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## Effects of Assigning Two or More Instructors for a Single Course in a Section in Higher Institutions: A Case Study in Mekelle University

Kassa Michael\*

### Background

It is assumed that education is a key to unlock the future. This being a point of departure, maintaining quality education will bring about changes in the development of society and a nation. It is stated that in maintaining quality education *institutions must understand students mind, give them caring, personalized service and provide them with the knowledge and skill they need to be successful* (Coate 1995:131). As a causative effect one way to develop quality education refers to the style of teaching learning process.

Although there are different methods or approaches of teaching, each approach is assumed to have its own merits and demerits. From and among these different approaches in the teaching learning, Ethiopian higher institutions of learning most commonly follow the lecture method besides the handling of researches. It is now common knowledge that the lack of skilled task force in the higher institutions in Ethiopia is getting worse from time to time.

Mekelle University, as one of the higher institutions in Ethiopia, possesses many responsibilities in developing targeted profiles, but it shares the problem of lack of skilled task force as stated above.

As a way of tackling this problem different strategies have been employed. These include: pulling experts from different institutions - government and non government organizations; offering courses in block form and sometimes inviting part-time teaching. Molla (2001) has studied the implications.

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Another form of managing such a teaching learning process, as specially exercised in the Faculty of Dry Land Agriculture, is assigning two or more instructors to handle a single course in one section. For example, up to four instructors have been assigned to teach one course in one semester and in one section at Mekelle University.

The presumed benefits of such a system as stated by Mukherjee (1999) are that *it makes better use of each teacher's individual interests and strengths; that it avoids unnecessary replications, and teaching in front of one's colleagues is a beneficial practice providing some evaluative feed back.* This indicates that those instructors assigned for one course are working as a team. Although such an approach is a common experience in the teaching learning process, the usual and observed practice in Mekelle University is that instructors shared the course contents topic by topic and thus present their own share of topics or sub-topics separately.

It is obviously required in education that the delivery of courses should include work outline for a semester and for a session beginning from introduction, presentation, stabilization or synthesis, upto evaluation. In keeping with this intent, quality of education has to be sensed in one part as the way students learn. If students do not perform well, it's their problem or fault, irrespective of how they have been taught, the environment in which they have been asked to learn or differences in their learning styles (Guskin, 1994:25).

Studies indicate that the academic achievement of students is not only a function of students' ability but also the environmental factors that students are living in. Among these factors the instructor-student relationship could be considered. Whenever a course is offered by more than two instructors, the time span an instructor stays in contact with his students is short and as a result he/she could finish the topic/sub-topic without knowing his/her students.

As a way and means of course delivery, the exercise taken so far at Mekelle University (assigning two or more instructors to teach a

single course) was supervised in use of oral questions and discussions with students and instructors. Beyond this, the practice was taken as a complex question by the academic staff. Out of the discussions, some students were observed complaining about the approach. Because of these, the writer intended to address the issue and to try to look into possible assessment as deemed to the objective and profile of higher level education.

### **Limitation**

Some of the limitations of the study are:-

- It does not include all the required subjects of study.
- The respondents are very few.
- It simply aims at the base line analysis of what is being done.

### **Methods**

In order to investigate the case, the researcher undertook the following:

- A list of courses assigned for more than two instructors was identified.
- A sample of 20 instructors was taken
- A sample of 20 students from and among those who participated in such courses was taken.
- A questionnaire consisting of 12 items was developed. The questions mainly focused on reflecting the respondents' general perception of the teaching approach and its method of implementation.
- Views and perceptions were gathered using structured and semi-structured interviews.
- Different examining approaches were taken.

## Discussion

In Mekelle University, the list of the courses offered by two or more instructors included:

- Biometry and Experimental design
- Research Methodology
- Land Use Planning
- Principles of Crop Production
- Environmental Science

**Table 1: Summary of Student Responses to the Questionnaire**

Item/Question	Responses		
	Agree X10%	Disagree X10%	I don't Know x10%
Teaching a course by two or more instructors is benefiting at Mekelle University	3.68	3.68	2.63
Teaching a course by two or more instructors brings different and variety of concepts	2.80	6.67	0.53
Different instructors(if assigned) present their course/topic/sub-topic separately	9.47	0.53	---
The degree of coherence in the concept of each topic/sub-topic is as expected	1.11	6.67	2.22
Assignment of two or more instructors for a course affects the learning condition of students	3.68	2.63	3.68
Instructors do finish their topic before transferring to the next instructor	5.26	1.58	3.16
It brings sound and genuine grading	2.50	6.00	1.50
It truly develops the required knowledge in the student capacity	2.27	1.11	6.67
It is a good system that should continue as it exists in Mekelle University	2.00	7.50	0.50
All assigned instructors always attend in every session	---	9.50	0.50
Instructors intend to give their own separate topic examinations	2.78	3.68	3.54
The approach to such an assignment of instructors for a single course should be improved and needs modification	8.50	0.50	1.00

**Table 2: Summary of Instructor Responses to the Questionnaire**

Item/Question	Responses		
	Agree X10%	Disagree X10%	I don't Know x10%
Teaching a course by two or more instructors is benefiting at Mekelle University	6	3	1
Teaching a course by two or more instructors brings different and variety of concepts	6.67	22.2	11.1
Different instructors(if assigned) present their course/topic/sub-topic separately	5.79	2.63	1.58
The degree of coherence in the concept of each topic/sub-topic is as expected	2.78	5.56	1.66
Assignment of two or more instructors for a course affects the learning condition of students	5.79	3.68	5.3
Instructors do finish their topic before transferring to the next instructor	3.16	1.58	5.26
It brings sound and genuine grading	3.16	5.26	1.58
It truly develops the required knowledge in the student capacity	4.44	3.33	2.22
It is a good system that should continue as it exists in Mekelle University	3.68	3.68	2.63
All assigned instructors always attend in every session	1.58	5.26	3.16
Instructors intend to give their own separate topic examinations	7.89	0.53	1.58
The approach to such an assignment of instructors for a single course should be improved and needs modification	8.94	0.53	0.53

Based on the above responses, the reaction of students and instructors to the (coherence and smooth development of the course content and synthesis in achieving the required objective) assignment of two or more than two instructors for a single course is explained here under. As described by the responses, 60% of the instructors agree on the item that teaching a course by two or more instructors is effective at Mekelle University. But, about 63.1% of the students disagree and some indicated the option *I don't know*. The item, *Teaching a course by two or more instructors brings different and variety of concepts* has been agreed by 66.7% of instructors and, on the contrary, disagreed by 66.7% of students. This shows a clear difference in the perception of its value. As has been stated in the background, team teaching is of advantage if properly handled and followed. Against this fact, 57.9% of instructors and 94.7% of students disagree with team teaching and state that instructors should teach their own topic or sub-topic separately. As a complement to this fact, the response to the item *All assigned instructors always attend every session* has been disagreed by 52.6% of instructors and 95% of the students. This shows instructors might lack the ground to proceed from what those sharing the teaching of a particular course have taught. This will further definitely affect the coherence of the concept taught by different instructors. In a similar way, the item *the degree of coherence in the concept of each topic/sub-topic is as expected* has been disagreed by 55.6% of instructors and 66.7% of students. This obviously rectifies the effect of the approach that is being currently handled at Mekelle University.

It is relevant to mention whether there really exists supervision or not in the approach. This has been defied by the response to the item *Do instructors finish their topic before transferring to the next instructor*, that is, 52.6% of the instructors responded *I don't know*. One thing that I would like to mention here is that about 55% of the respondent instructors are heads of departments or bear some responsibility. The fact that 52.6% of them don't know means that continuous supervisory task is not properly carried out.

From what has been given above, how should this system be treated? Should it continue or not? needs to be checked. The response to the item *it is a good system that should continue as it exists in Mekelle University* has been disagreed by 75% of the students and actually, 73.2% of the instructors either disagree or state *I don't know*. Only 36.8% of the instructors have agreed on the continuation of this system. This however might not deny the use of such a system of teaching absolutely. This issue is stated in response to the item *the approach to such an assignment of instructors for a single course should be improved and needs modification*. 89.4% of the instructors and 85% of the students indicated *agree*.

The main points that can be extracted from the discussion given above are:-

- The approach as exercised at Mekelle University has got some shortcomings.
- There is no approach of team teaching to the courses assigned to two or more than two instructors.
- There is no supervisory scheme.
- There is a problem of coherence in the concept taught, including lack of synthesis and consolidation.
- This needs improvement and modification.

**Table 3: Averages of the Responses to the Questionnaire**

Responses	Students	Instructors
Agree	36.7	49.90
Disagree	41.7	31.07
Not decided	21.6	19.03

As it is observed from Table 3, there is a difference in the physical number average between students and instructors showing that there

is no common understanding on the issues mentioned or probably on the approach of assigning two or more instructors for a course.

### **Views and Suggestions as given by the respondents**

Among the views and suggestions given by the respondents on the assignment of two or more instructors for a course in one section as experienced in Mekelle University are:-

- It depends on the type of specific course.
- If instructors are in frequent contact and if there is a share of ideas, it is a good approach.
- It is worse specially when the instructors are paired as senior and junior ones.
- It is seriously affected by individual differences and thus needs careful assignment
- Such courses that are assigned for more than one instructor need to have an already produced teaching package.
- It is of advantage if departments can regularly and continuously collect information on courses handled by more than one instructor.
- It is a problem in that the course lacks flow and continuity; it brings redundancy of concepts; some important concepts may be missed specially whenever there is difference in the academic rank.
- If properly managed it will bring diversified knowledge.
- It should be based on instructors' interest and experience.

## Conclusion and Recommendation

In education, specially taking the three domains, for the best attainment of objectives, having diverse and variety experience is worth benefiting. e.g. for courses that require theory and practice, it can be best if assigned to two specialists where one can best deliver the founding and foundation theory and the other best present the application or practical. But, it does not seem feasible to assign a course for more than two instructors if the course is solely requiring concept presentation; for it may lack coherence, synthesis and linearity and can worsen students' problems of understanding the subject matter in depth.

Besides this, sometimes it becomes compulsory to assign two or more instructors or to replace an instructor. In such a case there should exist a mechanism of check and balance, developed teaching package, and continuous supervision to ascertain the smooth transfer of the course covered and the attainment of the required objective.

Finally, the writer recommends that the issues require detailed and continuous study and follow up in order to come up with feasible solutions.

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