

Assessing the Instructional Processes in Higher Education Institutions: Amhara Region's Universities and Colleges in Focus

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Abstract: This study assessed the instructional processes of Universities and Colleges of the Amhara Region, Ethiopia. The research design was descriptive survey and data were obtained from 204 participants (instructors, department heads and deans from Universities and Colleges) using questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion. Both University and College instructors' practices of the instructional processes and their conceptions on effective teaching and the factors affecting effective teaching were examined. Results indicated that the three interactive instructional processes (instructional planning, methods of teaching and assessment) were not adequately implemented in an integrated manner. More specifically, significant differences were observed between Universities and Colleges in the application of instructional planning and continuous assessment (assessment for learning that served as a feedback for students' learning). In this regard, Colleges were in a good position than Universities. However, active learning strategies that could enhance higher order thinking and problem-solving skills of students were not applied passably in both the Universities and the Colleges. There was also no statistically significant difference among the three Universities and the three Colleges themselves in applying various active learning methods. Attitudinal problems to prepare instructional plans (mainly for Universities), lack of knowledge on various active learning strategies and work load were influencing factors for the effective implementation of the instructional processes in Universities and Colleges. As a result, re-conceptualizing the practices of instructional processes in Universities and Colleges to enhance effective teaching is a timely concern for all education actors at various levels.

Keywords: Instructional processes, instructional planning, active learning, continuous assessment, higher education institutions

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the context of Higher Education, effective teaching is about reaching achievement goals; it is about students' learning in a particular context, grade levels or subjects through quality instructions (Berliner, 2005). Research into effective teaching (Reece & Walker, 2003) illustrates that quality instruction involves instructional planning and managing learning

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effectively, using a variety of active learning strategies and promoting and actively engaging in professional and personal development continually and evaluating students' learning experiences. In other words, instructional process comprises three basic interactive components (planning, teaching and assessment) that are aligned one another (Brookhart, 2004; Clarke, 2005; Reeves, 2006).

According to Reeves (2006) alignment of the instruction is essential and a success of any learning environment is determined by the degree to which there is adequate alignment among eight critical factors: 1) goals, 2) content, 3) instructional design, 4) learner tasks, 5) instructor roles, 6) student roles, 7) technological affordances, and 8) assessment. Failure to align these dimensions will affect the successful instructional planning and implementation.

In the instructional process, the first task of a teacher or an instructor is planning learning (Reece & Walker, 2003). Planning involves the formulation of instructional objectives, processes and learning outcomes which lead to decisions about the types of learning activities that will enable students to successfully achieve the required outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Gronlund, 2006). The second task is teaching. In a contemporary Higher Education context, effective teaching is enabling learners to become an independent learner, develop meta-cognitive skills, solve problems, act on feedbacks, assess one's strengths and weaknesses, acquire generic study skills, make effective use of technology, work effectively with others, and to show efficient time-management (Allan & Clarke, 2007). Consequently, the student-centered approach, focusing on the process of learning rather than the product (Zhang, 2003), is a central idea for effective teaching. As a final task of teachers or instructors, assessment is an integral part of the concept of objective setting and methods of teaching (Clarke, 2005; Reeves, 2006; Sperber, 2005). Assessment (mainly continuous assessment) is a strategy used by teachers to support the attainment of goals and skills by learners over a period of time (Clarke, 2005; Reeves, 2006). It provides regular information about teaching-learning, the achievement of learning objectives and competencies (Reece & Walker, 2003; Reeves, 2006; Sperber, 2005; USAID, 2010). Continuous assessment, mainly formative assessment, is therefore seen as an integral aspect of the teaching and learning cycle (Bain, 2004; Wiliam & Thompson, 2008). As Bain (2004:151) stated, best teachers in higher education use assessment "to help students learn, not just rate and rank their efforts".

Currently, in Higher Education, there is a shift from teacher centered to learner centered approach, from teaching to learning and from summative assessment to formative assessment (Darling Hammond, 2012). Despite the shift in conceptions of teaching and learning, a parallel shift in relation to formative assessment and feedback has not been seen rapidly (Yorke, 2003). Dryden and Vos (2005) pointed out that many educators throughout the world are still teaching in ways similar to the blackboard-and-chalk, desk-in-rows classroom model and formative assessment and feedback have still been largely controlled by and seen as the responsibility of teachers.

Although, innovative approaches to teaching are not common, there are good examples in the higher education literature of undergraduate courses where an appropriate level of alignment among objectives, methods of teaching and assessment have been reached (Bain, 2004; Reeves, 2006). But the weakest component of most designs is assessment, perhaps because both instructors and students are so accustomed to thinking of assessments in traditional ways (Reeves, 2006). An effective instructor starts with what he/she wants his/her students to learn (the objectives), goes through ‘entry behavior’ (what the student already knows about the topic), assess teaching methods (this involves experiences and reflections), and evaluate how much has been learned and finally provides the feedback (Gronlund, 2006; Reece & Walker, 2003).

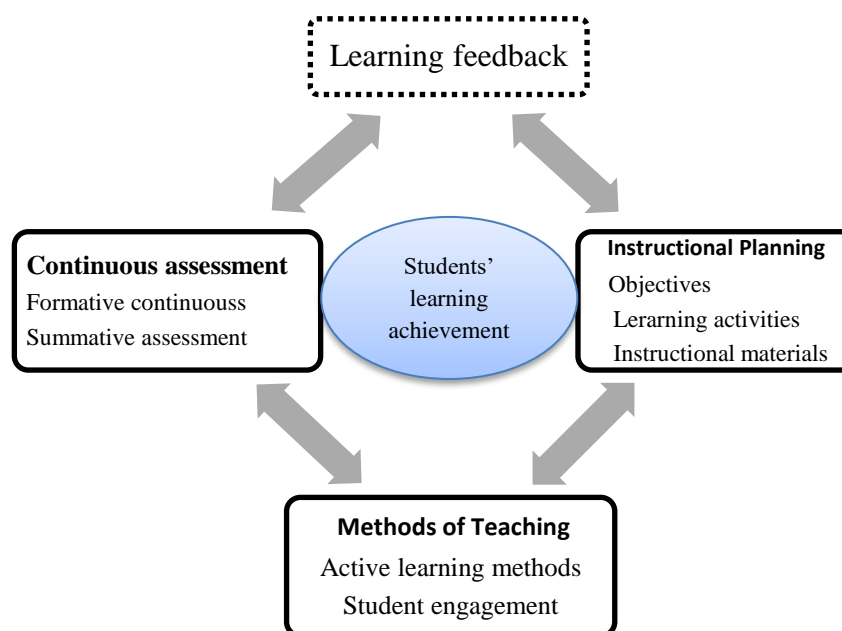


Fig.1. Instructional processes – a conceptual frame

Based on this conceptual frame work, an effective instructor should first plan the lesson, deliver it and assess whether students achieve the expected objective. Based on the assessment results feedback should be provided for further improvements. It is these alignments that help students achieve in a better condition. Based on view of constructivist teaching, instructional planning, teaching methods, and assessments have direct relationships (Reece & Walker, 2003). Nevertheless, in contexts where traditional methods of teaching are norms, assessments are often highly traditional. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, teachers are authoritarians “who expect students to listen and memorize correct answers or procedures rather than construct knowledge themselves” (Akyeampong et al., 2006, p. 34). Similarly, most Ethiopian classrooms still are teacher centered, where informative instruction is the norm (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; Tesfaye, 2014). For this reason, the focus of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of the instructional processes in Universities and Colleges found in the Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia.

Statement of the problem

In spite of the rapid expansion of education in general, and higher education in particular, the Ethiopian education system has been experiencing complex hurdles with long-term social, economic, and political implications (Tesfaye, 2014). Tesfaye added, the lack of genuine commitment to address the glaring problems of the quality of teacher education seems to manifest faster than many observers might have predicted. Specifically, the teacher education in Ethiopia has been noted a number of problems such as the professional competence of teachers is deficient; their content knowledge is unsatisfactory; the teaching skills and techniques are very low; the nature of courses and methods of teaching are theoretical and teacher centered, teacher professionalism is deteriorating, and teachers in general do not meet the standards and expectations of their professions (MoE, 2017),.

As a result, still the Ethiopian instructional classrooms remain teacher centered (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; Tesfaye, 2014). Particularly instructional practices in the Universities and Colleges are largely teacher-dominated and content-oriented (Daniel, 2004; Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). Even, the current system of evaluating teaching effectiveness encourages such practices (Zenawi, 2009). Moreover, there is no coherence and collaboration in the teacher education reforms and practices, and this is the reason for the apparent mismatch between the rhetoric in the country's teacher education policy and the reality of teacher education in training Universities and Colleges (Hussien, 2007). Regarding the challenges of teacher education, Hussien (2007) stated that Ethiopian teacher education is characterized as a terrain of persistent contradictions, challenges, and chaos. Many teachers are favoring teacher centered approaches (Dawit, 2008; Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; MoE, 2016; Tesfaye; 2014). Most of the institutions still teach their classes in the traditional lecture mode. Seventy one percent of university students indicated their role during the instructional process as passive listeners to teachers' presentations (Zenawi et al., 2011). Accordingly, students in higher education institutions memorize specific facts and skills that help them promote from one level to another level of education (Reda, 2001).

High-quality teacher preparation requires skill of instructional planning, a complex body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, nurturing pedagogy, and multiple forms of assessment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Goe, 2007; Huisheng, 2007; Osguthorpe, 2008). Good teaching, according to Osguthorpe (2008), also necessitates a teacher to be knowledgeable in content, skilled in pedagogy, and have virtuous character. Generally, the teaching profession requires competent professionals with high concern and commitment for the social, psychological and intellectual prosperity of future citizens (Huisheng, 2007). However, investigating the viability of such instructors is the timely demand of teacher education institutions.

Due to this, the current reality of the education system, particularly the teacher education system, has become a source of considerable concern among educators, politicians, and the public at large (Tesfaye, 2014). In order to improve the teacher education program, several reforms were introduced and one of the reforms was Teacher Education System Overhaul

(henceforth TESO) (MoE, 2003). TESO was expected to give a great premium to the creation of quality teachers who would transform the social, economic and political lives of the society (MoE, 2003). The overhaul assumes that teacher educators, with the capacity and commitment, are required to train transformative intellectuals and devote their time and energy to create informed citizens and have the initiative as well as the institutional support to play the transformative roles (Hussien, 2007).

Later on, despite its contributions, TESO was seriously criticized for marginalizing ‘content knowledge’ in its secondary teacher education program component (Dawit, 2008). The weaknesses of TESO were also expressed in terms of teachers’ ‘poor’ attributes-inadequate subject-matter knowledge, failure to apply student-centered or active learning methods, lack of interest to follow up and support students, low career commitment, and weak partnership of teachers with school leadership, parents, and the community at large (MoE, 2008; Tesfaye, 2014). Under such circumstances, graduates within the TESO program faced considerable difficulties in planning instruction, managing classrooms, and diagnosing students’ learning needs (Tefaye, 2014).

Recently, realizing the weaknesses of TESO and interest for bringing quality education, a new reform for the teacher education programs called the Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) has been put in place (MoE, 2009). Priorities in this process include: improving the effectiveness of university programs for teachers and providing induction support to Post-Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; MoE, 2009). The main aim of PGDT was to fill the content and pedagogical gaps that were present in earlier secondary education teaching programs as observed in teaching and classroom practices in secondary schools (MoE, 2009; Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). In order to implement the program properly, both the Ministry of Education and the Amhara Region Education Bureau (AREB) focused on Universities and Colleges to exercise instructional planning, active learning methods and continuous assessment techniques (MoE, 2009).

Thus, attempts have been made to improve teachers’ or instructors’ instructional processes through frequent in-service trainings, Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and Higher Diploma Program (HDP). Formative continuous assessment has also been given emphasis to improve the teaching-learning process and students’ achievement (MoE, 2009). However, in practice, most instructors are not in a position to prepare instructional planning and implement different active learning strategies (Tadesse, 2012). Continuous assessment exercises in many programs are also poor at least in terms of giving feedback and motivating further learning (Getachew, 2013; Singh, 2006; Zenawi, 2009; Zenawi et al., 2011). Similarly, in few Universities and Colleges, the researcher, as HDP leader, and in-service training provider on pedagogy realized that there are gaps on instructors in delivering the instructional processes (preparing instructional planning, using a variety of active learning strategies and applying different continuous assessment strategies). This triggered the researcher to examine the instructional processes of university and college instructors. Therefore, the main purpose

of this study was to investigate instructors' practices of the instructional processes of Universities and Colleges in a comparative analysis.

Accordingly, the present study had the following research questions.

1. To what extent do teacher educators of the Universities and Colleges apply the instructional processes (instructional planning, active learning methods and continuous assessment techniques)?
2. Is there a significant difference between and among Universities and Colleges in the application of the instructional processes?
3. How do University and College instructors and principals conceptualize effective teaching?
4. what are the factors affecting the implementation of the instructional processes of Universities and Colleges?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this study, descriptive survey research design was employed. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer the research questions. The data were obtained from three Universities (Wollo, Woldia and Debre Tabor) and three Colleges (Dessie, Woldia and Begimeder) of the Amhara Region. Within the three Universities, only Social Science and Humanities faculty, Natural and Computational Science faculty and Educational and Behavioural Science faculty were considered. Besides, two departments in each faculty of the Universities and five departments of each College were participated. Generally, using quantitative and qualitative collection instruments, this study involved instructors, deans, directors and department heads working in the stated colleges and faculties.

Participants

This study involved 231 participants (7 instructors from each departments of the Universities and 1 dean/directors of faculties or colleges). Participant instructors were selected randomly from the respective departments and the deans or directors of faculties or colleges were taken directly. However, the actual number of participants who filled out the survey and returned was 204 and the analysis conducted with that number.

Instruments

This study used data gathering instruments such as questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, and document reviews.

The questionnaire had both close ended and open-ended questions. Pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire and the reliability coefficient of Cronbach alpha was .82. The questionnaire items were also checked for validity by experts from measurement and evaluation. The semi-structured interview and the focus group questions were developed

based on the questionnaire items. Documents such as prepared course plans, daily lesson plans, course guide books, course outlines and different continuous assessment results were also analyzed.

Procedures

The data collection was first begun with administering the questionnaire on face to face basis and 204 participants filled it out correctly and returned. Then, three hours of interview was conducted with the Deans or Directors. Finally, the focus Group Discussion followed after collecting the required documents.

The collected data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For the quantitative data, percentage, mean, standard deviation, independent samples *t*-test, and One-way ANOVA were applied. The qualitative data, data from the interview, focus group discussion and document review, were analyzed qualitatively, using thematic and descriptive analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section, the results were thematically categorized in the form of instructional planning, active learning, continuous assessment and conceptions on effective teaching and factors affecting the effective teaching processes. Then, each category is stated here after.

Instructional Planning

Instructional planning is one of the prior tasks to be considered by higher education institutions. Thus, comparisons were made between Universities and Colleges regarding the use of instructional planning.

Table 1

t-test result for Differences in Instructional Planning Between College and University Instructors

| <i>Institution</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|--------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Colleges | 103 | 42.8155 | 4.04811 | 8.709* | 202 | .000 |
| Universities | 101 | 37.3069 | 4.94923 | | | |

As the table above shows, there is a significant difference on the utilization of instructional planning between Universities and Colleges. ($t=8.709^*$, $p<0.05$ at $df = 202$). That is, the mean value of Colleges (42.82) is greater than that of Universities (37.31) showing that Colleges were found to be more effective in utilizing the instructional planning than the Universities.

Table 2

One Way-ANOVA for differences regarding application of instructional planning among the

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Sum of Squares</i> | <i>Df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 1710.522 | 5 | 342.104 | 17.114* | .000 |
| Within Groups | 3957.890 | 198 | 19.989 | | |
| Total | 5668.412 | 203 | | | |

six institutions

As table 2, indicates, in order to see significance difference among the three Universities and three Colleges in the use of instructional planning, one-way ANOVA was employed and statistically significant difference was obtained ($F_{5,198} = 17.114$, $*p < 0.05$). In order to see major differences in the use of instructional planning among the three Universities and three Colleges, Scheffe's multiple comparison test was utilized.

Table 3

Scheffe's Multiple Mean Score Comparisons on The Utilization of Instructional Planning by Six Institutions

| Workplace (I) | (J) workplace | Mean | Mean Difference (I-J) | Sig. |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-------|-----------------------|------|
| Dessie CTE (41.92) | Begimeder CTE | 44.39 | -2.47 | .402 |
| | Woldia CTE | 42.37 | -.45 | .999 |
| | Wollo University | 36.75 | 5.17* | .000 |
| | Woldia University | 38.43 | 3.49 | .089 |
| | Debre Tabor University | 37.00 | 4.92* | .001 |

For the mean comparisons, the Scheffe multiple comparison test showed that Begimeder College used instructional planning better than others (44.39) followed by Woldia College (42.37) and Dessie College (41.92). Whereas, Wollo University with mean values (36.75), Debre Tabor University (37) and Woldia University (38.43) applied instructional planning less than the Colleges.

Such difference in instructional planning between the Universities and the Colleges may be because the majority of the instructors of Colleges were from the education field having better pedagogical concepts. Besides, Colleges were under the close inspection of the Regional Education Bureau. Whereas, most instructors of the Universities were from the applied Science field having little pedagogical background knowledge and skills. Moreover, instructors have relatively higher academic freedom than College which have a closer inspection has been made by higher officials.

Data from interviews of University instructors, even, supports the insignificance contribution of using the instructional plans to effective teaching. For instance, one of the interviewees from Woldia University strongly noted that they [instructors] have many years of teaching experience. They know what they will do in the class. So, putting what they already know in a piece of paper is just duplication and wastage of time, energy and resources. Besides, most instructors believed that planning on a regular basis is boring and time consuming. Most of them were not eager to devote much time in designing a variety of challenging activities for their students; instead they made students promote to the next grades which the students couldn't manage.

Conversely, research findings (e.g., Borich, 1988; Danielson, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Reece & Walker, 2003; Marton & Saljo, 1997) noted that preparing instructional plans could show the direction where the instructor is going, what he/she is doing and why he/she is doing.

Active Learning

In this section, comparisons between Universities and Colleges, as well as faculties and departments were made on the application of active learning methods.

Table 4

t-test result for Differences in Using Active Learning Methods Between College and University Instructors

| <i>Institute</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Colleges | 103 | 45.3786 | 4.95295 | -.037 | 202 | .971 |
| Universities | 101 | 45.4059 | 5.57168 | | | |

Comparisons on the use of active learning methods were made between Universities and Colleges and there was no statistically significant difference ($t = -.037$, $p > 0.05$ at $df = 202$).

Table 5

One Way-ANOVA for Differences in Using Active Learning Methods among Faculties and Departments

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Sum of Squares</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 233.299 | 9 | 25.922 | .936 | .495 |
| Within Groups | 5373.328 | 194 | 27.698 | | |
| Total | 5606.627 | 203 | | | |

Based on the above Table, the result of one way-ANOVA ($F_{9, 194} = .936, P > .05$) indicated no statistically significant difference among the three Universities and three Colleges on employing active learning.

Even though significant difference was not observed among Universities and Colleges in applying active learning strategies, differences were by instructors observed in exercising various active learning methods in their classroom practices.

Table 6

Percentage of Instructors Using the Different Active learning strategies (N=204)

| Methods of teaching | % | Methods of teaching | % | Methods of teaching | % |
|---------------------|----|------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|
| Lecture method | 86 | Case study method | 28 | Diamond ranking method | 19.2 |
| Discussion method | 83 | Classification | 26.5 | Think -pair- share method | 17 |
| Question & answer | 81 | Pyramiding method | 26 | Spider diagram method | 17 |
| Gapped lecture | 64 | Ice breaking method | 25.8 | Future wheel method | 13.5 |
| Demonstration | 55 | Reciprocal questioning | 25 | Inquiry method | 11 |
| Brain storming | 53 | Experiment method | 24.9 | Problem solving method | 8 |
| Independent work | 51 | Picture analysis | 24 | Hot seating method | 5 |
| Matching exercise | 48 | Role playing method | 24 | Golden fish bowl method | 3 |
| Project method | 41 | Field visit method | 22 | Mastery learning method | 2.8 |
| Debate | 38 | Model construction | 21 | Discovery method | 3.6 |
| | | | | Balloon Gaming method | 2 |

As Table 5 indicated most instructors of Universities and Colleges are applying the traditional methods of teaching that includes lecturing, discussion, question and answer, demonstration (86 %; 83%; 81 %; and 55 % respectively). This implies that instructors were not in a position to convey active learning methods properly. Similarly, the research findings (e. g., Daniel, 2004; Dawit, 2008; Joshi & Verspoor, 2013; Reda, 2001) disclosed that although the constructivist approach has been well documented in the literature, its effective implementation in Ethiopian Higher Educations, became insignificant. Joshi and Verspoor (2013) further stated that still the Ethiopian classrooms remain primarily teacher-centered and the instructional practices in the Universities and colleges are widely teacher-dominated and content-oriented and this might be because the current system of evaluating teaching effectiveness encourages such practice (Zenawi, 2009).

Even though, the Education Policy of Ethiopia claimed that the pedagogical implications of constructivism- active learning methods or student-centered teaching governs instructional practices in institutions (TGE, 1994), those active learning methods (problem solving, 8 %,

inquiry method, 11 %, mastery learning 2.8 %, and discovery learning 3.6 %) were not applied by most instructors of the Universities and Colleges. Nevertheless, analysis of existing research literature (Glaserfeld, 1989, cited in Kim, 2005; Narli, 2011; Prince, 2004) suggest that knowledge is not attained but constructed so students must do more than just listen and engage in such higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Continuous Assessment

In this section, implementation of continuous assessment between the Universities and the Colleges was compared

Table 7

t-test result for Differences in Application of Continuous Assessment Between College and University Instructors

| <i>Institute</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Colleges | 103 | 41.93 | 5.13 | 2.77* | 202 | .006 |
| University | 101 | 40.00 | 4.81 | | | |

As the table above indicates, the result of one-sample t-test shows a statistically significant difference between Colleges and Universities in the application of different continuous assessment techniques ($t=2.778^*$, $p<0.05$ at $df = 202$). That is, the mean score of Colleges (41.93) is greater than that of the Universities (40), revealing that Colleges were found to be better than the Universities in employing continuous assessment techniques.

Table 8

One Way-ANOVA for differences in Applying Continuous Assessment among the six institutions

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Sum of Squares</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 270.99 | 5 | 54.19 | 2.17 | .058 |
| Within Groups | 4927.15 | 198 | 24.88 | | |
| Total | 5198.15 | 203 | | | |

, The results of one-way ANOVA in Table 8 shown that there was no significant difference among the three Colleges and the three Universities in the application of various continuous assessment techniques ($F_{5, 198} = 2.178, P > .05$). Even though the Colleges were found to be better than the Universities, as the interview and FGD data revealed, in the application of continuous assessment, the focus of both the Universities and Colleges on assessment for learning (formative assessment) was very low. They were highly concentrated on assessment of learning (summative assessment). A variety of continuous assessment strategies such as independent work, practical tasks, reflective activities, portfolios, demonstration performances, authentic assessment, peer and self-assessment were not applied significantly. The data obtained through interviews and focus group discussion also revealed the same results. The interview results of some instructors from Debre Tabor and Wollo Universities confirmed this. For example, one of the interviewees noted:

Most of the time, they [the instructors] used few techniques of continuous assessment such as repeated paper and pencil tests, group assignments and final examinations. These assessment techniques were applied basically for grading purpose. Due to large class size, workload, shortage of time, and lack of commitment formative continuous assessment was not significantly applied.

Unlike the above findings, assessment is obtained as a crucial element of the instructional process. Assessment has many purposes in higher education ranging from narrow, formative ones to broad, summative ones (Reeves, 2006). Carefully designed assessment is a powerful tool for educators to improve the teaching-learning process (Bain, 2004; James et al., 2002; Reeves, 2006). More specifically, assessment for learning is seen as an integral aspect of the teaching and learning cycle that helps to improve students' achievement (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bain, 2004; Brookhart, 2004; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Gronlund, 2006; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995) and the quality of teaching (Austin, 1993; Ramsdon, 1992). However, the research finding proved that different continuous assessment exercises in many programs were poor in terms of giving feedback and motivating further learning. Specifically, university instructors were not concerned with assessment for learning. Much focus was given for grading than feedback.

Similar findings revealed that even though portfolios, self and peer assessment, simulations and other innovative methods were introduced in higher education contexts (Struyven et al., 2005) both Universities and Colleges' use of different continuous assessment techniques were not satisfactory (Singh, 2006). This may be because continuous assessment needs much more effort and resources than most institutions are expending at this time (Reeves, 2006).

Ramsden (1992) indicated that inappropriate assessment procedures encourage surface approach to learning, yet varying the alternative assessments evoke deep approaches to learning. Assessment also drives learning (Napoli & Raymond, 2004). Most students come to recognize that they can get good grades by cramming for tests and then quickly forgetting what

they have memorized to allow themselves to focus on other pursuits (Reeves, 2006). Therefore, instead of focusing on final grading, assessment should be used for checking the learners' readiness, their achievement about the expected goals and the effectiveness of the teaching approaches that should be in place (Brookhart, 2004; USAID, 2010).

On the other hand, the focus group discussants from Dessie and Begiemededer CTE, regarding the application of continuous assessment, noted:

Even though we used different continuous assessment techniques, it was not dictated by their instructional plans (daily lesson plan and course plan). We lacked remembering and joining what is planned and what is expected to measure and achieve.

In other words, even though instructors were using different continuous assessment techniques, they were not guided by their lesson objectives. Most of the objectives they stated in their plans were not congruent with the assessment techniques they applied. This entails that most instructors conducted assessment haphazardly. Similarly, according to Reeves (2006), evaluations of traditional and blended approaches to post-secondary teaching indicate that the most commonly misaligned factor among objectives, contents and instructional design is assessment. That is, instructors may have supercilious goals, share high-quality content, and even utilize advanced instructional designs, but most of their assessment strategies tend to focus on what is easy to measure rather than what is important (Reeves, 2006).

Generally, an effective instructor always strives for his/ her students achieve the stated objectives using a variety of active learning methods, and assessments should check whether the designed objectives were achieved (Brookhart, 1999; Reeves, 2006). If scholars want their university and college graduates to possess the 21st century skills, assessment must focus on those higher order types of outcomes such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, curiosity, concern for ethical issues as well as breadth and depth of specific knowledge and the methodologies and standards of evidence used to create that knowledge (Bain, 2004). Accordingly, university and college teachers must devote much more effort to the task of assessment because it is the lifeblood of good teaching (Blumenstyk, 2006). Rather than using just one method, robust assessment requires the critical analysis of multiple forms of evidence that learning outcomes have been attained (Reeves, 2006).

Conceptions of Effective Teaching

In section, the Universities and the Colleges' instructors' conceptions on the nature of effective teaching were analyzed and interpreted.

Table 9

t-test result for Differences in Conceptions of Effective Teaching Between College and University Instructors

| <i>Institute</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
|------------------|----------|-------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Colleges | 103 | 32.64 | 5.00 | -.18 | 202 | .85 |
| Universities | 101 | 32.76 | 4.60 | | | |

The *t*-test result of Table 9 indicated that there was no significant difference on the conceptions instructors on effective teaching between the Colleges and Universities ($t = -.180$, $p > 0.05$; $df = 202$). That is, the mean scores of the Colleges (32.64) and the Universities (32.76) on the conceptions of effective teaching were nearly the same.

Table 10

One Way-ANOVA for differences in Conception of Effective Teaching among the six institutions

| <i>Source</i> | <i>Sum of Squares</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Mean Square</i> | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|-------------|
| Between Groups | 4.769 | 5 | .954 | .040 | .999 |
| Within Groups | 4671.991 | 198 | 23.596 | | |
| Total | 4676.760 | 203 | | | |

As the above table shows, the results of one way-ANOVA implied that there was no statistically significant difference among the three Colleges and three Universities ($F_{5,198} = .040$, $P > 0.05$). However, as the Figure below indicates, individual instructor's conceptions and understandings concerning effective teaching tended to be varied.

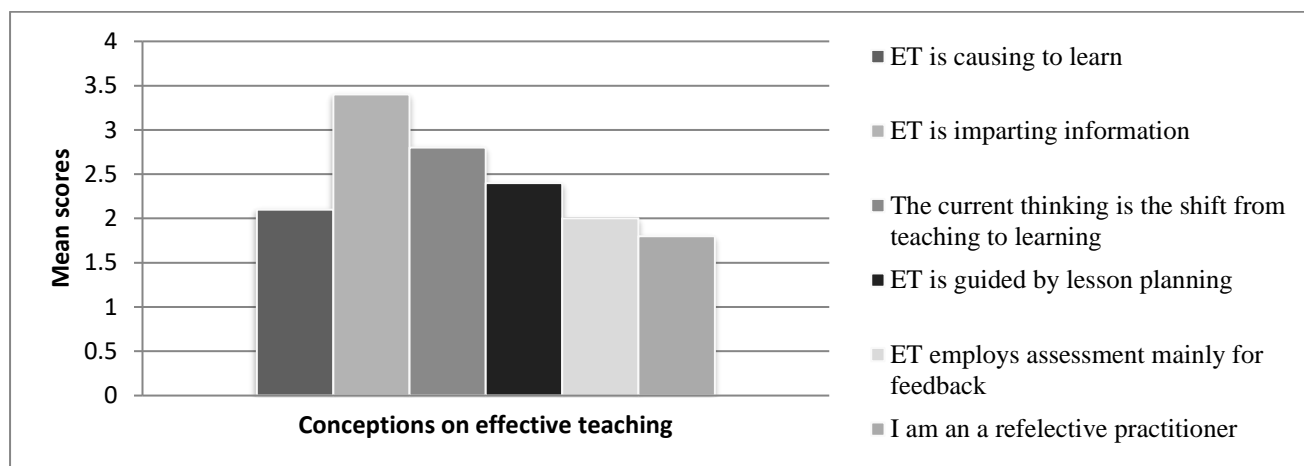


Figure- 1: A graph representing conceptions on effective teaching

As shown from Figure1 above, most of the instructors failed to conceptualize effective teaching well. Most of them considered effective teaching as imparting information. Such little conception may be one reason for exercising dominantly teacher-centered instructions.

Similarly, findings of Zenawi et al. (2011) revealed that teacher-centered conception was the predominant orientation, and the teaching and learning practices have been described to be reflections of this orientation. Even, the measure of teaching effectiveness currently in use reflects the teacher-centered paradigm (Joshi & Vespoor, 2013).

Nevertheless, the teacher-centered orientation and instruction is less likely to produce high-quality learning outcomes among students (Akerlind, 2004). Educators, researchers, and policymakers feel that the traditional view of learning, focused on knowledge and procedures of low cognitive challenge and the regurgitation of superficial understanding, does not meet the demands of the present and future (Danielson, 1996).

Our society today needs young people who are flexible, creative and proactive, who can solve problems, make decisions, think critically, communicate ideas effectively and work efficiently within teams and groups. In order to optimize life-long learning and potential success, it is now widely accepted that young people need to have opportunities to develop personal capabilities and effective thinking skills as part of their well-rounded education. By using active learning methodologies, it is hoped that pupils will not only come to a deeper understanding of the issues involved, but also meet their motivation and enthusiasm (Danielson, 1996; Silberman, 1996).

Nevertheless, many instructors tended to understand that the current thinking is the shift from teaching to learning but practice doesn't manifest this. In order to sustain lifelong learning, it is learners who should actively participate in the learning process and the role of the instructors is facilitating, guiding and creating conducive environment for learners. This shift encourages teachers to reflect not only on the key principles of learning and teaching but also on their roles in the process.

Factors Affecting the Instruction Process

Based on data obtained from open ended questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions, there are some factors affecting the overall implementation of the instructional process. These are lack of interest and commitment to conduct instructional plans or attitudinal problems (i.e., most instructors believe that preparing a lesson plan is wastage of time); lack of knowledge in implementing different active learning strategies (mostly for those from the applied field of the Universities); work over loads of instructors (both horizontally and vertically); large class size and shortage of time; and instructors' focus on assessment of learning than on assessment for learning.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The success of any learning environment is determined by the degree to which there is adequate integration among the critical components (instructional planning, methods of teaching and assessment) (Reeves, 2006). Effective teaching in Higher Education is about achieving the planned programs, i.e., bringing learning into effect. Thus, quality instruction involves first, preparing instructional planning and managing learning effectively; second, using a variety of active learning strategies; finally assessing students' learning experiences properly.

In the instructional process, the first task of the instructor is planning learning. Planning involves the establishment of instructional objectives, processes and learning outcomes which lead to decisions about the types of learning activities that will enable students to successfully achieve the required outcomes. In this regard, Universities have lower or almost minimal practices than teacher education colleges. Therefore, as Higher Education Institutions (Universities and Colleges) are the producers of the learned society, the teaching-learning processes should be guided by the instructional plans and the continuous assessment practices should be in line with the stated objectives of students set in the instructional plans.

Currently, in Higher Education, there is a shift from teacher centered to learner centered approach and from teaching to learning. Thus, in a contemporary Higher Education context, effective teaching is enabling learners to become an independent learner, develop meta-cognitive skills and deep learning, solve problems, acquire generic study skills, make effective use of technology and to promote one's own learning, and work effectively with others. To this end, the Universities and the Colleges were not largely applying various active learning methods that promote higher order thinking and problem-solving abilities of students. Therefore, in both Universities and Colleges those active learning strategies that reinforce higher order thinking and enable learners to learn by themselves should be employed adequately.

Besides, integral to the concept of instructional planning and methods of teaching is continuous assessment. Best instructors in Higher Education usually use formative continuous assessment to help students learn, not just rate and rank their efforts. However, the Universities and the Colleges were not properly using formative assessment (assessment *for* learning) as a

feedback for students' learning. Instead, their focus was on summative assessment (assessment *of* learning) that mainly meant for grading. Therefore, in order to make students grow and develop their potential in academics, both University and College instructors should primarily implement formative continuous assessment more than summative assessment.

Moreover, now days, the paradigm shift in teaching is from teaching to learning, from assessment of learning to assessment for learning and from knowledge reproduction to knowledge production or knowledge creation. In this aspect, there is a wider gap among instructors in perceiving what effective teaching is and to which direction the paradigm shift must show. Though conceptions on effective teaching vary among instructors of the Universities and the Colleges, they have to focus on teaching learning process or learning how to learn rather than imparting knowledge. They should also emphasize on enabling learners produce their own knowledge and creativity than pushing them to reproduce the same knowledge since the target of effective teaching is how to make students learn.

Finally, instructors' attitudinal problems to develop instructional plans (mainly for Universities), lack of knowledge to implement different active learning strategies (mainly for those from the applied field of the Universities), and work load and large class size (referring one instructor entering to many classes with different courses) were taken as major factors affecting the implementation of active learning methods.. Therefore, training on these challenges should be provided in a more sensible and continuous manner.

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