

Students' Learning Practices as a Function of Curriculum Type and Residence Experiences in Selected Preparatory Schools of Amhara Region

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Abstract: This study tried to examine the contributions of preparatory school students' motivation, commitment and participation on their learning practices. It also checked whether or not there were significant differences in students' learning practices, motivation, commitment, and participation with respect to their curriculum type (NSC and SSC) and previous residence experiences (urban and rural). The study identified 312 (192 males and 120 females) randomly selected Ghion, Woreta and Durebete preparatory school students of Amhara Region as its participants. Questionnaire and interview were the data collection instruments of this study. One sample t-test, independent t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regressions were employed as the major analysis techniques. Findings of the study were the following. Preparatory school students' learning practices were below the expected position. Even though students' participation seemed to be at average, their motivation and commitment in learning were below the expected level of performance. As the regression analysis indicated, 33 % of the successes and failures of students' learning practices was attributing for the interactive effect of motivation, commitment and participation. In comparison to urban-background preparatory school students, rural-background preparatory school students were better in their learning practices, motivation and commitment but they did not have significant differences in their participation towards learning. Similarly, NSC students were better in their learning practices, motivation and commitment than their counterparts in SSC. Level of participation, however, was better in SSC students than the NSC students

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did. Based on its findings, the study suggested that preparatory school teachers and students (particularly who are working with SSC and urban-background students) need to work their teaching learning processes as challenging as possible. This in turn helps to facilitate motivation, commitment and participation which are taken as basic for attaining better learning practices in school.

Background of the Study

Students' learning practice in school curricula is the ultimate goal of all stake holders in education. All educational inputs such as teachers and other staffs, the curriculum, buildings and other teaching learning equipments are placed in schools for the sake of reinforcing and fostering students' active, interactive and proper learning practices over the school contents/curriculum experiences (Waes et al, 2010). Learning the designed curriculum, in fact, incorporates searching variety of past, present and future experiences which have relationships/differences with the respective curriculum under discussion. In support of this, Adelman & Taylor (2008) and Tableman (2004) contended that proper learning practices mainly devoting to make the available curriculum meaningful and practical for each learner by connecting the learning processes with his/her real-world events and needs. Through such approaches, the learner may ensure an internalized and integrated type of learning practices and outcomes that lead him/ her towards the expected behavioral competencies.

The learning practices are the sources of students' behavioral change which is expected from the accomplishments and outcomes of certain academic cycles (unit, course content, a semester, a year or a program). Real learning practice is usually associated with positive academic outcomes, including achievement and persistence in school; and it is higher in classrooms with supportive teachers and peers, challenging and authentic tasks, more opportunities for choice of learning, and sufficient structure in encouraging high mental thought efforts (Fredricks, et al, 2004; Waes et al, 2010). In general terms,

learning practices include all engagements of students in thinking and doing about the theoretical and practical aspects of a lesson. Listening to presentation, taking notes, doing assignments, presentations, class works, exams etc could be taken as learning practices. Learning practices might be accomplished in different types of settings (e.g. in groups, independently, cooperatively or competitively) within (or sometimes without) the supervision of the teacher (Redding & Walberg, 2012).

Even though the practice of learning is mainly attached to students devotion, all ingredients of the teaching learning processes including the teacher and the curriculum advised to be conscious for checking their knowledge stand continually and substantially (Adelman & Taylor, 2008) because it is highly dynamic in nature (Billington et al, 2007). When they are thinking and doing in such a way, they will pursue the academic substance in further detail and thoughtful manner. This in turn has significant positive contributions for students' committed learning practices and then outcomes persistently (Hardre et al, 2007; Shamrock, 2009).

The concern for improving students' learning practices began since formal schooling has been started in ancient Egypt and china around 2nd-3rd century A.D (Lee & Smith, 2001, McNeely, 2004). However, until the first decade of the 19th century literacy and numeracy skills were the only focus of teaching learning in schools (Lee & Smith, 2001). Moreover, the system lacked to have planned curricula and other learning tasks to enhance students' learning practices. Nevertheless, the introduction of the notion of social efficiency made the schools concerned for increasing students' proper learning practices and then the attainment of the expected outcomes that have to aim in serving the society: the front purpose of schooling (Seyoum, 1996). Following this, the concern of students' learning should focus on strengthening the capacities of children to act progressively through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, useful skills, and appropriate attitudes (Aggarwal, 1993; Shamrock, 2009; Waes et al, 2010) for varied businesses in the society.

The issue is similar in the Ethiopian context too. Though the traditional and religious system of schooling in Ethiopia began at least as of the 6th century A.D. (Adane, 1993), it was not as such systematic to improve students' all rounded learning practices. Even, the trends of modern education of Ethiopia has been introduced before hundred years ago, it has been criticized for its inability to make students' learning practice purposeful, relevant, accessible and equitable (Adane, 1993; Ministry of Education, MoE, 1994) for all segments of the society and the learners in the classroom as well (Amare, 2001). Responding to those problems, the government of Ethiopia has launched a new Education and Training Policy and implemented it since 1994 (MoE, 1994, 1998, 2003). These documents give more emphasis to dynamic approaches of the teaching learning processes through introducing and focusing problem-based, action-oriented, and continuous/process-based type of curriculum deliveries.

In this regard, Amara (2012), in his review, stated that all documents provided by the Ministry of Education such as the serious of education sector development programs, school improvement programs, quality education framework, etc put students' learning practices at the heart of their writing although its actuality is unsatisfactory (Derebssa, 2006; World Bank, 2016). Dunne (2010), Girum (2010) and World Bank (2016) further contended that throughout the world including Ethiopia, students' learning practice seems inadequately performed with less commitment from students as well as from teachers. Accordingly, different researchers and educators have invested their time to understand the status of students' learning practice and how it is progressed and qualified by taking different personal and curricular aspects into account (Topoul, 2006; Rammala, 2009; Redding and Walberg, 2012). With this consent, all the levels of schooling (whether it is primary, secondary or higher education level) have to be responsible for the success of students' learning practice and its outcome so as to prepare them for the next academic or work life scenario.

The present study, however, gave attention to examine the status of preparatory school students' learning practices as per the structure/type of the curriculum, students' previous residence experiences, motivation, commitment and participation. For the last 20 and above years (MoE, 1994) the system of general education in Ethiopia has been fixed as 4-4-2-2. Structure 4-4-2-2 refers 4 years lower primary (Grades 1-4), four years upper primary (Grades 5-8), 2 years lower secondary (Grades 9-10) and 2 years upper secondary (Grades 11-12) schools. Upper secondary school (Grades 11-12), which is also named as preparatory school, was taken as a concern of this study.

Preparatory school education in Ethiopia, which has only two streams (social and natural sciences) (MoE, 1994), also has to take itself as a place where students get relevant and sufficient preparation for their university education. Therefore, this school is an intermediate level education that transfers the students from primary and middle level education, education for general literacy skills, to the preparation of higher education, education that demands depth and specialization (Rammala, 2009; Lee & Smith, 2001). To get well preparation for the next higher education, students, therefore, have to work hard and exhibit better learning practices in the preparatory school level. However, there is a consensus of opinion that the quality of lower secondary and preparatory school education is falling behind the standard (Dribssa, 2008; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; MoE, 2010). In this regard, Dribssa (2006) and Adelman and Taylor (2008) stated that though countries were committed to provide budgets and other resources for quality education to their citizens, in many countries including Ethiopia, children's learning practices are not in a position to master and achieve basic skills, knowledge and attitude that expect from each level of schooling.

Amare et al (2006), MoE (2010) and USAID (2008) also remarked that, despite the level of concern of the Ethiopian government for quality learning engagement and then for quality education, current conditions of schooling processes throughout the country are disturbing and less engaging to the academic matters (World bank, 2016). Therefore, it

seems in need of certain compelling activities. If preparatory level of education, as a bridge for higher education, is at a risk and with no investigation and consideration it is likely to happen problems at subsequent levels and types of higher institution learning which are of course expected to provide quality graduates for the job options in the society (MoE, 2010; Rammala, 2009). As a result, the overall developmental aspects of a nation might be affected negatively. Such weaknesses observed in the system of education in general and in the preparatory schools in particular were taken as the rationale that the present study intended to focus in examining students' learning practices and related variables so as to indicate gaps and their possible bridges as well.

Students' learning practices might be affected by different variables which are related to teachers, the nature of the curriculum, students' characteristics, school contexts, etc. Of such variables, this study focused on the broad classification types of the preparatory curriculum (social science, SSC and natural science curricula, NSC) of Ethiopia (MoE, 1994), and some selected student-related variables such as motivation, commitment, participation and of course students' previous residence experiences (urban and rural settings). Skinner and Belmont (1993) and Aggrawal (1993), for example, stated that learning is a matter of individual learners' will and motive. When there is a will and motive, there is learners' commitment and participation thereby there will be reasonable amount and quality of academic practices (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Such arguments showed that for learning to occur the learner should be willing and motivate to take his/her responsibility. That is to mean willingness of the learner that might be explained through his/her motivation, commitment and participation is the most important factor for learning practices (Connel & Wellborn, 1991; Rocca, 2010; Skinner & Belmont, 1993; Topoul, 2006). The type of curriculum (being SSC and NSC), which tells something about the nature of the learning content (Fuzia & Mahmood, 2012), and previous residence experiences (being rural and urban), which is mentioned as one of the fertile grounds of school learning practices (Cox et al, 1988), also have effects on

students' learning practices (Opoku-Asare, 2015; Dunne, 2010; Grant, 2013; Lemlech, 2002). This shows that the aforementioned variables are among the critical attributes of the success and failure of students' learning practices. Therefore, examining such variables contribution on preparatory school students' learning practices seems timely and well-accepted.

Statement of the Problem

The main purpose of this study was to examine the contributions of some individual learner related variables such as motivation, commitment, participation, type of curriculum [natural science curriculum (NSC) and social science curriculum (SSC)] and previous residence experiences (being rural and urban settler) on students' learning practices by taking some selected preparatory schools of Amhara Region as its research setting. The study preferred preparatory schools because of the following underlined reasons. The scholastic achievement of preparatory school students is a license to pass to the university where most of the school children and their parents take as an important destiny of schooling (Rammala, 2009; Dobbie & Freyer, 2011) might be taken as the first reason. The second possible reason is that preparatory school in Ethiopia has introduced with a different interface in curriculum that attempts to address freshman stage higher education contents (MoE, 1994; MoE, 1988). As the last possible reason, as far as my knowledge is concerned, though this school level is this much important, no studies focused peculiarly to preparatory school students' learning practices. As a matter of such facts, the present research came into the board by taking students' learning practice and related variables as its major attention.

Motivation seems a potential energy that directs someone towards certain practices and ideas. That is why it gains more popularity than other learner-related variables (Connell and Welborn, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In support of this, Aggrawal (1994) contended that motivation is the very heart of the learning process because it directs the

learner towards achievement and enhances level of participation. This reminds that students' learning performance is closely dependent upon motivation (Baranek, 1996; Williams et al, 1996). Research findings about students' participation, the other independent variable of the study, showed that students' level of participation has a positive correlation with students' learning. Students who take part actively and genuinely in their learning tasks retain better than those who don't (Frederic & Mcolsky, 2004; Kristin, 1995). Similarly, Karussanu & McAuley (1995) and Frey & Fisher (2010) suggested that students who actively participate in their learning are successful to achieve their instructional goals. However teachers need to differentiate whether students' participation is within the right truck of the learning processes and outputs of certain topic (Amera, 2012; Amare, et al, 2006) in order to protect irrelevant dialogues and practices.

Students' commitment is another important independent variable that can determine academic achievement. According to Shamarock (2009), students to be effective in their learning require not only motivation, but also a personal commitment. Commitment is the ability to transform motivation and interest into practical reality in order to successfully perform a particular action (Shamarock; 2009; Girum 2010). In this sense, commitment is a moderating factor between an individual's potential and actual performance, and assimilates that directs individual potentials towards the accomplishment of personal goals. Hence, students leaning effort and commitment determine their levels of engagement in learning (Aggarawal, 1994). In general, the practice of students' learning could be influenced by their motivation, commitment (Baranek, 1996) and participation level (Tefera, 2012; Rocca, 2010) because these variables, especially motivation and commitment, are internally triggered which can be taken as critically important for enhancing learning practices (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Therefore, because motivation is taking as major instrument to encourage commitment and participation, they together have positive contributions to have better learning practices (Frey & Fisher, 2010; Connell and Wellborn, 1991). If learners' motivation, commitment and participation

are below the expected level, their learning practice is affected negatively (Williams & Williams, 2009; Kristin, 1995).

Curriculum type, which is powerful in determining the nature of contents, activities and other teaching learning strategies (Amera, 2012; Billington et al, 2007), matters students' style, effort and amount of learning (Dunne, 2010; Hausfather, 2001) for curriculum is a source of data for students' behavioral change. Therefore, curriculum can be taken as the second decisive elements of the learning processes in fact next to students' presence since it is responsible to change the learner from illiterate to literate position (Lemlech, 2002). Accordingly, the nature of students' learning practice is varied as a function of being social and natural science curriculum (Fauzia & Mahmood, 2012). For example, procedural, rigid and rule-oriented contents (which are the typical features of natural science curriculum) (Philips, 1997; Okasha, 2002) have a power to encourage learners to be motivated and hard worker than flexible, fluid and argumentative contents (which are the typical features of natural science curriculum) (Billington et al, 2007) do. Other writers like Datcher (1992) and Tableman (2004), on the contrary, stated that because social reality (the major content of social science curricula) is accustomed with the learner, as a human being, it has a capacity to encourage students' learning practices. Therefore, in order to see what looks like in our context, examining the status of learning practices and related variables as per the nature and types of curriculum and then suggesting something workable and visible alternatives for facilitating students' learning practices seems to be very important.

Previous residence experiences (being urban or rural dweller) also another important factor in students' learning practices. This experience might contribute something (positive or negative) for learning because the learning process generally is a matter of adjusting past experiences with what we have today and will have for tomorrow (Waes et al, 2010). In other words, no learning process that starts from zero level experiences (Lemlech, 2002, Taba, 1962). In addition, it is not as such doubtful to see varied experiences between urban and rural background

students (Redding and Walberg, 2012; Cox et al, 1998). As a result, it is possible to conclude that urban background students mainly characterized in their flexible, fast adaptable, easily boring, less engaged, etc (Opoku-Asare & Siaw, 2015; Walker, 2006) nature. Rural background students, on the other hand, might be defined as relatively rigid, hard worker, persistent, etc (Peter & Abigail, 2001).

The context at home, at the village, at the community and at the school context of urban area is relatively different from rural areas (Grant, 2013) though these days, due to the satellite technological development, there is a kind of attraction for having a nearby feature between the two areas: Urban and rural. However, residence location (being urban and rural) has its own impact for learning practices though its magnitude is varied from one type of investigation to the other (Adedji & Olaniyan, 2011). For instance, Walker (2006) and Opoku-Asare & Siaw (2015) reported that since urban students have better resources including well trained and experienced teachers, they practiced better in their learning. On the contrary, other writers (Peter & Abigail (2001) and Redding & Walberg (2012) contended that as a consequence of their challenging and hard working environmental experiences, rural-ground students showed better learning practices at the school. Because the presences of these two residential areas are unavoidable (Hardere et al, 2007), investigating the status of students' learning practices as per their residence area thereby to develop a lesson to the future might be taken as one of the useful agendas in education.

From the above theoretical and empirical review, this study developed the following conceptual framework (Fig. 1). The framework serves as a road map for developing research questions, methods, analysis and the findings as well.

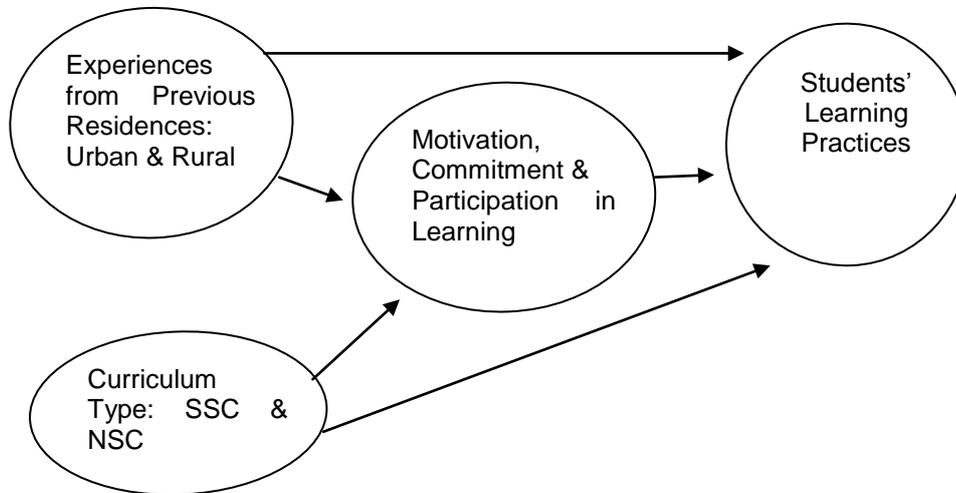


Fig. 1: Conceptual Map of the Study

By taking the theoretical literature review and the conceptual map (Fig. 1) done so far into account, this study tried to examine preparatory school students' learning practices with respect to their motivation, commitment, participation, curriculum type and previous residence experiences. Accordingly, the study attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the statuses of preparatory school students' motivation, commitment, participation and learning practices?
2. What are the independent contributions of preparatory school students' motivation, commitment and participation on their learning practices?
3. Are there variations in students' motivation, commitment, participation and learning practices between rural- and urban-background preparatory students?

4. Are there variations in students' motivation, commitment, participation and learning practices between the NSC and SSC preparatory students?

Significance of the Study

This study may add valuable inputs for different stakeholders of the school on how and what should be done in the future for the betterment of students' learning practices. That is to say, getting proper understanding about the current status of preparatory school students' motivation, commitment, and level of participation in learning helps parents, teachers and school management to adjust their theorizations and actions about these variables accordingly. Stakeholders (especially teachers, parents and students themselves) can also understand the contextual differences of preparatory school students' learning practices between the two types of curricula (SSC and NSC) and experiences from previous residences (rural and urban) thereby to respond accordingly. The study can also increase educators' aspiration to pursue further investigations in the area of learning practices in different types and levels of schooling.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Learning practice: refers all types of learner's engagements (e.g. thinking, demonstrating/doing something, listening, reading, responding for assessment tasks, etc) for learning a certain theoretical and practical curriculum by referring variety of experiences in order to make sense what the student currently expect to learn about. 16 five scale questionnaire items were employed to measure students' learning practices.

Motivation is the pressure that urges the learner from the internal as well as the external feelings towards learning thereby accelerates actions to get responses for the learning task. It was measured with 13 scale questionnaire items.

Commitment refers students' emotional and physical effort, strength and persistence to be successful in their learning practices and measured by using 11 scale questionnaire items.

Participation represents the extent that students are involved in asking, answering, discussing and doing something in a way that it supports the teaching learning processes. It was measured with 12 five scale questionnaire items.

Curriculum type: In the Ethiopian preparatory school the structure of the program mainly classified into two broad categories: Social science and natural science curriculum. **Social science curriculum (SSC)** incorporates subjects like history, geography, business area courses, etc, and **Natural science curriculum (NSC)** incorporates physics, biology, chemistry, etc.

Previous residence experiences: refer students' academic and non-academic experiences because of their residence location (being urban or rural) while they studied their education before Grade 11. **Rural background students** mainly referred those students who studied their pre-grade 11 education in the rural area schools mostly by engaging themselves in different agricultural and other family-income generating activities in their free time though it is hardly to state that they are totally free from other technological entertainments. Students who studied their pre-grade 11 education in urban area schools are mainly assumed to engage themselves in different soft tasks (e.g. mini-shopping) and/or variety of entertainments (e.g. watching TV, attending Face book, playing football, etc) referred as **urban-background students**.

Methodology of the Study

Research Design

Since data was collected from large size sample through questionnaire so as to investigate currently available truths about preparatory school students' learning practices and related variables, quantitative descriptive survey was the main design of this study.

Data Sources and Research Setting

Major data sources of this study were preparatory school students because the major issue of the study, learning practice, was mainly their duty. By taking their (a) nearness to Bahir Dar City (the researcher's residence and (b) capacity of having number of sufficient students who completed their pre-preparatory schools (Grades 1-10) in rural areas, Ghion preparatory school (found in Bahir Dar City), Woreta Preparatory School (in South Gondar, Woreta Town) and Durebete Preparatory School (in West Gojjam, Durebete Town) were purposively identified as the research setting of this study.

Sample and sampling Techniques

The populations of this study were 2512 (1378 females and 1134 males) Grade 12 students of the above three mentioned schools in 2016 academic year. Grade 12 students were selected because their three semester experiences make their questionnaire and interview responses as well as learning practices are rich enough about the scenario of preparatory schools. If, for example, grade 11 students are considered, they have only a single semester (first semester) experience of preparatory schools which is minimal to give full-fledged and matured data about. Bearing this in mind, just for the sake of simplicity and manageability in the research procedure, 312 (192 males and 120 females) Grade 12 students were selected through stratified random sampling. This sampling technique is helpful to have reasonable

number of sample students from each dimension of the variables (such as NSC and SSC students as well as rural- and urban-background students) treated in the study. As long as the procedure of sampling is done to the standard (Singh, 2006), such a sample size (e.g. 312 in this study) is sufficient for manipulating data via various inferential statistics thereby to represent a population that it draws. Accordingly, actual questionnaire respondents' distribution in line with the intended variables was reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants in the Study

Variables	Previous Residence		Total
	Urban	Rural	
Curriculum Type			
SSC	79	72	151
NSC	81	80	161
Total	160	152	312

Twelve interview respondents (6 teachers and 6 students) were selected through purposive sampling by taking their willingness, experience, curriculum type, distributions among the three selected schools into account. This was helpful to have key informants in each of the contexts. For the sake of anonymity, teacher respondents labeled as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5 and T6; student respondents as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5 and S6.

Instruments

The data collection instruments of this study were questionnaire and interview.

Questionnaire: was used to collect information from the identified samples. Therefore, data about students' learning practices, motivation, commitment, class participation and personal data (sex, name of the school, previous residence and curriculum type/academic stream) in this study were secured through questionnaire. The researcher, based on the available and related literature (Adelman and Taylor, 2008;

Aggrawal, 1994; Frederic & Mcolsky, 2004; Kristin, 1995), developed the questionnaire items. It was to be so because ready-made or tried-out instruments, which are relevant to the variable under investigation, were not accessible for the researcher. The questionnaire had 54 items with a 5 point scale that labels as strongly disagree (0), disagree (1), slightly agree (2), agree (3) and strongly agree (4). Three professionals (one PhD graduates in curriculum and instruction and other two PhD graduates in educational psychology) judged the face and content validity of the questionnaire. In addition to see the language and format clarity of the instrument, the researcher purposely informed the professionals to see items' content-wise relevancy to the intention (research questions) of the study. As per the comments of these professionals, three items were rejected due to their inappropriateness to the purpose of the study. On the other hand, one item was added as to the suggestions of the invited professionals. Finally, the number of items reduced to 52. From the data collected for the main study, questionnaire reliability indexes were calculated through Cronbach alpha before the major data analysis was taking place. The obtained reliability indexes were 0.91, 0.81, 0.88 and 0.79 for students' learning practices, motivation, commitment and participation respectively. No items and their data were rejected since their reliability indexes were above the expected measure.

In the questionnaire students' learning practices measured with 16 items, motivation with 13 items, commitment with 11 items and participation with 12 items. To avoid anticipated language barriers, language experts translated the questionnaire into Amharic language. In order to minimize problems that may arise from lack of clarity of items and/or other problems, the researcher himself administered the questionnaire. The investigator distributed questionnaires to 325 (199 males and 126 females) students during the second semester of 2016 Academic year. Thirteen questionnaires were not returned. This made the final sample size to be 312 (192 males and 120 females). The rate of return of the questionnaire was about 96 percent, regarded as high for a survey study of this kind.

Semi structured Interview: was conducted with selected teachers and students. Teachers and students, as interviewees, were helpful to secure some relevant data about students' learning practices and related learning variables so as to support the questionnaire data. Ten items were used as a guide for the interview sessions.

Procedures of the Study: once the topic is identified as researchable area further readings and practical observations of preparatory schools were done. The problem and its rationale were framed and basic questions were established. Accordingly, the study identified its design, data sources and settings. Instruments were developed from the related literature of the topic. Then, professionals reviewed the instrument and some amendments were taken. Questionnaire items were translated into Amharic with the help of language expert (an associate professor in Amharic). Both questionnaire and interview was administered by the author. This could be taken as good opportunity for ensuring clarity for the doubts raised by the respondents. The data collection procedure (both questionnaire and interview) took around 45 days. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed via SPSS and thematic narration, respectively. Lastly, conclusions and recommendations were made.

Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data were analyzed through one sample t-test, independent t-test and multiple regressions. **One sample t-test** was used to analyze the current status of students' learning practices, motivation, commitment, participation. **Multiple regression analysis** was applied to see the unique and interactive contributions of selected independent variables (motivation, commitment, participation) on the dependent variable (students' learning practices). **Independent t-test**, on its side, worked to examine the mean differences of motivation, commitment, participation and learning practices between rural- and urban-background students as well as between SSC and NSC students. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The qualitative data were analyzed via thematic narration (as per the pre-designed research

questions) in order to supplement the quantitative data and to seek some kinds of justifications about the results of the study. Therefore, in the qualitative data analysis attention was given to study the collected data in order to see the thematic line of the data in line with the general purposes and research questions of the study.

Results

This investigation attempted to examine the contributions of preparatory school students' motivation, commitment and participation on their learning practices. It also checked how much students' learning practices, motivation, commitment and participation are varied as a function of their curriculum type (SSC and NSC) and the context of their previous residence experiences (being urban and rural). To this end, the results obtained were presented and interpreted in the following subsequent sections. Next, in Table 2, the current statuses of the variables are displayed.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and One-Sample t-test Values for Preparatory School Students' (N = 312 & expected mean = 3) Learning Practices (SLP), Motivation (SM), Commitment (SC), and Participation (SP).

Sources of Variation	Observed Mean	S.D	t-observed	P-Value
SLP	2.68	9.23	4.02	0.00
SM	2.72	8.12	3.84	0.02
SC	2.46	10.16	4.12	0.00
SP	2.94	4.56	1.06	0.08

All the observed mean scores are below the expected mean of the population (3.00) (Table 2). As one-sample t-test showed, the observed mean scores of students' learning practices (2.68), motivation (2.72) and commitment in learning (2.46) were significantly below the expected mean of the population (Table 2). However, the mean score of students' participation in learning (2.94) did not have statistically significant differences from the expected mean of the population. This indicates that students' motivation and commitment towards their learning were below the expected value for sustaining healthy and effective learning practices. That is why the overall students' learning practices (2.68) also observed below the assumed level of performances. On the other hand, students' participation seemed at average status. That is to say, students' participation was neither below nor above the expected mean. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that preparatory students' level of participation is not bad.

Correlation coefficient results among the variables of the study are displayed in Table 3. High and positive relations between learning practices and commitment (0.80), motivation and participation (0.76), and motivation and commitment (0.72) are seen in Table 3. Moderate relationship is observed between motivation and learning practices (0.49) and participation and commitment (0.42). On the contrary, the relationship between learning practices and participation (0.13) was taken as weak.

Table 3: Correlation Coefficient Results among Students' Learning Practices (SLP), Motivation (SM), Commitment (SC) and Participation (SP)

variables	Learning Practices (SAA)	Motivation (SM)	Commitment (SC)	Participation (SP)
SLP	1			
SM	0.49*	1		
SC	0.80*	0.72*	1	
SP	0.13	0.72*	0.42	1

This correlation result clearly indicated that students with high commitment were likely to practice high learning endeavors but moderate in the case of motivation and weak in the case of participation. Motivation has well recognized relationship with commitment (0.72) and participation (0.76) and therefore it seems to have a favorable ground for both of them. The relationship between participation and commitment (0.42), on the other hand, are not as such strong to ensure positive relationship between them thereby to have more encouraging and favorable support one to the other.

As it is shown in the regression analysis (Table 4), results of the unique proportion of variance explained by students' motivation and commitment in their learning practices are 14 percent, $[F(1, 309) = 11.12, P < 0.05]$, and 18 percent $[F(1, 309) = 14.12, P < 0.05]$, respectively. Participation in learning alone could not make unique contribution for students' learning practices though the unique proportion of variance explained by the interaction of the three independent variables (SM X SC X SP) is 33 percent $[F(1, 211) = 10.68, P < 0.05]$. In general the regression analysis revealed that the effect of the variables over students' learning practices designates as students' motivation (14%), commitment (18%), participation (0.03%) and interactive effect of motivation, commitment and participation (33%). This indicates that 33% of the success and failure of preparatory school students' learning practices is attributed for their motivation, commitment and participation.

The remaining 67% could be attributed for the other extraneous variables which were not included in this study.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Statistics of Academic Achievement by Students' Motivation (SM), Commitment (SC), Participation (SP) and Their Interaction

Source	DF	Sum of scores	R ²	F
SM	1	412.07	0.14	11.12
SC	1	367.16	0.18	14.12
SP	1	286.84	0.03	0.06
SMXSCXSP	1	348.80	0.33	13.64
Regression	3	288.47		6.42
Residual	309	1996.65		
Total	312	2285.12		

Independent t-test analysis (see Table 5) revealed significance differences in students' learning practices ($t = 12.23$), motivation ($t = 9.43$), and commitment ($t = 14.6$) between rural- and urban-background Preparatory school students. The t-test analysis in Table 5 shows that rural-background preparatory school students did better in their learning practices and related variables in comparison to the urban-background preparatory school students. That is why rural-background preparatory school students' learning practices (2.88), motivation (2.92) and commitment (3.04) are significantly greater than urban-background students' learning practices (2.44), motivation (2.04) and commitment (2.11) (Table 5).

Table 5: Independent Sample t-test Results of Students' Learning Practices (SLP), Motivation (SM), Commitment (SC) and Participation (SP) between Rural-background (N=152) and Urban-background (N=160) Preparatory School Students

Variables	Mean		Standard Deviation		t-obtained	P-value
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural		
SLP	2.44	2.88	5.82	4.46	12.23	0.01
SM	2.04	2.92	4.82	3.83	9.43	0.03
SC	2.11	3.04	4.94	3.06	14.68	0.00
SP	2.95	2.91	5.68	3.82	1.49	0.78

Therefore, in their learning practices, motivation and commitment rural-background preparatory school students were relatively in a better position than urban-background preparatory school students do. On the contrary, the t-test analysis in Table 5 does not show significant variations between urban-background (2.95) and rural-background (2.91) preparatory school students' participation in learning (with $t=1.49$). In other words, preparatory school students did not have any differences in participation whether they are from urban- or rural-background residences. Therefore, students seemed to ready for participation regardless of their previous residence experiences.

Another independent t-test analysis (see Table 6) shows that NSC students (2.90) were significantly greater than SSC (2.38) students in their engagement towards the learning practices (with $t = 4.16$). The same table, Table 6, also verifies that there is statistically significant differences between the mean scores of SSC (2.16) and NSC (2.89) students' motivation (with $t=5.74$), and between the mean scores of SSC (2.35) and NSS (3.12) students' commitment (with $t=12.42$) of course with the favor of NSC students in both cases.

Table 6: Independent Sample t-test Results of Students' Learning Practices (SLP), Motivation (SM), Commitment (SC) and Participation (SP) between Natural Science (NSC) (N= 161) and Social Science (SSC) (N= 151) Curriculum Students

Variables	Mean		Standard Deviation		t-obtained	P-value
	SSC	NSC	SSC	NSC		
SLP	2.38	2.90	3.41	5.23	4.16	0.02
SM	2.16	2.89	2.96	4.83	5.74	0.01
SC	2.35	3.12	3.88	4.26	12.42	0.00
SP	3.18	2.54	5.69	6.33	8.76	0.02

This implies that NSC students were more motivated, committed and involved in their learning practices than the SSC students do. On the other hand, in their participation level, Table 6 indicates that there was statistically significant differences between SSC (3.18) and NSC (2.54) students in such a way that SSC students were better than their counterpart in the NSC (with $t=8.76$). That is to say, SSC students did learning participation better than NSC students.

Discussion

As one sample t-test analysis indicates, students' participation was just in its average level (around the expected level, 3). This result tells that students have optimum courage to participate in their learning via questioning and answering, involving in discussions and the like. Students' learning practices, motivation and commitment, on the other hand, are below the assumed level of performance. This result indicates that students were not in a position to be motivated and committed which are mainly emerged (Aggrawal, 1994; Shamrock, 2009) from the internal landscape of the learner and have strong effect for the learning practices (Baranek, 1996). This might be the reason for the minimal occurrence of students learning practices. The results of this study seemed to entertain certain inconsistencies. For instance, students' participation [which was less related (see Table 3) and with minimal

contribution (see Table 4) to students' learning practice] is indicated as if it was performed well and to the status (see Table 2) though its contribution for students' learning practice is poor. This possibly shows that there might be some kinds of shallow and unrelated participation which may not be emerged from individual learners' genuine, motivational and internal landscape. Such kinds of practices in learning are highly susceptible not to lead students towards genuine and internalized learning practices which might be taken as strong negative consequences for the overall endeavor of the education system.

However, as Williams et al (2009) and Ryan & Deci (2000) stated, under the normal circumstances, motivation serves as favorable context for commitment and participation and then they together work for better learning practices. Therefore, undoubtedly, students' genuine and focused participation in learning is highly affected with the nature and status of their motivation and commitment (Frey & Fisher, 2009; Topoul, 2006) though this study showed the other way round. In this regard, interview respondents (S4, S5, T2, T3, T5 and T6) reported that now-a-days students' classroom participation and their learning practices might not be the real expressions of their knowledge, skill and attitude about a topic/subject that they expect to exhaust. Teacher respondent T6 further said, "Malpractice of continuous assessment and assignment-based teaching learning seemed to inflate the picture of real participation. Because students can secure more scores from group work, field and home assignment reports, and other forms of continuous assessment, they did not worry for participating in actual and true learning practices." That is why, though the actual learning practices of students are below the expected level, 'participation' in learning seemed to be at the expected level (see Table 2).

All the variables are correlated strongly and moderately except the weak correlation obtained between learning practices and 'participation' (see Table 3). The study, moreover, found that commitment for learning is the most contributing factor (18%) for students' learning practices followed with motivation (14%) (see Table 4). Commitment as the most influential

variable for students' learning practices seems acceptable because it has a capacity to translate individual motivation, interest, self efficacy, etc into practice /actualization (Hardere, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Shamrock, 2009). But, participation almost had no contribution for learner's learning practices (Table 4). In this regard, in his interview response, T4 explained, "The essence of participation in the classroom is taking as equivalent with frequency, quality and quantity of speech rather than dealing with the learning contents exactly." Respondent S2, S3, S6, T1 and T2 said that most of the teachers and students in the school take classroom participation as simple exercising, talking and forwarding any kinds and levels of ideas in front of the class regardless of seeing its relevancy between the contents that students are saying and what topic is under discussion. That is possibly one of the reasons that 'participation' failed to contribute something for students' learning practices.

In comparison of the variables of this study, Baranek (1996) and Skinner & Belmolt (1993) noted that commitment and motivation in most cases are internal triggers to think and practice something rather than imposed from the external environment (e.g. teachers and parents), therefore, they might not be done in artificial manner. In this regard, the result of this study, which identifies commitment (around 18%) and motivation (around 14%) as best contributors of students' learning practices, seems to consistent with the explanations of Frey & Fisher (2010) and Williams et al (2009). Participation, however, seemed to initiate more from an external (teachers and colleagues) trigger to say or demonstrate though it sometimes initiated from internal trigger too (Karussamu & McAuley, 1995). Therefore, due to the pressure from teachers, student colleagues, and the lesson, (Hardere et al, 2007) participation might be occurred for the sake of participation rather than always being genuine that emanated from the internal and real concern of the learner about a given curricular discussion.

The other purpose of this study was to see the differences in students' learning practices, motivation, commitment and participation with reference to their previous residence background (rural and urban) and curriculum type (NSC and SSC). Regarding to previous residence experiences, this study found that learning practice was significantly greater in rural-background preparatory school students than their partners in urban-background. This study is in favor with many of the previous studies' (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Grant, 2013; Peter & Abigail, 2009; Redding & Walberg, 2002) findings. Adedeji & Olaniyan (2011) reported that as a result of their hard working, rural-background students have supremacy in academia. This might be further justified as follow. Rural-background students may (a) take education as a tool to escape from the hard nature of agricultural practices and rural life, (b) not waste extra time for non-academic engagements such as face book, different kinds of movies, games, etc. and (c) experience challenges and hard working, which are critically valuable for learning, from their agricultural and related practices (Peter & Abigail, 2001). As a matter of such facts, rural-based students are relatively more of academic-oriented than investing their time and energy on side issues including different entertainment provisions (Hardere et al, 2007).

On top of this, the tasks related to learning are relatively more enjoyable practices for rural-background students than for the urban-background ones (Adedji & Olaniyan, 2011; Grant, 2013). Supporting to this, interview respondents (T1, T3, T5, S3, S4 and S6) also reported that rural-background students, in order to ensure their life through learning, have to work a lot on the academic matters that will have direct influence to students' learning practice and outcome positively. In support of this, T3 further said,

In general, rural-background students develop a kind of learning approach which encourages themselves towards more academic engagements than urban-background students do. In addition, we teachers also encouraged to help students who are more interested and devoted (e.g. rural-background students) than the less interested and devoted ones (e.g. urban-background students).

This seems natural because working with motivated and interested students learners is more comfortable for teachers to have successful teaching learning accomplishments than working with less (no) motivated and interested ones (Shamrock, 2009; Aggrawal, 1994).

Similarly, as the present study found, motivation and commitment in learning were also better maintained in rural-background students than urban-background students do. This is possibly one of the reasons that rural-background students have tried better in their learning practices than the urban-background students did. This finding indicates that motivation and commitment need to facilitate with further qualified educational inputs such as teachers' support, students' devotion to learning that have a capacity to nock students' inside landscape (Hardere et al, 2007; Shamrock, 2009) for learning. This will be helpful to involve students in more academic hard working and challenges thereby to develop motivation and commitment towards better learning (Baranek, 1996; Skinner & Belmont, 1993), which can be taken as favorable ground for better achievements in education.

In this study students' participation, on the other hand, did not show statistically significant variations between the two groups (rural- and urban-background) of students. This shows that students' participation may not be grounded on their involvement to previous challenges and hard working as well as on their motivation and commitment that they had. Rather, it might be initiated from any kinds of mere interaction with teachers and colleagues whatever the nature and quality of interaction is. This result and its argument for justification seem to go in line with the

work of Amare et al (2006) and Rocca (2010). These authors contended that teachers and students took participation in school as the major goal of schooling because they satisfied for the sake of students' raising hand, saying something or demonstrating some actions whether or not their involvement is in the right truck with the lesson content under discussion. In this regard, respondent S3 said, "These days regardless of our background as well as contextual differences, we can explain the ideas what we feel and demonstrate the practices what we attempt to do." Even to the extent students do not care about whether their participation is scientifically right or wrong (S2, S4, T2, T4 and T5). Such kinds of participation (that has no any significant amount and quality of contribution for their academic learning practices, as clearly observed in this study,) can be gained in easy ways even from the day to day engagements with the environment out of school though it might had little contribution to the classroom discussion.

In terms of curriculum type, the study found that commitment and motivation in learning are exhibited higher among natural science curriculum students than social science curriculum students do. There was also significant difference between NSC and SSC students' learning practices in favor of NSC students. Fauzia and Mahmood (2012) obtained a similar finding. They reported that natural science students are courageous and hard working in their academic practices. This variation of learning practice is also seemed consistent to Grade 12 National University Entrance Examination results of Ethiopia. In this exam NSC students were scoring better than the SSC students (Bahir Dar Town Education Office, 2015). NSC students' better learning engagement seems to be justifiable because motivation and commitment in learning, which were better in NSC students, have positive contributions over the content learning engagements which was not the case of participation in learning (see Tables 3 & 4). Therefore, it is not surprising to see relatively better learning practices in NSC students, who had better motivation and commitment in learning, than SSC students actually did.

Participation, which is weakly related to students' learning practices, was observed higher in SSC students (who scored less in learning practices) than in natural science students (who scored relatively high learning practices). In support of this, S6 responded,

የሶሻል ሳይንስ ይዘቶች በባህሪቸው አንድ ተማሪ ምንም አይነት ዝግጅት ሳይኖረው ክፍል ውስጥ ቢገባም ሲጠየቅ የሚለው ነገር ላያጣ ይችላል። ተፈጥሮ ሳይንስ ትምህርቶች ላይ ግን አንድ ሰው ስቴፖችን በደንብ ተዘጋጅቶ ካልገባ በመላ ምት ወይም በማመሳሰል ሊሳተፍ ይከብደዋል። ይህ የሚነግረን ተፈጥሮ ሳይንስ ትምህርት ላይ ተሳተፎን አልፎ ተርፎም የመማር ውጤታማነትን ለማረጋገጥ ካስፈለገ በተነሳሽነት እና በቁርጠኝነት መስራት እና በችግሮች ውስጥ ማለፍ የግድ እንደሆነ ነው።

This Amharic quotation translated as ‘it is possible to say something in social science content discussions even though some one has no any preparation. In natural science contents, however, you cannot say anything without preparation and actual engagement. Therefore, in natural science lessons, in order to ensure certain level of participation and then effective learning practices, it needs to work with motivation, commitment and problematic situations.’

Commitment and motivation in learning are mostly encouraged where there are hardship and challenging contexts (Baranek, 1996; Shamrock, 2009; Skinner & Belmolt, 199) because these contexts push students to elicit more energy for motivating and committing oneself than soft and relaxed environments do. The result of this study, in this regard, seems consistent with such arguments. Naturally, the learning contents of natural science are a bit demanding and needs serious and attentive follow-ups which have a capacity to initiate students towards motivation and commitment (Dunne, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2010; Phillips, 1997). On the contrary, they contended that since the contexts and tasks in social science curriculum are dealing about the social reality which is nearest to human experiences, they are minimally challenging for students. In this case, therefore, it is not that much difficult to guess answers and to

raise questions even though the participation (questioning, answering, discussing, demonstrating, etc) might not be in the right pattern. That is why, in this study, though SSC students' participation was higher than their counterparts in the NSC, they were lesser in their motivation and commitment than the NSC students.

All in all, this study found that except participation in its crude attempt and practice, the other variables were below the expected average performances. The study, moreover, realized that students' motivation and commitment in learning, which will encourage through challenges and hard work, were positively and persistently contributing on learning practices but not 'participation' which was not in its real sense and focused towards the basic content of learning. As a result, NSC and rural-background students' [who were relatively being encouraged towards hard work and challenges via the hard nature of the content (in the case of NSS) as well as previous challenges related to serious rural work engagements (in the case of rural-background students)] motivation, commitment and learning practices were better than their counterparts in SSC and urban-background students.

Conclusions and Implications

The following conclusions are drawn as per the analysis and discussions made above.

1. Preparatory school students' learning practices, motivation and commitment in general were significantly below the expected standard. That is to say, students were not motivated and committed to accomplish their learning practices as to the assumed level of devotion. Students' Participation was found in its average level though its appropriateness seemed in doubt for a reason that it did not contribute anything for students' learning practices. Therefore, even though they did not do right participation in a right scenario, students' involvement to say and/or demonstrate something that they feel right was not bad.

2. All the variables of the study were correlating strongly and moderately expect the weak correlation observed between participation and students' learning practices. This study, moreover, indicated that 33% of students' learning practices can be attributed for motivation, commitment and participation with independent contributions of motivation (14%), commitment (18%), and participation (0.03%).
3. Rural-background preparatory school students (who relatively experienced hardship environment in their previous agriculture related life) were better in their motivation, commitment and learning practices than urban-background (who relatively experienced soft environment in their previous and current city life) ones. There was no statistically significant difference between rural-background and urban-background preparatory school students' classroom 'participation'. This result by itself informs that students' participation is an ordinary occurrence rather than emerged from the internal and longitudinal experiences, which can be taken as very important ground for proper learning.
4. NSC students were better in their learning practices, motivation and commitment than SSC students did. Students' 'participation' about learning, however, was better in SSC students (because of the softness/fluidness nature of the contents that SSC has) than their partner in the NSC. That is to say, in SSC it seems easy to raise some points of discussions in a topic even with no previous readiness.

In line with the major findings of this study, the following implications were forwarded.

- Teachers and students have to work for achieving participation in learning in its real senses and practices than doing participation through speaking and demonstrating anything irrelevant (less relevant) to the topic of the day's learning. This cannot be an opportunity to enhance students' effective learning over the planned curricula and then to exhibit better and effective learning practices in their schooling. Therefore,

teachers should not allow students to talk and demonstrate extremely out of the lesson under discussion rather the discussion ought to be within the content of learning under the lesson and its related. Similarly, students must be focused on their learning in the curriculum of course with related, extended and insightful arguments and actions which are very useful to make learning real and sensible.

- Teachers should be devoted for promoting students' learning motivation, commitment and participation (particularly for SSC and urban-background students) by exposing them to the challenging and demanding learning conditions of course with serious follow up. School teachers can realize this fact through designing and implementing demanding theoretical/practical learning tasks/contents that facilitate high amount of mental investments of students. This will be expedient for the promotions of students' motivation, commitment, genuine participation and learning practices.
- School teachers and students (particularly for SSC students) have to think for developing well designed and thoughtful learning tasks (e.g. making check and balance about the philosophies, theories, and principles of social science contents) rather than dictating them directly from the sources (e.g. books and handouts). This will increase challenges and hardships among students so as to inspire their learning practices, motivation, commitment and participation from internal.
- Like that of the rural-background students, urban-background students have to be eager and initiative to take their education as a serious business rather than consider it as waiting station. By doing so, they can be successful in their education and then protect themselves and their nation from unnecessary wastages in resources which are paid for schooling practice which is ended up with dropouts and failures. Not only students but also teachers should be serious in using provoking and initiative tasks for all students' learning engagement in general and for urban-background students in particular. Among other attempts, teachers have to follow whether or not students' learning experiences (assignments, class works, classroom discussions, tests, etc) are accomplished properly, on time and of course with each of the student's peculiar effort.

- By implementing the above suggested alternatives, it might be possible to initiate motivation, commitment, participation and then learning practices among preparatory school students rather than showing a sort of 'participation' which is unrelated (or less related) to the curricula under discussion.
- As it is mentioned in the methodology section, this study calculated its reliability indexes from the main study data. Therefore, future researchers (of course if they want to do so) in the area may check the reliability of these questionnaire items via pilot testing and use for their purpose.

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