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## Professional Learning of Teachers in Ethiopia: Challenges and Implications for Reform

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## Professional Learning of Teachers in Ethiopia: Challenges and Implications for Reform

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*Abstract: Continuous professional development of teachers is of growing interest globally, as it is considered vital to cope effectively with ongoing changes and to improve the quality of education. This qualitative case study explores potential and actual barriers that hinder teachers' professional development in Ethiopian schools. Data was collected via interviews and focus group discussions from 37 purposively sampled participants. The study reveals three major challenges in teachers' development: 1) conceptions and conceptual issues related to teaching, professional development and mentoring, 2) management and leadership, and 3) teachers' work conditions. The need to reconsider educational change management strategies, reform teacher education, strengthen research-based practices, renew management and leadership culture, and improve teachers' work conditions are thus found to be the areas identified as needing interventions.*

### Introduction

The world is in a constant state of change in every aspect: technologically, socially, politically, and economically. This demands a nation's school system to be responsive and continuously update the capacity of its staff. To this end, professional development programs for teachers are seen to play a vital role, as they provide opportunities for teachers to learn and grow within the profession. This in turn is expected to have an impact on student learning (Lowden, 2005).

In the last two decades, the Ethiopian government has embarked on a massive expansion of the national education system with the intention to transform the country. The increasing access to education was also fueled by the government's promise to meet its official educational goals such as achieving universal primary education in 2015 and secondary education in 2020. Though tremendous achievement has been made in terms of quantitative expansion, the quality of education has been deteriorating and student achievement declining (Fekede & Fiorucci, 2012; Lemlem, 2010; National Agency for Examinations (NAE), 2011; Oulai et al., 2011; Tessema, 2006). The professional development of teachers is considered to be an essential component and strategy in efforts aimed at improving the quality of the schools (Guskey, 2000). To this end, a centrally designed professional development program have been disseminated in a top-down fashion and implemented prescriptively across the country. The overall aim of the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program is to improve teacher effectiveness and

raise the achievement levels of students in Ethiopian schools (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2003; 2009). It is expected that effective professional development opportunities for teachers will renew their capacity to improve classroom practices and will have a positive impact on student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Guskey, 2000). Currently, schools are challenged to raise student achievement through the provision of CPD.

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges that exist in the Ethiopian education system, especially those aspects that may become potential barriers to the teachers' professional development and provide the necessary considerations to create an effective professional learning. In the next section, the recent literature on teachers' professional development in Ethiopia is discussed.

### **Professional Development of Teachers**

Craft (2000) asserts that if schools are about promoting the learning of pupils in a changing world, then education professionals learning throughout their career is essential. Fullan (1991) defined teachers' professional development as the sum total of formal and informal learning experiences throughout a teachers' career from pre-service teacher education to retirement. Correspondingly, Wei et al. (2009) conceptualise professional learning as a product of both externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers' knowledge and change their instructional practices in ways that support student learning. Both emphasise that learning will occur both in formal and informal ways. This conception of professional development thus challenges the traditional, training-focused approach to teachers' learning that gives more emphasis to formal learning. In current global educational practices, the emphasis on the utilisation of both formal and informal learning in professional development has become even strengthened. For example, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) stress the need to recognise and utilise informal and non-formal learning opportunities in teachers' professional development. Likewise, Hara (2001) remarked that formal and informal learning are complementary to professional development and should be leveraged by communities of practice to bridge the two kinds of learning opportunities.

### **Why Do Teacher Development Efforts Fail?**

As teachers are identified as the most important factor in determining student achievement and learning (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000), the continual renewing and deepening of teachers' knowledge and skills through professional development is imperative. Despite the consensus among researchers that professional development is a central component in any school reform, research reports have indicated the ineffectiveness of professional development programs (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006; Steiner, 2004). Several research reports have identified the various factors that have contributed to the ineffectiveness of professional development programs for teachers'. For example, Fullan (1991) states, the greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations. Undermining the complexity of the teaching knowledge base, teachers' professional

development is seen as something to be 'planned' or 'managed' without proper consideration being given to what is to be developed, beyond 'implementing' a particular program or centrally developed initiative (Kleinhenz & Fleming, 2007). Kleinhenz and Fleming call such approaches short-sighted and self-defeating.

Researchers have also identified the one-shot approach as one of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of some professional development programs (Fullan, 2007; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). In a typical one-shot approach, an expert delivers knowledge on a particular topic to a large audience within a limited time period. Here teachers' attitudes toward the topic are not deemed relevant. This approach makes the professional development of teachers' intellectually superficial, disconnected from deep issues pertaining to the curriculum and learning, and causes it to be fragmented, and noncumulative (Ball & Cohen cited in Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley, 2007). Moreover, it is believed that this deficit-based model fails to acknowledge teachers as sources of knowledge or as active participants in their own professional growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006).

Markee (2001) reports that almost three quarters of all educational innovations are likely to fail over time without ever reaching the implementation stage. The same author (citing Karavas-Doukas, 1998) suggests that the reason for the low rate of success is that policymakers are too often concerned with 'what' of innovation rather than the 'how' of innovation. In a similar vein, Cole (2004) argues that the focus on 'what' and 'why' to change and not participants' learning 'how' to implement improvements, accounts for the failure of most professional development attempts. Notably, Cole (2004) further states that most professional development is development *for* performance (acquiring knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary before changes can be made) rather than development *of* performance (professional learning to support a change in practice). According to these authors, more attention needs to be paid to the process of implementing innovation or reform. Moreover, the key to success in professional development rests on our capacity to wisely use the knowledge that we gain not only on the discovery of new knowledge.

Acknowledging the importance of the school context, Mohamed (2006) remarked that teacher development programs should not be of a one-size-fits-all nature, but rather the design and content of the program must take into account the context in which the program is to take place. On this same issue, Richards (1991) and Schmoker (2006) further argue that teacher education must adopt a bottom-up approach, where the starting point is an internal view (arising from the teachers themselves) of teaching rather than an external one (imposed on them by an outsider). A top-down approach would leave the teachers feeling that they have no real personal investment in the program and they may therefore be less committed to it. Similarly, Sandholtz (2002) notes that in-service education typically implies a deficit approach that assumes teachers need information from people in authority. Sandholtz further argues that teachers are neither seen as active participants in the process of their own professional growth, nor are they treated as sources of knowledge themselves. Teachers are often left in a powerless position when such uni-directional transmission models of education are applied.

In conclusion, many researchers (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Fullan, 2007; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kelleher, 2003; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006; Wei et al., 2009) argue against narrow, one-shot workshop, disjointed and fragmented, outsider-led training, one size fits-all and deficit-based model of professional development. These researchers noted that these models of professional development were traditional, antiquated and inadequate since they marginalise and disempower teachers, produce minimal change, lack coherence and

influence, ignore different needs among teachers, whilst failing to acknowledge teachers as sources of knowledge or as active participants in their own professional growth.

### **Effective professional development**

Wei et al. (2009) conceptualise high quality or effective professional development as that which results in improvements in teachers' knowledge and instructional practice, as well as in improved student learning outcomes. It is about empowering staff (Bubb & Earley, 2007) and should be a seamless part of teaching and not an added burden (Sparks, 2005). After conducting an extensive review of the existing literature, Wei et al. (2009) found the following common features characterising professional development practices in high- achieving countries:

- Extensive opportunities for both formal and informal in-service development;
- Time for professional learning and collaboration built into teachers' work hours;
- Professional development activities that are embedded in teachers' contexts and that are ongoing over a period of time;
- School governance structures that support the involvement of teachers in decisions regarding curriculum and instructional practice; and
- Teacher induction programs for new teachers with release time for new teachers and mentor teachers, and formal training for mentors.

Research on professional learning listed several principles that appear common to effective professional development programs and most likely contribute to improved teaching practice that leads to improved student learning and achievement. Effective professional development programs are:

- *Job embedded* (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Callahan & Spalding, 2006; Kelleher, 2003; Pittinsky, 2005),
- *Ongoing/ continuous/ sustained* (Borko, 2004; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000; Tomlinson, 2005),
- *Focused on learning and learners* (Dufour, 2004; Guskey, 2000; Wei et al., 2009),
- *Effective leadership* (Danaher, Price and Kluth, 2009; Fink & Resnick, 2001; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001; Murphy, 2002; O'Hara & Pritchard, 2008; Phillips, 2003; Sparks, 2002),
- *Collaborative* (Carroll, 2009; Mitchell, 1999; Sieveke-Pearson, 2004),
- *Reflective practice* (Appleby, 2009; Heckendorn, 2006; Nuebert & Binko, 1998; Yost, Vogel and Rosenberg, 2009; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), and
- *Grounded on adult learning theories* (Bubb & Earley, 2007; Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 2005; Zepeda, 2008).

### **Teacher development in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia has embarked on a massive expansion of education at all levels (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary education). Even though tremendous achievement has been made in terms of quantitative expansion, poor quality of education (Fekede & Fiorucci, 2012; Lemlem, 2010; MoE, 2003; Oulai et al., 2011; Tekeste, 2006; Tessema, 2006) and low student achievement (National Agency for Examinations, [NAE], 2011) remain the main challenges of the Ethiopian education system. The three National Education Assessments (NEAs) conducted in

Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP) I and II (2000, 2004 and 2007) revealed low student achievement. The Ministry of Education has designed and implemented a series of policy guides to address the multifaceted problems in the education sector. These documents include: Continuous Professional Development Guideline (MoE, 2003); Teacher Education System Overhaul (MoE, 2003); and General Education Quality Improvement Program (MoE, 2007). Notably, all of these initiatives place substantial emphasis on professional development of teachers', although, as Tekleselassie (2000) explained, embarking on an educational reform and creating as well as sustaining significant levels of improvement are not the same thing. Rather, as Tekleselassie argues, school reform is about changing the will, ability and actions of many players at different levels in the educational system, among whom teachers are the most important. The guidelines of the CPD program were developed in 2003 and introduced to the schools by central reform planners in a top-down approach. As stated in the CPD guide produced by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 2003), the overall objectives of the CPD program are aimed at helping teachers to understand the concept of CPD, to engage in high quality CPD and to develop their knowledge and skills continuously, thereby bringing about improvements in student learning and achievement.

The CPD guide also intends to promote active learning, problem solving, and student centered teaching methods that are lacking in the system. Acknowledging that CPD is the most effective process and system of learning, experiencing and sharing throughout a teacher's career, the CPD guide articulates that all serving teachers and head teachers should have the right of access to high-quality and relevant CPD opportunities. The newly employed teachers are also expected to work through a two-year induction program, produced at the national level and supported by mentors. These mentors are selected from experienced members of staff in the schools. Although the CPD guide is largely aimed at improving the performance of teachers in the classroom in order to raise student achievement and learning, the evidence shows that the program has so far not been successful in fulfilling its promise. For instance, the National Learning Assessment of Grades 10 and 12 conducted in the year 2010 to measure the academic achievement levels of students revealed the overall low achievement of students (NAE, 2010). Given this fact, this study was intended to assess the existing professional development program and find out factors that hinder the successful implementation of CPD with the intention to draw implications to improve teacher learning.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the present study was to examine the challenges faced in the Ethiopian education system, particularly in regard to potential and actual barriers to teachers' professional development. It also suggests important implications that are relevant to schools who are striving to improve teachers learning and ultimately student learning and achievement.

### **Research Methodology**

Grounded in the constructivist research paradigm (Creswell, 2011; Shkedi, 2005), this study aimed to explore the challenges that hinder teachers' development in Ethiopian secondary schools and suggest ways of enhancing teachers professional learning. To this end, an in-depth



exploration was undertaken to understand participants' experiences in their context. Purposive sampling was undertaken, which is, as Patton (2002) describes it the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study, from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. A total of 37 participants took part in the study (32 teachers, 2 professional development coordinators [PDC] and 3 education officers [EO]). The data collection process took place from May to August 2013.

Sem-structured interviews and focus group discussions [FGD] were the main data collection methods utilised in this study. To begin with, a semi-structured interview guideline was prepared and used to obtain information from 14 teachers selected from four different secondary schools. The interview sessions each lasted from 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded to retain the information. Then, following the teacher interviews, a focus group discussion guideline was prepared and used to obtain further information about teachers' professional learning. Moreover, data obtained via focus group discussion is used to validate statements and views voiced by teachers. The focus group discussions were held in three secondary schools and involved teachers with various levels of experience who differed in age, gender and specialisation. The first focus group discussion comprised five participants, the second focus group discussion comprised seven participants and the third focus group discussion comprised six participants. The focus group discussions were also audio recorded. A separate interview guideline was prepared and used to obtain additional information from the educational officers and professional development coordinators. All of the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in participants' mother tongue in order to enable the participants to communicate easily and express their views in detail, so that a rich and satisfactory set of data was gained.

The audio-recorded qualitative data were transcribed verbatim. Then, the authors read and re-read the transcription in order to develop a deeper understanding of the information. Then repeated patterns were identified and coded. After the coding was completed, the data relating to each code were collated and combined into potential themes. Finally, the codes were reduced to three major themes and six subthemes as presented in the next section.

### **Findings: Challenges of teacher development in Ethiopia**

The analysis of the data collected via interviews and focus group discussions resulted in the identification of three main challenges that hinder the development of teachers in the Ethiopian context. The first theme concerns conceptions and conceptual problems related to teaching, learning, professional development and mentoring. The second theme regards leadership and management issues and deals with school leadership, national demand and teachers' needs. The third theme is devoted to work conditions and deal with the intensification of teachers' work, wages and incentives. These challenges are described in more detail in the following section.

## 1. Conceptions and conceptual issues

### i. Views on teaching, learning and professional development

In the course of the data collection, all of the participants commented on how they conceptualise teaching, learning, and professional development. It is evident from the data that (from the perspectives of teachers, professional development coordinators and educational officers) the way teaching, learning and professional development are being conceptualised coincides closely with behaviorist ideas, which claim that learning occurs as a result of stimuli in the environment, that is, through the passive transmission of information from one individual to another. Within this context, the teachers adopt a teacher-focused strategy, with the intention of transmitting information/knowledge to the students' about the subject they teach. Moreover, the prior knowledge of students is not considered important. Here are some excerpts from interviews conducted with participants as a part of the present study:

*Learning is change in behavior and teaching is transferring knowledge and helping someone to know something that he didn't know before.*(Teacher 5)

*Learning is acquiring knowledge while teaching is transferring the knowledge we acquire to those who don't know.*(Teacher 1)

*Learning is a means of knowing things that we didn't know before, while teaching is the creation of a knowledgeable or capable person.* (Teacher 8)

The participants' descriptions about professional development were in line with their learning and teaching conceptions, surfacing by and large in the workshops, training and courses organised by external bodies to improve teachers' skills and knowledge. In the process of professional development, teachers were considered as a learner, passive receiver of information from excerpts, and everything was designed and prescribed for them from the center [ Ministry of Education] in a top-down fashion. Below are examples of participants' descriptions of professional development:

*[Professional development] is an activity organised by experts in the form of workshops or training to update teachers' skill and knowledge...*(Teacher 4)

*[Professional development] is training organised by qualified individuals involving different areas such as pedagogy, assessment, classroom management and so on in order to improve teachers' knowledge...*(PDC 2)

Altogether, the participants' views about teaching, learning and professional development seem to reflect traditional interpretation of knowledge transmission which is in sharp contrast to the current constructivist idea of learning as being an active, social process. Professional development was seen from limited perspectives that didn't include many of its aspects. This kind of narrow conception and limited perspective of professional development has proven to be inadequate (Guskey, 2000; Steiner, 2004; Yoon et al., 2007) for bringing about the desired change through the school reform in this era of rapidly changing and challenging times. In the same vein, Bubb and Earley (2007) explained that the way that we understand learning will affect the provision of activities we make for people to



learn, and the accuracy of our understanding will affect the effectiveness of the learning that takes place. The most striking difference between the participants' views and recent ideas of teacher development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012, Tynjälä, 2013) is that the informal, nonformal and self-organised forms of learning were disregarded. Instead, the basic idea of teacher development was that there should be someone (usually an expert) who has to deliver training or workshops for teachers. Knipe and Speck (2001) further discuss that the traditional professional development model was never an effective approach to adult learning as it violates the principle of adult learners. This approach encourages the flow of information in unidirectional and hierarchical way. Moreover, in this kind of system, it is difficult to have a room for reflection, dialogue, and active participation, which are very important to improve classroom practices (Schmoker, 2006).

## *ii. The nature of mentoring practices*

Mentoring is an important part of the support system offered to newly qualified teachers and regarded as a promising way to promote teachers professional development in the induction phase (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2008, 2012). Unlike its traditional one-way and hierarchal counterpart, according to Hussein (2007), mentoring should be reciprocal and emphasises the mutual and interdependent professional growth of the mentor and the mentee. From the descriptions of the participants, it is clear that mentoring is seen as an activity designed to help newly qualified teachers who lack the necessary experience and skills to serve as a teacher. The following excerpts illustrate typical ideas of mentoring:

*[Mentoring] is a practice where experienced teachers in the Department give advice and support to newly graduated teachers who lack the necessary experience to teach. (FGD 1)*

*[Mentoring] is an activity where a senior and experienced member of the school's teaching staff gives professional support and guidance to new teachers. (Teacher 2)*

*[Mentoring] is a process by which experienced teachers (mentors) are expected to guide the induction of newly qualified teachers...(ED 1)*

Likewise, the CPD document prepared by the Ministry of Education describes mentoring in the same ways as the participants. According to the document prepared by Ministry of Education:

Mentoring is a process by which experienced teachers give support, motivation and any other help when necessary to someone less experienced. It is also a method that helps Newly Deployed Teachers (NDTs) to set goals and strive for their success by having the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes. A mentor is therefore an experienced practitioner who provides professional guidance and support. (MoE, 2010, p.3)

The concept of mentoring clearly resonates with the prevailing power structures within the education system that concentrated on transmission of knowledge through one-way hierarchical structures. To the contrary, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2008) argue that mentoring is not considered as one way counseling rather a conversation or dialogue that entails the reciprocal exchange of thoughts and joint creation of knowledge, in which both mentor and mentee can learn. They further explained that mentor does not transfer the correct

understanding or knowledge to the mentee; instead, the mentor builds the meaning and interpretation together with the mentee, through a play of sharing ideas and thought with the others. This signifies the need to reconceptualise mentoring in the Ethiopian education system.

The newly qualified teachers are believed to have more up-to-date knowledge of current research based educational practices than their experienced peers who were trained according to the previous, more traditional curriculum. However, the interviewees' comments show that these newly qualified teachers were not sufficiently competent yet and still in need of receiving information, guidance, structural support, and further knowledge rather than being ready to contribute as a teacher. The following quote describes one experience of newly qualified teacher:

*After I graduated with a Bachelor of Education, I was assigned to this school with the full rights and obligations as any teacher. I was given the same teaching hours and other duties as the experienced teachers. A mentor was assigned to me by my school on the basis of experience. The most surprising thing was that in most cases all experienced staff including mentors viewed my and other newly qualified teachers' qualifications and competence with skepticism. That is why mentors were assigned to us to guide us, to tell us the procedures, to dictate to us how to do things. Newly qualified teachers were always perceived as lacking the necessary knowledge to perform the duties of their profession and needing support. But there are areas where we are better. The good thing about the mentoring was that it was helpful in getting us socialize accustomed to the school environment. (Teacher 3)*

The description above indicates that the relationship between mentors and mentees was experienced as a unidirectional one, where it is only the mentors who have something to give to the other party, the mentees. This hierarchical and unidirectional relationship plays a significant role in maintaining the status quo and impeding the instigation of change to improve the school system. Simply put, the newly employed teachers who are believed to come with better and more innovative means of providing quality teaching are restricted to sustaining the old system. Bjerkholt and Hedegaard (2008) note that new teachers have different competencies and capacities that are vital for the further development of schools. The same authors (citing Tickle, 2000 and Britton et al., 2003) warn that stigmatising new teachers as being helpless leads to the risk of missing out on utilising the strength they possess. Likewise, Heikkinen, Jokinen and Tynjälä (2012) state that the application of mentoring not only supports new teachers but also the professional dialogue between teachers of different ages, in which both the novice and experienced teachers learn something new. Contrary to the traditional hierarchical relationship between mentor and mentee, where the mentor transfers knowledge to the mentee, Heikkinen et al. (2008; 2012) describe mentoring as a reciprocal exchange of ideas and joint construction of knowledge, from which both parties learn.

## 2. Leadership and management issues

### *i. School leadership*

In a rapidly changing world, the roles and expectations for school leaders are changing. Educational administrators are no longer expected to be merely good managers but above all leaders of schools as learning organisations (Dinham, 2005; Elmore, 2000; Hargreaves, Halász & Pont, 2007; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Hence, school leaders play a paramount role in the continuous improvement of education. As Sparks (2002) states if quality teaching is to occur in every classroom, all teachers must be supported in turn by skillful principals who work in systems that support their sustained development as instructional leaders. Data from this research indicated that schools are facing a lack of qualified principals and they stated that this problem was created wittingly by the government with the intention to control the school system. According to the respondents, the recruitment of school principals lacks scientific basis, and instead it rested on the loyalty of the candidates to the ruling regime. This view is illustrated in the following extract:

*Our main problem is leadership. School leaders are assigned on the basis of their political affiliation. You need to be a member of the political party governing the country to be assigned as a principal. Competency and merit have no or little value. What matters most is your loyalty to the government. So, often school leaders appointed are not capable of guiding and leading teachers' learning, as they lack the necessary profile for the post. This way of assigning principals eroded the healthy relationship and collaboration among the staff at my school. It also demotivates and discomforts those staff with better experience and qualifications. Politics have more importance than students' education. Hence, school leaders are more concerned about implementing the interest of authorities than about the academic issues. (FGD 1)*

Chapman (2005) stated that quality schools require quality leadership. The same author remarked that quality leadership cannot be assumed or acquired without a coherent, integrated, consequential, and systematic approach to leadership recruitment, retention, and development. In the same vein, Edwards (2011) affirmed that individuals should occupy leadership positions depending on preparation and skills as well as needs and desires. Conversely, the data revealed that recruitment of a principal was not itself based on merit and experience of the candidates. This will adversely impact school quality and student learning by severely damaging the culture of learning and teaching in schools. The quote above also indicated that the system has failed to accommodate the ideological and political diversity among the staff. Rather, it seems to favor one side over the other, which has led to the erosion of trust among the staff. This, in turn, negatively influences the collaboration and commitment of teachers.

The participants went on to explain that the unscientific basis for assigning school leaders affects teachers' development. According to the participants, most of the currently nominated school principals do not have the adequate profile for their leadership position. Hence, they are facing a problem in leading schools as learning organisations since they lack

the required experience, qualification and competency. Tesema (2007) described the situation as the move to maintain status quo through managers loyal to state ideology.

The participants also reported that the CPD program suffers from a lack of school leaders' ownership and that there was no support or continuous follow ups to teacher development initiatives that would benefit everyone. Here are examples of excerpts illuminating these views:

*Structurally we have a CPD program for schools but there is no leadership capacity to coordinate, design and implement the teachers' professional development. There is no support, follow-up or feedback from the school administrators. Even they themselves have no adequate understanding of the current CPD program let alone of guiding teachers development. They just gave orders to teachers to be engaged in professional development. (Teacher 4)*

*The issue of professional development is only active on paper. Practically, nothing was changed as a result of the CPD program. From the onset, the initiative was not clear. A module was prepared by the central reform planners [Ministry of Education] and sent to us for implementation. The Ministry of Education's strategy to introduce the CPD program has many pitfalls. A few individuals working in administrative position were invited to take part in the training organised by the Ministry so that upon returning to their school (district) they could provide training for teachers. However, when they came back, they did not remember what was said during the training. So, they organized a meeting and simply told the teachers that the CPD program was mandatory for all teachers. They were not able to answer and clarify teachers' questions about CPD matters. Thus, the full information passed on from the center [Ministry of Education] didn't reach us intact. (Teacher 10)*

*From the very beginning, CPD initiative had no owner. It didn't not move beyond talk. We simply were forced to accept it without having the necessary awareness and understanding of the CPD program. There was no follow-up or support for the teachers. The evaluation was also fake. You produced a plan and submitted a written report indicating that you have done what you planned. No one checked whether the report was true or not. So, it was the plan that was evaluated, rather than the actual work accomplished. (FGD 2)*

From the above descriptions, the following lessons can be drawn regarding the challenges of teachers' professional development in Ethiopian schools. First, a hierarchical top-down approach was utilised to enact reform tasks. Second, the CPD program suffers from the lack of ownership. Third, a cascading model was used to disseminate the information from the centre to the periphery. Fourth, the CPD initiative did not move beyond talk and did not live up to its promise. Fifth, both the lack of support and continuous follow-ups regarding the CPD program left teachers confused.

**ii. The discrepancy between national demand and teachers' needs**

On the basis of several syntheses of research, Hawley and Valli (1999) identify several principles of effective professional learning that are most likely to contribute to improved teaching practice that leads to improved student learning. One of the principles is that professional development should involve teachers in the identification of what they need to learn and in the development of the learning experiences in which they will be involved. This is identifying gaps in teachers own learning and choosing the valuable learning experiences teachers need to deal with the gaps in order to address the need of the diverse learners. Affirming the findings of Hawley and Valli, Timperley (2012) indicated that the planning of professional development begins by examining student-learning needs and identifying the teacher knowledge and skills required to address those learning needs. This helps in meeting the different needs and accommodates different levels of expertise by finding out what teachers know and do not know, and what they need to know in order to help all students in learning. In this study, it was reported by the participants that the existing CPD programme was planned centrally and prescribed by the central government for implementation. The participants claimed that there was a mismatch between the government's demands and teachers' needs. The following excerpts show how this issue was described by participants:

*We need to participate in every decision that affects our practices. However, the reality was different. All decisions were made at the center and passed to the periphery through the government channel for implementation. We expressed our dissatisfaction at various times, but our voice was unheard. All of the reforms were forcefully implemented. There were also many occasions where teachers were terrified for the concern and worries they expressed about the teachers development. The same was true regarding the CPD initiative. We were not asked what we need, what skill gaps we have or, what suits our context and so on. We were all made to participate in the same professional development program that didn't address our needs. So, we have accepted it half-heartedly since we didn't have any other option. (Teacher 5)*

*They assigned me to coordinate the CPD program at my school. From my observations, I didn't see any promising results brought about by the CPD initiative. Teachers were always complaining about the CPD program. It did not address the needs and realities of our school. All teachers were obliged to take part in the same CPD program, the content and activities of which had been determined by the Ministry of Education. The program was entrenched with many problems. The resource, awareness and training for teachers and coordinators regarding the CPD initiatives were inadequate. Everything was a mess. We reported all the problems to the school leaders, but they didn't do anything as the reforms were being determined by the central government... (PDC 1)*

*The forceful implementation of the nationwide reform did not bring any results. The ultimate goal of CPD was to raise student achievement. However, if you look at the achievement levels of students in the national exam, you will see that these have declined. Therefore, something was wrong with the CPD program. It didn't match our needs. For instance, teachers want to update their knowledge in areas where they had some gaps, and also in the area of the subject they were teaching, whereas the CPD*



*program overlooked teachers' needs and made all of them engage in the same professional development tasks.(Teacher 11)*

The vignettes above suggest that “one size fit all” professional development- which addressed the interests of the national planners’ but ignored the voices and needs of teachers was enacted across the country. This type of professional development model is considered as traditional, which according to Hargreaves and Fullan (1996), ignores different needs among teachers related to years of experience, gender and stage of career and life. The traditional method of professional development has been deemed antiquated and ineffective (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The inadequacies of professional development programs affect student learning because they influence teachers’ development as professionals, which have a profound impact on students and student achievement (for example Craft, 2000; Guskey & Huberman, 1995). Bubb and Earley (2007) indicated that each individual is different and a ‘one size fits all’ approach to meeting development needs is unlikely to be successful. They further asserted that staff will always feel the need to be valued and this should not be forgotten when considering the balance between identifying and meeting individual, school and national needs. They believe that managers and leaders of CPD need to ensure that personal development is not marginalised as it is crucial to teacher effectiveness and school success. Arguably, the bureaucratic and hierarchical imposition of centrally planned CPD did not significantly influence the existing practices of teaching and learning, as the approach itself left no room for participation, reflection and collaboration. Mohammed (2006) remarked that teacher development programs should not be of a one-size-fits-all nature, but rather the design and content of the program must take into account the context in which the program is to take place. According to him, learning must be related to the individual needs of the schools and teachers involved. Correspondingly, Barnes (as cited in Mohammed, 2006) argues that in a culture where power is concentrated in the centre and in the hands of a few a traditional transmission view of education is most likely to be upheld with the belief that the teacher should be in authority, in control of the classroom dynamics, and in control of the knowledge being taught.

### **3. Work conditions**

#### *i. Wages*

In discussing the challenges of teachers development, the respondents unanimously remarked that the remuneration of teachers is an issue that should be raised as a part of the reform agenda. They further explained that their monthly income runs out before the month ends without even covering their living expenses. The respondents indicated that, owing to this, the basic needs (foods, shelter and clothing), that are fundamental for survival were not being met. The participants’ explained that, this has a devastating effect on the quality of the instruction they deliver and jeopardises the future of the profession. Here are examples of excerpts highlighting these concerns:

*The government ‘talked’ too much about the school reform agenda. However, teachers, one of the most important components in an education system, were ignored. Their worries, concerns and problems were disregarded. Economically teachers are in a bad*



*situation. They are not able to cover their monthly living expenses. Imagine the instruction that teachers deliver in the classroom while lacking access to basic requirements such as food, shelter and clothing. Think of what develops in students' minds, particularly regarding the teaching profession, when they see teachers starved of food, always wearing the same clothes, looking physically unattractive.(FGD 1) Currently, teachers don't want to stay in the profession because they are paid a low salary and the profession is unfairly disrespected. This significantly affects teachers' motivation to continue in the profession. Owing to this, the majority of teachers are looking for other types of jobs and others are attending university education in other fields of study in order to leave the profession by widening their scope for job opportunities.(Teacher 3)*

*The goal of improving schools will remain unmet unless the government reconsiders the salary structure for teachers, and supports them morally and materially. Besides, it is impossible to attract better candidates to the teacher training program if teachers' salary is low compared to that of other government employees. Those in the profession are also looking for other better paying jobs...(ED 3)*

The data suggests the following important understandings about the issue under consideration. First, in Ethiopia, the teaching profession is often considered as a kind of bridge occupation in which young people stay only until they find a better job or study place. Second, teachers do not enjoy the advantages that other civil servants enjoy. Third, teachers seem to be disinterested, and demotivated, and some have even developed hatred toward their profession. Fourth, teachers shift their focus from providing quality instruction to ways by which they can get out of the profession and gain a better income in their quest to meet their and their family's basic needs. Moreover, during the data collection process of this research there were dozens of mass teacher protests and strikes in some parts of the country, mainly in big cities and towns, demanding better salaries and working conditions.

## **ii. Intensification of teachers work**

The participants gave several accounts of their experiences of increasing and intensified teaching workloads. They explained that the increase and intensification of teachers' workload not only impede their participation in professional development but also causes them to lose their focus, since they are distracted by multiple, contradictory and often confusing demands. The participants pointed out that the reasons for the increased workload were changes in the demographic characteristics of students, changes to assessment procedures, the intensification of non-instructional duties, and the curriculum content too broad. The following excerpts highlight these concerns of the participants:

*The reality on the ground is not favoring the engagement of teachers in professional development. The classrooms are overcrowded, and consequently we have to assess a lot of students and keep their profile. The curriculum content is very broad, so we have to rush to cover it. We are also overloaded with non-instructional duties, such as organising clubs, participating in different meetings, engaging in various committees.*

*So, we are very stressed, confused and in a dilemma over what to do and what not to do. (Teacher 9)*

*We have an average of 60 students in every classroom. I was teaching seven sections, which means I was in contact with 420 students. So, imagine how difficult it was to follow the progress of each and every student, assessing them on a continuous basis, identifying needy students and providing the necessary support. That is why the CPD program became another, additional burden for us. (Teacher 1)*

*We were overloaded with multiple tasks. For instance, I was teaching 25 hours a week, preparing lesson plans, tutoring students, and coordinating extracurricular activities. We were overloaded. We were in a difficult situation, making it hard to help our students as we were being bombarded by different tasks and responsibilities. Accordingly, it was difficult for us to find time for the CPD program. (Teacher 8)*

The experiences of the respondents indicate that teachers' workload were increased and intensified, causing them to be stressed; and it negatively affected their participation in professional development. Apple (2000) stated that intensification is one of the most tangible ways in which the working conditions of teachers are eroded. Correspondingly, Fullan (2007) reported that teacher stress and alienation are at an all-time high, judging from the increase in work-related illness, and the numbers of teachers leaving or wanting to leave the profession.

## Discussion

Research studies (Guskey, 2000; Yoon et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä, 2012) have emphasised the need for professional development of teachers' in improving student learning and achievement. For this reason, many countries are investing resources in renewing the capacity of their teaching force on a continuous basis and thereby improving schools. Likewise, the Ethiopian government initiated and implemented a nationwide school reform since 2003 with the intention to raise student achievement. However, there is a critique that the reform has not fulfilled its promise. Hence, this study explored the challenges of teacher development in the Ethiopian context and suggests implication for practices. Drawing upon participants' experiences, this study identified several challenges that impede the development of teachers in secondary schools. This section summarises these challenges and discuss them in relation to previous studies and developments in other countries.

The results of the study are illustrated in Figure 1. As can be seen, the major challenges of teacher development in Ethiopia can be divided into three main categories: 1) conceptions and conceptual issues, 2) management and leadership issues and 3) issues related to teachers working conditions.

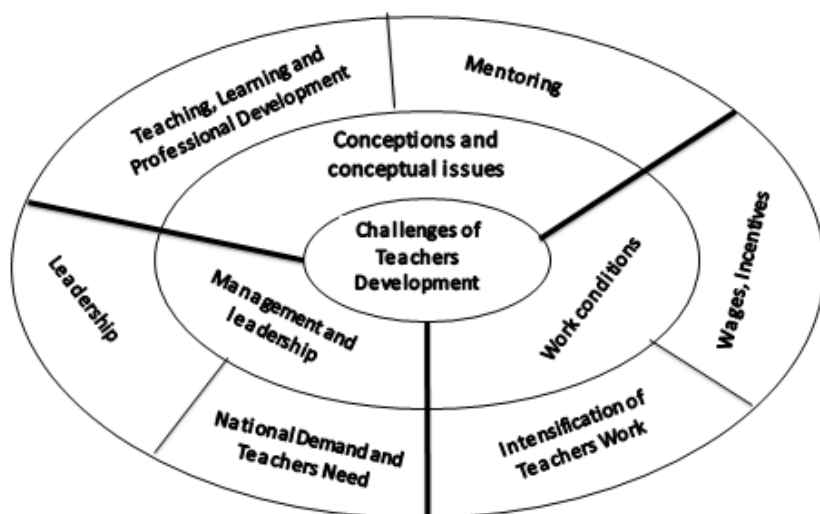


Figure 1: Challenges of teachers' professional development.

The participants' conceptions of teaching, learning and professional development proved to be crucial. The beliefs held by participants about teaching and learning influence their views about the nature of knowledge, where to seek knowledge and their practical approach to teaching and learning. The findings indicate that the way in which professional development is articulated reflects a traditional, passive approach. Similarly, the study revealed that in current educational practices, the behaviorist view of teaching and learning, which is centred around the transmission of knowledge from the instructor to the student dominates over the constructivist view, which is focused on the construction of knowledge by the student. This is contradictory to a large and increasing body of scientific research that recognises constructivism as having a major theoretical influence on contemporary education reform (Hassad, 2011; Mills, 2002).

The second challenge, related to conceptual issues of teacher development, is the concept and practice of mentoring. The findings demonstrate that mentoring is seen as a unidirectional activity, where experienced teachers give advice and support to less experienced, newly qualified teachers. Mentoring was conducted in a way which did not give room to newly qualified teachers' fresh ideas, skills and knowledge. Thus, newly qualified teachers were seen as passive receivers who have nothing to contribute. This view of mentoring lead to the danger of missing out on using the strength possessed by newly qualified teachers and their potential contribution to the school improvement effort (see Bjerkholt & Hedegaard, 2008) and it is contrary to Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä (2012) description of mentoring as a reciprocal exchange of ideas and joint construction of knowledge, from which both parties learn.

Management and leadership also proved to be challenging issues in teacher development. In this regard, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar and Fung (2007) state that in order to bring about a substantive, positive outcome for students, the role of leadership should be: (1) developing a vision, (2) managing and organizing, (3) leading professional learning, and (4) developing the leadership of others. The same authors, placing strong emphasis on the role of leadership in leading the professional learning of staff, explained that school leaders should move beyond just

organising opportunities for teachers to learn and become involved in the learning itself and promote learning cultures within their schools. Similarly, Jäppinen and Sarja (2012) have suggested that dialogue and what they call distributed pedagogical leadership or collaborative leadership would provide a promising approach to leading schools. The data revealed that these ideas were not being applied in Ethiopian schools. The processes for recruiting school leaders were unscientific and unsystematic, and were based on political aspects rather than on professional competence. Owing to this, unsatisfactory leadership in learning threatens the quality of teachers' professional practices and the collective capacity of their schools. The participants in this study felt that the trust between the school staff and their leaders was weak. In such circumstances, it is difficult to form a shared vision and propitious environment for creating learning cultures.

Another challenge related to management and leadership was the mismatch between the government requirements/ national demand and teachers' needs. As Day (1999) has explained teachers cannot be developed passively; rather, they develop actively. Therefore, they should be involved in decisions concerning the direction and process of their own learning. The data of this study revealed that the CPD program in Ethiopia is an initiative planned at the central, government level and prescribed in a top-down approach regarding its implementation. Subsequently, teachers have been forced to participate in a one-size-fits all type of professional development program that does not address their needs and circumstances or those of their schools. The imposition of reform on schools without involving the key actors in the decision making or considering their concerns negatively influences the culture of the schools and undermines participation, discourse, dialogue and negotiation.

Finally, the study showed that teachers' work conditions form a big challenge for teacher development. Low wages for teachers and the lack of fringe benefits upset the participants. Although the teachers are shouldering huge responsibility in the education system, they are not being rewarded well. This situation is likely to have a substantive effect not only on the quality of education but also on the future of the teaching profession in Ethiopia. Several studies link salary and benefits to teacher satisfaction, motivation, level of commitment, and attrition (Akiba, Chiu, Shimizu & Liang, 2012; Giacometti, 2005; Ololube, 2005; Osei, 2006; Page & Page, 1982). The low salary of teachers not only affects their commitment but also influences their decision to stay in or leave the profession. Moreover, it was reported that low wages hinder the teaching profession from attracting the best candidates to the profession.

The intensification of teachers' work is another challenge pertaining to teachers' work conditions. The data signalled that teachers were overloaded not only with instructional but also with non-instructional activities that absorb a bulk of their time and energy. This finding corroborated what Apple (2000) describes as "more and more has to be done; less and less time is available to do it". Similarly, Fullan (2007) states that the range of educational goals and expectations for schools- coupled with the imposition of multiple, disconnected reform initiatives- present intolerable conditions for sustained educational development and satisfying work experiences. The findings, confirm that this is the case in Ethiopia. Teachers are expected to perform an increasing number of imposed tasks for which they lack adequate time and resources. This limits the teachers' opportunities for creativity, reflection, and engagement in pedagogical work as well as for the development of collegial relationships, and may ultimately lead to de-professionalisation or de-skilling.

## **Implications for Practices**

Today's schools are facing complex and dynamic changes and challenges, from which follows that teachers' roles and responsibilities are more diversified and complex than ever before. It is therefore indisputable that teachers should be encouraged and supported to develop professionally and renew their capacity on a continuous basis to ensure the availability of quality education for all students. In the present study, we explored the challenges of teachers' professional development in Ethiopian schools, and, on the basis of the findings, we consider the following actions necessary for practices to facilitate and improve teachers' development.

## **Reconsidering educational change management strategies**

The practice of providing professional learning opportunities for teachers within the study context is top-down national priority driven, bureaucratically inflexible and transmissive, one-size-fits-all' strategies for improvement. This practice seemed to oppose what Kincheloe (2008) describes as top-down mandates and pedagogical directives cannot facilitate teachers' efforts to produce students with the disposition to become scholars concerned with learning for their own development. Likewise, Fullan (1993) argues that when complex change is involved, people do not and cannot change by being told to do so. Rather, as Schmoker (2006) state, authoritative top down imposition encourages culture of dependency, disempower teachers and wreak havoc on the culture of improvement. In a world of constantly evolving technology, rapid change, and the constant creation of new knowledge, teachers must not be treated as merely managers and implementers of predetermined knowledge. Instead, teachers must be considered as professionals and community of discourse engaged in activity, reflection, and conversation. Hence, there is a need to adjust educational change management practices to cultivate the learning communities and successfully enact education reform within the study context. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education (as a central reform planner through experts) has to shift away from the traditional, top-down and noncollaborative nature of decision-making and unidirectional command structure that relied on hierarchy to more collaboration, dialogue, open communication and active participation with teachers and other concerned stakeholders.

## **Reforming teacher education**

The teacher education institutes should reinvent and transform themselves to produce well-qualified teachers and lifelong learners with a strong theoretical and practical foundation, who then, in turn, support and nurture the needs of the diverse learners in Ethiopia's evolving society. Tillema and Kremer-Hayon (1998) concluded that teacher education can play a major role in developing self-regulated learning competency in student teachers by increasing opportunities for directing one's own learning, being receptive to inquiry, and challenging one's own ideas to construct new knowledge. Teacher education programs should also be based on constructivist theories of learning (Richardson, 1996) and provide wide opportunities for prospective teachers to engage in dynamic processes of knowledge construction and deconstruction. Consequently, the role of the teacher educators should also change from monopolising and providing knowledge towards helping prospective teachers learn independently and generate knowledge on their own. The teacher education programs should



help teachers develop the disposition to seek answers to difficult problems in teaching and learning and the skills to develop and renew their own practices. This requires an inquiry based approach to teacher education where theory and practice are tightly integrated with each other (see Heikkinen, Kiviniemi & Tynjälä, 2011). Strengthening the research-based approach to teacher development would be an important part of this endeavor. Teachers should be trained to undertake research projects in the classroom so that they can examine teaching and learning problems and find solutions that can be shared with others. As Vrijnsen-de Corte, Brok, Kamp and Bergen (2013) have stated seeing the teacher as a researcher is one promising means of fostering meaningful professional development.

### **Revisiting school leadership**

Several researchers (Beattie, 2002; Elmore, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2006) strongly recognized the key role that leadership plays in promoting and managing school development and change and in developing and sustaining schools as communities of learners. The findings of the study clearly revealed that the school leadership needs to be improved as weaknesses in leadership could have adverse effects on the quality of pupils' learning and attainment. The effort to improve educational leadership culture in the study context would begin with the selection and recruitment of the candidates with adequate profile for the post. Leadership, according to Day (1999), plays a crucial role in enabling or discouraging learning. As Beattie (2002) states the notion that leadership is the exclusive domain of one group of individuals in a school should be challenged, and a view of leadership as inclusive, connected, and collaborative should be promoted (see Jäppinen, 2012; Jäppinen & Sarja, 2012). The educational leadership culture of the Ethiopian secondary schools should not only be required to move out of the traditional command and control model but also needs to be reconceptualized in a way that meets the demands of the current complex and dynamic nature of educational reforms. A competent, well qualified and experienced educational leader with an up-to-date knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy and key educational developments needs to be in a place to move the Ethiopian schools forward by identifying and implementing reform initiatives and continuously improve the quality of learning, teaching and attainment. Moreover, school leadership continues to rise to the changing demands and challenges of the present and future by focusing on continuous improvement. The schools' leader and management need to consider the greater roles and responsibilities necessary in creating and shaping a learning environment that facilitates the development of the collective capacity of the school and their community. Moreover, they need to be actively engaged in motivating teachers, promoting reflection and collaboration, and modeling the desired commitment, values, norms and practices.

### **Improving work conditions**

Working conditions play an important role in a school's ability to deliver high quality education by attracting, developing, and retaining effective teachers (see Leithwood, 2006). In the same vein, Choy (1996) explained schools that are able to offer their teachers a safe, pleasant, and supportive working environment and adequate compensation are better able to attract and retain good teachers and motivate them to do their best. The findings revealed the



urgent need to improve teachers' work conditions. Reasonable incentives and better working conditions need to be employed to attract and retain more qualified school principals and teachers to the teaching profession. According to an Organization for Economic Cooperation [OECD] (2005) study, the main factors contributing to teachers' retention include adequate salary, supportive working conditions, and status and respect for teachers, whereas poor working conditions are often the main reason for leaving the teaching profession.

## Conclusion

We are living in a world that is knowledge based, constantly changing, culturally diverse, and technologically driven (Divjak et al., 2004). Consequently, schools need to be recultured to prepare students not only for a changing world but also in a changing world. As Zmuda, Kuklis and Kline (2004) explained, schools need to be built as a competent system, which requires several significant shifts—from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, from an environment of isolation to one of collegiality, from perceived reality to information-driven reality, and from individual autonomy to collective autonomy and collective accountability. Within such a context there is a need for teachers to be lifelong learner who envision continuous learning and improvement. To this end, professional learning has been placed at the forefront.

This study explored the challenges of teachers' professional learning in Ethiopia and drew some implications for reform. The findings of the study revealed that the meaning attached to teaching and learning fit the traditional concept of teaching and learning that portrays teaching as telling and learning as passively receiving of information. Within the current professional learning context, teachers were positioned at the margin of knowledge generation for school improvement and become deliverers of pedagogical directives mandated by top-down edicts. Further, the result indicated that the existing professional learning opportunity was not promising. The study identified several conditions that impede the professional development and learning of teachers. To close or reduce the gap between the current practices and effective professional learning practices, the article argued for an intervention in the areas of educational change management strategies, school leadership, building professional learning communities, teacher education, and work conditions of teachers.

Altogether, the developments we propose require cultural changes and new mindsets. Therefore, it is important to recognise that educational changes are processes and not a one-off event. The proposed changes are big and it might take a long time to achieve them, but it is not impossible as Sahlberg (2011) has reminded us in describing the case of Finland as a country that was able to transform its education system from being mediocre to being the top in the world.

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