

# Teaching History: Pedagogical Practices and Complexities in Upper Secondary Schools of Ethiopia

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## Abstract

This study examined the pedagogical practices and complexities in teaching history in the upper secondary schools of Ethiopia. The study employed descriptive case study research design. Data were obtained from nine key informants, textbooks, syllabi, and other publications. Interview and document review were used as principal data collection tools. Data were analyzed using qualitative narrative approach. The findings revealed that teachers frequently use lecture, explanation, and discussion as the main methods of teaching. Debate, inquiry, justification, and multiple-interpretation methods were not properly used by teachers, and are rarely incorporated in the textbooks. Instructional activities such as what and why questions, explanations, and discussion questions appeared often in the prescribed textbooks. Moreover, the grand historical narratives and counter-narratives apparently made Ethiopia's history turbulent and complex as such narratives are influenced by political factors. Furthermore, interview respondents revealed that phrases incorporated in the Ethiopian history publications such as 'Assimilation', 'Amharanisation', 'Colonization', 'Restoration', and 'Oromization' are politically motivated discourse than academic concepts and they create complexities in the Ethiopian historical narratives. Besides, content overload, over emphasis on the country's political and military histories than social and economic history, and lack of consensus among politicians make the teaching of history very complex.

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## Introduction

Following the downfall of the 'Dergue' regime in 1991, the then Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) dominated Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) politicians used ethnicity as the cornerstone of the major political initiatives (Merera, 2004), "at the risk of national unity, and overused historical grievances and pitfalls to evoke fear, and hatred" (Adamu, 2013, p. 24). Apparently, they operated against the grand Ethiopian historical narrative. In fact, since the 1960s, Ethno-nationalists attempted to reconstruct Ethiopian history along ethnic lines (Zahorik, 2014). The Ethno-nationalist parties and their affiliated elites, prominently the TPLF, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Eritrean People Liberation Front (EPLF) prioritized ethnicity and advocated the 'nationalities questions and self-determinations (Medhane et al., 2021).

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In Ethiopia, beyond the politicians, historical controversies are intense between the established grand narrativist and counter-narrativist (constructivist or revisionist) historians (Hultin, 1996; Marzagora, 2016). The grand narrativist or master narrativist advocated conventional Ethiopian history and presented the linearity of the state, the notion of national unity ‘oneness’ and its glories (Toggia, 2008, p. 321). They celebrated victories of the country and Menelik -II- incorporation of the periphery and territorial expansion, and integration (Levine, 1974; Marcus, 1994; Markakis, 2011). Against this discourse, the counter-narratives led the youth to violence by reinforcing fanatical identities and victimhood behavior (Paulson, 2015; Astrom et al., 2017; Catherine, 2017). Gebru (2012, p. xiii) described this complication as “there are few countries in Africa that are as enriched and burdened by the past as Ethiopia.” Such critical discourse intensifies the complexity of history curriculum construction and pedagogical practices (Yilmaz, 2008; Thorp, 2014a; Psaltis et al., 2017). Besides, teaching history may be influenced, among other factors, by instructional methods, the nature of the subject matter itself, and the demand of the political groups. Hence, this research tried to find out the practices and complexities in history teaching in Ethiopian upper secondary schools.

### Statement of the Problem

The history of a nation is subject to interpretations, contradictory narratives, and is often a site of contention (Hultin, 1996). As a result, countries are forced to rethink their history (Catherine, 2017), and it is not advisable to ignore contradictory narratives in curriculum making (Astrom et al., 2017). To address contradictory narratives, teachers can employ a wide range of pedagogical approaches.

Previous studies suggested that *multi-perspectives* and *transformative approaches* are vital to respond to the growing diversity in history education (McCully, 2012) and to cultivate students’ historical thinking and empathy (Psaltis et al., 2017). However, how often these approaches appeared in history textbooks is not yet studied meticulously. Besides, how complex narratives should be taught in school is a gray area for researchers (McCully, 2012) as such narratives need adequate care and attention (Marie, 2010). Besides, researchers advised that it is crucial, legitimate, and fair to investigate “How do we learn history?” (Williams, 2016, p. 10).

There are two contending views about Ethiopian history among Ethiopian nationalists and ethno-nationalists (Sorenson, 1992). Both used history as a mobilizing instrument to attain their political interest and promoted contending narratives (Sorenson, 1992; Keller, 2005). These contending narratives possibly will complicate history education because some school teachers may have political motives and are reluctant or blind to teach some of potentially contested history topics. Consequently, it could have a catastrophic effect on the construction of historical knowledge, on the scholarship of the discipline, meaningfulness of the subject, and construction of collective aspirations of a nation.

Previous studies conducted by local researchers in Ethiopia did not show in detail the complexity of teaching potentially contentious narratives in secondary schools. Rather they identified inadequate teacher performance (Bekele, 2006), crowded classrooms, and shortage of reference materials (Teshome, 1990) as the leading challenges in teaching and learning history.

Besides, study conducted by Cambridge international also revealed that there is slight evidence that learners are encouraged to think about the causation and consequence of events in history (UNICEF, 2019). For various reasons, there is also lack of enthusiasm and interest among students and some teachers towards learning and teaching history. Besides, as a complex undertaking and interpretative discipline (Hultin, 1996; Thorp, 2014a; Astrom et al., 2017), examining history education practices and complexities is vital, yet, none of the above studies critically addressed it in relation with contested issues. Hence, this study attempted to fill these gaps.

Thus, the following questions guided the study. (1) What pedagogical methods do teachers employ to teach history in Ethiopian upper secondary schools? (2) What are the main methods of teaching and instructional activities in prescribed upper secondary school history textbooks/syllabi? (3) How do teachers teach contents of contested narratives of the same history? (4) What are the major complexities in teaching history in Ethiopian secondary schools?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The core objective of this study is to examine the pedagogical practices and complexities of history teaching. Specifically, this article intended to identify the pedagogical methods employed by teachers to teach history, and review the suggested methods of teaching and instructional activities incorporated in the prescribed textbooks/syllabi. It also examined teachers' position in teaching contested topics and the major complex issues in teaching history.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides empirical information for teachers, curriculum planners and educational leaders that help them address historical controversies and complexities while teaching the subject in particular and history curriculum making in general. In addition, it is important for policy makers to revisit prescribed contents, suggested methods of teaching, and instructional activities designed to the upper secondary school history textbook. It can also potentially initiate a national project to settle historical controversies and complexities in the country at large.

### **Review of Related Literature**

In line with the objective and basic questions of the study, this section reviewed contemporary methods of history teaching and complex narratives in Ethiopian history.

### **History Teaching Methods**

In studying the teaching of history, the various methods such as *historical narratives*, *historical thinking*, *historical consciousness*, and *historical interpretation method* (Yilmaz, 2008; Fulda, 2014; Thorp, 2014b; Ahonen, 2017; Ramsey, 2017; Harrell, 2017) need to be considered by history educators. In addition, researcher has identified questioning, sourcing, explaining, connecting, critical reading, conceptualizing, discussion, writing and assessing as essential teaching methods in teaching history (Namamba & Rao, 2017).

*Historiographic narration* method combines both narration (as an act) and narrative (as a structure) (Fulda, 2014), presenting facts through connected events in a specific time and setting (Ramsey, 2017), and shaping how societies understand themselves. It is divided into two: (1) *Epistemological* (the past does not inherently possess a narrative structure), and (2) *Narrativist* (truth can be extended beyond exact historical facts) (Ramsey, 2017). It may be important for a historian to search the middle ground between these two contended thinking's. Besides, there are two common types of narratives: the *grand narrative* advocates the primordial origins of a nation and materialized it in school curricula to unify communities, construct collective identities (Ahonen, 2017), and create continuity. Divergently, *counter narratives* did not grant the collective identities (Ahonen, 2017). Moreover, Rusen in Ahonen (2017) categorized narratives into four perspectives: *traditional narrative*, *exemplary narrative*, *genetic narrative*, and *critical narrative*.

*Traditional* narratives are the most pregnant with meaning which derived from big ideas, believed to imbed in the course of events. The *exemplary* approach implies picking events and acts from the past based on their moral meaning, while a *genetic* narrative impregnated the past with meanings that are relevant for the posterity. The *critical* accounts imply the deconstruction of the ideological meaning-content of traditional narratives. Subsequently, grand narratives have been eroded by critical multi-perspectival dealings with the past (Ahonen, 2017, p. 46).

All narratives are related with individual understanding of history (Thorp, 2014b), and this shows us the multiple layers of historical narrative method.

*Historical consciousness* is a vague and complex concept (Thorp, 2014a). In fact, in 1979 Karl-Ernst defined it as a notion that 'incorporates the connection, interpretation of the past, understanding the present, and perspective on the future' (Thorp, 2014a). According to Thorp (2014b, pp. 29-30) historical consciousness methods demonstrate various concepts such as *identity-creating*, *meaning-making*, *history-creating*, *gaining insight*, *value-creating*, and *heuristic concepts*. The heuristic concepts pose new questions to history and generate new perspectives in research. This method always involves a form of self-reflection and openness for interpretation to the various narratives (Maria & Robbert, 2019). This ability requires three specific competencies: *historical experience*, *historical interpretation*, and *historical orientation*. In a more detailed manner, Pandel, in De Rezende & Martins (2019, p.22) proposed seven dimensions of historical consciousness method: *time awareness*, *sensitivity to reality*, *consciousness of historicity*, *identity awareness*, *political awareness*, *economic and social awareness*, and *moral awareness*.

*Historical thinking* means the ability to understand how historical knowledge has been constructed and contextualize historical facts, events, and persons (Thorp, 2014a). This method involves "historical interpretation that consists of sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, evidence-based thinking, and attention to multiple perspectives in history, evaluating the historical significance and multiple causes of historical events" (Marie, 2010, p. 14).

*Historical interpretation method* incorporates interpretive decisions and considers multiple perspectives (Harrell, 2017). This method allows students to question, investigate, evaluate, reflect and revise (ibid) or "*doing history*" (Havekes, 2015). Hence, history teachers need to understand

history as an interpretative business and be subjected to multiple versions (Yilmaz, 2008). Moreover, a teacher is responsible to develop “young citizens’ skill to distinguish fact from opinions, detect biases, prejudices, and unwarranted claims, weigh contrasting evidence.... and critically evaluate others positions and perspectives” (Yilmaz, 2008, p. 40). The very essential question in this regard is: Do our teachers have a clear understanding of the concept of *historical narratives, historical thinking, historical consciousness, and historical interpretations*? Besides, how do they apply these concepts in the real classroom is still a gray area in the scholarship of history education and may need large-scale examinations.

### Complex Narratives in Ethiopian History

Like many of the nationalist movements in Africa (Zahorik, 2014), in the 1960s, Ethiopian students shape the country’s political and social movement (Vaughan, 2003; Siraw, 2016). Primarily, students fought the monarchical regime with the slogans of ‘*land to tiller*’, ‘*national equality*’, ‘*and social justice*’ (Merera, 2006). The students’ questions gradually deviated in line with their historical consciousness, understanding and interpretation, and their questions were confined to class, identity, and self-determination (Mohammed, 1999; Vaughan, 2003; Keller, 2005; Merera, 2006; Gebru, 2009). Slowly, a radical student group who has diverse views, incompatible goals and tactics led to factionalism and sectarianism (Gebru, 2009). The student movement was led by three groups, ‘*Ethiopianist*’ (Assefa, 1999), ‘*Ethno-nationalist*’, and ‘*Territorial-nationalist*’ (Bulcha, 1996; Vaughan, 2003; Gebru, 2009; Zahorik, 2014). The Tigrayan students were the most successful “*ethnic entrepreneurs*” (Gebru, 2009, p. 33). According to Crummey (2001), “*Ethiopianists*” support the primordial interpretation of Ethiopian history. In contrary, some of Eritrean, Tigrayan and Oromo elites positioned themselves critically against the Ethiopianist tradition, and some of them are hostile; they are anti-centrist, anti-Ethiopianist and advocate ethnic-nationalism and territorial-nationalism or self-determination to secession.

In 1966, an Oromo student, Ibsa Gutama, questioned “*Itiopiawiwu mann naw?*” (“Who is the Ethiopian?”) This Amharic poem raised the questions of identity (Bulcha, 1996; Vaughan, 2003). This idea was consistent with Walleligne Mekonnen’s, an Amharan students’ movement pioneer work “*On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia*” which attacked Ethiopian nationalism and cemented the wrong characterization of Amhara and Tigray as the oppressor (Walleligne, 1969). Then, some students regard the diversity of language and cultures as divisive and recognition of such diversity as dangerous and anti-Ethiopianism (Bulcha, 1996; Gebru, 2009). Since, 1991 the national question propagated in the late 1960s and early 70s has been institutionalized by TPLF led EPRDF government as state apparatus (Siraw, 2016), and put the country at risk of disintegration. Scholars such as Banks, Parekh in Siraw (2016) also argued that an unbalanced emphasis on diversity could lead the country to disintegration; by the same token unbalanced emphasis for national unity ultimately ends by discontents and conflicts.

Until now, some historical issues are contested among academicians and politicians (Siraw, 2016). Besides, Crummey (2001) disclosed that Oromo historiography has a complex relationship to the Ethiopianist historiography. In addition, Levine (1974) grouped the historical discourse as

the “*Amhara thesis*,” the “*Oromo anti-thesis*” and the “*Ethiopian synthesis*,” (Zahorik, 2011, p. 264). In addition, Merera (2006, p. 120) revealed the three perspectives ‘*the nation-building perspective*’, ‘*the national operation perspective*’ and ‘*the colonization perspectives*’. These are critical in the Ethiopian political circle since the 1960s. Besides, ethnicity and the national question are persistent problems in Ethiopia (Bulcha, 1996; Vaughan, 2003; Keller, 2005), and need new consensus (Merera, 2006). Some other scholars, for instance, Zahorik (2014) claimed that, Ethno-nationalism was not only a challenge to Pan-Africanism but also an obstacle for the emergence of democratic governance because it served as a means to mobilize people and instruct them to vote for their ethnic parties. As a pro-Ethiopianist scholar, Crummey (2001, p. 17) argued that “Ethiopian nationalism has a genuinely trans-ethnic dimension”.

Many literatures revealed that Ethiopia is one of the oldest independent nations in the world (Siraw, 2016). However, the formation of Ethiopian state was questioned by ethnic-nationalists and considered as a contested process (Gebru, 2009). In this regard, Assefa (1999) argued towards Ethiopia as a colonial nation that was created by Menelik-II-. Concerning this historical process many authors and researchers used contested historical terms and phrases that further complicated the history of the country (Table 1) and tremor the teaching-learning process.

**Table 1***Contested Historical Terms/Phrases*

Terms/ phrase	Authors	Terms/ phrase	Authors
‘subjugated’	Holcomb, 1999, Assefa,	‘assimilation’,	Bulcha, 1996
‘colonization’	1999, Toggia, 2008	‘Amharanisation’	Holcomb, 1999
	Merera, 2006	‘control’, ‘dominance’	Getahun, 2009
‘conquest’		‘assimilation’,	Bulcha, 1996
‘exploitation’	Sorenson, 1992	‘Oromization’	Keller, 2005
‘deculturation’	Mohammed, 1999		Hultin, 1996
‘decolonization’		‘restoration’	Vaughan, 2003
‘ <i>Neftanya</i> ’			Marcus, 1994
‘incorporation’	Bahru, 1991, 2000	‘racism’	Assefa, 1999
‘territorial, expansion’			
‘invention’	Crummey, 2001	‘territorial unity’	Markakis, 2011
		‘reunification’, ‘expansion’	Merera, 2006
‘genocide’	Bulcha, 1996	‘settlers’, ‘colonial ‘settlers’	Siraw, 2016
	Zahorik, 2014		

Some of the words and phrases stated in Table 1 lack criticality and framed to achieve political ambition in unbalanced manner. Many Oromo scholars promoted the colonial perspective terms and phrases. Others challenged the published materials of these scholars and rejected



politically charged colonialism propaganda (Vaughan, 2003), and they are considered as the extension of “Italian propaganda of de-Amharization campaigns” (Vaughan, 2003, p. 18). Besides, Marcus (1994) blessed Menelik-II- for his protection of the periphery from the colonizer and his act is considered as restoration and re-unification. As a result, the issue of colonial thesis in Ethiopia was contested. Even an Oromo prominent politician Professor Merera argued that the Oromo colonial thesis did not fit neatly into a historically recorded colonial system (2006, p. 125). Furthermore, in Ethiopia, the issue of domination has been a politicized and ethnicized agenda (Zahorik, 2014). The aforementioned narrations and explanations show how Ethiopian political history is contested, and consequently, hampering the normative teaching–learning process and complicate the history scholarship.

In addition, in the scholarship of history education, researchers often identified shortage of instructional aids, teacher-dominated instruction, low history teachers' classroom performance, low teachers subject matter and pedagogical knowledge as the major bottlenecks in Ethiopia (Bekele, 2006). These challenges may incapacitate students potentials and engagement in the teaching and learning process. Besides, a study conducted by Cambridge International revealed that the provision of so many topics in each grade, insufficient time, repetition of contents between grades contribute to overload, and it also hinders students' ability to develop higher order thinking skills (UNICEF, 2019). Apparently, ethnic consciousness (in some regions), the social media campaign and political propaganda may have negative effects on teaching some contested history topics.

## Methods

This study aimed at qualitatively explaining the current pedagogical practices and complexities in teaching history in Ethiopian upper secondary schools. Thus, it is a descriptive qualitative case-study in its design as this design best fits such objectives (Cohen et al., 2011). The study was also informed by *critical theory* since this theory advocates for an independent enquiry and empowers learners (Freire, 1971) through problem posing, questioning, and learn to think critically, and develops a critical consciousness (Promise, 2022). The critical theory advocates Cohen et al., (2011) and Lingawa (2013) claimed that social realities are shaped by historical events. In light with these concepts, questions and activities, and suggested methods of teaching in textbooks were examined.

Prominent historians, history teachers and experts, the history curriculum framework, history syllabi, and student textbooks were used as data sources. A semi-structured key informant interview, and document and content review were used to collect relevant data. Interviewees were selected purposely because such informants should be chosen based on their in-depth expertise, experiences, knowledge, views, and suggestions on the topic (Vander-Stoep & Deirdre., 2009). As a result, two prominent historians, who have various publications in the discipline, six experienced secondary school history teachers, and one history education expert from the Ministry of Education (MoE) were interviewed. History student textbooks, syllabi, history curriculum framework, and previous publications in the area were reviewed carefully as reviewing documents is helpful to collect qualitative data (Yin, 1994; Creswell, 2009). In addition, content analysis was employed to

understand the frequency of suggested methods of teaching and the type of instructional activities and questions included in the textbooks.

## Results and Discussion

The respondents' (R1, R2-R9) have teaching experience of 5- 47 years. Their minimum qualification was a BA degree in history and the maximum was Emeritus professor in history. Variation in both professional experience and academic rank helps to capture and understand the opinions and experiences of history teachers across qualification levels and years of teaching experience. The average interview duration for a respondent was 55 minutes.

### Pedagogical Practices in Upper Secondary Schools

Multi-perspective and transformative teaching (McCully, 2012; Psaltis et al., 2017), inquiry-based teaching (Paulson, 2015), historical interpretation (Harrell, 2017), and mastering historical thinking (Thorp, 2014a; Havekes, 2015) are methods that are suggested to teach history. To check whether teachers employed these approaches or not, the respondents were asked one major probing question: What kinds of pedagogical approaches do you employ to teach history? Often, they replied that *they use lecturing in order to cover the contents* (R1, R2 & R3). According to other respondents, *discussion, lecturing and peer-discussion* were employed to teach history because the textbooks are designed with such methods (R6, R8, and R9). Senior historians replied that *Ethiopian teachers have followed traditional methods of teaching in their history classrooms* (R5 and R7). This is because the history textbook in Ethiopian secondary schools covers a broader topic. Based on these responses, it is safe to conclude that teachers often use lecturing whereby students are forced to remember historical facts and ideas. Moreover, it is possible to conclude that Ethiopian teachers worried a lot about content coverage than students understanding. These findings were consistent with the finding of Bekele (2006) that history classroom instructions were teacher-centered rather than employing group discussion and inquiry techniques. This may be linked with the level of history teachers' performance of questioning skills, facilitating classroom instruction, pedagogical and content knowledge. Besides, the teachers' over emphasis on lecturing methods should be discouraged to realize meaningful learning. When we look at the suggested instructional methods the result was consistent with teacher responses. Besides, we looked at the frequency of instructional activities, and type of provoking questions appeared in the textbook.

**Table 2**

#### *Suggested Instructional Methods in the Textbooks*

Suggested Methods	N *	%	N**	%
Explanation method, Expression/Elaboration methods	41	22.04	53	26.8
Discussion method	30	16.12	34	16
Analysis method	27	14.5	27	12.7
Identification method	26	13.97	14	6.6



Suggested Methods	N *	%	N**	%
Description method	15	8.06	22	10.4
Show, Locate, Mention, and Indication methods	9	4.8	14	6.6
Assess, Evaluation, and Examination methods	16	8.56	11	5.2
Point Out, Outline methods	8	4.3	13	6
Compare & Contrast method	7	3.76	7	3.3
Interpretation and Justification method	4	2.13	3	1.4
Realization method	2	1.07	7	3.3
Demonstration and Debating method	1	0.53	3	1.4
Total	186	100	212	100

*Note.* \*N=number of suggested methods of teaching in grade 11 history Syllabus and Textbook (MoE, 2006a)

\*\* N=number of suggested methods of teaching in grade 12 history Syllabus and Textbook (MoE, 2006b)

**Table 3**

*Type of Instructional Activities and Questions Included in the Textbook*

Major type of instructional activities and questions	N *	%	N**	%
Explanation, Expression and Elaboration questions	41	10.6	53	8.84
Discussion questions	30	7.7	34	5.67
Analysis questions	27	7.0	27	4.5
Identification questions	26	6.7	14	2.33
Description question	15	3.8	22	3.67
Show, Locate, Mention, and Indication questions	9	2.3	14	2.33
Assess, Evaluation, and Examination questions	16	4.14	11	1.8
Point Out and Outline questions	8	2.07	13	2.17
Compare & Contrast questions	7	1.8	7	1.16
Interpretation questions	3	0.7	3	0.5
What questions	60	15.5	176	29.4
Why questions	15	3.8	104	17.36
How questions	19	4.9	58	9.68
Which questions	31	8.03	14	2.33
When question	1	0.25	5	0.83
Who questions	15	3.8	6	1.00
Where question	1	0.25	2	0.33
Other questions	62	16.1	36	6.01
Total	386	100	599	100

*Note.* \*N= number of instructional activities and questions included in grade 11 history Textbook (MoE, 2006a)

\*\* N= number of instructional activities and questions included in grade 12 history Textbook (MoE, 2006b)

Table 2 shows that in grades 11 and 12, the textbooks and the syllabus focused on explanation and discussion methods. There are limited examples that encourage the students to debate, justify, demonstrate, realize, interpret, and compare and contrast different tailored history

source materials. The suggested methods in the textbooks may bring history subjects boring. Consistent with these findings, Jackson (2005: 8) reported that the “history is dull and boring subject” because transmission methods of teaching permits very little room for students’ creativity. Activities need to be challenging to process information, to think, raise questions, motivate and engage students in classroom interactions.

Based on the results in Table 3 one can conclude that questions included in the student textbook emphasized lower order thinking skills or cognition skills rather than developing higher order thinking skills. This finding was consistent with the report of Cambridge international on history education that content overload with insufficient time hinders the development of high order thinking skills (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, it may be appropriate to revise the textbook in order to enhance students writing, analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, and reasoning skills because these skills are mainly influenced by the learning materials provided. In addition, it requires appropriate teaching and learning environment to enhance students thinking skills.

### Contested Narratives and the Role of the History Teacher

Grever and Tina, (2017, p. 289) reported that “political elites, opinion leaders, historians, education experts fight about which historical topics are relevant and worthy to be presented in textbooks, and in what ways”. Then after the selection of the contents and delivering the selected contents in classrooms is not a simple undertaking because by its very nature, teaching history is a complex and multi-dimensional task. Besides, what teachers do when they are teaching contending narratives is still one of the gray areas in research. Having this in mind, first, respondents were asked one critical question to examine what teachers can do when there are contested narratives on the same historical event while teaching in secondary schools. Is there a contested historical narrative in Ethiopian history? They replied that: *Yes, there are contested historical narratives in Ethiopia. For example, the formation of modern Ethiopia is one of the contested issues. Some blessed the state formation of Menelik II, and others considered Menelik-II’s state formation as colonization (R1 & R2, R6).* Other respondent replied that: *Yes, because some historians considered history narrowly and they focused on counter narratives (R3, R7, R8, and R9).* Respondent from MoE believed that *Ethiopia has a contested history. Yet, the MoE did not identify contested topics.* Other respondent replied that: *history is a contested subject because it emphasized the political and military history, and biased narratives. Anomaly and over politicization are the causes of controversy (R5).* These explanations show that there are contested historical narratives in Ethiopia. However, the MoE did not recognize and include contested narratives in the textbook.

Besides, publications related to Ethiopian history convey contested terms such as ‘assimilation’, ‘Amharanisation’ ‘colonization’ and ‘restoration’ & ‘Oromization’, and respondents were asked about this discourse to further understand their perspectives. Respondents replied that: *‘Assimilation’, ‘Amharanization’ or ‘Oromization’ are politically motivated historical discourses (R1, R2, R3, and R6)* which is a response consistent with the arguments of Levine (1974), Marcus (1994), Crummey (2001), Vaughan, (2003) that in Ethiopia internal-colonialism was politically charged propaganda. Besides, one of the respondents replied in this

regard that: *Menelik-II's territorial expansion was not colonization because it was to consolidate power and to incorporate territories which was similar to the American civil war* (R6). With regard to the colonization and restoration discourse, majority of interview participants argued that: colonization and restoration narratives are the two extreme and politicized discourses used to mobilize the people for political purpose (R1, R2, R3, R6, R7, R8, and R9). Still, others felt that: *“Menelik-II's expansion does not fulfil the criteria of colonization”* (R3, R6). Contrary to the dominant response, one of the respondents who is a prominent professor with an Oromo background replied that: *Menelik-II's expansion was a colonization process because it fulfils the criteria of colonialism, but it was internally consolidated colonization* (R5). However, contrary to this response, in the history literature there is only exogenous based domination (colonialism) (Lorenzo, 2011) than internally consolidated colonization. All the aforementioned responses and explanations depicted that in Ethiopia some historical topics are contested due to political and ethnic factors. In addition, historical narratives have political repercussions and it can be considered as political subject. Besides, some politicians and historians framed and used contested terms to mobilize people for political purposes. This act may affect the teaching practices in secondary schools. Supporting this assertion, Bahru (2000) argued that political regimes considerably influenced Ethiopian historiography.

Hence, respondents were asked about what they can do while teaching the stated contested narratives of the same past. They replied that: *I always try to be independent while teaching contested issues through allowing students to have multiple views on contested issues* (R1, R2). Other respondents replied that: I didn't face any challenge in this regard because the topics included in the textbook are not contested (R3, R6). Other respondents also reflected that: *I am trying to be careful, sensitive, and allow students to reflect their own opinions while teaching some contested topics* (R8, R9). As exit scheme, one of the respondents advised that: *I suggest that teachers should understand the reality, recognize divers' perspectives, and see diversity within unity not only unity in diversity, use sources while they are writing and teaching to reduce distortion and being biased* (R5). Based on the responses forwarded one can conclude that secondary school teachers have tried to be independent from biased narration in teaching history; they have tried to be careful, sensitive, and understand the reality. They also recognize diverse perspectives, use sources, and reduce distortion and bias while they teach contested topics. Despite the stated facts, two respondents reported that Ethiopian secondary school history textbooks did not include contested topics and narratives, and mostly focus on the dominant narratives and discourses.

### **The Major Complexities in Teaching History**

In this study, respondents were asked about the major complexities while teaching history in secondary schools. They reported that: *content overload is the major problem because it is difficult to cover the topic within the given period of time* (R1, R2, R3, R6, R8, and R9). From this finding one can conclude that there is an issue of content overload or too much content in the history curriculum. Others replied that: *over politicization of history complicates the teaching of ethnically sensitive topics* (R6, R8, and R9). Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand the

discipline of history in a comprehensive manner than politicizing it, and recognize its complexity to make the learning and teaching of history more engaging and meaningful for students and educators. Other also reported that: low government attention towards history as a subject is a major problem (R1, R2, and R3). In addition, others responded that: *the textbook gives too much emphasis on the political and military history of the country than social and economic history* (R5 and R7). They also replied that: *there is lack of consensus and understanding among historians and politicians on some historical topics* (R5 and R7). Hence, instead of naturalizing contested topics it is advisable to consider transnational historiographical approach. Besides, they reflected that: *teacher domination in the classroom, low utility of the subject in the market, and utilization of conservative teaching approach are the major problems* (R5 and R7). Based on this report, one can understand that history education is under serious complications. Hence, it is useful to provide training to history teachers on the methodology and epistemology of history teaching and learning.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on the results and discussion of the study, one can conclude that in Ethiopia historical understanding, interpretation, consciousness, thinking and narration are framed by political factors. In Ethiopia, politicians used history as a mobilizing tool. Based on the evidence, one can conclude that the phrases such as ‘*Assimilation*’, ‘*Amharanisation*’ ‘*Colonization*’ and ‘*Restoration*’ & ‘*Oromization*’ are mostly political discourses. However, these discourses are influencing the teaching and learning process of history as a subject. In Ethiopian secondary schools, history teachers employed lecture and group discussion as dominant methods of teaching despite the fact that inquiry methods and multi-perspective approaches are often suggested in the history literature. Hence, one can conclude that the prescribed student textbook activities and methods focused on lower order thinking skills rather than developing higher order thinking skills. Therefore, the history teacher should move beyond the traditional teaching model and allow for more interactive, innovative, and thought-provoking methods of teaching. In addition, students should be given opportunities to engage in critical discussions. They should also be provided with chances of visiting historical sites and then reporting what they have seen in the classroom.

In addition, over politicization of the subject, contention on the process of state formation, low government attention towards the subject matter, and content overload are some of the factors that complicate history education. These problems require instant and mutual intervention by key stakeholders including policy makers, teachers, and historians in order to reconstruct the textbook and the scholarship of the discipline. Besides, it is essential to enhance secondary school teachers understanding about the nature of contested historical narratives, multiple versions of history, and the pedagogy it requires in order to increase students’ capacity to view past events from different perspectives.

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