approach that addresses stealing/cheating in one hand, and relevant, efficient, and pedagogically feasible at the same time.

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Authors' contributions

- A. 1, 2 and 11 drafted the policy brief.
B. All authors have reviewed, read the final version, and agreed to the publication of the policy brief.

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Competing of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Declarations of Corresponding author: This policy brief is based on findings of the main study titled "Appraisal of and Lessons Obtained from the New Grade 12 Examination Management Approach"

Consent for publication

We have agreed to submit the manuscript to the Journal of Social Sciences and Language Studies and approved the manuscript for submission. Corresponding author's signature:



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