

Perceptions of Bahir Dar University Teacher Educators about Functions of Education in Ethiopia

Mulugeta Yayeh Worku (Ph. D.)

Associate Professor, Department of Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies, School of Educational Sciences, College of Education, Bahir Dar University

Abstract

Using the four major philosophies of education (Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, and Social Reconstructionism) as its theoretical framework, this study examined the perceptions of teacher educators about the functions of education in Ethiopia. The study adopted the qualitative research approach and employed the case study as a design. Through a purposeful criterion-based sampling technique, six teacher educators from Bahir Dar University were selected as participants in the study. Data pertinent to the study were collected through semi-structured interviews and document reviews. The data collected through these methods were thematically analyzed. The results of the study revealed the existence of multifarious perceptions among teacher educators. To be specific, the teacher educators were found to be proponents of the perennialist, essentialist, and progressivist educational purposes. As far as the function of education in Ethiopia was concerned, the study revealed that the perennialist and essentialist purposes of education were dominant. Educational purposes advocated by the progressive educational philosophy were also found to be important. The social reconstructionist function of education, however, was not given an adequate place. Finally, the implications of these findings for the country's teacher education programs and policymaking initiatives are indicated.

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Introduction

Although there has been a general consensus on the role that education plays in ameliorating social, economic, and political problems, its major function has remained a contested issue (Rury, 2002; Russell, 2010; White, 2010). The main reason behind this problem, among others, is the emergence of different thoughts on the purposes of education. Due to the presence of contradictory perceptions of education, there has been much debate among different stakeholders. The debate involves philosophers, sociologists, politicians and the public at large

CONTACT Mulugeta Yayeh Worku  gashu65@gmail.com

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(Carr, 2003; Ellis, 2004; Labaree, 1997; Schiro, 2013). Because of these intense debates, education, in the words of Rury (2002, p. 17), has now become “a volatile issue”.

According to Carr (2003), one of the long-running debates about the purpose of education has been the intrinsic versus extrinsic purpose. In this debate, the proponents of the former purpose view education from a non-instrumentalist perspective. For scholars in this camp, education is a matter of the initiation of human agents into the rational capacities, values, and virtues that warrant their full status as persons. According to these scholars, to be educated means to come to appreciate values, knowledge, understanding and skills for their own sake (Carr, 2003). On the other hand, advocates of the latter purpose emphasize the instrumentalist perspective. For this group of scholars “the main task of education is to prepare young people for adult personal and social functioning” (Carr, 2003, p. 7).

Focusing on the history of American education, Labaree (1997) has observed three major goals of education that have been the subject of heated discussion among various groups. According to him, the debate involves three contending groups. The first group advocates democratic equality, focusing on three specific educational goals: citizenship training, equal treatment, and equal access. According to Labaree (1977), education for social efficiency is an educational goal that the second group strives for. The third group, in contrast, gives much prominence to social mobility as an educational goal.

Although these three contending educational goals have their own specific interests and requirements, Labaree (1997) believes that they could be put into two categories: the public and the private goals of education. This scholar further contends that the first two educational goals, i.e., democratic equality and social efficiency, are pro-public since they prioritize the public or social benefit of education to society over individual benefit. The third educational goal, social mobility, for Labaree, however, is pro-private as its primary concern is the benefit of the individual learner.

The issue of globalization and the expected challenges of the 21st century are also exerting powerful pressure on the debate concerning the purpose of education (Cogan & Derricott, 2000). Due to rapid technological advancements, the world today has become a small village, ushering in global interdependence. A situation that occurs in one particular part of the world does not usually take a long time, as was the case in the past, to impact other parts of the planet either negatively or positively. Because of globalization, national boundaries are becoming open to the international community (Cogan & Derricott, 2000; Quisumbing, 2002). Thus, the closed-door policy has now become a futile national policy to be followed.

This emerging international scenario has important implications for education. The issue of national integration or social cohesion, which has long been considered the major function of education, has now come under scrutiny (Cogan & Derricott, 2000; Quisumbing, 2002; Russell, 2010). Proponents of this view of education (e.g., Cogan & Derricott, 2000; Quisumbing, 2002) contend that future citizens of the world need to be educated on diverse issues of the planet if they are to confront the challenges of globalization and the threats of the 21st century. For this group of scholars, world cultures, problems, languages, history, and political systems need to be at the

forefront of national educational policies. For them, mere emphasis on national integration and social cohesion focusing on national problems, history, languages, and culture, is not adequate in this rapidly changing international situation (Cogan & Derricott, 2000; Russell, 2010). Therefore, they advocate education for international citizenship, global education, education for sustainable development, and so forth.

It should, however, be noted that a new global movement that opposes globalization has been arising. This movement, named "Deglobalization," rejects the fundamental tenants of globalization. Instead, it advocates the need to reduce interdependence and integration among countries, societies and economies around the world (Dadush, 2022; Kornprobst & Wallace, 2022).

Deglobalization has had a negative impact on educational systems. Analysts of contemporary global education (e.g., Weidmann, 2020) noted that deglobalization is bringing such issues as a decline in the number of international students, restrictions on the mobility of academics and researchers, and cuts to funding for programs that support global citizenship in education.

Regardless of the emergence of different contending views on the purposes of education, many educators attempted to show the main functions of education. For instance, according to Taba (1962) and Ellis (2004), the three main purposes of education are to preserve and transmit cultural heritage, develop the individual learner and transform the culture of a society. In a similar vein, some educators (e.g., Brameld, 1971; Cohn, 1999; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Ebert II & Culyer III, 2011) believe that the preservation, transmission, moderation, and transformation of cultural heritage, which emanate from the four major educational philosophies, are the main purposes of education. It seems, therefore, important to conduct an investigation into the major functions of education in Ethiopia in relation to the educational purposes advocated by these philosophies.

A Glimpse of the Major Educational Philosophies

The present study is based on ideas and theories taken from the four major educational philosophies with regard to the purpose of education. The four major educational philosophies with well-developed ideas of educational goals are Perennialism, Essentialism, Progressivism, and Social Reconstructionism (Taba, 1962; Brameld, 1971; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Schiro, 2013).

According to Perennialism, the principal purpose of education is to preserve society's cultural heritage (Taba, 1962; Brameld, 1971; Cohn, 1999; Ellis, 2004). For the Perennialist philosophers, human beings possess the capacity to know and discover truth by their own nature. This potentiality, according to these philosophers, can be activated if students are taught about the major achievements of mankind. Accordingly, their education aims at developing students understanding of the great ideas of ancient civilizations (Brameld, 1971; Cohn, 1999; Ornstein & Levine, 2008). Irrespective of time and place, the ancient ideas of the Western world are

considered vital to solving all societal problems (Cohn, 1999). In line with this, they advocate for a thorough examination of the classic books of Western civilizations. For Perennialists, classic works with recurring themes are important in improving students' intellectual ability and critical thinking skills (Ornstein & Levine, 2008).

The transmission of cultural heritage is an educational purpose advocated by Essentialism. Essentialist educational thinkers stress the importance of transmitting the great achievements of previous generations to future generations. Proponents of this view urge schools to provide all students with the knowledge that they need to function in society (Ebert II & Culyer III, 2011). For them, all students should be taught the core skills and knowledge that play decisive roles in sustaining modern societies. According to essentialist philosophers, the school's primary responsibility is to preserve the most important aspects of culture by teaching skills and knowledge through a well-organized curriculum (Ornstein & Levine, 2008). Essentialists urge schools and teachers to teach students "core" or "basic" subjects so that they will serve their society effectively and efficiently in the future. In a nutshell, the Essentialist educational philosophy views education as a process of transmitting the essential components of human culture to the next generation.

Educational Progressivism, which was established as a revolt against traditional schools, opposes much of the ideas advocated by Perennialism and Essentialism (Cohn, 1999; Ellis, 2004; Ornstein & Levine, 2008). Educators of Progressivism contend that developing the potential and capabilities of each learner, through a democratic instructional process, is the central purpose of education (Dewey, 1916; Taba, 1962; Ellis, 2004). For these educators, education is not preparation for life, but life itself. Hence, the development of each learner's talent and skill, through problem-solving and participatory approaches, is the major function of education. According to Dewey (1916), schools cannot prepare problem-solving and democratic citizens if they fail to reflect freedom and democracy in their day-to-day activities. Thus, shared decision-making, collaborative planning between teachers and students, and the selection and organization of curriculum contents based on students' interests and participation are considered key educational agendas of the philosophy. In this philosophy, learning is expected to take place based on students' active participation and experience of the world around them (Kilpatrick, 1932; Cohn, 1999). The learner, for educational progressives, is a problem solver and a meaning maker using his or her unique experience.

Advocates of Social Reconstructionism criticize many of the positions of the above groups of scholars (Ellis, 2004; Hill, 2006). Educators subscribing to this philosophy contend that the transformation of society and its cultural heritage needs to be the central purpose of education (Counts, 1932; Brameld, 1971; Quisumbing, 2002; Russell, 2010). For these scholars, education is a social process. Hence, they contend that social change and reform should be its primary concerns. In this philosophy, preserving and transmitting what has already been achieved is not considered an adequate purpose for educational institutions. Its philosophers, therefore, urge schools and educators to give attention to society and societal problems (Counts, 1932; Brameld, 1971; Stanley, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Bussler 2010). To put it briefly, Social Reconstructionist

educators emphasize the social responsibility of education. For these educators, understanding society, societal problems, seeking solutions to societal problems, and ultimately reconstructing and transforming society need to be the major purposes of education (Counts, 1932; Brameld, 1971; Stanley, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Bussler 2010). Seen from this angle, the four major philosophies of education are found to be appropriate to provide a theoretical basis for investigating the major functions of education in Ethiopia.

The Problem

Though the central purpose of education is still controversial, many scholars unanimously agree on education's ability to alleviate various societal problems and ameliorate life in society. The role it plays in bringing about social transformation, social justice, and a better social, economic, and political order is also widely acknowledged.

Despite these facts, many societies today are not benefiting much from the educational programs they are running. Instead, as reported by many scholars (e.g., Counts, 1932; Kilpatrick, 1932; Stanley, 1992; Quisumbing, 2002; Thomas, 2010; Schiro, 2013), they are besieged with unprecedented social crises. According to Counts (1932, p. 1), mankind had been experiencing the following problems since the 1930s: "vice, crime, war, poverty, injustice, racketeering, political corruption, race hatred, class conflict, or just plain original sin". Global warming, ozone depletion, desertification, environmental pollution and drought are also among the challenges that are threatening the survival of mankind today (Quisumbing, 2002; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004; Desha & Hargroves, 2014). In short, as Desha and Hargroves (2014) concisely put it, citizens of the 21st century are living in pressing and critical times.

The same story is true in Ethiopia. According to many sources, present-day Ethiopian societies are engulfed by perplexing political problems, paradoxical economic crises, and unprecedented social and environmental challenges (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Milkias, 2011; Dawit, 2019). In Ethiopia, it is also common to hear about the inability of the country's education system to prepare citizens who are competent enough to address many of the country's pervasive problems.

This national milieu, particularly the failure of the country's education system to reverse the persistent societal problems of the country, therefore, was the main reason to undertake this study. The dearth of adequate studies on the topic at hand was also another reason to think about this study. To my best knowledge, full-fledged research aimed at understanding Ethiopian educators' perceptions of the major function of education and exploring the principal functions of education in the country has not been adequately conducted.

The present study, therefore, aimed at understanding the perceptions of teacher educators (focusing on Bahir Dar University teacher educators) on the functions of education. Through an understanding of the teacher educators' positions, the study also sought to shed light on the major functions of the Ethiopian education system. In line with these purposes, the study is organized under the following two research questions: (1) How do Bahir Dar University teacher educators

perceive the major functions of education? (2) What are the positions of Bahir Dar University teacher educators on the major functions of the Ethiopian education system?

Methods

Design

This study adopted the qualitative research approach. One of its designs, the case study design, was also used. As Stake (2011) and Yin (2011) explained, a case study is an appropriate research design that aims at acquiring an in-depth understanding of issues in a limited number of cases. In the present study, this design was found appropriate as the purpose of the study was to understand the position of teacher educators on the major functions of education, focusing on the Ethiopian education system.

Sampling

In this study, six teacher educators who were teaching in the college of education and behavioral sciences at Bahir Dar University served as research participants. They were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Two criteria, i.e., willingness and experience of teaching at teacher education institutes, were used to select the participants.

Table1

Research Participants

Participant Pseudonym	Specialization	Academic Rank	Teaching Experience
Tibeb	Psychology	Lecturer	10
Ewuket	Psychology	Assistant Prof.	12
Selam	EDPM	Lecturer	11
Balcha	Curriculum and Instruction	Assistant Prof.	12
Tsenat	Curriculum and Instruction	Lecturer	16
Ali	Curriculum and Instruction	Lecturer	16

As indicated in Table 1, the participants had a teaching experience ranging from 10 to 16 years. Four of the participants were lecturers, whilst the other two were assistant professors with respect to academic rank. As far as the participants' specialization was concerned, three of them were professors of Curriculum and Instruction, while two of them were teaching Psychology and one other professor was teaching Educational Planning and Management.

Data Gathering

To get data pertinent to the study, two methods were used. In this regard, semi-structured interviews served as the major data-gathering method. In the interview schedule, five items focusing on the study's purpose were included. Using these items, the researcher also asked some relevant probes and follow-up questions. During data gathering, each research participant was interviewed for 40 to 60 minutes.

In this study, a document review was also used. The document reviewed was Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy of 1994. The reason behind this task was the need to corroborate the interview data. The review focused on the five general objectives of the policy.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the above methods were analyzed thematically. Two themes that emanated from the study's purposes guided the data analysis. Besides, specific data analysis techniques such as narration, description, and direct citation were used to analyze the data.

Ethical Issues

In this study, unreserved efforts were made to strictly adhere to the major ethical principles that must be observed when doing research. The duty of a researcher to respect the rights, needs, values, and desires of research participants, in particular, was given a special attention.

Results

Teacher Educators' Perceptions of the Functions of Education

Understanding teacher educators' perceptions of the major functions of education was one purpose of this study. The data obtained in this regard are summarized in the following paragraphs.

According to Balcha* , the primary function of education must be the establishment of a moral society. In light of this, he said the following: "Many problems in the modern world emanate from issues of morality. In all corners of the world, there is a general decline in moral values. In the media, we are looking at many cruel and inhuman actions".

According to this participant, the kind of education essential for present-day societies is the one that gives much attention to moral and ethical values. He also asserted that the new generation needs to be taught how to become disciplined, moral and ethical. For him, education systems should also give attention to cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge.

Ewuket had a similar opinion regarding the function of education. According to this participant, modern societies are suffering from problems of suicide, crime, theft, corruption,

* All participant names used in this study are pseudonyms.

violence, and the deterioration of moral values. For this participant, education should aim at reversing all these problems.

Some research participants, on the other hand, reflected ideas that are consistent with the Essentialist educational philosophy. The replies of the two participants (Tsenat and Ali) are good examples in this regard.

According to Tsenat, “One of the unresolved issues of many developing countries is the problem of unemployment. Due to the expansion of educational opportunities, each year many students graduate from higher education institutions. However, most of them are not getting employed”. This participant described the root cause of this problem as follows: “You know, our curriculum lacks relevance. Most of the programs that universities offer are not demand-driven. Put differently, they are teaching students knowledge and skills that are less relevant to the existing labor market”.

Tsenat, therefore, prioritizes an education that is capable of solving this problem. In this regard, he forwarded the following suggestion: “Education should always be concerned with the fate of students. It should prepare students to lead a decent life. Its curriculum, in particular, needs to give attention to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions relevant to the world of the job”.

Ali too underlined the importance of an education that emphasizes the core skills and knowledge essential for every society. The following words directly taken from his interview strengthens this contention:

I strongly believe that education should prepare students to be effective and efficient members of society. To prepare this kind of student, education should give attention to the core or most important subjects. For instance, subjects like science, technology, and mathematics need to be prioritized.

This participant tried to justify his position as follows:

It is science and technology that make a big difference among nations. The history of the Western world shows that the main reason behind its development is its success in advancing science and technology. No nation can achieve sustainable development without these subjects. That is why I insist on an education system that gives much attention to subjects like science and technology.

The ideas of the two research participants (Tsenat and Ali) presented above indicate that these teacher educators had an educational position that supports the Essentialist educational philosophy. These participants preferred an education system that strives for a generation possessing knowledge and skills essential for society.

The remaining two participants forwarded educational purposes that reflect the Progressive educational philosophy. For instance, Selam said the following while explaining his position on educational purposes:

Education should not aim at the memorization of facts. Instead, it needs to focus on students’ problem-solving skills. Students should be given the opportunity to develop the core skills they will need in the future to tackle the various problems

they will encounter. In short, education should prepare citizens who are capable of solving problems.

Tibeb's position on the function of education is not different from that of the above-mentioned participants. For this participant, "The preparation of problem-solving citizens must be the major purpose of education. For him, education should always aim at bringing about a productive generation capable of addressing the economic and political problems of the day".

The two participants' responses mentioned above suggest that they had an inclination toward a progressive view of education. Like many progressive educators, these participants emphasized the need to develop the problem-solving skills of citizens. As they explicitly stated, the preparation of citizens who are capable of solving different problems needs to be the major responsibility of any educational system.

Teacher Educators' Positions Concerning the Major Functions of Education in Ethiopia

The present study also attempted to understand teacher educators' positions concerning the major functions of education in present-day Ethiopia. For this purpose, participants were requested to discuss their observations vis-à-vis Ethiopia's educational system. The positions they reflected are summarized as follows.

Some participants reported that though modern educational concepts were incorporated at a policy level, their practice—particularly in the classroom—was in accordance with knowledge mastery and the preservation view of education. Supporting this idea, Tsenat had the following to say: "On paper, the main emphasis is on the preparation of citizens with strong problem-solving skills. But, in practice, mastery of knowledge is the norm in every classroom". Tsenat further indicated that textbooks used in Ethiopian schools are prepared with too much lengthy content, and they offer few opportunities for experiential learning. This implies the existence of a big gap between theory and practice.

In quite a similar fashion, Ewuket asserted that the major concern of Ethiopia's education is knowledge mastery. For this teacher educator, from curriculum development at the national level to curriculum implementation at the classroom level, knowledge mastery is given due emphasis. This participant also had the following to add: "Assessment strategies and procedures used by teachers, in particular, show the predominance of the knowledge mastery educational idea. The quizzes, tests, mid-exams and final examinations given by teachers all aim at checking students' knowledge mastery".

Selam also expressed a similar position. For this educator, knowledge preservation and transmission are the main features of the Ethiopian educational system. For Selam, the country's educational system preserves and transmits the knowledge of the Western world, not its indigenous knowledge. According to this participant, though Ethiopia has an extensive record of indigenous education, its education system has been disregarding local indigenous knowledge. In its place, he adds, "the Western cultural heritage has been given much importance". Selam

believed that many of the challenges facing the Ethiopian educational system are related to this problem. In this regard, he forwarded the following idea:

Our educational system does not prepare citizens who possess fundamental moral and ethical values. The new generation is becoming less aware and appreciative of its history and cultural heritage. It is also becoming less concerned with the social values that Ethiopia has been known for.

Some participants, on their part, believed that the educational system in Ethiopia has not focused on solving problems of the society. In this regard, Balcha replied as follows:

The national education and training policy in Ethiopia is not concerned with the needs and interests of our people. At the outset, the policy was formulated by the ruling party, where opposition parties, intellectuals, parents, teachers, students, and NGOs working in the education sector were prevented from taking active part. As a result, the policy has failed to reflect the realities of contemporary society.

Supporting this, Tibeb responded with the following: “If you take a thorough look at our teacher education curriculum, you can easily understand that it was designed in line with Western educational ideas. Its attention to Ethiopian societies and their problems is inadequate”. This participant also had the following to say:

One major problem of curriculum development in Ethiopia is related to the task of need diagnosis. Usually, curriculum development in Ethiopia does not emanate from needs analysis studies. Due to this problem, our curriculum does not reflect the country’s real problems.

Finally, Ali described the function of education in Ethiopia as follows: “Our education system is under the direct influence of the Western world. Since the country is still dependent on the loans and financial assistance of the developed world, its education system is in line with their educational ideas”. According to this participant,

Due to the pressure of Western institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, our education system is overwhelmed with ideas of the Progressive educational philosophy. The predominance of such educational ideas as active learning, collaborative learning, continuous assessment, and cost-sharing epitomizes this contention.

The above responses suggest that Ethiopia's educational system has been under the influence of some Western educational ideas. According to his reflections, no adequate attention has been given to the problems of contemporary Ethiopian societies.

To corroborate the above findings obtained through interviews, a review was made on the Education and Training Policy* of Ethiopia. The review was limited to Part II of the policy. In this part, five general and fifteen specific objectives of education are listed. The review, however,

* Recently, a new education and training policy that substitutes the 1994 ETP has been officially introduced.

focused only on the general objectives. The five general objectives of education, the central concept, and the dominant educational philosophy of each general objective are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

General Objectives of Education, Central Concepts, and Dominant Philosophy

General Objective*	Central Concept**	Dominant Philosophy**
Develop the physical and mental potential and the problem-solving capacity of individuals	The problem-solving capacity of individuals	Progressivism
Bring up citizens who can take care of and utilize resources wisely, who are trained in various skills	Wise utilization of resources	Essentialism
Bring up citizens who respect human rights, stand for the well-being of people, as well as for equality, justice, and peace, endowed with democratic culture and discipline	Human rights, people well-being, equality, justice, peace, democracy	Progressivism and Social Reconstructionism
Bring up citizens who differentiate harmful practices from useful ones, who seek and stand for truth, appreciate aesthetics, and show a positive attitude towards the development and dissemination of science and technology in society.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful practice, truth, and aesthetics • Science and technology 	Perennialism and Essentialism
Cultivate the cognitive, creative, productive, and appreciative potential of citizens.	Cognitive, creative, productive and appreciative potentials	Essentialism and Progressivism

Note. * Source, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (TGE, 1994, pp. 7-8).

** The researcher's interpretations.

As indicated in Table 2, educational purposes that reflect the various philosophies of education are included in the 1994 education and training policy. However, they were not given equal weight. For example, Progressivism and Essentialism seem dominant, as they are highly visible in at least three of the general objectives. In this regard, one can observe educational purposes advocated by Progressivism in the first, third, and fifth general objectives. Likewise, Essentialist educational ideas are reflected at least in the second, fourth, and fifth general objectives.

From the same table, it is also possible to infer that the Perennialist and Social Reconstructionist educational purposes were not well reflected, as they were visible only in one

general objective. To be specific, the Perennialist view of education was reflected in the fourth general objective, while Social Reconstructionism was included in the third one.

Discussion

The present study attempted to understand Bahir Dar University teacher educators' perceptions of the major functions of education. The results of the study showed the presence of multifarious viewpoints among the participating teacher educators.

To be specific, some teacher educators reflected a position that was consistent with the Perennialist view of education. These teacher educators gave much emphasis to the cultural preservation function of education. On the other hand, some teacher educators reflected ideas that were consistent with the Essentialist educational philosophy. These educators were very interested in an education system that prepares a generation equipped with skills and knowledge essential for the survival of existing societies. They also emphasized the role of such subjects as science, mathematics and technology in achieving national development. Still, some teacher educators were found to be supporters of Progressivism. These educators frequently mentioned the importance of preparing a generation with problem-solving skills.

Overall, the participating teacher educators were found to be supporters of the Perennialist, Essentialist, or Progressivist views of education. No teacher educator, however, had mentioned a Social Reconstructionist educational purpose. From this, it may be possible to infer that the Social Reconstructionist (society-centered) function of education had not been either adequately understood or considered important by the teacher educators. This can be taken as one educational challenge because, as prominent scholars of education (e.g., Brameld, 1971; Stanley, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Bussler, 2010; Schiro, 2013) put it succinctly, education cannot play its role of mitigating societal problems and creating better social orders if it fails to be society-sensitive. Students are more unlikely to understand their society and its problems and, most importantly, to become agents of social change if they fail to get a society-sensitive education. As Social Reconstructionist educators posited, society and societal problems must be at the center of educational discourse if social reconstruction and transformation are to be realized through education.

This study has also examined teacher educators' positions concerning the functions of education in Ethiopia. In this regard, the study's findings were found to be consistent with the above findings. As many of the teacher educators asserted, knowledge mastery, which reflects the Perennialist and Essentialist purpose of education, was found to be dominant in the Ethiopian educational system. Besides, educational purposes advocated by Progressivism were found to be important. The findings obtained from the document review also strengthened the above result. However, in both findings, the Social Reconstructionist function of education was not given adequate place.

These findings are consistent with some local research findings. For instance, the study conducted by Amare (2009) indicated that education in Ethiopia was highly affected by the course coverage syndrome. This researcher further reported that instructional processes were geared towards only one dimension of the educational goal, the knowledge acquisition goal. Derebssa (2006), on his part, indicated that Progressivism was the dominant educational philosophy in Ethiopia at a policy level. This scholar, however, uncovered that the implementation of active learning, one important educational idea of Progressivism, was not common in the country's educational institutions.

Though full-fledged research aimed at understanding the reasons for the above findings is necessary, at this juncture, it appears reasonable to reflect on some of the possible causes. The failure of national educational policy to emphasize society and societal issues, the researcher argues, is one of the major reasons for teacher educators' lack of concern for the social function of education. As reported by some local studies (e.g., Damtew, 2008; Mulugeta, 2017; Mulugeta, Solomon, & Alemayehu, 2018; Mulugeta, 2021), the country's educational system did not give issues of society and societal problems considerable attention.

In the content analysis they conducted on the 1994 Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy, Mulugeta, Solomon, and Alemayehu (2018), in particular, came up with a finding that strengthens the above contention. According to these researchers, terms and phrases that indicate the inclusion of Social Reconstructionist educational purposes were not adequately incorporated in the national Education and Training Policy. To be specific, terms and phrases like social reconstruction, social transformation, better social order, social change, and social amelioration that imply Social Reconstructionist educational purpose were not mentioned in the country's education policy document.

The prominence of Progressivism in the educational system of Ethiopia could also be another reason. Educational Progressivism, which aims to instill key principles of liberal democracy, has received government backing since its inception in the late 19th century (Brameld, 1971; Reese, 2001; Hill, 2006). One of the factors that contributed to the philosophy's growing popularity was the emphasis it placed on the principles of individual freedom and democratic teaching, as well as its opposition to teacher dominance, subject-centered curriculum, and student punishment. Since Ethiopia is one of the poorest sub-Saharan countries and relies heavily on the Western world and its multinational institutions, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), it has very little chance of avoiding the influence of this educational philosophy.

Another possible root cause of the problem is the broad embrace of neo-liberal concepts in Ethiopia's education system. Marketization, managerialism, standards, and privatization, according to Maguire and Dillon (2007), are the four fundamental neo-liberal principles that have a significant impact on national educational systems. These concepts' relevance to society and societal issues is too limited because they mostly focus on individualism. Therefore, the failure to adequately include the Social Reconstructionist purpose of education may have been attributed to the presence of these neo-liberal principles in Ethiopia's educational system.

Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed at examining the perceptions of teacher educators about the major functions of education. It also aimed to shed light on the major function of education in Ethiopia. Consequently, it brought the following findings.

The first finding indicated that teacher educators had multifarious perceptions concerning the major functions of education. In this regard, some teacher educators reflected a perception that was consistent with the Perennialist view of education. On the other hand, some teacher educators were found to be supporters of the Essentialist view of education. Still, some teacher educators were found to be adherents to the Progressivist educational purpose. However, their perceptions did not reflect the Social Reconstructionist educational purpose.

As far as the major function of education in Ethiopia is concerned, the present study came up with a similar story. To be specific, the study confirmed that content mastery, or the Perennialist and Essentialist purpose of education, was dominant. Educational purposes advocated by the Progressive educational thinkers were also found to be important. The study, however, did not adequately indicate the inclusion of a Social Reconstructionist function of education.

The findings of this study have some important implications. First, as the study revealed, teacher educators' perceptions did not reflect society-centered educational purposes. This implies the need for some short-term measures that are aimed at developing teacher educators' conceptual understanding of various educational purposes. To be specific, Ethiopian teacher education institutions need to organize forums and professional discourse opportunities that focus on the multidimensional purposes of education. In doing so, Social Reconstructionist educational purposes need to be given adequate attention.

The second finding of the present study also has policy implications. As the study showed, educational purposes that reflect Social Reconstructionism were scanty in Ethiopia's education system. Therefore, education policymakers and curriculum developers in Ethiopia need to revitalize the importance of society-centered educational purposes. In this regard, they need to deliberate on its relevance for nation-building. This is because, as many educators (e.g., Brameld, 1971; Stanley, 1992; Bussler, 2010; Schiro, 2013) contend, neither knowledge-centered nor learner-centered education alone could realize the social transformation or reconstruction educational agenda of nations. By acknowledging the strengths and limitations of each philosophy of education, policymakers need to strive to create a balanced educational system and develop relevant curricula that meet the diverse needs of students and society at large.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study are based mainly on qualitative data collected from a few teacher educators selected from one higher education institution. The study would have been more generalizable in portraying the whole reality of the function of education in Ethiopia had additional quantitative data been collected from more teacher educators working in other educational institutions. Hence, the conclusions of the study need to be considered cautiously.

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