

Examining Practices of Active Learning Approach in Gedeo Zone and Halaba Special Woreda, SNNPR, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Southern Nations, Nationalities and People Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia is one of the regions where the education system is influenced by traditional system where the teachers has a central position while students is passive and do not have chance to express their opinions. However, active learning is essential need for educational context of the country. So, the aim of the study is to explore students and teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to active learning and identify some of the main challenges of this approach in selected schools of the region. The study has been based on quantitative approaches with 100 male and female teachers in four schools of Gedeo Zone and Halaba special Woreda which included the questionnaires from 100 teachers and semi-structured observation of 10 different subject teachers. The findings show that considerable numbers of teachers use some traditional lecture methods even if MoE and NGOs like People In Need Ethiopia have been implementing projects focus on Modern Teaching Methods (MTM) in primary schools. It means that the implementation of active learning in various stages of teaching process at primary schools is not yet being fully practiced, but likely promising. As well as, the use of active learning such as group work, pair work and open questions are not mostly considered during teaching processes. Because of some main obstacles such as: lack of classroom space, large number of students in classrooms, shortage of time, the amount of content that needs to be covered, and lack of materials. At all, the viewpoints of teachers were in support of using active learning approach in the teaching-learning process that developed through MTM training that was organized by PIN but observation shows that average number of teachers still focus on traditional methods because of some main obstacles which are mentioned before.

Keywords: Quality Education, Modern Teaching Methods, Active learning, Instruction, Teacher Training

Introduction

Education is one of the fundamental rights of all citizens under Ethiopian constitution (1997). Though the provision of education is granted to children all over country in accordance with the right, it is not the same for every student in terms of quality. There is school and area-based differences in National Learning Assessment results, and there remains the existence of students who cannot read and write though they proceed to upper grades (EGRA, 2010). One of the approaches that can solve mentioned problems and emerging initiative is sustained employment of active learning methods in primary schools that a preferred way to ensure quality education.

In this regard, People In Need (PIN), an international NGO started its activities in Ethiopia as of 2003, has been implementing a project entitled "Modern Teaching Methods LEAD to Quality Education" in Gedeo Zone and Halaba Special Woreda of SNNPR, Ethiopia. It aimed at improving the quality of primary education through the establishment of a quality monitoring system in the framework of school clusters by involving all relevant actors in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region.

Well-run teacher training programmes and well-managed schools that provide teachers with good work experience are expected to improve the quality of education. Good-quality teaching is also crucial. However, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education notes the presence of a huge gap in educational attainment and academic achievement among students, which is the result of lack of capacity (MOE and USAID 2008).

It is said that lesson itself is not interesting; in fact, it is teacher who makes the lesson enjoyable using various teaching methods that fascinate the students. Teaching methods used in the class have imperative role in learning and producing skilled and knowledgeable students. In the regard of this point, however, still in Ethiopian primary schools, two types of teaching methods are being used; modern and traditional. In most of the schools, especially located in low-privileged areas, students are still attended by traditional teaching methods which are impeding their intellectual growth. On the other hand, active learning methods facilitate the intellectual growth by developing critical thinking and creativity.

It is obvious that many researches have proved the significant impact of active learning methods on academic performance of the students. Students who were given instructions in active learning methods significantly secured higher mark in their subject tests as compare to those who were taught their lesson in conventional way (Khurshid & Ansari, 2012). Students' achievement in academics largely depends on how teachers behave in their class. Structured and planned activities proved to be more effective than routine and conventional methods. Students' perception of learning process being used with them also counts a lot.

Satisfaction the students gain from their teachers during class enhances their interest in academic activities. Students are deemed as best judge of evaluating teaching methods.

Considering this, the present study has been designed to evaluate the improving trends of active learning methods used in selected Schools of Dilla Zuria and Wonago Woredas of Gedeo Zone and Halaba Special Woreda by finding answers of the following research questions;

- How do students perceive active learning methods used in their classroom?
- How is active learning viewed by selected teachers in primary schools?
- Which type of active learning practices are mostly used by teachers?
- Which are the most common challenges the selected teachers face when using active learning exercises in classrooms?

Methodology

In this part, the research design and data collection procedure are described which has mainly focused on close ended questionnaire for students and both close ended and open ended questionnaires for teachers. In addition, semi-structured observation has been employed. Students and teachers were debriefed about the purpose of study by the researcher in advance.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of active learning methods, about 40 students were purposely selected from four Schools (Meja, Halaba Experimental, Mokonissa and Tumticha primary schools). Students were asked to respond to a question given in written form, “How did you feel about teaching methods used in your class during the lessons?” with the most supposed methods to rate. These specific methods were supposed teachers may use in selected primary schools based on listed teaching techniques of PIN’s basic MTM training module (MTM: 2014) and researcher’s past experience whilst he was involved in practicum implementation during his stay at College of Teacher Education within the region. Supposed methods were from both modern and traditional methods. The researcher had explained the concept of each technique of instructions for students to do not be confused with those professional terminologies. They were asked to answer on 3 point rating scale; Good, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to examine the perception of students regarding teaching methods.

The use of questionnaire as a quantitative method helps the researcher to collect the view of a large number of respondents in a short period of time (Bryman, 2012). Therefore; in this research closed-ended questionnaires and open questions were distributed to 100 male and female teachers. Teachers responded in various cases relating to their use of ALMs and the main problems / challenges that impede the implementation of this approach in schools.

Furthermore, the questionnaire implemented the four point Likert scale because it helps the respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement on a given scale (Braymn, 2012). As, this type of Likert scale questionnaire was administered with the following meanings:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

The last section includes two open-ended questions for teachers about ALMs. These were:

- Which other obstacles exist which prevents the actively involvement of students?
- Have you attended any methodical workshop/training?

Moreover, semi structured observation of 10 different subjects within both lower and upper grade levels of primary schools had been used in this study to collect data on the implementation of MTMs in the classrooms. Areas of semi structured observation were concentrated on: (a) learners’ active participation in classrooms activities, (b) type of questions used by the teacher, (c) interaction between teacher and students, and (d) learners pair work or group work. A total of 8 observations were once observed by the researcher. After every observation time the researcher used to decide what kind of teaching approach was dominated in that time period and then he filled the right category of his form.

Results and Discussion

1. Students' Perception about Teaching Methods

Table 1: Students' perception about teaching methods

S/n	Technique of instruction	Good		Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Brainstorming	32	80	04	10	04	10
2	Small group discussion	34	85	06	15	0	0
3	Role play	26	65	10	25	04	10
4	Individual presentation	22	55	10	25	08	20
5	Game	36	90	04	10	0	0
6	free writing tasks	26	65	08	20	06	15
7	Jigsaw	38	95	02	5	0	0
8	Coping answer/ material	04	10	04	10	32	80
9	Reading	10	25	06	15	24	60
10	Traditional homework	06	15	14	35	20	50

Results (Table 1) show that majority of the students (80%) perceived over all the methods are being used by teachers are good. Mostly (95%) rated the jigsaw as good than other types of teaching methods. About 85% students also perceived small group discussion method as good for their learning. Free writing task and role play methods were rated a good by 65% students, whereas individual presentation was perceived good by 55% students. Not a single student rated small group discussion and game methods as unsatisfactory. Surprisingly, there were 10% students who perceived brainstorming method as unsatisfactory.

Students' satisfaction depends on variety of factors such as; they need, their learning preference or style and so forth. Their level of satisfaction also influences their academic achievement. Students performed better in their academics when their teaching style was according to the learning style preference of students (Zeeb, 2004). In the present study, though learning style preference of students was not investigated, but results reveal that most of the students wanted to study in innovative way. Their felt good when subject teacher encouraged them to express their opinion by exposing the teaching methods of group discussion, presentation and assignment of free writing tasks.

Most of the students (75%) were unsatisfied with the overall traditional teaching methods used in the class. The method of copying answer/material was most unsatisfactory teaching method for students (80%). Reading method did not satisfy 60 % students at all, whereas 50% students rated giving traditional homework as unsatisfactory. There were 35% students who were satisfied with assigning traditional homework and 15% rated homework as good. About 25% students rated reading method as good. Moreover, 10% students rated copying answer/material as good and satisfactory respectively.

2. Teachers' attitude toward Active learning methods

Table 2: Teachers view on active learning approach

S/n	Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I do support students to have active participation in the lesson.	1	1	2	2	27	27	70	70
2	My role in classroom is to facilitate students' learning.	1	1	0	0	21	21	78	78
3	I provoke students to actively participate in their own learning process.	1	1	1	1	16	16	82	82
4	I try to link new knowledge to students' prior experiences whenever I start instruction.	2	2	3	3	38	38	57	57
5	I help students to take responsibility for their own learning.	4	4	10	10	30	30	56	56
6	I encourage students to make decisions about the what, how and when of learning.	0	0	3	3	35	35	62	62
7	I encourage students to provide comment to their teachers about how they learn effectively.	2	2	2	2	26	26	70	70

Based on Table 2, teachers' points of view are summarized as follow.

- To be a facilitator for student in the teaching learning process (99%, agree plus strongly agree)
- Motivating students in actively participating in the teaching and learning process (98%, agree plus strongly agree);

- Providing classroom environment that could involve students actively in the classroom (97%, agree plus strongly agree).
- Encourage students to take their decisions on what, how and when to learn (97%, agree plus strongly agree).

However during the observation of the classrooms, it was noted that considerable number of the teachers used the lecture method where the students were taught by the teachers from the beginning to the end of the class.

From the observation, almost half of teachers showed up with reading from books, writing it down on black board, asking the students to read from books or black board and mostly asking questions from some students. Generally, considerable numbers of students were passive during whole class session.

As well as, near to half of teachers were to take all decisions on how to teach, when and what, and also the chance for participation was only given for few of students. Instead of given the chance for all participation (students) to take their decision about what, how and when to learn. But more than half were being used to deal with students about what, how and when to learn.

In addition, 96% of teachers responded that they asked students about how are they learn easily and they used their students' tips during the teaching learning process. While, observation showed that teachers often did not give this opportunity to students to express their point of views, only about half of them did.

Generally, all male and female teachers had the same point of view about active learning approaches.

3. Teachers' view and practices of Active learning methods in the teaching-learning process

Teachers point of views on using some major techniques to engage students in classroom activities are presented as follow.

Table 3: Practices of Active learning approach

S/n	Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I often organize the students into groups	1	1	10	10	45	45	44	44
2	I often divide the students in to couples to work on their tasks.	5	5	25	25	30	30	40	40
3	I often ask close-ended questions for which there is only one correct answer.	12	12	13	13	43	43	32	32
4	I often ask open-ended questions.	17	17	14	14	33	33	36	36
5	I used to give enough time for students to think after asking questions.	1	1	8	8	29	29	62	62
6	I encourage students to ask questions.	1	1	1	1	16	16	82	82
7	I encourage students to have discussions between each other on their tasks.	0	0	3	3	41	41	56	56

The result (Table 3) indicate that teachers were willing to ask close ended questions for which there was only one correct answer and also open ended questions; about 75% and 69% of the respondents supported these types of approaches respectively. Based on observation, this was confirmed that teachers usually put some close ended questions which required from the students to use their memories to recall a fact or provided answers. Sometimes teachers asked questions that required from students to give answers by yes or no. Mostly, teachers did not use open ended question which help students to think critically.

Furthermore, for the approach such as: after asking question they often gave enough time for students to think, the respondents supported this by 91%. But in observation, mostly teachers instead of first putting the question then waiting for students to think and after that choose from those students who were volunteers to respond- teacher first choose one student then asked a question from him or her and after that did not give enough time for student to think.

Likewise, for the item that they encouraged student to ask questions from each other, 98% of respondents support this item but observation showed that teachers mostly did not encourage students to ask questions.

The result also indicate that for the section where the teachers consciously arranged the student in to group and encouraged them to have discussion between each other on their tasks, respondents showed 89% agreement. However, observation showed that teacher often did not prepare some groups to discuss the task between each other or divided students in to pairs.

Usually, teachers did not pose questions to students seated in the last rows of the classrooms where they were not paying attention to the subject.

Another case that the researcher could note during the classroom observation was the methods being used by teachers were uniformly similar in both lower and upper grade levels. That is why students view towards

some techniques was varying based on their grade level.

In active learning approaches students play major role in their learning process. In this approach students take full responsibility for their learning and teacher are just facilitators.

The results of this study showed that implementation of active learning in teaching and learning process at Mokonisa and Tumticha primary schools (Gedeo Zone) are low comparing with schools in Halaba special Woreda. The major results of this study are as follow:

- The viewpoints of teachers were in support of active learning but observation shows that still considerable number of teachers' focus on teacher-centred method.
- Teachers' are playing more active role in class instead of students; almost half students are passive in classrooms environment.
- Teachers are the main decision makers in class, where rarely teachers give the opportunity to the students to decide what, how and when to study.

Use of active learning approaches while teaching in the classrooms has really advantageous impact on students learning. Many studies indicate that students prefer activities that involve active learning rather than traditional lectures, many learners construct their own understating of knowledge by their personal experiences and their interaction with environment (Perkins and Wang, 2008; Alemu, 2010; Ginsburg, 2010;).

The result of this study indicate that use of active learning such as group work, pair work and open questions which enable student to solve the problem analytically and to assist students critical thinking were seldom considered during teaching processes. As;

- The viewpoints of teachers were in support of both open and close ended questions but observations showed that teachers mostly used closed ended questions where student were given yes or no questions and they are called to answer by recalling a fact. Generally, high order thinking questions were not common among the teacher probably because it is easy to answer and it is less time consuming method.
- In similar ways teachers supported the idea of giving time to students to think about the problem or questions but in observations teachers preferred to ask close ended questions from one of the student who was expected to answer quickly. This may be due to shortage of time for teachers to cover the entire material of the course or preference of instructor to dictate students to know what they taught in class previously.
- Observations also indicated that teachers seldom encourage students to ask questions. It might be the teachers favor to answer the questions that they already know; new questions may lead them to search more for answers which is not preferable for them.
- Based on observations teachers often point out a student and then pose a question, this method is not preferred by student due to fear of answering wrong in front of other classmates. Teachers may like to hear the correct answer by the student that spends less time to answer because teachers were not willing to spend time with student whom is time taking to work with especially the student setting in the back row of the classroom. Therefore, asking a question from the students setting in the back row of the classroom was rarely observed.
- As the results indicated in teachers' questionnaires summary, majority of teachers agreed to encourage students to have discussions between each other in their tasks, but observations adversely showed that students were not allowed to create groups and discuss the tasks. Mostly they were working individually and they were asked to memorize the text and repeat them. It might be due to lack of time, large number of students in classes, lack of flexible chairs and so on.

4. Factors influencing the implementation of MTM approaches

Table 4: Challenges of Active learning Approach

S/n	Items	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%
1	I lack training on the implementation of some techniques which make students to actively involve in the classroom.	35	35	31	31	21	21	13	13
2	The lectures are the best way for me to teach students.	19	19	35	35	21	21	25	25
3	Students dislike active participation in my instruction.	39	39	16	16	29	29	16	16
4	The load of content that needs to be covered prevents the actively involvement of students in my classroom.	16	16	19	19	35	35	30	30
5	There is a lack of time to actively involve students in my instruction.	19	19	13	13	37	37	31	31
6	Lack of materials inhibits to actively involve students in my classroom.	18	18	17	17	36	36	29	29
7	It is unworkable for me to actively involve students in large classes	11	11	10	10	27	27	52	52

Based on table 4, the following points were mentioned as the main factors impeding the implementation of active learning approaches.

- Large classes (27 plus 52% equal to 79%);
- Lack of time to actively involve students in the teaching learning process (37 plus 31% equal to 68%);
- Lack of materials (36 plus 29% equal to 65%);
- The amount of content that need to be covered (35 plus 30% equal to 65%).

Classroom observation also showed that these four points were the most influencing factors on implementation of active learning approaches. For example, in large classes the seating of the students (front to back) and also fixed seats were the factors which discourage students to talk with each other. As well as, giving attention for all students in very small amount of time was hard for the teachers.

From the researcher's observation, mostly teachers did not allow their students to ask questions from the teacher or from other student or talk with each other. It is noteworthy to mention, that teachers tended to be working hard but lack of professional approach disabled them to make students active in the teaching learning process.

Mostly, all male and female teachers had the same point of view about the factors that hinder the implementation of active learning approaches.

Many Educators particularly teachers believe that large number of students in classrooms prevent proper group work. Teachers point out some major issues in implementing active learning such as: shortage of time in actively involving students in teaching learning process; the amount of teaching material to be covered during one class session; lack of problem-based teaching material that requires too much time and effort from teachers (Alemu, 2010).

Burns and Myhill (2004) also indicated that main issue related to implementation of active learning is lack of time and content to be covered. Even though teachers showed positive views based on results taken from classrooms due to improvements in students learning ability and fun way of teaching still the amount of time and content remains the main concern.

Furthermore, in open ended part of the questionnaire, more than half of teachers thank People In Need NGO that equipped them with knowledge and skills on several modern teaching methods and how to use them in the actual classroom. Teachers confirm that majority of the techniques currently they have been employing were introduced in MTM project training by PIN education team.

In fact, it is not enough for teachers to know about the significance or importance of teaching methods, but there is also need for to know how to apply and how to use the useful methods practically during teaching. Therefore, Ethiopian Government Education Authorities and NGOs who are working on the sector like People In Need Ethiopia need to continue the training programs and workshops for the teachers to introduce them how to apply new and useful methods in the classrooms.

Finally, the result of this study showed that the teachers knew about the useful methods but could not apply them fully accordingly, maybe because of some problems which are mentioned above or maybe they did not have constructive support from their fellow/professionals on how to apply these methods and improve day-

to-day.

Conclusion

The overall aim of study was to assess emerging practices of modern teaching methods in selected primary schools of Gedeo Zone and Halaba special Woreda focusing on students and teacher views as well as identify the main obstacles that prevent the usage of active learning approach. To this end, the researcher found that, students of this era are impossible to be satisfied with the old teaching style and highly prefer to active teaching learning style, the viewpoints of teachers were in support of active learning approach because of its significant impact on learning but observation shows that considerable number of teachers focus on traditional method. Additionally, researcher identified some main obstacles which were; large classes, lack of time, lack of materials, and the amount of content that need to be covered.

Recommendations

I recommend that age-grade level-friendly teaching techniques to be applied by teachers rather than using only those already acquainted techniques through MTM trainings for all grade level similarly.

MTM should be emphasized in CPD sessions to update all teachers regular base in order to fill any confusion with implementation procedures of some specific techniques with strong educational monitoring and evaluation techniques. Hence, education sector officials, supervisors and senior teachers have to strictly follow-up how schools are implementing active learning accordingly; and recognize well performing teachers and schools whereas, less performance to be taken development action furtherly.

Development partners like People In Need NGOs should continue working to improve quality education through MTM and related projects whereas GoE and the community have to work for sustainable employment of age-grade level-friendly teaching techniques in all primary schools in strong partnership. Through collaborated partnership, continues professional development programs and community participation observed challenges and other affecting factors supposed to be minimized.

The current research did not address issues on attitudes towards active learning approach among education authorities, parents and communities; and students' academic achievement related change. Hence, the future research on students' academic result based change and educational authorities, parental and community attitudes are desirable.

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