

The Roles of Civics and Ethical Education in Shaping Attitude of the Students in Higher Education: The Case of Mekelle University

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly acknowledged as a means for combating diverse societal problems. It is also widely accredited as pre eminent in fostering attitudes, knowledge and skills of citizens (Birhanu, 2012). The education system has a societal responsibility to produce good and responsible citizens, who understand, respect the constitution, democratic values and human rights; develop attitudes for research and community services; develop a sense of citizenship to participate in and contribute to the development of the community and the country (BHRT, 2001). To achieve this objective, a curriculum for the delivery of Civics and Ethical Education was developed and harmonized at national level. As a result, Civics and Ethical Education has started to be taught at the primary, secondary and higher education levels.

Civics and Ethical education has a great role in attitude change of the students in Ethiopia and many other countries like the United states of America , China , African and middle east countries, and it also serve as a way of cultivating good citizens(Ibid).

In Ethiopia, it is playing a great role in producing good citizens, who understand properly the problem of their country, understand the citizenry obligation to make personal contribution equipped with good ethical and democratic culture. In shaping citizens to the best of this purpose, it is the obligation of any government to acquaint his citizens with good civic and ethical values, knowledge and skills (Seyoum, 1996).

To promote the effectiveness of Civics and Ethical Education, the FDRE Ministry of Education has taken different measures so far. Of these measures, one is measure regarding curriculum change. There were three major periods of curricular change. The first period was, of course, when the subject was introduced. According to the first curriculum, the mission of Civics and Ethical Education is to help students into competent Ethiopian citizens endowed with a global and human outlook, strong and democratic national feelings and sense of patriotism; to develop democratic values and the culture of respect for human rights; to stand for truth and the well-being of the peoples of Ethiopia as well as for equality, justice, and peace; to understand, apply, and uphold the Constitution (Yamada, 2011).

The role of higher education in shaping the moral and civic lives of students is critical. It is believe that higher education has a critical role to play in shaping character and enhancing a sense of social responsibility (Ruben, 2007). It is also potential to be a powerful influence in reinvigorating the democratic spirit in a given state. In Ethiopia, many thousands of students are now enrolling in higher education. These students are expecting to involve in democratic and development processes at both local and national levels and thereby higher education has the highest lion share in producing active citizens in a democratic society, personal development, and the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base (McIlrath, Lyons, and Munck, 2012).

Higher Education Proclamation no. 650/2009 states that the objectives of higher education are:

to prepare knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in numbers with demand-based proportional balance of fields and disciplines so that the country shall become internationally competitive; promote and uphold justice, fairness, and rule of law in institutional life; promote democratic culture and uphold multicultural community life; ensure fairness in the distribution of public institutions and expand access on the basis of need and equity (HEP, 2009).

Students enrolled at universities have the opportunity to transform their social interests into advocacy through personal connections with the community. Historically, higher education has been viewed as a vehicle to promote holistic student development (Shankar, 2009).

2. Statement of the Problem

In view of building democracy, the Ethiopian government has introduced the new Educational and Training Policy with a goal to ensuring democratic values such as equality, liberty, justice truth and respect for human rights (Seyoum, 1996). In order to realize the intended educational goals, FDRE Ministry of Education has developed Civics and Ethical education as common course to all departments in the Mekelle University like other universities in the country so as to build democracy and enhance prosperity (MOE, 2005). Civics and Ethical Education aimed to produce effective and active citizen, who can recognize problem of their countries, their own citizenship responsibility and desirable code of conduct. As a result, it has been apparently introduced

to Ethiopian universities, but yet its role has not been well studied. This study, therefore, intended to investigate the roles of Civics and Ethical education in cultivating attitudes of students in Mekelle University.

3. Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this study is to assess the roles of Civics and Ethical education in shaping the attitude of students in Mekelle University. Specifically, this study has the following objectives.

- ✓ To assess the roles of Civics and Ethical Education in cultivation of moral and ethical values of the students
- ✓ To examine the efforts of Civics and Ethical Education in development of democratic outlook and strengthening democratic values
- ✓ To examine the roles of Civics and Ethical Education in creating peaceful citizen

4. Methodology and Method of Data Collection

This study was employed qualitative research approach. The reason for the selection of qualitative approach is that it helps the researcher to investigate the roles of Civics and Ethical Education in shaping the attitude of the students in higher education, specifically in Mekelle University. It also focused on the depth of information rather than generalization of the whole population (Patton, 1990). In terms of tools of data collection, the researcher used both primary and secondary sources. Regarding primary sources, observation of the researcher was used as tools of data collection due to the fact that the researcher has been teaching Civics and Ethical Education course for more than five years in regular, extension and summer in-service programs in various colleges in the University. The researcher has been made classroom and outside classroom observations regarding the impacts of Civics and Ethical Education on learners of the Mekelle University. As secondary sources books, journals, proclamation and working papers are employed.

5. Sampling Techniques and Sampling Size

Identifying sampling size and technique is very important when somebody studies a large number of populations. Thus, this study employed purposive sampling technique because it involved the observations and reflections of the researcher who has been teaching Civics and Ethical Education course in different batches and departments.

6. Data Analysis and Scope of the Study

The information collected through qualitative data was critically analyzed by using explanation, and interpretation. This study delimited to assess the roles of Civics and Ethical Education in attitude change of the students at Mekelle University since 2009.

7. The Roles of Civics and Ethical Education in Shaping the Attitude of Students in Higher Education

This article discusses the roles of Civics and Ethical Education in cultivating the moral and ethical values of the students followed by the efforts of Civics and Ethical Education in development of democratic outlook and strengthening democratic values. It also gives attention to the contribution of Civics and Ethical Education as a channel to create peaceful citizen.

7.1 The Roles of Civics and Ethical Education in Cultivating Moral and Ethical Values of the Students

The major role of Civics and Ethical Education is to produce good citizen. A good citizen is a citizen who believes in equality of opportunity for all (Akalewold, 2005). Civics and Ethical Education also cultivates student's character positively by teaching about morality and also enable them to discharges their responsibilities to the best of their capability. Moreover, it helps the students of the Mekelle University to appreciate and recognize the cultures and ways of life of the Nation, Nationalities and Peoples, as well as, develop personal responsibility for the wise use of resources of the University. Through Civics and Ethical Education students have knowledge and skill about active participation in economic, social and cultural aspects. It is possible to argue that Civics and Ethical Education is promoting the idea of live and let Live.

The acquisition of civic knowledge and skills can't alone be helpful in practice, if the appropriate attitudes are not developed. That is why Civics and Ethical Education course aimed to help students to develop suitable behavior and attitude, personal and public characters that matters the willingness of citizens to act in public affairs (Shankar, 2009).

Civics and Ethical Education course is developing and promoting civic skills, knowledge and disposition in Mekelle University to affirm both changes in behavior and attitude of the learners. It also promotes cohesion and harmony among learners in the university in the sense that it create conducive environment to co-exist with other socio-cultural groups and have a culture of respect for one another's view. Besides, it also enforces the students so as to develop culture of hardworking due to the fact that it discusses issues titled patriotism, responsibility,

industriousness and self-reliance. These issues are more closely related with character development and moral education (Yamada, 2011).

Civics and Ethical Education is significant for addressing ethical dilemmas of modern society. Regarding this, universities, specifically Mekelle University, Department of Civics and Ethics is working in providing and developing a sense of moral and social responsibility of the students in particular and fostering a reflective culture and attitude that produce self-confidence and commitment of the students at large.

7.2 The Roles of Civics and Ethical Education in Development of Democratic Outlook and Strengthening Democratic Values

Civics and Ethical Education is aimed at promoting foundation of democracy and democratic values to reduce conflict among students with different backgrounds and interests. When students have a good attitude toward their citizens and follow democratic procedures and rules, they can solve conflicts of interest. This means Civics and Ethical Education is maintaining unity in diversity in higher education in particular and in Ethiopia at large. This implies that some contents of Civics and Ethical Education do celebrate and appreciate multiculturalism and the existence of peoples who have different languages, ethnicities, religions or any other elements (Yamada, 2011).

Teaching of Civics and Ethical Education aimed at generating political consciousness in the students and inculcate democratic outlook in the souls of the students. For young democracy a study of Civics and Ethical Education can help a lot to develop proper attitudes in students, which can ultimately strengthen democracy (Gottlieb and Robinson, 2006).

Civics and Ethical Education make students of higher education socially efficient and well-aware of the social and political problems of their country to take active part in them. It is the students of today who think about the destiny of the future of his/her country. Consequently, social efficiency requires the students to have the qualities of sympathy, cooperation, patriotism etc. Such qualities can be developed in students by teaching of civics and ethics in a scientific manner (Shankar, 2009). It would help the students to leave unscientific and unnecessary things in their life.

Civics and Ethical Education is making a sound base against social evils in the minds of the students. It also increases civic engagement which involves learning from others and environment to develop informed perspective on social issues, participating actively in public life, and in the affairs of the University. Moreover, it is strengthening sense of the unity and consensus. This means that a proper teaching of Civics and Ethical Education is creating a sound base for the continued oneness and unity of the students of the Mekelle University. A student can be a real citizen of his/her country only when he/she possesses national outlook. Such an outlook will help him/her to acquire the attitude of co-existence.

Civics and Ethical Education is preparing students of Mekelle University to take part in the ethical and legal governance of public goods such as classroom, dormitory and university's property etc. It also an education based on constitutional rights and duties of citizens and cultivating democratic cultures in the mind of students as a belief in rule of law, justice, fair and free and periodic election. Besides, it creates capacity that helps students to understand government priorities, the nature of the law, political and economic plans of their country (Naval, Rafaela and Santos, 2011; Jover and Naval, 2006; Lange and Print, 2012).

Civics and Ethical Education is produce ideal citizens, who respects basic human rights, understands democratic principle and exercise his/her right freely, accept his/her civic responsibility and discharges them to the best of his or her capacity (Murphy, 2004). It also important to enables citizens to be equipped with values of democracy, human right, and patriotism and apply these values in their life (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito and Kerr, 2008).

It also enables the students to use their right of political participation and to raise a question when there is any violation of human and democratic rights. It is also a very essential course which provides deep knowledge about the importance of participation to solve their problems and differences among themselves in the University in particular and social problems at large. In other words, students by learning their rights and obligations, they are committed to administer themselves.

Civics and Ethics discipline can also reinforce notions of participation, accountability, solidarity, tolerance, courage in particular and promoting democratic citizenship at large. This means that it increases loyalty to democratic values and procedures. Democracy will not function if virtues like tolerance and willingness to follow democratic principles and procedures do not have grounding in everyday life (Banda, 2009).

7.3 Civics and Ethical Education as a Channel to Build Peaceful Citizen

Civics and Ethical Education is the key player discipline that turning away students from violent conflicts in higher education in general and Mekelle University in particular. It is creating productive political and social

relationships, through which disagreements can be negotiated nonviolently and constructively. The importance of citizenship education for peace building is tied to the idea of nation building as an object of primary loyalty, so that citizens of a state are motivated to seek the common good of society (Shankar, 2009). Producing responsible, rational and active citizens through civics and ethical education are needed for peace building success and tolerance. Civics and Ethical Education can also ‘help to stabilize societies affected by violence and should be seen as an important positive feature of a post conflict landscape’ (Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz, 2001).

8. Conclusion and Recommendation

Civics and Ethical Education is inculcating and emphasizing the interconnectedness of the core values, social and cross-cultural skills that are critical for character and citizenship development of the students. It aimed to produce rational and ethical citizens who participate in affairs of their community in particular and nation in general. Besides, it prepares students for responsible citizenship and effective participation. It also makes them to involve in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship, community service, and personal responsibility. Generally, promoting students attitudinal/behavior change can be realized when the entire university communities are concerned and committed to work for ethical and attitudinal values. Especially, the instructors are primarily responsible in shaping the attitudes of the students.

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