

Evolution of Teacher Education in Ethiopia: A Critical Review of the Historical Roots and Contemporary Perspectives

Solomon Areaya (solomonaeyak@gmail.com)

Associate Professor, College of Education and Language Studies, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63990/ejtel.v2i2.12446>

Received: Dec.9/2024; Revised: June 25, 2025;

Accepted: July 28, 2025

Abstract

This Article presents a critical analysis of the evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia, tracing its roots from religious-based education to modern pedagogical frameworks. Historically, teacher education in Ethiopia began within the religious institutions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, where instruction was closely tied to spiritual teachings. The transition to modern education was marked by Emperor Menelik II's initiatives and further expanded under Emperor Haile Selassie, who established the first formal teacher training institutions. Over the decades, the system has undergone significant changes. The introduction of secular education, the establishment of formal training programs, and the socialist restructuring during the Derg regime - infused with Marxist-Leninist ideologies - were pivotal moments in Ethiopia's educational evolution. In the early 2000s, the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) represented a ground-breaking shift towards modern approaches, focusing on competency-based training and student-centered learning. Despite these advancements, challenges continue to exist. Resource limitations, disparities in quality across regions, and the struggle to retain skilled teachers - especially in rural areas - highlight persistent issues. The Article also examines the socio-political and economic influences shaping teacher education, including the contributions of international organizations like UNESCO and USAID. By weaving together historical and contemporary perspectives, this Article sheds light on Ethiopia's progress and persistent challenges in teacher education. The Article recommends policy improvements. It also emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development to ensure the system's long-term success and effectiveness.

Keywords: Traditional education, Teacher education, Professional development, Modern education, System Overhaul

Introduction

The origin of teacher education in Ethiopia is deeply rooted in both the traditional religious system and the early phases of modern schooling. Long before the establishment of formal secular education, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church served as the primary institution for education and teacher training. With no formal national school system in place, the Church assumed responsibility for educating not only priests and religious leaders but also individuals who would go on to teach within ecclesiastical structures and local communities. This religious education system emphasized rote memorization, discipline, spiritual commitment, and strong teacher-learner relationships, laying a foundational educational culture that would influence

Ethiopia for centuries. Though the religious education system lacked modern bureaucratic structures, it was highly systematic, respected, and integral to the Country's intellectual life.

Ethiopia's educational practices can be traced back to the 4th century during the reign of King Ezana of Aksum, when Christianity was officially adopted. Religious instruction, which centered on biblical texts, hymns, and theological writings, became the bedrock of formal education. Clergy members were the principal educators, delivering instruction in church schools such as *Messaf Bet* and *Zema Bet* (Zewde, 2001). Teacher education followed an apprenticeship model, with novices learning under senior priests, gradually acquiring the skills necessary for teaching and liturgical service. Monasteries like Debre Libanos and Waldeba emerged as key centers for theological and pedagogical training, offering rigorous education in scripture, liturgy, and the traditional Ge'ez script (Pankhurst, 1972).

Even with the advent of modern education under Emperor Menelik II in the late 19th century, the influence of religious institutions on teacher preparation remained significant. Many of the first teachers in government schools had backgrounds in the Church education system (Teklehaymanot, 2013). Although the shift toward a secular teacher education framework gained momentum in the 20th century, religious principles—particularly those related to moral and character formation—continued to influence pedagogical training programs. The historical connection between religious and modern teacher education is therefore undeniable. The Church not only laid the groundwork for Ethiopia's formal education system but also provided the earliest model of teacher preparation, leaving a legacy on the evolution of the Ethiopia's educational landscape. The Church played a central role in educating the youth in religious doctrines, reading, and writing (Teshome, 1979).

In Ethiopia, formal schooling began in the early 20th century, when Emperor Menelik II established the first formal school, Menelik II School, in 1908, primarily to educate the nobility and modernize the Country (McClellan, 1988). This initiative was later expanded under Emperor Haile Selassie, who prioritized formal education as a cornerstone of modernization approaches (Zewde, 2001).

Historical evidence indicates that Ethiopia had structured religious education systems long before the introduction of modern schooling. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church and Quranic schools offered formalized education characterized by structured curricula based on religious texts, hierarchical teacher-scholar relationships, and defined entry and exit criteria. For instance, the Church's education system included levels such as *qene* (poetry), *zema* (church songs), and *qidase* (liturgy), each with specific training processes and scholarly expectations (Levine, 1974).

Similarly, European missionaries also played a significant role in expanding modern, Western-style education in Ethiopia. They introduced curricula that combined secular subjects with

religious instruction, marking a shift from traditional religious education to modern one. Additionally, missionaries implemented new pedagogical techniques and practices distinct from the existing systems. However, their contributions are more accurately associated with the expansion of Western-style education rather than the broader concept of formal education (Tibebu, 1995).

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church was the primary education provider, where teachers, known as ‘Yeneta’, were responsible for transmitting religious teachings and traditional knowledge. ‘Yeneta’ refers to teachers within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church who have completed higher studies in traditional education, including chant books (Degwa) and poetry (Qene Bet). These individuals are responsible for instructing students in religious studies and church conventions. Their instruction was largely based on the Holy Bible, emphasizing rote memorization and recitation (Pankhurst, 1968). Teacher training was informal, following an apprenticeship model in which young learners studied under experienced ‘Yeneta’, acquiring the skills to educate others. This traditional approach focused on religious texts and spiritual songs, essential for preparing clergy and religious scholars (Sergew, 1972).

Modern teacher education began to emerge in the early 20th century, primarily as a result of Emperor Menelik II’s modernization efforts. Menelik invited foreign missionaries and educators to establish secular schools, marking a shift from a religion-based education to one that included secular subjects and formal teacher training (Zewde, 2001). This transition highlighted the growing need for trained teachers with modern pedagogical skills (Markakis, 2011). The establishment of the first formal teacher training institute under Emperor Haile Selassie marked a significant shift, incorporating subjects like science, mathematics, and history, thus cultivating a new generation of educators qualified to teach a broader curriculum (Negash, 1996).

Teacher training during the traditional era had both strengths and limitations. The apprenticeship model offered personalized, hands-on learning, where novices mastered religious content through direct interaction with experienced ‘Yeneta’. However, this model was narrow in scope. It centred mainly on religious matters. It lacked standardized procedures, educational theories, and diverse pedagogical skills crucial for modern teaching. Its emphasis on memorization and recitation also limited the development of critical thinking and analytical skills - key competencies in contemporary education.

The shift from religious to secular education did not happen easily. The deeply rooted traditional system, which had served as the primary mode of instruction for centuries, faced resistance. The introduction of secular subjects and modern pedagogies by missionaries and the monarchy met with apprehension in some communities, which considered it as a threat to religious and cultural values (Tekeste, 1990). Under Emperor Haile Selassie, modernization efforts aimed to align education with national development goals. However, these reforms were often perceived as

top-down impositions, which centralized education development and sidelined traditional educators (Amare, 2006; Eshetu, 2014). Despite initial resistance, Ethiopia's education system gradually witnessed the coexistence and adaptation of traditional and modern pedagogical practices. Concepts of moral education and community-centered learning from traditional systems were adapted into modern schooling, emphasizing civic education and national consciousness (Wondimu, 2003). In some cases, the blending of traditional and modern systems led to hybrid teaching approaches, enriching the teacher education curriculum with culturally relevant pedagogy (Eshetu, 2014). However, integrating these approaches remains a challenge, as formal training often prioritizes Western pedagogical models over indigenous knowledge (Amare, 2006).

While the national curriculum has largely shifted toward secular and Western-based models, traditional elements have been preserved, particularly in primary teacher training. These elements include an emphasis on community-oriented teaching, moral education, and the role of teachers as moral guides (Tekeste, 1990). Recent efforts have also recognized the importance of incorporating local contexts and indigenous knowledge into teacher training (Wondimu, 2003). However, many teacher graduates still struggle to teach in culturally diverse settings, pointing to the need for a more culturally responsive teacher education system (Eshetu, 2014). The transformation from informal religious teacher education to formal teacher training in Ethiopia was marked by resistance, adaptation, and a gradual merging of educational systems. To develop a more effective and culturally relevant teacher education system, a deliberate effort is needed to blend Ethiopia's traditional heritages with modern educational principles. This integration could help to address the persistent gaps in teacher preparation and thereby contribute to a more comprehensive and adaptive education system.

The first primary teacher education program began in September 1944 within a single room at Menelik II School, leading to the establishment of the first dedicated training institute in Gullele, Addis Ababa, in 1946/47. Then, secondary teacher education was introduced in 1951/52 at the then University College of Addis Ababa, which later expanded into the Faculty of Education (Mekuanent, 2000; Tadesse, 2017). However, the restructuring of the Faculty of Education at Addis Ababa University in 1978, following regime changes in 1974. This phenomenon affected the continuity and focus of teacher education (Aklilu, 2013; Areaya, 2008; Mekuanent, 2000).

The historical development of teacher education in Ethiopia—from religious to secular instruction—illustrates a gradual shift driven by modernization. This transformation has paved the way for an education system that seeks to harmonize traditional heritage with structured teacher training, addressing challenges related to inclusivity, pedagogical diversity, and adaptation to modern frameworks.

Knowledge Base of Teacher Education

The concept of the *knowledge base* in teacher education refers to the body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and understandings that prospective teachers are expected to acquire during their preparation programs. This knowledge is often categorized into content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners and learning contexts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, Shulman, 1987).

Globally, scholars argue that a robust teacher education program must integrate both theoretical and practical components to build a comprehensive knowledge base. According to Darling-Hammond (2006), effective programs are characterized by a strong focus on subject matter knowledge, pedagogical strategies, reflective practice, and clinical experiences. A comparative analysis of teacher education systems in Finland, Singapore, and Canada revealed that coherent, research-based knowledge frameworks are essential for cultivating effective teachers (Schleicher, 2012).

Empirical research supports the idea that structured teacher knowledge contributes to teaching effectiveness and student learning. For example, a large-scale study in the U.S. found a positive correlation between teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and student achievement in mathematics and science (Hill et al., 2005). Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, the UNESCO Teacher Policy Development Guide emphasizes the need for a clear articulation of the knowledge base required for teacher professionalism (UNESCO, 2015).

In Ethiopia, several studies have indicated critical gaps in teacher educators' and pre-service teachers' knowledge bases. Semela (2014a) reported that teacher education institutions often lack coherence in their curriculum, leading to fragmented knowledge acquisition among pre-service teachers. Similarly, Tessema and Tadesse (2020) found that many Ethiopian teacher education programs are heavily theoretical, with limited practical integration, resulting in a mismatch between what teachers know and what classroom teaching demands.

Efforts like the Teacher Development Program (TDP) and GEQIP-E have aimed to address these challenges by emphasizing continuous professional development, subject specialization, and the integration of practical teaching experiences. However, evaluations indicate persistent issues regarding instructional delivery, particularly in connecting theory to practice (MoE, 2018; World Bank, 2020).

Areaya (2016) has examined the Ethiopian teacher education system, showing that repeated reforms often lack contextual relevance and fails to integrate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), resulting in a disconnect between theory and practice. He suggests a paradigm shift that conceptualizes teachers not as mere technicians but as researchers and reflective practitioners.

To enhance teaching effectiveness, he advocates for teacher education programs that are contextually grounded, promote reflection, and incorporate PCK.

The knowledge base of teacher education is a multifaceted construct encompassing content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and an understanding of learners and their contexts. While international models have demonstrated the importance of integrating theory with practice, challenges remain in many contexts, including Ethiopia, where fragmented curricula and limited practical training hinder effective teacher preparation. Addressing these gaps requires rethinking teacher education as a dynamic process that fosters reflective, contextually aware, and professionally competent educators.

Methods and Materials

Research Design

This Study employs a desk review approach to critically analyze the evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia. Desk reviews are a systematic method for synthesizing existing literature, policy documents, reports, and other secondary data to draw meaningful conclusions about a research topic (Creswell, 2014). This approach is particularly appropriate for the current Study, given its historical and policy-oriented focus, which required an in-depth examination of documented evidence spanning multiple decades.

Sources of Data

The sources of data for this Study encompasses a range of materials to ensure a comprehensive understanding of Ethiopian teacher education. These includes academic publications, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations, which provide in-depth analyses and insights into the subject. Policy documents are another source, including government-issued education policies, curriculum frameworks, and reform reports, such as the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) and the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT). Also, reports from international organizations, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Bank, have been utilized, as they offer valuable perspectives and data relevant to teacher education in Ethiopia. Besides, historical documents tracing the evolution of Ethiopian education systems—from religious education models to formalized structures— have provided essential contextual background.

To ensure the reliability and relevance of these sources, inclusion criteria have been applied, emphasizing alignment with the research objectives, academic rigor, and credibility. Priority has been given to publications that focus on Ethiopian teacher education, particularly those offering recent updates from the 1990s onward.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through systematic literature searches using digital databases, university repositories, and institutional archives. Key search terms include “teacher education in

Ethiopia,” “TESO reform,” “PGDT program,” “Ethiopian educational reforms,” and “historical evolution of Ethiopian education.” Documents were screened and selected based on their relevance, authenticity, and contribution to understanding the development of teacher education in Ethiopia.

Data Analysis

The Study has employed a thematic content analysis approach to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within the reviewed documents, following the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method portrays a structured examination of key themes, including the historical progression of teacher education in Ethiopia, the impacts of major educational reforms—such as Haile Selassie’s modernization initiatives, the policies of the Derg regime, and the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) reforms—along with the challenges and opportunities currently faced by the teacher education system. Additionally, the roles of international organizations in shaping Ethiopian teacher education were explored.

The analysis has been done in three stages to ensure a systematic process. First, data organization involved categorizing sources according to themes and historical periods, enabling a chronological and thematic structure. Second, coding was undertaken to extract and align key excerpts with the study’s objectives, ensuring relevance and focus. Finally, synthesis and interpretation aggregated these codes into broader themes, forming the basis for the Study’s findings and discussions. This approach provided a robust framework for understanding and interpreting the dynamics of teacher education in Ethiopia.

Ethical Considerations

Given the desk review nature of this Study, ethical considerations were primarily centred on proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources. The Study adhered to academic standards of transparency, rigor, and ethical responsibility in data synthesis and reporting.

Significance

The significance of this Study is multi-faceted, targeting educators, policymakers, researchers, and schools. It should also be considered from a national development perspective. Teacher education is pivotal to Ethiopia’s educational and societal progress. The Study is important because it is the foundation of the education system, well-trained teachers who are essential for delivering high-quality education, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing the skills and attitudes of future generations. In Ethiopia, where education is crucial for national development, the contribution of teacher education significantly influences the country’s ability to address social challenges, drive economic growth, and achieve sustainable development goals.

Moreover, teacher education plays a vital role in promoting an inclusive and equitable society. Skilled educators are better equipped to meet the diverse needs of students, including those from marginalized or underserved communities. This inclusivity is critical for reducing educational

disparities and strengthening social cohesion. As Ethiopia continues to invest in education as a means of empowerment, the need for developing competent, adaptable, and innovative teachers is paramount. Enhancing the quality of teacher education is essential for building a resilient and dynamic education system that supports sustainable societal progress.

Historical Context of Teacher Education in Ethiopia

Early Beginnings

The origins of teacher education in Ethiopia are deeply rooted in traditional knowledge transmission methods that predate formal schooling. Historically, Ethiopian society relied on informal and communal teaching, primarily through oral traditions, apprenticeships, and family-based instruction. Elders and community leaders were central figures in educating younger generations about cultural values, practical skills, and local customs (Abate, 2020). This traditional system was effective in preserving cultural heritage and equipping individuals with skills essential for community survival. However, it was limited by its informal nature, lacking a structured approach to pedagogy and content standardization, which ultimately became a challenge in adapting to more formal educational demands.

Religious institutions, particularly the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, were among the earliest centres for both learning and teacher training. The Church's role was pivotal not only in the spiritual domain but also in advancing literacy and education. Priests and deacons, who served as spiritual guides, were simultaneously educators, teaching not only religious doctrine but also literacy in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian language (Teklehaimanot, 2018). The Church's educational approach, however, was primarily religious, with minimal emphasis on secular subjects, which limited the scope of learning. Despite this, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church laid the foundational structures of what would later evolve into formal schooling, emphasizing reading, writing, and basic arithmetic. This religious model of education fostered a strong moral foundation, despite its lack of inclusivity in terms of access, gender representation, and secular knowledge hindered broader societal development.

The transition from traditional knowledge transmission to formal teacher education began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, coinciding with Ethiopia's modernization efforts. Emperor Menelik II's efforts to establish formal schools marked a remarkable shift toward structured education, which emphasized standardized curricula and formal teacher training. This transformation was also influenced by the presence of foreign missionaries and colonial pressures that introduced Western educational models, which were characterized by regimented curricula, formal assessment practices, and systematic teacher training programs (Getachew, 2021). While this shift was progressive, it also carried implications for Ethiopia's cultural and educational identity. The adoption of Western pedagogical methods, although beneficial for

standardization and broader knowledge acquisition, often conflicted with indigenous teaching practices, side-lining local knowledge systems and cultural perspectives.

The historical progression of teacher education in Ethiopia reveals a complex interplay between tradition, religion, and modernization. While early teacher education was highly localized and community-centric, it lacked the formal structures necessary for scalability and inclusivity. Religious institutions contributed significantly to literacy and moral instruction but they were limited by their narrow focus on religious content. The modernization era, although pivotal for standardizing education, often imposed external pedagogical frameworks that were not always culturally responsive or aligned with Ethiopian societal needs (Wagaw, 1999).

Critically analyzing this trajectory, it is evident that Ethiopia's teacher education system has been shaped by a series of cultural, religious, and political influences that have had both positive and negative consequences. The traditional methods emphasized moral and cultural values but were insufficient for the broader educational needs of a growing society. On the other hand, formalization brought about structural improvements but risked diminishing the role of indigenous knowledge and localized pedagogical strategies (Teshome, 2007). This witnesses the need for a balanced approach in contemporary teacher education—one that integrates local knowledge systems, cultural values, and modern pedagogical frameworks to produce well-rounded educators capable of addressing Ethiopia's diverse educational needs.

Influence of Religious Institutions

Religious institutions, particularly the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, played a foundational role in early teacher training practices in Ethiopia. The Church was not only a spiritual authority but also a primary educational institution for centuries. It established schools known as *Qene* and *Debre*, which provided religious education to young boys and trained future teachers, clergy, and scribes (Woldemariam, 2019). These religious schools emphasized theological studies, literacy in Ge'ez, and moral instruction, preparing students to become educators within the Church and their communities.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church's emphasis on rote memorization, recitation, and ethical instruction shaped the teaching methods and curriculum in these schools. Teachers, often priests or monks, were trained in this traditional framework, which was deeply intertwined with religious practices and rituals (Asfaw, 2017). This model of teacher education focused heavily on imparting religious doctrine and literacy, laying the foundation for Ethiopia's early educational structures.

As Ethiopia began to encounter external influences in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Church's role in teacher education was challenged and gradually supplemented by secular educational models. However, the Church's legacy in shaping early teacher training practices persists, as it set a precedent for the value of education in Ethiopian society (Abune, 2020).

Colonial and Post-Colonial Influences

The Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941) brought significant changes to the country's education system, including teacher education. During this period, the Italians attempted to impose their own educational model, which aimed to create a workforce that would serve colonial interests. Italian authorities established schools with a curriculum that emphasized practical skills over intellectual development, as they intended to limit the educational advancement of Ethiopians (Tareke, 2000). Teacher training during this time was minimal, focused primarily on basic skills necessary for supporting the colonial administration, which greatly hindered the progress of teacher education in Ethiopia.

Following Ethiopia's victory in 1941, post-occupation reforms sought to rebuild and modernize the education system. Emperor Haile Selassie gave priority to education as a key aspect of national development and established teacher training institutions to enhance the quality of education (Zewde, 2001). These reforms included the establishment of teacher training colleges and the introduction of modern teaching methodologies. The Ethiopian Imperial Government collaborated with international organizations to standardize teacher training programs, incorporating Western pedagogical approaches while maintaining aspects of Ethiopian culture and identity (Teshome, 1990).

During the post-Italian Occupation era, Ethiopia also sought to expand access to teacher education, opening more institutions across the country to address regional disparities. These reforms laid the groundwork for Ethiopia's current teacher education system, highlighting a move away from colonial influence toward a more autonomous and nationally focused approach to training educators.

20th Century Reforms and Developments in Teacher Education

Modernization Efforts under Emperor Haile Selassie

During Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (1930–1974), significant educational reforms aimed at modernizing Ethiopia's teacher training system were introduced. These reforms were part of a broader strategy to promote national development and align Ethiopia's education system with international standards. The Emperor considered education as a crucial tool for progress, leading to the establishment of formal teacher training institutions and the integration of modern pedagogical approaches (Zewde, 2001).

One of the key initiatives was the establishment of teacher training colleges, such as the Addis Ababa Teachers' College in 1944, which was the first of its kind in Ethiopia (Mekuria, 2015). These institutions were developed to address the growing need for trained educators capable of teaching in both urban and rural areas. Emperor Haile Selassie's Government also sought assistance from international organizations like UNESCO, which provided expertise and resources to develop curriculum and training methodologies (UNESCO, 1964). The

involvement of international organizations was instrumental in exposing Ethiopian educators to global teaching standards and practices, which were then adapted to suit local needs.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Reforms

The modernization of teacher education during this period involved a shift from religious and traditional methods to secular and standardized curricula. The training programs focused on subjects like science, mathematics, and language arts, reflecting a broader goal to equip students with skills relevant to a modernizing society. Pedagogically, the reforms introduced new teaching methods, such as student-centered approaches and practical teaching exercises, which encouraged critical thinking and active participation (Tekeste, 1990). However, these changes were not uniformly implemented across the country, as rural areas often lacked the resources and infrastructure necessary to support such reforms.

While the modernization efforts under Emperor Haile Selassie were ambitious, they faced several challenges. The educational reforms were largely top-down, with limited input from local educators or communities. This approach often resulted in a disconnect between the training provided and the practical realities faced by teachers in rural and underserved areas (Paulos, 2007). Additionally, the focus on Western educational models sometimes conflicted with traditional Ethiopian values and methods of teaching. Critics argue that the reliance on foreign expertise contributed to a lack of local ownership and a dependency on external support, which undermined the sustainability of these reforms in the long term (Assefa, 2012). In response to internal criticism, pressures, and public dissatisfaction with the existing education system, the Imperial Government of Ethiopia made a decisive policy decision in October 1971 to undertake a comprehensive study focused on the educational curriculum. This initiative, known as the Education Sector Review (ESR), was documented by the Ministry of Education as cited in Areaya (2019:53). However, the onset of the 1974 revolution, as Tefera (1996:7) described, dealt a fatal blow to the ESR.

Despite these criticisms, Haile Selassie's modernization efforts laid a critical foundation for the evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia. By establishing formal institutions and introducing modern pedagogies, the reforms set the stage for subsequent advancements in the country's education system. However, the limitations of these efforts highlighted the need for more context-sensitive approaches that could better address Ethiopia's diverse educational needs.

The Derg Regime's Impact on Teacher Education

Regrettably, Ethiopia has never witnessed a peaceful and democratic transition of power from one government to another. The military coup in 1974 marked the beginning of a profound Marxist-Leninist revolution that toppled the Imperial regime. Following the Revolution, Ethiopia adopted Marxism-Leninism as the foundational ideology guiding its political, economic, and social frameworks (Areaya, 2019:58).

The Derg regime, which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, brought significant ideological and structural changes to the Ethiopia's education system, including teacher education. Driven by Marxist-Leninist ideology, the Derg implemented sweeping reforms aimed at aligning education with socialist principles. These reforms had both immediate and long-lasting impacts on teacher training, as they shifted the curriculum and reoriented the objectives of teacher education to reflect the regime's political agenda (Molla, 2013a & b).

Under the Derg, education was redefined as a tool for socialist transformation, with a strong focus on promoting class consciousness and loyalty to the state. Teacher education programs were infused with socialist ideology, and courses in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and political education became mandatory components of the curriculum (Getahun, 1998). This ideological shift represented a significant departure from the previous era, as teachers were now expected to function as agents of the regime, disseminating socialist principles and fostering allegiance among students.

The Derg's approach to teacher training placed considerable emphasis on collective action and the role of teachers in building a socialist society. Programs were designed to prepare teachers not only as educators but also as community leaders and political advocates. This approach intended to create an army of cadre teachers who would promote socialist ideals and facilitate the regime's goals of societal transformation (Gebre, 2006). However, critics argue that this politicization of teacher education compromised the quality of instruction and marginalized pedagogical concerns, as ideological training often took precedence over educational best practices.

The Derg's curriculum reforms included the centralization of educational content and the standardization of teacher training across Ethiopia. The Curriculum heavily focused on promoting agricultural and technical skills, reflecting the regime's emphasis on self-sufficiency and economic independence (Assefa, 1991). The training programs were altered to include more vocational subjects, with the goal of creating a workforce aligned with the regime's economic objectives. Additionally, the Curriculum incorporated military training, which was intended to instil discipline and loyalty among teachers and students alike.

While the Regime's emphasis on technical and vocational education was seen as a practical response to Ethiopia's development needs, the implementation was often criticized for its rigidity and lack of responsiveness to local contexts. The centralized nature of the curriculum left little room for regional adaptation or consideration of the diverse educational needs within Ethiopia (Teshome, 2001). Furthermore, the focus on ideological indoctrination detracted from the development of critical thinking skills, as the regime discouraged any curriculum content that could potentially foster dissent or critical evaluation of the state.

The Derg's reforms had mixed outcomes for teacher education in Ethiopia. On one hand, the Regime expanded access to education and increased the number of teacher training institutions, particularly in rural areas (Wubneh, 1990). This expansion was intended to increase educational equity and address the widespread teacher shortage that Ethiopia faced. However, the quality of teacher training often suffered due to the regime's prioritization of ideological indoctrination over pedagogical excellence. Teachers were frequently viewed more as instruments of state policy than as educators, which undermined professional autonomy and reduced morale among educators (Demeke, 1999).

Moreover, the Derg's reliance on centralization limited the adaptability and effectiveness of teacher training programs. The focus on political loyalty over teaching skills contributed to a gap between training and actual classroom needs, as teachers were not adequately prepared to handle diverse educational challenges. In the long term, these policies led to a legacy of under-resourced and ideologically constrained teacher education that would require significant reform in the post-Derg era to rebuild.

In summary, while the Derg regime made strides in expanding access to teacher training, its focus on ideological conformity and centralization ultimately hindered the development of a flexible and effective teacher education system. The Regime's impact on teacher education illustrates the challenges of balancing political agendas with educational quality, a legacy that continues to influence Ethiopia's educational landscape.

Educational Reforms in the 1990s and 2000s

The 1990s and 2000s marked a period of significant educational reform in Ethiopia, as the country transitioned from a socialist regime to a federal democratic republic. This shift brought about profound changes in teacher education, driven by a series of new policies aimed at addressing the limitations of the previous system and aligning education with the needs of a modernizing nation. Key among these reforms was the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), which sought to transform both the structure and content of teacher training to improve educational quality and equity (Seyoum, 2016).

Post-Socialist Educational Reforms and Policy Shifts

After seventeen years of rule, the military government was overthrown in May 1991 by a coup led by the political group Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) (Areaya, 2019: 61). After the fall of the Derg regime in 1991, the new government (EPRDF) implemented a range of policies to decentralize and democratize education. The 1994 Education and Training Policy (ETP) laid the foundation for these reforms, emphasizing the need to expand access, improve educational relevance, and promote inclusive education (Negash, 2006). These policy shifts in turn led to a rapid expansion of teacher training institutions across the country,

particularly in rural and underserved areas, to address teacher shortages and enhance regional equity in access to education (Yizengaw, 2005).

The expansion of teacher training colleges (TTCs) during this time was notable. By increasing the number of TTCs, the government aimed to produce a larger workforce of qualified teachers to meet the demands of a growing population. These institutions were tasked with implementing new curricula that focused on student-centred approaches and critical thinking skills, contrasting sharply with the more ideological and rigid training methods of the Derg era (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011). However, while the expansion was successful in increasing the number of trained teachers, it also led to concerns about the quality and consistency of training across different institutions.

Teacher Education System Overhaul

The Ministry of Education (MoE), acknowledging the shortcomings in the teacher education system nationwide, implemented the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO). Despite its rollout across all six universities in the country, the TESO program had sparked significant debate and controversy regarding its effectiveness as a remedy for our teacher education system (Areaya, 2019:73).

The Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) reforms, launched in the early 2000s, represented a significant effort to modernize teacher education in Ethiopia by emphasizing competency-based training and a holistic approach to teacher professionalism. TESO aimed to move away from traditional, lecture-centric methods and towards more participatory and interactive pedagogical approaches. This shift included the integration of practical skills, real-world applications, and an emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD) (Semela, 2014b; Tadesse, 2017; Teferra, 2011a). TESO sought to foster student-centered learning environments where teachers act as facilitators, promoting critical thinking and active engagement.

Despite aligning with international trends in teacher education, TESO faced considerable implementation challenges. Many educators struggled to adapt to the new methods due to limited experience and resources, and the rapid pace of reform outpaced the capacity of some institutions to fully integrate these changes (Alemu, 2015). Additionally, the decentralized approach led to inconsistent implementation across regions, with resource limitations and insufficient training further exacerbating these disparities (Bekele, 2010).

The TESO reforms highlighted key considerations for Ethiopia's teacher education system, such as the need for clarity on the governance of teacher education programs, recruitment strategies, and curriculum balance. Questions arose regarding which institutions should oversee teacher education and how best to integrate subject content knowledge with pedagogical skills to develop Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) (Tadesse, 2017). The Ministry of Education, as

the primary initiator of TESO, aimed to shift away from a fragmented approach to a cohesive, experiential model that connected learning with students' personal experiences and communities (MoE, 2003).

TESO's core objectives included enhancing teacher quality, aligning teacher education with national standards, and establishing CPD programs to promote ongoing skill development (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2015). By emphasizing "learning by doing," TESO replaced traditional methods with a system that prioritized field-based training and continuous assessment. It introduced tools such as reflective journals and formative assessments to monitor pre-service teachers' development (Amare, 2019). The reform also aimed to decentralize teacher education, allowing regional institutions to adapt programs to local needs and address educational disparities (Hailu & Tadesse, 2018).

However, TESO's impact was mixed. The shift to a competency-based approach required significant infrastructure and faculty training, which were often lacking. As a result, inconsistencies in teacher preparation quality persisted across regions (Asgedom, 2020). Moreover, there was a notable gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, with some pre-service teachers reporting limited practical experience (Yizengaw, 2019). While TESO aimed to enhance teacher quality, studies have shown that its effects on student learning outcomes have been variable, indicating a need for additional reforms (Negash, 2020). The uneven execution of CPD programs further underscored these challenges, as many schools lacked the necessary resources to sustain effective professional development (Wolde, 2021).

TESO underscored the importance of aligning teacher education reforms with broader national goals, as well as the need for ongoing support mechanisms like mentorship and investment in educational infrastructure. Mekonnen (2008) discusses the TESO reform, noting it brought significant changes aimed at improving the quality and effectiveness of teacher education. Despite these intentions, a review of the TESO document and feedback from teacher educators show mismatches between the reform's goals and its practical application. This misalignment reveals flaws in mission coherence and implementation tactics. While TESO introduced important features like longer practicum periods and an emphasis on professional training, issues such as uneven program components, admitting underprepared students, and inconsistencies between its declared and actual strategies raise doubts about its capacity to fulfil its transformative goals (Mekonnen, 2008).

Based on exiting and documented studies, it can be safely and logically asserted that TESO was a foundational step toward reforming Ethiopia's teacher education system. It introduced innovative teaching practices and fostered a shift towards a more integrated and practical approach. However, its success was hindered by several operational and strategic challenges.

The mismatch between the reform's ambitious goals and its implementation on the ground revealed significant gaps in planning, resource allocation, and execution.

Despite its limitations, TESO set a valuable precedent for competency-based and student-centred teacher education in Ethiopia, marking a foundational step toward meeting the nation's educational aspirations (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2021). Addressing these gaps is crucial for advancing teacher education and ultimately improving the quality of education. Continued investment in educational infrastructure, along with a more coordinated approach at both national and regional levels, is necessary to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of such reforms.

Teacher Education in Ethiopia Post-TESO Reform: A Comprehensive Pathway Approach

Following the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) reform, Ethiopia's teacher education structure was designed to provide multiple pathways—diploma, degree, and postgraduate programs—catering to various educational needs. This system reflects a strategic effort to enhance teacher quality across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, each program offering distinct specialization, depth, and teaching-level alignment.

Approximately, six years after the launch and implementation of the TESO program and following the graduation and deployment of its first cohort into the teaching workforce, concerns emerged regarding the program's effectiveness. Certain stakeholders expressed doubts and complaints, suggesting that teachers' competence had not significantly improved. In response, and after considerable debate, the Ministry of Education introduced the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) program, which adopted a different teacher preparation approach than its predecessor. The first PGDT cohort graduated in the 2011/12 academic year. The rationale for launching the PGDT program stemmed partly from the same issues that prompted the introduction of TESO and partly from a Ministry initiative to reorient the teacher education system towards pragmatic and reflective orientations (CEBS, 2013). However, as noted by Tadesse (2017), evidence-based experience from a teacher educator involved in implementing the PGDT indicated that these issues had, in fact, worsened.

Originally, the PGDT program was designed as a regular program aligned with the standard academic calendar. However, this mode was abruptly abandoned by the Ministry of Education in favour of a tentative new mode—an "in-out-in" delivery format. The intended structure of the program was not fully realized, and the new mode has faced numerous implementation challenges and bottlenecks. The difficulties encountered by the PGDT program are multifaceted, encompassing both internal and external factors within the implementing institutions. Some of these issues are inherently tied to policy and program design, while others are rooted in practical implementation challenges.

A. Diploma Programs: Preparing Primary School Teachers

Diploma programs, primarily offered at Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs), are geared towards training primary school teachers. Typically lasting two to three years, these programs emphasize foundational subjects such as language, mathematics, and pedagogy, focusing on child-centered teaching approaches. Although the diploma program had been in practice long before the introduction of the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), the version implemented under the TESO reform faced criticism for its limited scope—particularly in fostering critical thinking and practical teaching skills (Taye, 2013; Asgedom, 2015). As a result, many diploma graduates require additional training to effectively manage diverse classroom environments, especially in rural areas with limited resources.

B. Degree Programs: Secondary Education and Specialized Training

Secondary school teachers are trained through degree programs offered at universities, spanning three to four years. These programs allow specialization in fields such as science, mathematics, and social studies, integrating content knowledge with pedagogical training. A key component is the practicum experience, where student teachers engage in supervised teaching to bridge theory and practice (Yizengaw, 2005). However, challenges such as large class sizes and limited resources can affect the quality of training. Degree programs also rely heavily on traditional lecture-based methods, which may not align well with Ethiopia's broader educational reforms emphasizing student-centered approaches (Alemayehu, 2019; Wolde, 2017).

Niguse (2022) examined the development of teacher training programs in Ethiopia from 1994 onward, observing a transition from socialist to pragmatist educational ideologies. He assessed various reforms such as pre-TESO, TESO, and PGDT programs, as well as newer integrated training methods. His findings suggest differing skill sets among graduates: those from TESO programs were notably proficient in subject knowledge and teaching methods; pre-TESO graduates stood out in student assessment and professional dedication; and PGDT graduates excelled in building relationships with students. The study advises retaining the strong points of each program, especially the TESO, to improve future teacher training efforts.

Current Teacher Education System in Ethiopia

Recently the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education (MOE) has ratified Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education to serve the general education. The Teacher Education Curriculum Framework was developed to guide the design and implementation of teacher education programs in Ethiopia. It addresses the organization of these programs, highlighting essential guidelines and standards for effective teacher education. The framework aims to improve program quality by providing a structured approach to course organization, educational focus, and quality assurance. It identifies current challenges and presents strategies for developing teacher profiles, competencies, and curricula, while also emphasizing the

importance of addressing cross-cutting issues such as methodology, assessment, and quality enhancement (MOE, 2022).

The current curriculum framework for teacher education in Ethiopia is structured to be implemented across all regions and teacher education institutions. It delineates three main levels, each with specific sub-levels and qualification requirements for teachers. The *Pre-primary Level* comprises two sub-levels, Level I and Level II, with a minimum qualification of a certificate for teachers. The *Primary Level* encompasses Grades 1 to 6, requiring teachers to hold at least a diploma. The *Middle and Secondary Level* covers Grades 7 to 12, where the minimum qualification for teachers is a degree (MOE, 2022).

This framework aims to ensure that teachers are suitably trained to meet the demands of the various educational levels. By specifying distinct qualifications for each level, it emphasizes the importance of appropriate pedagogical skills and content knowledge aligned with learners' developmental stages. Pre-primary education focuses on early childhood development, necessitating that teachers have foundational knowledge in child psychology, early literacy, and numeracy. The certificate qualification underscores the need for specialized training to nurture young learners' socio-emotional and cognitive growth.

Primary education covers a broader array of subjects and aims to establish a strong foundation in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking. The diploma qualification requirement reflects the necessity for a comprehensive understanding of subject content, classroom management, and diverse teaching strategies suitable for younger learners. Middle and secondary education is more specialized, as it prepares students for higher education and the workforce. Teachers at this level are expected to demonstrate deeper content mastery, critical thinking, and advanced instructional strategies, thus necessitating a degree as the minimum qualification (MOE, 2022).

This structured approach aligns with global trends in teacher education, where training programs are tailored to the complexity and demands of different educational stages. By setting clear qualification standards, the framework aims to enhance the quality of education nationwide, ensuring educators are equipped to deliver effective learning experiences at each level. Furthermore, it contributes to the professionalization of teaching, establishing clear career progression pathways from certificates to degrees.

The objectives of the current Ethiopia's teacher education curriculum framework

The general objective of the teacher education curriculum framework is to align teacher education with broader educational goals, attracting and developing teachers who meet policy requirements and embody 21st-century competencies. This framework emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge, technology, and vocational skills to ensure a holistic approach to teacher education. The curriculum framework aims to develop curricula that equip

learners with professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This approach ensures that teacher education programs prepare future teachers not just with theoretical understanding but also with practical skills that are crucial for effective teaching and learning. It promotes the incorporation of technology as both content and a tool, highlighting its significance in modern education. By doing so, it fosters an environment where teachers can utilize technological tools to enhance teaching methodologies, making learning more engaging and accessible (MOE, 2022). Moreover, the framework emphasizes the development of skills and vocationalization, which aligns with the national drive towards practical skill acquisition. Vocationalization aims to prepare educators who can impart vocational skills, thereby aligning teacher education programs with the broader general education curriculum. This alignment ensures consistency and continuity across all levels of education, ensuring that teacher preparation is in sync with general educational objectives.

An important aspect of this framework is the integration of indigenous knowledge throughout the curriculum. By promoting local knowledge systems, the curriculum aims to enrich teaching content and methods, ensuring relevance to local contexts. Furthermore, socio-emotional learning is given prominence to enhance children's well-being, which is critical for holistic development. Teachers trained within this framework are expected to contribute to the socio-emotional growth of their students, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Advancing 21st-century competencies is another key goal. This involves equipping teachers with critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication skills, which are essential for modern education. The framework also emphasizes reflective practice, encouraging teachers to continuously analyze and improve their teaching strategies. This focus on reflection helps teachers become more aware of their strengths and areas for improvement, contributing to ongoing professional development. Inclusivity is also addressed in the framework, emphasizing the need to cater to diverse learners, including those with gender-based differences and special needs. By advocating for inclusive education, the framework ensures equity and access for all students, promoting a culture of acceptance and support.

Finally, the framework highlights the need for strong relationships between teacher education institutions and the surrounding communities. This focus on community engagement ensures that teacher education programs are not only locally relevant but also foster positive relationships that support broader educational goals. In summary, the teacher education curriculum framework is designed to produce competent, reflective, and inclusive educators who can meet the demands of 21st-century education. By integrating technology, vocational skills, indigenous knowledge, and socio-emotional learning, the framework aims to create a holistic and responsive approach to teacher preparation.

Core Competencies

Core competencies refer to a set of essential characteristics and abilities that enable individuals to effectively perform tasks by combining knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practical application. In the context of the Ethiopian General Education Curriculum Framework (GECF), these core competencies are foundational attributes that all learners are expected to develop, aligning with the broader educational goals of the nation (MOE, 2022)

The first competency, ***learning to learn***, emphasizes the capacity for self-directed learning. It encourages students to take ownership of their educational journey, cultivating curiosity, adaptability, and the ability to seek and process information independently. ***Critical thinking and problem-solving*** are vital for developing analytical skills, enabling learners to approach challenges with a logical and evaluative mindset. This competency is crucial for navigating complex issues, making informed decisions, and applying solutions effectively in real-world scenarios.

The framework also highlights ***creative thinking and innovation***, which fosters the ability to generate new ideas, think outside the box, and apply imaginative solutions to problems. This skill set is particularly important in today's rapidly changing world, where innovation drives progress. ***Communication*** as a core competency involves not only verbal and written skills but also active listening and the ability to convey ideas clearly and effectively. Strong communication skills are integral to fostering collaboration, understanding, and the effective exchange of information across different contexts.

Collaboration is another key competency identified in the current teacher education framework, emphasizing teamwork and the ability to work effectively with others. It promotes cooperation, respect for diverse perspectives, and the ability to contribute positively to group efforts, making it essential for both academic and professional success. ***Leadership and decision as a key competency focus*** on developing learners' ability to guide others, take responsibility, and make informed choices. This competency aims to build confidence and empower students to lead initiatives, solve conflicts, and contribute to community development.

In today's digital age, ***digital literacy*** is indispensable. It encompasses the skills needed to effectively use digital tools and technologies for learning, communication, and problem-solving. Digital literacy enables learners to navigate and engage with digital resources responsibly and effectively, preparing them for the demands of the modern world. Lastly, ***cultural identity and global citizenship*** promote an understanding of one's own cultural heritage while also fostering a global perspective. This competency encourages learners to respect cultural diversity, advocate for social justice, and actively participate in both local and global communities. Together, these core competencies form a holistic framework aimed at producing well-rounded, capable, and globally aware individuals equipped to thrive in diverse contexts.

The implementation of such a framework has been a longstanding challenge in the history of teacher education in Ethiopia. There are numerous lessons to be learned from the multiple unsuccessful and short-lived reforms in Ethiopian teacher education. To this end, the current teacher education framework requires the commitment and collaboration of all stakeholders and educational leaders to avoid the fate of its predecessor reforms. Often, implementation of teacher education in Ethiopia encounters significant challenges, including resource constraints, regional disparities, and resistance to change. These challenges are compounded by issues such as insufficient technological resources and a standardized approach that may fail to address localized needs. To ensure success, essential conditions must be met, such as increased funding, infrastructure development, capacity building, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems. Effective stakeholder engagement, long-term policy consistency, and a commitment to equity and inclusivity will also play a pivotal role. By addressing these factors and fostering community involvement, the framework has the potential to overcome historical challenges and establish a foundation for sustainable and impactful reform.

The parallel between the current teacher education framework and TESO

The current teacher education approach is potentially a different way of preventing the TESO program, and the MOE has clearly acknowledged the strength and innovative nature of the TESO program (MOE; 2022:1-2)

The Ministry of Education mandates adherence to this framework across all certification levels. Following a 2002 study on teacher education, the Ministry implemented reforms under the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) initiative. This reform responded to major deficiencies, such as inadequate professional competence and unsatisfactory content knowledge among teachers, as well as ineffective teaching skills and a misalignment between teacher standards and professional expectations.

However, after a long silence and a "black box" surrounding the TESO program, the MOE provided the following justifications for its eventual abandonment (MOE, 2022:2)

The TESO program in Ethiopia faced significant challenges as graduates struggled with planning, classroom management, and addressing students' needs due to inadequate subject knowledge and a lack of consideration for local social, political, and economic contexts. In response, several reforms were introduced to improve pre-service teacher education. These included changes in program duration and structure, such as shifting from a one-year certificate to a three-year diploma program and later to a generalist/specialist modality. Despite these changes, issues persisted, leading to the development of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) for secondary education. However, a national study and a recent education roadmap identified

ongoing issues, including misalignment between teacher education and school curricula, poor training quality, frequent changes in modalities, and neglect of cross-cutting issues like ICT and environmental education.

The national professional standards for teacher education cover three key domains: Professional Knowledge, Professional Practice, and Professional Engagement. Professional Knowledge emphasizes understanding both students and the content to be taught, while Professional Practice focuses on creating effective learning environments and utilizing appropriate assessment strategies. Professional Engagement encourages teachers to pursue continuous professional learning and actively engage with the wider educational community. Together, these standards foster a holistic development of teachers, ensuring they are well-prepared to contribute positively to the educational landscape.

In the pre-primary teacher education program, the curriculum is divided between diploma and certificate holders, with a focus on content knowledge and Integrated Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPCK). Diploma programs emphasize content knowledge (50%), whereas certificate programs allocate a significant portion (42.11%) to Integrated TPCK. Practicum and common courses are smaller but essential components, balancing theoretical knowledge with practical skills. This distribution allows diploma holders to develop a strong foundation in subject matter, while certificate holders receive more practice-oriented coursework, which is particularly beneficial in pre-primary education.

For middle and secondary school teacher education, the four-year degree program is structured around key course categories, including subject matter, methodology, and general professional courses. Subject matter and methodology form the core of the curriculum, ensuring teachers are well-prepared in both their content area and pedagogical approaches. Practicum courses account for approximately 9–10% of the curriculum, emphasizing the importance of hands-on teaching experience. This balanced curriculum equips teachers with the necessary skills to address the complexities of middle and secondary education effectively. The framework also allows for subject specialization at the primary school level. Teachers can focus on specific curriculum subjects, such as First Language and Mathematics, through major and minor specializations. This approach provides flexibility, enabling teachers to develop subject-specific expertise that can lead to improved educational outcomes for their students. Similarly, middle and secondary school teachers can pursue majors and minors in specific subjects, with combinations like Physics/Mathematics or Chemistry/Biology. This system supports the development of subject-specific expertise, essential for addressing the specialized content required at higher education levels (MOE, 2022)

A critical examination of the frequent and short-lived reforms in teacher education in Ethiopia, along with the history of their implementation, reveals a pattern that falls short of producing a

sustainable success story. Teacher education reforms in Ethiopia have often been characterized by poorly coordinated undertakings and have persistently faced numerous challenges that hinder effective implementation. Among the notable bottlenecks are a lack of alignment between policy design and practical realities, inadequate resource allocation from the government, and insufficient commitment to long-term capacity building.

For instance, despite the introduction of seemingly progressive frameworks, such as the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), the initiative often suffers from poor planning, limited stakeholder engagement, and a lack of rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Studies suggest that reforms frequently overlook the contextual realities of Ethiopia's diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape, further complicating their implementation (MoE, 2018; Teshome, 2014).

Moreover, the persistent gap in resource allocation reflects a systemic issue. Research highlights that for any education reform to succeed, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Ethiopia, adequate funding and infrastructural support are critical (UNESCO, 2016). Inadequate investment undermines efforts to enhance teacher training facilities, curriculum relevance, and the professional development of educators—key pillars for improving the quality of teacher education (Adamu & Haile, 2020).

The lack of ownership and accountability within the system exacerbates existing challenges. Without shared responsibility among policymakers, institutions, and educators, the implementation of any well-designed framework remains unattainable. As Fullan (2007) aptly observes, systemic reforms require coherence and collaboration across all levels of the education system to effectively translate policy into practice.

Unless deliberate attention is given to realizing these reforms—through strategic planning, adequate resource mobilization, and rigorous implementation strategies—Ethiopia's teacher education system risks remaining in a perpetual state of flux, awaiting yet another reform cycle. This cycle not only wastes valuable resources but also undermines public confidence in the education sector's capacity to effect meaningful change. Much can be learned from the TESO reform, which faced shortcomings like those of its predecessor and successor reforms, to ensure the meaningful execution of the current framework.

To break this cycle, policymakers must prioritize sustainable reform strategies that encompass robust planning, equitable resource allocation, and continuous professional development for teachers. Only through such integrated and sustained efforts can lasting improvements in teacher education be achieved.

The current teacher education system in Ethiopia, guided by the recently ratified Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, seeks to standardize and professionalize teacher preparation

across all educational levels by establishing clear qualification structures, pedagogical competencies, and curricular content. Structured around pre-primary, primary, middle, and secondary levels, the framework delineates minimum qualifications and emphasizes pedagogical relevance, subject mastery, and practical training. It integrates 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, digital literacy, and socio-emotional learning, while also promoting indigenous knowledge, inclusivity, and vocational skills. Drawing lessons from the shortcomings of past reforms like the TESO initiative, the framework addresses persistent challenges including weak implementation, inadequate resources, and poor alignment with contextual realities. Despite its ambitious design, the success of this framework hinges on sustained political commitment, stakeholder collaboration, sufficient funding, capacity building, and rigorous monitoring. Without these, the reform risks repeating the cycle of short-lived and ineffective initiatives, ultimately undermining efforts to elevate the quality and equity of teacher education in Ethiopia.

Teacher Education at Addis Ababa University

The historical development of teacher education at Addis Ababa University (AAU) mirrors broader educational trends in Ethiopia, showcasing the university's pivotal role in shaping the country's teaching workforce. This analysis critically examines key milestones in the evolution of teacher education at AAU, drawing on relevant evidence and scholarly insights.

The Emergence of Teacher Education in the Faculty of Arts (1952)

The origins of teacher education at AAU date back to 1952, when it began as a section within the Faculty of Arts. This establishment reflected a recognition of the pressing need for trained educators to address the growing demand for quality education following the expansion of Ethiopia's formal education system during Emperor Haile Selassie's reign (Negash, 2017). The creation of this section represented an initial effort to provide specialized training in pedagogy, marking the beginning of Ethiopia's systematic approach to teacher education. This development aligned with global trends at the time, as many countries in the Global South were similarly establishing foundational teacher training institutions to support national development (Altbach & Kelly, 1978). However, the early teacher education curriculum faced challenges, such as limited resources and a lack of localized content, which hindered its immediate effectiveness (Beyene, 2016).

Transition to a Full-fledged Department of Education (1959)

The evolution from a section to a fully-fledged Department of Education in 1959 marked a significant institutional advancement. This transition indicated formal recognition of teacher education as a distinct academic discipline requiring a dedicated curriculum (World Bank, 2004). The department's establishment allowed for the development of specialized courses designed to equip educators for diverse classroom environments, addressing both primary and

secondary education needs. The department's curriculum, however, faced criticism for being predominantly theory-oriented, with insufficient focus on practical pedagogical skills (Teshome, 2010a). This limitation reflected a broader challenge within Ethiopian higher education, where theoretical knowledge often outpaced practical application (Hoot et al., 2004).

The Establishment of the Faculty of Education (1962)

The transformation into the Faculty of Education in 1962 represented a crucial step towards comprehensive teacher training. This change facilitated a broader curriculum that incorporated not only educational theory but also research, educational policy analysis, and leadership training (UNESCO, 2005). This strategic shift was critical, as it responded to national demands for educational leadership capable of driving reforms across Ethiopia's education system. However, while the faculty succeeded in expanding the scope of teacher training, it faced challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a shortage of qualified teacher educators—issues common in many post-colonial African countries (Mekonnen, 2009; World Bank, 2008).

The Be'ede Mariam Laboratory School (1965-77)

The establishment of the Be'ede Mariam Laboratory School in 1965 offered a practical training ground for prospective teachers, aligning theory with real-world teaching experiences (Teshome, 2010b). The laboratory school provided student-teachers with hands-on experience, enabling them to apply educational theories in a controlled environment. Its closure in 1978, however, signified a setback in the practical component of teacher training. The absorption of its functions by various subject departments raised concerns about whether this model adequately maintained the experiential learning opportunities critical for teacher development (Yizengaw, 2005).

The Re-establishment of the College of Education (2003-06)

The re-establishment of the College of Education between 2003 and 2006 signified renewed commitment to modernizing teacher education in Ethiopia. This period saw the introduction of updated curricula that integrated contemporary pedagogical theories and practices, emphasizing competency-based training and ICT integration (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2007). Despite these advancements, challenges persisted in terms of aligning teacher training with local needs, as the curriculum often drew heavily from Western models, which were not always contextually appropriate (Ashcroft & Rayner, 2011).

Emergence of the College of Education and Behavioural Studies (2007 Onwards)

In 2007, the formation of the College of Education and Behavioural Studies marked a shift towards an interdisciplinary approach, reflecting global trends that emphasize the importance of behavioral sciences in understanding teaching and learning dynamics (Harris, 2014). This

transition facilitated a more holistic approach to teacher training, integrating educational psychology, research methods, and behavioral studies. Such interdisciplinary training has been instrumental in addressing diverse learning needs and promoting inclusive education. However, despite these positive developments, the college has faced criticism for insufficient attention to indigenous knowledge systems, which are vital for culturally relevant pedagogy in Ethiopia (Gudeta, 2013).

In conclusion, the historical evolution of teacher education at Addis Ababa University demonstrates a progressive response to the changing educational landscape in Ethiopia. Each developmental phase, from the initial section in the Faculty of Arts to the present-day College of Education and Behavioural Studies, has contributed significantly to shaping quality teacher education in the country. Continued investment in localized curricula, enhanced practical training opportunities, and research-driven reforms will be crucial in addressing ongoing challenges and ensuring that Ethiopia's teacher education system meets both national and global educational standard.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Shifts: Moving Towards Modernized Practices

In recent years, Ethiopian teacher education has undergone substantial changes to better align with global standards. The shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to interactive, student-centered approaches emphasizes critical thinking, problem-solving, and active learning. Despite these advancements, challenges such as resource constraints, insufficient instructor training, and regional disparities, especially in under-resourced rural areas, persistently hinder effective implementation (Gebrehiwot, 2019; Mulugeta, 2015; Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013).

Modern curricula in Ethiopia integrate subject content with pedagogical training, preparing teachers to meet diverse student needs. This includes courses on educational psychology, classroom management, and assessment (Hailemariam, 2016; Tessema, 2014). However, the curriculum is sometimes criticized for its theoretical focus and lack of practical applications, which impacts its coherence (Eshetu, 2018a).

Further reforms in Ethiopian education have introduced competency-based education, shifting away from rote memorization to developing essential skills such as critical thinking and collaboration. These reforms are designed to meet local market needs and ensure that education is academically and practically relevant (Melese & Tadege, 2019; Tadesse & Melese, 2016). Additionally, the integration of digital technologies within teacher education is significant. Despite the challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and high initial costs, initiatives like the e-SHE and the Digital Technology for Education Sector Transformation (D-TEST) aim to enhance digital literacy among educators and students, crucial for modernizing educational practices (Ferede et al., 2021; Ministry of Education [MOE], 2023).

Despite these advancements, a recent study by Mekonnen (2023) has revealed a significant reliance on traditional, content-driven pedagogical approaches within Ethiopian teacher education. These approaches prioritize content transmission over pedagogical skill development, which is essential for effective teaching. Mekonnen highlights issues such as poor-quality learning materials and inadequate preparation of teacher educators, which adversely affect the competency of future teachers and hinder educational achievements. He advocates for a fundamental transformation in the conceptualization and delivery of teacher education, requiring a shift in both the mindset and methodologies of educators and institutions (Mekonnen, 2023).

Pedagogical Approaches-Transitioning to Student-Centered Learning

Ethiopia's teacher education increasingly incorporates student-centered methodologies, encouraging active learning and collaboration. However, traditional mindsets among educators, combined with resource limitations, impede the full adoption of these methods. Continuous professional development is needed to support educators in transitioning to these innovative practices (Berhanu, 2018; Tadesse, 2017). Reform efforts also focus on transitioning from summative to formative assessment practices, incorporating peer evaluations and reflective journals to support personalized learning (Negash, 2020). While these approaches align with student-centered pedagogies, inconsistent implementation and a reliance on high-stakes testing remain challenges (Alemu, 2016).

Persistent Challenges: Resource Gaps, Retention Issues, and Quality Disparities

Despite reforms, Ethiopia's teacher education system faces challenges, such as resource limitations, high attrition rates, and inconsistencies in training quality. These issues impede efforts to produce well-prepared educators and highlight the need for systemic improvements (Bekele, 2015; Mulugeta, 2015). Teacher training institutions, particularly in rural areas, often lack essential resources, such as teaching materials, infrastructure, and technology. This scarcity hinders the quality of training and limits the practical experience necessary for future teachers.

Attrition rates among teacher candidates are high, largely due to low salaries, poor working conditions, and limited career advancement opportunities, especially in rural placements (Wolde, 2017). Although salary adjustments and professional development programs have been introduced, broader improvements in working conditions are essential to retain a stable, motivated workforce (Tadesse, 2017). There are significant discrepancies in curriculum quality across institutions, with some programs remaining overly theoretical and misaligned with practical classroom needs. Many teacher educators themselves lack training in student-centered methods, affecting the consistency and effectiveness of teacher preparation (Alemu, 2016; Eshetu, 2018b).

In conclusion, teacher education in Ethiopia has undergone substantial evolution over the past five decades, aligning more closely with global educational standards and transitioning from traditional, teacher-centered methods to dynamic, student-centered learning. These reforms are instrumental in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and active engagement among students. However, challenges remain, including scarce resources, inadequate instructor training, and significant regional disparities. These issues particularly hinder the effective adoption of modern pedagogical approaches in under-resourced rural areas.

The introduction of modern curricula that blend subject knowledge with pedagogical skills, along with competency-based education reforms, reflects a proactive effort to cater to diverse student needs and local market demands. However, the theoretical nature of these curricula and the irregular integration of practical applications necessitate a re-evaluation to enhance their relevance and coherence. Additionally, although digital technologies present a promising frontier for educational transformation, their deployment must be scaled up to overcome infrastructural deficits and high costs, which are current barriers to widespread adoption.

To transform teacher education in Ethiopia, a holistic approach is necessary—one that extends beyond curriculum reform to address the systemic issues of resource allocation, teacher retention, and quality disparities. Prioritizing investments in rural education infrastructure, improving working conditions to reduce teacher attrition, and aligning teacher training programs with the practical demands of classroom teaching are critical steps towards building a resilient education system.

Moreover, as reform efforts continue, it is imperative that they are embedded within a broader societal and institutional context that supports these changes. Only with a sustained commitment to enhancing the conditions under which teachers work, and by fostering an educational environment that values democratic principles and practices, can Ethiopia hope to achieve lasting improvements in its educational outcomes. The role of teachers and teacher education programs is central to this vision, requiring continuous support and recognition as pillars of national development. Thus, while the journey is on-going and tense with challenges, the pathway to reforming Ethiopian teacher education is clear: it requires a comprehensive, inclusive, and pragmatic approach that holistically addresses the needs of all stakeholders involved.

The Role of International Organizations

International organizations have played a pivotal role in shaping teacher education in Ethiopia, providing financial support, technical expertise, and strategic guidance that has influenced policy development and program implementation. Key players, including UNESCO, UNICEF, USAID, and the World Bank, have each contributed uniquely to the evolution of teacher

education, particularly in terms of improving access, enhancing quality, and promoting inclusive education.

UNESCO and UNICEF have been instrumental in advocating for universal education and teacher quality, working closely with the Ethiopian government to build capacity and promote educational reform. UNESCO has been actively involved in teacher training since the 1960s, focusing on curriculum development, pedagogical training, and the promotion of literacy. UNESCO has helped Ethiopian institutions adopt modern teaching methods and develop standardized curricula that are culturally relevant and internationally recognized (Teferra, 2011b).

UNICEF, meanwhile, has contributed significantly by supporting initiatives aimed at expanding access to education for marginalized groups, including girls and children with disabilities. Through programs like the Child-Friendly Schools initiative, UNICEF has emphasized the importance of creating safe, inclusive learning environments and training teachers to meet diverse student needs (Tirunch, 2013). While these organizations have had a positive impact on teacher education, their interventions have sometimes been critiqued for being overly focused on international standards, which may not always align perfectly with local contexts and needs (Demeke, 2018).

UNESCO and UNICEF have played pivotal roles in advancing teacher education and strengthening Ethiopia's education system. UNESCO's International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa (IICBA), in partnership with UNICEF's Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) and the African Union, organized workshops to enhance teacher policy development. In 2023, UNESCO prioritized mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) for educators to address post-COVID-19 challenges. UNICEF has supported curriculum reforms focusing on early childhood development and play-based learning. Through the Multi-Year Resilience Programme, UNICEF, in 2020, partnered with Ethiopia's Ministry of Education to improve access to education during crises and enhance teacher capacity. These initiatives underscore UNESCO's and UNICEF's significant roles in improving teacher education and bolstering the resilience of Ethiopia's education system.

USAID has been another major contributor to Ethiopia's teacher education sector, providing funding for the construction of teacher training colleges and the development of educational resources. One of USAID's notable contributions is the introduction of in-service training programs, which have helped improve the skills of existing teachers and facilitate their adaptation to new pedagogical approaches (Negash, 2006). However, USAID's programs have occasionally been criticized for promoting a more Americanized model of education, which may not always consider Ethiopia's unique socio-cultural dynamics (Gebre, 2015).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has made a substantial impact on Ethiopia's teacher education system through initiatives designed to improve educational access, equity, quality, and relevance. Beginning from 1994 with the Basic Education System Overhaul (BESO I), USAID focused on strengthening primary education by enhancing teacher training and educational management (USAID, 2010). This effort was extended to 2002 with BESO II, which emphasized community participation and capacity building within the education sector. Moreover, USAID has been instrumental in providing in-service training programs that improve teaching methodologies and subject matter expertise, thereby elevating the quality of education in Ethiopia (Ethiopia Pilot Study, 2006). Through these sustained efforts, USAID has played a pivotal role in developing and enhancing Ethiopia's teacher education system and improving the overall quality of education in the country.

The World Bank in its part has focused on broad educational reforms in Ethiopia, often tied to structural adjustment programs that emphasize efficiency, accountability, and measurable outcomes. The World Bank's funding has enabled large-scale improvements in educational infrastructure, including the establishment of new teacher training facilities and the provision of teaching materials (Yizengaw, 2007a & b). However, critics argue that the World Bank's emphasis on standardized testing and quantifiable metrics has, at times, detracted from the development of more holistic, context-sensitive approaches to teacher education (Negash, 2006).

The World Bank has significantly contributed to enhancing Ethiopia's teacher education system through various initiatives aimed at improving educational quality and access. A notable effort is the General Education Quality Improvement Project II (GEQIP II), which, during its implementation, facilitated the graduation of over 20,000 primary teacher trainees and more than 5,600 secondary school teacher trainees in the 2016/17 academic year (World Bank, 2017a). Furthermore, the project supported the distribution of millions of textbooks and supplementary materials, improving the student-textbook ratio and providing essential resources for teachers and students. Building upon these efforts, the General Education Quality Improvement Program for Equity (GEQIP-E), launched in 2017, has implemented targeted interventions across all of Ethiopia's primary and secondary public schools to strengthen the education sector from the ground up, ensuring students and teachers receive the necessary support to enhance learning outcomes (World Bank, 2017b). Through these comprehensive programs, the World Bank has played a pivotal role in advancing Ethiopia's teacher education system and overall educational quality.

Other international organizations, such as the British Council and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), have also made notable contributions. The British Council has focused on English language proficiency, sponsoring training programs to improve teachers'

language skills and instructional methods in English, which is the medium of instruction in Ethiopian secondary and tertiary education (Wolff, 2011). GIZ, on the other hand, has worked extensively in rural areas, promoting teacher training programs that emphasize vocational skills and community engagement, thereby aligning teacher education with local economic development goals (Berhanu, 2012).

While the contributions of these organizations have been invaluable in expanding access to teacher education and enhancing quality, their interventions are not without challenges. The reliance on international funding has sometimes led to an overemphasis on donor-driven priorities, which may not always align with Ethiopia's specific educational needs. Moreover, the focus on standardized approaches to teacher training can limit the flexibility of the education system, making it difficult for local institutions to adapt programs to the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of the country (Hailemariam, 2014).

In a nutshell, international organizations have played a crucial role in the development of teacher education in Ethiopia, offering resources and expertise that have supported substantial progress. However, for Ethiopia to maximize the benefits of these contributions, it will be essential to continue integrating local perspectives and ensuring that international initiatives are adapted to the country's unique context.

Summary

Table 1 below provides a structured and chronological summary of the historical evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia, tracing its development from traditional religious foundations to the contemporary period. The table delineates key transformations across six major political eras—Pre-Modern, Menelik II, Haile Selassie, the Derg regime, the EPRDF period, and the Current Era. For each period, it outlines the core focus of teacher education content, prevailing pedagogical philosophies, institutional organization of teacher training, and the primary challenges encountered. This synthesis underscores how teacher education has continuously evolved in response to sociopolitical dynamics, national reforms, and global educational trends, while also revealing persistent structural and contextual challenges that have influenced the emergence of a coherent and contextually relevant teacher education system in Ethiopia.

Table 1:

Evolution of Teacher Education in Ethiopia: Shifts in Content, Pedagogy, Organization, and Challenges

Historical Period	Content Focus	Pedagogical Approach	Organizational Structure	Key Challenges
Pre-Modern Era (Pre-1908)	Religious instruction (Bible, Ge'ez,	Apprenticeship model, oral transmission, rote memorization	Informal teacher preparation in churches/monaste	Exclusivity, lack of secular or scientific content, gender exclusion,

Historical Period	Content Focus	Pedagogical Approach	Organizational Structure	Key Challenges
	liturgy, chant, poetry)		ries led by senior clergy (Yeneta)	oral/non-standard curriculum
Menelik II Era (1908–1930)	Introduction of secular content (basic sciences, languages, arithmetic)	Teacher-centered, missionary influence, didactic approaches	First modern school (1908); beginning of structured teacher training; foreign educators and missionaries	Urban concentration, limited local expertise, inadequate infrastructure
Haile Selassie Era (1930–1974)	Expansion of modern subjects; moral and civic education added	Structured pedagogy, early student-teacher practicum, top-down reforms	Establishment of teacher training institutes (e.g., Addis Ababa Teachers' College, Faculty of Education)	Urban bias, theoretical focus, weak linkage to classroom realities, dependence on foreign models
Derg Regime (1974–1991)	Marxist-Leninist ideology, technical/vocational training	Ideological instruction, collectivist and authoritarian methodology	Centralized curriculum; expanded TTCs nationwide; military-style teacher roles	Ideological bias over pedagogy, teacher politicization, centralized rigidity, weak critical thinking
EPRDF Era (1991–2018)	Competency-based education, critical thinking, CPD, localized curriculum	Shift to student-centered learning, integration of PCK and practicum	TESO reform (2002); PGDT for secondary; TTC expansion; decentralized teacher education governance	Uneven reform execution, regional inequality, lack of alignment with school curriculum
Current Era (2019–Present)	21st-century skills, digital literacy, indigenous knowledge, vocational skills	Blended pedagogy (TPCK, reflective teaching, formative assessment)	National Teacher Education Framework (2024); levels-based qualification (certificate, diploma, degree)	Implementation gaps, resource scarcity, misalignment between training and classroom realities

Conclusions

As can be understood from the discussions above, the evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia reflects a complex interplay of historical, political, and cultural factors that have shaped its current form. From its roots in religious instruction to its modernization under various regimes,

Ethiopian teacher education has undergone significant reforms aimed at improving educational quality and relevance. While strides have been made, challenges remain, including resource limitations, quality disparities, and the need for continuous professional development. Today, Ethiopia's teacher education system is more diverse and structured, yet it requires on-going reforms to align with the nation's evolving educational goals and international standards.

The development of teacher education in Ethiopia underscores the importance of adapting to societal needs while retaining a sense of cultural identity. As Ethiopia continues to prioritize education as a tool for national development, the role of teachers remains crucial. Ensuring that teacher education programs are well-aligned with local contexts and global best practices will be essential for fostering a robust educational system capable of addressing both current and future challenges.

The evolution of teacher education in Ethiopia has significant implications for policy, practice, and future research. For policymakers, the historical progression underscores the need for adaptable and contextually relevant education policies that address the diverse needs of Ethiopian society. Teacher education institutions must consider both the socio-cultural contexts and the increasing demand for competency-based and student-centered pedagogies. Furthermore, integrating technology and addressing regional disparities in teacher training are critical for meeting the country's development goals. This calls for on-going investment in resources, infrastructure, and professional development to support educators effectively.

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