

The Flexibility of Educational Curriculum and Practices in Selected Primary Schools of Middle Education in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Educational policy, program and curriculum development policy of general education (K-12) have been centralized, decentralized and a combination of two depending on a country's socio-economic and cultural diversities. The main objective of this study was to explore aspects of flexibility and actual practice of curriculum at school level. Qualitative case study design was adopted by selecting one upper primary school purposively from Wolaita zone. The sources of data were in-depth interview, personal experience, informal discussion, classroom observation and qualitative document review. The findings of study have implied positive and negative sides. Firstly, to some extent educational policy, educational sector development program, curriculum framework and some textbook activities were flexible enough to consider the context in which instructional activities were happening. Secondly, the study revealed that there are limitations in the case of providing sufficient spaces for school teachers and contextualization of curriculum at school practices and they were more inclined to prescriptive curricular materials. Some of the critical causes of adaptation of curricula are the way textbooks are prepared, absence of supportive guidelines for contextualization by taking into account the purpose of education, low motivation of students and teachers and focusing on summative assessment like regional examination.

Keywords: Flexible Curricula, Curriculum Implementation, middle education; Curriculum Contextualization

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Upper primary school represents middle education which include grade 7 and 8 with standard age of students with 13 and 14 year according to Ethiopian educational structure/system

1. Introduction

Educational policy, program and curricula of a country have a great contribution when it provides freedom for lower level implementers of curriculum. Countries like Ethiopia with various forms of cultural diversity empowering front line implementers of curriculum by giving opportunity to contextualize and localize instructional activities will have advantageous to achieve the goals of education through the implementation of curriculum in general education. It needs to investigate the flexibility of policy, program and plan related to the curriculum.

There are conception and theorization differences and similarities among scholars and researchers in the field in defining and describing the term curriculum (Mulegna, 2019; UNESCO, 2013; Su, 2012; Oliva, 1997 & 2009; Derbissa, 2004). The focus of definitions and conceptualization of curriculum may vary regarding the elements or dimension of curriculum, specificity and broadness, philosophical views of education or curriculum and individual theoretical perspectives.

There are commonalities and differences on conceptualization of the term curriculum according to different individuals/researchers. The difference among definitions is common phenomena but all of these conceptions have limitations with respect to the process of educational activities because there are various factors that influence curriculum, these are internal and external to educational institutions. According to UNESCO (2013, 15), the curriculum can also be viewed as a political and social agreement that reflects a society's common vision while taking into account local, national and global needs and expectations. Thus, contemporary curriculum development and reform processes increasingly involve public discussion and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. It is one of the implications for curriculum that has been the nucleus of educational programs.

There was also another conceptualization conducted, like the former study or previous section of curriculum conceptualizations emphasized on similar areas. Some of these are curriculum as a programme of education; curriculum is what is taught in school, such an approach to education seems to limit learning to the school and then limiting a curriculum to academic subjects; and another very common conceptualization of a curriculum is that of viewing it as content (Mulegna, 2019: p2-3). Criticism of this one is considering curriculum as subject matter is the most traditional image of a curriculum which depicts it as the combining of subject matter to form a

body of content to be taught. The other area proposed to define curriculum is the educational philosophical point of view that determines its construction like constructionism, pragmatism and others. Philosophies we used determine the way how to implement curricula.

Similarly, theory or models of curriculum development, perspectives of curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation vary depending on scholars' and researchers' views towards development of curriculum and countries educational policy and program. Post-1994 Ethiopian educational policy and program have led by constructivist theories which encourage learner-centered method of teaching, continuous assessment, various mechanisms of teachers' professional development and decentralized educational and curricular development or enrichment initiatives (TGE, 1994; MoE, 2021, 2020, 2018, 2016 & 2009).

The main constructs of this study reviewed by UNESCO (2013, 1-57). This international organization has accepted the following definitions provided by different scholars/researchers and organization itself and used as a glossary for terminologies. Thus:

- Curriculum adaptation: A process of adjusting the existing curriculum to meet the context of school and sociocultural values of society in the case of relating contents, instructional process, locally available resources and assessment.
- Curriculum implementation: The process of putting the formal curriculum into practice.
- According to Kelly(2009), it is about putting theory in practice or utilization of curriculum materials for instructional purposes in various settings.

2. Statement of the Problems

The national curriculum or educational program/reform merely can't recommend achieving goals of education. Therefore, observing local context and national interest will make curriculum implementation meaningful or fruitful. In line with this, the construct curricular contextualization will play a very great role to reduce deficiency. There was study on teachers' beliefs and actual practice of problem-solving approaches in mathematics teaching. It was stated in Alemayehu (2010: 75):

... Teachers should contextualize the content to the learners' real experience during problem solving and make a relationship between teachers' beliefs about their application of problem-solving approach and their actual practice in the classroom.

To apply it widely clearly, understanding the theoretical perspective of the curriculum is curious. There are basic things prerequisite to curriculum contextualization and pedagogy which are intended to analyse or before going on adaptation of curriculum and pedagogy, knowing challenges to find universally agreed definition of curriculum, master theory of curriculum implementation and similarity among different countries in the world will have advantages. The conclusion remark concerning curriculum implementation was stated by Solomon (2006:53):

Studies of implementation in developed as well as developing countries, almost all, are culture and contexts bound and have their own limitations to serve as conceptual frameworks for studies in Ethiopia. In other words, there seems to be no universally agreed upon meaning of curriculum and its implementation strategy. It also indicates the need to focus on process rather than product.

Study conducted by Lemma (2019) indicated that at regional level in SNNPR education bureau there were limitations in curricular materials preparation and editing in the case of educators professionalism, motivation and commitment. To fill such gaps and solve other local issues, devolution of power to the school level curricular development process will be important. It has been based on flexibility of national educational policy, program and curricular materials.

Empirical evidence of study was implied that in the study area regional education office or SNNPR there were shortage of professionals to prepare and edit textbooks and they were left with a mandated policy provided to develop or prepare grade 7 and 8 textbooks, teachers guide and other relevant instructional material (Lemma, 2019). To fill these gaps and to achieve the goals of upper primary education like preparing learners for further education or learning to learn and the world of work investigating challenges and opportunities related to national educational and curricular aspects, level of freedom is very important. Furthermore, 21st century educational system needs to consider local socio-economic, cultural and day to day activities of community integration with formal education. It will happen when national educational and curricular reforms provide freedom to contextualize curriculum. Thus this study was intended to answer the following basic research questions.

- 1.1 Do national educational programs and curricular materials provide ample freedom for school teachers to contextualize curricula of middle education?
- 1.2 What are critical challenges for contextualization of curriculum in middle education in selected primary schools in Ethiopia?
- 1.3 What are/were differences between periodically changing reforms of educational programs and curriculum taking into account context and local issues?

Theories of constructivism and connectivism lead to study the problems of research. These theories include Active, situated, authentic, experiential, and anchored learning theories (Joao, 2018). Accordingly, constructivism

is defined as a general philosophy of education encompassing several different learning theories.

The adaptations of the curriculum include input, considering local and national educational aspects, output, size, time, difficulty, level of support, degree of participation, modified goals, enrichment of curriculum, supplementary instructional materials utilization and substitute curriculum. Generally, curriculum adaptation can be conceptualized in various studies as:

- *modifications that relate specifically to instruction or content of a curriculum and any adjustments to learning, teaching and assessment of environment, assessment techniques, that enhance a learner's performance or allow at least partial participation in learning activity, structured learning programs and assessment*
- *Consist of changes to the curricular content, changes to the conceptual difficulty level of the curriculum or changes to the instructional objectives and methodology.*
- *Suggest actions at the classroom and teacher level. It is to take the curriculum and adjust it to fit the needs or to modify and use existing materials for insertion in a regular curriculum for very specialized reasons.* (Jia-Wei, 2014: 254) .

Like centralization and decentralization of curriculum development approach, there is possibility of curriculum adaptation at national, regional, district and school or classroom level. Curriculum adaptation also takes place at the school and class level, and work of this nature is mostly carried out by teachers who are going to use the adapted materials themselves. Berliner (1982, cited in Lewy, 1991:54) demonstrated that teachers adapt the goals, objectives, and content of formal curricula to their specific classroom context. According to researchers, all kinds of adaptations are primarily based on flexibility and freedoms provided from the upper level at policy and program level of the country to lower level practitioners.

There are two important terms in this study, contextualized and globalized which are related and differ from adaptation in some points of study. According to Sharma (2014) adapting curriculum into the local context is taken differently by different countries. It is different because the understanding of the schools, parents, teachers and society exists differently. Thus, it is relative to the time, place and context. So, terms contextualized and universalized are interchangeably used as localized and globalized curriculum respectively.

Contextualization of the curriculum embraces relating the content, the teaching learning process and the materials to meaningful situations that are relevant to students' lives (Ambissa, 2014: 49). It assumes that instead of first teaching skills and knowledge separated from the context of the learner and hoping that they will end up knowing how to transfer what they have learned to life outside the classroom, teachers start with real-life contexts and weave these contexts into every stage of the teaching and learning process. Curriculum adaptations will build the access roads to the curriculum, highlighted by Vygotsky as means of building alternative paths that will allow the student to ascend school knowledge (Capellini, *et al.*, 2015: 56). Internationally, different countries like Portugal, Brazil, Nigeria, United Kingdom, China, Philippines and South Africa have employed different ways of curriculum adaptation in their educational policy (Hamilton-Ekeke and Ebiere (2015, 36); Facer (2014); Sharma (2014); and DoE (2002a: p10 -14)).

It was implied that devolution of power to curricular contextualization was based on each country's educational policy guidelines (Sharma, 2014). Both local and global entities need to merge for the existence of local and global. Local knowledge with global recognition and global knowledge with local relevance would be the better resolution of local global debate.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed qualitative case study research design. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2013). According to Best & Khan (2010: p272) the study was followed or taken care of in data organization due to voluminous data collected in a qualitative study; description of the data, the setting in which they have been collected; and the participants in the study and interpretation of data.

The study area was southern Ethiopia; specific name of administrative structure is Wolaita Zone. It is 300km away from capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. The people of study area were more based on agriculture. In the case of education there is one or two primary schools in each village have and totally around 600 primary schools are found. For this qualitative case study only two schools were purposively selected.

Population of the study was purposely selected two primary school teachers who were implementing a new curriculum during data collection of this study. The sample also included purposely selected eight teachers who have teaching experience of old curricula and new under pilot stage and good stage in work experience. Primary data was collected by interview, open ended questionnaire items, and classroom and school observation and secondary data was employed qualitative document review of educational and curricular materials. It was analyzed qualitatively by keeping the theme of the study. Finally by triangulating summary of data discussion was conducted.

4. Findings and Discussion of Data

There are various documents selected to review. Most of these documents have been found from MoE of Ethiopian official wave site search and schools. List of published and unpublished documents were education and training policy (TGE, 1994); education sector development programs; curriculum frameworks and textbooks.

Analysis, discussion and interpretation of documents were based on the research questions raised. It has flexibility of curricula to contextualize the instructional activities and pedagogical adaptation.

Thus, in the case of the existence of diversity, investigating the opportunities, issues and challenges of nationally and regionally prepared materials appropriateness to contextualize curricula and apply pedagogical adaptation is very important. Qualitative document analysis, discussion and interpretation were discussed in the following sub sections.

Table 3: Models of General Education Curriculum in Ethiopia based on ESDP

No.	Period	Models of curriculum development focused
1	Before 1994 ETP	Transmission of knowledge and objective based model
2	ESDP I	Objective based model or product oriented model and more attention in access of education
3	ESDP II (2000/01-2004/5)	Objective model or product oriented model
4	ESDP III (2005/6-2009/10)	Objective or product oriented model and provided attention for equity, access, quality and efficiency of education
5	ESDP IV (2010/11-2014/15)	Competency based curriculum development model -constructivist theory and social learning theory was introduced in curriculum framework (MoE, 2009)
6	ESDP V (2015/16- 2019/20)	Competency based curriculum development model -flexibility of curricula and curriculum differentiations was introduced
7	ESDP VI (2020/21-2024/25)	Competency based curriculum development model: -Social re-constructivist theory, co-curricular and extracurricular program, how to enhance ways for 21 st skills, localization or Indigeneousation of curriculum, technology integration and internationalization, vocationalization and multidisciplinary approach were introduced. Relevance of education for contemporary issues like peace and security of a country, climate change, natural resource management.

ESDP represents education sector development program

Different authors categorize the models of curriculum development in different ways. But the main things in the case of implementation of curriculum at both top to down and bottom to up approach developed curriculum and educators engaged in the practice at all levels have various perspectives. Head of MoE of Ethiopia Birhanu Nega (Professor) was stated about students' academic achievement and teacher's performance or how teachers taught and its influence on students exit examination of higher education. In addition to this he has disclosed that about the issues of national examination administration of grade 12.

...the exit examination result of students will show who taught or trained effectively and who was not trained/taught as expected.

...in the case of examination cheating, different regional or local level concerned bodies (educators) were engaged in facilitating to record the achievement without students' independent work in different means or unethical activities related with examination management.

Self-translation (August, 2022)

This was one of evidence for lack of clarity between perspectives important for post-modern education and models of curriculum development and implementation. Without clearly analyzing drawbacks and strengths of each model of curriculum development it is difficult to improve the quality of curriculum implementation. Model/s should go in line with how to promote 21st century skills through the practice of curriculum like multidimensional aspects of social, cultural, economic, ideological and technological.

The major challenges of educational sector development program related with the implementation of curriculum and roles of key stakeholders of curricula practice were identified at ESDP VI (MoE, 2021) were:

Inadequate follow-up and monitoring of the classroom practice of trained teachers; making major precursor to the curriculum reform was the establishment of a centralized curriculum institute, which has not yet been completed; lack of accurate data on the number of students and on the ratio of textbooks per subject, problems with the distribution of teachers' guides at regional and local levels; and low parental participation in the students learning and teaching process.

To achieve the purpose of education both top level and bottom level of educational stakeholders is important. But here, the above challenges have implied that there were problems in the educational process employed.

Furthermore, there is limitation on exploring the issues related with contextualization of curricula at school level.

One of the values of the education and training system (policies, instructions, plans) discussed on ESDP VI (MoE, 2021) was excellence. It has been indicated as high quality, acquisition of skills necessary for self-reliance, not only high scores on assessment tests, but also intellectual capacities to reason, interpret information and solve problems. This indicates that general education has both academic and nonacademic outcomes. Contextualization of curricula and pedagogical adaptation will also lead to achieve this value.

Thinking about benefits of education for academic, social, cultural, economic and technological utilization is one of reforms in 21st century requirements. It is also essential to ensure the relevance of education and training to the world of work and social participation. Curricula, pedagogy, teaching and learning materials and assessments need to be aligned with labour market requirements or day to day activities of society. This will be critical about flexibility in the case of educational programs and curricular materials to diverse society needs or interests. Thus target activities related with contextualization of curricula was presented in the ESDP VI.

Planned tasks & strategies mentioned on ESDP VI related with flexibility of curriculum development and implementation are: a general curriculum framework will be developed to address the concerns of indigenization, professionalization, and morality; the development of the new curriculum will be primarily competency-based and will be based on the progression of concepts and skills within and across disciplines; teachers will be able to target their teaching based on students' background knowledge, readiness, preferences, and interests; and the quality assurance team must ensure that textbooks are not ponderous and prescriptive. But practicality school teachers' response and school observation indicated that the curricula and educational program are prescriptive.

Moreover in similar documents good strategies designed to implement new curriculum was stated. Some of these ideas were listed with respect to professionalism of teachers below:

- *Train teachers, principals, and supervisors to improve, adapt, and respond to regional and local realities and individual learner needs in the new curriculum*
- *The successful implementation of a high-quality curriculum depends on the quality of teachers, teacher educators, and educational leaders.*

Therefore, they will be trained and retrained to improve, adapt, and meet the individual needs of learners when implementing the curriculum (MoE, 2020).

Some issues arose from two schools concerning training of teachers. Major teachers have reported that since 2020, we have not got a chance of short term training from the government structure. But some departments or teachers' participation of NGO prepared training opportunities. This implies there is a gap between what was stated at ESDP and what has happened at grass root level because it was supposed to fill knowledge and skill deficiency by training.

Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30) of an integrated executive summary did not clearly explore the impact of contextualization of curriculum and pedagogical adaptation. Some of the challenges and ways forwarded concerning primary education were discussed below.

Graduates of primary education lack competence which requires integration of knowledge, skills and the necessary values. The focus seems to be on factual knowledge, and a good proportion of children fail to master basic skills of learning at the completion of the first cycle (MoE, 2018:P15).

Drawback of this explanation is absence of clearly justified reason with respect to the ways educational policy, programs, reform and curricular materials implement strategies. As educators trying to raise how much lower level implementer was tried to consider local level issues and considered to solve issues by their context. In short, did it provide ample space for primary school students to integrate knowledge, skill and values from their community or practice what was written in the textbook as it is. So, critically thinking about the balance between coverage of contents versus integrating knowledge, skills and values of curricula will be very important and finally nothing stated about middle education.

The finding of study about continuous assessment and co-curricular activities presented as:

Co-curricular activities which are instrumental to promote social competence and moral development are not part of the curriculum (MoE, 2018; P16).

The issues were not well discussed. It should raise questions like: Why is the practice of continuous assessment made poor?, how do they improve it?; How do we make co-curricular activities part of curricular activity? Why was it left so far? Why was the curriculum saturated with academic subjects and contents? In general there is limitation in clarifying issues and suggesting ways to improve.

How do we integrate with academic subjects soft life skills? These all are businesses of higher and middle level educators by supervising to take remedial actions soon rather than waiting 20 years of educational policy change.

Policy recommendation related with curriculum of 1994 ETP (TGE, 1994):

3.1.3 Ensure that the curriculum developed and textbooks prepared at central and regional levels, are based on sound pedagogical and psychological principles and are up to inter-national standard, giving due attention to concrete local conditions and gender issues.(TGE, 1994).

The following is a quotation extracted from the interview informant transcript:

The policy and curricular materials are very rigid. The period allowed is not sufficient to cover the content because the yearly schooling days is less than lessons provided each day. In addition to this in different cases instruction was lost.

Policy related with Educational Measurement and Examination was explained as follows:

3.3.3 In order to- get promoted from one level to the next, students will be required to have a minimum of fifty percent achievement (TGE, 1994).

The ways how to make the educational measurement and examination relevant and acceptable to the level of educational stakeholders was practically demonstrated. The quality and relevance of assessment at local level issues was not taken into consideration at policy level. Article 3.3.3 was not implemented last 25 up to 28 years in the case of grade 8 regional examinations. Lack of clarity on assessment and examination policy of study areas exposed lower educators for unethical activities like theft of examination. Pass mark of grade 8 regional examination most frequently used in Southern Ethiopia 35-40% last two and half decay.

In the Ethiopian educational system based on ETP of 1994 curriculum framework first time was prepared in 2009. Some of very important things explored in this document and intended to improve quality and relevance of curriculum development and implementation were:

This curriculum framework adopts the principles of active learning and a competency based approach to education as the most flexible means to achieve the desired changes.

This curriculum framework aims to encourage flexibility in teaching and learning methodologies and strategies and will require a shift in teachers' thinking to enable them to include a variety of more appropriate activities to enhance students' participation in their learning (MoE, 2009).

This explanation implied that the curriculum framework has been provided ample space to contextualize curricula. In addition to curricular materials flexibility, it has also given freedom to employ pedagogical adaptation.

The comparison of two frameworks was presented on Table 4

Table 4: The Comparison between Grades 7 and 8 Learning Areas or Subjects of 2009 and 2020 Curriculum Framework

	2009 /10		2020/21	
1	Mother Tongue	3	First Language	3
2	Amharic	2	A Federal Language	3
3	English	5	English	5
4	Mathematics	5	Mathematics	5
5	Biology	2	General Science	5
6	Chemistry	2		
7	Physics	3		
8	Social Studies	2	Social Studies	3
9	Civics and Ethical Education	3	Citizenship Educations	2
10	Physical Education	2	Health and Physical Education	2
11	Visual arts and Music	1	Performing and Visual Arts	2
12			Information technologies	2
13			Career and Technical Education	2
	Total period per week	30 period	35period each 45' (24 hr 45' per week)	

Source: curriculum framework of general education (K-12) of 2009 & 2021. Ethiopia, MoE

Table 4 has indicated that there are differences and similarity between subjects mentioned and corresponding periods allotted per week. There is similarity in the case of incorporating core subjects' language (mother tongue, Ethiopian language and English as foreign language, Mathematics and Social studies. The difference is merging three natural science subjects (Biology, Chemistry and Physics); change of civic and ethical education to citizenship education and Visual arts and Music to performing and visual arts; and addition two new subjects. Two newly added subjects are Information technologies and Career and technical education.

The knowledge and skills of information technologies will have so many advantages for learners' academic progress and making them ready for the world of work. Career and technical education will also have so many advantages in the case of vocationalization and relating contents of subjects surrounding community economic and social activities.

Before deciding schooling period and hour per week, making analysis on the context in which education is delivered and thinking about flexibility based on social, cultural and local problems are crucial. Practically, currently personally I have observed that in the new curriculum implementation all the schools use a shifting system. This implies searching alternatives by taking into consideration school level facilities like classrooms, desks and out of class factors of rural communities. Socio-economic status of the community should be considered

in the period's allotment.

Review of contents in the case of considering context is one mechanism to improve curricular process.

Accordingly, all four subjects' teachers have explained that there are sufficient places to contextualize at school and classroom level in each subject. There are some successes and hindering factors to contextualize it as reported by participants of the study. The success factors according to teachers were low motivation of teacher and students, implementer's creativity, instructional supervision of the school, commitment and professional competence and hindering factors will be availability of periods allowed for each topic or lesson workload. Finally they agreed that through the process of pedagogical adaptation it is possible to accommodate achievement of higher level of three domains educational objectives (cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains).

Analysis and discussion was based on some selected items proposed to evaluate the strengths and limitations of curricular materials were presented in the following ways. In this study old books indicate the book which was first developed in 2013 E.C (2010/11) and in practice up to now or 2021/22 in the schools and new indicate the book in pilot stage.

The difference between contents included in old and new textbooks

New textbook follows from simple to complex and clear for students and it is presented in simple ways. This makes it acceptable (Teacher 11). Respondent was reported what he observed but it is difficult to see what is simple and complex. It depends on the student's previous knowledge, teacher's views towards subject matter and other factors. One of social studies subject teacher was reported as follows:

Curriculum contents of 2009 were overloaded and there were confusing things found. But in new curricula there are suitable activities occupied for teaching learning relevant and also there are clear and short activities have incorporated. The problem with the new textbook is the presence of complicated topics like "calculation on population". (Teacher 42).

According to the review of a grade 7 English teacher, there are many differences between the old and new textbooks. In a new textbook the contents are more available and cleared to the teachers and students. In English the sub topic or theme "listening text" is boring and difficult to understand. It is better when simple and clear things occupy (Teacher 22). Therefore, modifying the new curriculum has provided a comment in the case of contents.

There are also content variations. The third teacher reported that new book contents are more of indigenous based, and students understand more when the lessons are connected with their environment and their history. In the old book there was no history content like Adwa, ceremony (Te3; April, 2022). It is about integration of local knowledge, skill and values in curricula.

Integration of local/indigenous knowledge, skills and values

Two mathematics teachers explained how new curricula provided freedom to integrate local knowledge and skill. First, the new textbook has local knowledge and skill. It has also integrated or linked with daily life experience and interaction of students and community (Teacher 12). New curricula considered local knowledge and skill. For example, calculating profit and loss percentage is highly related with community daily life practice (Teacher 23). The third respondent relates the lesson with local institutions or organization office activities.

To gain knowledge, skill and good values from a local level making linkage or connection with organization is good. In the case of mathematics students visiting a nearby accounting or finance office/organization to change experience sharing or practical activity observation is necessary. This one makes students get tangible knowledge and motivates them. Furthermore, they can gain knowledge of the national level and get awareness on the practicality of the subject's matter they learned (Teacher 11.)

Social studies teachers were discussing that the new book has incorporated localization of curriculum in better ways than the former curriculum. Contents of the subject have included seven units and it has also tried to integrate heritage; cultural knowledge, values and skills; and social aspects of Ethiopia (Teacher 42). The integrating mechanism of local knowledge, skill and values in the new curricula is better than existing one. (Teacher 41). According to English teachers the integration of indigenous knowledge, skill and values are very good in a new textbook. "We have used local knowledge to give the meaning of new words to the learner to know their mother tongue or first language" (Teacher 22). Indigenous knowledge, skills and values are integrated in a new textbook or found in sufficient level to relate local elements in the curricula (Teacher 21).

Table 5: Learning Outcomes From Grade Mathematics

No.	Contents	unit outcome of 2003 E.C (MoE)	Unit outcome of 2014 E.C
1	Data handling	-collect data and construct simple line graphs and pie charts for a given data -calculate the mean, median and mode of a given data -Find the range of a given data	-Organize data using frequency tables for a given data - Construct and Interpret data from pie charts - Calculate Mean, Mode, Median and range of a given data -Apply the concept of data handling to organize and interpret real life problems
2	Ratio, proportion and percentage	-Understand the notions of ration and proportions -Solve problems related with percentage -make the use of the concept of percentage to solve problems of profit, loss and simple interest	-Understand the notions of ratio and proportions. -Solve problems involving ratio and proportion -Describe a percentage -Solve problems involving percentages. - Relate fractions, decimals and percentages to real life situations -Apply the concept of percentage in solving real life problems

Source: Collected from old and new grade 7 mathematics curricula of Ethiopia
(*old represents 2009 curriculum and new represents 2020 curriculum)

It was clearly stated in the same contents of mathematics that how to relate learning experience with daily life practice on Table 5, .learning outcome supports contextualization of instructional process under the content data handling is “apply the concept of data handling to organize and interpret real life problems”.

From the second topic, the learning outcomes are “relate fractions, decimals and percentages to real life situations”; and apply the concept of percentage in solving real life problems. It needs teachers and students' commitment to achieve the outcome during the instructional process by thinking to adapt each lesson. It motivates both teachers and learners to consider local aspects.

5. Discussion of Major Findings

The main aim of study was intended to explore the flexibility or rigidity of education policy, program and curricular materials to employ instructional activities at school level. It was focused on how nationally and regionally prepared educational and or curricular resources provide freedom to school and classroom level curriculum implementation. Most of these activities are the role of school teachers. So, the main focus area will be contextualization of instructional materials at school level and application of classroom pedagogy relevant for learners by considering background and context variables to improve learning outcome of students. Thus, the question was stated as follows:

The study was focused on upper primary education to the specific grade 7 and 8 level curriculum implementation in southern Ethiopia at Wolaita zone selected primary schools. It tried to analyze national educational policy, program, curriculum framework and curricular materials level of flexibility and rigidity.

Documents reviewed were ETP (TGE, 1994), ESDP (MoE, 2021), Curriculum framework (MoE, 2009 &2021), Textbooks of grade 7 and 8 English , Mathematics , Social Studies and Biology and books of grade 7 in pilot stage. Some of strengths and weaknesses were discussed regarding flexibility as follows:

Firstly, the Ethiopia education and training policy of 1994 did not state about contextualization of curricula. In a broad way it was stated that primary educational materials like textbooks will be prepared at regional level based on national standard. There was no article presented regarding contextualization of curricula and implementation of pedagogical adaptation in clear ways. One of the articles to some extent tried to touch it and explained in the following ways:

Ensure that the curriculum developed and textbooks prepared at central and regional levels, are based on sound pedagogical and psychological principles and are up to inter-national standard, giving due attention to concrete local conditions and gender issues.(TGE, 1994).

The limitation of this one is clarification of various forms of social, cultural, economic, local values. It focused only on issues of Ethiopia as gender related but practically so many issues found which needs to consider local diversities. The second or currently in selected primary schools new curriculum implementation has been started based on educational development road map. Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30) of an integrated executive summary did not clearly explore the impact of contextualization of curriculum and pedagogical adaptation. It described the challenges but there are problems in making contextualization of curriculum to solve the problems identified.

Some of planned tasks & strategies mentioned on Ethiopia ESDP VI related to the curriculum are good to make curriculum flexible at school level. These were:- ” teachers will be able to target their teaching based on

students' background knowledge, readiness, preferences, and interests; indigenous knowledge will be integrated into the progression frameworks along with universal knowledge from the start; and the quality assurance team must ensure that textbooks are not ponderous and prescriptive". This shows there is freedom to adapt curricula at school and classroom instructional process because it motivates teachers to consider local context during instructional process and opposing prescriptiveness of curricular materials development. The curriculum framework also supported the practice of contextualization. Thus:

This Curriculum Framework aims to encourage flexibility in teaching and learning methodologies and strategies and will require a shift in teachers' thinking to enable them to include a variety of more appropriate activities to enhance students' participation in their learning (MoE, 2009).

In a good way it was stated how school teachers make the teaching learning process attractive by considering local and national context in a flexible way. But there are issues in the case of period allowed. It is highly rigid. There are no alternative ways provided by considering rural versus urban, public versus private school, drought and famine, compensation mechanisms of curricula in different man-made and natural disasters and insecurity.

An international study of curriculum flexibility versus prescription indicated different mechanisms. According to Cowley & Williamson, 1998:92) national curricula can be overprescribed and rigidly enforced by central authorities (as in England and Wales). Alternatively, a more flexible approach can be taken, where national curricula guidelines are issued at the center, but local implementation of them adjusts them appropriately to suit the local context (as in Australia).

The contents of grade 7 and 8 Mathematics, English, Social Studies and Biology were reviewed. All of these were included appropriate and relevant sub topics to relate or contextualize the study area reality in different ways. In addition to these, new grade 7 and old textbook contents of three subjects was observed. It was reviewed by selected school teachers who have experience of teaching old and new curriculum materials.

There are activities in both old and new curriculum of Social Studies, Mathematics and English which were provided for students to do individually, in group and project work which guides learners to relate subject matter with local context. In addition to contextualization of curriculum these types activities/exercise will support learners to develop 21st century skills.

The school teachers' review of major findings of curriculum with respect to contextualization presented by making comparison between old and new curricula:

- Clear activities and exercises presented by considering local aspects
- The new textbook was prepared more in the student-centered approach
- New curricula encourage learners better than the existing or old one by providing opportunities to do activities which are related with concrete realities and relevant to develop socio-economic skill based on local context;
- Diversity of assessment in new textbook makes it interesting
- It leads to read reference books and analyses the things widely and use technology
- New curricula considered local knowledge and skill better than old curricula

Textbook utilization and modification has not clearly stated for implementers at policy and program level in Ethiopia. In the case of Ethiopia, teacher's guides and textbooks serve as a form of teacher training; they provide ideas on how to plan and teach lessons as well as formats that teachers can use for instructional activities. The way how to use and integrate other local and international issues and good practices will make it more effective. According to research findings, textbook utilization has its own advantages and disadvantages. These are:

Advantages:- provide structure and a syllabus for a program; help standardize instruction; maintain quality; provide a variety of learning resources; make efficient; provide effective language models and input; and empower or train teachers. However there are also potential negative effects. These are:- may contain inauthentic language; it may distort content; textbooks often present an idealized view of the world or fail to represent real issues.; it may not reflect students' needs; and it can discourage teachers(Richards(ny), p1-4).

The way to modify textbooks in order to achieve the objective of the curriculum was suggested by the researcher. Accordingly, adaptation may take a variety of forms. Some of recommended activities to modify are modifying content, adding or deleting content, reorganizing content, addressing omissions, modifying tasks, and extending tasks (ibid, p5).

Internationally countries curricular materials utilization and preparation was depending up on the countries educational jurisdiction. According to Creese, *et al.* (2016, p9), it depends on decentralization and centralization of the educational system. Some systems manage instruction by centrally controlled provision of textbooks and other support materials. For instance Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore allow schools to choose texts from an approved list, whereas Japan develops national texts for each subject.

The study conducted in the adaptation of curriculum indicated that there were challenges during the preparation process in SNNPR. Major finding of the study according to Lemma (2019:1):

...primary school syllabi have been developed and repeatedly revised at the Federal Ministry of Education with limited participation of the SNNPRS' representatives. The earlier regional level preparation had given the regional state chances to adapt the curriculum to concrete regional conditions and most local needs were met using local contents and learning experiences. However, lack of experience, material resources and absence of trained curriculum staff including resistance from few groups were the challenges encountered.

It was one evidence that except for the mother tongue subject, the remaining curricular materials developed at the central level with little participation from the regional education bureau. The same study revealed the following as challenges in the adaptation of curriculum at regional level:

Getting trained and experienced curriculum planners was a challenge to the regional state for the practice was a new task to the region as it was to the country too. Lack of experience, shortage of educational resources, materials and some kind of resistance from few teachers were some of the challenges identified in planning the primary school curriculum in SNNPRS. The high level of diversity of the people in the region and its inability to prepare well-adapted or localized curriculum was also influenced (Lemma, 2019: 28-30).

The challenges related with curricular materials adaptation of regional level were analyzed and discussed in the study findings in a good approach. But the schools and districts and zonal level diversity and the impact of nationally developed curricular materials implementation was not considered in the study. Wherever curricular materials are developed, it may be top to down, bottom to up or combination of two, the critical issues should be how it should be implemented at school and classroom level or identifying the role and responsibility of subject teachers will be very important. Thus, the findings stated so far did not investigate the role of school teachers or key implementers instructional materials regarding the strategies of curriculum adaptation. Current practices of curricular materials preparation and post-1994 has implication for oscillation of SNNPR curricular materials development of grade 7 and 8.

Uncooperatively, adaptation of curricula at a lower level is very difficult due to national or regionally prescriptive curricula and assessment of students or minimum learning competence measurement. Some of the barriers and corresponding strategies of adaptation were identified in the research conducted. The perspectives of teachers on national curriculum versus curricular adaptation investigated. The study discovered that,

...teachers list as their main concerns and impediments for a more frequent curriculum adaptation, the lack of time and opportunity due to the need of fulfilling the national curriculum defined for their school subjects, and the pressure from the incoming national exams. Also, they refer to the length of the curricula, as an obstacle to curriculum innovation. Nevertheless, they express the willingness to extend the national curriculum through different approaches and act as curriculum developers (Leite, et al., 2013: p560).

The same things have held in the case of Ethiopian national curriculum implementation. Informal discussion with teachers has shown it. Teachers and schools provide more attention for national examinations and trying to implement prescribed curricula with a very great attachment. However, the relevance and an issue discussed in the framework of the national curriculum of Ethiopia tried to give exposure to related social life.

Classroom teaching learning process observation of teachers has some differences from interview reports in the case of contextualizing instruction. Major parts of teachers observed were highly made rigidity with textbook educational experiences rather than localizing and contextualizing the lessons. Moreover, the classroom pedagogy is highly inclined to be autocratic. Making pedagogy democratic in selected grade 7 and 8 was influenced by teachers and students related factors like motivation and views towards competency of curriculum development.

6. Conclusions

In the case of countries like Ethiopia with multilingual and multicultural societies it is difficult to achieve the goals of education only by applying top down approach curriculum in a prescriptive manner. The curriculum implementation perspective which emphasizes contextualization of curriculum is effective when nationally developed or prepared education and curriculum provide freedom for local level curriculum implementers, especially for school teachers. Document review and school teachers self-report revealed that Ethiopian educational and curricular materials have provided some freedom to consider the context in which teaching learning process happened with some degree of freedom implicitly. The study also explored that lack of explicitly written guide line of curriculum adaptation, periods allowed for each subject, students and teachers level of motivation, professional competence of teachers and school related factors influenced flexible ways of practicing curriculum in upper primary schools of Wolaita Zone in Ethiopia.

Although there is a big variation at school level, practices and philosophy of curriculum adopted at national level curriculum framework recognize the freedom to apply post-modern era of curriculum practices. When researchers compare before 1994 educational policy, ESDP one period up to ESDP three and ESDP four up to ESDP six, there are very high differences. The documents review implied that the transmission of knowledge, objective/product oriented model, process oriented and combination of models. The report of the interview also

supported it. Especially in ESDP VI, the components of 21st century skills were included in the formal curriculum making and strengthening it by adding co-curricular and extracurricular program parts of explicit curricula, indigenous knowledge integration and ICT integration.

7. Implication of the Study

To improve the relevance and internal efficiency of education in general and the implementation of curriculum in upper primary schools, preparing guidelines for curriculum materials development and school level curriculum implementers will be suggested. Deep awareness of lower level up to upper level educators views towards flexibility of curriculum materials preparation and utilization have various merits to achieve 21st skills though the implementation of curriculum. According to Wrahatnolo and Munoto (2018:6), 21st century skills include having life planning; flexibility and adaptability; initiative and self-management; entrepreneurship; social and cultural interaction; productivity and accountability, leadership, and responsibility; critical thinking, creative and innovative; problem solving; communication; collaborative and teamwork; life skills and digital literacy. To achieve these learning outcome making educational system and curricula relevant for the this century or present and future generation, critically thinking about flexibility versus rigidity, top down versus bottom up approach; context versus text and fidelity versus mutual adaptation and other extreme cases comparison will have resource to improve practice of educational activities of developed as well as developing nations education system.

Without taking into consideration the models of curriculum proposed at national level and clear conceptualization of curriculum implementation it is difficult to improve relevance, quality, equity and internal efficiency of education. Only trying to evaluate educational outcomes by summative assessment leads to losing other very important elements and impact of curricula. To get comprehensive and holistic solutions professionals of the curriculum will be very important. It is supportive and which confirms a study conducted by Solomon and Aschale (2019) under the title “The Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation vis-à-vis Schwab's signs of crisis in the field of curriculum”. The final remark of mine also to minimise the issues of curriculum implementation will be strengthening cooperation among curricularists to provide appropriate ways for educational curriculum related problems.

Further study should be conducted on how to contextualize curriculum by considering educational outcome issues in the case of multicultural, multilingual society and presence of nationally prescribed curricula.

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