

The contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development: Ethiopian secondary schools in focus

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers' multicultural competence development in Ethiopia. The major sources of data were prospective teachers of the three randomly selected Teacher Education Institutes who took their placement school experiences at the respective secondary schools. Two hundred and forty prospective teachers were selected from five hundred and seventy three prospective teachers of the 2011/2012 academic year cohort using a proportional random sampling technique to fill in the questionnaire. Fifteen prospective teachers were also selected for interview using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through questionnaire and interview. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using percentage and one sample t-test. Interview data were reported in words following themes made vis-à-vis the research questions of this study. The findings of the study pointed out that collaboration among prospective teachers, staffs of placement schools, and students' parents have brought the required multicultural knowledge, attitude, and skill to prospective teachers. However, the findings noted that learner-centered knowledge construction philosophy is at its infant stage at the placement schools. In light of these findings, relevant recommendations have been made in the paper.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a wide consensus among educators that education is a critical weapon for bringing social, economic, and political advancement in a given society. That is why investment in education is often accompanied by optimistic assumptions, such as for example, an educated population contributes to the socio-economic development of a given society as a whole; it further contributes to the well-being of individuals within the society; and to a swiftly increasing technological innovations and changing face of the world's economic and political systems. This requires a new flexibility and adaptability by societies and individuals for which education is increasingly being seen as an essential component for an adaptable and flexible population.

In spite of this agreement among scholars, however, there are two major theories regarding the role of education in society. Some consider that education functions as a means of both cultural production [1] as

well as cultural reproduction [2, 3]. As McLaren agrees, education works to maintain the status quo through the reproduction of the mainstream culture and discourse that maintain the normality of oppressive behavior in the respective society (1994). Some theorists see this process as a political and a means of reproducing dominant ideologies and practices in the respective society. In this line, McLaren [3] further contends that curriculum is “never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge. Part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge”. Thus, what counts as knowledge, how it is organized, who is empowered to teach it, how students demonstrate mastery of it, and even who is allowed to ask questions are all parts of the politics of official knowledge and the way dominance and subordination are reproduced in a society [4]. The implication behind this assertion is that educational institutions legitimize the mainstream culture through the arrangement of bodies of knowledge in the “hegemonic curriculum” and by privileging the students whose cultural capital match with those of the culture that gets reinforced in schools [1].

In contrast to this, there is also a possibility that education could equally produce possibilities for equitable relations in society [5]. This kind of educational influence enables one to bring a society with little social, economic, and political problems [6]. That is why education is considered as a priority area in the move to combat the social ills of cultural diversity. In view of the above arguments, educational institutions are contradictory places where the dynamics of production and reproduction are simultaneously at work. At this point, what comes to the minds of professionals is how to encourage educational institutions to become sites of struggle over biased relations between and among the culturally diverse people in a given society. That is why educators [7]. Consider multicultural education as a potential instrument of correcting of past distortions and inequalities. It is a process of school reform that challenges the statuesque and rejects different forms of discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, and other differences in school and society. It accepts and affirms diversity and pluralism (ethnic, linguistic, religious, and gender among others) that students, teachers and other school personnel reflect [8].

As it can be observed from the above list of TEP objectives, the second objective from the last states the issue of multiculturalism directly. However, one can imply that the realization of all the objectives listed above requires PTs to exhibit multicultural competence with regards to them, their students, students’ families, the respective community, and the society at large. Moreover, a critical review of the strategies suggested in the new teacher education framework document has highlighted the commitment to theory-practice intermarriage in the entire cycle of teacher education program implementation. This commitment seeks PTs to learn from their lived experiences and the experiences of others, which are the basic attributes of multicultural teacher education programs. All in all, it is on the basis of the preceding conceptual, theoretical, and empirical backgrounds that the researcher made an investigation into the contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers’ multicultural competence development in Ethiopia. To this end, therefore, below an attempt is made to address the statement of the problem.

It is an open secret that teachers who know their students’ family lives are likely to be better prepared to understand the students’ in-school behavior and to incorporate the knowledge those families possess into classroom activities [9-12]. In spite of the concern exhibited from the current government to improve school-family ties, the interaction between teachers and students’ families happens infrequently in Ethiopia. Therefore, in this study an attempt was made to check whether or not PTs were informed about the cultures of diverse families as per the demands of the nation. On the basis of the researcher’s long years of experience in the teaching profession, it can be deduced that the issue of cultural diversity is not well addressed at the ground in the Ethiopian education system. The researchers of this study found that the task force for the National Teacher Education Curriculum Framework considered this to be a gap in its deliberation process as well. The researchers put this remark due to the fact that the Framework discloses the following procedures passed through in the process of its formulation. The task force has attempted to address the needs of the country through analysis of policy and program documents, identify the problems in TEPs through discussions with TEs of Ethiopian Universities and reviewing empirical studies conducted on Ethiopian TEIs, and benchmark best practices through literature review and educational visits to some European and African countries (p. 4). Therefore, investigating the multicultural contribution of the current placement school experiences to PTs’ multicultural competence development seems in order.

To achieve the preceding purposes of this study, the article is organized into the following research questions. To what extent does the placement school practicum provide prospective teachers an opportunity to reflect on multicultural issues? To what extent does the placement school practicum provide prospective teachers an opportunity to interact with and teach a diverse student population? To what extent does the placement school practicum give prospective teachers an opportunity to interact with placement school students’ families?

The paper tries to highlight the very significance of studying the contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers’ multicultural competence development in Ethiopia. An examination of

the contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers' preparedness to effectively teach diverse student population is important for several reasons. One of the reasons is that prospective teachers will continue to be directly affected by the cultural and ethnic distribution of students at placement schools. This kind of research is very important and necessary for timely placement school experiences decisions because of its potential to inform the programs for the Ethiopian context. Similarly, the literature repeatedly states that multicultural competence has its own contribution to effective teaching and learning in diverse educational institutions. It is, therefore, important to understand PTs' multicultural competence since if they are left unobserved, they will end up negatively impacting the teaching and learning of diverse student population in the culturally diverse schools. TEPs must prepare PTs for the diverse student population with whom they will come into contact, as well as to understand these students' needs. To do these, we should have teachers with multicultural competence especially at schools. Therefore, the study will shed light on the state of PTs' multicultural competence in Ethiopia. Generally, a better understanding of the contribution of placement school experiences to prospective teachers' multicultural knowledge, attitude and skill competence development may help the provision of quality placement school experiences that deepen understandings of cultural responsiveness and begin to foster the development of diversity-responsive prospective teachers.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

The design used in this study is a mixed method design based on concurrent nested quantitative-qualitative design strategies.

2.2. Data sources for the study

The sources of data in this study were PTs of the three randomly selected TEIs in Ethiopia, i.e., TEIs situated in Hawassa University (HU), Bahir Dar University (BDU), and Mekele University (MU).

2.3. Sample size and sampling techniques

At its inception, the TEP was implemented in ten TEIs in Ethiopia. Out of these TEIs, three were randomly selected. These include TEIs at Bahir Dar, Mekelle, and Hawassa universities. The researchers felt that the three TEIs were representative of the diversity at the ten TEIs in Ethiopia. This is due to the fact that PTs are randomly assigned to TEIs from any corner of the nation. Moreover, as the Teacher Education Curriculum Framework has been designed at the center over a long period of time deliberating of representative TEIs of each TEI in Ethiopia, and PTs of the sample TEIs were drawn from different regions, the three TEIs selected are assumed to represent the ten TEIs in Ethiopia.

The total numbers of PTs of the three TEIs were 573 (422 male and 151 female). Of these, 112 (90 male and 22 female) were from Hawassa, 224 (162 male and 62 female) were from Mekelle, and 237 (170 male and 67 female) were from Bahir Dar Universities. Using proportional random sampling technique, forty eight PTs from Hawassa, hundred PTs from Bahir Dar, and ninety two PTs from Mekele TEIs (a total of two hundred forty PTs) were selected to fill in the questionnaire. Forty three (35 male and 8 female) PTs from Hawassa, ninety one (65 male and 26 female) PTs from Bahir Dar, and eighty six (62 male and 24 female) PTs from Mekele TEIs returned the filled in questionnaire. A total of two hundred twenty two filled in PTs' questionnaires were returned. Of these, five PTs from each TEI were selected using a purposive sampling technique for an in-depth interview to elaborate further some of the points addressed through the questionnaire. Gender, religion and diversity in ethnic origin were used as the basic criteria in PTs' selection for interviewing.

2.4. Data gathering instruments

To gather reliable and valid data from the samples of this study, the researcher used PTs' questionnaire (including multicultural competence scales, such as MCK, MCA, and MCS scales), and interview. These instruments were developed by referring to the research questions and the theoretical framework of this study.

2.5. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used as a major instrument to collect data in this study. One set of questionnaire (i.e., for PTs) was designed and employed in the study. Basic data that was solicited using questionnaire included: 1) demographic composition of PTs, 2) teaching styles used by PTs at placement schools and learning styles of placement school students, and 3) PTs state of interaction at the placement schools both with cooperative teachers, students, and parents. In addition, multicultural competence scales were included in PTs questionnaire to check their state of MCK, MCA, and MCS. The three scales placed

emphasis on the understanding level of PTs about cultural differences, their attitude towards diverse students, and their skill of getting along with diverse student population at the schools.

The questionnaire was organized into two sections. One of which is background information about prospective teachers. It consisted of eight items. The second section focused on PTs' multicultural competence. They were classified into three themes. One of which was PTs' MCK that consisted of 25 items. The second theme focused on PTs' MCA, which consisted of 81 items. The third theme focused on PTs' MCS, which consisted of 45 items.

The validity of the items was ascertained by three colleagues who were working at BDU. The language used in constructing the items was also commented on by a senior foreign language lecturer at BDU. In addition, the reliability level of the questionnaire items was ascertained by giving the items for potential respondents. The reliability level was checked using SPSS 17. And it was found to be 0.82.

2.6. Interview

Interview questions focused on PTs reflections (intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogue) about multicultural issues during their stay at placement schools, their interaction with diverse parents, the effectiveness of the interaction process, their state of communication with students' parents at placement schools, and their evaluation of the philosophy behind knowledge construction process at placement schools.

As in the case of the questionnaire items, interview items were developed by referring to existent literature on multiculturalism and based on the research questions of this article. Using this procedure, eight items were constructed. The validity of the items was ascertained by three colleagues who were working at BDU. The language used in constructing the items was also commented by the senior Foreign Language Instructor at BDU.

2.6. Data analysis techniques

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed using percentage and one sample t-tests. The data from interviews were reported qualitatively in words following the basic themes made vis-à-vis the research questions of this study. The percentage was employed to see the demographic composition of PTs at the sample TEIs. The one sample t-test analysis was also used to check whether or not there was a difference between the multicultural competences improvements observed among PTs as a result of their placement school experiences. At last, depending upon the nature of the data, the qualitative data was used as a cross validating means, complement, or supplement to the quantitative data in the entire process of data analysis.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Level of collaborative relationship prospective teachers have with staffs of placement schools

Demographic Data of the Participants of this Study. The aggregate value of collaborative relation PTs have with TEs at placement schools and TEIs, colleagues at placement schools and TEIs, cooperative teachers/mentors at placement schools, non-teaching staff members of TEIs and placement schools, students and students' parents at placement schools (27.57) is above the test value (24). This value is significant at α value of 0.05. That is, the aforementioned stakeholders at the TEIs and placement schools were providing the necessary support for prospective teachers. This collaboration, extended from TEI and placement school staff members, is believed to bring the required multicultural competence among PTs, as collaboration helps PTs get knowledge from the diverse group population, develop the skill of how to get along with diverse people, and develop tolerance of differences. Collaborative relation prospective teachers have with staffs at placement schools as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Collaborative relation prospective teachers have with staffs at placement schools

Collaborative relations with:	N	Test value	Calculated Mean	Std. Deviation	Ff	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
CTs at placement schools	222	3	3.93	1.103	221	12.54	.000*
Colleagues at placement schools	222	3	3.68	1.106	221	9.16	.000*
University instructors at placement schools	222	3	2.90	1.510	221	-.98	.329
Placement school students	222	3	4.09	1.029	221	15.78	.000*
Placement school students' parents	222	3	3.43	1.158	221	5.56	.000*
Non-teaching staffs of placement schools	222	3	3.23	1.304	221	2.68	.008*

3.2. The contribution of multicultural attributes of placement school experiences to prospective teachers multicultural competence development, prospective teachers' questionnaire results

An attempt was made to check how far attributes of multiculturalism observed at placement schools contributed to PTs multicultural competence development. Table 2 indicates that the organizational culture of placement schools enabled them to positively interact with diverse learners at schools (4.09), instructional materials used at placement schools enabled them to examine their personal position for bias across diverse learners (3.73), the curriculum at placement schools employ multiple perspectives (3.85), the curriculum at placement schools enabled them to explain the experiences of diverse groups (3.75), the placement school experiences represent the various learning styles of the students (4.00), diverse parents participate in planning placement school activities (3.56). That is, the aforementioned multicultural attributes are observed above the test value (3). This value difference is significant at α value of 0.05. This implies that placement school experiences have an immense contribution to PTs multicultural competence development.

Table 2. The contribution of multicultural attributes of placement school experiences to prospective teachers multicultural competence development

Multicultural attributes	N	Test value	Calculate d Mean	Std	df	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Organizational culture of the placement school enabled you to positively interact with diverse learners of the school	222	3	4.9	1.01	221	16.13	.000*
Instructional materials used in the placement schools enabled you to examine your personal position for bias across diverse learners	222	3	3.3	1.19	221	9.12	.000*
The curriculum at placement schools employ multiple perspectives	222	3	3.5	1.03	221	12.33	.000*
The curriculum at placement schools enabled you to explain the experiences of diverse groups	222	3	3.75	1.12	221	10.04	.000*
The placement school experiences reflects the various learning styles of the students at the school	222	3	4.00	.98	221	15.25	.000*
Diverse parents participate in planning placement school activities	222	3	3.56	1.29	221	6.50	.000*

3.3. Prospective teachers state of understanding diverse student population at the placement schools, interview results

The researchers tried to solicit information about PTs state of understanding the culturally different student population using interview. The placement school practical experience and the interaction that PTs have with placement school students and parents made them to have a better understanding of the culturally different people. Others feel that their life philosophy emanated from the national ideology made them to value equitable treatment of diverse people.

3.4. Placement school experiences' contribution to prospective teachers multicultural competence development in ethiopia, interview results

An attempt was made to ascertain whether or not placement school experiences have contributions to PTs multicultural competence development. The descriptions made in the interview confirmed that PTs believed that placement school practical experiences have an immense contribution to PTs' multicultural competence development. They asserted that they have brought great shifts towards the issue of multiculturalism as a result of their exposure with diverse placement school contexts during the implementation of their placement school experiences. Other interviewees' value lesson planning practice at the placement school and still other interviewees considered the practicum guidebook as good avenues for PTs multicultural competence development. However, other prospective teachers reported limited benefit of such kinds of arrangements due to mentors' inability to provide the required professional support and limited instructional time to deliberate on practicum tasks done at the placement schools.

3.5. Knowledge construction philosophy at placement schools, interview results

As the multicultural literature indicated, the way knowledge is constructed may obstruct or contribute to PTs' multicultural competence development. On this background, an attempt was made to investigate the way knowledge is constructed at placement schools.

As it is proved from the direct description of the interviews held with PTs, it is being disclosed that learner-centered knowledge construction philosophy is better practiced at TEIs than placement schools. As to the interviewees, this is due to large class size, secondary teachers' inability to manage such kinds of classroom organizations, and secondary school students' hatred towards student-centered approaches at the

placement school than the TEIs. However, other respondents disclosed that both TEIs and placement schools practice direct instruction due to participants' negative attitude towards learner-centered approaches, teachers' inability to manage learner-centered approaches, and the like.

The foregoing discussion implies that there is better interaction opportunity between and among PTs than placement school students. This implies that relatively speaking knowledge construction philosophy at TEIs is somehow conducive for the development of positive attitude towards the culturally different than the situation at the placement schools today, as more and more interaction makes role players more and more tolerant of diverse views created due to multicultural parameters.

However, still other interviewees pointed out that placement schools employ stronger learner-centered approaches than the TEIs. Other interviewees disclosed that both institutes employ learner-centered instruction. Still others feel that both levels exercise learner-centered instruction.

3.6. The state of placement school experiences in enhancing prospective teachers' multicultural knowledge competence, questionnaire result

An attempt was made to check the MCK competence of PTs using a 26-item knowledge scale filled in by PTs themselves. The results pointed out that the MCK competence level (107.45) of PTs is greater than the test value (78). Table 3 shows that the difference from the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. This implies that placement school experiences seem to enable PTs be capable of knowing diversified issues regarding the culturally different people.

Table 3. Prospective teacher's multicultural knowledge competence

Focal point	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Multicultural knowledge competence	222	78	107.45	15.05	221	29.15	.000*

3.7. The state of placement school experiences in enhancing prospective teachers multicultural attitude competence development

The researcher checked the MCA competence of PTs using an 81-item attitude scale filled in by PTs themselves. The results showed that the MCA competence level (344.88) of PTs is above the test value (255). Table 4 confirmed that the difference from the mean is significant at α value of 0.05. This implies that placement school experiences seem to have made PTs be capable of developing a positive attitude towards the culturally different.

Table 4. Prospective teachers' multicultural attitude competence

Focal point	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	f	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Multicultural attitude competence	222	255	344.88	44.3	21	30.23	.000*

3.8. The state of placement school experiences in enhancing prospective teachers multicultural skill competence development

An attempt was made to check the MCS competence level of PTs using a 42 item MCS scale filled in by PTs themselves. The results pointed out that the MCS competence level (175.50) of PTs is above the test value (126). Table 5 confirmed that the difference from the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. This implies that the placement school experiences seem to have made PTs be capable of managing the culturally different people during subject delivery as well as in their walk of life.

Table 5. Prospective teachers' multicultural skill competence

Focus point	N	Test value	Calculated Mean	Std. Deviation	df	T	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Multicultural Skill competence	222	126	175.50	20.6	221	35.73	.000*

3.9. The extent to which placement school experiences provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to reflect on multicultural issues

3.9.1. Reflection provision at placement schools, questionnaire results

An attempt was made to check how far multicultural issues were addressed in the overall teacher education and training programs. Table 6 specifically summarizes data related to reflection opportunities of PTs at placement schools. The results indicated that the contribution of the reflection opportunities is above the test value (3). The difference in PTs' reactions to the contribution of the reflection for their multicultural competence to the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. The result implies that there seems to have enough reflection opportunity for PTs on the issue of multiculturalism at placement schools.

Table 6. Prospective teachers' reflection provision at placement schools

Reflection at placement schools	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std.	ddf	Tt	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Instructional materials used in the schools enabled you to examine your personal position for bias across diverse learners	222	3	3.73	1.185	221	9.12	.000*
The school curriculum reflects the various learning styles of the respective students	222	3	4.00	.982	221	15.25	.000*

3.9.2. Prospective teachers' reflection opportunity about the issue of multiculturalism at placement schools, interview results

An attempt was also made to ascertain the state of reflection practice by PTs at placement schools using PTs' interview. As it is indicated in the narration made by PTs, it is agreed that they usually reflect on the issue of multiculturalism. To this end, they confirmed that participating in wedding, funeral ceremonies and other social gatherings with the outside community were some of the means to reflect on the issue of multiculturalism they encountered in placement schools. However, other respondents disclosed that there existed some level of reflection at the respective placement schools. And, still other respondents declared that there existed low reflection opportunity at placement schools.

3.10. Prospective teachers' placement school multicultural experiences, prospective teachers' questionnaire results

An attempt was made to check how far multicultural issues are addressed in the overall placement school experiences. Table 7 specifically summarizes data related to placement school multicultural experiences that lead PTs develop their multicultural competence. The results indicated that the contribution of field-based multicultural experiences is above the test value (3). The difference in PTs' reactions to the contribution of the placement school multicultural experiences for their multicultural competence development to the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. The finding implies that placement school experiences seem to have provided enough opportunity for PTs to have accustomed to multicultural experiences.

Table 7. Prospective teachers' placement school multicultural experiences

School experiences:	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Given you sufficient preparation to teach diverse students	222	3	4.30	.878	221	22.01	.000*
Prepared you to satisfy the educational needs of diverse students	222	3	4.23	.907	221	20.27	.000*
Helped you to better communicate with diverse students' families	222	3	4.09	1.023	221	15.81	.000*
Helped you to better communicate with diverse students	222	3	4.21	.928	221	19.38	.000*
Given you the knowledge to be able to do authentic assessment of diverse students	222	3	4.15	.893	221	19.17	.000*
Given you the knowledge to be able to evaluate culturally diverse materials	222	3	4.02	.932	221	16.28	.000*
Presented you with techniques for effectively teach the culturally diverse students	222	3	4.05	.964	221	16.15	.000*
Made you more aware of the need for diversity in education	222	3	4.23	.891	221	20.57	.000*
Made you more aware of cultural diversity in Ethiopia	222	3	4.23	.911	221	20.12	.000*

3.11. The extent to which placement school experiences provide an opportunity for prospective teachers to interact with and teach the culturally different students

The nature and frequency of interaction with diversities at placement schools, questionnaire results. An attempt was made to check how much opportunity was given for PTs' for placement school interactions with diversities. Table 8 specifically summarizes data related to placement school interaction provisions with diverse people. The results indicated that the opportunity for placement school interaction with diversities (49) was above the test value (12). The difference in PTs' reactions to the opportunity for placement school interaction with diversity to the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. This result implies that PTs seem to have received great opportunity to interact with diversities at placement schools.

Table 8. Placement school provision for interaction with diversity

Provisions at placement schools	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Organizational culture of the school enabled you to positively interact with diverse learners	22	3	4.09	1.007	21	16.13	.000*
Diverse parents participate in planning school activities	22	3	3.56	1.291	21	6.50	.000*
Helped you to better communicate with diverse students' families	22	3	4.09	1.023	21	5.81	.000*
Helped you to better communicate with diverse students	22	3	4.21	.928	21	19.38	.000*

3.12. The extent to which placement school experiences provide opportunities for prospective teachers to interact with students' families

Prospectiveteachers placement school provision for interaction with diverse students' families, questionnaire results. An attempt was made to check how far PTs' interact with placement school students' parents. Table 9 specifically summarizes data related to PTs' placement school interaction with students' parents. The results indicated that the PTs' opportunity to interact with students' parents at placement schools (8.22) is above the test value (3). The difference for PTs' reactions to the provision of their interaction with students' parents at placement schools to the test value is significant at α value of 0.05. The result implies that PTs seem to have a very good interaction with placement school students' parents.

Table 9. Placement school provision for interaction with diverse students' families

Focal points	N	Test value	Cal. Mean	Std. Deviation	f	t	Sig. (2 - tailed)
placement school teacher-parent interaction	22	3	8.22	1.683	21	72.88	.000*

4. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1. Prospective teachers' collaborative relation with staffs at placement schools

The aggregate value of collaborative relationship PTs have with TEs at placement schools, colleagues at placement schools, cooperative teachers/mentors at placement schools, non-teaching staff members of placement schools, students and students' parents at placement schools is above the test value. That is, the aforementioned staff members seem to have provided the necessary support for prospective teachers. This collaboration extended from the staffs, and parents is believed to bring multicultural competence to prospective teachers.

It is important that PTs receive appropriate guidance and support in placement school experiences [13, 14]. Indicates the fact that collaborations made in experiences of this kind can be effective in impacting PTs' multicultural competence development. In this respect, Groulx [1] found that PTs who had placement school experiences involving adequate collaboration with cooperative teachers demonstrated changes in their attitudes, but PTs who had placement school experiences with little collaboration did not change. Similarly, other scholars [9, 14-16]. Noted that placement school experiences can also serve to reinforce PTs' existing biases and stereotypes unless they receive appropriate mentoring and supervision during these experiences.

In one case study of PTs, however, Ladson-Billings [12] found that PTs did not have the support structure to explore and reflect on the "cultural issues they were encountering in their classrooms" (p. 182). That is why researchers [17, 18]. Suggest carefully planned placement school experiences that include time for PTs to discuss their perceptions and share their reactions with placement school and TEI staff members while working in the schools.

4.2. The contribution of multicultural attributes of placement school experiences to prospective teachers multicultural competence development

The findings of the questionnaire data confirms that the culture of placement schools seem to have enabled PTs to positively interact with diverse student population, instructional materials used at the placement schools enabled PTs to examine their personal position for bias across diverse learners, the curriculum at the placement schools employ multiple perspectives and enabled PTs to explain the experiences of diverse groups, placement school experiences reflect the various learning styles of the students, and diverse parents participate in planning placement school activities. The contribution that the above attributes have to PTs multicultural competence is above the test value. This implies that placement school experiences seem to have immense contribution to PTs multicultural competence development.

4.3. Prospective teachers state of understanding the culturally different students at placement schools

Interview with PTs disclosed that their understanding of the culturally different becomes stronger as a result of their interaction with placement school staff members, placement school experience, and their interaction with placement school students and parents. This is a step ahead to work effectively with the culturally different in diverse settings. This finding is consistent with the findings reported by early multicultural researchers. Villegas and Lukas, for example, pointed out that PTs need to “develop critical understandings of systematic issues of power, bias, and privilege in order to better understand and work effectively in diverse settings” [10].

4.4. Placement school experience and prospective teachers’ multicultural competence development

Interview with PTs ascertained that placement school experiences have immense contribution to PTs’ multicultural competence development. Specifically, they asserted that they have brought great changes in their multicultural competence as a result of their exposure to placement school contexts during the implementation of the practicum at schools. This finding is consistent with early research findings.

Sleeter [19] for example, studied the contribution of placement school experiences to PTs’ attitude towards teaching the culturally diverse classrooms. Questionnaire responses disclose that this program improved the attitudes of prospective teachers. Findings support the idea that placement school experience facilitates the preparation of the culturally responsive prospective teachers.

Placement school experiences, as some researchers argue [20, 13]. Guide PTs degree of incorporation, organization and implementation of multicultural issues in their future real life practices. It is considered a crucial input that positively influences multicultural views of prospective teachers. Specifically put, researchers [9, 8, 21] hope that placement school experiences create an authentic context that will make PTs’ understanding about diverse populations and their pedagogy concretely-based.

So as to minimize unfair attitudes of PTs towards the culturally different people, therefore, exposing them with placement school experiences as an integral part of TEPs is suggested by many researchers [22], [23]. In this respect, many studies [24, 20, 4]. Conclude that including placement school experiences in TEPs result in positive changes in the attitudes of PTs and their preparedness to teach the culturally diverse student population. That is why researchers in the area require PTs to involve into placement school experiences as one of the valuable experiences in their pre-service teaching. Generally, different research works [13, 25] ascertained that placement school experience is effective in contributing to PTs’ MCA, MCK, and MCS/practices development.

4.5. Knowledge construction philosophy at placement schools in Ethiopia, interview result

The way knowledge is constructed may contribute or obstruct PTs’ multicultural competence development. On the basis of this theoretical background, an attempt was made to investigate the way knowledge is constructed at placement schools. As it is proved from the direct descriptions of the interviews held with PTs, it is being disclosed that learner-led knowledge construction is best practiced at TEIs than placement schools in Ethiopia. As to the interviewees, the difference is due to large class size at high schools, high school teachers’ inability to manage such kinds of classroom organizations, students’ hatred towards student-centered approach in high schools than TEIs, and the like. In spite of the slight disparity among prospective teachers on the implementation of student-centered approaches at the two levels, the researcher felt that the practice still has its own limitations at both educational levels. However, learner-led knowledge construction philosophy is nowadays equally shared in the educational system at least at a policy level as affirmed through the researchers lived experience. This implies that such a philosophy is conducive for the development of positive attitude towards the culturally different as it creates an opportunity to interact with diverse culture learners. This finding is equally sensed by early researchers as well.

Learner-led knowledge construction process entails opportunities for students to critically examine how knowledge is socially constructed [26]. As the methods of teaching literature confirm, knowledge is

both a social and cultural product. More specifically, such an approach encourages students to examine how knowledge is shaped by biases, cultural norms, and perspectives embedded within a specific social group [7]. To this end, therefore, numerous lessons and pedagogical methods could be developed to actively engage students in the knowledge construction process. However, in curricula and attendant courses/subjects organized on the basis of the traditional view of knowledge, students often study events, concepts, and issues only or primarily from the point of view of teachers [20]. As a result, perspectives of diverse learners are frequently silenced, ignored, or marginalized. This kind of teaching privileges some groups of learners who most often identify themselves with the culture emphasized during instruction and cause diverse learners to feel left out of the societal story. This had been the case in point in the Ethiopian education system for decades. The researcher said this due to the fact that curriculum designing attempt in Ethiopia had been following a 'top-down' approach which violates real participation at the grassroots. Especially, such an attempt corners those who had little participation in the entire cycle of curriculum planning and the instructional process [27].

Similarly, the transmission view of teaching predominates at the placement school programs in Ethiopia [27]. But, Freire [5] argues that teaching is not simply the transfer of knowledge but the creation of possibilities for the reproduction of knowledge, which goes with the currently emphasized educational ideology of Ethiopia: considering students as meaning makers and taking into account 'learning how to learn' at the cost of receiving inert information from teachers and textbooks [28].

4.6. The state of placement school practicum in enhancing prospective teachers' multicultural knowledge competence

An attempt was made to assess the MCK competence of PTs using a 26-item MCK scale as part of the questionnaire filled in by PTs. The results pointed out that the MCK competence level of PTs is above the test value. This implies that the current teacher education curricula seem to have enabled PTs to be capable of knowing diversified issues regarding the culturally different people.

It is pointed out that placement school experiences should be directed towards acquainting PTs with the multicultural standards and demonstrating where these standards will be met in placement school experiences [29]; acquire an understanding of multicultural effects on culturally diverse learners such that they are better able to embed that knowledge within their subjects [30], and identify effective teaching practices that fit for culturally diverse students.

4.7. The state of placement school practicum in enhancing prospective teachers' multicultural attitude competence, questionnaire result

An investigation was made on the MCA competence level of PTs using an 82-item attitude scale questionnaire filled in by PTs themselves. The results pointed out that the MCA competence level of PTs is above the test value. This implies that the current teacher education curricula seem to have made PTs be capable of developing positive attitude towards the culturally different.

This finding is consistent with research findings of early researchers. Brisk, [30], for example, disclosed that TEIs "challenge pre-service teachers' attitudes toward, beliefs about and expectations of the culturally different populations" (p. 250). Moreover, Brown [9] evaluated the attitudes of PTs on their ability to teach the culturally diverse student populations. Analysis of the quantitative data did not show any statistical gains in PT attitudes toward their preparedness to teach the culturally diverse student populations. Using interviews, however, all of the participants disclosed changes that would provide opportunities for PTs to enhance their MCA.

4.8. The state of placement school practicum in enhancing prospective teachers' multicultural skill competence, prospective teachers' questionnaire result

An attempt was made to check the MCS competence level of PTs using a 42-item MCS questionnaire scale filled in by PTs themselves. The results pointed out that the MCS competence level of PTs is above the test value. This implies that the current teacher education curricula seem to have producing PTs who are capable of exhibiting the skill of managing the culturally different people during subject delivery as well as in their walk of life. Therefore, the current finding is consistent with the findings made by early multicultural researchers. Pratt-Johnson [14], for example, suggested that TEIs have been working for years to boost-up PTs' MCS in such areas like, building relationships with students and their parents, listening empathetically, and taking advantage of available resources in the respective school and the nearby community. This researcher confirmed that PTs exhibit dramatic changes in their MCS competence level through time.

5. CONCLUSION

The collaborative relationship PTs have with staffs of placement schools seemed to have contributed much for PTs in their move to grow professionally. This collaboration extended from staff members at placement schools and the respective placement school students' parents is believed to bring the required multicultural competence development among prospective teachers.

Interview with diverse PT population disclosed that their understanding of the culturally different becomes strong as a result of their interaction with staffs at the placement schools, the placement school experience, and their interaction with the placement school students and their parents. It is equally shared by educators that understanding the culturally different is steps ahead towards effectively work with people in diverse settings.

Interview with PTs ascertained that placement school experiences have immense contribution to PTs multicultural competence development. They asserted that they have seen great changes in their multicultural competence with regards to the issue of multiculturalism as a result of their exposure to placement school contexts during the implementation of their practicum at the placement schools.

The existing theory informed us that the way knowledge is constructed may contribute or obstruct PTs' multicultural competence development. On this background, an attempt was made to investigate the way knowledge is constructed at the placement schools. As it is proved from the direct description of the interviews held with PTs, it is disclosed that learner-centered knowledge construction is better practiced at the TEIs than placement schools. As to the interviewees, the difference is due to large class size, teachers' inability to manage such kinds of classroom organizations, students' hatred towards student-centered approach at the placement schools than the TEIs. Though the practice has still its own limitations, learner-centered knowledge construction philosophy is nowadays equally shared in the overall educational system of Ethiopia at least at a policy level as affirmed by the researchers lived experience. This implies that such a philosophy is conducive for the development of positive attitude towards the culturally different as it creates interaction between and among diverse cultural groups of learners.

The researcher further tried to check how far placement school based reflection provision was organized using questionnaire. The results indicated that there appears to have enough reflection opportunity to PTs on the issue of multiculturalism at the placement schools. An attempt was also being made to solicit information about the state of reflection practice at the placement schools using interview. As it is indicated in the description, PTs agree that they usually reflect on the issue of multiculturalism. To this end, they confirmed that participating in wedding and funeral ceremonies and in 'equb' with people in the respective community are some of the means used by PTs' to reflect on the issue of multiculturalism at the placement schools.

Interview data received from PTs attest that placement school experiences have an immense contribution to PTs multicultural competence development. They also asserted that they have seen great changes in awareness about the issue of multiculturalism as a result of their exposure with diverse school contexts during the implementation of their placement school experiences.

An attempt was made to check how far multicultural issues are addressed in the overall placement school experiences using questionnaire. The results indicated that placement school contexts seem to have provided enough awareness opportunity for PTs about multicultural experiences.

An attempt was made to check how much opportunity was given for PTs' to interact with and teach the culturally different students using questionnaire. The results indicated that PTs seem to have received great opportunity to interact with and teach the culturally different student population at the placement schools, as diversities vis-à-vis multicultural parameters is the basic attribute in the current secondary schools in Ethiopia. An attempt was also being made to ascertain PT's interaction opportunity with diversities at the placement schools using interview. Generally, PTs perceived that they have very good and smooth interaction opportunity with diverse student population during their placement school experience.

On a similar basis, an attempt was made to solicit data on the state of PTs' encouragement of placement school students towards interaction and forming friendships with the culturally different student population at the placement schools using interview. Generally, PTs encouraged interaction and form friendship among diverse students at the respective placement schools through techniques like, giving group tasks to be done on randomly formed group basis, consulting isolated students to work as a contributing member of a group, and consulting female students to feel that they are at equal footing with their male counterparts, and others.

An attempt was also being made to check how far placement school experiences give PTs the chance to interact with the students' families using questionnaire. The results indicated that PTs seem to have received an opportunity to smoothly interact with the placement school students' parents. An attempt was also being made to ascertain PTs state of interaction with diverse families at the placement schools using interview. Generally, PTs reported that they have little interaction with the placement school students'

parents. But their involvement in community ceremonies and their participation in ‘equbs’ with people in the nearby community to the placement schools helped them get a feel for some customs of the community and thereby use the occasion to engage in conversation with the placement school students’ parents who rarely come to the schools.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having examined the magnitude of the contribution placement school experiences have to PTs multicultural competence development and reached some conclusions, the following recommendations are made. The findings noted that learner-centered knowledge construction seems at its infant stage at the placement schools. Large class size, teachers’ inability to manage learner-centered classroom organizations, students’ negative attitude towards student-centered approaches at the placement schools worsens the situation. The researchers, thus, feels that instruction should be directed towards realizing authentic behavioral change among learners. To this end, higher officials of the placement schools shall create training opportunities for teachers on how to practice learner-centered instruction in large class size. Cooperative teachers at the placement schools, in turn, shall provide detail orientation for PTs and placement school students respectively on the benefits of learner-centered instruction for authentic, long lasting and deep-rooted learning to take place.

The results confirmed that the placement school experiences seem to have partly failed to produce PTs who are capable of exhibiting the skill of managing the culturally different people during subject delivery as well as in their walk of life. Therefore, HLI experts at the Ethiopian Ministry of Education should organize forums that lead teachers to share their multicultural experiences and thereby boost-up their skill of managing the culturally different people during subject delivery as well as in their walk of life.

The results further confirmed that prospective teachers seem to have little interaction with the placement school students’ parents. But, learning requires support for placement school teachers by the respective school students’ parents if/and when asked. Parents can give support for placement school teachers of providing some relevant information needed for making concerns-based decisions about their children’s learning. They can also be tutors for their children. To this end, authentic communication shall be created between placement school teachers and students’ parents. To this end, placement school officials and district education officers shall create conducive opportunity for frequent interaction between placement school teachers and students’ parents in particular and the nearby community in general if/and when asked.

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