

# Assessment of Challenges to Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

Civics and Ethical Education was expected to produce responsible citizens and regulate human conduct in a good manner. As a result, it has been apparently introduced to the Ethiopian schools at different grade levels and tertiary level as well. However, challenges to Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian particularly, in Secondary School have not been well studied. This article, therefore, employed qualitative research approach to assess the challenges to Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian secondary schools. Accordingly, pedagogical gaps, lack of appropriate professionals on the field of the study, less emphasis and attention on developing proper skills of enquiry and communication of the learners, the absence of democratic acting and learning at schools, lack of appropriate and updated teaching methodology and materials, lack of character building, imbalance of the contents of civics and ethics, lack of opportunity of the learners to practice and exercise what they have acquired in class, and existence of unnecessary content redundancy at different grade levels are challenging the very essence and aims of Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian secondary schools. Generally, misbehave and abuse power of Parents, Students and Teachers Association and their low involvement in the affairs of their respective schools and improper mode of delivery of Civics and Ethical Education are also slow down the effort of producing critical, responsible and participatory students. Recommended solutions include school community should be exemplary for students, Civics and Ethical Education curriculum and teaching materials should be developed by appropriate, experienced and qualified experts.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Civics and Ethical Education, Secondary Schools

## I. Introduction

Civics and Ethical Education is a field of study that deals with both rights and responsibilities, which is guided by social values and encouragement of active participation. It is a relationship between an individual and a state and governing an individual citizen's relations with other individuals and social groups. Post 1990s was the age of Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian history due to the major socio-political changes that took place in the country. Civics & Ethical Education is among the choice of justifiable means of having effective and responsible citizens. That is why it has been prepared as a separate school subject in primary, secondary, preparatory schools and as a common course for all university students. It has been aspired to produce informed, competent and responsible citizens by equipping them with the civics knowledge, civics skills and civics dispositions so that they can efficiently take part in the political, social and economic affairs of the society (Gosa and Desta, 2014). However, serious challenges to teaching- learning process of the Civics and Ethical Education have been existed in schools. But these challenges have not been well studied. The objective of this study is, therefore, to assess the challenges to civics and ethical education in Ethiopian secondary schools.

## II. Methodology

This study employed qualitative research approach to explore views, observation, experiences, and opinions of the key informants about the challenges to Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian secondary schools. In terms of tools of data collection, the data is collected both from primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through key informants' interview and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) techniques. Schools observation was also conducted so as to understand the extent to which Civics and Ethical Education teachers and schools communities give due attention to ethical issues during their teaching-learning process and democratic acting in classes and out of class in schools. Moreover, students' behavior inside and outside the classroom was also observed.

Focused Group Discussion and key informants interview were used based on purposive sampling method in the sense that key informants and study participants were selected based on their merit in terms of knowledge, experience, and relevance to the issue studied. 11 teachers who were teaching Civics and Ethical Education in secondary schools were purposely selected from all regional states of Ethiopia and two city administrations participated in Focused Group Discussion. Besides, 20 Civics and Ethical Education teachers teaching at different levels participated in the study as interview participants. From these 20 Civics and Ethical Education teachers, 10 teachers were not graduates of Civics and Ethical Studies or Civics and Ethical Education.

Secondary sources included articles and research reports were also reviewed in this study. Besides, Civics and Ethical Education textbooks from Grade 9 to10 and reference materials were also reviewed in order to

evaluate the emphasis on developing skills of enquiry and communication of the learners, content redundancy in the text books and reference materials.

### III. The Results and Discussion

The introduction of Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopia as a subject to be taught in primary and secondary schools, as well as, tertiary levels was expected to further deepen democratic culture and encourage participations of the citizen. Civics and Ethical Education is becoming the subject of increasing attention in many countries due to the fact that education leads to freedom, making it possible for people to participate in civic life (Endalcachew, 2016). However, it is not without challenges. These challenges are discussed in detail as follows.

#### A. Professional and Pedagogical Related Challenges

Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian secondary schools faces some significant challenges. Professional and pedagogical related challenges began with the *'copy and paste'* of curriculums political science, philosophy and other fields of study for Civics and Ethics curriculum without proper adoption and contexts. As a result, the curriculum doesn't focus on tools and skills for student engagement in societal affairs in more active efforts. Moreover, it is not allowing students to get fuller insight about general issues of their country and then critically understand the strength and shortcomings of their local government without personal bias. Commitment by itself is not enough; the capacity to actively engage in the socio- economic affairs and political system is required for the sake of the community as well as the individual. In this regard, the current curriculum of the discipline is not far dictate and encourages students to participate in various affairs of the society. Eyayu (2007) as cited in Birhanu (2012) found that the social values in grade 10 civics and ethical education curriculum have been inadequately incorporated in the curriculum. This implies that it does not strongly dictate and stipulate what is right to be done and what is wrong to be avoided by engaging the learners in teaching –learning process.

The teaching- learning content of Civics and Ethical Education should not be limited to curriculum. Certain co-curricular activities should also be considered. Because co-curricular activities help the students to develop the civics skills, transmit the knowledge, and inculcate the civics dispositions. It also builds students' confidence in the class and out of the class as well as increases their participation in their respective community and local government affairs. Schools should offer opportunities for students to get involved in their schools or communities outside of the classroom. In this regard, as to both interview and focused group discussion informants, co-curricular activities in most schools are underestimated. Co-curricular activities are other methods through which behaviors are shaped and activities that enable the learners to develop good character as a result of real life experience and because of their great contribution to the whole development of the learners (Birhanu, 2012).

The results of the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and observations in some secondary schools implied that there were academic clubs in different schools but practically they were weak in function. In this regard, the key informants confirmed that the school administration did not encourage and reward the academic clubs to be effective. This implies that in most schools co-curricular activities were poorly performed. The government believes that co-curricular activities have key roles to promote students ethics (ibid). Added to this, the trend of students' parents' involvement in schools affairs was observed as very limited. Not only parental involvement was needed but also the involvements of all stakeholders of schools (elders and local administrators) were also essential to effectively promote students ethical behavior. Accordingly, schools should strongly work to get the help of other individuals and groups. These problems should not be considered as the minor challenges to Civics and Ethical Education in course of shaping the behaviors of the students rather it was a serious challenge.

In addition to this, the time allocated for the teaching-learning process of Civics and Ethical Education in schools has not been equal as compared with other subjects. The schedules allocated to teach the subject is inadequate. There are a lot of issues/lessons that required much time to equip students with the necessary civics knowledge, skills and character. To equip students with international and domestic legal frameworks, more schedules are required in addition to other activities.

Besides, most of the FGD informants argue that most of teachers do not provide meaningful assessment for Civics and Ethical Education. This implies that Civics and Ethical Education teachers have the knowledge and skills gaps in measurement and evaluation in addition to lack of commitment of some teachers. Further, student text books of grade nine and ten as well as reference materials did not adequately convey the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes required for an informed and engaged students. For instance, secondary schools Civics and Ethical Education students' text books and references are also underestimate the contents of the globalization and regional integration. Its course' syllabus should give due attention to the globalization and regional integration concepts due to the fact that Ethiopia not exists in isolation; it is part of a global community that is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent. As a result, it is playing an important role in other regional organizations such as Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the New Partnership for Africa's Development to address the critical problems of the Africa (Getaneh, Mesfin, Lakew and Tewodros,

2002 and 2010). This is due to the fact that global issue is the major concern of any citizen nowadays and in the future. Thus, these problems cannot be addressed by the domestic politics and policy of a single state alone.

Moreover, there is content imbalance between civics and ethics themes in student text books and reference materials at different levels. Ethics has the most basic purpose of Ethiopia's schools to teach students about moral responsibilities and social values. Students should have moral and civic virtues. Ethics concerned with the rights and welfare of others and social responsibility (Jamieson, 2013). As a result, one of the rational for changing Civics Education into Civics and Ethical Education was to incorporate ethical issues and values because of the alarming increase of ethical problems among professional and high rank government officials as well (Akalewold, 2005 cited in Birhanu, 2012). However, student text books are still less emphasized in ethics themes and the content coverage given to the ethics part is inadequate. This implies that the very essence for the introduction of Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopia secondary schools is underestimated.

The interview with the key informants implies that teachers who graduated in social studies have been teaching Civics and Ethical Education. The results of key informants indicated that in many secondary schools teachers who graduated in non-social studies were also teaching Civics and Ethical Education. As to FGD informants these teachers didn't have detail knowledge of the subject matter and the methods of teaching-learning process as well as don't have classroom instructional materials. Anyone can argue that teachers who don't professionalize in Civics and Ethical Education cannot lay a strong foundation for effective citizenship education and this in turn contributed to the improper socialization of citizens during their schooling. In addition to this, as Fekade, 2003 cited in Birhanu, 2012 noted that the Ethiopian young people in moral crisis in the sense that they have been manifesting poor manner of talking, dressing, disrespecting of elders and lacking of discipline (Fekade, 2003 cited in Birhanu, 2012, Alem and Tewodros, 2014 and Kassaye, 2007). In addition to this, the key informants and FGD responses revealed that students in the schools were poor at shouldering their responsibility rather they run to protect their rights without caring out their responsibility.

Respect to elders, teachers, parents, guests were typical Ethiopian values. However, today these values seem to be forgotten. When we see our students, they are no more respectful to their teachers (Birhanu, 2012). Besides, the major reasons for the poor implementation of the subject were attributed to lack of trained teachers, the negative attitude of the teachers of the subject and other teachers towards the subject, shortage of reference materials, lack of attention given by the concerned bodies (as MOE, 2006 cited in Birhanu, 2012).

Improper mode of delivery of Civics and Ethical Education was also hampering the effort of building good behavior, creating active and participant citizens who could play a role in the democratization process of the country (Endalcachew, 2016). To be precise, improper ways of using plasma as a method of delivery was affecting learners from acquiring the required knowledge and skill from the subject (Tesfaye et al., 2013 cited in Endalcachew, 2016). This problem is prevalent at the high school level, where plasma was being employed (ibid). The nature of the subject requires more than allocated periods/ schedules for discussion, debate and critical thinking to equip students with necessary knowledge and skills as well as shape the behaviors of the learners.

Civics and Ethical Education needs to be interactive and participatory. It needs to be employed participatory and interactive methods such as role playing, problem-solving and judicial activities to deliver better civic knowledge, skills and dispositions (Browne, 2013 and EU, 2011 cited in Endalcachew, 2016). Because education for students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must include critical thinking skills, participatory skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and the imagination to embrace a world that functions on the fundamental principles of democracy, and respectful of human rights (Kidwell, 2013, Levinson, 2011 and UNSCO, 2014).

### **B. The Challenges of Democratic Acting and Learning at Schools**

The school as educational environment can be conducive for moral development and determine the character of democratic learning and acting (Birhanu, 2012, Yamada, 2011). However, an authoritarian kind of secondary schools administration has been observed in many Ethiopian schools. This autocratic behavior is shaping the students behavior negatively. Hence, it is difficult to achieve the objectives of Civics and Ethical Education in "the schools that are dominated by a culture that does not promote dialogue, tolerance, acceptance and respect for differences, freedom of opinion and expression, equality, cooperation, or social responsibility" (Abdulhameed, n.d cited in Endalcachew, 2016). It is further stated that "a school climate characterized by a rigid, authoritarian administrators and teachers will hinder the development of independent, responsible, and critical-thinking citizens" (Ibid). From this one can understand that the way that school community is treating students is hampering the effort of creating informed, active and responsible citizens.

### **C. Reading and Teaching Materials Related Challenges**

Achieving the objective of Civics and Ethical Education is impossible without the necessary resources to carry out the necessary tasks. This leads to inefficiency and poorly implemented programmes of Civics and Ethical Education (Murphy, 2003). The reasons why teachers feel uncomfortable about teaching Civics and Ethical Education may include lack of teaching aids, teaching materials and its sensitivity to politics (Shan, 2011). However, most of the Civics and Ethical Education teachers are not utilizing reputable news papers, others

relevant and updated references, video-audio tapes, materials prepared by the teachers among the others (Tovmasyan, and Thoma, 2008).

#### **D. Lack of Role Model Teachers**

To better transmit knowledge and help to develop students' understanding and core values, teachers should have professional and ethical mandates (Endalcachew, 2016). In addition to this, teachers should also role model for their students. However, it is common to see poorly role model and unmotivated teachers with low morale due to inadequate incentives, low respect for and status of teachers, and poor school management (Sarton et al., n.d. cited in Endalcachew, 2016). This in turn, adversely affects the proper role that teachers should play in delivering quality education and shaping the behaviors of the students (ibid). Rights and love of country are key concepts for good character (Eddington and Ambrose, 2010). The cultivation of the students' ethical conduct cannot be realized by the simple effort of Civics and Ethical Education teachers. Non-Civics and Ethical Education teachers excluded themselves from the character building of the students in schools.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Recommendation**

National and global issues contributed to the emergence of Civics and Ethical Education post 1990 both in Ethiopia and in other countries. Civics and Ethical Education has been regarded as an important way of inculcating the ideas of democracy, peace and development. It also enables citizens active, responsible and critical who contributes for the consolidation of democratic governance and promoting peace and stability. That is why it is being offered at different school levels. However, a number of challenges are affecting the teaching-learning process of Civics and Ethical Education in Ethiopian Secondary Schools. The students are not practically exercising the lessons they have acquired in class in their local governance and community. This implies that the teaching and learning approach of the subject is not practically supported.

The culture of democratic administration in school is still not prevailed in many Ethiopian schools. Some school principals and Parents, Students and Teachers Association (PSTA) misbehave and abuse their power in their respective schools. Their day-to-day activities and decisions do not base on the basic principles and values of democracy and good governance. The manner in which school principals and most teachers is treating students is negatively affecting the students' attitude towards their present and future life.

Inappropriate mode of delivery of Civics and Ethical Education subject is also slow down the effort of building good behaviour and creating active citizens who can contribute for the democratization process of the country. There are indifferent teachers with stumpy morale who adversely affects delivering quality and values of Civics and Ethical Education. In addition to this, lack of democratic acting and learning at schools, inappropriate teaching methodology, lack of adequate and relevant teaching materials, lack of character building of teachers are challenges that constraining the effective implementation of the purpose of the subject. To achieve the very purpose of Civics and Ethical Education effectively, democratic acting of Parents, Students and Teachers Association (PSTA) in each school, role model of teachers and school principals should be created. Particularly, school principals and teachers should be exemplary for students by actually practicing democratic values and principles as well as civic virtues. The teachers should also equip their students with the necessary knowledge and skills of pedagogy as well as teaching methodology to encourage the learners to practice what they have acquired in class and to produce responsible and rationale citizens.

Teaching materials and references that will develop civic skills, knowledge and inculcate the civic disposition of the students need to be developed. Besides, Civics and Ethical Education curriculum should be developed by appropriate, experienced and qualified experts of the field. Ethical behavior of the students can be realized when the school community committed to work for ethical values. Especially, teachers are also resourceful to promote ethical behavior of the students by being 'Ambassadors' of ethics and ethical values. Therefore, both school community and other local communities are primarily responsible to shape ethical and moral values of the students in and outside schools. Finally, further research need to be conducted to clearly assess the attitude of secondary schools teachers of Civics and Ethical Education and other subject teachers towards the subject.

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