

## Trends of Teacher Education in Ethiopia

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper deals with a review of teacher education trends in Ethiopia with a special emphasis on the current practices. Various literature and empirical studies regarding history, current status, reforms, policy issues, perception and attitudinal issues, cross-cutting issues, challenges, and training system in general were consulted followed by the author's reflection vis-à-vis his lived experiences. Different teacher education reforms have been introduced at different times. The post-1991 teacher education system is characterized by frequent reforms. Despite these efforts, the trends indicated that the teacher education practices have been in a state of crises and contradiction which signal no pattern of improvement. On top of that the reform processes have been carried out in top-down approaches that ignore participation of practitioners. As a result, the intentions of the teacher education reforms remained unpractical. Therefore, it is necessary to have clear roadmap for the educational programs that shows the emphasis given for the teaching profession and respective professionals.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher education, secondary education, teacher education reforms, trends of teacher education*

### Introduction

Teachers are human engineers. They are believed to play a crucial role in shaping individuals and the society at large. The young generation in particular is at the hands of teachers. Hence, effective teacher education is considered as the fundamental element of quality education elsewhere in the world. It comprises formal and non-formal training to prepare effective teachers equipped with subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, and moral standards. To accomplish any significant reforms in education, staff development initiatives are necessary.

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the trends of teacher education in Ethiopia. The paper examines the brief history of teacher education, various reforms of teacher education, and the present status teacher education. It also explores the perceptions and attitudinal issues, cross-cutting issues in teacher education, and the challenges

faced in the practices of teacher education system of the country. Last but not least, concluding remarks and implications are briefly presented. To this end, various literature, empirical local researches, and policy documents were consulted. In addition, the author's lived experiences were used as sources of evidences. The paper is significant for policy makers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators to play their respective roles on implementing effective and realistic teacher education system. It can also initiate researchers to conduct empirical studies in such sensitive issues.

### **The History of Teacher Education in Ethiopia**

It is known that education has been co-created since the beginning of human existence on earth. Ethiopia is a country that has used religious and other indigenous teachings to pass down generations. When modern education was introduced in 1908 by Emperor Menelik II, it was met with strong opposition from the clergy, who feared that it would change or weaken the faith. To solve this problem, the king decided to give the administration of education to the church which resulted in importing teachers from Orthodox countries. The priests and devoted families had the authority to choose and accept the prospective teachers based on their content expertise (Eyasu et al, 2017). As modern education gained acceptance and spread among society, its growth was hampered by the Italian invasion that occurred from 1936 to 1941. Immediately after the expulsion of Italy in 1941, education again showed expansion with the support of British.

As it has been highlighted above, teachers were imported from other nations in early stages of modern education, and there was no formal teacher education program until 1944/45 (Ahmed, 2013; Eyasu et al, 2017). The re-expansion of education in the post-Italian invasion resulted in a shortage of teachers, so there needed to be increased teacher training programs in the country as well. Accordingly, the first primary teacher training had begun in 1944/45 in Minilik-II school (Ahmed, 2013; Tesfaye, 2014; Eyasu et al, 2017). Furthermore, secondary school teacher education began in 1950–51 at the University College of Addis Ababa's Faculty of Arts, and several teacher-training institutions were founded throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Tefaye, 2014; Eyasu et al, 2017). While secondary school teacher candidates were chosen from grade 12 students who scored highest and had five years of training, primary teacher candidates were chosen from the top performers of grade 10 students and received two years of training (Eyasu et al, 2017). During the imperial period, teachers were relatively well-paid and highly respected (Tefaye, 2014; Eyasu et al, 2017) so that teaching profession was attractive.

Tesfaye (2014) claimed that teacher education in Ethiopia was turned down during the socialist government. He vividly explained that the teacher education program had changed and the social prestige of teachers was eroded after the fall of the Imperial regime and the subsequent socialist practices. The '*Idget Be Hibret Zemecha*' campaign caused a shortage of teachers in schools, colleges, and teacher training institutes, which in turn compelled the government to recruit untrained teachers called '*Degoma Memheran*' (Tesfaye, 2014). This, among other factors, raised questions about the quality and social acceptance of the teaching profession. On top of this, the candidates assigned to teacher education programs were academically poor compared to those of the Imperial period (Eyasu et al, 2017).

During the socialist era, teachers were selected and admitted into technical and vocational teacher education (Grades 10+3, 12+3), secondary teacher education (Grades 12+4), community teacher training (Grades 8+1, 8+4, 10+2, and 12+1), and primary teacher preparation (Grades 8+1, 8+4, 10+2, and 12+1) programs (Eyasu et al, 2017; Ahmed, 2013). The duration of secondary school teacher training was 4 year comprising pedagogical courses that range from 18 to 28 credit hours which are below the standard set by UNESCO (Eyasu et al, 2017).

### **The State of Ethiopian Teacher Education in Post-1991**

In his historical analysis, Tesfaye (2014) concluded that the education system in general and the teacher education programs in particular were far from Ethiopian realities, and the various reforms had been carried out under the control of external forces, which include Britain, USA, USSR, and so on. After the overthrow of the socialist regime, the EPRDF-led government of Ethiopia has developed a new education and training policy that takes the issues of teacher training into account. According to the policy, pre-service, in-service, and continuous professional development strategies would be employed to ensure that teachers, from kindergarten through higher education, possess the necessary teaching qualifications and competencies. In rhetorical terms, the policy has tried to articulate the Ethiopianized education system and curriculum reforms.

Evaluations of primary school teacher-training institutions by scholars like Barnes et.al (2017) revealed that transmission-based learning, in which students were not given the chance to put their theoretical knowledge into practice, was dominant in Ethiopia. Barnes and his colleagues investigated the changes in teacher educators' knowledge and teaching methods and found out that the teacher educators are trying to integrate research-based practices and student-centered learning activities into their

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classroom instruction. The authors also investigated that many of the teacher educators have internalized the content and continued to broaden their professional knowledge of research-based practices in literacy instruction. However, teacher educators usually lack the necessary skills to deliver appropriate, research-based instruction to pre-service teachers, as they are often overlooked in training programs (Barnes et.al, 2017). The writers also noted that one of the main obstacles to fully implementing the curricular materials' requirements is a lack of resources.

Amera (2015) examined student-teacher learning engagement with respect to secondary school teacher education academic and administrative practices and investigated that the administrative practices of teacher education are not in a position to support the academic practices in general and student-teachers` learning engagements in particular. He added that though it was not to the expected level, academic performances contributed something better than the administrative practices to encourage student-teachers` learning engagements. Accordingly, he argued that different actors within the academic as well as administrative practices need to give emphasis to the program and work in harmony. The two dimensions should interplay efficiently and effectively to ensure the overall program of teacher education in general and student-teachers` learning engagement in particular (Amera, 2015).

In order to make alignment with the competency-based primary and secondary education, teacher education should be modified and implemented based on the competency-based training modality. Reda (2015) suggested that teacher education institutions should not overlook the developmental component of the skills that allow student teachers to achieve graduate teacher profiles when aligning their program with the competence statements found in the national curriculum. He contended that every teacher education institution has to make decisions about the best way to incorporate the statements into their program and assessment of practical teaching.

One of the strategies to develop trainees' professional competencies is to get exposure with their future work place. This obviously demands active involvement of key partners. However, local studies (e.g. Alemselem & Wudu, 2012; Zemenu, 2014) have shown that the teacher training system is less supportive to develop teaching skills in schools. Alemselem and Wudu (2012) stated that the collaboration between secondary schools and teacher education institutions is typically little because of the problems related to practicum organization, student teachers' discipline, instructors' assessment of student teachers, and teachers' involvement in mentoring students Similarly, studies

on primary teacher education revealed that there is an incongruity of college cluster curricula with that of the school in terms of objectives, contents, activities or learning experiences, active learning methods, and assessment techniques (Zemenu, 2014). In his conclusion, Zemenu (2014) remarked that revision should be made to integrate the college and school curricula through practical and hands-on activities and other mechanisms.

As one form of teacher education, continuous professional development is considered as an important educational element in Ethiopia. However, the status of such lifelong learning strategy is generally fragile due to various problems related to conceptions and conceptual issues, management and leadership, and teachers' work conditions (Fekede, 2015). Fekede argued that there needs to reconsider educational change management strategies, reform teacher education, strengthen research-based practices, renew leadership culture, and improve teachers' work conditions.

### **Reforms in Post-1991 Ethiopian Teacher Education**

Apart from the reforms made associated with regime changes, teacher education reform is common in Ethiopia. It is obvious that policy issues are the backbone of teacher education endeavors. If policies are developed and implemented without realities and series of deliberations among stakeholders, there will be a problem in implementation of the policy directions. The Ethiopian education policies are primarily based on active learning, student-centered approaches, and problem-solving strategies that are aligned with constructivism (Ahmad, 2013). This demands understanding and skills that go beyond the conventional teacher-centered approaches characterized by memorization of facts and information (USAID/EQUIP1/AED, 2006 in Ahmed, 2013).

After the endorsement of the education and training policy, Teacher Development Program (TDP) was designed for all levels of teacher education to benefit teacher trainees, school teachers, teacher educators, educational leaders, and technical staff (Eyasu et. al, 2017). The aim of TDP was to improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teacher educators. Eyasu and his associates added that the teacher education program was categorized into various levels: certificate, diploma, and degree holders for the primary first cycle, the primary second cycle, and the two cycles of secondary education respectively. The existing Teacher Education Institutes (TEIs) were advanced to diploma-offering colleges, and several new Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) were also opened (Tesfaye, 2014).

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Along with TDP implementation, a commission was established and studied the teacher education system as a whole. The commission came-up with the study result that indicates the presence of lack of subject-matter knowledge, lack of pedagogical knowledge and skills, too rhetoric and teacher-centered teaching approach, and low teacher competencies in general (Eyasu et al, 2017). Accordingly, a taskforce was established to produce the national framework called Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) so as to redress the past problems related to subject-matter knowledge, professional and pedagogical knowledge, and practical teaching skills (Eyasu et al, 2017; Tesfaye, 2014). TESO had come-up with its own recruitment criteria; practice-oriented training; school-based and student-centered learning; and self-preparedness for the teaching profession (Ahmed, 2013). The program of TESO includes changes like reducing study years; introducing practicum; offering action research courses; and paradigmatic shifting in teaching methods (Eyasu et al, 2017).

On its turn TESO was criticized for different reasons. Tesfaye (2014) reflected that the graduates within this program faced considerable difficulties in planning lessons, managing classrooms, and identifying learners` needs. The program was not effectively implemented due to implementers` lack of awareness, policy-practice incoherence, marginalizing content knowledge, and so on (Tesfaye, 2014; Eyasu et al, 2017). The reason for the failure of TESO, according to Kedir (2007), is managerial approach sidestepping pedagogues and peripheralization of pedagogical practitioners. Temechegn (2008) on the other hand has commented that it is difficult to clearly identify TESO`s ideological backgrounds and psychological basis, and the authors of TESO have forwarded confusing and contradictory arguments.

If this is the case, it is implied that TESO has brought virtually no change at all levels of the teacher education program. Though attempts have been made to change curriculum and restructure timeframes, the pathway pursued to bring about `system overhaul` and `paradigm shift` have not enabled the reformers to see the `changes` they sought (Kedir, 2007). Yet, Reda (2015) argued that the intention of TESO was to prepare student-teachers equipped with practical teaching skills rather than the theory of teaching Accordingly, he suggested that the government reconsider TESO since it could result in a competition for standards where competence statements are used as a crucial quality control measure for prospective newly trained qualified teachers who meet graduate teacher profiles.

In response to the limitations of TESO, the Ministry of Education again introduced another modality for secondary school teacher education named Post Graduate

Diploma in Teaching (PGDT). This was an add-on program intended to run teacher training that enable prospective teachers to develop the required knowledge and skills, to become reflective practitioners, to develop understanding of the nature of teacher profession, and so on (Eyasu et al, 2017). Alongside with its strengths, Tesfaye (2014) listed out some limitations of the PGDT program which comprise exclusion of primary school teacher training, existence of too many courses, its inadequacy to address the continued challenges of the teaching profession, and wrongly boosted as a long-lasting solution.

Some authors (e.g. Mulugeta, 2017; Wondifraw et al, 2018) also argue that the quality of PGDT implementation is under question. Mulugeta (2017) claimed that experienced teacher educators are not involved in the training on the one hand, and instructors and tutors are not working up to the expected level on the other. When we see the entry characteristics of PGDT, Wondifraw et al (2018) argued that the pre-service teacher trainees join the program with a behaviorist orientation, which is not in agreement with the teacher education reform. Despite the growing concern for improving learning quality at all levels through constructivist classroom practice, the student-teachers were found to be surface learners (Wondifraw et al, 2018). Recently, the government has developed a new policy regarding the education system, and the teacher training system has been changed into an integrated modality, in contrast to PGDT.

From the above analysis it is possible to conclude that frequent changes have been made in the Post-1991 Ethiopian teacher education system: *TDP, TESO, PGDT, and so on*. According to Tesfaye (2014), the reforms that were implemented between 1995 and 2002 largely focused on incremental changes which were later followed by a paradigm shift in 2003. And yet, the intentions of the reforms remained unpractical. The teacher education system of Ethiopia continues to be non-educative because of the disagreement between local-national contexts and global influences (Tefaye, 2014; Kedir, 2007). The reform initiatives and process as well as implementation were still under the influence of external actors. On top of this, the reform processes were top down (Eyasu et al, 2017; Ahmad, 2013; Nasir & Kedir, 2011) where the key professionals and implementers were less involved in the processes. In a nutshell, each reforms of our teacher education have been linked with de-emphasis on local contexts, insufficient time, inadequate resources, low level of teacher and student involvement, less or no involvement of professional associations, and failure to conduct pilot study (Eyasu et al, 2017; Tesfaye, 2014; Kedir, 2007).

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### **Perceptions and Attitudes towards Teacher Education**

Many scholars agree that teaching is the noblest profession. The payment, respect, prestige, and the attitudes towards the profession were by far better in the imperial regime than ever happened after (Tesfaye, 2014). Associated with the erosion of such acceptances and prestige, high achievers preferred to search for other professions that pay better when incompetent teachers started joining the teaching profession. In such circumstances, it is less likely to have teachers who are enthusiastic in their profession and pedagogical activities.

With regard to the perception of stakeholders about teaching and teacher training, studies have shown that teacher educators perceived their role as transmitter of knowledge and practice rather than being practice-oriented (Barnes et al, 2017). Barnes and his colleagues claimed that most teacher educators usually skip the task-based activities in the modules. In addition, teacher trainers who teach subject-area courses often do not identify themselves as teacher educators and pay less attention to how they teach their courses (Barnes et al, 2017). Barnes and his colleagues remarked that while these conceptualizations are being challenged by current reform initiatives, the integration of active learning may be hampered by identity issues.

With regard to PGDT students, regular and summer students are found to be different in attitudes towards their profession. For instance, a survey study conducted by Koye (2014) on regular PGDT students demonstrated that the attitude of student teachers towards teaching profession is found to be generally poor. Koye contended that the student teachers are joining the profession not because they love it but because they lack other options. My experience also told that high academic achievers usually win the competition of the PGDT entrance; yet, they are disengaged in attending courses or classes, searching for vacancies on other professions. Therefore, it is necessary to build positive attitude towards the profession through promotion about the relevance of the teaching profession and implementation of attractive payment for teachers (Koye, 2014).

Unlike regular students, summer student teachers are found to have favorable attitude towards PGDT students (Sintayehu, 2017). Sintayehu's research indicates that although summer PGDT students' academic performance in many courses is shown to be very low, they have a positive perception on the program's relevance. Therefore, this inconsistency between perceived importance and low academic performance might place the effectiveness of this teacher preparation program under question

(Sintayehu, 2017). The author of this article also felt that insofar as it needs further study, the positive attitude of summer students may result from the poor academic performance they had to search for other jobs. It is also safe to suggest that summer students are already teachers and have developed positive mentality through time. On the other hand, regular PGDT students have experienced with field specialty which in turn caused them to boost their self-perception as field specialists.

### **Cross-cutting Issues in Teacher Education**

Cross-cutting issues like religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, language, HIV/AIDS, and so on are key considerations in educational endeavors. There is no adequate research about the representation of such diversified issues in Ethiopian teacher education program. However, policy documents and the daily experiences demonstrate that there are efforts to consider diversity as sensitive and cross-cutting issues. Introduction of mother tongue as medium of instruction in colleges of teacher education, applying affirmative actions for females to join the teaching profession, and establishment of special needs educational programs are some of the manifestations in addressing diversity. There is also an increasing desire to address issues of multicultural education in the Ethiopian secondary teacher education curricula framework where the courses “Teaching in Multicultural Settings” and “Inclusive Education” in the PGDT modality are typical examples.

Favoring the above argument, local research results (e.g. Solomon, 2016; Tesfaye, 2014) suggested that there are manifestations of representations of multicultural issues in the teacher education system of the country. The analysis of basic policy documents made by Solomon (2016) seem to have given adequate contextual support to prospective teachers’ multicultural development, as policies guide the actual practice at schools to the pre-service teacher education program (Solomon, 2016). Similarly, Tesfaye (2014) boldly noted that the education sector's growth has positively impacted educational access to address disability, gender, and regional issues as compared to the years before 1994. There are attempts to fill disparities in terms of educational access and teaching careers through affirmative action policies (Tefaye, 2014).

Egne (2014) has reservation on the above arguments. He conducted a study on the PGDT program and came up with a finding that there are inadequate representations of diversity issues in this teacher education system of the nation. Acknowledging the increasing ambition to address issues of multicultural education, Egne stated that the general curriculum framework and its subsequent courses of PGDT do not incorporate the diverse characteristics of the Ethiopian society as expected. He recommended that

it is essential to integrate the fundamental elements of multiethnic and multicultural education into all of the specific professional courses to equip the prospective teachers with the cultural competence necessary for teaching in a multicultural setting. I also argue there are increasing efforts to address cross-cutting issues; yet, it is necessary to go beyond what has been done so far.

### **Challenges and Resolutions of Teacher Education**

The Ethiopian teacher education system is full of challenges as investigated by different researchers (e.g. Fekede & Tynjala, 2015; Ahmad, 2013; Nasir & Kedir, 2011). The study conducted by Fekede and Tynjala (2015) revealed three major challenges that include conceptions and conceptual issues related to teaching, professional development and mentoring; management and leadership; and teachers' work conditions. Workneh and Tasew (2013) claimed that the issues of education quality in general and teacher training programs in particular continued to be a great challenge for the Ethiopian education system over the years. There are typical challenges related to the emphasis given to content knowledge and modern pedagogical styles (Workneh & Tasew, 2013). In addition, absence of adequate capacity for professional development within the education system, lack of transparency within its processes, and absence of participatory approach with regard to leadership and management of educational institutions are some of the problems that characterize the teacher education system in Ethiopia (Ahmad, 2013).

One of the possible reasons for the different challenges is associated with policy issues. Awoke et al (2017) claimed that the problem of education quality is attributed to policy issues regarding the structure and nature of teacher education itself, emanating particularly from two extreme policy debates: pedagogical knowledge vs. subject matter knowledge. Similarly, Nasir and Kedir (2011) argued that the implementation of top-down approaches in the change process of the teacher education system has its own contribution to the underlined challenges. In the name of curriculum standardization, the state agents are maintaining the status quo which may be unrealistic to the localities: mismatches and disconnects between policy makers and practitioners (Nasir & Kedir, 2011). Ahmad (2013) also commented that the teacher education institutions are controlled by centrally planned and standardized curricula produced through MoE for all educational institutions so that a rhetoric-reality gap was observed in the paradigms.