

Perceived Impact of Collaborative Partnerships on Student Teachers' Core Skills of the 21st Century: A Case of East-Central and Southern Ethiopia

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Abstract: The study explored the perceived impact of collaborative partnerships on the core skills of the 21st century in learning institutions East-Central and Southern Ethiopia using the descriptive research design. The study involved 7 colleges of teacher education and 35 secondary schools with 6021 college teachers, secondary school teachers and student-teachers. The researchers randomly sampled 853 respondents. Questionnaire was used as the major instrument for data collection and the scale of mean scores interpretation was as follows: 3.50-4.00 = strongly agree, 2.50-3.49= agree, 1.50-2.49 = disagree and 1.00-1.49 = strongly disagree. Respondents considered collaborative partnership to have impact on the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, research conducting skills, communication skills, creativity and innovation skills and life and career skills. Based on the conclusions, the researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education, colleges and schools should work collaboratively to improve the colleges and schools' curricula in a ways that encourage sustainable collaboration so as student teachers may develop various skills that are necessary for their future careers.

Keywords: Collaborative partnerships; core skills; trainees' skills; teacher education; secondary schools.

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Introduction

Collaborative partnerships are the working together of people, different organizations and or multiple sectors with the common goal of improving the services rendered by them. If it is a health sector, it aims at improving the community health service; for education, it is intended to improve the quality of education and for a business organization its goal is to improve the profit (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). When two or more parties come together for the common good of a school or to enhance student learning, it is called an educational partnership (Foerste, Merler & Vargiu, 2017). This kind of partnership is important for education to be practical. Islahuddin, Tolla and Mansyur (2016) explained that educational partnerships reach the

rank of totality when they extend the level of full collaboration.

In the U.S. school system, there is a trend in policymaking trying to introduce content standards and higher-order thinking skills into the documents of partnership for the 21st Century. Partnership for the 21st century is aimed to integrate theory with practice (Guo & Woulfin, 2016). In the Philippines, education focused mainly on knowledge-based approach. The skill-based education is therefore limited and there is a need for collaborative partnerships with international communities to develop the best practices (Alda, Boholano & Dayagbil, 2020).

In Africa, the partnership of teacher education institutions is a joint project with the U.S. based on

a foundation that is to strengthen the capacity of Competence-based curriculum in the continent (Institute of International Education, 2019). In South Africa, university-school partnerships are considered a new epistemology for teacher education programs and it is believed to create learning opportunities for prospective teachers. It helps them to have deep knowledge and skills in their areas. However, the authoritative method of considering universities as the source of knowledge has been questioned because of its less impact on developing the skills of students (Mutemeri & Chetty, 2011).

In the Ethiopian history of Higher Education, the idea of partnership has been included in the government policy since 2003. The Higher Education Proclamation No. 351/2003 in parts 12 and 14 states the significance of partnerships amongst private institutions, public institutions, organs and units under any institutions. In East-Central and Southern Ethiopia, there are challenges regarding the application of skill-based curriculum in schools, educational offices, and colleges. There are teacher-related challenges such as teachers' reluctance to adapt new teaching methods and lack of professionalism. There are also institution-related challenges which are challenges outside the teachers' control and student-related challenges-the unwillingness of students to participate in different activities (Garmamo, 2018). Generally, the experience of different countries indicates that collaborative partnerships help students learn important skills.

In this study, the core skills are skills of critical thinking and problem solving, research conducting, communication skills, creativity and innovation and life and career skills. The study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of the student-teachers' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?
2. To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of the student-teachers' research conducting skills?
3. To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of communication skills?
4. To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of creative and innovative skills

Collaborative Partnerships and the Skills of Critical Thinking and Problem-solving

Collaboration is the joint work of partners to perform a certain task. Collaborative partnership refers to the working together of parties to attain a mutual goal. The skills of critical thinking and problem-solving are connected because it is impossible to solve a problem without filtering information /critical thinking (Gut, 2011). The collaborative partnerships between colleges of teacher education and educational agencies endow the trainees with practical skills of reasoning. The skills of critical thinking and problem-solving require deep reasoning. Skills of problem-solving can be developed by working collaboratively with partners. When there are complex challenges, collaborative partnerships or the working together of groups can easily come up with solutions and this develops the skills of problem-solving through a combined effort of the partners (Flore, et al., 2017). This indicates that when different partners join together to accomplish an effective task, this will foster the skills of critical thinking and problem-solving. Therefore, the skills of critical thinking and problem solving are significant in solving different challenges. They are best developed if two or more stakeholders or groups of people work together by combining their resources. The major goal of collaborative partnerships is developing the skills of trainees by combining different resources of stakeholders. It is also called collaborative problem-solving skills.

Collaborative Partnerships and Skills in Research

Research skill refers to ability to collect information, organize, analyze and interpret the findings of a specific problem. Academic research is the investigation into some problems. It does not only investigate but also it involves critical analysis of a subject (The National University of Ireland, 2021). From the context of teacher education, research skills refer to a methodological tool for unlocking different problems in the realm of education. Professional teachers and student-teachers engage in different action research activities to come up with practical solutions. Research skills are tools to solve the challenges of life in the 21st century. It does involve the collaborative work of students, teachers, educators and other partners. The skills are considered as a method of making education practical (Froehlich, Hobusch & Moeslinger, 2021). Thus, the skills of conducting research are a key to connecting education to practical skills.

According to Bera-Rsa (2014), skills of conducting research are viewed as a mandatory for teachers because there are problems that need to be investigated and given solutions. Skills are attained through the work of collaborative partnerships among students, teachers, and educators. Hence, collaborative partnerships among schools, colleges and educational offices help to develop the skill of conducting research. Furthermore, Farrell (2021) confirmed that collaborative partnerships among institutions develop the skills of conducting research for teachers and educators. When student-teachers have collaborative works with school teachers and college teachers, there is a chance for them to learn how to conduct action research. Finally, collaborative partnerships develop the skills of inquiry of the student-teachers. Halasz (2016) articulated that the collaborative partnership helps the educators develop the skill of conducting research by helping them to have new exposure at schools.

Collaborative Partnerships and the skill of Communication

Communication is the use of interpersonal and literacy skills to deliver ideas and messages effectively. The skills of communication go hand in hand with collaborative skills (Urbani, Roshandel, Michaels & Elizabeth, 2017). The skills of communication develop as student-teachers have exposure to schools and educational offices through collaborative partnerships. When trainees have the skill of communication, they can work with others effectively. It is the skills of communication that help teachers to effectively achieve their objectives.

Student-teachers, teachers and educators develop the skills of communication as they are linked to each other through collaborative partnerships to achieve a mutual goal. According to Martin, Oliva, Lopez and Aranda (2017), teachers and students lack communication skills and technology literacy. This has been considered as one of the challenges that compromise the professionalism of teachers. Collaborative partnerships aim to bridge the gap by connecting colleges and schools by combining their resources.

In his study, Fekadu and Melese (2012) confirmed that the communication between school and college teachers in Ethiopia is poor. Colleges send the student-teachers for their practicum without having prior communication. Schools and the secondary school teachers are not given strategies and

arrangement to evaluate student teachers' enhancement. Effective collaborative partnerships between colleges of teacher education develop the student-teachers, school-teachers and college teachers' skills of communication. The students' skills of communication develop as they are in contact with people at different schools and educational offices through the collaborative partnerships model. This will lead student-teachers to develop the skill of working together. Students may learn the knowledge concerning communication skills during lectures, but interpersonal and literacy skills are well developed as they start communicating with others such as teachers, instructors and workers at educational offices. In brief, effective messages delivery or communication skills can be practical as students have exposure to educational agencies through collaborative partnerships model because the model improves the working together of students with others with the aim of developing a specific skill. The verbal, written, and non-verbal communication skills can be developed through collaborative partnerships model because the model helps also the practicability of the skill (Burnage, 2018).

Collaborative Partnerships and Skills of Creativity and Innovation

Creativity is the use of new ideas to create something. It is a key to unlocking daily problems. Innovation is the process of putting new ideas into practice. Creativity and innovation skills have become crucial to solving problems of the 21st century. Their importance in this new century is indispensable. However, the two skills go together because it is impossible to innovate something without the skill of creativity. The skills of creativity are seen as horizontal skills that enable the application of other innovative skills. In this case, creativity skills are antecedent skills for innovation skills (Aranda, et al., 2020). Therefore, there should be a method to make them applicable in colleges of teacher education; without these skills, teachers could never come up with new methodologies and students do not gain new skills.

Halvorsen (2014) noted that the effective working together of parties helps develop the skills of innovation and flexibility by divulging stakeholders to real-world challenges and by joining the partners' resources to create and use new ideas. The exposure helps teachers to come across different problems which need practical solutions. This indicates that teachers can't be part of solutions

until they develop these skills of the 21st century because it is through creativity and innovation that it is possible to solve new challenges. According to Halasz (2016), collaborative partnerships develop the student-teachers', school teachers', and educators' skill of innovation by helping them participating in real-world experience. Moreover, the partners join their resources together to achieve their mutual goals. In this case, the stakeholders start to think beyond the box of rote teaching method (teacher-centered). Thus, collaborative partnerships help the partners to develop the skills of creativity and innovation as they endeavor to solve different challenges or problems.

Collaborative Partnerships and Life and Career Skills

People in the 21st century focus on different skills which are helpful in doing practical work and living together. These skills are crucial for students to develop academic and practical life. Life and career skills are among the different skills for the century which are needed to resolve the current social and economic challenges (Chalkiadaki, 2018). This indicates that life and career skills are the important skills of the century that give students the ability to do and live together successfully in the global community. Paiwithayasiritham and Yanpechaset (2021) indicated that one of the guidelines to enhance the life and career skills of student teachers is by encouraging them to have exposure to real-life experiences. The other guideline is helping trainees to have knowledge about life and career skills that is by offering courses related to the skill. Therefore, the collaborative partnership model fosters the development of life and career skills so that trainees become successful in their life careers.

Collaborative partnership is a means for bringing partners together in the common purpose of improving the wellbeing or the life of people (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Life and career skills are about having new experiences in life and the ability needed to work in a conducive atmosphere. When students have the experience of working in schools and educational offices, they certainly develop the skills of life and career. Collaborative partnerships among colleges, schools and education offices help students have real-life exposure. Romain and Odom (2019) explored collaborative partnerships as fuel for personal resilience, which are life and career skills.

Methodology

This section dealt with the research methodology that includes the following: research design, population and sampling techniques, research instruments, data-gathering procedures, statistical treatment of data, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study used a descriptive research design. The design enabled the researchers to analyze the quantitative data and answer the research question.

Population and Sampling

The study involved 7 colleges of teacher education and 35 secondary schools with 6021 college teachers, secondary school teachers and student-teachers. The researchers randomly sampled 853 respondents including 357 student-teachers, 306 secondary school teachers and 190 college instructors.

Research Instruments

This study used a self-constructed questionnaire to get information from college teachers, student-teachers and school teacher. The instruments were prepared from the literature review. The scale of mean scores interpretation was as follows: 3.50-4.00 = strongly agree, 2.50-3.49= agree, 1.50-2.49 = disagree and 1.00-1.49 = strongly disagree.

Validity and Reliability

The researchers used different techniques to affirm the validity and reliability of the instruments. To confirm face validity, the researchers carefully checked the appearance, readability, formatting and clarity of the language used in the questionnaire. In this case, experts looked at the items and suggested if they were valid to measure the concept. To confirm content validity, the researchers developed the instruments from literature. The Cronbach's Alpha of .936, .809, and .822 were established for college teachers', school teachers', and trainees' questionnaires respectively.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers ensured participants' autonomous right to decide whether to participate in the study or not. The research permits to gather the data were obtained from the office of the director of graduate studies and research at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton in Kenya and Government Authorities in Ethiopia.

Results and Discussion

This part presents the findings concerning the impact of collaborative partnerships on the development of the student-teachers core skills in the 21st century.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of the student-teachers' critical thinking and problem-solving skills?

As seen in table 1, the mean score for college teachers was 3.22. The mean score for school teachers was 3.23 and the mean score for student teachers was 3.75. As far as the scale for mean score interpretation is concerned, college teachers and school teachers agreed while student teachers strongly agreed that collaborative partnership impact the development of the student-teachers' critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Table 1: The extent of Collaborative Partnerships to Develop Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Item	Raters	N	Mean	SD
Collaborative partnerships help to develop the student-teachers' skills of critical thinking and problem-solving	College Teachers	190	3.22	0.728
	School Teachers	306	3.23	0.729
	Student-Teachers	357	3.75	0.482

Table 2: The extent of Collaborative Partnerships to Develop Research Conducting Skills

Item	Raters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaborative partnerships help to develop the student-teachers' skills in conducting research.	College Teachers	190	3.15	0.765
	School Teachers	306	3.20	0.735
	Student-Teachers	357	3.73	0.521

Table 3: The extent of Collaborative Partnerships to Develop Communication Skills

Item	Raters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaborative partnerships help to develop the student-teachers' skills of communication.	College Teachers	190	3.41	0.674
	School Teachers	306	3.34	0.645
	Student-Teachers	357	3.77	0.489

This finding is in harmony with the citation from Flore, et al., (2017) who asserted that collaborative partnerships develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. When student-teachers have exposure to the real world, they face different challenges and endeavor to apply their theoretical knowledge and solve it. In the process, they develop the skills of critical thinking and problem-solving.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of the student-teachers' research conducting skills?

As seen in table 2, the mean score for college teachers was 3.15. The mean score for school teachers was 3.20 and the mean score for student teachers was 3.73. As far as the scale for mean score interpretation is concerned, college teachers and school teachers agreed while student teachers strongly agreed that collaborative partnership impacts the development of the student-teachers' research conducting skills.

The finding agrees with Christianakis (2010) who says collaborative partnerships (alliances) are

significant for student-teachers in combining theory and practice. It develops the skills of collaborative research. Moreover, Farrell (2021) found that collaborative partnerships among institutions improve the practicum and develop the skills of conducting research. Halasz (2016) also supports that collaborative partnerships develop the skill of conducting research by helping the concerned to have new exposure at schools.

Research Question 3: To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of communication skills?

As seen in table 3, the mean score for college teachers was 3.41. The mean score for school teachers was 3.34 and the mean score for student teachers was 3.77. As far as the scale for mean score interpretation is concerned, college teachers and school teachers agreed while student teachers strongly agreed that collaborative partnership impacts the development of communication skills.

The findings agree with Fekadu and Melese (2012) who found that the communication between

schools and college teachers (collaborative partnership) develops the student-teacher's communication skills. Therefore, it is crucial for student-teaches to develop their communication skills through collaborative partnership.

Research Question 4: To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of creative and innovative skills?

As seen in table 4, the mean score for college teachers was 3.26. The mean score for school teachers was 3.34 and the mean score for student teachers was 3.61. As far as the scale for mean score

interpretation is concerned, college teachers and school teachers agreed while student teachers strongly agreed that collaborative partnership impacts the development of creative and innovative skills. The findings agree with the finding of Halvorsen (2014) who held that an effective partnership develops the creativity and innovation skills of students. Therefore, collaborative partnerships between Colleges of Teacher Education, educational offices, researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders can help to foster creativity and innovation skills.

Table 4: The extent of Collaborative Partnerships to Develop Creativity and Innovation Skills

Item	Raters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaborative partnerships help to develop the student-teachers' skills of creativity and innovation.	College Teachers	189	3.26	0.781
	School Teachers	306	3.34	0.664
	Student-Teachers	357	3.61	0.629

Table 5: The extent of Collaborative Partnerships to Develop Life and Career Skills

Item	Raters	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collaborative partnerships help to develop the student-teachers' skills in life and career.	College Teachers	189	3.41	0.683
	School Teachers	305	3.36	0.665
	Student-Teachers	357	3.61	0.593

Research Question 5: To what extent does the collaborative partnership impact the development of life and career skills?

As seen in table 5, the mean score for college teachers was 3.41. The mean score for school teachers was 3.36 and the mean score for student teachers was 3.61. As far as the scale for mean score interpretation is concerned, college teachers and school teachers agreed while student teachers strongly agreed that collaborative partnership impacts the development of life and career skills.

The findings agree with Ortaleza (2019) who held that collaborative partnerships with industries/job immersion programs develop flexibility and adaptability skills or life and career skills. Therefore, the collaborative partnerships of colleges with schools, industries and other stakeholders may help to develop the student-teachers life and career skills for better functioning of the student teachers under investigation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

It is concluded that respondents considered collaborative partnership to have impact on the

development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, research conducting skills, communication skills, creativity and innovation skills and life and career skills. While college teachers and school teachers agreed with all the items in the tables, student teachers strongly agreed. Therefore, student teachers had higher expectations on the advantage of collaborative partnership than college and school teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the researchers recommend that the Ministry of Education, colleges and schools should work collaboratively to improve the colleges and schools' curricula in a ways that encourage sustainable collaboration so as student teachers may develop various skills that are necessary for their future careers. The regional and zonal education offices should motivate, encourage and train the college and school teachers and administrators to understand the importance of collaborative partnerships in developing the core skills of the 21st century.

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