Quality of Teaching and Learning in Ethiopian Primary Schools: Tension between Traditional and Innovative teaching-learning Approaches

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Abstract

Quality is at the heart of any educational system. It influences what students learn, how well they learn and what benefits they draw from their education. Whether a particular education system is of high or low quality can be judged in terms of input, output and process. Until recently, however, much discussion of educational quality is centered on only system inputs in terms of the provision of teachers, teaching materials and other facilities, and on output in terms of students' achievement. No or less attention is given to the teaching-learning process, the dimension which involves what really happens in the classroom. This study thus, aimed at finding out the extent to which innovative approach of teaching and learning approaches are employed under the Ethiopian tradition of teaching at primary schools, to identify the factors that affect its implementation, and finally recommend better ways and means for further improvement.

In conclusion, the study found out that, realizing the importance of quality education, the Ethiopian government has taken quite a number of measures particularly aimed at improving quality of teaching. The employment of innovative teaching and learning is emphasized in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994. However, as the government strives to expand education, it also faces the challenge of ensuring quality. Currently traditional lecture methods, in which teachers talk and students listen, dominate most classrooms. The common obstacles to the employment of innovative methods of teaching as found out by this study are: the Ethiopian tradition of teaching and child upbringing, lack of institutional support, and learning resources, teachers' lack of expertise, inappropriate curricular materials and students' lack of prior experience to actively participate in the teaching and learning process. On the spectrum running from traditional 'chalk-and talk' teaching to 'open-ended' instruction, the writer recommends structured teaching – a combination of direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning, integrating lecture with interactive teaching, re-writing the curricular materials, re-training teachers, and improving the provision of learning resources.

Background

Throughout the world, people are looking to education to pave the way for a more just social order, on the grounds that education instills in the young crucial humanitarian values such as equity, tolerance and peace. Progress in education is also taken to be essential for sustainable development, environmental protection, improvement in maternal and child health and participation in democratic social and political processes. Education is also currently becoming the single most important contributor to national economic growth. Access to good-quality schooling is thus, of central importance to national development.

For education to play these roles it needs to meet minimum quality standard. Quality education contributes to higher lifetime earnings and more strong national economic growth, and helps individuals make more informed choices about fertility and other matters important to their welfare. Achieving universal participation also depends fundamentally upon the quality of education available. Parents make judgments about school quality when investing in their children's education. People in all countries expect

schooling to help children develop creative thinking and acquire the skills, values and attitudes necessary for them to lead productive lives and become responsible citizens.

This being the reality, although the right to education has been reaffirmed on many occasions since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948, much has not been done on the qualitative dimension of learning until recently. It was on the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) that quality of education was recognized as a prime condition for achieving Education for All. The Dakar Framework affirms that quality is 'at the heart of education'. Goal 2 commits nations to providing primary education 'of good quality'. Goal 6 includes commitments to improving 'all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills' (UNESCO, 1990).

Although countries were committed to provide quality education to their citizens, the monitoring result of EFA (2005) indicates that, in many countries, children are not mastering basic skills, and low achievement is widespread. National assessments in four Latin American countries, for example, show low achievement levels for large proportions of students at the end of primary school. In Nicaragua (2002), 70% of students reached only the 'basic' level in language and more than 80% did the same in mathematics. In Uruguay (1999), the performance of 40% of sixth graders in language was considered 'unsatisfactory' or 'highly unsatisfactory'. In El Salvador (1999) 40% of sixth-graders reached only the 'basic' level in language, mathematics, science and social studies. In Honduras (2002), the performance in language and mathematics was 'low' for 90% of sixth graders.

The report indicated similar situation in Africa too. A study by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (1995-98) measured primary school students' reading literacy against standards established by national reading experts and sixth-grade teachers. In four out of seven countries, fewer than half of sixth-graders achieved minimum competence in reading. Low achievement is also evident in the study conducted in six French-speaking African countries from 1996 to 2001. 14% to 43% of grade 5 pupils had 'low' achievement in either French or mathematics. In Senegal, for example, over 40% of students had difficulty putting in order several numbers with two decimal points (UNESCO 2005).

Despite the concern of the Ethiopian government for quality of education, current conditions in most schools throughout the country is also both compelling and disturbing. In the 2000 assessment of learning achievement of Grad 4 and Grade 8 students, about 10,500 fourth grade students were tested in reading the language of instruction, English, mathematics and Environmental sciences; and some 5,500 eight graders were tested in English, mathematics, Chemistry and Biology. The average percentage of correct answers for all the subjects combined was 48% in the grade 4 sample; and 41% in the Grade 8 sample. Given that the test items were chosen from a range of key topics in the curriculum for the grades tested as well as that of the previous grades, these scores indicate that a large number of students were not achieving the curriculum objectives. In

many parts of the country, an enormous gap persists between the numbers of students graduating from school and those among them who master a minimum set of cognitive skills.

Given the number of children who have not mastered basic skills by the end of primary school, there are enough reasons for the Ethiopians to be worried about quality issue. The government is under pressure from students, parents, employers and educators not only to expand opportunities for education, but also to make institutions and programmes work better. However, the government with severe resource constraints faced with difficult choices on how to improve quality.

With the introduction of rapid expansion of the education system in Ethiopia, fundamental change in approach to the problems of teaching and learning is a necessity for improving quality. Until recently, much discussion of educational quality in Ethiopia is centered on only system inputs, such as supporting inputs from outside, enabling conditions, and school climates. No or less attention is given to the teaching-learning process dimension, which involves what happening in the classroom. Indicators such as, use of interactive teaching methods and how progress is assessed are among those applied to these processes. Scholars conformed that the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process depends largely on teachers' ability to use interactive methods of teaching to help students learn.

It is cognizant of this situation that the employment of learner-centered is emphasized in the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994. The policy statement refers frequently to the employment of learner-centered, active learning, and problem solving approaches in different contexts. Recently, the buzzword for educational reform in Ethiopia is learner-centered learning. National and regional education personnel are advocating for students to be actively engaged in learning, constructing understanding and meaning, not receiving it. Even though learner-centered approach may not be the cure for all the education quality problems in Ethiopia, it is a step in the right direction, although it is a widely phrased, but poorly understood concept in practice.

Research Problem and Questions

In Ethiopia, the current curriculum calls for emphasis on active learning and teaching approach, and therefore demands teachers to employ this teaching-learning style. However, little attempt is made by the policy document and other subsequent education strategy documents to give elaborations and to indicate how it can be translated in the teaching-learning process at the classroom situation. Thus, learner-centered is most commonly understood for what it is not. Even education personnel at different levels are only phrasing around the term without mastering it and thereby providing support system for teachers, which is just only half the battle.

Under such circumstances, curriculum designers, textbook writers, teacher training institutions, education experts, and teachers all followed their own way in translating learner-centered approach into practice. Moreover, few studies have been conducted to

examine to what extent this approach is being employed in the Ethiopian primary schools. Thus this study attempts to find out how far the learner-centered approach is being employed in the Ethiopian primary schools and what challenges teachers encountered while implementing it by raising the following research questions:

1. How is learner-centered approach being employed in the Ethiopian primary schools?
2. To what extent has the Ethiopian traditional teaching and child upbringing affected the implementation of learner-centered approach/
3. Were the curricular materials prepared in a way to facilitate learner-centered
4. How far is the school environment conducive to utilize the learner-centered approach?
5. Are teachers equipped by the learner-centered approach during their training?
6. What is the students view of being taught by active learning approach?

Purpose of the Study

There is a scarcity of research on quality of education in Ethiopia. The studies which do exist mostly describe the quality of an educational system or part of the system in terms of 'input' into the teaching process (teachers, equipment, materials, etc.) or look at student achievement in relation to these inputs. There is very little research which uses 'process perspectives of what is really happening in the classrooms. The purpose of this study is therefore to assess the quality of Ethiopian primary education from the perspective of teaching strategies employed by teachers.

To this end, the study aimed at analysing the extent to which student-centred learning approach is understood among, teachers and students in Ethiopia. In addition, the study aimed at exploring, through field investigation, the manner in which teacher and school related variables militate against the implementation of learner-centered approach. Ultimately, its findings are meant to help teachers, researchers, key educational policy-makers and other education experts, to explore possibilities of developing more effective ways of utilizing active learning approach at school level.

Methodology

This study is an explanatory study of quality of education in relation to quality of teaching and learning, and a descriptive survey method is used in the study

A. Data Sources:

The sources of data were different groups of respondents that consist of primary school students, and teachers, Moreover, curriculum materials, school pedagogical centers, and classrooms were used as data sources. Questionnaires and Observation were used as instrument for collecting data.

B. Sampling Procedure:

The country was divided in to three strata from which three regions were randomly selected. These were: (1) Core Regions (Oromia, Amhara, Tigrai and SNNPR), (2)Peripheral Regions (Somalia, Benshangul Gumuz, Afar and Gambella) and ,

(3)Cities (Addis Ababa, Hararri and Diredawa). By using Simple Random Sampling Technique, Oromia, Somalia, and Hararri were selected from the Core Peripheral Regions and Cities, respectively.

A total of 12 schools (four schools from each region) were purposefully selected in which 6 schools from urban and 6 schools from rural areas were included. A purposive Sampling Technique was used to determine the grades of students for filling questionnaire, and making observation. Accordingly, Students from grade 4 and 8, (which are both the terminal grades for their respective cycles) were selected for the very purpose that they have better experience of their respective cycles than students of other grades. Ten teachers and 50 students from each school were selected by using a simple random sampling technique. Finally, a total of 120 teachers and 600 students were selected to fill in the questionnaires. Furthermore, observation of classrooms, pedagogical centers, laboratories and libraries were made in each school.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding Education Quality

Despite a growing consensus about the importance of quality, there is much less agreement on what the concept means in practice. Quality in education is relative and not easy to define and measure. Many educators agree that an adequate definition of quality of education must be related to students' achievement (output) as its basis. They also include in the definition the nature of the educational experiences that assist the students to produce those outcomes. In the context of schooling, the concept of quality is linked to how efficiently learning takes place. This is believed to be strongly determined by the teaching and learning style taking place at the classroom level, teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical skills, the availability of textbooks and other learning materials including the time spent by pupils actually learning their lessons (UNESCO, 1993).

Most public debates on the quality of education include concerns about a student's level of achievement, the relevance of learning to the world of employment or the social, cultural and political worlds occupied by the student. Frequently they often also include concerns about the conditions of learning, such as supply of teachers or facilities. In the light of this, researchers have suggested that the concept of educational quality is complex and multidimensional (Grisay & Mahlck, 1991; Hawes & Stephens, 1990). Grisay and Mahlck (1991) argue that the notion of quality should not be limited to student results alone but should also take into account the determinant factors which influence these, such as the provision of teachers, buildings, equipment, and curriculum. As such, the general concept of quality of education is made up of three interrelated dimensions. These are: the quality of human and material resources available for teaching (inputs), the quality of teaching practices (process) and the quality of results (outputs and outcomes).

Thus, studies which set out to assess the quality of education need to treat these factors carefully. Some studies support assessing the quality of education by using simple

measures of input to education (teachers, equipment, materials, etc.) Many of these studies are problematic because they focus on formal rather than actual quality characteristics. For example, one school might have a larger number of highly qualified teachers than another, but they may be less motivated. Similarly, one school might have fewer facilities than another, but use them more efficiently (Carron & Ta Ngoc, 1981).

Another set of studies are those which use indicators such as repetition rates and dropout rates as proxy measures of educational quality. The attractiveness of such studies is the availability of data, often contained in educational statistics collected through Educational Management Information Systems in most developing countries. According to Lockheed and Hanushek (1987), these data are useful for making aggregate comparisons between regions of a country, and between countries, but are less relevant for analyzing differences in performance between schools and between children in the same grade. They are even less useful for explaining such differences (Alexander et al, 1999).

Many studies do collect data on student achievement. However, most such data are based on standard achievement tests and tend to focus on the acquisition of traditional knowledge and skills. According to Ross and Mahlck (1990), the attainment of more complex educational objectives, such as 'individuals capable of working in cooperation with others' or 'demonstrating ability to solve problems' are rarely evaluated.

Indeed, looking at student outcomes alone does not tell us how schools operate. A school whose students achieve a higher score than those of another is not necessarily a better school. Higher scores may be explained by 'out of school' factors such as the fact that students enter school with higher academic abilities. In other words, a school's 'effectiveness' should be judged by its contribution to a students achievement independent of the student's home background. In this sense, it is the 'value added' by the school to the student's literacy, academic and social skills, which should determine its standing (Grisay and Mahlck 1991).

The most common research tradition in Ethiopia is still that of the input-output survey. However, there is increasing criticism of the value of these studies in determining the quality of education. Thus, emphasis is given in this study to the analysis of the teaching and learning strategy as affecting quality of education.,

Teaching Strategy and Quality of Education

Research has confirmed that there are many ways to learn and many ways to demonstrate learning. A teaching strategy is not just about the activities of teachers, although that will be one component. It is actually a plan for someone else's learning, and it encompasses the presentations which the teacher might make, the exercises and activities designed for students, materials which will be supplied or suggested for students to work with, and ways in which evidence of their understanding and capability will be collected. A teaching strategy means all of the activities and resources that a teacher plans in order to enable students to learn.

In planning the teaching strategy a number of factors have to be taken into consideration. Obviously we need to focus primarily on what we want students to achieve, but we will also need to consider our students' own goals and whether their conception of achievement is likely to differ. What we know about how people learn will be an important factor in choosing learning activities, but the need to fit within an institutional, political and social context will also affect our choice.

Many studies have been carried out on the uses and effectiveness of individual teaching strategies, but they offer only limited guidance when it comes to choosing the strategy which we hope will achieve a specific outcome. In his work on students' choice of learning strategy, Biggs (1987) identified many factors other than their approach to learning which affected the achievement of learning outcomes. These factors include the student's prior knowledge, personality, background and motivation, as well as aspects of the educational context such as the nature of the subject, the course structure, the teaching strategy, the time available for the learning task and the nature of the assessment (Biggs, 1987).

Student-centered Learning and Quality of Education

Learning by "doing" is a theme that many educators have stressed since John Dewey's convincing argument that children must be engaged in an active quest for learning and new ideas. "Students should be presented with real life problems and then helped to discover information required to solve them**.** Jean Piaget stressed the need for "concrete operations" in early childhood. While experimental research continues to show the usefulness of student-centered learning, descriptive research indicates little application of active learning methods. Relatively little use is made of such student-centered learning methods such as inquiry, discovery, community-based learning, and simulations.

According to Lowry (1989) learner-centered is a process in which individuals take the initiative to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources, select and implement learning strategies and evaluate learning outcomes. Assessment tools are learner-determined and focus on self-reflection that increase learning and promotes self-awareness.

The role of teachers in student-centered learning will become guides and mentors helping students access, interpret, organize and transfer knowledge to solve authentic problems, while students gain expertise not only in the content areas being studied, but also in learning. In fact teachers become more the guide on the side helping students to find answers to real life problems. Schools need to be organized around the work of student instead of the work of teachers (Thonburg, 1995).

It is true that students must do more than just listening and note taking: They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis,

and evaluation. Within this context, it is proposed by many that such strategies be termed as active-learning that learner-centered approach.

Active teaching and learning involves the use of strategies which maximize opportunities for interaction. Indeed, some literature makes reference to 'interactive' rather than active approaches. Our main focus here is on the kinds of strategies that are frequently put in opposition to so-called transmission methods. By transmission methods, is meant formal, didactic, expository and teacher-centered approaches, such as the fifty minute lecture that most of us are so familiar with.

In contrast, active teaching and learning offers opportunities for interaction between teachers and students, amongst the students themselves, as well as between students and the materials, the topic itself or the academic discipline. Typically, the kinds of strategies we would employ in order to promote active learning are small group work, research based projects, case studies, discussions, role play, field trips and so on. Below is a diagram which I have borrowed from Huddleston & Unwin (1997) and adapted slightly.

Use of active learning technique in the classroom is vital because of their powerful impact upon students' learning. For example, several studies have shown that students prefer strategies promoting active learning to traditional lectures. Other research studies evaluating students' achievement have demonstrated that many strategies promoting active learning are comparable to lectures in promoting the mastery of content but superior to lectures in promoting the development of students' skills in thinking and writing. Further, some cognitive research has shown that a significant number of individuals have learning styles best served by pedagogical techniques other than lecturing.

There are many reasons that teacher-centered learning needs to shift to learner-centered learning. One is that student-centered learning is more aligned with the life long learning skills needed in the workforce of the information age. Second, with the rapid changes in history and culture, textbooks based and teacher-led learning has become obsolete. Instead technology resources are replacing these obsolete approaches to create an interactive learner-centered classroom.

The most fundamental justification for taking an active learning approach to the delivery of lessons is the widely agreed-upon assertion that the degree to which students understand a concept is in direct proportion to the amount of personal energy they have expended in trying to master it. A second, justification for students learning in this fashion is that it may closely models what students will need to do when they leave the schools and enter the work place.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Effective teaching and learning requires the use of different methodologies and pedagogies to meet the demands of the current generation of students, new technologies, and the ever-changing educational environments. The challenge is to find new ways to

stimulate and motivate the creative abilities of today's generation who have a different set of orientations toward learning than most of us did as students. The traditional "chalk and talk" lecture approach with the student as the passive recipient of knowledge may not be suitable for the today's generation. The traditional lecture approach has its merits, but it is increasingly critical that educators employ a wide range of pedagogies and strategies to encourage students' participation.

Educators broadly agree that teacher-dominated pedagogy, placing students in a passive role is undesirable. Government policies and implementation strategies encourage learner-centered, active pedagogy, cooperative learning and the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Yet teacher-dominated pedagogy is the norm in the vast majority of classrooms observed. Thus, this study attempted to address the reasons why most teachers although recognized the importance of active learning, have not embraced on active learning approaches in the light of the following factors.

1. Ethiopian Tradition of Teaching and the Employment of Active learning

The attitudes and expectations of society in general and of the family of the learner in particular affect how learning is viewed and how teaching is organized. These attitudes and expectations vary from society to society, and attempting to copy learning and teaching strategy from one society into another without trying to adapt it to the local conditions may not be successful. Most of the learning models available are based upon developed countries educational traditions. It is, therefore, necessary to analyze some differences in educational traditions that affect the ways in which teaching and learning are viewed.

Memorization, including repetition, is a learning technique that is out of favor in some countries' education system. It is often associated with rote learning and thus, is not considered to lead to deep learning. However, as obtained from classroom observation and analysis of curricular materials, for students in the Ethiopian school system, repetition is associated with creating a deep impression. Repetition is also used to deepen or develop understanding by discovering new meaning.

Another difference perceived through this study is the learner's concept of ability. Students and teachers regard ability as something that can be improved by hard work rather than as something insight. These affects the value placed on student effort within the school system, compared with the valuing of student insight. "Whereas understanding is as usually a process of sudden insight in many countries, Ethiopian students typically thought of understanding as a long process that requires considerable repletion, and lecture method is found to be more appropriate for establishing such understanding.

When asked why teachers are using the lecture method strategy 86.6% of teachers and 81.3% of students responded that the lecture method of teaching is more situated to the current curriculum and students' background and 90.0% of teachers and 82.7% of students replied teachers are using this method because they know it very well. They furthermore responded that they are teaching the way they were taught in schools and

teacher training colleges and institutions, which is the result of the Ethiopian tradition of teaching.

Table 1: Teachers' and Students' view on Ethiopian Tradition of Teaching and the Implementation of Learner-centered Approach

	Rating Scale							
	Teachers				Students			
	Agree		Disagree		Agree		Disagree	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
The lecture method teaching strategy is more situated to the current curriculum and students background	104	86.6	16	13	488	81.3	112	18.7
Most teachers use lecture method because it is the method they know well.	108	90.0	22	10.0	496	82.7	104	17.3
Most students in your school use memorization as a learning technique	97	80.8	23	19.2	512	85.3	88	14.7
Understanding is a long process that can be achieved through repletion and drill	87	72.5	33	27.8	498	83.0	102	17.0
Teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers.	112	93.3	8	6.7	574	95.7	23	4.3
Students have adequate prior experience and understanding of active learning	4	3.3	116	96.7	110	18.3	490	81.7
Students role is listening to lecture, note taking and response to questions upon request	107	89.2	13	10.8	538	89.7	62	10.3

It is not only teachers' attitude that affects the effective implementation of learner-centered teaching approach. The attitudes and expectations of students also affect how learning is viewed and how teaching is organized. Learning is student-centered in the sense that students take initiative and responsibility for their own learning. This is not the case in Ethiopian primary schools, where 95.7% of the students replied that teaching is the sole responsibility of teachers, and 89.7% responded that the responsibility of students is listening to lecture, taking notes and responding to questions upon request.

This is associated with students' lack of prior experience of active learning as replied by 96.7% of the teachers and 81.7% of the students. It is also worth noting that for children who have had the kind of upbringing where they are expected to be silent unless they are demanded, responding without being requsted is considered as impoliteness and disrespect.

Ethiopian tradition of teaching can be better understood against the background of traditional or Church education. Education was a function associated with the church in Ethiopia from its earliest days. Few wealthy households employed clerics as tutors to their children. Furthermore, as stated by Girma (1967) regardless *of* his/her wealth or

social status every Christian in Ethiopia has a confessor (father of the soul), who may be regarded as a part-time tutor, because a confessor is a counselor on all matters pertaining to religion and also an instructor on the virtues of the good life.

Traditional Church Education provided and is providing a sophisticated and peculiar type of education that takes as many as 30 years to complete all levels of the church education. Mainly because of poor teaching methods, it takes about ten years to complete each level of Church education. Students suffer from the unsystematic procedures of the church school system and the utilization of the Ge'ez language, a language which no student understands as a medium of instruction, which leads to memorization as the only method of teaching and learning.

The Church Schools served as an important resource of educated people including teachers. Among other things, because most modern educators, most great intellectuals and teachers began their education in Church schools, its influence on the strategies employed in the teaching learning process was and is paramount. Those teachers, who have church education background, teach the way they were taught. This traditional approach is not limited to only those who have church education background, but also transferred to those who were taught by the teachers with this traditional teaching background.

The distinguishing features of the traditional church schools' approaches employed in teaching and learning include:

- The emphasis it places on obedience and complete subordinate to authority" to the extent that "individual initiative and inquiry are considered defects that have to be discouraged by severe punishment" (Girma Amare 1967 p7);
- A heavy dependence on rote learning -- especially in the early stages -- and a low requirement for understanding except at fairly advanced stages;
- the mastery of what is essentially a stable body of knowledge passed on through the generations - there is little sense of knowledge as dynamic and changing, of the need for creativity and invention (except within very narrow constraints), or for the personal construction of knowledge. "The traditional system of education is based on the theory that the present state of knowledge is all that could ever be attained." (Hailu Fulass 1974 p 19)

These traditional educational practices are continued to provide the cultural framing for the practice of teaching and learning in 'modern' education. This study did not only confirm the dominant authoritative paradigm but also point to the way in which this paradigm has been transmitted. As obtained from classroom observations and learned from teachers' responses the lecture method is the dominant approach employed by the majority of teachers. The tendency of using this approach was not only the reflection of their experience in their own schools but also the reflection of the way they had been taught in teacher training colleges. The majority of teachers in teacher training colleges tend to teach in the way they have been taught in the church schools and in universities.

This is an indication of the impact of 'teaching tradition in the traditional Ethiopian education that has made teachers to perform in the way they are currently performing.

Moreover, obedience and politeness are the overriding goals in bringing up children among the Ethiopian people. Children are taught to fulfill without question any request made by any older person. The effect of Ethiopian socialization, then, is to inhibit rather than to stimulate the development of interaction and discussion. Thus, it is worth noting that for children who have had anything like this kind of upbringing, the reluctance to say anything more than is explicitly demanded of them will have been deeply felt as a matter of politeness and respect and not merely ignorance or hindrance. The notion of 'discovering' information is linked with the idea of teachers failing to do their job properly or as evidence of the teacher's ignorance.

Dependence and passivity in learning are not values that any educational system admits to, yet this study confirms that this is the effect of traditional patterns of organizing teaching and learning. Thus, the study concludes that the traditional education and the Ethiopian tradition of child upbringing couldn't provide a good learning climate for employing active learning strategy in Ethiopian Primary schools.

2. Institutional context and the Application of Active Learning in Ethiopia

The quality and availability of learning materials strongly affect what teachers can do. The Application of active learning should not be the sole responsibility of the individual teacher. Changes in teaching and learning method are likely to mean that the institutions' resources facility will become more important to the quality of teaching. Teachers are often teaching in a situation where other factors do influence. Being a good teacher is sometimes a matter of being allowed to be a good teacher. Creative and innovative teaching does not flourish in a vacuum. The classroom starts becoming learner-centered and takes on a different feeling when learners are provided with the appropriate resource supports.

Table 2: Teachers Response on Active Learning and Resources Requirement

	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
The classroom setup is conducive for carrying out active-learning			10	8.3	110	91.7
learning resources are adequate for employing active learning			25	20.8	95	79.2
Class size is appropriate for carrying out active learning	10	8.3	12	10	98	81.7

From the classroom observation and response of the majority of teachers (91.7%), it was found out that the classroom seating arrangement does not allow teachers to employ active learning. Front to back seating arrangements encourage only one-way communication. It is hard to talk to the back of someone else's head. Front to back seating arrangements discourage students from talking among themselves but they do

focus attention on the instructor. They also complained about the large size of classes. They (81.7%) replied that in a typical classroom containing 80 or more students, only a very small proportion of the students ever speak out to respond to questions.

Furthermore, the employment of active learning calls for the availability of ample teaching resources. "With appropriate resource, teachers can spend more of their time assisting students in their quest to learn" (Thornburg, 1995). "Give the students the tools and they will be the single most important source of guidance on how to make their schools relevant and effective places to learn" (Tapscott, D., 1999). In this regard, the majority of teachers (79.2%) replied that they were constrained by lack of adequate resources for using active learning approach. The available teaching aids in the pedagogical centers were only used by teachers to assist their lectures.

Active-Learning and Curricular Materials in Ethiopian Primary schools

The materials need to be designed for use in the context of a class organized along active-learning lines. They need to consist of carefully sequenced sets of guiding activities designed for the learners and should be intended to be used actively by students. As replied by the majority of teachers (87.5%) and also observed from the curricular materials, the activities in the materials are not presented in a way to encourage independent, purposive and reflective way of learning. They were not written to be used in active learning classrooms. Most teachers (85%) complained that the teaching materials are full of large amount of information to be memorized by students and thus, many teachers feel responsibility to cover the courses. If active learning approach is employed, the majority of teachers (85%) regretfully admitted that their students never get the chance to look at some topics in-depth, for there are always too much to be covered.

Table 3: Teachers' Response to the Situation of curricular materials (student textbooks and teachers' guide) in relation to active learning

	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
The activities in the materials are presented in a way to encourage independent active learning	5	4.2	10	8.3	105	87.5
The teaching materials are full of large amount of information to be memorized	102	85.0			18	15.0
The curriculum can be covered if active learning is employed	18	15			102	85.0
The curriculum can be covered if only lecture method is employed			15	12.5	105	87.5
The curricular materials provide opportunity for discussion and collaborative working			5	4.2	115	95.8
The curricular materials address the needs of students	15	12.5	15	12.5	90	75.0

Most teachers (87.5%) replied that the only way they can 'get through' their subject in the available time is to deliver it, in a formal didactic style, with as little 'distraction' from students. Furthermore, 95.8% of the teachers confirmed that the curricular materials

do not provide opportunity for discussion and collaborative working. Many teachers (75.0%) reported that students have no real understanding of what they have supposed to do with information in the textbooks, for it does not address their needs and match to their readiness.

The implementation of active learning requires a certain amount of time to think about and explore each topic. Such strategies may take more time than, a straight lecture. Teachers have heavy workload, and excessive material to cover that force them to emphasis on coverage. In such circumstances, it is the teacher who gets through the teaching material rather than the students and the saving of time can represent a false economy.)

Teachers' Concern about the Employment of Learner-centered Approach

The pedagogical shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach, in which the emphasis is on teachers and what they teach, to student-centered approach, in which the emphasis is on students and what they learn, requires a fundamental change in the role of the educator from that of a didactic teacher to that of a facilitator of learning. The common element in the active learning approach is that teaches are removed from their role of standing at the front of a classroom and presenting the material.

Rather, the students are placed into the position of teaching themselves, and the instructor is converted into a coach and a helper in this process. Active learning demands that not only teachers are experts in their fields, but also that they understand how pupils learn. It is a challenge for teachers to accept active learning approach and thus not be easy to get teachers to join the active learning. It was in cognizant of this fact that teachers were asked their opinion about and expertise on learner-centered learning g approach.

Table 4: Teachers Concern about Active Learning the

	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Teachers' recognize participatory learning	105	87.5	10	8.3	5	4.2
Staff qualification and experience are appropriate	60	50	20	16.7	40	33.3
Student' access to teacher's expertise may be decreased if active learning is used	75	62.5			45	37.5
Students participate to learn sufficient content through active learning	28	23.3	7	5.8	85	70.8
Students Rely mainly on notes and absorb facts, details and procedures related to exams only	102	85			18	15

The majority of teachers (87.5%) recognized the importance of active learning in principle, although, some feel (62.5%) that the adoption of more student-centered approaches will limit the access that students have to teachers' knowledge and expertise in the subject.

Asked about their competence of employing active learning, only 33.3% have doubts while 50.0% are confident that they can employ active learning with the absence of other

constraints. These are the teachers who were graduated recently from teacher colleges where some elements of active-learning is started to be offered. Many teachers broadly agreed that teacher-dominated pedagogy, placing students in a passive role is undesirable, although they are frequently using teacher dominated pedagogy.

Those teachers (87.5%) who recognized student-centered approaches in principle, replied that they were unable to do so because of a lack of confidence or knowledge (50%)) about what such approaches might entail. The other reason for not using active learning as replied by 70.8% is the fact that teachers' feel that the employment of active learning involve risk--the risks that students will not participate and use higher-order thinking, or learn sufficient content, that they felt might occur due to loss of control and lack of necessary skills.

Assessment Techniques and the Implementation of Learner-centered

The purpose of evaluation in the learner-centered learning approach is not merely to rate the learner's performance and to maintain academic standards, but are used instead to encourage independent learning and critical thinking. Confirming this, Bound (1990), Hammond and Collins, (1991) argued that accomplishing active learning starts with involving the learners in making decisions about their programs. They further argued that learners should be made fully aware of the institutional requirements for submitting grades, but also instructed on the details of the importance and relevance of the self-directed learning experience.

Since examinations have a very high priority in the system, active learning tends to be viewed with suspicion by students. With the constant focus on 'the right answer' to an examination question, students commit large part of their time to memorizing chunks of information, as replied by 85% of the teachers. Assessment, particularly in the form of examination, which emphasizes recall of a wide range of very specific information and problem solving by formula, does not encourage active learning.

Table 5: Students' view of the Assessment procedures

	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	No	**%**	**No**	**%**	**No**	**%**
Teachers' encourage participation of students	165	27.5			435	72.5
Teachers' assessment techniques encourage active learning of students	178	29.7	21	3.5	401	66.8
Teachers' provide detailed and prompt feedback on time to students activities	192	32	33	5.5	375	62.5

Regarding the questions whether teachers encourage them to actively participate in learning, 72.5% of the students replied that teachers are not showing sufficient enthusiasm and encouragement of active participation by students. Provision of detailed and prompt feedback to students is poor as replied by 62.5% of the respondents. As replied by many students (66.8) the assessment system employed by teachers only allows students to pass by replaying information from lectures and textbooks.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Quality is at the heart of education. It influences what students learn, how well they learn and what benefits they draw from their education. Whether a particular education system is of high or low quality can be judged in terms of input, output and process. Until recently, much discussion of educational quality is centered on only system inputs, such as providing teachers, textbooks, and other facilities, and students' achievement despite, the current curriculum's calls for emphasis on improving the teaching learning process, and therefore demanding teachers to employ active teaching-learning style.

The quest to ensure that students achieve decent learning outcomes and acquire values and skills that help them play a positive role in their societies is an issue on the Ethiopian policy agenda. Realizing the importance of quality education, the Ethiopian government has taken quite a number of measures particularly aimed at improving quality of primary education. In the last ten years, efforts were made to improve access to quality education.

However, despite the concern for quality, current conditions in most schools throughout the country is both compelling and disturbing. As the government strives to expand basic education, it also face the challenge of ensuring that students stay in school long enough to acquire the knowledge they need to cope in a rapidly changing world. To this end, the study was aimed at analysing the extent to which participatory and/or active learning approach as demanded by the education policy, is understood and properly implemented by teachers and students in Ethiopian primary schools, identify the factors militate against its implementation and provide recommendations on how to improve the teaching-learning process.

It is found out that traditional lecture methods, in which teachers talk and students listen dominate most classrooms. The common obstacles and barriers to the employment of active learning in Ethiopian primary schools are the Ethiopian tradition of teaching and learning, lack of institutional support and learning resources, teachers' lack of expertise, inappropriate curricular materials and students' less preference to actively participate in learning due lack of prior experience.

Recommendations

To create an effective learning situation for the employment of active learning in the classroom, the following issues need to be considered:

1) **Employment of Partnership Approaches**

On the spectrum running from traditional 'chalk-and talk' teaching to 'open-ended' instruction, many educators advocate structured teaching – a combination of direct instruction, guided practice and independent learning, in which teachers present some amounts of material and encourage active participation of students. Much evidence suggests that structured teaching (combinations of teachers' presentation and students' participation) works far better than open-ended learner-centered approaches for children from disadvantaged backgrounds like in Ethiopia. It still allows for creating an active learning environment with opportunities for individual discovery**.**

In this model, power is shared between learner and teacher for it demands a fruitful collaboration between the teachers and learners, where each has complementary roles, rather than one being subsidiary to the other. Partnership may serve to strengthen, rather than dilute, the capacity of the teacher and the learner to manage and benefit from the learning process. The tension between teacher-centerlines and learner-centerlines is here apparently resolved. The learner is at the center of the process, but what is to be learned and how it is be learned are socially and democratically determined by learners and teachers in response to the needs of the wider society. Thus, it is wise to consider the partnership approach under the current Ethiopian situation.

2) **Incorporating Active Learning with Lecture**

The modification of traditional lectures is one way to incorporate active learning in the classroom. Discussion in class is one of the most common strategies promoting active learning with good reason. If the objectives of a course are to promote long-term retention of information, to motivate students toward further learning, to allow students to apply information in new settings, or to develop students' thinking skills, then discussion is preferable to lecture. To achieve these goals, instructors must be knowledgeable of alternative techniques and strategies for questioning and discussion and must create a supportive intellectual and emotional environment that encourages students to take risks. Visual-based instruction, for example, can provide a helpful focal point for other interactive techniques. In-class writing across the disciplines is another productive way to involve students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing. In short, the published literature on alternatives to traditional classroom presentations provides a rich menu of different approaches instructors can readily add to their repertoire of instructional skills.

3) Re-writing Curricular Materials

Curricular Materials those actively engage students in a process of investigation and discovery have been found to be effective in improving students' participation in learning. The current curricular materials rely on the objectivist view of knowledge, which assumes learning as imparting knowledge from teacher to learner through instruction, by employing lecture method. Furthermore, they are overloaded with content and often stress knowledge of facts. Their emphasis is preparing students for examinations to be admitted to the next level.

Preparing students for the world of work and life-long learning involves teaching skills to analyze problems, synthesize information and tackle wide range of tasks. Curricular materials therefore should be re-written in a way they involve activities to process the new material, linking it to what the student already knows. Tasks should be authentic, set in a meaningful context, and related to the real world. They should not just involve repeating back facts as this causes 'surface' learning. As student's learning will involve errors, tasks should offer opportunities for self-assessment, correction, peer discussion, teacher feedback and other 'reality checks'.

4) Ensuring the Availability of learning Resources

Active learning will be difficult without the use of appropriate resources in the school and classroom. Students become active seekers rather than passive recipients to knowledge, when they are provided with the necessary learning resources. Active-learning requires textbooks, library books, wall charts, notebooks, maps, and if possible computers and network connections.

Employment of active learning also requires the meeting of minimum standards of physical infrastructure. It requires attractive classrooms with enough spaces for making proper seating arrangements suited for active-learning. It is very difficult for teachers to implement active-learning in its true nature in overcrowded classrooms, with 80-100 students in a single classroom.

5) Provision of appropriate Training to Teachers on Active- learning Strategy

The evidence from this study indicates that if we want teachers to be confident and innovative users of active learning, we must provide teachers with the appropriate training, the time and the facilities they need. The government has made a good start in demanding teachers to be innovative, but must also continue with empowering teachers with the necessary skills they require for proper implementation of interactive teaching and learning. What teachers need now are effective peer training communities on-line and face to face so that the professionals can learn together. Through in-service training, teachers should start to Pool their talents and expertise and agree to roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty. Learning can be painful. The profession has to triumph over the pain barrier if teachers are to make a real contribution to this century's achievements in universal quality education.

6) Changing Evaluation Mechanisms

Failure to periodically solicit student feedback in a course about how it is progressing is very important in creating conducive environment for active-learning approach. Are students getting out of the course what they want? Are the classroom procedures and methods used well? Are there some things that you are doing which students don't like (for example, lecture organization, clarity of presentations, unfriendly manner)? Information on these factors not only helps make the classroom atmosphere better but it also creates an atmosphere where students feel the instructor is interested in what they have to say. This has a tendency to transfer into content areas as well.

Regular, reliable, timely assessment is a key to implementing active learning. The purpose is to give learners feedback and to improve learning and teaching practices. Local circumstances, however, prevent the practice from being widely used. Adequate resources, teachers trained in assessment techniques and relatively small class sizes are required.