

They Should Not Be Someone Who Will Tell Their Story: Education for Democracy in Secondary Schools of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

This study tries to identify practical challenges of teaching democracy in secondary schools in Addis Ababa using qualitative research method. The data was collected by interviews, document analysis and classroom observations. The most important finding shows that there is a discrepancy between the theoretical part of teaching democracy in the classroom and the actual practice in the society. Moreover, instead of working for democracy, there seems to be expecting from others. Creating continuity between the theory and practice by raising awareness and ensuring accountability is one of the suggestions.

1. Introduction

A democratic system which gives recognition both to human and democratic rights cannot be materialised without cultivating the concept among the majority of the people. The best place this could be realised is school (Sifuna, 2000). This is because the power of education is multidimensional which have a major role in addressing prejudices, constructing sympathy between individuals and communities, capacitating deprived groups, and encouraging open, respectful debate (Brett *et.al*, 2009). Thus, it is vital to make use of education for democracy (EfD) to capacitate citizens. “EfD is about participation, engagement, social justice, political literacy, deliberation, and connecting the interdependent issues, concerns, and realities so as to enact and be a part of social change” (Carr and Thésée, u.d.:3). The organisation of the school should demonstrate democracy in its everyday life for the reason that democratic values and behaviours are acquainted both through experience and exposure to the theory (Harber and Serf, 2006).

This reminds us of two important points: first the active engagement of an individual needs understanding of the issues that he or she is willing to take part in. As Abdi (2008:158) rightly put it, “the more you know about a given phenomenon, the less frightened you will be to engage in”. Thus, students should be acquainted with the knowledge, skill and understanding that prepares them for the mission they will assume in the future (Gollob *et.a*, 2010; Hartley and Huddleston, 2010). In other words, schools are responsible to equip students with the values and the practice of democracy which can help them engage actively in a democratic society (Alshurman, 2015). The second is that, the active engagement of students may increase when schools provide them with the opportunity of participation in discussions on contemporary issues and other activities in the actual world which may need cooperation with the nearby community and institutions (Sliwka, 2006). It is important to underline the fact that “Education for active citizenship is not just about the absorption of factual knowledge, but about practical understanding, skills and aptitudes, values and characters.” (Gollob *et.al*, 2010: p:9)

Such engagement starts by creating an atmosphere of classroom which could encourage the student to express themselves freely. In this regard, the contribution of cooperative learning is bold (Sliwka, 2006). According to Birezea *et.al* (2005), creating such atmosphere needs a shift on how we define learning, ‘from an idea of learning as teacher-centred to learning through experience, participation, research and sharing’. The same authors stated that, students who are boldly expressing themselves in the classroom have the ability of applying their right of opinion in public. Moreover, the engagement of students can be assured by democratising schools by establishing students’ parliament or council which allows the active, fair and transparent participation of students in matters which extend from simple entertainment to important policy issues (Bäckman and Trafford, 2007). The authors depict democratic school as a place where there is trust and openness but not fear and intimidation; reward and encourage active participation; open its door for other organisations; encourage students to channel their voice through newspaper or magazine prepared by themselves; and engagement in counselling, mediation and support.

The engagement of the students in the different community projects via for example internship could have long lasting changes such as; change of perspective towards people who need support, understand the actual poverty status of people, be aware of both individual and societal prejudices and the experience may contribute for the increment of social and voluntary engagements of the students (Wohnig, 2016). Thus, one can argue that the more students are exposed to the community work, the more they develop a sense of empathy. Doing so will contribute for the holistic formation of the students. Wohnig (2016) argues that the engagement of the students should be nurtured. When students come up with for example political questions, the responsible body should address the inquiry appropriately. Otherwise, the author explains, the consequence could be *political*

disenchantment'- a phenomena which leads to distrust or disrespect for the politics. On the other hand, such feeling may lead to the disengagement of the students. Thus, it is important to form collaborative relationship with local, national or international organisations which can provide a platform of engagement for students (Brett *et.al*, 2009). Students' council by itself or in collaboration with the school community should take the role of identifying "real-life projects that might help to build community cohesion and build towards substantive events such as exhibitions, campaigning and debates, involving not only the school but also the community looking at "who we are"" (ibid: 50).

The quality of the experience could also contribute for the effectiveness of engagement of students. This means, the more we provide them with activities which could help them engage with interest, the more the quality is positively affected. On the other hand, those activities which could disengage students are negative (Dewey in Sliwka, 2006). The quality could also be assured by maximising the number of participants and discouraging the dominance of individual students. Moreover, the success of the experience could also be assured through reflection, ongoing evaluation and by giving recognition for the success of the students (ibid).

It has been more than a while since the introduction of the contemporary civic and ethical education in Ethiopia. The blueprint of the subject, among other things, stated that the objective is inculcating and help develop the idea of democracy and good governance among the youth and by doing so making them active participant in the social, economic and political activities of the country (MoE, 2006). The blueprint further states that, though the depth and width increase as the grade level increase, the general education will focus on similar values. As indicated in the syllabuses of grades 9 to 12 the values are: building democratic system, the rule of law, equality, justice, patriotism, responsibility, industriousness, self-reliance, saving, active community participation and the pursuit of wisdom (MoE, n.d). Thus, one can argue that the mission of education for democracy is bestowed to civic and ethical education.

Studies illuminated that, though the subject created awareness on human and democratic values, the challenges are dominant. Among other things, we can mention challenges such as: lack of civic societies, undemocratic schools' leadership, unintended methodology, (Bayeh, 2016) and the need for two way communications during instruction (*Semela et.al*, 2012). On the same note, the study conducted by FDRE Policy and Research Centre in collaboration with MoE (2016) indicated the following challenges: lack of attention to main facts and events in the nation which could have contribution for multiculturalism, redundancy of content of civic and ethical education from grade 5 to 12, utilising methodology which has less value for the objective of the subject, lack of teachers with civic and ethical education preparation, lack of motivation and self-confidence of the teachers and lack of engagement of stakeholders. Though there are studies on civic and ethical education in general, the idea of education for democracy received limited attention. With the intention of filling the gap and igniting further inquiry, this research designed with the following objectives.

2. Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to assess the practice of teaching and living democracy in secondary schools of Addis Ababa. With the intention of unlocking the main objectives, the article will focus on addressing the following specific objectives.

- I. To assess the practice of education about, through and for democracy.
- II. To investigate the opportunities of learning through democratic communication in secondary schools.
- III. To examine the practice of learning by taking over responsibilities in the school and the community.
- IV. To examine the quality of the experience of education through and for democracy.
- V. To investigate the challenges of education for democracy.

3. Research Design and Methodology

To address the above objectives, qualitative methodology was utilised. Thus, this is a case study of three secondary and preparatory schools in two sub-cities of Addis Ababa. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques since they are teacher or expert of civic and ethical education. Thus the respondents could best add to the perceptive of the subject under study. Data were collected using interview of civic and ethical education teachers and experts. Moreover, classroom observation was conducted and various documents were also analysed. The collection of data continued until the point of saturation. The closed-ended interview guideline and the classroom observation instruments were developed after the consultation of multiple scholarly articles. The instruments were also reviewed by experts in the area so as to increase the reliability of the findings. The data was transcribed and thematically categorised carefully and then described as stated by the respondent and comprehended by the researcher.

4. Findings of the Study

In the following part the finding of the study has been presented. It is categorised into five parts based on the

basic questions of the study. When there is a need, direct citations from the interviewees have also been presented. This could help to vividly show the readers the extent of the situation under investigation.

4.1. Education about, through and for Democracy

Since definition of democracy could affect action on the actual ground, the participants were asked to define the word democracy. Most of them characterized democracy as the will of people, participation, and involvement of the people to elect their governor so that the system may work for them. They underlined the fact that the elected officials should be transparent to the electors. The study participants added that the system should be fair, provide space for different opinions and respect both human and democratic rights. The system, in addition to creating freedom, should facilitate peaceful relation among the people. The freedom of one should not affect the freedom of the other. They also underlined the importance of providing different tasks to the student so that they could develop democratic quality through experience.

If that is the case, the next important question is: what are the opportunities for students to practice democracy in everyday school life? To some, though limited, there is such opportunity, while others totally denounce creating such an atmosphere. There are teachers who believe that the duty of schools is equipping the students with theory, and the practical aspect is the responsibility of others who are out of school. Those who believed that there was an effort to create opportunity of democratic practice stated that the concept of developing democratic system is part of the syllabus so that students may have clear understanding of the concept. Thus, students are exposed to the yardsticks of measuring a system as a democratic or not. Students are clear about dos and don'ts. It was also underlined that school principals and others, whether they teach civic and ethical education or not, should demonstrate the values of democracy. Learning should be both in theory and practice. This is how the subject is designed. However, it is questionable how far this is being implemented on the actual ground. One of the study participants stated that:

“For example, equality is one of the values of democracy. It is the idea that the principal or teachers should treat all equally even if there is difference of gender, age, ethnicity, language and so on. This is what is being taught as part of theory. If this is not implemented by the school community, then it will be contradictory. However, the various studies and discussion conducted in different time indicated that there is still gap between the theory and the actual practice. This is also lubricated by infancy of democratic system in the country.” (Respondent 1).

According to the above respondent, the discrepancy between theory and the actual situation on the ground is the reflection of the infant nature of democracy in the nation. He believes that democratisation of a nation needs time and the past three decades have not been enough to do so. Whether democracy is improving or deteriorating in Ethiopia is a question that needs another discussion. Though the same respondent is optimistic that the nation is learning from its mistakes and will establish a democratic system, the writer of this study has reservation as the so called mistakes could also develop a sense of revenge which could not be alleviated easily. This is true as the number of victims of the so called mistakes increase, so does the grievance of the people, which on the other hand will not be easy to address with the existing system, unless and otherwise the system is restructured based on the demand of the people.

Most of the respondents boldly argue that there is no fertile ground to practice democracy in everyday life of the school. The teachers, though responsible to create fertile ground at least in the school, they limited themselves on the theoretical part. Thus the discrepancy of the theory and the practice is visible both inside and outside school. There are practices which belittle the student as a person even in the school. Thus, the students are confused and bring questions to the classroom which sometimes challenges the importance of the subject. One of the respondents stated:

“Let me give you an example, there is a rule which ban corporal punishment; but, we see that school community and police assault students. We also teach them the characteristics of popular participation; but they don't see this on the actual ground. Generally, the role of civic and ethical education in the democratisation process is limited in equipping the student with the theoretical part and has no contribution on the actual ground.” (Respondent 2).

In this regard, students have been asking questions on the discrepancy of the theory and the practice. Here, the response of the teacher is very vital. Some explain that they skip this kind of question with frustration and others try to convince students to be persistent. One of the respondents stated that:

“They usually ask the discrepancy between theory and practice. My answer to them is you will assume that position tomorrow, by then please do not be like the person that you are accusing or blaming.” (Respondent 5)

What else a teacher could do other than this? However, it should also be noted that become aware of complications, is a phase in developing democracy. So, an antidemocratic situation could be a very fertile ground if it encourages reflection on how to develop democracy. This could lead them on the how of adopting democracy based on the actual situation of the nation. Thus, teachers should build up a sense of hope and

possibility among their students.

Some explain that, though limited, there are practices which provide opportunity for students to practice democracy in the school. They also argue that there is gradual improvement. In this regard, they mention the process of organising students' council as an example. One of the respondents explains that:

“At school level, students practice the idea of democracy in the students' council. The individual elected as a coordinator of the council is also a member of disciplinary committee. The other important point is the way the council is organised; from each classroom two individuals are elected. These individuals gather together in a hall and elect the chairman and the secretary. This is a better opportunity for the students to learn the idea of democracy.” (Respondent 3).

Even if the practice varies from school to school, the practice of forming students' council is interesting example of exposing students with the practice of democracy. Here it is vital to underline the importance of the actual engagement of the council in the various activities of the school. Only students' council with real tasks, make sense. Otherwise, they become even contra productive: they serve as an excuse and as a show case.

When it comes to the modality of delivery of the lesson, it varies from nation to nation. Some prefer to integrate the theme horizontally with other subjects and others deliver it independently. In Ethiopia, the concept of democracy is part of civic and ethical education. Respondents were asked which modality they prefer and why. It seems the responses and their justifications also vary.

Those respondents who are convinced about the importance of integrating the subject horizontally with other subjects justify that it will help to make every teacher the owner of the subject. On the other hand, since there are people who consider the subject as the program of the leading party, integration could help to address such a challenge.

Some argue that integration could cause lack of periodic allotment which will make it difficult to address important themes. Moreover, such modality may cause lack of attention to the subject and thus it will be considered as supplementary course. In this regard, one of the participants who appreciate giving the subject independently stated that:

“The advantage of giving the course in one formal subject is vital to cover different areas. However, that does not mean that the idea of democracy is limited to civic and ethical education only. For example, teachers of other subject may encourage students to ask question freely. This could help the development of democracy by creating free generation.” (Respondent 3)

This indicate that there is a possibility of teaching the subject independently so as to address multidimensional themes without time constraint and integrate important values such as freedom of participation in all subjects. This could help on one hand addressing important themes adequately, and on the other hand creating fertile ground of practicing the concept of democracy. But this could only happen where there is not only awareness but also consensus on the values of democracy among the responsible bodies.

One of the study participants explain that deciding to deliver the subject independently or integrated it with other subject is based on the actual situation of the nation. Where there is consensus on the values that should be delivered as lesson, integration is preferable modality. But, in the absence of such consensus, delivering the subject independently is the better option. The same respondent elaborates that:

“In our country, teaching the idea of democracy is considered as the role of only civic and ethical education teachers. What we have learnt from Singapore is that every teacher is civic and ethical education teacher. They have about six values and these values are integrated with every subject. The teacher training modality is also aligned with this approach. There is common understanding on the values. That is not the case in Ethiopia.”(Respondent 1)

For one of my respondent, the idea of giving the subject independently or integrated with other subject is not the most important issue. The respondent underlined the importance of creating continuity between what is happening in the classroom as part of theory and what is happening outside classroom as part of practical life. So, the most important agenda is addressing such discrepancy. The same respondent states that:

“Whether we deliver it independently or integrated with other subjects, the main drawback is that there is discrepancy between what we are teaching and what is happening in the actual ground. They do not listen to me if I told them to ignore what they are seeing and focus on what I am telling them. People trust what they see than what they listen. So it is convincing to work on the improvement of the practical aspect.” (Respondent 5)

Here it is important to assess the presence of legally mandated bodies for practicing the principle of democracy in schools such as students' council and their actual contribution for the school and the school community. What are conditions for them to be more than just a structure?

Structurally there are different organisations in the school such as children parliament, students' council, ambassador of ethics, peace committee and so on. There are also practical activities of these organisations. We can take the activities of students' council as an example. As it has been mentioned, primarily there will be election of two students from every class and these students gather to choose their representatives. The elected

individuals will simulate the actual government bodies. One of the respondents elucidates that;

“Ministry of education of our school has a mandate to create supportive atmosphere among students. Similarly, ministry of justice has a program of mediating conflict among students or even between teachers and students.” (Respondent 3)

Though such practices are constructive, there are also various challenges which need the attention of the responsible bodies. One of the most impeding factors is that such activities are limited to some area. This shows that there are many schools which are denied of such opportunity and thus limited themselves on the theoretical part. Even those which are practicing the program stated that students choose someone incompetent just only because of friendship and network. By doing so, the incompetent students fail to deliver their duties. This is also a serious problem which we are witnessing in the actual setting. This may confirm that, what we are going through is the continuation of what we have been doing in the school. Thus, one can say that by improving the democratic culture of school we may also improve the democratisation of our nation. There is also a problem of lack of initiative and thus the council works only when they are needed for a certain program. The respondents stated that lack of teachers and the structural problem of MoE to deliver support and follow up as the source of the challenges.

An assessment was also made to see if there is a way of engaging students in solving local problems so as to make them learn from what they acquired from school. My respondents stated that the subject was designed to address issue of the engagement of the students in solving local problems. To this end, the syllabus included active participation of the people. However, most of my respondents agreed that such activities are weak. But still there were some activities which could be taken as a lesson. These included fundraising to support HIV victims, maintaining the house of the weak and vulnerable and cleaning their environment. They were also enthusiastically active during cultural days by way of contributing music, dance and other cultural shows.

However, the gap is visible that one can't escape asking for the factors. In this regard one of my respondents explains that:

“There is a gap in this regard. Both the government and the society at large lack openness. Even when there is community meeting, they don't give a chance for the youth to speak out their minds.” (Respondent 5).

Thus it is very vital to revisit the way we help our students to engage in various activities to solve societal problems. This could happen with the active participation of every stakeholder. In this regard the respondent from MOE pinpointed that the ministry is undergoing structural reform which could help bring about changes. The same respondent stated that:

“We hope to bring paradigm shift after the reorganisation of the structure of our office. We will work with the community and the entire stakeholders for the success of our program. There will be no success if we depend on only on the works of MOE; it needs collaboration to build a nation.” (Respondent 1)

These remind us on one hand the responsibility of the government to work for the improvement of the democratisation of the nation, on the other hand it is vital to pin point that the society should not wait and see. Rather it is important to fight for the democratisation of the nation, whether the power holders are willing or not. This can be evidenced by the movement of the youth particularly in Oromia and Amhara regional states which has forced the leading party to introduce amendments.

4.2. Democratic Communication

The pivotal element of quality education is the quality of teachers. Thus, the adequate preparation of the teachers is irreplaceable factor. Taking into consideration this general truth, respondents were asked how far teacher education course prepared teachers to teach education for democratic citizenship. Some of the respondents explained that, when civic and ethical education started as a subject, there was shortage of teachers. Thus, any social science teacher used to deliver the course. By then there was a problem of adequate preparation of teachers. However, the situation is different now since there are first and second degree holders who are prepared both in their subject area and subject method to teach the idea of democracy. Unfortunately, they further stated that, in the actual situation teachers prefer the easy going approach such as lecturing or talk and chalk so as to cover the content on time. This has been discouraging the participation of students and thus their opportunity to learn through experience is limited.

On the other hand some of my respondents underlined the importance of creating alignment between the curriculum of teachers' training and general education. One of the respondents elaborates that:

“Actually, what we are studying and what we are teaching has difference. What we were studying was philosophy and it is different from the curriculum that we are teaching” (Respondent 4).

Quality education needs alignment among the curriculum of general education and teachers training manuals. Otherwise, teachers' training institutions will focus only on the theories and philosophies, and then teachers will face difficulty of content when they assume the actual teaching post. The problem of lack of alignment is further concretized by one of my respondent from MOE. The respondent explains that:

“There is no coordination among the various stakeholders. This leads to lack of alignment. For example,

there are teachers who are preparing to teach for the general education, but the curriculum does not align with what is given in the general education. Even here (MoE), I happen to work in the department of curriculum for about three or four years, when our department revise the curriculum, on the other hand, department of teachers' development does not revise the training manuals in the same manner." (Respondent 1).

On the other hand one of my informants illuminates that the idea of teaching democracy is more than teachers' preparation during their time in pre-service training. For her, the way we were brought up has also discrepancy with what is in the theory. The same informant states that:

"The way we were brought up has caused a problem. The idea of democracy could be integrated with us through practice. But there is a discrepancy among what we teach, what we prepared for during pre-service training and the way we are living. Since we do not see the practical aspect as we are seeing it in the theory, it has a negative impact on us." (Respondent 7)

The situation needs serious attention from all stakeholders who should work together to address the multidimensional challenges that extend from general education to higher education and even the society.

On the same note, respondents were asked how far the pre-service training helped teachers to teach controversial issues in the classroom. One of my respondents explains that:

"The subject is full of such (controversial) points. Take for example the rule of law, while there is rule to sole problem legally, police prefer to take physical assault. So they (students) wonder why they are studying the subject." (Respondent 9)

One can tell from the above reflection that teaching democracy has various controversial themes. This is particularly true in a country where the discrepancy between theory and the actual life situation is bold. Thus, teaching such themes needs adequate preparation. In this regard, most of my respondents stated that they have gone through adequate preparation to entertain controversial themes in the classroom. However, some of my respondents witnessed that teacher's deliberately avoid this kind of themes. In this regard, one of my respondents explained that:

"Though it is important to bring into the classroom contemporary and even sensitive themes, what is happening in the actual ground is different. Teachers skip this kind of themes and discouraged students when they raise the issue. This is because of fear caused by different reasons. Thus, they prefer to focus on the facts which are stated in the text." (Respondent 2)

Teachers should not impose their outlook on their students. But, that doesn't mean they should skip important themes which could affect the school and the community students are living with. However, the fear of the untold obstructed such opportunity. This will definitely affect the skill of the students to relate what they acquired in the classroom as part of theory and what is happening in their day to day life.

One of my respondents reflected that, managing controversial themes needs experience and support from the experienced colleagues. The same respondent stated that:

"In this regard, I think it is the experience that moulded me more than the study. In the university we focus on the theoretical aspect and we gave emphasis to our Cumulative Grade Points Average. To this end, we spend much of our time for the rote memorization. Thus, it is the exposure and experience sharing with the seniors that helped me to develop my idea on this issue." (Respondent 5).

The reflections of the above respondent remind us of the importance of ongoing professional development and forming collaboration among teachers. These kinds of opportunity will ensure the continuous professional development of the teachers and help them to be reflective in their action. It is also a call for us to revisit the way we prepare our teachers which gives priority for rote memorisation of facts than reflection and active engagement of the would be teachers.

Some scholars argue that using different cooperative learning strategies could help develop social cohesion among diverse learners in the classroom. Taking into consideration this premises, respondents were asked about the practice of cooperative learning strategy in the classroom. It was pinpointed by the respondents of this study that civic and ethical education is designed with different case studies which encourage discussion among students and field work which needs a reflection from the students. Most of them explained that the contribution of using cooperative learning in this regard is visible. Among other things, the respondents assured the contribution of cooperative learning in areas such as freedom of expression and thought. They also stated that the strategy has a contribution for students to feel free and increase their intimacy with their teacher.

Some stated that they use modality such as drama and what is commonly called 1 to 5 students organisations. The latter is a strategy of forming a group of 6 students of fast learner, medium learner and slow learner. The fast learner will assume the responsibility of coordinating the group hence 1 to 5. However, there are people who state that the modality is politicized and this affected the perception of the community towards the program. One of my respondent states:

"It is also important to give attention on how the community perceive 1 to 5. There are people who consider it as the language of the leading party. 1 to 5 is used in different parts of the government from top to down."

It has its own advantages such as sharing of knowledge which on the other hand has significant contribution for advocating democracy. We are also using it when we give assignment to our students. But there is something that needs to be done with the society.” (Respondent 4)

On the other hand, the study participants witnessed that the practice of cooperative learning is limited. This is related with different factors such as classroom size and lack of the commitment of the teachers. Some of the respondents also related it with the challenges of the medium of instruction. While the official language of both the country and Addis Ababa is Amharic, but the medium of instruction is English. During classroom observation the researcher of this study also witnessed that the students were actively participating when they were allowed to speak in Amharic. Though it is good to learn language such as English for international communication, using it for medium of instruction in a country where there is adequate opinions is not convincing. Thus, the responsible body should either help the students to be acquainted well with English or allow them to use their own mother tongue.

Channelling the voice of the student and creating fertile ground for them to take part in the matter of the school could encourage the participation of the students. By doing so, it could strengthen their skill which will help them play instrumental role latter in their life when they assume actual responsibility. When it comes to structure, almost all of my informants agreed that there is a channel of communication. The difference among the respondents appeared when they were asked to explain the practice.

Some of my informants stated that the representative of the student is the member of various committees including Parents, Students and Teachers Union (PSTU). It is the responsibility of the committees to decide on important matters of the schools and thus the view of the students are reflected by their representatives. They even argue that one of the successes of civic and ethical education is creating demanding generation; though the students focus more on their rights than their responsibilities.

On the other hand there were respondents who argue that, despite the presence of structurally organised committees, the voice of the student is under represented. In this regard, one of my informants stated that:

“There is a view that put the teacher as a superior being and thus they do not want to see students talking to them firmly. So there is disagreement between teachers who think that we should give a chance to our students to express themselves freely and those teachers who wanted to restrict the right of students. But, most of the teachers do not want to see the students talking freely.” (Respondent 7)

Thus, one can conclude that channelling the needs of student vary from school to school and even within school. While some support the idea of channelling the voice of the students, others discourage the involvement of the students. This is the direct reflection of the national politics in which those people who control power either misunderstand or misrepresent and even exclude those who have different views. The practice in the school tells us that the students who are denied of the opportunity of channelling their voice will either develop a sense of exclusion and disengagement or work on how to get their right even in an illegal ways.

From my classroom observation there were areas that I admire both from students and teachers. Students, though not all, were performing well in areas such as listening attentively, responding to the questions and trying to understand and react to the different activities accordingly. There are teachers who have friendly communication with their students and come to the class with adequate preparation. There are also teachers who were guiding the lesson properly, addressing students with their name and asking them questions. Though very limited, I had also seen a teacher who was using cooperative learning and was encouraging the engagement of most of the students.

During classroom observation, the contents were different. These include citizens’ duties, civic citizens, open-mindedness, compromise, honesty, loyalty, and responsiveness, taking the consequence of one’s own action, legal, moral and ethical responsibilities. There was also lesson on fulfilling promise in the international arena, global citizenship and promise. Themes such as patriotism, base of patriotism and attributes of patriotism, self-reliance and characteristics of moral decision were also included. The contents would help students to take part in the different activities with knowhow and allow them to see the different areas of participation. Moreover, the contents could help them understand their right and responsibilities. It will also help students know what it means to be patriot and develop love for their country.

Regarding the methodology, the most dominant were lecture or chalk and talk. Mostly it was the teacher who had taken the dominant role of the activities in the classroom. There was time in which students remained silent for longer duration. It was not clear whether the silence connotes listening or mere disengagement. There were some teachers who ask questions at the end of the lesson to check how far students were following them. Unfortunately, only few students were responding. This could indicate disengagement of the students. The instructional materials were very limited. The most common are note book, white board, textbook and plasma. In some case there were even students without notebooks and textbooks.

There was a teacher who used a cooperative learning, which encouraged the collaboration of students. When it was important, she used lecture method. The students were told to read a speech of Mr. Mandela and try to understand the cost of responsibility. It seems that significant numbers of students were actively engaged and

the teacher took the responsibility of facilitating and leading them to the intended objective. This could boost the confidence of the students to engage more even in the actual settings which could help the development of democracy. Even in this classroom, there were still some students who were disengaged.

Let us further unlock how the teaching style and the chosen methodology represent learning for democracy. Where there was successful classroom management, students can learn the rule of law, active participation and respecting the right of others. As we have said the activities were dominated by teachers. Such methodologies disengaged students and made them passive. There were classes with manageable number of students. However, the teachers still preferred to use lecture method. In this kind of situations, teachers should have used cooperative learning and active teaching methods. There were also situations whereby limited number of students actively participated in the classroom. There was a need for diversifying the methodology based on the needs of students and the nature of the lesson. This could help the active participation of all of students and by doing so help the students feel free and engage even in different situations outside school.

4.3. Taking Over Responsibility in the School and the Community

So as to provide learning opportunity through practice, it is important to give responsibility to students. This has to be followed with accountability. Respondents were asked to describe the practice of responsibility and accountability in the classroom. They were also asked to give examples. Some of my respondents elucidated that students have a good sense of responsibility. In this regard one of my respondents explains:

“Students indeed understand the challenges of their peers. For example, when we see those students who are distracting the school rule, their friends know why they are out of order and they usually have even recommendation to address the challenges. I was also asking for support to help the slow learner students and still the response was amazing. Moreover, I was interested on how to help addicted students. In this regard the support of the students was important both in identifying those who are addicted and their level of addiction.” (Respondent 3)

On the other hand, most of the respondents stated that there is the need to work more on the issues of responsibility and accountability. They stated that most of the students are lagging behind when it comes to assuming responsibility. For example when school properties such as plasma and white board are damaged, students do not act responsibly. Even if the theme is there as part of the syllabus, the discrepancy between the awareness of the student and the actual practice is visible. The issue of accountability is highly associated with corrective measures such as disciplinary action. Contrary to respondent 3, one of my respondents stated that:

“When you give them assignment, all may not do it with a sense of responsibility. Surprisingly, they want to gate grade while it was only one or two individuals who did the group work. So, it is only few students who are taking the responsibility.” (Respondent 6)

Such contradiction between schools and even within school needs attention. There should be experience sharing and other means to scale up good practices. This could help to minimise or even address the challenges.

It is vital to mention that the subject give greater attention to civic issues at the expense of ethical issues. According to most of my respondents, since there is lack of balance between civics and ethical themes, most students give emphasis to their right than their duties. The participants witnessed that most of students usually avoid responsibility, but amplify their right. One of the respondents explains that:

“Even if the subject named as civic and ethical education, it gives no attention to the ethical part.” (Respondent 1).

In an attempt to uncover closely how students are learning through experience by taking over responsibility in the school and the community at large, respondents were asked to explain collaboration with the community and local institutions to provide rich civic learning opportunities for students. One of my respondents stated that:

“There are some schools which take their students into court, House of Federation, House of Peoples Representatives and other places which could enrich the experience of the student. However, this is not the case for all school.” (Respondent 2)

Some argue that so long as there is someone who is ready to guide them, students are willing to take part in the different activities that could benefit the community at large. In this regard, one of my respondents stated that:

“There is a lesson about civic societies, during which students organise fundraising and went to MEKEDONIA (a centre for disabled and old persons). If there is someone who could help the student, they are ready to engage.” (Respondents 3)

Thus, schools and responsible bodies need to work on improving the channels for the students to take part in the various activities which could encourage them to engage in activities that will have contribution to the community and facilitate the learning opportunity of the students. In some case, when students fail to find a channel which could help them to engage, they themselves participate in local initiatives in their area of residence. Elucidating this point, one of my respondents stated that:

“The school has no such channel. However, there are students who are engaged in youth association or similar activities.” (Respondent 6)

Some of the respondents dissociate themselves from such responsibility. They do not see their role in facilitating such opportunity to the students they are teaching. One of my respondents stated that:

“This is the responsibility of school; however, I had never seen this kind of thing yet.” (Respondent 4)

According to some of my respondents, the problem of lack of engagement is the result of lack of budget to organise the various programs. However, one can also see active participation of students who have the same budget and even similar circumstances. Though budget is fundamental, it is the initiative and commitment of the school community that matters most. One thing is certain: if we could facilitate opportunity of engagement, students may come up with an idea which could bring visible change in the community. Here is very enlightening quote as an example from one of my respondents:

“Let me give you an example, most of the condominium projects in Addis Ababa had no playground for children. It was the president of children’s parliament who came up with a proposal of inclusion of the playground in the projects. Based on this, it was decided that from that time on ward, the new projects should include the playground.” (Respondent 2)

In a similar fashion, respondents were also asked to give examples of the service learning in and for school. Most of the respondents illuminated that the participation of students is not as much as their expectation. Regarding the activities, they mentioned the engagement of students in environmental protection, fundraising to support those from low income families, and coordinating school feeding program. Students are also energetically engaged in scientific innovation programs.

Some argue that the participation of students in the various activities of the school is decreasing. Though there could be various factor for this, one of my respondent justify that:

“This is gradually decreasing. There is a practice in which students receive payment as a per diem when they attend meeting or training which affects volunteerism. Comparatively speaking, it seems students of previous time are better than now. When you prepare something, then they will ask you if there is payment.” (Respondent 6)

It is important to underline the fact that the participants are limited in terms of number, lack of diversity of the activities and most of the students expect pressure from their teacher are the most important pressing challenges.

4.4. The Quality of the Experience

The effect of the various programs could be affected by its quality. Thus, respondents were asked how they maximize actual experience for each individual student and how they deal with differences such as class, gender, ethnicity and disability. Most of the respondents stated that participation is open for all as long as the individual has the expected quality. They also confirmed that there is no discrimination to take part in the different activities of the school. However, most of my respondents fail to enlighten me on the methods of maximising the experience. Moreover, instead of working on the formation of the students, the teachers expected a certain quality to require the students. This could lead us to ask why do students should join any activities in the school if they already have mastered the expected quality.

Regarding discrimination based on the various difference students have, some argue that there is unconscious bias. One of my respondents stated that:

“For example, the coordinator of the club may wish to work with someone who runs from here to there and the teacher may focus on those who are promoting themselves” (Respondent 1)

One can see from the above reflection that some may use a criterion of running from here to there to assign a student to coordinate a co-curricular activity. In a country where the schools are constructed without considering the needs of students with disability, pursuing such criterion is a direct way of excluding the students. Moreover, the above reflection may also indicate that instead of closely looking at the quality of each individual student, they give priority to those who are talking more. By doing so, they exclude some group from the various co-curricular activities which will affect the quality of the experience.

The quality of learning experience could be witnessed on how students are managing conflict. To unlock this, respondents were asked if they observe group conflict among students. Some of my respondents stated that most of the conflicts are simple and manageable. The conflicts are mainly caused among boys who have interest over the same girl. These usually develop into group fight. The conflict is resolved by the disciplinary committee in which there is also representative of students.

One of my respondents argues that the subject has a problem of balance where by higher attention is given to knowledge and little attention to attitude and skill. The same respondent stated that, even if civic and ethical education could have helped them to resolve conflict through discussion, the reality is different. However, the respondent pinpointed that the main purpose of this subject is to resolve misunderstanding through discussion.

On the other hand, for one of my respondents the misunderstandings or even the conflicts that we are witnessing have nothing to do with the subject. For him it is the response of the people for the failure of the government to deliver what the citizens are expecting. The same respondent stated that:

“I do not think this is related with civic and ethical education. When people demand something, it is important to give them appropriate responses. Failing to do so could lead to discontent. As the government accepted and as I also witnessed from the community, there is a problem of equity and good governance. Most of the conflicts revolve around issues that the government fail to address. People said accepting the problem is not adequate, we need solution.” (Respondent 2)

It is vital to critically investigate the causes of the various conflicts and the way by which they are resolved. It is also important to see the involvement of the students during conflict resolution. However, one thing is certain; there is conflict even if there is difference in their cause and the way they are resolved. Some of the conflicts are human in their nature and could be resolved without serious consequence. Those conflicts which are the reflection of the national political problems need very serious attention. Failing to address the questions, could bring a very serious misunderstanding. Regarding the youths who are taking part in coordinating the current peaceful disobedience, I would rather encourage and appreciate them for the sacrifice they are paying. This should be considered as the contribution of the subject.

The quality of the experience could also be demonstrated by providing choices of activities to the students so that they may contribute based on their interest and competencies. Most of my participants explained that the various co-curricular activities are open for all and thus the interest of the students to take part in any activity they wish is guaranteed. However, the issue of competency is overlooked. As it has been stated, most of the time it is those who talk too much who are taking the responsibilities than those who are competent. Some argue that most of the competent students are not interested to participate in the co-curricular activities. In this regard, the only exception is science club which encourages the innovation skill of students. It is important to ask why the various co-curricular activities fail to attract competent students as it could be related with the gap of the activities in addressing the interest of the competent students.

There is a mismatch between the interest of the students and that of the teachers. Sometimes, teachers consider some areas more important than the other. With this intention, they may try to convince their students to take part in activities which are not in the interest of the students. In this regard, one of my respondents stated that:

“We want them to participate in programs which could improve their ethics and academy. But, they are more interested on music and dance.” (Respondent 9)

Though most of the study participants convinced that respecting the interest of the individual students is vital, there are people who are encouraging students only to lean towards the academy. In other words, participation is accepted if it supports the idea of the teachers. This is a demonstration of dictatorship where only the voice of the leader is considered as the right road map. Here, it is crucial to provide students with multidimensional activities so that they could develop in a holistic manner.

The quality of experience could also be improved through structured reflection and formative assessment. In this regard, some of my respondents stated that this kind of activities are seasonal and unstructured other even elucidate that there is no such activities. Without structured reflection and ongoing evaluation, it is uncertain to tell how far the program is going according to the expectation of the school. This could seriously affect the quality of the learning opportunity of the students.

It is also important to give public recognition to the students which could then encourage them to work and contribute more. By doing so, such activities could not only improve the quality of learning but also attract others to take part in the various activities of the school. Most of my respondents stated that there is recognition for those students who came up with successful result. But there are also respondents who illuminate that there is no such activity because of lack of budget.

4.5. Challenges

In this part an attempt is made to unlock the most important challenges of teaching democracy. Most of the respondents explain that democracy is yet to develop in Ethiopia. This could affect the teaching of democracy as there is a discrepancy between the theory and the actual practice. Strengthening this, one of my respondents stated that:

“The challenge is the discrepancy between the theory and the actual practice. Since the theory is very different from the actual situation, they think that we are telling them a mere story. So, what we are trying to convince them is that they should not be someone who will tell story.” (Respondent 7)

Some also explained the importance of reviewing the curriculum which has been there for a while. They also underlined the challenges in relation to office structure in which civic and ethical education, though it is one of the six components of the General Education Quality Improvement Package (GEQIP), has no department which follows the program. There is also shortage of teacher which makes it difficult to take students to various places which could have contributed for the practical learning of students.

There is also a tendency of labelling the subject as a party politics and there are people who are convinced that the subject is a means to strengthen the existing system. This is because there had been a tendency of

utilising the subject wrongly for longer time. Thus, it is considered part of the propaganda mechanism of the government.

Moreover, very recently, the curriculum included morality and religious equality. This is a response to the demand of the community that the subject is dominated by civic part which lets students give priority to their right than their duties. However, the change is not satisfactory. There is the need to create balance between the civic and the ethics part.

5. Conclusion and Possible Recommendations

The findings indicate that the focus is on education about democracy without adequate emphasis on education through or for democracy. Thus, though students are exposed to various natures of theoretical aspects of democracy, the practical aspect of living democracy is very limited. The disparity between the theory and the practice starts from school and extended to the suppressive actions of the various institutions of the government including police. Schools fail to use the various committees and organisations which were supposed to encourage the active engagement of students. The engagement of the students in the various concerns of the community is minimal and thus students are isolated from the reality.

Democratic communication could help develop the practice of democracy. To this end, the preparation of the teachers is vital. Though most of the study participants claim that teachers are prepared both in their area of study and pedagogy, significant number of the teachers were utilising lecture or chalk and talk. This could disengage students and make them mere receiver. Instead of asking and engaging, students simply follow the teacher. Such experience could make students to be passive and reluctant to actively participate even in the actual setting. The medium of instruction has also contribution to the disengagement of students. On one hand, students lack adequate preparation on the medium of instruction, English, on the other hand they are expected to participate actively. Thus, either the medium of instruction should be their mother tongue or schools should work on the English fluency of the student. Moreover, it was witnessed that teachers sidestep controversial issues and focus mainly on simple facts stated in the textbook. Thus, students failed to relate what they were acquiring in the classroom with the actual world. In addition to creating link between the curriculum of teachers' preparation and general education, it is vital to form professional cooperative among teachers.

Even if most of my respondents argued that participation is equally open for all, there were dominant students who were controlling most of the activities. The interest and competency of students were not well recognised for the participation of students. It is also vital to see how far the criterion of participation was fair for students with disability. Though there were conflicts among students, their role of resolution was minimal. The various activities also lack structured reflection and ongoing evaluation. It is also uncovered that people expect democracy to be introduced by others without their contribution. They should know that democracy can't be materialised without the engagement of all.

It was suggested that awareness creation is vital. The executive and the judiciary should be loyal to the rules and the regulation which could then create continuity between the theory and the actual life situation. When failing to do so, then there should be accountability.

I shall conclude the article with the suggestion of one of my respondents:

"It is very important to be open-minded. One should listen to the views of others. It is also important to listen to the interest of the people. Without it, one will not bring any change. People are interested with development and progress. Thus, it is important to listen to the interest of the people instead of maintaining the interest of elected officials. There should exist experience sharing and research."
(Respondent 4)

A school should be a place where students not only learn the principle of democracy but also the place of exercising the theory.

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