A Critical Review of the Practice of Teacher Education in Ethiopia: Assumptions, Promises and Pitfalls

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Abstract

It is believed that education, which is greatly influenced by the practice of teacher education, has a significant impact up on the success of any individual and a nation. Hence, to improve the quality of education in a nation, it is important to improve the quality of teacher education in that nation. This paper is intended to examine whether teacher education practices in Ethiopia address the problems and realities of the Ethiopian educational system and to assess whether the assumptions and practices of the Ethiopian teacher education complements with modern perspectives. To achieve this purpose, the teacher education program is analyzed against empirical evidences. Furthermore, the study has explored the challenges faced in the implementation of the teacher education program. To this end, trainee teachers, teachers, teacher educators, concerned others and pertinent documents were used as sources of data. Data were collected from different sources using document analysis, interview and observation. Using Hatch's interpretive data analysis model I have examined the data closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomena being studied. Finally, I came to understand that the teacher education practice in Ethiopia is seriously entangled with many problems associated with recruitment, training and education, development of pedagogical content knowledge and practice-teaching. The implication of this study has illuminated ways to resolve the problems observed.

Key Words: Teacher Education, Teacher Education Program, Educational System, Teacher Preparation

1. Introduction

Education has increasingly become important to the success of both individuals and nations. Hence it can be said that the fate of any nation by and large is determined by the quality of

education in that nation. Here note that in the search for ways to improve quality of education, most countries increasingly focus on understanding complex interactions that take place at the school, classroom, and community levels as the primary engines of quality and as a way of engaging local actors to address the frequently weak link between policy and practice (Farrell, 2002). Of the factors that contribute to education quality at the local level, quality of teaching is recognized as the key, the factor without which other quality inputs are unlikely to be successful (Anderson, 2002; UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO, 2006).

The quality of education in a nation is greatly determined (above any other factor) by the quality of teachers and teacher education in that nation. Supporting this idea Darling-Hammond (2006) stated that, among all educational resources, teachers' abilities are especially critical contributors to students learning and consequently to the success of a nation to advance in it's economic, social and political spheres. In the same token Feiman-Nemser (2001) stated that, what students learn is directly related to what and how teachers teach; and what and how teachers teach depends on the knowledge, skills and commitments they bring to their teaching and the opportunities they have to continue learning in and from their experience.

An interesting fact in this regard is that, an educational institution performs a significant function of providing learning experiences to students so as to lead them from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge. In this regard the key personnel in the institutions (schools) who play an important role to bring about this transformation are teachers. Hence, it is important to underline, now and then, the fact that the teacher is the most important element in any educational program. It is the teacher who is mainly responsible for implementing educational programs and process at any stage. Hence, what teachers know and can do makes crucial difference in what teachers can accomplish. Based on this fact, it can be concluded that the transformation of any nation and its society is to large extent determined by the transformation of education, schools and the stakeholders (mainly teachers) in the schools. But this is not to mean that individual teachers alone are responsible for the successes and failures of the educational system. Rather, it is to mean that teachers are the most important of all the personnel in schools in implementing educational programs and practices. Therefore, it is imperative to invest in the preparation of teachers, so as to secure the future of a nation. Here one might raise the question

'Is the teacher education program in Ethiopia able to produce well qualified professional teachers who properly execute their professional and social responsibilities?'

2. Methods and Design of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to examine whether the teacher education practices in Ethiopia address the problems and realities of the Ethiopian education system and to assess whether the assumptions and practices of the Ethiopian teacher education complement with modern perspectives of teacher education. To achieve this purpose, it is important to analyze the teacher education program vis-à-vis the empirical evidences collected on the practices of the teacher education programs and reforms, and to explore the challenges faced in the implementation of the teacher education program as reported by concerned parties, especially teacher educators and newly recruited teachers. Hence, to achieve the purposes of this research, I decided to use qualitative research methodology.

The sources of data were officials in the Federal Ministry of Education, Regional Education Bureaus, teacher educators and recently recruited teachers. Furthermore, pertinent documents were used as sources of data. Data were collected using interview, observation and document analysis. That is, analysis of documents pertinent to selection, training, curriculum components and practice teaching or practicum, has been made. In addition, interview was used to understand the perspectives and practices of officials in the Federal Ministry of Education, Regional Education Bureaus, teacher educators and recently recruited teachers. Furthermore, observation was made to assure (triangulate) the classroom practices of teacher educators and the trainee teachers.

Using Hatch's interpretive data analysis model, one of the five models of qualitative data analysis (Hatch, 2002), I have examined the data closely in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the phenomena being studied (teacher education). In this case it should be noted that, my analytic reflection was aided by the data I gathered through a lived-in-it experience. Of course, I was able to uniquely capitalize on my personal experience; since I have been directly involved in the training of teachers (both primary and secondary school) for the last twenty years. Therefore, I have had the chance to be involved in all the activities and practices pertinent to teacher education in teacher education institutions.

3. Context Analysis

It is known that human experience is shaped in particular context and cannot be understood if removed from those contexts. Supporting this idea Yin (1989, 2003) emphasizes the importance of studying a phenomenon in its natural context. He observes that studies in social phenomena typically involve investigation of the phenomenon for which the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident. He argues that these boundaries should be clarified as part of the study. Based on this fact, I have tried to describe the contexts surrounding the practice of teacher education in Ethiopia. With this vein, I have given description of the socio-political, historical and theoretical backgrounds that contributed to the existing practices of teacher education in the country.

3.1. Socio-political Context

Ethiopia, officially known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, is a country located in the Horn of Africa. It is one of the populous countries in the world and the second-most populated nation on the African continent (MoE, 2010) with a multilingual society of around 80 ethnic groups. It is a land of natural contrasts with diverse climate, land surface, natural resources, cultures, etc.

In 1994 a constitution was adopted that led Ethiopia to federal governance. Hence, the country now has a government system consisting of a federal government overseeing regional states. By now the country has ten ethnically based and politically 'autonomous' regional states and two chartered city councils. Each regional state and/or city council is further divided in to administrative units called zones (sub-cities in the case of the city councils) then further to woredas (districts) and finally to kebeles (the smallest administrative unit).

At this juncture it should be noted that, the provision of education is the concurrent responsibility of federal, regional and woreda governments. The Federal Government plays the dominant role in the provision of post-secondary education, while also setting standards and providing overall policy guidance and monitoring and evaluation for the entire education sector. On the other hand, regional governments are responsible for the oversight of the training of primary school teachers, for providing primary school textbooks and for adapting the primary school syllabus to local conditions. Woredas are responsible for recruiting and paying of primary and secondary school

teachers. Furthermore, they are responsible for supervising and providing in-service training (in the form of continuous professional development) for primary and secondary school teachers (MoE, 2008).

3.2. Historical Context

It is known that teaching has been one of the oldest and respected professions in the world. In line with this, the role, functions, competence and preparation of teachers have undergone a dramatic change from time to time. This is because; the changing times as well as the requirements of the society have necessitated changes in the ways of teacher preparation in all its history in Ethiopia and in the world at large. Here note that, conceptions of teaching reflect the values and social philosophy of the larger society, and as these change, so too does society's view of its teachers (Arends, 2009). Hence, to understand the role of the teacher in today's society requires a brief historical review of some of the important changes that have taken place in teaching and schooling over the past century.

Until the early years of the twenty century there was no modern schooling in Ethiopia. It was in 1908 that the first modern school in the country was established. From its inception until 1944/5 Ethiopian modern schooling was inhabited by teachers and principals from abroad. Hence, it was only in 1944/5 that the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts opened its first teacher training institution called a 'college' in one room at the Menilik II School (Taye, 1993; MoE, 1999; Yizenbgaw, 2000 and Zewdie, 2000). The teacher training institution was later moved to new location at Gulele, in Addis Ababa, at the then police officers' club in 1945/6 and later to Harar in 1952. In Harar it was renamed as the Harar Teacher Training School.

The Harar Teacher Training School started its work by adopting a new 8+4 structure. That is, admitting trainees who completed Grade 8 and train them for four years. In 1963/64 the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts decided to standardize the teacher training policy of the country. Consequently, it announced the phase out of the 8+4 program of training and introduced the 10+2 structure. That is, admitting trainers who completed grade 10 and train them for two years. By then, the overall practice of education was not satisfying. Sensing this situation the imperial government initiated a study called the Education Sector Review in 1971.

Education Sector Review (to be called ESR here after) was the first and one of the most impressive educational plans in the history of the Ethiopian education system. It had introduced a number of innovative ideas to the educational system of the country; one of which is the need to orientate the educational practice of the country to practice (activity oriented) than its old bookish and academic orientation. Furthermore, in that study it was suggested that the rural population be made the target of educational policy. However, the implementation of the ESR plan was postponed in January 1974, following a national teachers' strike, and consequently with the overthrow of the majestic regime later in the year they were officially dropped (Cameron and Hurst (ed.), 1983).

The Dergue (a military group that took the power and began to rule the country) did not continue as was planned in the ESR. Rather the government passed a resolution calling for a review of the education sector in 1983. Soon after the passing of the resolution, the Ministry of Education initiated a project known as the Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (to be called ERGESE here after). In general, ERGESE noted that text books and hence the whole educational practice do not reflect national educational objectives and that most of them pay attention to the teaching rather than learning dimensions (Negash, 1990). Furthermore, Dergue had observed that the curriculum did not take into account the concrete conditions in the country (Negash, 1996). Although, the final ERGESE report was submitted to the government at the end of 1985, it appears that the government has either ignored the ERGESE report completely or simply shelved it (Negash, 1990).

After 1963(4), the structure of all schools in the country had changed from the then prevailing 8-4 system to the 6-2-4- structure (that is, six years of primary school, two years of junior secondary school and four years of secondary school). This had paved the way for the training of teachers for three levels; namely teacher training for elementary schools (1-6) at certificate level, junior secondary schools (7-8) at diploma level and secondary schools (9-12) at first degree level. The military government continued this tradition (the training of teachers for the three levels). Despite this fact, as Negash (1996) stated, the Dergue dismissed many of the educated elite which it inherited from the imperial era and filled the vacant posts by those who were to graduate under its benign support and encouragement. Side-by-side, the military government employed a significant number of untrained teachers to fill the scarcity of teachers in schools.

This has greatly affected the quality of education and partly the respect of the teaching profession in the country. All in all, it has been observed that the Ethiopian educational system for years (of course, up until the downfall of the military government) was suffering from enormous problems of access, equity, relevance and quality (FDRGE, 1994).

The present Ethiopian government documented the inadequacy of the education system to prepare the learner for useful participation in the community. Thus the government developed a new Education and Training Policy (to be called ETP here after) so as to alleviate the age long problems that entangled the education system of the country (ibid). A number of measures were and still are taken to alleviate, if not to get ride with, the aforementioned age long problems of the educational practices of the country. Consequently the measures taken have brought a number of changes.

One of the significant changes brought to the educational system of the country with the inception of ETP is the change in educational structure. In this case an 8+4 educational structure is introduced. That is 8-years of primary schooling and 4-years of secondary schooling. Each of the levels is further classified in to two cycles: first cycle of primary school (from Grade 1 to 4), second cycle of primary school (from Grade 5 to 8), first cycle of general secondary schools (from Grade 9 to 10) and second cycle of higher education preparatory schools (from Grade 11 to 12). In line with this, primary schools teacher education succeeds general secondary education (i.e. completion of Grade 10) and covers 3 years of college studies. On the other hand, secondary schools teacher education follows the completion of higher education preparatory schools (Grade 12) and covers 3 years of university studies in academic specialization and 1 year training and education in pedagogical knowledge and skills for post graduate diploma in teaching (to be called as PGDT here after).

The other important change (and of course success) brought to the educational system of Ethiopia with the inception of ETP is the expansion of education from primary through secondary till tertiary level. The net enrolment rate in primary education increased from 24.9% in 1996/97 to 73.2% in 2004/05 (MoE, 2005). Similarly, the total enrollment in secondary education (Grades 9 to 12) increased from 426,495 in 1996/97 to 953,217 in 2004/05, a rise of 123%. In 2004/05, the gross enrollment rate for girls, boys and the total in the first cycle of secondary education (Grades 9-10) reached 19.8%, 34.6% and 27.3% respectively (ibid). Such

an expansion in education obviously requires the deployment of large number of quality teachers. Despite the achievements in the enrollment rate of the Ethiopian educational practice, it is observed (especially in some regions) that the quality of education has deteriorated. Concerning this reality MoE (2008:2) stated that the achievements in enrolment have not been accompanied by sufficient progress in the quality of education – in fact, "… in some areas quality has deteriorated, at least partly as a result of rapid expansion."

Following the expansion of primary and secondary education, there observed a tremendous expansion of the teacher education institutions and the teacher educators. This as one factor might have negatively affected the quality of teacher education in the country. This is because; many of the teacher education institutions sprang here and there without significant preparation in human and material resources. This and other related reasons caused the teacher education practices of the country not to be up to snuff. Sensing this reality the federal government introduced a teacher education system overhaul (to be called TESO here after) thirteen years ago.

The reasons that initiated the TESO reform had been outlined by the Ministry of Education as below (MOE, 2003):

- The professional competence of teachers is deficient.
- The content knowledge of teachers is unsatisfactory.
- Teachers do not match up to the standards and expectations of their professions.
- Practicum receives inadequate emphasis and is insufficiently implemented.
- The quality of courses and methods of teaching are theoretical and teacher centered.
- There is lack of professionalism, and ethical values in Ethiopia teacher education program; etc.

Despite important achievements following the introduction of TESO, still now there are problems that currently characterize secondary schools teachers' education (but not limited to) and that are very much similar to those which TESO was meant to address. For example, the Ministry of Education (2009) indicated that the following are major problems of the day:

- Teachers' subject matter competence is inadequate.
- Active learning methods are not properly and sufficiently employed.
- Professional commitment and work ethics are not demonstrated as desired.

- Teachers' interest to follow up and assist students is low.
- School-community relationships are poor.

Hence to alleviate these problems the government has introduced a new secondary school teachers' education schema called the PGDT which is in place by now.

3.3. Theoretical Context

Goods Dictionary of Education as cited in Aggarwal (2004) defined teacher education as all the formal and non-formal activities and experiences that help to qualify a person to assume the responsibility as a member of the educational profession or to discharge his/her responsibility most effectively as a teacher. It refers to the programs and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school and wider community. In other words, it is a program that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and face the challenges therein.

As stated so far, teacher education refers to the processes and practices through which teachers gain, deepen, and expand their professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions. These processes and practices are complex and occur over the course of teachers' careers and across multiple contexts, including universities, schools, and professional networks and associations. Hence, although ideally it should be conceived of, and organized as, a perfect continuum, teacher education is often divided into the following three stages: initial teacher education (a pre-service teacher education), induction (the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school) and teacher development or continuing professional development (to be called CPD here after). In Ethiopia, initial teacher education is usually the responsibility of teacher education institutions. But induction training and the CPD (excluding upgrading from certificate to diploma and the like practices) is usually the responsibility of schools that host the deployed teachers. Hence, in this paper emphasis is given to the initial teacher education practice (i.e. the pre-service teacher education program).

In recent years, there has been a good deal of controversy over the preparation of teachers. Some argue that teachers need more expertise in their subject matters; others suggest that teachers need

more expertise in pedagogical knowledge and skills. Feiman-Nemser (1990) provides interesting classifications of conceptual orientations in teacher education which characterized reform movements within the United States over the past century. These orientations refer to a body of values and beliefs about teaching and teacher education that at different points in history have been particularly influential in shaping the nature of initial teacher education courses. The conceptual orientations are: the academic orientation, the practical orientation, the technical orientation, the personal orientation and the critical inquiry orientation. Let's look them apart:

- The academic-orientation emphasizes teachers' subject expertise and sees the quality of the teacher's own education as his/her professional strength. In this view, a sound liberal arts education is seen as the crucial ingredient of teacher preparation.
- The practical-orientation, on the other hand, emphasizes the artistry and classroom technique of the teacher, viewing the teacher as a craftsperson. It therefore attaches importance to classroom experience and apprenticeship models of learning to teach.
- The technical-orientation derives from a behaviorist model of teaching and learning, emphasizes the knowledge and behavioral skills that teachers require and has been associated with microteaching and competency-based approaches to teacher education.
- The personal-orientation emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relationships in the classroom, often derives support from humanistic psychology, and views learning to teach as a process of 'becoming' or personal development. In this view, teacher education takes the form of offering a safe environment which encourages experimentation and discovery of personal strengths.
- The critical inquiry-orientation views schooling as a process of social reform and emphasizes the role of schools in promoting democratic values and reducing social injustices; an important aspect of teacher education is, therefore, seen as enabling prospective teachers to become aware of the social context of schools and of the social consequences of their own actions as teachers. Within this orientation, teacher education functions to help teachers become critical, reflective change-agents alignment

Regardless of the aforementioned orientations, there are two divergent perspectives (that are aligned with the two epistemologies) that describe the practice of teacher education and the curricula therein: positivism and constructivism.

3.3.1 Positivism:

This epistemology or concept of knowledge assumes that knowledge exists separate from the learner. That is, knowledge is something that is "out there" in the world, fixed, and made up of discrete and irrefutable pieces of information or fact. Within this concept of knowledge, there is relatively little room for interpretation; because, knowledge is seen as being primarily fixed or stable (Leu, 2000, 2001). Accordingly, there are facts, these facts are true and represent reality.

Marsh (1990) described the schools that adhere to this notion as characterized by "Para-military" kind of organization. This is because; everything within the school system is regulated by certain rules. Thus, throughout the day there are all sorts of minor checks and routines that make it easier for a student to conform than to use his/her individuality. According to this model teachers and text books are considered to be the most important, perhaps the sole, sources of information. The task of schooling is, therefore, transmission (imposition).

The type of educational practice associated with this model is in fact imposition from above and from outside. That is, it imposes adult standards, subject matter, and methods up on those who are only growing slowly toward maturity (Dewey, 1938). Paulo Freire further explained this notion with his verification of the "Banking concept of education" (Freire, 1972:72). Accordingly, the teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable or else she/he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existing experience of the students.

Freire (1972) adds; the outstanding characteristic of this form of educational practice is the sonority of words, not their transforming power. 'Learning is a change in behavior in individuals; three times three is nine; the earth rotates on its own axis.' The student records, memorizes and repeats these 'sayings' without perceiving the true meaning of 'change in behavior', or realizing what three times three means or understanding the real aspect of earth's rotation. Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the student teachers are the depositories and the teacher educator is the depositor (ibid).

From the foregoing discussion one can easily understand the fact that the task of the teacher educator while designing the curriculum is to design it while giving due respect to the nature of

the discipline and its logical organization; that present large amount of information in a straight forward manner (Leu, 2001). That is, information is mostly organized according to academic disciplines in a linear (non-integrated) form. In this model the tendency is to design the curriculum overcrowded with subject contents without considering the interest, experience, ability, etc. of the learner to whom it is designed. In this case, when one looks at the textbooks or lecture notes of instructors he/she sees page after page of presentation of facts and information probably followed by questions that ask pupils to recall or repeat the information. It is possible to find activities hear, but they often play a minor role; because they simply ask for factual information and are usually placed at the very end of the unit or course like an afterthought.

The teacher educator in the classroom, according to this notion, repeats or 'gives' the prescribed pieces of information from the textbook or lecture notes as "efficiently" as possible mostly using the 'talk and chalk' method of instruction. And consequently, the task of the learners (the trainee prospective teachers) is to absorb or memorize facts or pieces of information often for the purpose of repeating them (Leu, 2001, 2000). There is less emphasis on linking facts and making a coherent and meaningful whole. Often just memorizing the facts is sufficient and is thought to be successful learning. Thus, prospective teachers in this view think of teaching as passing on knowledge and learning as absorbing and memorizing knowledge (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

This view that dominated teacher education institutions for many decades in many areas of the world basically has not changed, although many studies have shown its failure to strongly influence the practices of graduates of teacher education programs (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). Thus, the view is criticized for its understanding of the learners (prospective teachers) as passive recipient of knowledge and hence, uncritical. That is, critical reflection of once own thinking, perspective and practices is not encouraged in this model. John Dewey described the educational problem of this position as: "It is as if the child were forever tasting and never eating; always having his palate tickled upon the emotional side, but never getting the organic satisfaction that comes only with digestion of food and transformation of it into working power." (Dewey, 1968: 17)

3.3.2 Constructivism

The limitations and criticism behind the trans-missive approach to teaching-learning eventually led to the development of a new approach to learning-constructivism. The constructivist epistemology assumes that knowledge is produced or made meaningful through interaction between the learner and the world around him/her (Leu, 2000, 2001). This interaction leads to interpretation and understanding, not just memorization. Brooks and Brooks (1993) stated that, construction of understanding of the world we live in is key if we are going to make sense of new experiences and relate them to previous learning. It is this form of practice that is termed to be "true learning". True learning as defined by Holt (1969) is learning that is permanent and useful, that leads to intelligent action and further learning that arises only out of the experience, interests, and concerns of the learner.

According to this view, the world is not seen as being made up primarily of fixed facts. Instead, all knowledge is seen as being rather unstable and depends on the interpretation of the learner or the observer. Thus Kliebard (1993) said that it is better not to look for rules, but for certain key ideas that can apply to a given situation. Although some facts are seen as being relatively fixed or stable, the instructional emphasis is on using those facts in a creative, analytical or critical way rather than just absorbing them for the purpose of repetition. When we analyze and interpret, we also produce or construct knowledge or new ways of looking at the world. Therefore, it can be said that knowledge is constructed inside people's mind; it is neither outside (real) nor inside (mental) but both (like the water in the jug in the ocean) (Wilson, 1994). Education on this view is, therefore, a process of development.

Hence, if education is the means by which we help the individual to structure her/his experience in this way, then it must start from within rather than being imposed from without (Blenkin and Kelly, 1981). In other words, it implies that education is something a person gets for himself or herself, not that which someone else gives or does to him/her (Holt, 1969). Therefore, according to this notion, the learner is the focal point in the educative process. That is, she/he is the starting-point, the center, and the end (Dewey, 1968).

Thus, to the development of the learner all studies are subservient; that is, they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of development. In short, it can be said that the learner is the agent in his/her own learning (Thomas, 1990). Hence, it is he/she-the student not the subject matter that determines both the quality and quantity of learning. Subject matter is but spiritual food, possible nutritive material. It cannot digest itself; it cannot of its own occurred turn into bone and muscle and blood (Dewey, 1968).

Followers of this position recommend the use of experience, inquiry and the environment as resource of learning, based on the learner's stage of cognitive development needs and interests (Salia-Bao, 1989). Therefore, the teacher educator while designing the curriculum develops materials in a way which provide opportunities for students (prospective teachers) to interact with the world around him/her. Thus, the student understands, thinks critically, makes linkages, interprets, analyzes, draws conclusions and communicates about what he/she is learning. Here, the teacher educators do not just give information in textbooks; rather, they design activities to encourage students to interact with information from the world around them. Therefore, textbooks and/ or materials designed for teaching are not over- crowded and overly academic; instead, room is left for exploring and interpreting knowledge (Leu, 2000, 2001).

Many of the attempts related with the constructivist perspective are characterized by an emphasis on reflective teaching (Calder head, 1989). This implies that teacher development is conceptualized as an ongoing process of experiencing practical teaching and learning situations, reflecting on them under the guidance of an expert, and developing one's own insights into teaching through the interaction between personal reflection and theoretical notions offered by the expert (Korthagen and Kessels, 1999). On the other hand, the teacher educator in his/her practice use methods that encourage the students to be as active as possible by analyzing and interpreting knowledge through the use of reflective practice, higher order thinking skills, active learning, problem solving and communication-based methods in their teaching (Leu, 2001). Thus, the teacher (in this case the teacher educator) becomes guide, helper and resource person (Macdonald, 1971). In short, she/he is there to guide the student (in this case would be teacher) in the development of his/her experiences and of the ability to build those experiences into a coherent body of knowledge and understanding (Blenkin and Kelly, 1981). In other words,

helping individual students or would be teachers make sense and meaning of what they were learning becomes the role of the teacher educator.

The history of Ethiopian education, in general, has shown that its theoretical orientation for years was greatly, if not totally, inclined to the positivist paradigm. Hence, teacher education cannot be an exception to this fact. Of course, it is only recently with the inception of ETP that the educational system of the country started to orientate towards the constructivist paradigm. The new idea introduced with the ETP is compatible with conceptions of teaching, learning, and knowledge that undergird new visions of reform minded practices. Before the prospective teachers can embarrass these new visions, prospective teachers need opportunities to examine critically their taken-for-granted, often deeply entrenched beliefs so that these beliefs can be developed or amended (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Hence, teacher educators should engage prospective teachers in a critical examination of their entering beliefs in light of compelling alternatives and help them develop powerful images of good teaching and strong professional commitments, so that these entering beliefs will continue to shape their ideas and practices (ibid).

4. Review of the Practices of Teacher Education in Ethiopia

This section provides my personal reflection of the teacher education practices of the country. I have presented my reflection in four thematic areas, namely: recruitment in to the profession, training and education in teacher education institutions, pedagogical content knowledge of trainee teachers and practice-teaching.

4.1. Recruitment in to the Profession

According to the ETP, the conscription of teachers is designed to be based on academic competence and interest. Concerning this the policy states as, it will be ascertained that "teacher trainees have the ability, diligence, professional interest, and physical and mental fitness appropriate for the profession" (FDRGE, 1994:20). To this end, TESO is aimed to attract interested and potentially able students to the teaching force (MoE, 2003). Despite this fact, no reliable mechanism is in place for checking and assuring the academic competence and interest of the novice teachers towards the teaching profession before they are allowed to join the profession.

Regarding academic competence, the selection practice is carried for the primary school teacher education usually from among those who failed to pass the pre-university learning (higher education preparatory schools) program. Hence, how can it be possible to say that such candidates are competent enough to teach at primary school level? Surprisingly, many of the student teachers join the teaching profession when they feel that they find no means to join what they call 'the better professions like: business and accounting, health science, technical education, etc.'. This was confirmed by TESO (MoE, 2003). This situation was extremely serious when it is associated with the 10 + 1 structure of the first cycle of primary school teachers training which existed until recently. This structure was seriously criticized by scholars (Mekonnen, 2008); and the critique might have led to the change in the structure from the 10 + 1 to the 10 + 3 a few years ago. This is synonymous with the existing second cycles of primary school teacher education program.

The situation becomes even worst when it comes to the selection of secondary school teachers. In this case, those who are academically outstanding usually prefer to join those fields of study other than the teaching profession (engineering, medicine, fields in business and economics, etc.). It is less likely to find outstanding students joining the applied fields of natural sciences and social sciences that are related to the academic disciplines of secondary schools. Commonly even the applied science graduates primarily look for jobs in non-teaching careers such as industries, business, social administration, politics and the like. Many come to join the teaching profession when they feel that they are unable (of course through competition) to find jobs of other types. Here the saying of one of the novice teacher suffices. He says "I had to look for jobs other than the teaching profession for a year; but I could not find any. There is strong competition among graduates. Hundreds of graduates compete for few vacant posts." Hence he adds "I am obliged to join the teaching profession; because I could not afford to stay jobless in such day of general social economic bankruptcy"

On the other hand, it is observed that there is no way to check (before entry in to the teaching profession) the attitude and interest of the candidates about the teaching profession. Hence, many of the newly recruited teachers joined the profession as a stepping stone (as a springboard) for another profession. An expert in the MoE stated this awkward feeling of the novice teachers by saying "many of the new teachers leave the profession immediately when they find an

alternative. Not least of them leave it even without finishing their two years commitment". In the same token a novice teacher said that she joined the profession because she found no way to go and no means to work. She says in a very displease mood "unless I joined this hideous profession I feel I will remain being jobless".

On the other hand, it needs to be clearly noted that, mastery of content area knowledge (in the Ethiopian secondary school teacher education system) is addressed through the teaching of courses in the specific subject. This is apprehended in the three years university education when the students are attending their degree courses in the applied disciplines. In this case, the students learn their respective subjects while considering themselves as they are would be applied scientists than teachers. This created the conviction (in the mind of both the students and their teachers) that they are going to be scientists than teachers. A university chemistry teacher who feels that teaching is inferior to other professions said that "our graduates will join the verities of industries in the country, and that teaching is the last option they have at hand. Hence, they are not by now (like the earlier years) obliged to join the teaching profession." Similarly a history instructor when discussing with me about the fate of graduates in history stated that "they are likely to be consultants, social workers, politicians (but a few)." Teaching for them is, he adds with an astonished facial expression, "one from the many options they deserve". Undoubtedly he was very much dissatisfied with my question, feeling that teaching, the 'inferior' profession, should be regarded as an option from the ocean of opportunities in the job market. This situation certainly creates mystified feelings on the part of the graduates, as far as the teaching profession is concerned. Needless to say, it is with these feelings that the graduates join the teaching profession.

4.2. The Training and Education in Teacher Education Institutions

A complete change in educational philosophy of Ethiopia was recommended from the outset of the inception of the present ETP. Regarding this, one of the general educational objectives in the ETP states "Develop the physical and mental potential and the problem-solving capacity of individuals…" (FDRGE, 1994:7). In line with this and other similar objectives of the ETP, TESO has clearly articulated the need for a complete paradigm shift. Accordingly rote, passive learning has been replaced with a commitment to active, learner-focused education. This requires a Teacher Education System that develops higher order thinking skills in graduates (MoE, 2003).

To realize the intentions of the ETP and TESO the government introduced Higher Diploma Program (to be called HDP here after) for all the instructors in teacher education institution when TESO was in place in 2004.

HDP was meant to improve the pedagogical competence of the teacher educators in teacher education institutions. In relation to this, the paradigm shift envisaged in the TESO document involves (MoE, 2003):

- teaching which makes changes - in ideas and directly in peoples' lives
- taking the real world into the classroom and taking teachers out into the real world
- democratizing teacher education - giving teachers, students and citizens confidence to make decisions and take initiative, to take control of their world.

With the aforementioned intentions, HDP was started to be implemented from 2004 onwards. However, the changes observed in the classroom practices of the teacher educators still are not as expected. Hence, teacher educators in teacher education institutions usually relay on the traditional practice of lecturing and an authoritarian teacher student relation. Here note that, there are many teacher educators who try their best in improving their classroom practices. But not least of them usually use discussion as the 'sole' technique of active learning. This has not only misled the prospective teachers but also dissatisfied them. In this case, it is common to see instructors in teacher education institutions who recommend the students frequently to sit together for discussion (even on issues that cannot be discussed). A student teacher asked me in my interview session with him as "all my teachers require me and my classmates to discuss. And discussion has come to be the culture of the day. I am feeling that active learning is exactly synonymous with discussion. Is it true?" Such feelings are the results of frequent exposure to group discussion at the expense of the hundreds and thousands of interactive classroom practices.

It is convincing that this practice of the teacher educators undoubtedly affects the pedagogical skills of the trainee teachers. I have made observation in the classroom practices of the recently deployed teachers. In my observation, I have clearly noticed the dominance of the lecture method and implementation of the discussion method in few instances along with the lectures. Some of the discussions I observed are not designed in an appropriate way with issues suitable for discussion. That is, either the issue presented or the way of presenting the issue or both are wrongly sated. For instance, I have observed a teacher asking the students to discuss on the first

low of mechanics. He said the students: “discus on the first low of mechanics”. What does this mean to the students? Is this really clear? Is the issue suitable for discussion? Another newly graduated primary school teacher asked her students to discuss about the parts of a tree. She said: “Discus about the parts of a tree”. Such observations of the teaching styles in Ethiopian schools not only confirm the newly established misunderstood paradigm but also point to the way in which this paradigm has been transmitted. In other words, the tendency reflected not only the teachers experience in their own schools but also the way they had been taught in the university. The saying ‘teachers teach the way they were taught’ suffice here. Zewdie (1993) stated that naturally what might come first to mind when teachers are asked to teach could be the way they were taught by their teachers. Therefore, it is conceivable that, it is too difficult for the newly deployed teachers, who were mystified, to exercise the new paradigm as set in the policy documents. Lortie (1975) stated that, images of teaching, learning, students, and subject matter formed during elementary and secondary schools (let alone the experience of teacher education institution) provide a base for interpreting and assessing ideas and practices encouraged during teacher preparation. These taken-for-granted beliefs may, says Feiman-Nemser (2001), mislead prospective teachers into thinking that they know more about teaching than they actually do and make it harder for them to form new ideas and new habits of thought and action.

The problem is even worst with the upgrading summer in-service teacher education practices. In this case, the total time allotted for each summer is eight weeks. From these, two to three weeks are exclusively meant for tutorial and final examination of distance courses and mid and final examination of the face to face courses. Therefore, what is purely left for the teaching of the face to face courses is about five to six weeks. This not only encourages but also enforces the teacher educators to relay on the traditional lecture method and there by jeopardizes the overall intent of the summer in-service training of teachers.

Here it should be noted that, the curriculum of the PGDT program is designed in a way that facilitates the use of active learning, continuous assessment and the like; and these in turn encourage the development of high order thinking skills. Despite this fact, it has been observed (in my observation of the practices of teacher educators) that the shortage of time in the summer-in-service training has created the following problems:

- The method of teaching usually used is the traditional lecture method.

- Assignments and activities designed in the PGDT framework and the curriculum are/cannot be carried as they are designed in the syllabus.
- Assessment of the students is usually carried through the traditional paper-pen examination.

All in all, it is indispensable to consider the shortage of time in the summer in-service training of teachers to alleviate the aforementioned critical problems observed.

4.3. The Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Trainee Teachers

This section gives account of a critical review of the pedagogical content knowledge needed for teachers. By pedagogical content knowledge it is to mean what teachers should use to explain concepts, ideas and facts in teaching their specific subject (Mekonnen, 2008). In the same token, Shulman (1987) defined it as an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, presented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction. In short, it refers to the knowledge that teachers use in classrooms to produce instruction and students development. It is a way of representing contents in an understandable and comprehensible manner.

According to Mekonnen (2008), pedagogical content knowledge is subject specific in that the contents and the modes of pedagogical representation vary from subject to subject. Hence, Shulman (1987) noted that, teachers need the most useful forms of representation of (the subject area's) ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations—in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others. Accordingly, this can be developed when teachers have mastery in content area knowledge of a discipline and in the corresponding specific methods of learning and teaching (ibid).

In the Ethiopian teacher education system, although there are courses called subject method of teaching, there are no teacher educators specifically trained for this purpose. Mekonnen (2008) stated that one of the problem in developing pedagogical content knowledge stems from the absence of teacher educators who are trained to teach subject methodology courses. He says "… apart from some subjects like English and Amharic, there are no teachers trained in the teaching of subject methods" p-294.

To alleviate the problem of dearth of trained teachers, who are trained to teach subject methodology courses, the teacher education institutions usually assign teachers who are subject specialists and attended some courses in general pedagogy when they were attending their first degree courses (as part of or in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Science or Arts or Education). As seen above, not least of these teachers lack the necessary pedagogical competence in designing activities and managing to create an interactive classroom atmosphere. Then, how can it be possible for these teachers to enable the prospective teachers to be effective in pedagogical content knowledge?

4.4. Practice-Teaching

The other important point that needs to be critically observed in relation to the teacher education practices of Ethiopia is the practice teaching that is often called practicum. Practicum is one of the three most important experiences that need to be arranged in teacher education programs. Supporting this, scholars in teacher education stated that teacher preparation should include subject matter, professional courses, and adequate field experiences-practicum (Buchberger, 2000; Shulman, 1987; Sultana, 2005). Based on this fact, TESO has given due emphasis to practicum (MoE, 2003).

Previously practicum (with its old name teaching practice) was used to be arranged for few weeks usually towards the end of the training year. Hence, was deficient in that firstly, it was too short in its duration. Secondly, it detaches the practice from its theoretical foundation while being acting like an afterthought activity. But important changes are observed with the inception of TESO. Of course, the practicum is one of the strengths of TESO when viewed in terms of the allocated duration and the planned activities which student teachers are expected to carry out during their stay in teacher education institutions (Mekonnen, 2008). Furthermore, MoE (2003) stated that practicum is well planned, “in that it progresses from level to level in a way that enables students grasp real situations in a developmental and well-organized manner. Notwithstanding these facts, there are important issues that need to be considered if practicum is to be effectively executed.

In the first place, the assignment of mentors is not appropriate; because, a few of them lack the necessary professional experience. Even few of them lack the necessary academic knowledge;

because, these teachers usually have two to four years of teaching experience. A student teacher states "my mentor has two years of experience in teaching and fortunately we know each other (at least in a facial look) when he was in a university." This clearly shows the fact that there is no any clearly stated standard in the assignment of mentors.

These kinds of mentors are not sure as to what is to be done in such a case. Mekonnen (2008) while listing the problems of TESO in relation to practicum stated that teachers in high schools are not clear about their role in monitoring pre-service teachers. Hence, discussion with some student teachers indicated that not few of the mentors execute their assigned duties and responsibilities in wrong ways. In line with this, the following problems are clearly observed:

- The mentors do not frequently visit the student teachers for enabling them to be competent in pedagogical skills.
- Sometimes, the mentors mislead the student teachers in both the academic knowledge and the pedagogical skills sides.
- Grades are given not based on the performance and effort of the student teachers; but, on personal criteria of the mentors (that is, sometimes contradictory to the intentions and requirements of TESO).
- There is no significant opportunity for discussion and reflection on what the student teachers have exercised and there by gained from the process.

The aforementioned problems are further exacerbated by the fact that there is no significant support given by teacher educators and/or the teacher education institutions. This is mainly because: firstly due to their large number the student teachers are assigned in relatively distant areas and schools. Secondly, the teacher educators (especially the primary school teacher educators) have relatively large number of teaching loads in their respective campus. Hence, the role of the teacher educators (especially the secondary school teacher educators) is very much limited to the observation of the students' reflection in the campus. That is, the students come to their respective institution to reflect on their own practices. However, in the word of a teacher educator, "the students usually rationalize on the various problems they faced during the practicum session". On the part of the primary school teacher educators, they have little chance of visiting the classroom practices of their students (they observe them usually one to two

periods - a period being 40minuts time). This can and should not be significant enough for appropriate supervision to be carried by the teacher educators.

The other important issue that needs to be considered is the real practice of the student teachers. In this case, primarily the students are expected to fill varieties of formats in the practicum practice. This has forced them to focus on routines than the major experiences. Surprisingly, neither the students nor their mentors are clear as to what and why the routine exercises are done. Mekonnen (2008:296) stated that the tasks set for students have become routine activities and/or the students and their mentors do not know exactly what is expected of them. In discussion with a student teacher, the student teacher reported:

> Although I filled all the required formats and activities as properly as I understood, there is no one (even in the teacher education institution) commenting on my deeds. What is commonly observed is that, they collect the assignments and grade it. Finally, the graded report will be given to me back, but with no significant comments on it. Even during the reflection session, the mentor as well as the teacher educator focuses on what I said than what I did on the portfolio. Therefore, now I am feeling that the portfolio is done for nothing.

The other issue (of course a distressful situation) is that, the student teachers are assigned for full load in the schools (18 periods per week). They are left being autonomous with full rights and responsibilities. This is contradictory with the decision of the education and training policy. The policy states, "teachers will be certified before assigned to teach at any level of education" (FDRGE, 1994). Remember, the student teachers are assigned as full-fledged teachers regardless of their major concern (the training) and lack of professional certification. They are assigned for the same load as do the regular teachers. In such a case, it is clear that the students focus on their teaching duties than their assigned roles and responsibilities as trainee teachers. Hence, it becomes very difficult for them to make self-reflection, to work on their portfolio effectively, etc.

The reason why the student teachers are assigned full load is not clearly known. In the interviews with experts in the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureaus I have realized that it is the belief of the Ministry of Education that the trainee teachers must not be allowed to teach

more than 8 to 10 teaching load (per week). On the other hand, regional education bureaus believe that the student teachers are assigned as graduates of a certain field of study and expect to be paid with equal salary as do the regular teachers and receive all the necessary benefits given to the regular teachers. Hence, the bureaus believe that the student teachers should execute equal responsibility as do the regular teachers. An expert from one of the regional bureaus of education states with strong words:

> Although the Ministry of Education wants regional education bureaus not to oblige to assign the student teachers to teach full load, we are unable to accept the intention of the ministry. Because, there is a great shortage of teachers; and furthermore, the student teachers are paid with full salary and all the benefits. So, how can the bureaus manage to compromise all these realities? We have no means and ways! We insist to do the same even in the future, unless convincing reasons and solutions are in place.

Hence, it can be said that the Ministry of Education is unable to convince the regional education bureaus.

All in all, it is the belief of many of the student teachers that they do not find significant opportunities for trying out the following exercise and experiences as set in the policy documents: creating attractive learning environment, understanding the behavior of the children and finding solution to their problem, observing the life of the children and their families, making teaching methods appeal to the interests and physical and mental readiness of the children, and making evaluation techniques a means to assess the behavioral development and changes of the children (MoE, 2003; MoE, 2009) and improve their own experience of implementing teaching learning methods and their own philosophies and practices at large.

5. Conclusion

There is no doubt that teachers are change agents in a society. As Fullan (1993: 104) argues, “a high quality teaching force - always learning - is the sine qua non of coping with dynamic complexities, i.e. of helping to produce citizens who can manage their lives and relate to those around them in a continually changing world. There are no substitutes to having better teachers.”

Based on these premises, one can argue that responsible and democratic governments should invest in the teaching profession in general and teacher education programs in particular (Engida, 2007).

Teacher education in Ethiopia has passed through a number of reform changes in all its history, from its inception since 1944. However, until recently it is entangled with chronic problems of access, equity, relevance and quality (these being the chronic problems of the whole educational system in the country). To alleviate these problems the present government has taken significant measures. The measures include: adopting a workable educational and training policy, expanding education in all levels of schooling, 'decentralizing and democratizing' the whole educational system so as to involve the peoples in the grass root level, designing a teacher education system overhaul that involves a paradigm shift in its theories as well as practices, designing a system of accreditation and career development, etc.

Despite all these measures, yet the teacher education system is not free from misguided practices. Here are the problems clearly observed:

- Although the recruitment of teachers is designed to be based on academic competence and interest, no reliable mechanism is in place for checking and assuring the academic competence and interest of the novice teachers towards the teaching profession. Hence, many of the newly recruited teachers joined the profession as springboard for another profession. These might have been exacerbated (especially in relation to the secondary school teacher education practice) by the present 'add-on' practice. Because, the practice has created the conviction (in the mind of both the students and their teachers) that they are going to be scientists than teachers. Hence, they take teaching as the last resort, of course, not on their will and interest.
- Another important observation is that, although the age old practice of rote, passive learning is required to be replaced with a commitment to active, learner-focused education, the changes observed in the classroom practices of the teacher educators still are not as expected. Hence, teacher educators in teacher education institutions usually relay on the traditional practice of lecturing and an authoritarian teacher student relation. Even the few motivated once usually use discussion as the 'sole' technique of active learning. This has not only misled the prospective teachers but also dissatisfied them.

- In the Ethiopian teacher education system, although there are courses called "Subject Method of Teaching", there are no teacher educators specifically trained for this purpose. To alleviate the problem of scarcity of trained teachers, who are trained to teach subject methodology courses, the teacher education institutions usually assign teachers who are subject specialists and attended some courses in general pedagogy when they were attending their first degree courses (as part of or in partial fulfillment of the degree of Bachelor of Science or Arts or Education). These teachers lack the necessary pedagogical competence in designing activities and managing to create an interactive classroom atmosphere.

Although practicum is well planned, still there are important issues that need to be considered if practicum is to be effectively executed. The problems observed in relation to practicum are the following:

- There is no standard as to who is to be assigned as a mentor. The assignment of mentors seems usually based on the notion that there should be fair distribution of responsibility and associated benefits among staff. This led to the assignment of teachers who lack the necessary professional experience and academic knowledge. This situation in turn has created the following problems:
  - Mentors do not frequently visit the student teachers for enabling them to be competent in pedagogical skills.
  - Sometimes, the mentors mislead the student teachers in both the academic knowledge and the pedagogical skills development.
  - Grades are given not based on the performance and effort of the student teachers but on personal criteria some of the mentors.
  - There is no adequate opportunity for discussion and reflection on what the student teachers have exercised and gained from the process.
- Teacher educators have no significant opportunity of providing support for the student teachers. Their support is limited to the observation of the students' reflection in the campus. Yet, during reflection the student teachers focus on the problems they encounter in the practicum practice (the problems created by the schools they are assigned in). This is especially true in the case of the secondary school teacher educators. In the case of the

primary school teacher educators, they observe the student teachers usually for one or two periods; this is very short to better support the student teachers professionally.

- The real practice of the student teachers is greatly inundated by routine practices such as filling different formats that are not clear for both the student teachers and their mentors. That is, neither the students nor their mentors are clear as to what and why the routine exercises are done. Therefore, it seems that the various activities are done for their own sake than for the sake of professional development of the student teachers.
- Due to lack of consensus between the Federal Ministry of Education and the Regional Education Bureaus the student teachers are assigned for full academic responsibility. Hence, the student teachers usually focus on their teaching duties than their assigned roles and responsibilities as trainee teachers. Consequently, it becomes very difficult for them to make self-reflection, to work on their portfolio effectively, etc.
- Generally, it is the belief of many of the student teachers that they do not find significant opportunities for trying out the following exercise and experiences as set in the policy documents: creating attractive learning environment, understanding the behavior of the children and finding solution to their problem, observing the life of the children and their families, making teaching methods appeal to the interests and physical and mental readiness of the children, and making evaluation techniques a means to assess the behavioral development and changes of the children and improve their own experience of implementing teaching learning methods and their own philosophies and practices at large.

6. Implication

It is important to develop a system of identifying those individuals who have the interest and ability or talent associated with the teaching profession before newly recruited trainee teachers are to join the profession. This may require concerned parties to start recruitment of trainee teachers at early grades (say from Grade 6 or even from Grade 1). From the early grade on wards would be teachers can be cultivated to develop the interest, attitude and skills associated with the teaching profession while organizing them in the form of clubs. Hence, only those who succeeded to develop the interest and aptitude towards the teaching profession can be allowed to join the profession.

Teacher educators need to encouraged and enforced to use active learning techniques while teaching the trainee teachers. This may require concerned parties to develop a system of reflection, assessment and accreditation for teacher educators to develop their professional competence. That is, teacher educators must develop the skill of reflection so as to make self-improvement. Furthermore, if they are not willing to make self-improvement they have to be assessed and accredited. Those who are not up to the standard must be given the chance to make personal and professional development through continuous professional development (CPD) practices. However, if they are unable to foster significant professional improvement or development through long term efforts a system must be established to terminate the contract of such kinds of teacher educators.

To alleviate the problem of scarcity of trained teachers, who are trained to teach subject methodology courses, the teacher education institutions in universities have to launch post graduate programs aligned with secondary school teaching. The post graduate programs to be launched must be established based on need assessment and the observed gap in the teacher education institutions.

In order to improve the practices in practicum there is a need to set standard as to who is to be assigned as a mentor. Only those who have the skills, experiences and interest to support trainee teachers and who love the teaching profession must be assigned as mentors. Furthermore, adequate chance must be arranged for teacher educators to provide support for the student teachers.

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