

# Curriculum Development in Ethiopia vis-à-vis Patrick Slattery's Postmodern Curriculum Principles: A Reflection

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## Abstract

This article revisits curriculum development in the Ethiopian context vis-à-vis Patrick Slattery's postmodern views of curriculum development principles (rejection of metanarratives, the artificial bifurcations, the interconnectedness of individual experiences in a global context, the assertion and validation of everyone's voice in the school community and understanding of the complexity of metaphysics) using critical review and discursive analysis. For this purpose, the different time education initiatives, education policies, education sector development programs, and general education curriculum development frameworks were reviewed. The findings unveil that behavioristic, linear and objective-oriented, ideological or hegemonic, competitive, and patriarchal features shadowed curriculum development in Ethiopia. The Cartesian dualism of Western and Tylerian rationale metanarrative; bifurcation of students in ability groups and learning outcomes; the abandonment of different voices (mainly educated professionals) in curriculum development; the rejection of important values, religious and cultural thoughts in the pretext of secular education; and the detachment of indigenous and value education from Ethiopian schooling stipulate postmodern perspective in developing curriculum. Despite the rhetorical representation of postmodern viewpoints in educational policy, the current practical operation is also scant. Hence, the article implies some useful lessons to deconstruct and construct critical issues while developing curricula in the Ethiopian education system.

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## Introduction

The education system in Ethiopia has undergone many conflicting views and ideologies. Curriculum development has covered a large landscape in the introduction of modern education in Ethiopia despite imported and donor-driven curriculum (Tekeste, 2006), inadequate research in the area (Woube, 2014), and dominantly influenced by western values and curriculum (Tekeste, 2006). The traditional approach which is based on behaviorism (positivism) theory

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assumes measuring and controlling of behavior, dominates curriculum development (how the curriculum is planned, implemented, and evaluated) and curriculum development calls for alternative approaches and modes to address the curriculum development issues. Hence, some curricularists argue that being systematic doesn't impede flexibility and that their models consider multiple variables and permit choices. They also argued that as everything is relational or contextual, there are no universal principles to be applied to all curriculum development processes. However, despite reservations on critique on limitations of the model, many wrote about the domination of the objective model of curriculum development in Ethiopia since 1974 (Feleke, 1990; Woube, 2014). There were also curriculum scholars and historians who challenged the relevance of curriculum in Ethiopia (Seyoum, 1996; Tekeste, 1996, 2006). Policy documents at different times (e.g., MoE, 1994, 2002, 2018, 2023) also unveiled the problems of education in terms of addressing access, equity, relevance, and quality.

The official discourses and narratives in Ethiopian education over the last several decades have justified various reforms taken in widening of access, ensuring social justice, and improving the quality of education (Tesfaye, 2014). Despite different reform initiatives such as the Education Sector Review (ESR), Evaluative Research of the General Education System of Ethiopia (ERGESE), and Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO), there is still a problem with the relevance and quality of curriculum development processes.

## Overview of Curriculum Development in Ethiopia

Historically, education in Ethiopia has been pigeonholed into '*traditional*' and '*modern*' rhetoric with many ups and downs in different ideological, philosophical, historical, and political orientations. In this vein, curriculum development and research experiences in Ethiopia were divided into two – curriculum development in the pre-modern education era (4th century A. D – 1908) and curriculum development in the modern education era (1908–to date) (Woube, 2014). Similarly, there has been an interest in the historical development of education and curriculum development in Ethiopia (Akalewold, 2005; Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012; Lemma, 2015; Messay, 2006; Seyoum 1996; Solomon, 2019; Solomon & Alemayehu, 2017; Tebeje, 2018; Tekeste, 1996).

Although it is very difficult to trace when indigenous education in Ethiopia started, the pre-modern era was coined with the introduction of the Church education system in the 4<sup>th</sup> century followed by Quranic education systems in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that extends up to the introduction of western-oriented modern education in 1908. On the other hand, the curriculum development and research in the modern education era in Ethiopia were divided into five periods: The Pre-Italian occupation period (French orientation of education period) (1908–1936), the Italian occupation period (1936–1941), the post-Italian occupation period (British and American orientation of education periods) (1941–1974), the Socialist oriented education period (1974–1991), and the post-1991 period (1991–to date). In those periods, Woube (2014) noticed that the introduction of modern education was from the vacuum by importing textbooks, other curricular materials, and medium of instruction from abroad. Besides, it was introduced without the research evidence in curriculum development and the participation of experts of indigenous knowledge, rather there

was high involvement of foreigners in curricular decisions, selection of instructional languages, and cultural considerations serving political interest (Alemayehu & Lasser, 2012).

In those modern education periods, despite the different important reform initiatives, there has been lack of relevance in the curriculum. For instance, the ESR was inspired by Ethiopianization in terms of philosophy, aims, Ethiopian culture, language, and curriculum. But, the ESR was introduced in 1971 for curriculum and research issues. Despite no agreed upon decision of applying a single curriculum development model, the objective model has been used in the planning and development of education since 1974 (Feleke, 1990). Still, this model is also the most widely applied model in Ethiopia (Tadesse, 2020).

ERGESE was another educational reform initiative in 1983 established to investigate the quality of primary and secondary schooling in Ethiopia and to recommend area of improvement in curriculum development. However, ERGESE was also technical in approach and the main findings emphasize factual knowledge and the domination of cognitive objective formation, weak lesson planning, domination of lecturing, and question and answering (MoE, 1986).

Later on, after the downfallen of the Socialist government, the new Education and Training Policy was formulated in 1994 based on the political ideology of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary and Democratic Front (EPRDF) to provide "secular education" through a radical multilingual curriculum (MoE, 1994). Following this policy formulation, various reform initiatives such as Education Sector Development Programs (ESDPs) (I-V) and Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO) (MoE, 2003) were introduced to address the major problems of the sector. TESO focuses on the selection, pre-service and in-service trainings, teacher education institutions and teacher educators. It also concentrates on school-based and student-centered learning, practice-oriented training, and self-preparedness for the teaching profession (MoE, 2003). However, the promise and assumptions of TESO were also challenged by considering the existing realities in Ethiopian schools on effective teacher education programs and educational reform (Dawit, 2008). As a result, the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) was introduced in 2009 (MoE, 2009b). Currently, also the New Education Policy (MoE, 2023) and ESDP VI (MoE, 2021) are ratified with the intention to improve the weaknesses of the previous education policy based on the recommendations of the Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap (2018-30) (MoE, 2018).

Despite all these initiatives and reform agenda, the Ethiopian education system is still suffering from a lack of quality and relevance which may result from the linkage of modern and indigenous education. Eleni (cited in Woube, 2014) pointed out that the chronic negligence of indigenous education has resulted in Africa's formal educational policies being totally dependent on indiscriminately imported educational ideas and thoughts. Besides, curriculum development in Ethiopia is more of an ideological curriculum and not addressing Ethiopian realities (Mohammed, 2012) and experiencing problems of the primary curriculum localization or adaptation because of the diversity of the people (Lemma, 2015).

Very recently, an educational reform initiative in the Ethiopian education development roadmap (2018-30) suggests a related issue is introducing an 'inconclusive' curriculum or a curriculum with alternative perspectives on issues. A good example for this is shaping the history

curriculum in such a way that there can be multiple interpretations by people from diverse backgrounds (MoE, 2018). The important question is ‘what possible curriculum model/s help to have alternatives in understating curriculum development in Ethiopia?’ This article review is triggered to answer this question specifically through: (1) reviewing the curriculum development of Ethiopia vis-a’-vis Slattery’s postmodern thoughts using his five principles and (2) reflecting on the existing local literature and policy documents using discursive analysis. For this purpose, the different time education initiatives (ESR, ERGESE, TESO, PGDT); education policies (both the 1994 and the new education policy, 2023); the different education sector development programs (ESDP I-VI), general education curriculum development frameworks, and review of related literature of the education and curriculum development of Ethiopia were reviewed.

### **A Glimpse of Patrick Slattery’s Curriculum Development Principles**

Unlike modernists, postmodern curriculum theorists focus on education’s larger ideological issues and they view curriculum development as an open system – a journey, rather than a destination to deconstruct interactions of the curriculum with political, economic, social, moral and artistic forces. Patrick Slattery is one of the postmodern curriculum theorists who authored a book entitled “*Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*” in 2006 under the reconceptualization theory to deconstruct Tylerian tradition and move from positivism to constructivist qualitative autobiography. Slattery’s postmodern view of curriculum development assumes a move from traditionalists, perennialists, and essentialists to pragmatists, critical theorists, feminists, deconstructionists, phenomenologists, multiculturalists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists. For Slattery, the curriculum needs to combine pre-modern, modern, and postmodern issues for balanced ecological global sustainability without missing individual perspectives. He also views curriculum as a historical text to be studied using autobiography through consideration of curriculum as currere in reconceptualization and as a theological text that advocates contextual spirituality.

Commonly, in his book, Slattery (2006) organized and discussed postmodernism using five guiding principles: (1) the rejection of metanarratives, (2) the artificial bifurcations, (3) interconnectedness of individual experiences, (4) the affirmation and validation of everyone’s voice, and (5) understanding of the complexity of metaphysics in the postmodern era.

### ***Metanarratives of certainty versus deconstructed “truths”***

Postmodern curriculum thinkers consider aesthetical context sensibilities of the political, economic, social, and theological issues in curriculum development. But, they refute the assumption about holding the existence of single truth in curriculum theory and development; question the assertion of singularity or metanarrative; elucidate legitimating meaning, experiences and values; and illuminate internal contradiction which leads to bias in racial, ethnic, identity, gender and master narratives such as programmed learning, standardized curriculum, cultural literacy, disembodied learning and disconnected objective in a race, gender and ethnicity (Slattery, 2006). In any curriculum development process, Slattery advocates local, emerging, contextual,

multidimensional, proleptic, contingent, evolving, and autobiographical history to be included. Thus, the deification of the validity of the knowledge based on a unified, singular, and master narrative of history is questioned in favor of eclectic, innovative, revisionist, ironic, and subjective knowledge as in historical interpretation (Slattery, 2006).

Slattery also rejects the positivist-based singularity of method in research and in curriculum development and advocates phenomenological, theological, autobiographical, hermeneutical, and aesthetical inquiry to inspire the understanding of phenomenological experience for individual growth and critical reflection. In place of archaic Tylerian rationale, Slattery also recommends Pinar's four stages of autobiographical reflection: regressive (understanding the past), progressive (understanding the future), analytical (biographic present), and syncretical (putting the past, present, and future in the complexity) under the tradition of reconceptualization of curriculum as 'currere'.

### ***The artificial bifurcations as an obstructor of vision***

Slattery coins 'bifurcation' to show the division of humans based on achievement, gender, race, and treatment accordingly in a competitive rather than cooperative sense. Rather than creating artificial 'bifurcations' of the world into "us" and "them", and students into upper and lower groups based on race, learning styles, intelligence, social class, gender, sexual orientation, or religion, since this dichotomy cripple cooperation, Slattery advocates the reintegration of apparent opposites into a creative tension of complementary and multifaceted dimensions of the whole. He also warns of the danger of viewing the world as a multiplicity of antagonistic and dangerous dualisms and opposites that see domination, destruction, and endless dialectic as the only solution in curricula and advocates a shift from the metanarrative of theology as curriculum text to the Cartesian dualism of curriculum to integrated or eclectic of curriculum as theological text. He further suggested that these curriculum materials are inclusive and promote an active learning process using phenomenological experience and eschatological implications.

### ***The interconnectedness of individual experiences in a global context***

Slattery's third dimension is the interconnectedness of all experiences and the importance of the autobiographical perspective against the backdrop of interdependence and ecological sustainability to ameliorate ecological crises including the destruction of the environment and its natural beauty using the dual role of informative and transformative pedagogy. He reflects on how the hegemonic dominance of certain cultural activities undermines personal and global survival. He considers the deconstruction of hegemonic texts and contends that textual representation needs to affirm the addition of an eclectic array of alternatives in schools and classrooms to overcome the negative impact of hegemony. Thus, Slattery evokes a multiplicity of interpretations and practices in religion, politics, and history; a multiplicity of complex emotions; and postmodern holistic philosophy. Hence, Slattery believes, curriculum as public discourses, present seeking transformation rather than transmitting culture, assimilating culture, and developing career through hermeneutical understanding which focuses on the community of interpreters and teachers

working together in mutually corrective and mutually collaborative efforts. Slattery also noted that the aesthetic vision and transformative pedagogy should be promoted to facilitate the active participation of both teachers and students through cooperation, holistic view, and multilayered interdisciplinary curriculum engagement in the classroom (Slattery, 2006).

### ***The affirmation and validation of every voice in the school community***

Curriculum development in the postmodern era needs to generate opportunities for students to deal with social and educational difficulties on a global basis without separating knowers from their context of community. For this, Slattery proposes community empowerment models to affirm and validate everyone's voice in the school community and promote a meaningful experience. He argues the importance of open discussion on ethnic inequality, issues of segregation, integration, and affirmative action in schools as an integral part of the postmodern curriculum and suggests curriculum development to respect and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual person, text, event, culture, and educative moment. Slattery also challenges curriculum development that exploits socialization, regulation, intimidation, and indoctrination by the name of the separation of religion and government in school. He notes that education should be contextualized, should not detach students' space and time, and must incorporate different perspectives by challenging prejudice of culture, history, politics, and power.

### ***Understanding of the complexity of metaphysics - chaos and uncertainty***

The last principle of Slattery's curriculum reconceptualization in the postmodern era is the complexity of metaphysics/chaos to describe curriculum as layers of the meaning entity. Slattery (2006) noted that chaos theory is a move from Newtonian's notion of time (time as clockwork) to Einstein's space-time notion (complex, unpredictable, dynamic, and unexpected). This theory provides aesthetical, political, racial, cultural, theological, and ecological sustainability and interdependence exists physically, psychologically, and spiritually in the complexity of metaphysics. He shows the chaotic and complex nature of postmodern curriculum using *kaleidoscope* (eclectic, changing image patterns in context) rather than *telescopic* (condensing) and *microscopic* (enlarging) which results in the demoralization of educators, disenfranchisement of students, and dissatisfaction of stakeholders as in Taylor's scientific management systems. Accordingly, Slattery suggested a paradigm shift from the linear and objective time management models to a globally interdependent ecological perspective or postmodern holistic philosophy for the emergence of optimal learning environments, just relationships, and ecological sustainability—intrinsic coherence about the body, the spirit, and the cosmos. He underscores the relevance of hermeneutic interpretations through poem experience, literature, the canonic novels, and poems that provide an appropriate and engaging curriculum for students to deconstruct the sedimented preceptors that prevent appreciation of the great artist, musician, athlete, filmmaker, scholar, dancer, or scientist using a hermeneutic circle.

Based on the five guiding principles of Slattery (not the whole book), this article is intended to review the Ethiopian education and curriculum development experiences due to three important reasons: (1) many authors (e.g., Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; Tesfaye, 2014; Tadesse, 2020) and policy documents (e.g., MoE, 2018, 2021, 2023) claimed that the education system in general and the curriculum development of Ethiopian education in particular do not focus on context-based indigenous knowledge, critical thinking, and problem solving, so it is important to have sound theoretical foundation to fill the gaps; (2) the article is also intended to open room for searching alternative approaches of curriculum development in the context of indigenous and context-based knowledge in Ethiopia; and (3) Lastly, Slattery's strong position to involve chief postmodern and constructivist thoughts such as phenomenology, autobiography, aesthetics, theology, history, environmental ecology, and hermeneutics in one's education system and curriculum development process attracted our interest.

### **Reflections on the Ethiopian Curriculum Development Process vis-à-vis Slattery's Postmodern Curriculum Thoughts**

The Ethiopian education system in general and curriculum development in particular have gone through different hurdles with a number of change initiatives and improvements. Despite signs of progress in the curricular development practice of Ethiopia from time to time, still it has its limitations in terms of relevance, quality, equity, contextualization, the inclusion of indigenous knowledge, and the like. As mentioned earlier, in order to explore major breaches, curriculum development reviews were made vis-a'-vis the ensuing five postmodern curriculum development principles of Slattery using discursive analysis.

#### **Metanarratives of Certainty versus Deconstructed "Truths"**

The presence of metanarrative in curriculum development in Ethiopia is complex and debatable across historians, educators, and activists. For instance, some scholars noted colonizing Ethiopians psychologically (Messay, 2006; Tekeste, 1996); the use of English as a medium of instruction as a sign of collapse (Tekeste, 2006); and internal colony in Ethiopia through its policy documents in terms of equity and access (Desalegn, 2013).

Other scholars also believed that one of the most noticeable areas of metanarrative is the existence of modern education based on western culture over long native/indigenous knowledge (in terms of the aim of education, textbook writing, way of delivery, etc.) by disregarding all existing cultural, religious and traditional schoolings (Maimire, 2006; Messay, 2006; Mohammed, 2012; Tebeje, 2018; Tekeste, 2006); considering traditional education as backward among elitists (Mesay, 2006); promoting hatred to the tradition and history of Ethiopia (Tekeste, 1996); and opening room for neo-colonialization albeit psychologically through imported curriculum, not physically (Mesay, 2006; Seoyum, 1996; Tekeste, 2006). This modern education appears ideologically affiliated, decontextualized, and practically destructive (Maimire, 2010; Mohammed, 2012). To this end, Maimire (2010) commented on Africa as an inglorious and cumbersome conquest and the manifestation of marginalizing thinking, copyism, and dictatorial

methods through elitism which spreads western education as sound, which is no exception to Ethiopia.

The move from elitism (emperor's) education to massification (socialist government) and pluralists (EPRDF) (ethnic decentralization and secularization) (Bezabih, 2019) brought ideological intrusion that repressive ambitions and neglect of indigenous legends rather than promoting them as philosophical (Mohammed, 2012). As a result, many scholars challenge the utilization of western policies in the Ethiopian schooling system (Tekeste, 1996; Mesay, in Mohammed, 2012); trying to overcome a one-size-fits-all model due to external imposition and centralization (Tadesse, 2020); giving distinct room for diversity dimensions such as ethnicity, language, and gender in education policy (Tariku & Gara, 2016); and challenging a 'rational-structural paradigm' in higher education curriculum reform (Tadesse & Melese, 2016). In earlier times, there were different manifestations such as considering curriculum as the culture of certain dominant groups (Mehari, 2011; Seyoum, 1996) and reflecting the political interest of the state in making citizens loyal to the king (Bezabih, 2019). This calls for "unhistorical consciousness of youth to the historical consciousness of adults..." (Maimire, 2010). Moreover, the issue of the use of mother-tongue language, addressing multicultural education, and others call for demand to transform. As a departure from Eurocentric education orientations (or at least as an alternative), Maimire (2010) suggested 'Tezeta' (*nostalgia*) as a philosophy of education. Considering three dimensions of time - past, present, and future towards a desire for Utopia, Mohammed (2012) extends the role of *qal-kidan* (literally means covenant) to reinterpret and balance economic development and restore the spiritual potential for respect and care for nature.

Although the contribution of Amharic to bring national unity as a means of communication for the multiethnic and multilingual community is highly valued, the past rhetoric of Amharic over other languages (Tebeje, 2018) and English over Ethiopian languages as medium of instruction (Tekeste, 2006) demands deconstruction. Thus, it seems true that the use of mother-tongue language is pedagogically sound for learners if it is not served as a point of departure politically and ideologically. We also believe that while respecting diversity, it is better to strengthen our unity through the promotion of bilingual education for unity by diversity rather than diversity by unity for mutual coexistence among citizens.

Metanarrative also presents content selection, objective formation, and method organization. In this regard, Meskerem (2017) argued that curriculum in primary education is mechanical, reductive, and utilitarian unlike holistic endeavors to culturally uplift and humanize individuals. She added the curriculum deemphasizes utopian curricula through fragmented contents by focusing on basic literacy, numeracy, mathematics, and science to realize industrialization and infrastructural expansion in the expense of social studies, music, painting, handicrafts, physical education and home-economics, and merging subjects as 'aesthetic education.

Findings also revealed that curriculum development in Ethiopia is dominantly influenced by positivist thoughts. Providing little emphasis on qualitative inquiry and hermeneutical and phenomenological research, most of the research is quantitative or mixed design, not purely qualitative (Mulugeta, personal communication, August 17, 2022). Pedagogy is another area of



metanarrative indicator in which students are expected to work in an “educational army” after grouping in three ability groups at all levels in Ethiopia regardless of context factors (MoE, 2018) and realizing diverse needs and interests of students (Tadesse, 2020; Tadesse & Sintayehu, 2022). In terms of subject discipline, history is becoming a hot area of debate in metanarrative which calls for the autobiographical presentation of different voices through phenomenological and hermeneutical analysis. Even though attempts are made to include in the current newly designed curriculum (MoE, 2021, 2023), theological texts, art, sculptor and music are not open for discourse in the curriculum due to the secular feature of the policy (MoE, 1994) and the more emphasis for science education than art education (MoE, 2015) despite the tendency to balance them (MoE, 2018, 2023). Still, the curriculum is highly content-based and theory-driven which does not allow students to explore their environment and practically visit and question the establishment of nearby castles, historical settings, rock-hewn churches and monasteries, mosques, and cultural places.

Although there are some attempts made, still the enacted education system does not significantly reflect our identity and culture and link with our indigenous knowledge and local contexts rather destructs our identities and culture; ridicules the introduction of indigenous knowledge, and instills mostly western thoughts. Through the passage of our educational journey, both as a student, teacher, and parent, our rhetoric largely places western civilization through Tylerian tradition. The biggest problem here is, we have the Ethiopian problem but we wish the solution to be brought from the West through the copied western curriculum or education system. Thus, it is time to make education Ethiopianized as the old adage says, “*yehagerun serdo be hageru bere.*” Of course, this argument of inward-looking is not disregarding the integration of indigenous knowledge with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

### **The Cartesian Dualism or Bifurcations in the Ethiopian Context**

Curriculum development issues are surrounded by paradoxes in Ethiopian education such as the utilization of competitiveness over cooperativeness, competence-based approaches over the active learning method, problem-solving behavior over minimum learning competence, and differentiated instruction over cooperative learning. Modern education was introduced as a tool of competition in light of Cartesian dualism in the Ethiopian education system by overlooking cultural capital and assets. The narrative and rhetoric of modern education go with bifurcations such as “civilized versus primitive”, “the superior race versus the inferior one”, “light versus darkness”, “awakening versus sleepiness” and “traditional versus modern” (Messay, 2006). In terms of dualism, Meskerem (2017) also put dualisms in terms of private versus public, individual pursuit versus public good, rich versus poor, modern versus traditional, technology versus nature (subsistence agriculture), foreign versus local, urban versus rural and individual versus communal as a manifestation of the renaissance of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Ethiopia. Similarly, in Ethiopian schooling, there is a tradition to divide children into upper and lower groups based on minimum learning competence, gifted and remedial, academic and non-academic, or compliant and behaviorally disordered students. Teachers alike are required to be competent to strive and thrive in a competence-based curriculum (MoE, 2018). Departments and subjects are also bifurcated,

with emphasis on science at the expense of art and aesthetics education (Meskerem, 2017; MoE, 2018) which does not consider the Ethiopian situation.

Similarly, history is another area of bifurcation in curriculum development in Ethiopia, and the area of departure among elites largely depended upon recognizing heroes and heroines of the past and bifurcating the present from the past rather than seeking the interconnection. History in Ethiopia is also presented by considering time as linear, not as a proleptic or cyclical process (the convergence of the past, the present, and future in the synthetical moment, reuniting body, psyche, and spirit), collection of past memory rather than lived experiences (Slattery, 2006). Likewise, Meskerem (2017) considered the division of past from the present and future in the history of Ethiopia as distortive, corruptive, and destructive, dormant and addresses the negative impact of the current political narrative which considers all religious and cultural achievements of the past as results of expansionism, chauvinism or fear. Besides, she promoted students' fluid understanding of the interconnection between the personal and the political, the biological and the cultural rather than reductionist explanations to social and natural phenomena via close-ended official rhetoric texts. In our country, history was viewed only from the political angle, but the social history, economic history, cultural history, water history, etc. was missing.

Also, history is bifurcated ideologically as the Christian history and the Islam history as well as the history of the 'north' and the history of the 'south.' As a result of such bifurcations in ideology and politics, currently, in a country having more than 3000 years of rich history, Ethiopian history is not given as a subject in secondary schools and higher education. Therefore, such misconceptions about the history and culture of Ethiopia need to be challenged through a holistic and integrated model rather than imported models of curricular and pedagogic practices as a pluralist democratic federal state (Tebeje, 2018). In this regard, of course, the corrective measures taken currently by the Ministry of Education's new curriculum development process to assuage this problem are cherished.

Similarly, politics and religion are bifurcated from education by the title of "securer education" despite the long historical connection of the people to different religions. Slattery also proposes that in this postmodern era, the study of politics needs to take an important position in curriculum studies. In the name of "secular education", the Ethiopian education system has long been divorced from addressing or studying the diverse contributions of politics, religion, and cultural and moral values, especially in the Socialist period and EPRDF era. Wittingly and unwittingly, politics and religion continue to affect positively and negatively our education and overall lives. Curriculum development should, therefore, be open for different political perspectives – minority or majority and for religious moral values. Hence, curriculum developers should deconstruct the bifurcation of politics and religion in the Ethiopian education system and stipulate the democratization of the curriculum and covering of the cultivation of democratic culture, tolerance, peaceful resolution of differences through dialogue, and a sense of responsibility towards one's own society on the content.

In terms of objective formulation, learning outcomes are bifurcated into three domains (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor) with the domination of cognitive (Solomon & Aschale, 2019) and from preschool to higher education being dominated by the Tylerian rationale

(Woube, 2014). This Tylerian rationale focuses only on the planned curriculum, but what students learn in school extends beyond the planned curriculum. The linear and planned curriculum translates the school's goals into the subjects that students are expected to learn, the measured objectives of the courses and lessons (often stated in the teachers' unit plans and lesson plans), and the subject's assigned readings. In this regard, student teachers in teacher education colleges express their discontent towards the linearity, mechanical, and rigidity of Tylerian tradition of objectives as stated '*you may feel that life in the college is comfortable for me but my heart is feeble by objective and content*'. However, it is important to challenge a message from an unplanned (informal) and hidden curriculum.

On the other hand, in Ethiopia, despite the promotion of cooperative teaching (*education development army*) rhetorically (MoE, 2018), teaching is dominantly telling and learning is receiving and content and methods are separated not holistic and integrated activities (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; Tadesse, 2020; Tadesse & Sintayehu, 2022). This education development army also called *one-to-five group arrangement* in schools has mainly served political purposes rather than the academic arena.

In sum, curriculum development scholars deconstruct traditional [indigenous] education (the value of cultural and religious assets including writing, art, music, poetic forms, and numeration system) should be given spaces; helping students to be aware of beliefs and social values of the society (Solomon, 2019); enhancing religious equality, the culture of trust and respect, and positive relations among students (MoE, in Abebaw, 2014); equipping citizens with the wisdom of goodness, discipline, order, tolerance, patriotism, industriousness, and self-control in moral and citizenship education despite the existing gaps and moving towards art education (soft/life skills subjects such as aesthetics, art, music, sport, and vocational skills) in policy initiative (MoE, 2018; 2021). Moreover, rather than bifurcating fields such as natural science or engineering dominating social science (60:40), it is better to take into account the country's contexts, the market, and job opportunities without missing the ecological sustainability of humans and nature.

### **The Interconnectedness of Individual Experiences in a Global Context**

Despite current attempts to make curriculum development eclectic in Ethiopia, it is still noticed as hierarchical, authoritarian, patriarchal, and hegemonic that encompasses educational outcomes outside processes and contexts, and perspectives of people. In the Ethiopian context, it has long been the norm that educational and curricular decisions are being made by the bureaucratic authorities and political leaders at the top (although education is a political activity when different voices are to be heard and presented!). Despite the student-centered at the heart of policy statements and the eclectic nature of curriculum development, the top-down approach still dominates the system (Seyoum, 1996; Akalewold, 2005; MoE, 2018) which calls for practical decentralization and active participation of the necessary stakeholders (MoE, 2018, 2023). In Ethiopia, still the curriculum framework, policy directives, initiatives, implementation strategies, and guidelines are ordered from the top, the Ministry of Education.

Curriculum development in the postmodern era by curriculum developers, as a community of learners, could be viewed as a lifelong journey of learning that may have relevance in Ethiopia as a hermeneutic circle. As one of the researchers of this paper is among the coordinators of the current national curriculum development in Ethiopia, his lived experience witnessed the incorporation of school administrators, parents, and students' voices and the involvement of teachers (actual implementers of the curriculum) are very low although to some extent university subject teachers and curriculum experts are involved in the development of curriculum. So, public discourses through relevant educational stakeholders (teachers, school principals, parents, and students) should be promoted in curriculum development by acknowledging mutually corrective and collaborative rather than being dictated and imposed by the bureaucratic authorities.

The authors also investigated that the influence of the Westerners is still high in curriculum development in Ethiopia either as consultants, technical advisors, donors, or evaluators. Further, they are attempting to indoctrinate their ideology, culture, and language in the curriculum of Ethiopia. Although it has its own merits, the employment of English as a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary education is a sign of indoctrination and educational crisis in Ethiopia (Tekeste, 2006) and an obstacle to promoting indigenous languages. In Ethiopia, there is a rich, yet untapped indigenous knowledge system, which is neglected by modern education with all its hegemonic features based on postmodern discourse. Accordingly, the global hegemonic forces and our inability to resist those forces have ended in the tragedy of ignoring our rich and old indigenous knowledge system. As a result, we have been indoctrinated for a long time to believe our native and indigenous education system is '*traditional*' and the Western is '*modern*.' Some even consider indigenous knowledge as traditional, outdated, and harmful. Nonetheless, there are several diseases that cannot be treated by modern health services but are treated only by traditional healers. There is very rich agricultural indigenous knowledge, which was neglected by agriculture extension services, inherited from long threshold ancient civilization. There are also ancient buildings and sculpture developments that are not properly favored and treated currently. Accordingly, the current education system needs to address such valuable indigenous resources, link them with the real life of learners, and upgrade them through the application of different technologies.

Curriculum development in the postmodern era also promotes the interconnectedness of all experiences and the importance of the interdependence of ecological sustainability to ameliorate ecological crises (Slattery, 2006). In Ethiopia too, Mulugeta et al. (2020) examined the representation of "nature" and the "environment" and students' perspectives in the official curriculum (textbooks). They found that an anthropocentric view coupled with nature's position could be obtained as an alienated, interdependent and integral part of the natural world by incorporating different outdoor experiences about local, national and global environmental issues.

Curriculum development in the postmodern era also demands transformative pedagogy that promotes cooperation than competition of stakeholders, although sometimes merit-based competition is invigorated. However, in the Ethiopian context, schools are unnecessarily being compared to other schools; the same is true for localities, districts, zones, and regions. This is happening despite the fact that the resource conditions of the different elements are unrelated! The

same is true for universities. Without the significant changes in human and financial resources, currently, Ethiopian universities are compared and stratified as research universities, comprehensive universities, and applied universities (MoE, 2018). People make interconnections in their poems, songs, history, and worshipping (people around nature such as the river (Blue Nile) and public gatherings in festivals such as Epiphany, *Ashendiye*, *Erecha* and etc. have aesthetical and ecological connections in indigenous education as a prerequisite and assuming the organic nature of Ethiopia (Solomon & Sintayehu, 2020). However, the neoliberal construct of competition should be abandoned and it is better if cooperation is promoted for the mutual ecological sustainability of primary, secondary, and tertiary education if not the dwindling signs of cooperation might disappear!

### **The Affirmation and Validation of Everyone's Voices in the School Community**

One of the missing links of curriculum development in Ethiopia is less engagement of the public which makes different voices peripheral. Policy initiatives and formation are developed behind the curtain, not unveiled. Curriculum development in particular and policy formation in general appears central (Seyoum, 1996; MoE, 2018). Ethiopia is a pluralistic nation with diverse political, historical, ethnic, and linguistic groups which calls forth a postmodern perspective of curriculum understanding including community empowerment models rather than the dominant hierarchical power position to affirm and validate everyone's voice in the school community and promote meaningfully. In this regard, gender is one of the areas of educational debate in Ethiopia and policy empowers females to fill the historical gap at different levels despite not being well articulated (MoE, 1994, 2010, 2015, 2021, 2023). Also, the bifurcation of the center (hegemonic) position from the periphery (marginal position) manifests itself in the language of instruction and in the distribution of educational institutions in ethnic lines (Tebeje, 2018). As a result, dualism in gender and language is becoming a source of conflict in universities and across the nation. An excerpt from Haile Selassie I's speech at the League of Nations (and later sung by the famous Bob Marley) reads: "...until the philosophy which holds one race superior, and another inferior, is finally and permanently discredited and abandoned, everywhere is war...." We believe it is animals' nature to dominate one over the other; a bigger and stronger animal kicks a weaker one of the same species or another for the purpose of getting food, drink, space, or mating right.

In a hermeneutical journey, the underrating of theology in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Mohammed, 2012) and the peacefully coexisting Judaism Christianity, Islam and indigenous and African religions in Ethiopia might have an impact in curriculum development. However, if properly and fairly applied, religious thoughts and social beliefs can help citizens to develop good moral character and values. In other words, there are alternatives to bridge the historic gaps through transformation by awakening students with the civilizing process of church, mosque, *gada*, and other native, cultural, and religious education systems in Ethiopia (Maimire, 2006) rather than detaching religion, indigenous knowledge and culture to the secular school system (Zewde, in Tesfaye, 2014) and neglecting discussion of religion-related and ethnic-related issues with religious and ethnic out-group members, and the resulted prevalence of ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts in Ethiopian higher institution (Abebaw, 2014).

Postmodern thinkers in curriculum study challenge any rejection of ‘traditional education’ as indoctrination, accusing of worldly life, impeding the advancement of science and technology (Teshome, 1979); as destructing earthly life and spiritual asset; and negligence of currere as autobiographical in Ethiopia (Solomon & Sintayehu, 2020). So, the curriculum does give room for Ethiopian elements (knowledge, culture, and history) (Tekeste, 1996) and revisiting the role of women including diplomatic and administrative throughout Ethiopian history as wives, queen mothers, and regents (Tebeje, 2018) through open dialogue in the context of moral discourses about female sexuality and convenient environment (Meselu et al., 2014).

### **Understanding of the Complexity of Metaphysics - chaos and uncertainty**

Ethiopia passes a millennium with rich religious history despite less recognition given in modern education in Ethiopia. Curriculum development in postmodernism should follow an open system that involves lived experience and chaos theory and a divergent path rather than following the closed systems of Tyler's rationale. Still, the Ethiopian curriculum development is assumed to be central, planned, segmented, controlled, and manipulated in objectives, activities, and instructional time through aspiring to standard and competency in Ethiopia, regardless of analyzing the contexts and contingency of different localities (MoE, 2018). Instruction time, waiting time (off-task), and allocating more time in primary and secondary education is a manifestation of linear consideration of time (MoE, 2018).

Of course, at least rhetorically, postmodern issues such as the cultures within nations and nationalities in the country, special learning needs, environmental matters, civics, and ethical values, gender equality, HIV/AIDS are included in the curriculum and in the promotion of participatory, decentralized, contextual, localized curriculum development, and student-centered approaches are articulated in attaining minimum learning competence (MoE, 2009a) and standardizations are maximized and flourished in public discourses (MoE, 2023; Tadesse, 2020). Rhetorically, the policy document also acknowledges the linkage between traditional and modern education. One of the articles states that “curriculum developed and textbooks prepared...give due attention to concrete local conditions...” and “traditional education will be improved and developed by integrating it with modern education” (MoE, 1994, pp. 12 & 26). Although this view is accompanied by the new education policy (MoE, 2023), the benchmark is still not local and indigenous but either Western or Eastern (MoE, 2018). In order to introduce sustainable quality and lifelong education in Ethiopia, nurturing indigenous knowledge and linking it with modern thoughts in a harmonious and open manner is vital rather than only following a rigid Taylerian rationale.

An attempt to shift from the modern or Tyler's objective model (Feleke, 1990) to the postmodern or economic development factory model (the rows of desks teaching) (Meskerem, 2017) to a seminar circle in the classroom teaching stimulates the promotion and celebration of the interconnectedness of knowledge, prior learning experiences, international communities, the natural world and life itself (Tadesse, 2021; Tadesse & Sintayehu, 2022). The Ethiopian education system emphasizes using the river metaphor of the linear paradigm at the expense of reflective dialogue, the use of autobiography, debate, cooperative investigation, and probing questions in a

holistic environment by focusing on learning and self-in ecological and holistic theories of curriculum and instruction. Hence, curriculum developers in Ethiopia should consider curriculum as kaleidoscopic (eclectic, changing image patterns in context - a web of ideas with changing) rather than telescopic (condensing) and microscopic (enlarging) systems which result in the demoralization of learners.

## **Concluding Remarks and Implications**

### **Concluding Remarks**

This article is envisioned to review the Ethiopian education and curriculum development experiences based on the five guiding principles of Slattery's postmodern thoughts. Curriculum development in the Ethiopian education system including policy documents, policy initiatives, education sector programs, and curriculum frameworks has faced limitations and strengths when reviewed vis-à-vis Slattery's five principles. It is possible to smoothly deduce that still there is the domination of influence of western culture in Ethiopian curriculum development. The Cartesian dualism of western thoughts and the Tylerian rationale metanarrative as a result of a tendency of '*seeking the western solution to the Ethiopian problem*'; bifurcation of students in ability groups; bifurcation of learning outcomes; rhetorical equity of woman and man, rural and urban, and peripheral and central; bifurcations of our education system into '*traditional*' and '*modern*'; the misconceptions and misinterpretations of Ethiopian history by different actors and not considering its proleptic process; historically, the negligence of different voices (mainly education professionals) in curriculum development; and the repudiation of important cultural values, religious thoughts and varied political issues divorcing from the education system by claiming secular education calls for post-structural and deconstructive discursive and analysis. Besides, neglect of indigenous knowledge and cultural values for modern education or the detachment of indigenous and value education from Ethiopian schooling; row seating rather than a circle as rigid and linear consideration of instructional time; the merging of cooperative learning (often called *one to five*) over competence and minimum learning competence; low emphasis is given to aesthetics and ecology which Ethiopia is alleged to be the cradle of ancient art and wisdom are areas of deconstruction in postmodern issues that Ethiopian curriculum development process need to address. Competitiveness and cooperativeness overlapped in the education system from kindergarten to grade twelve unlike daily manifestations of circling in dining and house building in Ethiopian culture.

### **Implications**

A call for shifting from modernism to postmodernism should deconstruct the historical upheaval of the curriculum in terms of public discourses, such as lack of relevance, equity, quality, access, and ideology through revisiting curriculum as an area of inquiry (Woube, 2014), as practical (Solomon & Aschale, 2019) and contextual and sensitive to specific and indigenous knowledge (Tadesse, 2020). The writers of the present manuscript want to challenge modernism which has brought some bad and some good news to Ethiopian education using deconstructivism

and post-structural philosophy, not as a singular method but as an alternative to describing rich aesthetical, theological, historical, and political [realities] for egalitarian/utopian and astronomical context that considers curriculum developers, as community learners.

Despite there are wide historical and contextual differences both in interpretation and understanding of modernism and postmodernism, educators need to connect their past experience with their present through Ethiopian education philosophy *tizita* (nostzia) (Maimire, 2006) and both *tizita* and *qalkidan* (Mohammed, 2012) and by making content relevant to human, nature, and environment (Mulugeta et al., 2020) and move towards our ideal Utopia/Ethiopian (Meskerem, 2017).

Consequently, the following remarks are useful as far as curriculum development in Ethiopian education in the aftermath of new millennium to critically reconceptualize and take into consideration different voices and contexts: (1) The influence of western education needs to be critically challenged with its all consequences; (2) The integration of indigenous and modern education has to be deconstructed by comprising the voices of all the necessary actors what Slattery called ‘*the community of learners*’; (3) There needs to be open mindedness by all actors to question, challenge and view Ethiopian history afresh and integrate holistically in different disciplines, including all the victims and heroes in fair lenses; (4) It is interesting to provide curriculum as Theological and Political text in Ethiopia both as constructive and deconstructive using hermeneutical sense (Ethiopia has rich science of textual interpretation in *Abinet* schools and *Deresa* schools) to promote religious tolerance justifying the country as home of diversity and tolerance before modernity; (5) Curriculum theory and inquiry be understood aesthetically and ecologically since Ethiopia is believed to be womb of ancient wisdom, art and indigenous knowledge, and deconstructing the social ecology of Ethiopia using the home-grown (indigenous) solutions is crucial; (6) Education in general and curriculum development in particular need to open room for thinking ways of development without violating human and environmental ecosystem; and (7) As a philosophy, revisiting the rationale model and viewing curriculum as currere, Ethiopian curriculum and pedagogy should not simply be directed toward preparing students for a career (a preparation for a future life) rather, it should be, as Dewey wrote, “an experience of life itself” (Dewey, 1938) by promoting interconnection rather than bifurcation.

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