

The Gap between Indigenous Ways of Life and Formal Education among the Guji People in Southern Ethiopia: Challenges and Lessons

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Abstract

Children among indigenous people are involved in two disconnected social environments: the indigenous home context and the “modern” school environment. This disconnection and the way it affects children’s everyday lives have received little research attention so far. Drawing on an ethnographic approach, this article examines children’s perspectives on this disconnection and its effects on their educational well-being among the Guji people in Ethiopia. Unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations were used to generate data. Data were collected from three villages in the western part of the Guji district in 2019. Twenty-five children (13 girls and 12 boys) in the age range of 6-13 and their parents participated as sources of data. The data were analyzed qualitatively and the result shows that the gap between the indigenous ways of life and formal education has exposed children to a sense of dis-entanglement and increasing challenges of learning. It discusses that the gap between the indigenous ways of life and formal education has weakened children’s learning efficacy; therefore, needs due attention from the government, policymakers, curriculum developers, teachers, and parents.

Keywords: *Indigenous ways of life, formal education, children, Guji people, Ethiopia*

Introduction

This article focuses on qualitative analyses of the gap between children’s indigenous ways of life and formal education and the effects of the gap on their learning efficacy among the Guji society - an indigenous society living on agro-pastoral activities in southern Ethiopia. It discusses how the disparity between the local ways of life and the school environment affects children’s success in learning.

Among the Guji people, children’s “indigenous ways of life” constitute unique social and cultural practices – value systems, customary practices, norms of interpersonal and intergenerational interactions, and learning through work and play- that the children perform as an integral part of their everyday life (Tadesse, 2012; Tadesse, 2017). According to Tadesse and Kjorhot (2013) and Tadesse (2018), children’s indigenous ways of life in Guji society includes profound oral traditions, traditional play practices, customary social relationships, subsistent livelihood practices, and ancestral values of parenting and household labour divisions. On the one hand, the school environment, which was introduced in the area only four decades ago, has been perceived to be a way to “modern” life although its constituents are all alien to children’s indigenous ways of life (Tadesse, 2022a; 2022b). According to Tadesse and Kjorholt (2013), the school environment encompasses organized and conventional learning processes and

didactic practices in which teachers present an extended explanation of concepts to students in structured school classrooms. This represents the universal mode of learning. On the other hand, the indigenous ways of life are characterized by relatively contextualized practical knowledge that children learn through observing, trying, and performing actions which can be understood as the indigenous mode of learning (Tadesse, 2022a; 2022b). These two children's daily environments have not yet been interconnected and used as mutually supportive learning contexts for children. This article deals with the challenges that this gap causes to children's learning within the context of the Guji People.

More specifically, the article documents how children's living conditions in their local environments affect their learning success in the formal educational context. Based on the empirical data from participant observation in children's homes, work, and school environments and in-depth interviews with selected children and adults in society, the article answers the following questions.

1. What do children's indigenous ways of life constitute among the Guji society?
2. What are the views of children, teachers and parents towards formal education?
3. What gaps exist between indigenous education and formal education in the eyes of children and parents?
4. What are the effects of these gaps on the teaching and learning process?

Based on these questions, the article analyses the gap between indigenous practices and formal education and its impact on children's formal education. It constructs knowledge that would help to enrich education policies and strategies relevant to children among agro-pastoral societies.

Indigenous Ways of Life and Formal Education in Africa: Literature Review

Kelman, et.al. (2012) and Schafer et al (2004) state that the indigenous way of life refers to a century-old way of life including knowledge, skills, and values developed by various groups of peoples to cope with their day-to-day environmental, socio-economic, and political challenges. It is a time-proven knowledge developed via trial-and-error method and sustained for centuries. According to Sharma (2011) and Mawere (2015), one of the typical characteristics of indigenous way of life is that it is context specific. However, this does not mean that the indigenous way of life is endemic because there is a high probability of finding similar knowledge in different countries with similar environmental or socio-economic contexts (Kinzel, 2020; Moahi, 2012). According to Kolawolei (2009), indigenous knowledge that is embedded in the indigenous way of life transmits via customary practices, material culture, folk arts and music, and folk lives and is perceived to be a means to become a knowledgeable person who can cope with the cultural ways of life which includes survival and accomplishments as individuals in a society. Furthermore, Moahi (2012) states that despite the existence of a great wealth of indigenous knowledge in the areas of social relationships, health, and natural and human phenomenon, this knowledge is not yet being sufficiently or systematically integrated into school curriculum to enrich and contextualize learning. Further, Tadesse (2022a) states that the pedagogic,

developmental, and social significance of the Ethiopian indigenous knowledge has not been utilized to the level it should be.

The loose connection between the indigenous ways of life and formal education in the African context is a result of colonialism in the past and globalization in the present persisting across different generations. Semali and Stambach (1997) assert that this divide is attributed to the colonization that damaged the African indigenous knowledge and introduced the Western educational system in the different parts of Africa. The African home environment constitutes indigenous ways of life that encompass what local people know and do, and what they have known and done for generations as parts of their everyday life (Kresse, 2009; Kolawolei, 2009; Semali & Stambach 1997). Such a way of life and knowledge connected to it is developed through trial and error and proved flexible to cope with changes. On the other hand, formal education in the African context, according to Elleni (1992), refers to the conventional mode of learning informed by universal thoughts and pedagogic practices.

Studies such as Isawumi and Oyundoyin (2016), McCarthy (2010), Martini (2010), and Baral (2018) argue that such disconnection between indigenous ways of life and formal education results in the widening of the gap between children's everyday life and formal education which in turn may affect their holistic learning. Accordingly, a curriculum that disconnects African "indigenous" knowledge from formal education fails to support children to contextualize their learning. According to Abebe and Kjørholt (2009), Marshall (2016), Kassa and Abebe (2016), and Sackey and Johannesen (2015), among traditional societies where the home environment is characterized by indigenous ways of life, formal education can only be relevant if it provides children with the intellectual tools, moral values, and skills needed to cope with local realities. In many contemporary African settings, however, the content and organization of formal education are structured in different ways from students' indigenous ways of life and out-of-school experiences (Greenwood, 2016; Shaerma, 2016; Mawere, 2015).

According to Hangartner-Everts (2013), what is significant is that there have been studies disapproving of the notion that puts disconnection between indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge as well as what is local and what is global. Bartel (2010) adds that there has been a continuous attempt to minimize the disconnection between indigenous knowledge and "modern" education, but it has been common to observe an increasing dilemma with the way schools in Africa may prepare children to cope with the local and global changes. Abebe and Kjørholt (2013) and Tadesse and Kjørholt (2013) state that these dilemmas include the way parents may be involved in the school environment to help children learn better, the way indigenous communities participate in and guide the education of their children in schools within their local districts, and the changes that the indigenous forms of education and formal school curricula should undergo to help children develop conventional knowledge based on traditional values. Sharma (2011) and Moahi (2012) argue that these dilemmas have contributed to the difference between home and school environments which in turn has made people's indigenous ways of life to be perceived as inferior to formal education.

Recent studies (Tadesse, 2018; 2019; 2022b; Tadesse & Kjørholt, 2015; Tadesse & Simonsen, 2014) argue that such a prevalent divide between the indigenous ways of life and formal education may affect children's holistic learning in many ways. It may make formal education fail to benefit from the underlying values and principles embedded in indigenous knowledge (Tadesse & Kjørholt, 2013). Because of the disconnection, there could be limited interplay between indigenous practices and formal educational exercises (Benti & Tadesse, 2013). Tadesse (2018) argues that there is also an inadequate understanding of how formal education intersects with indigenous knowledge and how to provide children with locally meaningful learning.

Research context and methodology

In this research, I employed participatory ethnographic activities through which I collected qualitative data embodying children's perspectives on the gap between their indigenous ways of life and formal education. This methodological approach considers children as social actors in their social and cultural settings on their rights. It involves child-centered research methods that can give opportunities for a researcher to construct children's perspectives through closeness and joint participation (Tadesse, 2017). By using joint participation as strategies for establishing trust with children (Tadesse, 2015), I was able to join children's peer groups and attained the ability to participate in their everyday lives (herding cattle with children, taking part in storytelling activities with children in the cattle herding places and at their homes) as an adult friend. My interest in studying the relationships between children's indigenous ways of life and formal education in society has grown out of my long-time connection to the society and continued ethnographic research in their local villages among the society.

The Guji society is part of the Oromo ethnic group. They speak Afan Oromo (Oromo language) and live in a large territory in the distant southern part of Ethiopia (Debsu, 2009). They predominantly inhabit rural remote areas where access to roads, electricity, and clean water is still limited. The Guji population is estimated to be 2.5 million (CSA, 2008) and live on traditional and subsistent agriculture that includes animal husbandry and crop cultivation. They largely exercise animal husbandry which they perceive as an integral part of their culture to which they give profound cultural and economic values. Apart from this, children are perceived to be valuable in the society in many ways (Tadesse, 2015). Firstly, the people perceive children as symbols of blessing and fertility. That is because a family with a large number of children is considered to be prosperous and respectful. Secondly, families understand that children are the prime forces in a household labor division as they share huge roles in agriculture and animal husbandry.

Data discussed in this article are drawn from the ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out among the Guji society from January to June in 2019. The fieldwork was done in three rural villages called Samaro, Bunata and Sorro (See Figure 1). I selected these villages on the basis of practical possibility for continuous participation and observation as well as their ecological and cultural representativeness. The Guji people resides in highland, midland and lowland ecological areas. The everyday life and cultural practices of the people across these ecological areas is slightly

different. To ensure representation of these areas, I selected one village from each ecological area. I used three methods of data collection: participant observation, unstructured interview and focus group discussion. Through the participant observation, I documented children's roles and learning activities at homes, in schools and workplaces (cattle herding places). This method enabled me to learn the way children participate in their home and school learning contexts; how they strive to connect their learning and work practices at home; and learning activities in school and challenges they encounter in the course of this process.

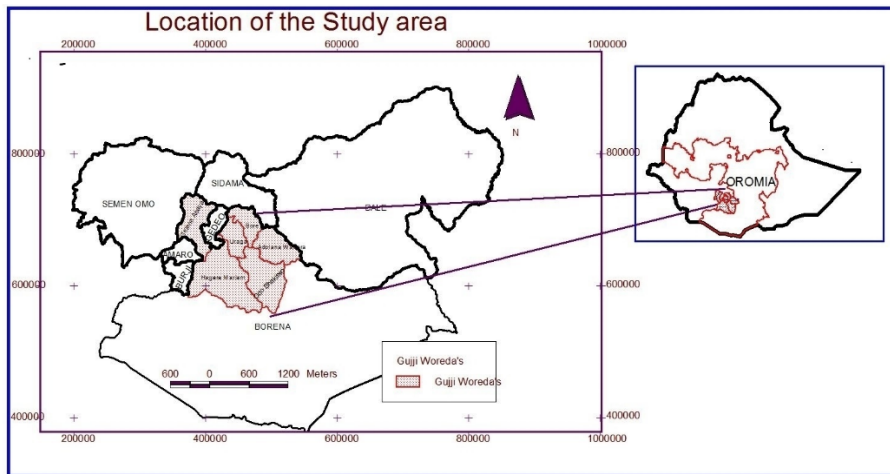


Figure 1: *Research Location*

I conducted unstructured interviews with 25 children (13 girls and 12 boys) who were in the age range of 6 -13 years old. I selected the children through purposive sampling in which I gave attention to children in the observation area and those who were able to express their views clearly. Through the unstructured interviews, I elicited the views and beliefs of the children in relation to what they think of the relationships between their everyday life and school practices, and how they connect their practices at their home and workplaces to their learning in school.

The same children participated in the focus group discussion (FGD). I divided the children into two groups and supported them to discuss on the connections and disconnections between their indigenous ways of life and formal education. Through the focus group discussion, I collected data related to the diverse views on the issues of the connection between children's indigenous ways of life and school participation among the Guji people. Although the major subjects of the research were children, parents and teachers were also participants mainly in the unstructured interviews. The involvement of parents and teachers was meant for reinforcement and triangulation of children's perspectives. Twenty-five children (13 girls and 12 boys), 15 parents and 10 primary school teachers who were selected purposively.

Analysis and Discussion

Play, Work, and Oral Performances as Children's Indigenous Ways of Life

The children and their parents expressed that play, work and oral performances including storytelling, riddling, and singing are integral parts of children's everyday lives among the Guji

people. Besides, home is conceptualized as a space where children learn from indigenous practices and develop their knowledge of culture, environment, and people (Tadesse, 2017). The children also stated that home is a space in which they begin to gain indigenous knowledge from their social and natural environment and develop their survival skills through work activities, social relationships, and oral traditions (Tadesse & Kjørholt, 2015). This is evident from the words of Gadissa (10-year-old boy) who said, “When I am out of school, I keep cattle and I play with my friends at cattle herding places. We would be involved in storytelling, riddling, and sing children’s songs”. It is clear from these statements that children’s indigenous ways of life in society embody work, participation in cultural practices, and learning through such participation. Barite (11-year-old) added all children above five years old are expected to take part in work that includes cattle herding, fetching water and firewood, and looking after younger siblings”. This shows that active participation in different forms of work, cultural processes, oral traditions, and peer interactions are social practices through which children play and learn to become capable persons who can exercise their social duties and rights (Tadesse, 2017). These social and cultural spaces encompass children’s practices of self-socialization, self-empowerment, and development. For instance, it is commonly accepted that children learn values related to the age-based and sex-based role divisions through participation in work activities, cultural practices, and oral traditions such as storytelling, folksongs, riddles, and games. A quote from an interview with Sore (12-year-old girl) illustrates this tradition.

My siblings and I play storytelling and riddling at home. I along with my younger sister and brother (five and seven years) participate in Gada rituals and work activities including fetching water, looking after calves around home, and herding cattle in the nearby fields. We play storytelling, riddling, and song-making with each other while doing these work activities. Our elder brother (14 years old) works on a farm with our father. My younger sister and I work at home with our mother. We cook food and make coffee for the family. We learn through working and playing with our parents and siblings. Not only during the daytime but also in the night time, we all come together and play storytelling and riddling with each other.

Participants in the focus group discussions also expressed that their indigenous ways of life encompass conditions in which they combine work with play and learn through working and playing with their parents and siblings. As notable from the quote above and focus group discussion, children understand that through performing storytelling, riddling, and song-making, they develop their knowledge about their social and cultural environment. They also recognize that their indigenous play practices provide them with the opportunity to learn values related to intergenerational, interpersonal, and inter-gender relationships. In the focus group discussion, it was emphasized that only very young children (children below five years old) are free from the social roles and labor divisions at home. This was also raised in the interview with Edilu (12-year-old boy) as, “Small children do not work. They eat without working. They stay at home and play.” As noted in the focus group discussions, learning such social values through social and cultural participation at home, the children present themselves as vital actors in family

livelihoods and knowledge transmission which Abebe (2007) called “intergenerational interdependence” among family members. Statements from the interview with Edema (11-year-old boy) explain such home tradition.

In our culture, every member of a family is responsible for his/her roles. There are roles for us [the children]. There are roles for my father. There are roles for my mother. If one fails to do his/her roles, our life cannot be in order. For example, if I do not herd cattle, my father cannot work on a farm. That is how we [the children] lead our everyday life.

This quotation shows that the children comprehend that their home environment provides them with an indigenous way of learning through which they develop their capability of active participation in the cultural performances and labor division which in turn is useful for their learning and development.



Figure 2: Children on Indigenous Play Practices

Similarly, data from the focus group discussions show that children understand that through their indigenous play practices and participation in cultural performances, they acquire indigenous knowledge and values by which they understand, manage, and utilize their social and cultural environments. Statements such as “learning culture is done through performing cultural practices, our culture is part of our everyday lives and learning” were often voiced in the focus group discussion and indicate how the children connect their indigenous practices to learning. The home environment, according to the children, embodies the different forms of oral narratives (tales, songs, rhymes, riddles) that their parents provide them as part of knowledge transfer. In this regard, Tadesse (2022a) states that these forms of oral narratives are produced by adults for children to develop children’s knowledge and capabilities. According to Tadesse and Simonsen (2014), the performance of oral narratives draws children and adults together and serves as a situation in which adults educate and entertain their children. The children, on the other hand, accept storytelling as a means of entertainment; thus, attentively listen to their parents/grandparents. The Guji children articulate that in such cultural interaction,

their parents and grandparents educate and entertain them in line with accepted norms and children's interest and motivations. As presented in the interviews and focus group discussions with children, the Guji children present that through their peer play tradition at home - folktales, riddles, songs – they gain values, norms and skills of life essential for their present and future lives. This shows how children are the central agents to initiate, reproduce, and transmit indigenous knowledge (Tadesse, 2013). In general, the children recognize that their indigenous ways of life that contain work, participation in cultural and play practices, peer interactions, and family relationships help them develop their capability through contextual learning and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

Formal Education as “Modernity”

Formal education is a new phenomenon in the Guji society like the other indigenous and agro-pastoral societies in the southern part of Ethiopia (Tadesse & Kjørholt, 2013). School was introduced in the area following the 1990s political change that brought about a better connection between the rural and the urban settings (Deressu, 2013). Following the political change, the governance and political arrangement in Ethiopia became the federation of nine regional states responsible for the expansion and development of formal education at all levels (MoE, 1994). The regional states in collaboration with the federal ministry of education have formulated policies and strategies for the development of education in rural and urban settings. However, these policies and strategies are substantially informed by conventional practices of schooling; therefore, they are rarely sensitive to children's indigenous ways of life among the agro-pastoral society (Tadesse, 2019). Participants in the focus group discussion asserted that schools among the agro-pastoral societies follow fixed schedules similar to schools in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country. This was supported by a key informant who stated that curriculums and course contents of school education among the agro-pastoral societies are based on conventional knowledge and educational trends without ample sensitivity to the indigenous ways of life in the local communities (Cavner & Fox, 2014). The voice of Roba (12-year-old boy) illustrates this reality.

I leave home at 7 am and arrive at school at 8 am. I attend school from 8 am to 3 pm. During this time, I stay in the classroom and learn subjects. We listen to teachers, take notes, do exercises, ask questions and answer questions. We only have 15 minutes break. When the bell rings, we leave the classrooms and rush home. In this modern way of learning, we do have no storytelling, riddling or singing in school.

As notable from the statements above, children perceive that formal education pertains to the modern ways of learning where they are confined in the school from 8 am to 3pm from Monday to Friday and attend “modern” education with no touch to their indigenous play practices.

Dureti (12-year-old girl) also says, “My purpose of attending school is to gain modern knowledge. I attend school from morning to early afternoon. In school, there is no time to play. We sit down in the classrooms and learn different subjects”. Dureti gives more illustrations of children's reality in school. She shows that children's activities in school are restricted to

classroom learning practices with narrow play opportunities. She also indicated that school exposes her and her friends to modern knowledge generated from conventional courses. She believes that learning in school allows her and her friends to become ‘literate’ and ‘modern’ but fails to help them manage their local life. The following statements of Ayano (11- year-old boy) exemplify this view.

I, like all children in my village, am attending school and hope to gain modern knowledge. I want to be able to read and write. However, the knowledge I gained from school has not helped me to become more knowledgeable in farming, herding cattle, and performing cultural practices.

This child understands formal education as a tool to become “modern” and literate but an obstacle to have the skill of leading the indigenous ways of life. This perception has resulted from the increasing interconnection between formal education and people’s local livelihood practices. What is clear from the perspective of Ayano is that the children recognize formal education as a force that helps them move from rural to urban areas, live and work in the urban areas, and detach themselves from agrarian and pastoral ways of life. This reality, in turn, has increased children’s need for the ability to read and write. Words of Niguse (12-year-old boy), reflect this situation as follows.

My father and my mother cannot read and write but they are knowledgeable and skilful in leading their livelihoods. I am happy that I can read and write. After I finish school, I want to get a government job, live in urban areas, and support my parents. But I do not think I will be capable of leading the rural livelihoods.

By these words, Niguse expressed that the underlying reasons for his interest in formal education are literacy, aspiration for a job, and life in the urban setting. As it was clear from the interview with school teachers, the improvement of access to primary schools in each village was accepted as a new phenomenon; thus, motivated parents to send children to school. Similarly, with the national and global drive to put all children in school, the government dictates parents to send their children to school. The increasing interconnection between the rural and urban areas has also made children and their parents perceive formal education as an important means to live a ‘modern’ life. However, the children perceive that formal education does not provide them with knowledge and skills that would help them cope with their indigenous ways of life and assist them survive in the rural areas.

The Gap between Children’s Indigenous Ways of Life and Formal Education as a Learning Challenge

The interplay between indigenous ways of life and formal education is essential for children’s holistic development particularly among societies living in relatively indigenous ways of life (Semali & Stambach, 1997). Holistic development, in this context, refers to comprehensive learning and growing achievement that combines indigenous knowledge with formal education (Semali & Stambach, 1997; Tedla, 1992). Such contexts of learning provide children with the opportunity to develop comprehensive competence that helps them to manage their everyday lives and makes them ready for success in formal education (Tadesse & Kjørholt, 2013). Among

the Guji people, the indigenous way of learning – learning through intergenerational and intra-generational interactions at home-is an integral part of everyday life and is essential for survival and sustainability. This is clear from statements by Galgalo (45- year-old), “We lead our everyday life by using our ancestral knowledge (indigenous knowledge). By using our indigenous knowledge, we teach our children to become wise, hard workers, skillful, respectful, and resilient”. According to this informant, agro-pastoral communities such as the Guji people give deep value to the knowledge and skills of farming, cattle rearing, environment protection, and peaceful interpersonal relationships. They pass these aspects of knowledge from generation to generation through their oral traditions and customary practices. However, the children among the people perceive that the knowledge they gain from formal education fails to help them develop their indigenous knowledge.

On the other hand, Beka (13-year-old boy) asserted that he and his friends attend formal education as they think that it is important for them to become literate. He believes that the connection between his indigenous ways of life and formal education is important because children’s indigenous knowledge can help children to contextualize and understand formal education. This shows that the Guji children have an interest in formal education but also want to remain connected to their local ways of life. However, they articulate that their indigenous knowledge has not been connected to their learning in school as it is clear from Chaltu’s (12-year-old girl) statement, “Our everyday play practices such storytelling, riddling and games are not available in our school. There is not enough time for storytelling, riddling, dramatic plays and creativity in school.” The children believe that learning in school does not help them to develop indigenous play practices to which they are familiar. This is clear from the following conversation.

Researcher: Do you want to perform your indigenous play practices in school? Why?

Gemechu (10-year-old boy): Yes, my friends and I are happy to perform our indigenous plays in school. Our indigenous plays are useful for learning in school.

Researcher: Is there time and opportunity for you to perform your indigenous play practices?

Gemechu: No, we cannot perform our indigenous play practices in school. There is a limited time for such play activities. In school, we can attend school subjects, but we cannot play. It is only during the night times at home and day times in the cattle herding places that we can perform storytelling, riddling, songs and other plays. Our indigenous plays are not connected to learning in school. Our learning in school does not help us learn and perform our indigenous plays.

Gemechu stated the disconnection between formal education and the indigenous ways of life as “Our indigenous plays are not connected to learning in school. Our learning in school does not help us learn and perform our indigenous plays”. These statements portray children’s understanding of the trade-off between their learning from their indigenous ways of life and

formal education. Barite (10-year-old girl) says, “The play and oral traditions that we perform at home do not exist in the school and the learning activities in the school do not give us the time and situation to play our oral traditions in school”. As shown by this statement, the children have the perspective that their indigenous play practices are not connected to learning activities in school and the learning activities in school do not provide them with skills to perform their social roles at home. Another child, Udessa (11-year-old boy) explains the incongruity between these two learning environments, “when I give time to working on farm or herding cattle, I cannot have time to attend school. I am good at working at home, but I am lazy at school.” This child perceives his social activities at home as a challenge to his learning success.

It is clear from the statements of these children that although a strong connection between indigenous knowledge and formal education is essential for children’s learning and development, there is a continuous dichotomization of home-based traditional practices from the disciplinary and pedagogic activities in the school environment. Such dichotomization has been perceived by the children as a learning challenge resulting in their failure to have quality and relevant learning to understand and manage their everyday lives. According to the children, the gap between the indigenous ways of life and formal education can be observed from several dimensions. The first gap originates from the way teachers perceive indigenous knowledge as less relevant for learning in school. The voice of a teacher who participated in the in-depth interview is a piece of evidence for the argument. A teacher said. “Indigenous knowledge is not scientific and structured. It is less relevant to support formal education”. Such perception has influenced the school environment to favor formal education and underestimate indigenous knowledge. As a result, indigenous knowledge has been perceived as “traditional” and lacks universally acceptable meaning and relevance for the modern world. Such a school environment has influenced the children to consider school education as a means to become “modern” and “knowledgeable” persons. This situation has caused an increasing gap between home and school environments in the agro-pastoral society and has perpetuated the perception that indigenous practices at home are inferior to formal education that represents modernization. In such a context, formal education has been considered weak to provide children with knowledge pertinent to their living realities. The second gap is the mismatch between times of children’s work in the home environment and learning in school. Of the four seasons of a year in Ethiopia, winter (December and January) is the peak time during which farmers harvest their crops. This is the season in which children’s work and social contribution at home is highly needed. On the other hand, this is an essential time when the first-semester final examinations are given in primary schools. The divergence between different environments of children is evident from the words of Diribe who was a 12 years old girl.

During the harvesting time, I became bewildered between home and school duties. At home, it is a time when crops are collected. I cannot go to school because I have to harvest crops. That is the way we live. In school, it is a time when final examinations are given. When I miss exams, I cannot continue with attending school as my teachers do not understand our ways of life.

Diribe expressed that the mismatch between the work times at home and learning times in school and teachers' poor recognition of her ways of life has made her home environment not conducive for her learning in school and her school environment is not favorable for her social responsibilities at home. She misses the opportunity to learn in school when she gives time to work and exercise her social responsibilities at home. She misses learning through the indigenous practices at home when she gives time to learning in school.

The third cause of the disparity is parents' perception of school and their lack of motivation to support children to attend school. Words of Elema (46-year-old man) illustrate this reality.

In our condition, children have social responsibilities at home of which work is the first. Besides, they may attend school. They have to herd cattle on the first day and attend school on the next day. This is the way our children work and learn. The problem is that our children stay in the school compound but do not learn as teachers do not allow them to sit in the classroom because of absenteeism. The teachers do not understand our ways of life. Our children neither work on our farms nor attend school properly. That is why we do not want to send children to school.

Statements of the informant above reflect how the disparity between home traditions and school environments shapes parents' perception of school and has a negative impact on their motivation to send children to it. The fact that teachers' disciplinary and pedagogic practices in school are not sensitive to children's social and cultural realities at home discourages parents' interest in allowing their children to attend school.

The fourth cause is the mismatch between girls' social roles at home and teacher's expectations in school. Unlike boys who are free at night times, girls have domestic routines that are extended to midnights during which they make coffee, serve food, clean dishes, put all equipment in order, and prepare food for breakfast. This extended time of domestic work constrains girls' time to work on school subjects. As a result, teachers often chase them out of classrooms. Barite (12-year-old girl) and Takelu (11-year-old girl) expressed such reality as follows.

Barite: I stand outside until the first period ends because the teacher refuses to let me sit in the classroom because I have not done my homework.

Takelu: I have not done the homework that the teacher gave us yesterday. Now, the teacher chased me out of the classroom. So, I must stay outside until this period ends.

I continued asking why the girls could not do their home-take assignments at home and Barite replied as follows.

At home, I am busy with home routines and don't have time to do school assignments. I have told this problem to my teachers, but they do not understand my problems. The teachers do not understand our problems.

Barite's and Takelu's statements clarify the disparity between girls' social responsibilities at home and learning practices in school; the impacts of such disparity on their learning and

development. The disparity is attributed to the failure of teachers to understand the girls' indigenous ways of life at home. This situation reflects how the school environment is not conducive to children's home tradition where the children struggle to learn through accomplishing their social responsibilities. The roles of teachers in supporting children to combine indigenous practices with learning activities in school have not been established as a trend (Knight-McKenna & Hollingsworth, 2016). This is attributed to the limited synchronization between the indigenous and school learning systems.

The inadequacy of synchronization is evident from the contesting views of teachers and parents as articulated by Alemu and Bonaya. Alemu (a primary school teacher) said, "Parents want children to give more time to work than schooling. They lead traditional ways of life and do not know the value of education." In contrast to the statement of the teacher, Bonayya (a father of three school children) said "Teachers think that children do not have duties at home. They do not know our ways of life. They condescend on our indigenous knowledge". Such lack of mutual compliance from teachers and parents originates from the very lack of communication and cooperation among members of school communities which in turn reflects the disconnection between home traditions and school contexts. Such a school environment makes children despise their indigenous practices because the school curriculum does not show that knowledge from such practices is important.

In general, discussions so far show that children among the Guji people observe there is a clear divide between their indigenous ways of life and learning activities in school to which due attention should be given. At home, children assert that they develop their capabilities through the indigenous ways of learning which they want to connect to the learning activities in school. However, both realities of children are less connected and integrated which they perceive as learning trade-offs. As children's formal education is not conducive to their indigenous learning, they fail to integrate their indigenous knowledge with their learning practices in school. It has been clear that parents' perception of school, teachers' perception of local traditions and indigenous ways of life, and the absence of home environment-sensitive school policies are factors that have made the home environment not supportive of children's learning in school. This implies that interventions are needed to enable children to make their indigenous knowledge and ways of life compatible with their learning practices in school.

Conclusion

This article observes children's perspectives on the connection between their indigenous ways of life and formal education and its effects on their learning. It shows that children in the Guji society understand that their indigenous practices enable them to meet the culturally acceptable values underlying everyday life and become productive members of a family while school contexts are characterized by universal pedagogic practices rarely sensitive to their indigenous ways of life. The children have the perspective that formal education seems to be disengaging their everyday lives.

Such disconnection between indigenous ways of life and formal education originates from the lack of effort to relate learning activities in school to people's indigenous knowledge and ways

of life. The lack of integration between the two realities created the tradition of condescending indigenous knowledge as inferior to formal education. As a result of such dichotomization, school teachers perceive formal education as “modern”, and the home traditions as “backward”. This scenario, in turn, created the situation in which schoolteachers undermine the educational values of indigenous practices and ways of life. Added to the intensive poverty, persistent drought and deteriorated health service, the disconnection between indigenous ways of life and formal education puts children at risk of losing their rights to meaningful learning. Although children need their indigenous play, cultural and oral practices become part of their learning practices in school, only limited attention has been given to the contextualization of formal education by connecting it to indigenous knowledge. What is clear from such reality is that ensuring children’s rights to education among indigenous societies can be possible only when the curriculum and pedagogic practices in school are sensitive to and inclusive of children’s indigenous ways of life. Members of the school community (children, parents, teachers, support staff, and management) must be included in the process of creating a formal learning context connected to children’s indigenous knowledge and ways of life. Similarly, there should be viable policies and strategies to make learning systems including curriculum, lessons and pedagogic activities, and teacher education programs sensitive to children’s indigenous practices and local ways of life. Above all, the in-service and preservice teachers training curriculums and courses should be designed in such a way that they enable teachers to make use of the indigenous knowledge and contextualize pedagogic activities. Parents’ involvement in the design of school activities and calendars is also very useful to connect indigenous ways of life to formal education. In general, the discussion in this article indicates that the realities of children among the agro-pastoral societies in Ethiopia require a new schooling paradigm that recognizes children’s traditional ways of life and promotes close cooperation among members of school communities including government, teachers, parents, and children.

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