Teaching-Learning Approaches and Practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) Schools (Ye'Abinet Timhirt Betoch): Implications for Pedagogical Skills in Ethiopian Higher Education

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Abstract: *The study aims to explore the EOTC Schools' (i.e., Ye'abnet Timhirt Betoch) teaching and learning approaches and practices that could be useful for Higher Education Institutions. To carry out the study, a qualitative approach was used, and both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. Key informants for the primary data were selected using a purposive sampling technique that considered their expertise and experience in teaching and learning in the EOTC Schools. Thus, amongst the school types in EOTC, both Qinie Bet (School of Poetry) and Metsaheft Bet (School of Books) were visited. This was because the teachers and the students in the schools had the experience of learning and teaching in other school types. Three data-gathering instruments, namely, interview, FGD, and observation, were employed as primary data-gathering tools. Similarly, books, journals, and educational policies were utilized as secondary data sources. The findings revealed different kinds of teaching and learning approaches and practices in EOTC schools which help learners create successful learning and teaching environments and opportunities, and this can contribute to improving the quality of higher education in Ethiopia. Further studies are recommended to be made into Ye'abnet Timhirt Betoch to benefit Ethiopian Higher Education at large.*

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Introduction

Before the introduction of modern education in Ethiopia in 1908, with the opening of Menellik II public school, the Church served as a center of Education. EOTC has also vested recognition as the only institution offering education in Ethiopia (Hable Silasie and Tamrat, 1970). And education has fallen out of favor with the Church and surrounding institutions including monasteries and convents and the individual men and women (Pankhurst, 1955). In the past few decades, there was the experience that beginners started learning the Fidel (alphabet) in the Church and its surrounding schools. Besides, the Yeneta (the teacher) praised the students when they did well and rebuked them when they were undisciplined. Such an experience makes its own contribution to the construction of ethical citizenship in Ethiopia (Hable and Tamerat 1977; Kefyalew, 1999). Furthermore, in the imperial courts, the counselors and judges were selected from the scholars of EOTC, and the Church schools were the only source in the country to produce civil servants such as governors, judges, scribes, treasurers, and general administrators.

Indigenous education is deeply rooted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church schools and is recognized as one of the oldest educational systems in the world (Pankhurst, 1962). The EOTC School existed through time and rooted itself in the socio-cultural and different physical environments of its own land. Normally, the sponsor of students was the community (Habte Mariam, 1980 E.C. Richard Pankhurst (Pankhurst 1962, 241) quoted one of the very few observers, Rev. Douglas O'Hanlon, as an intellectual who gave more attention to church education as he declares:

> In the Christian parts of Abyssinia, there is a church almost in every village and every church has its own school which is an honored institution. The school is the recruiting ground for the church services. It is a mortar in the building of the Christian life of the country and in the outlying districts. It is the main missionary factor.

This rich experience of EOTC education has been transmitted from generation to generation. In the 17th century, the Ethiopian Philosophers, Zar'a Ya'qob and his disciple Wolde Heywot (Sumner, 1986), wrote in the philosophical book by Zar'a Ya'qob developed an approach that learning should be accompanied by free debating and methodological doubt (Hateta Zer'a Ya'qob, N.D). This approach is currently in use in different Church schools especially at Qinie Bet (school of poem) and Tergwame Metsaheft Bet (School of Books). Moreover, both Zar'a Ya'qob and his disciple Wolde Heywot advised the importance of education, the benefit of having different knowledge types to increase job opportunities, and the function of vocational schools and advance human life (Tesfu, 2019). Zar'a Ya'qob's and Wolde Heywot's advice is considered one element for the development of education, proving itself as an Indigenous method of teaching and learning

The Indigenous education system does not seem to have drawn as much attention as is desirable in the Ethiopian education system. The teaching-learning approaches in the Ye'abinet Timhirt Bet are perceived to be effective. They produce students who can grasp the content of the lessons they are taught (Abiy, 2010). When they graduate as teachers or scholars, students of these schools have equal potential in each sect Ye'abinet Timhirt Bet (EOTC Schools), despite their effectiveness, have not been studied much.

The result of modern education, especially higher education is perceived unacceptable as it is bound in complicated problems (Yizengaw, 2007). Moreover, researchers pointed out that the quality of higher education has been declining over time (Amare et al, 2006, MoE, 2010 USAID, 2008). According to the World Bank (2016), limited students' engagement during lessons is held responsible for the decline in the quality of education, is the limited students. Moreover, in the classrooms, teachers employ teaching methodologies that are adapted from Western countries. For example, educational workshops held are mainly sponsored by The British Council (Fisher & David, 2006:309), and even in Ethiopian universities, the HDP (Higher Diploma Program) was first

held by British scholars. The outcome of education in the country is unsatisfactory in general, and the quality of higher education has become a concern because of its decline (Amare, 2006 cited in Abebaw and Aster, 2012).

A large body of literature depicted that the cause of the decline in the quality of education is the passive teaching and learning system practiced in universities. On the quality of education, UNICEF (2000) remarked that to be considered as education, several issues such as the quality of learners, quality of learning environment (quality of school facilities, class size, learning environment, teachers' behaviors, discipline policies), service delivery and quality curriculum content should be approved in a way that there is education quality. In addition, Edwards (2002) cited in Ahmed (2016) stated that the common causes of poor quality in education include poor curriculum design, unsuitable and poorly maintained buildings, poor working environment, unsuitable systems and procedures, lack of necessary resources, and insufficient staff development. In the above notes, the teaching and learning approaches and practices are not considered as a factor for the quality of education. However, the teaching-learning approach unquestionably affects the quality outcomes of education as it is intermingled with the interaction between students and a set of learning tasks in general (Martton, 1975 cited in Fry, et al, 2009, P. 16).

Teaching methods play a significant role in increasing students' achievement. A serious investigation conducted by Tefera (2018, p. 11) ascertained that "the actual practice in universities shows that the implementation of these curricula has not been consistent, and much teaching remains largely teacher-centered, traditional, and lecture-based." Thus, in the classroom, because of the lecture method, students are inactive, and they are idly busy listening and note taking from the lecture of the instructor. Basically, the lecture method is a teacher-centered method, and the implication is that learners are passive and learning tends to be superficial, (Durosaro & Adgoke, 2011). In the Ethiopian case too, the teaching-learning processes in the Ethiopian

universities were highly teacher-centered (Ayalew et al, 2009). The other factor that affects the teaching-learning process in the HE is the way the instructors employ assessment (Fautley, 2008; Norton, 2007). The instructors usually assess their students subjectively or objectively for pass or fail decisions. Therefore, these testing strategies allow students to engage themselves in routine memorization and rehearsal due to the passive learning practice (Baird, 2011). Hence, students fail to master the subject matter. In general, unless teaching is accompanied by appropriate methods, it leads to the production of unqualified students.

The education system in Ethiopia is in different problems which need to be investigated. Notably, Ethiopian education does not have room to put into consideration indigenous knowledge. The policy and program documents do not say anything about indigenous knowledge (Belay & Belay 2016:108). In this paper, ye'abnet timhirt bet is considered one of the sources of Indigenous knowledge. Previous studies on EOTC school's teaching and learning approaches and practices have been very limited in scope. Woube (2000) in his work *revisiting traditional education* pointed out that the purpose of considering traditional education (i.e. both EOTC and Islamic schools) is to help Ethiopian modern education. Aselefech (2014) aimed to push further the role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in developing adult education. In her thesis, she revealed that the EOTC schools played significant roles in the development of adult education.

However, the EOTC teaching-learning approaches and practices are not well investigated, and significant attention is not given to them. Therefore, it is important to explore the indigenous teaching and learning methods and practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church School (ye'abnet timhirt bet). The approach practiced in the schools is useful to improve the quality of higher education in Ethiopia. In addition, the study aims to bridge the gap between Ethiopian modern education in general and higher education in particular with the EOTC traditional teaching-learning approaches and practices. The findings of the study

can benefit the students, teachers, society, the church, and the country at large.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out how EOTC school teachers and students accept teaching.
2. To explore teachers' teaching methodology in the EOTC schools.
3. To examine students' engagement with the community that can help the achievement of their learning.

Literature Review

The Concept of Teaching-Learning Approaches and Practices

"A thousand teachers, a thousand methods" – a Chinese Proverb. In the classroom teachers use different kinds of approaches that can help the learning of their students. In the last 60 years, several kinds of teaching approaches have emerged in the world though their characteristics are different from discipline to discipline (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:15). Research examines teaching-learning approaches and practices in the way teaching and learning can be successful to secure the quality of education because teaching approaches and practices are intermingled with effective classroom learning and student outcomes (Brophy and Good, 1986; Wang, Haertel and Walberg, 1993).

Methodologists present different definitions, but analogous in their goal, for teaching-learning approaches and practices because they mainly emphasize the learners' success. The mutual intent of teaching-learning approaches and practices is focused on the success of education. For example, (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:15) described "an approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of teaching-learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught." The approach is established by theoretical

principles on which the design of education is based. The approach is also understood as the body of linguistic, psychological, and pedagogical theories that inspire the teaching practice where the educational theory and research take place (Stern 1983).

Dart et al (2000) approaches show the learning objectives and their orientation that include furthering knowledge, repetition and reconstruction, application, understanding, observation from different perspectives, and shaping thought. Arvind & Kusum (2017) also describe the approach as a broader term than method. It is a view of looking at things. They also claimed it has no scientific logic, but the approach is a set of ideas. It is an overall view or ideas to face a problem. It is a personal philosophy of teaching. The approach can also have many methods. A t teaching approach is the way we teach.. Thus, an approach is a set of principles, beliefs, or ideas about the nature of learning that is implemented in the classroom to ensure the success of teaching-learning.

The practice in teaching-learning refers to an action or exercise that is performed in an actual classroom. Teachers' Practice has a key influence on student learning - a desired outcome and primary goal of higher educational institutions (Aglazor, 2017). Salawu and Adeoye (2002) define teaching practice as a practical teaching activity by which the student-teachers are allowed in actual school situations to demonstrate and improve training in pedagogical skills over a period of time.

Several studies have described aspects of teaching practice that are related to effective classroom learning and student outcomes (Brophy and Good, 1986; Wang, Haertel, and Walberg, 1993). For instance, close monitoring, adequate pacing and classroom management, clarity of presentation, well-structured lessons, and informative and encouraging feedback are known as key aspects of "direct instruction". They have generally been shown to have a positive impact on student achievement. Teaching practice is normally an important component for

a teacher. It grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment (Marais & Meier, 2004:220; Perry, 2004:2).

According to Marais & Meier (2004:221), teaching practice is the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Marais and Meier (2004:221) pointed out that teaching practice is a challenging but important part of teacher training, especially in developing countries where the effectiveness of the teaching practice can be weakened by a variety of challenges, such as geographical distance, low and uneven levels of teacher expertise, a wide-ranging lack of resources as well as a lack of discipline among a wide cross-section of learners and educators.

To sum up, the notion of teaching-learning approaches and practices is associated with issues of how education should be successful in making effective the learning of the students in a particular classroom. Mainly, the approach is the issue of theoretical principles which serves as a base of the design of education. Teaching practice refers to the teachers' and learners' experiences of working in the classrooms and schools.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a case study type of qualitative research design in order to explore the teaching-learning approaches and practices in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Schools. The reason behind using a qualitative research design in this research is that the study mainly focuses on personal experiences, subjective opinions, and feelings. It explores certain group's behaviors, which rely on natural settings (Dornyei, 2007:32; Kothari 2004: 5).

Research Site

There are different kinds of EOTC schools (Ye'abnet Timhirt Betoch) in different places in Ethiopia. However, for this study, schools such as *Qinie Bet* (School of Poem) and *Tergwame Metsaheft Bet* (School of Commentary of Books) were purposefully selected. Therefore, the researcher collected data from the most popular Church Schools found in the following three sites (countries):

- *South Wollo, Hayq:* Monastery of Hayq Debre Negodguad Qedus Estifanos and Abune Eyesus Mo'a *Qinie Bet* (School of Poetry) and *Ye'aratu Guba'eyat Terguame Metsaheft Bet* (School of Commentary of the four Books).
- *Gondar City:* Church of *Menbere Mengest Medehanealem Ye'aratu Guba'eyat Terguame Metsaheft Bet* (School of the commentary of the four Books) and Church of *Qedame Adbarat Abere Qedus Giyorgis, Bete Yared weBete Wadla Qinie Bet* (School of Poetry)*.
- *Bahir Dar:* Church of Debre Selam Be'ale Egziabher and Church of Felege Giyon Abune Tekle Haymanot *Ye'aratu Guba'eyat Terguame Metsaheft Bet* (School of the commentary of the four Books) and Church of Selam Adrgiw Tsion Maryam and Church of *Debre Selam Be'ale Egziabher Qinie Bet* (Schools of Poetry).

Sources of the Data

For this research, the two major data sources were employed. These are primary and secondary data sources. The primary data sources were collected through three major tools, such as interview, focus group discussion (FGD) and observation. The secondary data sources were ancient manuscripts, books, research journals, online research, educational policies, etc. The secondary data sources are helpful to get extended data to strengthen the findings of the study.

Concerning the sources of primary data, the participants were selected from two schools, *Qinie Bet* (School of Poem) and *Terguame Metsahefte Bet* (School of Commentary of Books). The impetus for the selection of the two schools arose from observing that the teachers and students in both schools inevitably passed through the other schools of EOTC, and most of the participants had good achievements in their learning experience.

Sampling Technique

The population for this study consisted predominantly of the teachers and students of EOTC schools. There are different kinds of schools at the EOTC. In this research, two schools, namely; *Qinie Bet* (School of Poem) and *Metsahefte Terguame Bet* (School of Commentary of Books) were purposefully selected. The purposive sampling was selected to get rich and varied insights into the issue under investigation (Dornye, 2007:113). Purposive sampling benefits the researcher to have the best information to achieve the objectives of the study (Kumar, 1999:162). Therefore, church students and teachers who have rich experience of EOTC schooling were selected to be used as data sources for the study.

The number of students in Church schools is large, but in qualitative research, the sample size should relatively be small as an in-depth investigation is conducted to get the required data for the phenomenon under investigation on the chosen sample (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:83; Dornyei (2007:115). Therefore, twelve students and six teachers of the Schools were purposefully interviewed. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held with the Church students in four groups with 5 participants at all selected schools.

Data Tools

For this research, a variety of tools such as interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analyses were utilized. This is because different data-gathering tools help the researcher address the

research objectives satisfactorily (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009:242). The instruments help the researcher to get varied information. Furthermore, they help to cross-check and add more data to the previously collected using f one or more tools Corbin and Strauss (2008:27).

Data Analysis and Implications

Teaching and Learning Approaches and Practices in EOTC Schools (Ye'abenet Timhirt Betoch)

The main objective of this study was to explore the teaching-learning approaches and practices in EOTC Schools. The data obtained for this investigation are presented as follows.

The Students' Learning Experience in Ye'abenet Timhirt Bet

One of the distinctive features of EOTC students' learning experience is moving from one church school to another church school. This is one main way for them to acquire enough knowledge. This experience could help them to be successful in their learning and to graduate as a teacher (master). It is believed that learners who acquire knowledge from different masters have better knowledge. In this regard (P4, interview, 2022) reported that,

> In Ye'abnet timhirt bet, a student is expected to attend various schools in different places during their schooling times to acquire knowledge from different scholars. In this case, a student can experience learning tirelessly and share others' learning and teaching experiences. Usually, a student who attended a traditional school in the same place and school and graduated from that school is not considered a well-learned teacher. This experience is adopted from the natural lesson that we can learn from

> bees just as bees can taste different flowers from different plants and give sweetened honey. Thus, students who learn from different teachers help them to gain sweetened (i.e., enough) knowledge. This experience also refreshes students' learning. In addition to the knowledge, while they move from one country to another, students can get the chance to expose themselves to different national cultures and customs of the society and learn from that.

We can understand from the above extract that when students move from one place to the other, they can acquire better knowledge, and this experience may enable them to understand the social culture at large. To this end, we can gain possible implications for higher institutions. If students in higher education have the chance to move to at least one other institution in their academic years, it can stimulate their interest to learn, giving t them a chance to learn about the culture and customs of different places, and that could help them in their public service times for the future.

The Pride of Being Called a Teacher

Some research carried out in Ethiopia noted that teaching in Ethiopia is a despised profession. Teachers are unmotivated, and their lives are stressful due to constraints directly or indirectly linked to the quality of education (Getachew, 1999:30-40; World Bank, 2013 (XXV). However, in the EOTC schooling tradition, according to the interview data, there is a unique admiration for teaching. The main reason for this is that teachers at EOTC are considered knowledgeable and complete. Based on the obtained data from the interview and FGD there is a great honor for teaching at EOTC schools. The students also have a great interest in being teachers. This is because the learners observe during Church services that teachers are regularly given respectable seats during the banquet. They are also provided with special food. In some places, they are paid more than other Church servants. In addition, according to the

data obtained during the interviews and the FGDs conducted for this study,   anyone can learn to achieve up to a certain level of the schools of EOTC and can serve the Church. However, the one who can reach the level of a teacher or who deserves to be called 'a teacher' is one who graduated from a certain Church school.

Furthermore, for clarity, the respondents were asked *"what it means to be a graduate from a certain school in EOTC.".* They responded that a teacher who graduated from a certain school is the one who has mastered all the required knowledge and shoulders complete accountability and responsibility in the field of study. It is also found that there is no knowledge gap among the graduates, or there is a very narrow gap in knowledge among the graduates because during their schooling the learners pass from one level to the next after fully achieving the required knowledge at each level. Thus, teachers aggressively struggle to know as much as is desired to be known at the level. They also spend years moving from one church school to another seeking knowledge and experience in their chosen field of teaching.

To this end, we can understand that teaching has been given special attention in the EOTC School. It is closely associated with honor, knowledge, and interest. Therefore, among the teachers, some are selected for the highest responsibility in the Church, to be a Bishop or administrator of the Church, for example. This may imply that teaching in a higher learning institution needs to be associated with competence and benefit. This may improve the status of the profession and draw many candidates' interest in the teaching profession.

Teachers and Students' Interactions at EOTC Schools

To identify the overall teachers' and students' interactions at EOTC Schools, the respondents were asked how they would express their interaction in and out of lessons. This is because, the interaction of teachers and students has its own impact on the students' educational achievements (Tanner, 2013; Helfrich, 2014). In this regard, according

to the data obtained from the study participants, teachers' and students' interaction at EOTC is like the interactions between a father and children found in a good family. The teachers interact with their students in different situations: during lessons, outside lessons, and at church service. In these situations, teachers approach their students friendly. This approach can be taken as a good model for students to construct their personality. In this regard, we can understand that students need not only knowledge from their teachers but also like to take them as models who can contribute to the success of their learning and future lives.

It is also found that the interaction of teachers and students at EOTC schools has great advantages in making the learning environment effective, according to the obtained data from all respondents. There is a mutual interest among the students to help each other (interview and FGD, 2022). Observation data (observation, 2022) also reveals that there is a great interest among students to help each other. It was identified through observation that a student learns not only from his/her master but also from other fellow students freely. Thus, peer teaching is intensely accomplished at EOTC schools. For example, when a student is slow in his learning achievement, the responsibility to offer them extra lessons rests not only with the teacher but also with the other students, especially the ones who spend much time with him/her. This is a common practice in EOTC schools. Teachers also regularly remind their students to help each other. The participants reported that students' dedication to helping each other can benefit them to be successful in their learning achievement.

Moreover, in EOTC schools, teachers take the whole responsibility for their students (P1, P3, P7, Interview, 2022). In addition to their learning, teachers are also concerned with their students' security, food, clothing and shelter. Thus teachers' concern about their students can create a successful learning environment in the schools and this harvests a successful learning achievement. From this, we can understand that the

students' and teachers' interaction has its own contribution to attaining a successful teaching and learning environment.

The Teaching Methodology

The EOTC education is characterized as a self-contained teaching approach because a single teacher controls the entire teaching in a school. However, there are effective students who get recognition to deliver the learning-teaching process. They are called '*asqetsayoch*' (assistants). They are clever high achievers and disciplined students. Therefore, when the teacher is absent, one of the *asqetsayoch* (assistants) covers the teaching on behalf of the teacher, according to the whole respondents in the interviews and FGDs (2022). In all kinds of *ye'abnet timhirt betoch* there are *asqetsayoch*. In addition to *asqetsayoch,* particularly at qinie bet (school of poetry), there are also individuals who are called *Asnegari* and *Zerafi. Asnegari* means the one who gives correction when learners present *qinie* to him, and Z*erafi* is one who can immediately produce *qinie* during lessons as well as at any other time. e. These individuals are the highest achievers and are ready for graduation among the students. They are also responsible for performing the teaching-learning process.

As discussed above, there is a strong relationship between teachers and students that can create a successful learning environment. To this end, it can be considered that learning through regular interaction among learners is one of the common learning and teaching methods in EOTC Schools. In many schools, the number of students is very high. For example, during the data collection process for this study, more than 1000 students were found in all *qinie* betoch (school of poetry). All were controlled by a single teacher. In this large number of students, one of the techniques employed by the teachers is creating learning conditions among the students to teach each other (P3, P4, P7 and P9, interview; observation, 2022). This can be called cooperative learning. At EOTC schools, the teachers present the lesson, and the students teach each other the presented lesson on the same day.

On the next day, the teacher became a participant in the lesson which was presented by one of the high achievers. In this case, the student can present the lesson orally or by reading from the textbook. The teacher's role is to participate in the lesson with no interference unless students commit errors, or if only if they ask for clarification. We can understand from this that the learning-teaching process in EOTC schools does not only rely on teachers' responsibility, but students also take part in achieving their learning.

There is a good l learning practice at EOTC School that is called *'Yemaheber Qelem'* (i.e., Association Learning). This is exclusively employed at *qinie bet* (P3, P4, P9, interview, 2022).

The researcher observed (observation, 2022) that the learning-teaching process is carried out only by the students and the teacher may not be present during the lesson. In all schools, this is prepared on Friday afternoon. During the preparation time, students themselves are assigned into three: the first, is an individual who presents the lesson (the *qinie*), and the second is the challenger (contestant) who can raise questions and arguments upon the presented *qinie*. These individuals are intentionally designed to carry out the lesson. The remaining class can support or argue with the presenter or the challenger after listening to the debate. During the debate, the idea presented can be a cause for controversy in which the defendants strongly debate to persuade one another by presenting evidence from different books or previous lessons. Then, if they agree on the controversial idea, they move on to the next lesson. But, if they do not agree, they may postpone the issue until the next morning when the teacher comes to the school. The teacher listens to everyone's ideas and gives his decision which is expected to be more correct. However, the learners can also argue against the teacher's position if they think it is inaccurate.

Similarly, but it is unintentional, in the *terguame metsaheft bet* (School of Books) there is the custom of debating on a certain issue even on theological doctrines. According to the data obtained from (FGD 1, 2022; P6, P7, P11, interview, 2022),

> Debating is considered as part of the learning-teaching process. It is allowed and expected. During the lesson on the commentary of the Gospel of John, Chapter. 1, for example, controversy is often raised although it is the issue of pure Theology. Here, students have the experience and the right to ask "*how"* and "*why"* in a certain lesson even if the education of the Holy Bible is accepted as wholly true.

However, in the *Zema Bet* (School of Music) the question of *why* and *how* is not expected. Because the lesson is restricted with semiosis (i.e., hymnal notations, *yezema meleketoch*), and students learn in the way the teacher tells them how a particular verse (text) is sung through the process of recitations and rote memorization. Thus, the teaching approach is predominantly teacher-centered. It does not allow further discussion and argument on the lesson. However, at *qinie b*et (School of Poetry) and *Metsaheft Terguame Bet* (School of Commentary of Holy Books) as discussed above, the teaching and learning approach is different from the schools of Music (*Zema Bet)* (P3, P4, interview, 2022).

However, some researchers crudely state characteristically that the teaching approach in Church education encourages dependency, that is, underestimating inventiveness, curiosity, critical mindedness, and independence of thought and action which were desirable in the secular life of the society that can be compared to the present-day practice of education, (Girma, 2000). In addition, Abiy (2005:21) also added that "the content of church education is accepted as "*true*" and so the "*how*" and "*why*" questions were almost unthinkable.

Contrary to this point, the data obtained from the ancient manuscript customarily called *Hateta Zera Ya'eqob*, showed that discussion and debating were employed as teaching and learning practices in the ancient EOTC School (17th Cent.). Zera Yaeqob presented the lesson in a way that could inspire his students for discussion, question and debate with each other. In the manuscript (Hateta Zera Ya'eqob, P. 4), it is said that *"ወእንዘ እሜህር ወእተረጕም መጻሕፍተ እብል ከመዝ፤ ወከመዝ ይቤሉ ፍራንጅ ። ወከመዝ ይቤሉ ግብጸውያን። ወኢይብል ዝንቱ ሥናይ ወዝንቱ እኩይ …" (when I teach and translate books, I say like this, and the foreigners say this and this. And the Egyptians say this and this. But I don't say this is good and this is bad …)* from this point we can understand that the ancient EOTC School teaching approach was open for discussion and question. Currently, this method of teaching is also employed at both schools – the School of *qinie* and the School of *Metsaheft Terguame.*

According to the data from all the respondents in the interviews and FGDs, students have the right to raise any kind of question on the lesson. Thus, it is possible to say there is no restriction to raising questions at EOTC Schools, and rather, questioning is regarded as a part of learning. For example, P1 (2022) reported:

> Students have the full right to ask any kind of question in my school. Questioning is part of the lesson and one of the criteria that I can identify as my students are learning well, because how can a student ask a question unless he fails to grasp the lesson? I also create a situation for my students to raise questions and ask each other.

In addition, in an interview, P2 (2022) replied:

> I do not think I taught unless my students asked me during or after the lesson. What students learn today is to be responsive to any kind of question in the future because they are accountable for what they have been studying today. Thus, I

regularly open my class for questions so any kind of question can be raised.

In the same line, the students (FGD 1, 3 & 4, 2022; P4, P10, P11 interview, 2022) also reported that students have the right to raise any kind of question. They do not have any experience of being discouraged by their teachers because of asking questions.

In this regard, we can understand that there is the custom of questioning "*why*" and "*how*" about certain issues. Thus, from this point, we can also understand that the learning practice presented in the form of debating can help the students develop the skill of idea expression and persuasion. For example, the students, the researcher met in each of the schools to gather data for this study, were expressive enough in the way they responded to the interview questions; their use of words; their expressions; and their self-confidence. All these might be a result of t the learning and teaching practices employed in the schools. In addition, the practice could possibly enable students to shoulder responsibility, create a free learning environment, and manifest better interaction among the students.

In the EOTC schools, cooperative learning (*bemetegagez memar*) is one of the common learning and teaching practices. Cooperative learning in EOTC schools is expressed as a task that teachers constantly oblige their learners to learn cooperatively. The teachers remind their students that cooperative learning has a value from God when one shares what he acquired (the knowledge) with the other one (P1, P6, interview, 2022). The reported data from (P3, interview 2022; P4, interview, 2022), shows cooperative learning is a part of *qetsela* (study hard). All FGDs and Interview data revealed that in cooperative learning, the advanced learners are responsible for the beginners and for those falling behind others. Observation data (2022) obtained from the schools confirmed the interview and FGD data.

The data collected from (P2, P7, interview, 2022; FGD 1 &3), similarly, showed that learning cooperatively could help students to go together in their learning and avoid knowledge gaps among them. Cooperative learning can give students a sense of responsibility to teach each other (P1, interview, 2022; FGD 1 & 3). Moreover, cooperative learning could help learners get to know each other beyond their learning, develop their social interaction, and work more together (all FGDs and Interviews, 2022)

Therefore, instructors at a higher education institute can employ the approach and create an independent learning environment among students and help them create a better learning environment. Moreover, cooperative learning can help learners to be successful in their learning, manifest better interaction, and develop sociability.

Alternative Learning Methods

In the EOTC schools learning-teaching practices, learners pass through different alternative learning methods to achieve a certain subject matter. According to the reported data from (P3, P4, P5, and P9, interview, 2022), the major concern of the teachers is creating alternative learning environments that can help students master the subject matter; thus, there is no concern for assessment. The assessment is basically carried out to pass to the next level or to stay at the same level until they master what they missed during the assessment. It is never said "*You failed*" to the one who cannot achieve the required knowledge at the level.

The study finds the following alternative learning method through all the data tools (interviews, FGDs, and Observations), but all are practiced after a certain class is presented. These are:

- *Yeguba'e bet qetsela (የጉባኤ ቤት ቅጻላ, classroom study):* in this program students regularly attend and study the content of the presented lesson in the presence of the teacher.

- *Yemaheber qetsela (የማኅበር ቅጸላ, whole class learning):* as discussed above *(yemaheber qelem)*, all students sit together and carry out the learning-teaching process without the presence of the teacher.
- *Yebuden qetsela (የቡድን ቅጸላ, Group studying):* students sit in groups (but it is not limited in number) in the classroom, dormitory, or anywhere and study together; ask each other to attain well the lesson.
- *Yeguad qetsela (የጓድ ቅጸላ, Peer learning/ studying)***:** this is the practice in which students share what they have learned and studied.
- *Atinto Meqagnet (አጥንቶ መቃኘት, rehearsing/memorizing):* this is a practice in which students alone deliberately rehearse or memorize what he has learned or shared with others.
- *Yeguad leguad wutera (የጓድ ለጓድ ውጥራ, friend-to-friend challenging):* this is the practice in which the students challenge each other to assess themselves and how much they have achieved the presented lesson.
- *Kememher fit meqreb (ከመምህር ፊት መቅረብ, presenting in front of the teacher to be assessed):* in this scenario, students present in front of the teacher to be assessed, and the teacher gives feedback to the student. Thus, students are expected to have a complete achievement of what has been learned to pass to the next level.

Therefore, it is unquestionable that all these learning opportunities can help the students to master the subject matter without getting bored with the lesson. In the EOTC Schools, complete mastery of the subject matter is expected, and a student is required to know everything needed to be known at different levels of the education systems (P1, P3, interview, 2022, all FGDs).

Furthermore, the study finds different and alternative learning practices at EOTC schools. It is possible to help the learning of students, and help them manifest complete mastery of the subject matter and avoid

cognitive differences among them. Therefore, by designing alternative teaching and learning practices, instructors at HI can also help the students to be successful in their learning; to master the expected knowledge, and avoid cognitive differences among themselves.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the above findings, the following conclusions are drawn to deal with the research objectives set under this investigation.

The EOTC education system is categorized under a decentralized system of education. Each school is owned by a particular Church or Diocese. Thus, education is free from any influence of others, and the teacher is the major and the first responsible body of the schools. Teaching in EOTC is an honorable profession. Teaching is also considered as the measure of one's expertise because when a candidate qualifies and graduates as a teacher in a certain school, he is expected to know all that has been learned.

In the EOTC, there is a learning experience related to moving from place to place to expose themselves to several schools found in different provenances. Therefore, throughout this experience, the students can get the chance to collect a better variety of content on the subject matter. They also can get engaged with the different cultures of the society which can help them during their servicing times. Besides, there is also the experience of learning in different kinds of schools to enrich their services in the Church and outside.

The interaction between the students and the teachers in EOTC Schools could make its own contribution to creating a better educational environment that can help students learn. There is also a dedication to helping each other get good mastery of the subject matter. In addition to students' learning, teachers also have full responsibility for their

students' lives: students' security, food, shelter, and health. Therefore, these responsibilities have positive impacts on students' learning achievement.

Although the educational approach in EOTC schools is recognized as a self-contained one, controlled by the Master, there are also individuals e called '*Asqetsayoch'* in all schools, and particularly at *qinie bet,* there are also called *Asnegari* and *Zerafi* among the advanced learners. They are considered assistant teachers to run the teaching process. Thus, the teaching-learning process is never interrupted whenever the teacher is absent. In addition to students' cooperative learning, the practice of '*yemaheber qelem'* (association learning), the students could develop an independent learning environment. Therefore, education in EOTC Schools is not always carried on in the presence of the teacher. The students could develop a sense of educational responsibility and accountability that can help them to be successful in their learning. In addition, these practices help the students to have a balanced mastery of the subject matter. There is no significant difference in the knowledge gap among students.

In all classes of EOTC schools, particularly in *qinie bet* and *metsaheft bet* the questions "*how*" and "*why*" are regarded as a part of the lesson. Questioning is in general considered one of the criteria used to decide whether a student is learning well. Debates and arguments are also the usual practices during the lesson. These practices help the learners to rehearse what they have learned and enhance reasonableness. Furthermore, through questioning, debate, and argument, the students develop critical thinking, ways of expression, or skills of persuasion as well as self-confidence.

In the EOTC Schools, assessment is held to distinguish students' achievement. Mainly, the assessment is used to give the decision of 'passing to the next level' or 'pending until the student achieves the missed lesson'. Thus, a student is never told, '*You have failed* or *you are rejected'.* However, they are obliged to remain "*pending*" until they can

grasp what they have missed in their learning. This practice can also save the students from psychological and moral failure and help them achieve better in the future. Nevertheless, in the EOTC Schooling experience learners have a chance of exposure to different learning practices which can help them to achieve the lesson completely. Thus, the approach enhances learning opportunities and presents alternative ways of learning and studying techniques, helping students to be more successful in their learning.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are forwarded:

One of the good experiences of students' learning in EOTC is they move from place to place to acquire better knowledge. This experience enables them to refresh their learning and expose themselves to the different cultures of the society they serve after graduation. To this end, the MoE should propose a new allocation plan and procedure to give students the chance to learn by moving between institutions found in different regions of Ethiopia because this plan can refresh students' learning and expose them to different social cultures. Furthermore, the availability of instructional resources in HIs in Ethiopia is scarce. Therefore, students' movement from one institution to the other may compensate for the inadequacies of the teaching resources that now characterize individual higher education institutions.

The students in EOTC schools have the experience of learning in different schools to enrich their services in the Church and outside the community. To this end, it allows the students to get extra courses, about law, justice, administration, or leadership, for example. This could give them a better chance to learn and know more to serve the community better. In addition, it may also have its own contribution to manifest justice and create good citizenship in the country.

In addition to employing routine teaching methodology (predominantly the lecture method), the instructors in the HI should propose and use alternative learning and teaching techniques that can create successful learning opportunities. In addition, instructors need to develop a program that allows students to learn and study from each other and with each other with responsibility in order to foster a spirit of mutual support among themselves. Moreover, the grading system in higher education institutions reflects the disparity between students' achievement. To this end, to improve the quality of higher education, the students who cannot achieve enough mastery of the given lesson should be allowed to wait until they achieve the required knowledge. Thus, instead of awarding them 'F' or unsatisfactory grades ('C' or 'D'), it is advisable to say 'pending' to show decisions of a *pass* or *fail* will be made later. Besides, this decision could help students to get the chance of successful learning and build their s psychological and moral defects.

In EOTC Schools, independent learning practice, which is called '*yemaheber qelem*' (association learning) has been found. In such schools, the students create their learning environment. In this approach, the students can also develop a sense of responsibility and develop debating, arguing, persuading, or admitting skills. Based on this practice, instructors in the HI should exercise their students to create their own independent and responsible learning environment. This practice can help the students to develop a sense of helping each other and enhance better interaction among the students.

In the EOTC schools, there are different kinds of teaching-learning practices and approaches that might be uncovered. Therefore, interested researchers in the area can make endeavors by discovering better teaching–learning practices and approaches that could be made valuable to HE. To this end, the link between universities, churches, and monasteries as well as other religious institutions can be enhanced.

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