OPEN ACCESS JOURNALS

Indiana Journal of Arts & Literature

Abbreviate Tittle- Ind J Arts Lite

ISSN *(Online)*- 2582-869X

Journal Homepage Link- https://indianapublications.com/journal/IJAL

DOI- https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20711742

INDIANA PUBLICATIONS
PRODUCTIVE AND QUALITY RESEARCH

Research Article

Volume-07|Issue-06|2026

A Needs Assessment Survey of the Undergraduate Educational Planning and Management Program for Competency-Based Curriculum Redesign

Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie [1], DR. Gebremichael Berihu Hagos[2], Nechi Kidane Weldegiorgs[3]

[1]MA in EdPM, Specialized in Human Resource and Organizational Development in Education from Addis Ababa University, Ethiopa, Aksum University, College of Education and Behavioural Sciences Department of Teachers Education
[2]PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, from University of UNISA, Aksum University, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Teachers Education
[3]MA in Curriculum and Instruction, from Bahirdar University, Ethiopia, Aksum University, College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Teachers Education

Article History
Received: 26.04.2026
Accepted: 22.05.2026
Published: 16.06.2026

Citation
Zewudie, B. N., Hagos, G. B., Weldegiorgs, N. K. (2026). A Needs Assessment Survey of the Undergraduate Educational Planning and Management Program for Competency-Based Curriculum Redesign. *Indiana Journal of Arts & Literature, 7*(6), 1-13.

Abstract: This study presents a comprehensive review of the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program at Aksum University, Ethiopia, in response to growing global and national demands for competent educational leaders capable of addressing dynamic challenges in the education sector. The primary objective of the study was to assess the extent to which the program equips graduates with essential competencies, ensures job readiness, and aligns with the evolving needs of the education sector. Specifically, the study examined graduate competence and performance, practical skills and job readiness, and the relevance of the program to institutional and policy demands. A mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. Data were collected from 25 participants, including education bureau experts, woreda education officers, and school principals in the Tigray Regional. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to identify relevant institutions, followed by availability (convenience) sampling to recruit respondents who were accessible and directly involved in educational planning and management, given time and resource constraints. Quantitative data from Likert-scale questionnaires were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that graduates are moderately competent, with most ratings between "Fair" and "Good." Strengths were observed in knowledge of educational systems, communication, and basic leadership skills. However, gaps exist in data analysis, ICT proficiency, strategic problem-solving, and innovation. Graduates are generally prepared for administrative roles but lack advanced practical and technical competencies. The program shows moderate alignment with sector needs, with a notable gap between theory and practice. The study concludes that, although the program has a solid foundation, there is a need for improvement. It recommends Curriculum Redesign through a competency-based and practical-oriented approach, strengthened practical training, enhanced ICT integration, and stronger collaboration with stakeholders in order to improve graduate competence and ensure greater program relevance.

Keywords: Needs assessment, Competence-based curriculum, Curriculum Redesign, graduate competency,

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In recent decades, global trends in education have placed increasing emphasis on the quality and relevance of higher education programs, especially in fields like educational leadership and planning. As nations strive to achieve sustainable development goals, the demand for capable educational planners and managers has surged (UNESCO, 2015). These professionals are expected not only to possess theoretical knowledge but also to demonstrate practical skills in policy analysis, data-driven decision-making, and adaptive leadership in dynamic educational environments.

The preceding literature indicates that Ethiopia, like other nations, must align itself with both national and global development aspirations, especially as the 21st century represents an age of global interconnectedness. To remain competitive and adapt to the world/global trends, it is crucial to ensure that the education sector is managed by proficient educational planners and administrators.

Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) programs have emerged in response to these complex challenges. They are designed to develop strategic leaders who can navigate reforms, manage institutional resources, and lead innovations in education systems. However, as the educational landscape evolves—driven by digital transformation, decentralization, and shifts in policy priorities—there is an urgent need for these programs to continually evaluate their effectiveness and alignment with industry needs (OECD, 2018).

One of the central concerns in program evaluation is the extent to which graduates demonstrate core competencies and are job-ready upon completion. Scholars argue that higher education must strike a balance between academic rigor and employability, ensuring that students acquire not only disciplinary

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

knowledge but also technical and practical skills relevant to the workplace (Yorke, 2006; Harvey & Green, 1993). This is particularly vital in the education sector, where professionals are often called upon to implement policy, manage change, and engage in evidence-based planning (Fullan, 2007; Bray, 2003).

In this context, the present study reviews the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program at Aksum University, with a particular focus on its practical linkages with relevant sectors/industries, including education bureaus, woreda education offices, and schools located in the Tigray Regional State, Ethiopia. The analysis centers on three key thematic areas: graduate competence and performance, job readiness and practical skills, and relevance and alignment with industry needs (Education bureau, education offices and schools). These themes are informed by both global competency frameworks—such as the UNESCO IIEP benchmarks (UNESCO IIEP, 2018)—and national education priorities.

The review is based on a structured survey employing a Likert scale to assess key indicators across each thematic area. To triangulate the data obtained through the quantitative method, qualitative data were also collected by including a set of general open-ended questions for participants. In line with Creswell's (2014) guidelines for educational research, the ordinal data were analyzed using frequency distribution for the quantitative component and thematic analysis for the qualitative responses. The results are not only quantitatively evaluated but also contextualized through relevant literature, enabling a comprehensive identification of the program's strengths, existing gaps, and areas requiring curricular improvement.

This evidence-based program review thus aims to inform strategic curriculum reforms, guide instructional improvements, and ensure that the EdPM program continues to produce graduates who are academically competent, practically skilled, and professionally aligned with the evolving needs of the education sector/industry.

Objectives of the Needs Assessment

The primary objectives of this Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program needs assessment are to:

- Assess the extent to which the program equips graduates with core theoretical and practical competencies in educational leadership, planning, and management.
- Determine how well graduates are prepared for real-world professional roles, including their proficiency in using tools and techniques essential to the education sector.
- Analyze the alignment of the curriculum with current educational policies, sectoral challenges, and labor market demands at both national and global levels.
- Highlight areas of curricular strength as well as gaps in skill development, policy adaptation, or employability to inform targeted improvements.
- Generate evidence-based recommendations to enhance curriculum design, instructional methods, and field-based learning components in line with industry demand as well as international benchmarks

Significance of the needs assessment

This program review is of significant importance for several reasons:

- Quality Assurance and Continuous Improvement: It supports institutional efforts to uphold academic standards, monitor learning outcomes, and ensure the ongoing relevance and quality of the EdPM program in a rapidly changing educational context.
- Alignment with Global Educational Priorities: By evaluating how well the program prepares graduates to contribute to national development goals and global initiatives like SDG 4, the review promotes international best practices in educational planning and management.
- Bridging the Theory–Practice Gap: The review sheds light on whether academic training is effectively translating into real-world capabilities, thereby informing pedagogical approaches and practical skill integration.
- Stakeholder Engagement and Accountability: The findings contribute to greater transparency and responsiveness to stakeholder needs—including students, employers, policymakers, and academic staff—ensuring that the program remains industry-relevant and outcomes-focused.
- Foundation for Strategic Planning: Insights from this review can guide intuitional development, resource allocation, and partnerships with the education sector, thereby strengthening the program's long-term sustainability and impact.

Scope of the Needs Assessment Survey

This needs assessment survey study focuses on two main dimensions: the geographical area and sectors of investigation and the thematic variables examined. Geographically, the study is delimited to the Tigray region of Ethiopia, specifically targeting the Education Bureau, selected Wored ffices Office (Aksum Town Woreda Education Office, Laelay Maychew Woreda Education Office, Shire Endesilasse Town Woreda Education Office, Tsimbla Woreda Education Office, and Asgede Wereda Education Office), and some selected schools within these woredas. The selection of these particular sectors and locations is based on two key rationales. First, these entities maintain direct industrial linkages with the Education Program Management (EdPM) initiatives, making them relevant sites for examining the program's review. Second, under the current regional context, these woredas and towns have demonstrated relatively stable operation of day-to-day educational activities. This stability enhances the

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

reliability and credibility of the data collected, thereby strengthening the validity of the study's findings and conclusions.

Thematically, the scope of this review encompasses three core variables: Graduates' competence and performance, Job readiness and practical skills, and Relevance and alignment of educational programs with industry needs. These thematic areas serve as the primary lenses through which the effectiveness and applicability of the EdPM programs are evaluated.

Challenges

While conducting the program review survey for the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program, we encountered several challenges that affected the scope of our data collection.

Limited time and financial constraints, along with security concerns in certain areas, restricted our ability to access all zones within the region. Additionally, some participants were reluctant to provide detailed and valuable general information, which posed difficulties in gathering comprehensive data.

Despite these obstacles, through persistent effort and adaptive strategies, we were ultimately able to complete the study and gather meaningful insights to inform the program review.

METHODS

The study Approach

To ensure the comprehensive and effective completion of the program review survey, a mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This methodological triangulation enhances the validity and reliability of the findings by allowing for a more holistic understanding of the program under review (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component facilitated the collection of standardized data that can be analyzed statistically, while the qualitative component provided in-depth insights into stakeholders' perceptions and contextual nuances that numerical data alone cannot capture. Such a dual approach is particularly valuable in program evaluation studies where both measurable outcomes and experiential feedback are crucial for informed decision-making (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

Sources of the study

To ensure the successful completion and credibility of the study, both primary and secondary data sources were employed. Primary data were collected from key informants—including educational managers, experts, supervisors, and school principals—using both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires. These stakeholders were selected due to their direct involvement in educational planning and management, making their insights critical to understanding the practical implementation and relevance of the program.

Secondary data were gathered through a review of existing literature, including academic articles, books, policy documents, and reports. These sources provided a theoretical foundation and contextual understanding necessary to interpret the primary data and to compare the study findings with broader educational trends and practices.

The use of both primary and secondary sources aligns with best practices in educational research, as recommended by Creswell (2014), who emphasizes the importance of triangulating data to enhance validity and deepen the analysis.

Target population, Sample size, and Sampling techniques

The target areas of this program review study were entities within the education sector, specifically education bureaus, education offices, and schools which are located in Tigray Regional State. These institutions were selected due to their direct relevance to the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program, which aims to strengthen the operational linkages between academic training and the needs of educational institutions. Accordingly, the target population of this review study were educational managers and experts who are working in Education Bureau, Supervisors and experts who are working in Woreda Education office (Specifically, Aksum Town Woreda Education Office, Laelay Maychew Woreda Education Office, Shire Endesilasse Town Woreda Education Office, Tsimbla Woreda Education Office, and Asgede Wereda Education Office), and principals who are leading the schools in the mentioned selected woredas.

Concerning the sampling method utilized, we used a purposive sampling method to select the relevant target areas /institutions connected to the EdPM program. Within these identified institutions, we use availability sampling, often referred to as convenience sampling, to choose our respondents or participants. As a result, a total of 25 participants were chosen through this availability sampling approach. This approach is recommended and practical due to time and resource constraints. Moreover, the technique allowed the researchers to gather data from individuals who were readily accessible and directly involved in the implementation and evaluation of the EdPM program.

Data gathering tools

To collect the necessary data from respondents, a structured questionnaire was utilized as the primary data collection instrument. The questionnaire comprised Likert scale items designed to capture respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and satisfaction levels in a standardized format, which facilitates quantitative

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

analysis (Likert, 1932). The Likert scale is widely used in social science research due to its efficiency in measuring latent variables such as attitudes, beliefs, and opinions (Boone & Boone, 2012).

In addition to the closed-ended items, the questionnaire included a set of open-ended questions to allow respondents to elaborate on their responses, share experiences, or raise issues not covered by the structured items. The integration of both structured and unstructured items aligns with the mixed-methods approach of this study, enabling both breadth and depth in data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The open-ended questions were particularly valuable for gaining deeper insights into stakeholder perspectives that might not be captured through fixed-response options.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

To analyze the collected data effectively, both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed in alignment with the mixed-methods design. The responses gathered through the Likert scale were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistical methods, primarily frequency counts and percentage distributions. These techniques are useful for summarizing and interpreting trends, patterns, and the overall distribution of responses across key survey items (Field, 2018).

On the other hand, responses to the open-ended questions were subjected to qualitative content analysis. This involved systematically reviewing and narrating participants' responses to identify emerging themes, patterns, and categories relevant to the objectives of the program review.

Narrative analysis allowed for the preservation of respondent voice and context, which adds depth and meaning to the statistical findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This dual analysis approach enhances the robustness of the study by ensuring that both measurable and nuanced aspects of the program evaluation are adequately addressed.

Data presentation, Analysis and Interpretation

Background information of participants

Table 1: Background information of participants

No	Items	Category of respondents	N	%
	The organization respondents are currently working	Education Bureau	10	**40**
		Woreda Education office	9	36
1		Schools	6	24
	Total		**25**	**100%**
		Educational Planning & Management (EdPM)	10	40 %
2	Field of Training			
		Other fields	15	60 %
	Total		**25**	**100 %**
	Position/ title of the respondents	Managers	7	28
		Supervisors	10	40
3		Directors/principals	8	32
	Total		**25**	**100 %**
	Years of Service in the Education Sector	Below 10	3	12 %
		10–20	9	36 %
4		20-30	6	24 %
		Above 30	7	28 %
	Total		**25**	**100%**

As indicated in table 1 above, Item 1 illustrates the workplaces of the respondents. Among the 25 total participants, 10 individuals, representing 40%, are employed by the Tigray regional state Education bureau. Meanwhile, 9 respondents, or 36%, are based at woreda education offices, and 6 respondents, making up 24%, work in schools. The data analysis presented above demonstrates that the survey effectively addressed the primary clientele for the EdPM program, thereby enhancing the study's credibility and practicality.

The second item or variable examined while collecting the background information pertained to the training fields of the respondents or key informants. As shown in table 1 above, 10 out of the 25 respondents, constituting 40%, are professionals in EdPM, while the remaining 15 respondents, making up 60%, fall from different training backgrounds. These statistics clearly highlight that although participants with diverse training backgrounds can contribute various insights and perspectives for educational policy development and planning, the predominant focus in the education bureau, education offices, and schools is education. Therefore, it is expected that a significant presence of educational planning and management experts is necessary to design policies, prepare plans, and oversee educational resources and instructional processes. This reality reveals

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

a notable deficiency/gap in the number of EdPM professionals within these critical areas of the program.

The third variable reflected in the table above pertains to the job titles or positions held by the respondents. According to the data presented, out of 25 respondents, 7, or 28%, are situated in managerial roles, 8 respondents, constituting 32%, are in supervisory or expert positions, and 10, accounting for 40%, hold the title of school principal. The insights gathered from respondents employed in these diverse essential areas reinforce the practicality and reliability of the study's findings.

The last variable depicted in the table above relates to the years of service for the respondents. Notably, a significant majority, comprising 88% of the respondents, possess between 10 to 30 years of professional experience or more. This suggests that due to their extensive experience in the education sector, respondents evaluated the survey questions based on their knowledge and past encounters, thus strengthening the reliability of the data and providing valuable contributions for the program review.

Educational Planning and Management program graduates' competence and Performance

Table 2: Graduate competence and performance

Sl No	Indicators/Sub themes	Rating scales										Total in number and percent
		Very poor		Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1	Knowledge of educational systems and policies	0	0%	3	12%	8	32%	12	48%	2	8%	25 (100%)
2	Leadership and management skills	1	4%	2	8%	5	20%	14	56%	3	12%	25 (100%)
3	Problem-solving abilities in planning and resource management	0	0%	3	12%	10	40%	11	44%	1	4%	25 (100%)
4	Communication and report writing skills	0	0%	2	8%	8	32%	13	52%	2	8%	25 (100%)
5	Proficiency in using data and statistics in educational planning	1	4%	2	8%	10	40%	12	48%	0	0%	25 (100%)

Table 2 provides an evaluation of the core competencies and performance outcomes of graduates from the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program. The table captures the perceptions of 25 respondents regarding the proficiency of graduates across five critical performance domains relevant to educational systems, leadership, problem-solving, communication, and data-driven decision-making.

In the table above, Item 1 evaluates the graduates' knowledge of educational systems and policies. According to the data, 48 % of respondents (12 out of 25) believe that graduates possess a "Good" level of knowledge about educational systems and policies, followed by 32% (8 respondents) selecting "Fair." Only 2 respondents (8%) rated this competence as "Excellent," while 3 (12%) rated it "Poor." No one selected "Very Poor."

This finding aligns with broader international insights. According to UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2023), effective education planners must have a thorough understanding of both national policy contexts and global education agendas, such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The low number of "Excellent" evaluations among graduates implies a potential gap in this dual-level policy competence.

Similarly, the World Bank's 2024 education sector assessments underscore the increasing complexity of education governance in the context of decentralization reforms. These reforms demand more than basic knowledge; they require the ability to interpret and apply policy nuances across diverse administrative levels.

In the Ethiopian context, the *Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030)* also emphasizes the urgent need to strengthen leadership and management capacities within the sector. It identifies key challenges, including weak strategic planning, limited managerial competence, and a lack of transparency in leadership appointments. These national priorities further highlight the importance of equipping graduates with deeper, context-sensitive policy understanding and leadership capabilities.

The second variable or sub theme examined about graduates leadership and management skills in

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

Educational Settings. In this domain, the majority—56% of respondents (14 individuals)—rated the graduates' leadership and management skills as "Good," with 12% (3 respondents) giving an "Excellent" rating. Meanwhile, 5 respondents (20%) selected "Fair," and 3 (12%) rated this area as "Poor" or "Very Poor." This distribution reflects a positive but cautious view of graduates' leadership potential, with 68% perceiving the skills as "Good" or better. However, nearly one-third of respondents see room for improvement, which indicates a need for further development of practical leadership experience, organizational skills, and decision-making authority through internships, or in-service training.

These findings are consistent with broader international trends. The *OECD's* Education Policy Outlook (2023) highlights a growing "leadership gap" in education systems globally, particularly in the areas of crisis response and adaptive leadership. This underscores the need for future educational leaders to be equipped with dynamic and responsive leadership skills, which may currently be underdeveloped in many training programs. Reinforcing this perspective, McKinsey's Global Education Report (2024) notes that high-performing education systems increasingly adopt distributed leadership models, emphasizing collaborative decision-making and shared responsibilities—competencies that may not yet be fully integrated into current educational leadership development frameworks.

At the national level, the Ethiopian *Education Development Roadmap (2018–2030)* identifies similar challenges. It points to systemic weaknesses in leadership, strategic planning, and educational data management. The roadmap stresses the need for leaders who can effectively collect, process, and analyze data, as well as manage information across all levels of the education system. Moreover, it highlights ongoing issues related to limited capacities in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—further emphasizing the urgency of enhancing leadership training to meet both national and global expectations.

The third sub theme of in table 2 above depicts the EdPM graduates' competency in Problem-Solving in Education Planning and Resource Management. This item received favorable ratings, with 11 respondents (44%) selecting "Good," and 10 (40%) rating "Fair." Only 3 (12%) chose "Poor," and 1 respondent (4%) gave an "Excellent" rating. No respondent rated this area as "Very Poor." The high number of "Fair" and "Good" responses (84%) shows that graduates have a reasonable grasp of educational problem-solving, particularly in planning and managing resources. However, the low percentage of "Excellent" ratings, along with the 12% "Poor" response, suggests that higher-order analytical and critical thinking skills need to be more rigorously integrated into the curriculum, possibly through more applied case studies, real-world planning tasks, and data-driven decision-making exercises.

The fourth sub theme focuses on EdPM graduates' communication and report writing skills. In this category, 13 respondents (52%) rated graduates as "Good," 8 (32%) rated "Fair," and 2 each (8%) gave "Poor" and "Excellent" ratings. These results show that over 80% of respondents believe graduates demonstrate at least adequate communication skills, particularly in written reports—an essential aspect of education planning and supervision.

Nonetheless, the responses also suggest a need for more focused training in professional writing, document presentation, and possibly oral communication, which are critical for effective stakeholder engagement and policy advocacy.

The last sub theme depicts in the table above relates the capability of EdPm graduates in utilizing of data and statistics in planning and decision-making process. While 48% of respondents (12) rated this competence as "Good," a significant portion—40% (10 respondents)—rated it as "Fair." Only 2 respondents (8%) selected "Poor," and 1 (4%) selected "Very Poor." No respondents rated this area as "Excellent."

The absence of "Excellent" ratings and the relatively high number of "Fair" responses reveal a key gap in quantitative literacy and data application skills. As data-driven decision-making becomes increasingly central to education policy and planning, it is vital to equip EdPM graduates with practical skills in statistics, data analysis software, and interpretation for planning and policy purposes.

The findings in Table 2 present the following overall insights into graduate competence and performance:

Most graduates are seen as adequately prepared, particularly in terms of system knowledge, leadership, and communication, with the majority of ratings falling within the "Fair" and "Good" range. However, the low proportion of "Excellent" ratings across all indicators points to the need for more intensive, high-impact training approaches.

The most critical areas for improvement are: Data and statistical literacy, Strategic problem-solving, and Advanced policy interpretation and application. This analysis underscores the need to enhance the practical, analytical, and leadership components of the EdPM curriculum. Strengthening these areas will not only elevate the quality of graduates but also ensure their effectiveness and relevance in responding to evolving challenges within the education sector.

Educational Planning and Management program graduates' job readiness and practical skills

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

Table 3: Job readiness and practical skills

Sl No	Indicators/Sub themes	Rating scales										Total in number and percent
		Very poor		Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1	Prepared for roles in institutions/education sectors	0	0 %	2	8%	8	32	12	48%	2	8%	24 (96 %)
2	Project management and strategic planning skills or capabilities	1	4 %	4	16%	9	36%	8	32%	2	8%	24 (96%)
3	Use of ICT tools in educational management	3	12%	5	20%	10	40%	6	24%	1	4%	25 (100 %)
4	Knowledge of budgeting and finance management	1	4%	5	20%	8	32%	10	40%	1	4%	25 (100%)
5	Capacity to lead change and drive innovation	0	0%	2	8%	13	52%	7	28%	3	12%	25 (100%)

The table above presents evaluative feedback on the perceived job readiness and practical competencies of graduates from the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program. The assessment was made across five critical competency areas, each rated on a scale from "Very Poor" to "Excellent" by relevant respondents in the education sector.

As clearly seen in the table 3 above, item 1 depicts the graduates' preparedness for Roles in Educational Institutions. Accordingly, out of 25 total respondents, 24 (96%) rated this item. Among them, 12 respondents (48%) believe that graduates are "Good" in terms of being prepared for their roles in education-related institutions. Another 8 respondents (32%) rated the graduates' preparedness as "Fair," while only 2 respondents (8%) gave "Poor" and another 2 (8%) gave "Excellent" ratings. No respondents selected "Very Poor."

This distribution shows a generally favorable perception of EdPM graduates' readiness for institutional roles. The combined 80% rating in the "Good" and "Fair" categories reflects confidence in their foundational skills. However, the relatively small percentage of "Excellent" ratings points to opportunities for enhancing graduates' preparedness to meet the growing demands of leadership and administration in the education sector.

These findings align with current international perspectives. According to UNESCO (2023), education administrators must develop adaptive leadership skills to effectively manage post-pandemic recovery efforts and navigate ongoing digital transformations within the education sector. Furthermore, the World Bank (2024) emphasizes that as education systems become increasingly decentralized, professionals are expected to execute localized policies effectively requiring a blend of technical expertise, contextual understanding, and responsive leadership. The modest "Excellent" ratings in this study may reflect a gap in these advanced skill areas, highlighting the importance of refining pre-service training programs to better align with contemporary institutional needs.

The second variable or sub theme focuses on the graduates' project management and strategic skills. This item also received responses from 24 participants (96%). Of these, 9 respondents (36%) rated graduates' skills as "Fair," 8 (32%) as "Good," 4 (16%) as "Poor," and 2 (8%) as "Excellent." One respondent (4%) selected "Very Poor."

The data suggest that while most graduates possess adequate levels of planning and project management skills, a considerable number (20%) fall into the "Poor" or "Very Poor" categories. This indicates a need for strengthening practical training and hands-on exposure to strategic planning tools and project execution methodologies within the EdPM curriculum.

As clearly seen in the table above, the third variable or sub theme evaluates the graduate's capability of utilizing ICT tools and technologies in Educational Management. This indicator received responses from all 25 participants (100%). The results show a more mixed evaluation: 10 respondents (40%) rated graduates as "Fair," 6 (24%) as "Good," and 5 (20%) as "Poor." Additionally, 3 respondents (12%) selected "Very Poor," while only 1 respondent (4%) believed graduates performed at an "Excellent" level. The data clearly highlight ICT as a major area of weakness. With more than half (52%) of the respondents rating graduates "Fair" or below, it becomes evident that current training in digital tools and systems is insufficient. In an increasingly digital educational environment, this gap poses a risk to effective planning, data management, and communication, and should be addressed through updated ICT training and digital literacy integration in the program.

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

The fourth variable or item was focused on graduates' knowledge of educational budgeting and finance management. In this area, all 25 respondents also participated. 10 respondents (40%) rated graduates as "Good," 8 (32%) as "Fair," 5 (20%) as "Poor," while 1 respondent (4%) each selected "Very Poor" and "Excellent."

This pattern suggests a moderate level of competence in financial and budgeting skills, with 72% of the ratings falling in the "Fair" or "Good" range. While encouraging, the 24% in the "Poor" or lower categories signals that a significant portion of graduates may lack confidence or experience in financial planning, a critical skill in educational leadership. Strengthening this area through practical simulations, case studies, and budget management exercises would enhance graduates' real-world capabilities.

The last item or sub theme in the table above evaluates graduates' capacity to lead change and innovation in the education sector. This item gathered full participation, with 13 respondents (52%) rating the graduates' innovation and change leadership capacity as "Fair," 7 respondents (28%) as "Good," and 3 respondents (12%) as "Excellent." Only 2 respondents (8%) selected "Poor," and none chose "Very Poor."

The dominance of the "Fair" rating suggests that graduates are perceived as having the potential but lacking strong innovation and leadership capabilities. In an era where adaptability and change management are crucial in education reform, the data highlights the need for deliberate training in transformational leadership, innovation strategies, and system-level thinking.

Overall, the results in Table 3 point to the following conclusions:

General job readiness is perceived as adequate, with most graduates rated as "Fair" to "Good" across the five skill areas. The strongest performance is seen in general preparedness and budgeting knowledge. The weakest area is clearly the use of ICT tools in educational management, where most respondents indicate below-average performance. The relatively low percentage of "Excellent" ratings across all indicators underscores a need to enhance the depth and practical orientation of the EdPM program, especially in technical and leadership domains. These findings suggest that while the EdPM program is laying a solid foundation, there is a pressing need to revisit and revise curriculum content and delivery approaches, ensuring greater emphasis on experiential learning, project-based activities, digital proficiency, and strategic leadership. Doing so will increase the graduates' effectiveness and relevance in their professional roles within a dynamic educational landscape.

Educational Planning and Management program Relevance and alignment with industry needs

Table 4: Relevance and alignment with industry needs

Sl No	Indicators/Sub themes	Rating scales: Very poor N	Very poor %	Poor N	Poor %	Fair N	Fair %	Good N	Good %	Excellent N	Excellent %	Total in number and percent
1	Alignment with current education sector needs	0	0%	6	24%	8	32%	9	36 %	1	4 %	24 (96%)
2	Program relevance to practical challenges	0	0%	3	12%	7	28%	14	56%	1	4%	25 (100%)
3	Adaptability to educational policy reforms	1	4%	5	20%	8	32%	10	40%	1	4%	25 (100%)
4	Encouragement of lifelong learning	2	8%	4	16%	7	28%	8	32 %	4	16%	25 (100%)

A clearly show, the table 4 above evaluates the extent to which the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program aligns with the evolving demands of the education sector (industry). Feedback was collected from 25 respondents on four key indicators related to curriculum relevance, graduate adaptability, and the promotion of lifelong learning. The results offer critical insights into how well the program prepares its graduates for the realities and expectations of today's educational landscape.

Accordingly, in the table, item or sub theme evaluates the alignment of graduates' knowledge and skills with education sector needs. This indicator received responses from 24 of the 25 participants (96%). The largest group—9 respondents (36%)—rated the alignment as "Good," while 8 (32%) chose "Fair" and 6 (24%) rated it "Poor." Only 1 respondent (4%) selected "Excellent," and none rated it "Very Poor."

The data reflect mixed perceptions about how well graduates' knowledge and skills match real-world demands. While 72% rated this alignment at "Fair" or above, the high percentage of "Poor" responses (24%) and the low "Excellent" rating (4%) suggest that the program may require revision to better reflect current priorities, such as inclusive education, digital transformation, or decentralized planning systems in the sector.

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

The second sub theme in the table 4 above depicts the relevance of program content to practical institutional challenges. This item received full responses from all 25 participants. A majority—14 respondents (56%)—rated the content as "Good," followed by 7 (28%) who chose "Fair," 3 (12%) who chose "Poor," and only 1 respondent (4%) who rated it "Excellent."

These responses suggest that while a majority recognize the program's relevance to current institutional realities, there is still a notable minority (40%) who view the program as only moderately or weakly aligned with everyday challenges in schools and education offices. This may reflect a gap between theoretical coursework and the practical complexities faced in the field, highlighting a need for more experiential learning, case-based teaching, and direct engagement with institutional reform issues.

The third item or sub theme depicts the adaptability of graduates to dynamic educational policies and reform. This indicator also received full participation. Out of 25 total respondents, 10 (40%) rated graduates as "Good" in their ability to adapt to educational change, while 8 (32%) rated them "Fair." Meanwhile, 5 respondents (20%) rated them "Poor," 1 (4%) selected "Excellent," and 1 (4%) gave a "Very Poor" rating.

The overall response shows that while many believe graduates are adequately adaptive, nearly one in four respondents (24%) rated this adaptability as poor or very poor. This suggests that although graduates may be exposed to policy concepts, they may lack the tools or flexibility to effectively respond to reforms and policy shifts in real time. The program would benefit from incorporating content on policy analysis, change management, and innovation in education systems.

The last but not the least sub variable of thematic 4 evaluates the promotion of lifelong learning and professional development of EdPM program. This indicator received diverse responses: 8 respondents (32%) rated it "Good," 7 (28%) rated "Fair," 4 (16%) chose "Excellent," and another 4 (16%) selected "Poor." 2 respondents (8%) considered the program "Very Poor" in promoting ongoing professional growth.

These results indicate a relatively weaker performance in fostering lifelong learning habits and continuous professional development. While 60% of responses were positive, the combined 24% rating it "Poor" or "Very Poor" points to the need for stronger integration of reflective practice, self-directed learning strategies, and exposure to continuous professional development frameworks within the program. Encouraging graduates to pursue ongoing growth is vital in a rapidly evolving educational sector.

Overall, the findings from Table 4 highlight several critical insights:

Perceptions of the program's relevance to the field are generally positive but not strong.

While most graduates are seen as reasonably equipped for institutional challenges, alignment with current sector demands is moderate, not exceptional.

Adaptability to educational reforms and lifelong learning emerge as weaker areas, suggesting a need for: Curricular responsiveness to real-world shifts in policy and practice, Training in flexible, forward-thinking mindsets, Stronger emphasis on reflective learning, professional growth pathways, and continuous capacity building.

These findings are supported by broader international and national literature. For example, UNESCO (2023) stresses the importance of preparing education planners to operate within increasingly decentralized governance systems and to respond to locally driven policy implementation. Similarly, the World Bank (2024) underscores a growing global demand for education professionals capable of making data-driven decisions in dynamic policy environments.

In the Ethiopian context, there is a longstanding mismatch between higher education outputs and labor market needs. Several studies indicate that graduates frequently lack the practical competencies required by employers, contributing to high youth unemployment rates. While the EdPM program includes valuable components such as project management, budgeting, and leadership—areas aligned with labor market demands—findings reveal inconsistent skill acquisition among graduates. A significant proportion of graduates were rated as having "Poor" or "Very Poor" competencies in these key areas, signaling the need for curriculum reforms to better prepare students for professional demands and employment opportunities.

To sum up, while the EdPM program is on a solid foundation, there is clear evidence that it needs ongoing revision and innovation to keep pace with the dynamic demands of the education sector. Program planners should prioritize greater engagement with field practitioners, integrate policy simulation, and design adaptive learning modules to enhance alignment with industry needs.

Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions

As previously outlined in the methodology section regarding our survey review technique and the tools for data collection, we utilized a primarily quantitative approach, with some qualitative elements, known as a mixed method.

To illustrate this in the actual field study, we employed a Likert scale to verify the reliability of the information obtained through quantitative method. Additionally, to allow participants to express their feelings about the presented closed-ended questions, we included three general open-ended questions, as outlined below.

- Overall, how would you rate the quality of EdPM graduates from this institution?
- How satisfied are you with the contribution of EdPM graduates to your organization? And Justify your response briefly
- Would you recommend hiring more graduates from this EdPM program?

Overall perception of the quality of EdPM graduates

Respondents expressed varied perceptions regarding the overall quality of EdPM graduates. A few respondents rated the quality positively, describing graduates as competent and well-suited for educational leadership and administrative roles. These individuals viewed the graduates as adequately prepared and effective in their roles. In contrast, a larger group of respondents expressed concerns or reservations. Some viewed the quality as moderate or fair, indicating that the effectiveness of graduates differed from individual to individual. A notable number of respondents, however, rated the quality as poor, highlighting issues such as lack of practical competence, limited impact in real-world settings, and inadequate differentiation from other types of graduates.

Overall, the data suggest that perceptions of quality are divided. While a minority expressed confidence in the overall quality of graduates, a greater number either offered moderate evaluations or indicated dissatisfaction. This points to a need for more consistent training standards and quality assurance within the EdPM program.

Satisfaction with the contribution of EdPM graduates to organizations

The degree of satisfaction with EdPM graduates' contributions also varied across respondents. Several participants conveyed satisfaction, particularly noting graduates' involvement in essential functions such as planning, financial management, school leadership, and monitoring and evaluation. These responses suggest that, when effectively trained and deployed, EdPM graduates can add meaningful value to institutional operations. On the other hand, a significant portion of respondents expressed dissatisfaction or mixed feelings. Some noted that the graduates lacked sufficient practical application skills, while others observed that their theoretical knowledge was not always successfully translated into effective performance. A few respondents also indicated that some graduates were assigned roles that did not align with their training, further limiting their effectiveness.

In summary, while a reasonable number of respondents acknowledged positive contributions from EdPM graduates, the overall level of satisfaction appeared moderate. The findings underscore a need to better align the graduates' competencies with organizational expectations and ensure practical readiness.

Recommendation to hire more EdPM graduates

When asked whether they would recommend the hiring of more EdPM graduates, responses were again mixed. A fair number of respondents expressed support for continuing or increasing the recruitment of graduates from the program. However, many of these recommendations were conditional, suggesting that ongoing professional development, particularly through refresher trainings and needs-based job placement, would be necessary to ensure effectiveness.

Conversely, a substantial group of respondents expressed hesitation or outright opposition to hiring more EdPM graduates. Their concerns centered around the current adequacy of staffing, doubts about graduate performance, and the perceived disconnect between academic preparation and real-world demands.

A few respondents offered more nuanced or conditional recommendations, emphasizing the importance of equipping graduates with practical skills, adaptability, and readiness to meet evolving educational challenges. They stressed that any future recruitment efforts should be tied to improvements in training design and delivery.

In conclusion, while there is some support for hiring more EdPM graduates, the majority of respondents either called for strategic improvement in graduate preparedness or expressed reservations. This suggests a clear need for the EdPM program to focus on strengthening practical competencies, aligning curriculum with sector demands, and conducting job evaluations to ensure meaningful graduate deployment.

General conclusion on the alignment of quantitative and qualitative Findings

The qualitative data obtained through open-ended questions largely reinforce and elaborate on the findings generated through the quantitative Likert-scale data analysis. While each method offers distinct perspectives, their integration presents a coherent picture of both the strengths and the limitations of the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program

Graduate Competence and Performance

Quantitative results indicated that EdPM graduates generally performed fairly well in communication and leadership, while weaknesses were notable in technical and analytical areas such as data use and strategic problem-solving. The qualitative responses

align with these findings: some respondents affirmed graduate competence, especially in administrative roles, but many others voiced dissatisfaction, pointing out poor practical application, theoretical limitations, and the inability to consistently outperform or differentiate from graduates in other fields.

Job Readiness and Practical Skills

The Likert-scale ratings revealed that while EdPM graduates are considered adequately prepared in areas like budgeting and general administration, they struggle with ICT, project management, and innovation. This is strongly corroborated by qualitative responses, where several participants criticized the lack of hands-on skills and adaptability in real-world settings. Calls for practical training, refresher courses, and improved technological competency frequently appeared in the open-ended responses.

Alignment with Industry Needs and Future Hiring

Quantitative data found the program moderately aligned with current sector needs, but lacking in areas such as lifelong learning and adaptability. This is mirrored in qualitative feedback, where support for hiring more EdPM graduates was conditional. Many respondents expressed that unless the program evolves to meet the demands of a dynamic educational environment, additional graduates would not add substantial value. The open-ended data, therefore, deepen the quantitative insight by specifying the nature of the alignment gap—especially the mismatch between training content and the practical demands of the education sector.

The quantitative data largely supports the qualitative insights:

- Both data types affirm that EdPM graduates are generally moderately competent, especially in administrative roles.
- Both reveal weaknesses in practical and technical areas, such as ICT, project management, and data analysis.
- There is shared concern about program alignment with industry needs, particularly in adaptability and innovation.

Major Findings, Conclusions and Implications

Based on the comprehensive data analysis and interpretation from the four tables, the following major findings, conclusions, and implications are drawn regarding the Educational Planning and Management (EdPM) program.

Summary of major findings

Graduate Background and Relevance

- A significant portion of respondents (76%) are from education bureaus and woreda offices, confirming that the survey targeted the core clientele of the EdPM program.
- Only 40% of respondents have EdPM-specific training, indicating a shortage of qualified
- educational planners and managers in the education system.
- 88% of respondents have over 10 years of experience, validating the credibility of the feedback and insights provided.

Graduate Competence and Performance

- Graduates are perceived as generally competent in educational systems knowledge, communication, and leadership, with most ratings falling in the "Fair" to "Good" range.
- Critical weaknesses exist in data analysis, strategic problem-solving, and use of statistics, with no area receiving a majority of "Excellent" ratings.

Job Readiness and Practical Skills

- Overall, EdPM graduates are seen as adequately prepared for roles in institutions, especially in general administration and budgeting.
- However, there are marked deficiencies in ICT usage, project management, and capacity to lead innovation, with more than 50% of ratings falling below "Good" in these areas.

Alignment with Industry Needs

- The program is moderately aligned with current sector needs, with 72% of respondents rating it "Fair" or higher.
- Weak performance in lifelong learning, adaptability, and practical applicability suggests a need for program revision to better match the evolving education landscape.

CONCLUSION

- The EdPM program has a solid foundational structure and is contributing to developing skilled education professionals. However, it is not producing highly competent or specialized graduates, as evidenced by the low levels of "Excellent" ratings across all key areas.
- The curriculum lacks practical depth, particularly in technical competencies such as ICT, data-driven planning, and leadership for innovation.
- The program's relevance to current educational reforms and institutional needs is limited, requiring better integration with real-world challenges and forward-looking skills.
- A gap exists between theory and practice, especially in equipping graduates to adapt to fast-changing educational policy environments and technological advancements.

IMPLICATIONS

Curriculum Enhancement and Specialization

- The curriculum should be revised to include specialized modules in key areas such as educational data analysis, strategic planning, and project

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

management, addressing the identified competence gaps.
- Emphasis should be placed on practical applications, including simulations, case studies, and real-world scenarios that bridge the theory-practice gap.

Strengthening Technical and Digital Competencies
- Given the deficiencies in ICT skills, the program must integrate hands-on ICT training, including statistical software (e.g., SPSS, Excel), education management information systems (EMIS), and digital tools for planning and monitoring.
- A dedicated course or module on digital leadership and innovation in education should be introduced to align with ongoing technological transformations in the sector.

Institutional Linkages and Practical Exposure
- To improve job readiness and ensure relevance, stronger collaborations with education bureaus, schools, and NGOs are needed to create structured internships, fieldwork, and project-based learning opportunities.
- Mentorship programs involving experienced practitioners from the sector could also enhance applied learning and career preparedness.

Competency-Based Program Design
- The program should transition toward a competency-based model, where learning outcomes are explicitly tied to the skills required in educational planning, including evidence-based decision-making, leadership, and adaptability.
- Assessment tools should be redesigned to measure not just academic knowledge, but also professional behaviors, soft skills, and practical capabilities.

Promotion of Lifelong Learning and Adaptability
- Modules on self-directed learning, continuous professional development (CPD), and reflective practice should be embedded into the curriculum to cultivate a lifelong learning mindset.
- Graduates should be trained to navigate policy reforms, decentralization, and innovation, supporting sectoral demands for responsive and adaptable professionals.

Program Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms
- Establish a continuous feedback and monitoring system involving alumni, employers, and stakeholders to evaluate the ongoing relevance, effectiveness, and impact of the program.
- Incorporating tracer studies and performance audits into program evaluation can help ensure alignment with evolving labor market and policy needs.

Policy and Strategic Alignment
- The program must align more closely with national education strategies and global development goals (e.g., SDG 4) by integrating themes like inclusive education, decentralized governance, and quality assurance.

REFERENCES

1. Boone, H. N., & Boone, D. A. (2012). Analyzing Likert data. *Journal of Extension, 50*(2), 1–5.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
3. Bray, M. (2003). *Adverse effects of private supplementary tutoring: Dimensions, implications and government responses*. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.
4. Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
5. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.
6. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
7. Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
8. Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). Teachers College Press.
9. Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J., & Graham, W. F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(3), 255–274. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737011003255
10. Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 18*(1), 9–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260293930180102
11. Likert, R. (1932). *A technique for the measurement of attitudes*. *Archives of Psychology, 22*(140), 1–55.
12. McKinsey & Company. (2024). *Global education report: Leadership for learning*. https://www.mckinsey.com
13. Ministry of Education [MoE]. (2018). *The Ethiopian education development roadmap (2018–2030): An integrated executive summary*. Ministry of Education. https://example-url.org
14. OECD. (2018). *The future of education and skills: Education 2030*. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030/
15. OECD. (2023). *Education policy outlook 2023: Transforming education for the future*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/1e7dcbc6-en
16. Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21). (2009). *P21 framework definitions*. http://www.battelleforkids.org/networks/p21
17. UNESCO. (2015). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*.

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie

https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656

18. UNESCO. (2015). *Rethinking education: Towards a global common good?* UNESCO.
19. UNESCO. (2023). *Global education monitoring report 2023: Technology in education—A tool on whose terms?* https://www.unesco.org/gem-report
20. UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). (2018). *Training manual on education sector planning: Volume 1—Policy, context and analysis*. https://www.iiep.unesco.org
21. World Bank. (2024). *Education sector assessment report: Navigating decentralization and digitalization*. https://www.worldbank.org
22. Yorke, M. (2006). *Employability in higher education: What it is – What it is not*. Learning and Employability Series One. The Higher Education Academy.

***Corresponding Author:** Berhanemeskel Nigussie Zewudie