Teachers' concerns and policy suggestions for bridging the wide gaps between policy ambitions and classroom practices in Ethiopian teacher education system

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ABSTRACT

Although educational policy ambitions and classroom practice mismatch is an old debate and most often seen as 'normal' a wider gap is neither desirable nor is the cause well determined in various contexts such as Ethiopia. This paper focused on mapping the cause's wide-practice gap and its subsequent impacts on teachers' classroom practices in Ethiopia. A critical social science perspective was adopted with the assumption that teachers work under a socio-educational system in which the relationship involves a two-way process that imposed constraints and enablements a teacher. Participants were 99 in-service teachers pursuing their postgraduate studies in various school subjects. The teachers were asked to fill out a questionnaire that sought both quantitative and qualitative responses. Descriptive statistics backed by qualitative analysis showed, the gap is neither the result of the teachers' poor theoretical knowledge or skills to transfer the policy into classroom practice nor as such due to the lack of material resources, but is largely generated by the lack of intellectual freedom to construct authentic pedagogic texts which in turn is a reflection of the dictatorial socio-educational system within which the teachers work. Based on the findings, it is recommended that an independent teacher union that protects their job security, legal-political rights, academic freedom, and respect as citizens would play a pivotal role.

Keywords: Ethiopia, teacher education, pedagogic text, teacher autonomy, critical social science, critical ethnography

1. INTRODUCTION

Since, at least, the early 1990s, Ethiopia has conducted a series of general education reforms and teacher education reforms with billions of dollars of aids. Especially between 2000 and 2010, Ethiopia implemented what some call a 'big-bang education expansion' (Chicoine, 2016). That is a massive expansion of schools and massification of universities, provision of technological infrastructure to schools, restructuration of administrative activities, increment of salaries in 'unprecedented' scale, massive training and upgrading of teachers that enabled schools to be taught or administered even by MA/MEd/MSc degree holders and so forth were all conducted (ODI, 2011; Girmaw, 2017; Demie, et al. 2021; UNESCO, 2004).

Ethiopia's ambitious bid for high-quality teacher education was first set in Education and Training Policy (MoE1994) which stipulated that teachers should be certified before being assigned to teach at any level of education and that teachers of all levels of education are required to have the necessary teaching qualification and competency in all repertoire of teaching. In addition, Education Sector Development Program IV (ESDP IV) (MoE, 2010) wanted that all teachers at the school level, as well as tertiary level, should receive training on teaching methodology. For the most part, if not entirely, the purpose is geared towards accurate 'implementation' of the government's 'modernized' educational curricula and 'cutting edge' theories of good teaching. In other words, it was felt that policy and practice are to be made consistent or gaps among these are narrowed during the 'transfer' of the knowledge.

It follows that the commonest in-service teacher trainees' concerns, as far as Ethiopian experience indicates, are: 'How do we apply in schools the theories we learn here inside universities?' Likewise, the overarching concern of the government or the Ministry of Education is: 'How accurately shall teachers (learn to) implement the national policy or curricula set by the Ministry in school classrooms?' By the same token, both the Ministry and the in-service trainees expect the purpose of a training program or success of it inside the universities is measured by the extent to which it addresses both of these concerns. In other words, the match between the policy and the school classroom practice is assumed as a determinant factor of quality of education. Tasissa (2012), who studied Ethiopia's educational policy formulation and implementations with a special focus on the predicaments to the professional development of teachers, cites an interesting story from one of his respondents:

> I have attended several in-service pieces of training provided by the Ministry of Education, Regional Education Bureau, and District Education Office. Most of them were theories and assumptions. They repeat what I have learned in the training institutions. They do not reflect the problems and realities of my school and my professional needs, as well... it is like sitting far apart and thinking as if nearer (Tasissa 2012, pp. 332-333).

What this means is the centrally prepared courses and curricula, which, indeed, are derived from more theoretical texts, hence far removed from both the teacher's and student's lived experience and social context, become a stumbling block to effective implementation or practice in the actual classroom. Apparently, for this reason, the massive in-service training inside the higher education institution contexts usually ends up with no significant desired change in the actual school classroom.

Traditional Views on policy and practice gaps

Debates on the policy-practice gap, or gap among what contemporary theory indicates as 'best' training of teachers versus what the government adopts as 'best' policy versus the practical action in the school classroom, is an old debate in teacher education. Perhaps, it was the central question to the renowned John Dewey's project. In general, a complete correspondence between policy statements and school practice is farfetched imagination, and nor is its primary goal of teacher education. The dualist view of theory and practice, too, is not palatable. Yet, the significant level of discrepancy among these can safely indicate a problem, if not a crisis, in the educational system.

According to Agegnehu (2017), challenges to Ethiopian teacher education pedagogy, hence, to the training universities, comes from the resistive schools, that is the

transmission model in which teacher talks and the student listens still dominates Ethiopian classrooms despite universities training teachers against this model of. The other commonest obstacles to the employment of 'innovative methods of teaching as found out by the same study are lack of institutional supports/resources, teachers' lack of expertise, and students' lack of prior experience to actively participate in the teaching and learning process. In other words, the widening policy-practice gap is interpreted as a 'problem of knowledge transfer' (Van De Ven& Johnson, 2006). Similarly, a recent national document entitled Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap(MOE, 2018, pp. 40-43) lists some mundane 'lacks' as causals for the widening Policy-practice gaps, for instance, lack of alignment across policy instruments that the government issues to schools, lack of resources, inadequate training for both teachers and principals on the reforms. In general, the document sees it as a 'problem of knowledge transfer in the process of implementation of a state-designed curriculum.

Similar problems of policy-practice gaps are reported in many countries but the causal factors remain related to the aforementioned problem of knowledge transfer and/or problem of means of transfer of 'the knowledge (Spreen & Knapczyk, 2017) or failure to provide teachers with resources (Chapman, Wright, & Pascoe, 2018; Smith & Their, 2017; Tikkanen et al, 2017) or lack of enough time allocated in the schedule for teachers to plan for curriculum implementation (Germeten, 2011).

Teaching as a Practice of Freedom

From a critical educational theory perspective, teaching is not a mere transmission of ready-made knowledge to the student. Rather, teaching is a practice of pondering, inquiring, exploring, creating, challenging ideas and social conventions and absenting of lack of awareness, knowledge, or skills. It is an activity of removing ignorance about or misunderstanding of one's world. In other words, teaching is a practice of freedom-freeing and liberating ideas and humanity to the next, higher, desirable stage. "When our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two-that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other" (hooks 1994, p. 61)

The extent to which teachers effectively practice freedom is strongly related to the extent to which they not only theorize and practice knowledge/skills but also produce their own-of course for their students'-authentic pedagogic texts rather than do the 'transmission' of the policy or official texts/curricula. We adopted in this study Selander's definition of 'pedagogic texts': "we shall mean not only school textbooks but the whole range of possible texts + pictorial illustrations + films + computer programs which are produced for educational purposes" (Selander, 1995, p. 9). We, however, add to these Paulo Freire's text, the social and natural world which is *read* to be understood and acted on. To be authentic, the text should be abstracted or derived from the social context and a whole lot of student life experiences. Such "generative themes" includes not only the environmental, economic, political issues but tangible objects such as cultural objects and embodied actions such as artistic performativity in the form of drama, music, and poetry, sports, gestures, enactments, rituals, and sermons, acting out social and gender roles, as well as (doing) traditional paintings, graphics, and electronic hyper-graphics, and so forth. Shannon (1992, p.1) explicates 'text' beyond the traditional view:

Through it [literacy], we can learn to read and write the world to meet our needs and interests, taking from and making of the world what we will. Text is but one

way in which we express our literacy. We not only read and write … the alphabet in connected passages, but we also read other types of symbols embedded in social practice and institutions and write other types of symbols through our social action to define ourselves and affirm our cultural and social histories. Through literacy, we can also learn to read and write the world others prepare for us, taking from it correct thoughts, correct behaviors, and correct lives. In this way, skills to decode, encode, and translate text are all there is to literacy.

Teachers' construction and reconstruction of pedagogic texts are considered as praxis/practice of freedom, a practice of learning to theorize teaching and theorizing practices of teaching for themselves, knowing anew from before. In this process of designing pedagogic texts, the teacher conducts *recontextualization*, an act of making the text ready—or comprehensible input—for the learners in their social, historical, cultural, and ecological context (King, 1986). In so doing, teachers engage the triad of practicing the policy, practicing the theory, and theorizing about/on each, viz., the theory, the policy, and their practice. Freire's definition of human ontology works the best for teachers: "To be human is to work, eat, speak, criticize, read, disagree, come and go; in short, the *freedom to be*" (1996, p. 146 cited in Dale and Hyslop-Margison, 2010 p. 90). Teachers should be free to abstract pedagogic texts, using their theoretical and experiential knowledge, from the social and natural reality of students, the life and living problems and conditions that affect themselves and their students.

The Problem

Parallel to the aforementioned traditional explanation of causes of the policy-practice gap, the traditional remedy is, instead of explaining the constraints to practicing freedom, to blame the 'untrained' teacher or the soft-hearted school administrators who do not be tough controlling the teachers and, hence, launch massive training programs for both groups. However, as was touched above, in their training sessions, the in-service teachers confidently tell teacher educators that they have gained the skills and knowledge to apply the courses they take but what they timidly, yet unambiguously, tell is that their lived professional experience has proven that they drop the courses at the gate of the university before they finally leave the campuses. Therefore, neither the traditional remedies of 'quick fix' strategies such as conducting massive training, issuing regulation standards, increasing the salary and so forth do not work well.

Thus, a more critical social perspective (Leonardo, 2004), instead of the technical-rationalist one (Standaert, 1993), to understanding the widening policy-practice gap, is an imperative endeavour. Particularly essential for this old but relentless problem, is allowing experienced teachers to speak about themselves from critical social science perspectives which are concerned with understanding and explaining how the dominative and oppressive socio-educational system constrain them and, ultimately, exploring the condition of possibility for absenting such an undesirable system (Smyth, 2020). Accordingly, this study intends to seek responses to the following questions with experienced Ethiopian schoolteachers currently doing their MA/ MSc /M.Ed. studies in Haramaya University:

1. What is the major gap between policy ambition and classroom practices from the in-service teachers' point of view?

2. According to their professional experience, what causes the wide gap?

3. How is the gap bridged in their views? What should the school condition be for bridging the wide policy-practice gap to be possible from the teachers' point of view?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this study, we adopted critical ethnography as a methodology to approach as well as sample participants, formulate data collection instruments and go about the actual data collection in context as we train and research in tandem (Carspecken, 1996). Ninety-nine in-service teacher trainees studying for their MA/MSc/MEd degrees in Summer Program 2019 in Haramaya University's departments of history, chemistry, biology, mathematics, English, and Afaan Oromo were randomly selected out of 551 population whose list was obtained to offer their professional experience. They come from every corner of Ethiopia and their teaching experience ranges from 5-20 years. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers with a 3-Likert scale of nine items and one open-ended item all of whose general purpose was to extract the participants' experience and views about the policy-practice gap they encountered. The open-ended item required the participants to freely reflect on their experience write an essay or as longer paragraphs as of their own choice. This qualitative data is used to not only triangulate with the quantitative data but also used as a key and guiding theme(s) for analyzing and synthesizing the whole data. Simple descriptive statistics and the most salient qualitative data segments are sorted out and thematized to present the results in parallel.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 *Gap as Caused by Absence of Autonomy*

Teacher autonomy is relative freedom from centralized control, say from MOE or its local agents; the right, without external body's restriction, to carry out their jobs in accordance to what their task demands and what their theoretical knowledge informs. This involves their career of theory-and-research orientedness, their freedom to innovate their programs, lessons, or tasks as current theory of learning and the situation of their teaching and their learners demand. Nevertheless, the data we obtained shows that only 4.16% are regularly theory or research-oriented and able to innovate their lessons or classroom tasks based on emergent public issues, and 70.82% seldom/rarely do this. Though the remaining 25% say they innovate their lessons sometimes, maybe what they mean is skipping or revising the 'given' lessons by authorities who authored the student textbooks and teacher's guide. This is confirmed not only by our experiential knowledge but also by the most recurrent qualitative data the respondents offered: *"I have theoretical ideas but impossible to translate to practice because it is political"* and the very figurative response one participant gave is *"classroom seems dirty prison."*

Likewise, 21.12% and 26.76% respectively responded that they regularly and sometimes do experiments or conduct research or an inquiry into their practices to produce new knowledge and then try to practice better what they already know. This level can be considered phenomenal by Ethiopian standards compared to the 52.11% who seldom practice experiments/research or inquiry. Maybe this relatively positive response is influenced by the fact that these respondents are students who are already doing or are to conduct their M.Ed./MA/MSc theses research works. The data significantly changes if non-trainee teachers were asked at their schools the same question.

In a nutshell, the data shows there is a highly inflated authority of the central government which, in tandem,   diminished the autonomy of the teachers. In other words, teachers act not dutifully, for they have snatched the core professional duties, Instead, they are subject to every year, every semester, every lesson, regurgitating the end product externally prescribed ten or so years ago as official knowledge claimed by elites in the ministry as 'true', 'valid' knowledge as in the official Student Textbook and its partner Teacher's Guide. Consequently, there is a high prevalence in their school of heteronomy, i.e. subjection to external rule, authority, or dictatorship.

Gap as a Consequence of Teachers' Detachment from Reality

The social reality is, in essence, the textbook, the classroom task, the laboratory work for both teachers and students. Connection to the social and natural contexts of learning is real, meaningful, and substantive teaching to understand and help students understand and change their world as both teachers and learners. Nevertheless, disconnection invokes purposelessness, meaninglessness, pedagogical anomie, simply, alienation. We attempted to extract data from the teachers on this issue of connectivity. Asked how frequently they are engaged in open discussions on ecological, social, cultural, and policy issues, inside their classrooms, 2.81% responded they do this regularly, 26.76% responded sometimes while the vast majority, 70.42%, responded they seldom do this. Similarly, 61.42% of these teachers seldom reflect, discuss inside their classrooms on ideas, views, theories of other people such as politicians, writers, researchers, philosophers, or historians, while 24.28% said sometimes and only 14.28% of them said they do this regularly.

Africa's past and present are traditionally presented artistically or in a form of wisdom literature, symbolic material cultures, including ancient megaliths, totems, rock arts, regalia, and so forth, and performance arts of myths, rituals, games, music, dance, conflict resolution, peace building, and so forth. Excellent studies on these which offer vital opportunities and possibilities are available (Sefa Dei, 1994). In our study, unfortunately, 74.3% of the teachers responded they never/seldom do or use wisdom literature, symbolic material cultures, or performance arts for presenting their lessons while 5.71% and 20% say they regularly and sometimes engage in doing this, respectively. The qualitative data they offered was more fascinating. Among the recurrent ones are:

- *"MoE [=the Ministry of Education] should think about history subject";*
- *"Teachers, students, society, and government are not cooperating [=not let to involve] to put theory into practice";*
- *"The society or community is not being involved [=incorporated in the curricula] ";*
- *"Teachers   are not working [=not in their capacity] to engage the society";*
- *"Students' parents and community are not working with [=excluded from school curricula by] the government."*

The first point that the Ministry "should think about history subject" is worth fleshing out. Ethiopian society is polarized on history subjects and historiography. One group and the mainstream dominating history curricula are the Eurocentric narratives that trace Ethiopian history back to Caucasian origin and, consequently, de-Africanizes everything that is ancient and Ethiopian (Bekerie, 1997). The other stream and the suppressed one is/are Ethiopia and Ethiopians who is/are indigenous Black Africans have their proud history and origin. In Ethiopian school subjects and university courses, history has been deleted over the past few years for two main reasons. Students rejected the colonial era, Eurocentric

texts which dominated Ethiopian curricula and which many scholars describe as a 'technique of anachronistically writing future history' (Legesse, 2000, pp. 14-15). Consequently, the Ministry withheld history subject out of school curricula and university courses, and neither of the two polarized streams is yet treated so far at the time this study is conducted (some information obtained later on indicate that it is being 'revised' and 're-written' to be re-introduced into school subjects and university courses, sooner, after long hiatus).

Indeed, the respondents know this fact and are saying, in their context, the social and historical realities of themselves and their students are excluded from the school compound, curricula, or classroom tasks, hence the students and teacher have no opportunity to observe, re-describe, discuss, dialogue with their society in its strict sociological sense. Particularly, the fact that Ethiopian education denies teachers and students reflect on, name, and learn their societies' political and cultural history reminds us what Freire describes as "historical schizophrenia" and to which both teachers and students are coerced to, i.e., "retreat" or "contempt for the world and flight from it" (Freire, 1972, p. 88). But, it reminds us more Woodson who, in the early 1930s, accurately noted: "In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum.... No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian" (Woodson 1933/1990, p. 21).

Gap as Effected by Dichotomy between Word and World In Teaching Practices

Paulo Freirean's distinction between two types of *words* is essential (Freire, 1972). The first one is the *false word*, which "is unable to transform reality" because of being deprived of one of its dimensions; and the second one is the *true word*, which is "to transform the world" because of the close connection to the praxis, the combination of reflection and action on the world to change it. Having this in mind, we presented a question we thought was pertinent to this to our respondents. The response indicated 18.30% of them regularly discuss/read/criticize/ everyday public-ethical issues such as pollutions, human rights, corruptions, (un)employment, inside classrooms regularly while 29.57% only sometimes and a quite considerable one, 52.1% almost never brave or have opportunity to bring these issues to their classroom. This means these teachers' and their students' experience is less nourished with 'true words' by which they could have attempted to name and transform their world. The teachers put forward a similar point of view in the qualitative data as follows;

- *"Teachers and students are not discussing freely inside and outside the classroom. Now, we are not discussing"*;
- *"We teach [transmit to] students & they listen but they don't talk or solve problems"*

What this means is that both the teachers and students are missing Freirean praxis and dialogue, the two closely related concepts, because genuine dialogue represents a form of humanizing praxis (Freire, 1972, p. 61). This gap, a decouplation of dialogue and praxis, is further exacerbated by another emergent theme, viz. lack of technologies, which is discussed next.

Gap as Caused by Absence of Tools Mediating between Cognition and Real World

Current cognitive theory shows us we have no direct access to reality especially to the social, subjective reality; concepts and/or technologies mediate between us and our world. Both concepts and technologies (be it as simple as flashcards, diagrams, realia or the microscope, SPSS, and so forth) are just tools, i.e., gates to and fro reality. Therefore, any absence of such a tool invokes a gap between our theoretical knowledge and practical action, despite we would wish to bridge it. On this, we sought the teachers' experience and the data indicates only 26.76% of them regularly use technologies such as the Internet-connected computers, laboratory facilities, LCD projectors for classroom tasks while 25.35% and 47.88% responded they use sometimes and seldom, respectively. Supporting this, teachers expressed in the qualitative data that:

- *"Technology particularly computer is essentially wanted";*
- *"MoE should develop technology & internet infrastructure";*
- *"Laboratory is crucial to translate chemistry knowledge into practice, unfortunately, there is no material for lab";*
- *"There is no laboratory or workshop for practice, so these [theories] can't be translated into practice."*
- *There is no laboratory; no experiment so, theory can't be translated into practice;*

If technology is a means to facilitate Freirean dialogue, that is "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, to name the world" (Freire, 1972, p. 61), the absence of it inhibits the conation of "naming the world", i.e., the process of the human-here, the teachers-quest to understand and transform their world, through communication with others, and interaction with their social/natural world.

Gap as Effected by Teachers' Meager Salary

Some of the most recurrent responses the respondents offered to the generic open question as to what should be done to help them practice the theory and the policy at the required level of congruence were that:

- *"Improving teachers' salary can change the ide policy-practice gap or the quality of education";*
- *"Impossible to put into practice because of being poor";*
- *"All the above mentioned [questionnaire items] are possible but the problem is teachers are poor"*
- *"It is good to put the above points [questionnaire items] into practice but not possible because of our [teachers'] poverty"*

We might have, indeed, wondered how improving salaries bridge the teachers' training-practice or policy-practice gaps. Meager salary reduces the profession artificially to one of the lowest levels of consciousness, a level named by Freire as semi-intransitive consciousness. This is a level characteristic of which people cannot apprehend problems situated outside their sphere of biological necessity. Their interests "centre almost totally around survival, and they lack a sense of life on a more historic plane" (Freire, 2005, p. 13). In Ethiopian tradition, even if a meagre salary increment is occasionally made for teachers, it comes as the government's tool of legitimizing its political power and coercing their willingness to comply with curricula/policy directions rather than as enhancing the earnings of the teachers for many reasons.

Teacher poverty makes impossible the highest level of consciousness the teaching profession requires, viz., critical consciousness to develop. This is a level characterized by, inter alia, refusing to transfer responsibility or rejecting passive positions, and openness to information and revision of own assumptions by the attempt to avoid distortion and misconception (Freire, 2005, p. 14). Reasonably adequate salary helps teachers transcend survival tactics such as passivity or instrumental rationality of cooption with the dictatorial regime, and unleash their conational rationality to constantly yearn for understanding and change.

Gap as a Consequence of Strategy Dichotomy between Training Context and School Context

Two of the respondents mentioned their critical insights which are, doubtlessly, true of all despite only some of them managed to articulate well:

- *"I have no idea about your theory and practice; I take the theory course, I drop it at the university's gate because the school condition doesn't allow me practicing it";*
- *"I know only the [theoretical] course I studied. I did not take pedagogy courses with me to my school because it contributes nothing to my salary or promotion"*

What these mean is strategy 'dichotomy' or gaps between the training context (university) and the practice context (school). The classical approaches to change formulated by Chin and Benne (1989) can help us to substantiate this dichotomy as one big generative factor for the existing wider gap amongst policy desire, theoretical stock of knowledge, and actual classroom practice in Ethiopia schoolteachers. More or less, university-based training relies on rational-empirical strategy whose underlying tenets is transmitting scientifically 'proven' information (theories, methodologies, research findings or data, tools, technologies, etc.) to the trainee teachers who are 'naturally' rational, hence, uptake it and apply to effect proposed (by policy) changes in their school classrooms. The general misconstrual is higher education institutions (HEIs) disseminate to teachers and schools theories and 'research' findings (both of which policy-makers unequally pay attention to (theory is given more attention than research finding because the former is global and imported from Westerners while the latter 'only nags or dismisses the government's policy). Both HEIs and policymakers residing inside the MOE construe teachers as 'policy implementers' and all the teachers need is understanding and transfer of 'proven facts' set by experts. For instance, both the HEIs curricula and MOE's in-service training recommend the importance of continuous assessment but emphasize that teachers "should comply", however, with the list of "competency" and "objectives set by the education authorities" (MOE, 2019, p. 5).

Given our professional observations and lived experience, as well as some related research findings (Semela, 2014), Ethiopian school and educational management, employ solely what Chin and Benne (1989) call power-coercive strategy. The underlying tenets of this strategy are that power is legitimate and carries rights with it – teachers should listen to, from higher to the bottom in the echelon, policymakers in the Ministry and their local agents, viz., regional, zonal, and school administrators because they hold power and best knowledge which cascade down. These have the responsibility to give direction to teachers as well as the right to punish teachers who do not follow their directions, especially as exactly stated in the curricula and school regulations. The latter, school regulations, and rules set forth explicitly directives which interest the ruling groups instead of good, creative pedagogy or research skills. Top priority standards come as promotion and

educational opportunities for the clever supporters of the regulations but none for the dawdling teachers and, hence, as threats to their job and existential security. Teachers, at least in Ethiopia, never tested intellectual freedom to free action a professional action which is guided not necessarily by theory or policy 'X' out there but what they believe is theoretically right action, save that, teachers construct and reconstruct again and again over their theoretical beliefs as they design lessons, teach, read, research, critically reflect and conceptualize learning as a yearning for change. But, these teachers have no protection from government-picked authoritarian administrators and politicians, offended by what they think or say in the classroom, and their 'freedom' is at best only when they parrot what the latter say or invoke what they only think is 'right'. These "anti-democratic actions of such standardized education policies threaten the academic freedom of teachers around the world" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 7).

Gap as Caused by Dearth of Afrocentric Paradigm

The result of this study shows, of all the challenges, exclusion of doing or using wisdom literature, symbolic material cultures or performance arts for presenting lessons is the most weighty one (Table 1) followed by absence teachers' orienting oneself to theory/research and autonomy to, accordingly, innovate classroom programs/lessons/activities/tasks. This speaks to the need for the Ethiopian educational system to adopt the Afrocentrism or Afrocentric paradigm which is best defined by Asante (2007, p.2): "is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture trans-continentally and trans-generationally." It can safely be concluded that Ethiopian curricula completely ignore Ethiocenterism which is just a sub-component of Afrocentrism. In other words, the curricula ignore our common heritage, beliefs, moral and ethical values, folklore, ceremony, symbolism, and rituals that have been important aspects of the Ethiopian/African social and personal lives. Nobles (1980 cited in Harris, 1992 p. 312) explicates the "ideal" of Afrocentric curriculum: "The educational process was not seen only as acquiring knowledge; it was seen as a PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION of the learner or initiate, who progressed through successive stages of re-birth to become EXCELLENT."

This compels us to say a few words about one of the ancient and rich African curricula completely excluded from Ethiopian education, namely the Gadaa System. The Oromo worldview involves the spiralling cycle of time and history which boils down to the Gadaa paradigm, which is not linear like the Western view of history (Urton, 2017). According to Gadaa System, which is being best practiced in Boorans (Disasa, 2017; Hinew, 2012), every Oromo person used to pass through eleven series of grades, acquiring the various ontological, epistemological, and methodological knowledge, attitude, and skills, including agriculture, politics, arts, ecology, military, health, economics, mathematics, astronomy, parenting, and others. Every person is prepared to be a politician in the context of the inseparability of education, power, and politics. During *fora*, a practicum, or *jila*, field experience, learners have ample time to learn many things related to their culture from aged men and adults accompanying them; are educated by elders about values and customs of the Oromo community; study history, puzzles, stories, tales, poems, songs; argue with each other; and study manners of argument from seniors, whose purposes are to develop creative thinkers. Disasa (2017) affirms that Gadaa principles are guided by a culture of speaking (discourse-making and dialoguing) and collaborative learning and learning by practicing or inaction, in sharp contrast to rote-learning which, for instance, is widely practiced in the Abyssinian monastic circle.

Table 1: Constraints as gaps in ascending order

Issues (summarized)	In %
Absence of issues related to doing or using wisdom literature, symbolic material cultures or performance arts for artistically presenting lessons/didactics (indigenous games, rituals, material cultures, poetry, paintings, short stories, music, dance, etc.)	74%
Absence of issues related to orienting oneself to theory/research and autonomy to, accordingly, innovate programs/ lessons/activities, tasks myself	70.82%
Absence of issues related to engaging in open discussions in and out classrooms on ecological/ social/cultural/policy issues, etc. pertinent to lessons	70.42%
Absence of issues related to freedom to reflect/discuss in and out of classrooms on ideas/views/theories of other people (politicians, writers, researchers, philosophers, historians, etc. pertinent to lessons	61.42%
Absence of opportunity to do experiments/ research/inquiry to produce new knowledge & practice better what one already knows	52.11%
Issues related to freedom to discuss/read/criticize/ everyday public-ethical issues such as pollutions, human rights, corruptions, (un)employment, etc. as pertinent to lessons	52.1%
Issues related to deciding/controlling sufficient time to teach/assess/test the way courses I took informed me	50%
Absence of opportunity to accessing & using technologies such as computer, internet, overhead projectors, LCD, etc.	47.88%
Absence of opportunity doing sports like athletics, football, basketball, volleyball, etc. as a healthy component of enhancing pedagogic fitness	45.1%

3.2 Conclusions

This study attempted to understand and explain the problem of widening policy-practice and policy-practice gaps in the in-service teacher education system of Ethiopia. It also intended to explore the condition of possibility for bridging such an undesirable wide gap. Smaller population and sample size, limited setting (only Haramaya University), and non-extensive study especially, with such a limited instrument of data collection might not help us reach a generalizable conclusion. However, the participants' views and opinions should not be undermined not only because these are a mixture of young and highly experienced people coming from various parts of the country. Their insights can, at least, help us as a springboard for further extensive surveys as well as deeper practitioner inquiries.

In general, the findings indicate that the usual blame such as teachers' 'lack' of adequate understanding of the policy reform or methodological skills or of subject area

knowledge or their "clinging to technocratic and traditional attitude" (Tasissa, ibid., p. 401) does not hold. Also, although the other 'traditional' lacks, such as resources or technologies can play a role, again, these cannot be an adequate explanation for the relentlessly prevalent wider policy-practice gap merely because the provision of these alone cannot guarantee translation of theory or policy into action. It is generally agreed that theoretical knowledge offers adult learners a powerful impetus and lenses for their practices of teaching, researching, and analyzing their practices. Nonetheless, teachers are meta-theoretically creative in the sense that they might unleash or withhold their skills, knowledge, or conational pulse of liberating their theory by action based on their socio-educational context, especially the extent of their 'freedom to be'.

Teachers have adequate awareness that there are undesirable and unacceptable wide Policy-practice gaps, so do they have the knowledge, skills, and positive conation to narrow the gaps, but they could bridge it only contingently, i.e., with necessary school conditions. They distance themselves from bridging the wide policy-practice gap only because, at 'this' time, place, and position, they want freedom and security (existential, familial, economic, job, and so forth) far more desperately than the usual lacks, i.e., lack of pedagogic 'resources', such as laboratories and computers. Thus, for the teachers, the 'proven' and 'scientific' theories or the policy and curricula 'menus' are worthless, even if they have adequate awareness, skills, competence, and interest in employing them in their classrooms. Supporting the ruling group's interests outweighs it by far given the relatively affluent life of the regime's cadres, quite many of who have never stepped into the gates of schools ever.

These teachers are under 'pedagogical authoritarianism' which intrudes into their preferential territory without dialogue or without theoretical justifications. These teachers have nothing they control, including their fundamental human rights and expressive-performative rights. It is intellectual freedom-freedom from epistemological authoritarianism in the presence of teachers' cognitive competence to act and create-which the teachers want to narrow down the gulf between policy, theory, and practice by their potential to creativity, specialty creating authentic pedagogic texts. This is intellectual freedom in its wider sense of freedom from all the gaps enumerated, substantiated with the teachers' voices, and explained above in this paper. Above all, the implication is that an independent teacher union that protects teachers' job security, legal-political rights, academic freedom, and respect as citizens would play a pivotal role. After all, teachers are 'teachers of expression of oneself' concerning own world. Finally, it should be emphasized that a practitioner inquiry or action research in which teachers are involved in the construction and implementation of authentic pedagogical texts as defined earlier remains to be explored in the Ethiopian context.

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