

The Role of Higher Diploma Program in Enhancing Life-Long Learning, Teachers' Professional Development and Success in Ethiopian Private Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: *As part of the implementation strategies of the Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994), in 2003 the Ethiopian Ministry of Education had introduced a wide-ranging reform that touches every aspect of teacher education of the country via a program called the Teacher Education System Overhaul (hereafter TESO). TESO was introduced to bring about a paradigm shift in the Ethiopian teacher education system. One of the components of TESO was Higher Diploma Program. This program was designed mainly to introduce concepts such as being reflective teacher, active learning, continuous assessment, research methodology, and school/industry placement to public and private higher learning institutions engaged in offering higher education. Hence, the core intention of this research was to investigate the role of Higher Diploma Program in terms of enhancing teachers' continuous professional development and success in Ethiopian private higher education institutions with particular reference to Adama Campus of Rift Valley University and Unity University. To this end, 123 instructors were taken as the subjects of the study. Furthermore, the deans and supervisors of the two campuses were used as sources of data. Questionnaire, interviews, and observations were used as tools for data collection. The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The close-ended items of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively whereas the data gathered via open-ended questionnaire and interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The study revealed, except offering short-term trainings, there was no implementation of Higher Diploma Program across the two universities. Finally, recommendations were forwarded to the two universities to offer well-organized Higher Diploma Program to their respective academic staffs.*

Key words: Higher Diploma Program, life-long learning, success, teachers' professional development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

As part of the implementation strategies of the Education and Training Policy (TGE, 1994), the Ethiopian Ministry of Education had introduced in 2003 a wide-ranging reform that touches every aspect of the teacher education system of the country via a program called the Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO). According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2003), the framework of TESO is based on the findings of a study entitled “Improving the quality and effectiveness of teacher education in Ethiopia”, which was conducted in May 2002.

To that end, a task force, which consisted of six experts (four experts from Regional Education Bureaus and two experts from federal organizations, that is, from the Institute of Curriculum Development and Research, and the Ministry of Education), was formed. At a later stage three expatriates from donor organizations and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) joined the group. The study was intended to examine the basic problems of teacher education in Ethiopia. It came up with the following major findings: the professional competence of teachers is deficient; the content knowledge of teachers is unsatisfactory; teachers do not match up to the standards and expectations of their profession; the practicum receives inadequate emphasis and is insufficiently implemented, the quality of courses and methods of teaching are theoretical and teacher-centred; and there is lack of professionalism and ethical values in Ethiopian teacher education (Ministry of Education, 2003).

These problems were so critical that intervention was very timely. Hence to alleviate these problems, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education initiated TESO in 2003. It was designed to bring about a paradigm shift that should touch every aspect of the Ethiopian teacher education system (Mekonnen, 2008; Tessema, 2006). This shift was, amongst other things, expected to cover issues of teachers’ Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and success in their professional career. In addition, in the current Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching (PGDT) program, it is stated that Ethiopian teacher education envisions seeing teachers who are capable of producing responsible and competent citizens, committed to their profession and ready to lifelong learning, and who respect and behave in accordance with the

democratic principles enshrined in the constitution (Ministry of Education, 2009).

One of the components of TESO was Higher Diploma Program (HDP). This program was designed mainly in order to introduce concepts such as being reflective teacher, active learning, continuous assessment, research methodology, and school-industry linkage to instructors who are teaching in the country's higher education institutions. This means all higher learning institutions' instructors are expected to pursue this training in order to deliver quality education through identifying the learning needs of their students. Darling-Hammond (2000, p. 166) states that "an important contribution of teacher education is its development of teachers' abilities to examine teaching from the perspective of learners who bring diverse experiences and frames of references to the classroom."

Currently, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education more than ever has given great attention to HDP through a program called "deliverology", meaning a systematic approach for driving progress and delivering concrete results. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education has planned to use "deliverology" as an instrument to improve the employability rate of higher education graduates. To this end, ensuring quality learning in the country's higher learning institutions is mandatory. This, in turn, calls for strengthening the way the training of HDP is offered in both private and public higher education institutions in the country. This notion includes making HDP training compulsory for all higher learning institutions' instructors, making constant follow up and improving the training and its actual implementation.

Realizing the above intended improvements requires research-based evidences. In other words, there is a need for conducting a study to know whether HDP has brought improvements or not in terms of enhancing life-long learning, teachers' professional development and success in Ethiopian private and public higher education institutions in order to understand the strengths and the drawbacks of the existing HDP. Nonetheless, although I have served as the overall coordinator and facilitator of HDP for many years, to the best of my knowledge, there was no rigorous study that looked into the effectiveness of the existing HDP program under way across Ethiopian higher learning institutions in terms of fulfilling the purposes intended for the program. Therefore, this is a curiosity driven study that intends to figure

out the degree to which HDP is effective in enhancing private higher education institutions instructors' continuous professional development and success in offering quality education to their students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It could be argued that the effective implementation of teachers' continuous professional development in a university context requires a high overall level of commitment of the higher education institutions. This is because this commitment is expected to be realised in the recruitment and hiring of academic staff (Egne, 2015, 2017) as well as in the retention of employees and the institutions' relationships to the community that they serve. This implies that instructors' continuous professional development and success requires multifaceted efforts.

Education can play a key role in ensuring well-rounded development of a country (Egne, 2010, 2014b, 2016). It is also one of the basic human rights (Egne, 2014a). Therefore, any country that aspires towards 'integrated development' and fair treatment of all of its citizens has to design and deliver quality education (Egne, 2015). On the other hand, the quality of the education system mainly depends on the competence and commitment of teachers (Egne, 2017). In other words, the success of an education system to a large extent depends on the character and ability of teachers (Oliveira and Farrell, 1993). In support of the above claim, Al-Madani and Allafaijiy (2014, p. 448) argue that "teachers are the key knowledge producers and the development driving force of any nation". Teachers have far reaching roles in building and sustaining nations. Concerning this claim, Rajput (1996, p. 140) asserts:

The well-being of a nation is dependent upon the quality of its citizens. The quality of citizens is significantly determined by the kind of education they receive. The quality of education basically depends upon the quality of teachers the system produces. The importance of the teacher in a community cannot be ignored. From the very beginning of civilization till date philosophers as well as laymen have all praised the teacher's role in building a society. He has been called a nation builder and saviour of mankind.

In order for teachers to fulfil this key responsibility, there is a need for creating relevant and sustainable opportunities which help them to engage in continuous professional trainings and development. This is guided by the notion that no matter how we prepare teachers for effective teaching through

initial teacher education program, at best, we prepare them to start learning. This, in turn, implies the need for strengthening the HDP program under way in the current Ethiopian higher education institutions. To do so, there is a need for research-based evidences for improving the program.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aimed at answering the following basic research questions:

- To what extent is HDP effective in terms of enhancing instructors' continuous professional development and success in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama Campuses?
- What are the opportunities related with the implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama Campuses?
- What are the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama Campuses?
- What should be done to facilitate the effective implementation of HDP in the two private higher learning institutions?

1.4 Significances of the Study

This investigation is assumed to:

- Contribute to the existing body of knowledge concerning the application of teachers' continuous professional development and success particularly in the private higher learning institutions' contexts.
- Improve university instructors' knowledge, skills, and attitudes with respect to the importance of continuous professional development in enhancing the quality of education.
- Provide empirical knowledge for policy makers, university leaders, practitioners, and other relevant stakeholders about continuous professional development.
- Serve as a steppingstone for other researchers who want to make further investigations in the area under consideration.

1.5 Delimitations of the Study

The scope of this study was restricted to private higher learning institutions of Ethiopia. As a result, the conclusions that were drawn don't include public and religious higher learning institutions. Moreover, the generalizations that were made based on the findings of this research do include the continuous professional development program exercised by pre-primary, primary and secondary school teachers of the country. The scope of

the study was also delimited to analyzing the effectiveness of HDP in the Ethiopian private universities context. As such, it does not concern about the other updating and/or upgrading programs such as ELEP as well as other short-term trainings being implemented in the higher education institutions of the country.

2. Review of Related Literature

This chapter presents the conceptual framework for the study as rooted in existing research on teachers' continuous professional development and success. Following Thomson (2013), the discussions of the related literature are guided by three intentions. The first one is to review relevant related literature in order to position the study in the field of study under consideration. The second is to situate the contributions of the study, in particular to underline the relationship between the proposed research and previous investigations on the topic in order to identify the knowledge gap that the study intends to fill. The third one is to present the theoretical and empirical literature which is the foundation of the study. The chapter dwells on discussions of the details of CPD particularly in relation to the higher education contexts.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The core objective of teachers' CPD is to improve the performance of teachers in the teaching and learning process thereby raise students' academic achievements. It is a career-long process of improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of teachers in order to help them foster students' learning and success. As stated by Villegas-Riemers (2003), teachers' CPD has specific objectives such as supporting teachers to teach effectively using active learning approaches; improving teachers' mastery of the subject(s) they teach, helping teachers to develop positive attitudes towards their work at school level as well as at the large community level, introduce the idea of reflective practice; and assisting teachers to recognize their teaching duties and responsibilities as professional work via providing opportunities for growth, exploration, learning and development.

In addition, as asserted by Pollard (2002), the notion of CPD signifies the steady career-long process of learning and adaption which teachers are encouraged to undertake. This attempt is intimately connected to personal

development and career fulfillment. Moreover, professional development is part of the ongoing search to achieve high standards in teaching and learning, so that you can maximize the learning that will take place (Hillier, 2002). Furthermore, according to Solomon and Tresman (2002), the most enduring form of CPD is a process of coming to know oneself and one's strengths, weaknesses, and commitments as a teacher.

With regard to the basic principles of CPD, many scholars (Leu, 2004; Giable and Burns, 2005; Gray, 2005) suggest the following points to be taken in account in the process:

- The contents of CPD should focus on what teachers are to learn and how to address the different problems teachers may have in learning the contents to be learned.
- CPD should be based on analyses of the differences between the standards set for the training and the actual performance of the trainees.
- CPD should involve teachers in identifying what they want to learn and in developing the learning experiences in which they will be involved.
- CPD should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teachers.
- In CPD, most professional development activities should be organized around collaborative problem-solving strategies.
- Professional development should be continuous and ongoing activity that involves follow-up and support for further learning – including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives.
- Professional development should incorporate evaluation by multiple sources with respect to outcomes for trainees' learning and the processes involved in implementing the lessons learned.

In general, to be effective and efficient, CPD should be a planned, continuous and lifelong process whereby teachers try to develop their personal and professional qualities, and to improve their knowledge, skills and practice, leading to their empowerment, the improvement of their agency and the development of their organization and their students (Padwad and Dixit, 2011). To this end, they must pass through the following stages of development: getting the right adequate awareness, having keen understanding about the essence of professional development and the subsequent successes, engaging in continuous professional development

activities, demonstrating a high level of competency in their professional practices in their place of works.

2.2 Analytical Framework for the Study

This section presents the analytical framework for the study as rooted in existing research on teachers' professional development and the subsequent successes in terms of ensuring lifelong learning. Teachers' engagement in CPD program and their successes in terms of enhancing students' learning may be seen from different angles by different scholars at different times.

However, in this study the effectiveness of CPD particularly HDP was seen from the five components incorporated to HDP package i.e., reflective teacher, active learning, continuous assessment, research methodology, and university-industry linkage. In the following, I shall present each of the five elements briefly.

2.2.1 Being reflective teacher

Teaching is a complex activity that requires making appropriate decisions. Even if it is important for teachers to follow certain ground rules to make the teaching and learning processes orderly and fruitful, this practice may not make teachers effective and efficient. Hence, to be effective and efficient in their professional careers, teachers must develop reflective skills. Reflective action involves a series of logical rational steps which is based on deeper understanding of the matter under consideration. This means rather than guided by impulsive action, the teacher is guided by persistent and careful consideration of how a given activity should be accomplished (Brookfield, 1995). This notion was interpreted in this study in terms of analyzing the degree to which Rift Valley University as well as Unity University instructors show improvements in developing consistent reflective abilities and skills

2.2.2 Applying active learning

A teaching method is not merely a device adopted for communicating certain concepts to students and it is not exclusively the concern of the teacher who is supposed to be at the 'giving end'. This implies that a method must link up the teacher and his/her students into an organic relationship with constant mutual interaction (Aggarwal, 1996). Taking the above notion as a back drop, in this study, the extent to which Rift Valley University and Unity

University instructors brought change in terms of implementing active learning in their respective lessons was evaluated.

2.2.3 Implementing continuous assessment

A one shot assessment cannot give a true impression of a student's academic performance. This notion calls for the application of continuous assessment techniques. These techniques are learner-centered, teacher-directed, mutually beneficial, formative, context-specific, and ongoing processes. Therefore, this claim is interpreted in this research in terms of exploring the degree to which Rift Valley University and Unity University instructors brought improvement in applying different assessment techniques while assessing the performances of their students.

2.2.4 Research methodology

Conducting scientific research is one of the responsibilities of university instructors. In other words, apart from teaching and rendering community services, university instructors must engage in research works that may solve teaching and learning problems, societal problems and beyond. Therefore, this notion was applied in this research from the perspective of assessing the degree to which Rift Valley University and Unity University instructors become productive in conducting relevant research works in order to solve the problems they encounter in their day-to-day teaching and learning practices.

2.2.5 University-industry linkage

Nowadays, the Ethiopian government is trying its best to increase the employability of the graduates of higher learning institutions of the country. To this end, it is important to familiarize the students with the real contexts of industries and/or enterprises which are the potential areas of employments for the graduates. This, in turn, suggests that it is important that university instructors must get first-hand experiences about the potential employers in order to prepare graduates that best fulfill the demands of the labour market. Hence, this notion is conceived and interpreted in this study in terms of analyzing the extent to which Rift Valley University and Unity University instructors brought significant improvements in terms of creating sustainable as well as relevant collaborations with the nearby industries and/or

organizations so as to better prepare graduates who best fit to the demands of the labour market.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Method

Descriptive survey research method was used in the study. This is because the core intention of the study was to explore the degree to which Rift Valley University and Unity University instructors, Adama campuses brought improvements based on the inputs they have got through HDP and/or related trainings. These activities could be conceptualized in terms of becoming reflective teachers, implementing active learning, using continuous assessment, being productive in conducting different research works, and creating fruitful university-industry linkages.

3.2. Subjects of the Study

In this study, all instructors serving in both Rift Valley University (110 instructors) and Unity University (12 instructors), Adama campuses were considered as sources of data. This is due to the fact that according to the current intent of the Ethiopian Ministry of Education, all instructors serving in any higher education institutions are expected to pursue pedagogical science trainings in order to enhance students' learning outcomes. In addition, secondary data sources such as HDP training package as well as relevant teachers' continuous professional development guides were used as additional inputs in the study.

3.3 Samples and Sampling Techniques

In this research, two private higher education institutions i.e., Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses, were selected as samples purposely. This deliberate selection of the two universities was guided by the notion that the specific institutional contexts of universities influence their staff perceptions and practices of issues of continuous professional development and successes (Cochran-Smith, 2003). Furthermore, these universities were taken as samples purposely due to the fact that relatively they have better institutional capacity for practicing CPD programs. This is assumed to be useful for judging the extent to which the other private higher education institutions with less capacity can practice CPD programs. When it comes to the actual respondents and informants of the study, all the instructors who serve in the two universities were taken as subjects of the

study deliberately because of the manageable number of the subjects. In addition, the officials and instructors interviewed were also intentionally selected based on their positions and experiences.

3.4 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis were used as tools of data collection. The items of the questionnaire were made both close-ended and open-ended. The former was prepared in a Likert-scale with five options (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree) with the intention of obtaining objective responses through ensuring relatively better flexibility in the checking of each item whereas the latter was assumed to give the respondents full freedom to express their feelings.

After preparing the questionnaire, pilot study was undertaken. In this regard, the questionnaire was administered to a sample consisting of 20 instructors, randomly selected from the universe of the study. The appropriateness of the items of the questionnaire, i.e. whether they help to gather the intended data and the intelligibility of the wording, was judged based on the responses of the respondents. Improvements were made after evaluating the validity and reliability of the responses of respondents.

The reliability of the items of the questionnaire was calculated using internal consistency method (Cronback, 1951 as cited in Ferguson and Takane, 1989). Accordingly, the reliabilities of the items dealing with the sub-scales reflective teacher, active learning, continuous assessment, research methodology, and university-industry linkage were found to be alpha (α) = 0.76, 0.84, 0.68, 0.80, and 0.78 respectively. As suggested by Gay (1980), if reliability coefficient is ≥ 0.50 , it can be accepted as reliable instrument. Furthermore, the validity of the items of the questionnaire was improved by gathering comments from experts in the area of study under consideration i.e., from PhD holders of curriculum studies and/or teacher education.

Finally, the questionnaire was administered to 123 instructors of the two sample private higher learning institutions, out of which seventy of them filled out the questionnaire properly and returned. To obtain additional information to the data that were collected via the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were used as tools of data collection. In this regard, four officials (two from each institution) and four instructors (two from each

institution) were interviewed. Moreover, to further strengthen the results of the study, a document analysis was used as an instrument of data collection.

The items of the questionnaire and interviews were designed in a way they complement each other. In other words, the contents of the interviews were designed in a way they follow the items of the questionnaire, and thus the results of the two tools of data collection were crosschecked. In general, the contents and focuses of the questionnaire and interviews as well as that of the document analysis emphasized the basic research questions formulated in the study.

3.5 Methods of Data Analysis

Mixed methodology was used to analyze the data that were gathered in connection to this study (Creswell, 2014; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This is because this approach provides the opportunity to gather, analyse and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data and thereby help the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the research problem under consideration (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Yin, 2014). This means that using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods enables a researcher to strengthen one method by offsetting the drawbacks of the other (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This, in turn, is assumed to increase the validity, reliability and generalizability of the results of the study. On the contrary, as to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), mixed methods research has drawbacks such as difficulty in mixing qualitative and quantitative data in a right way, it is expensive and time consuming nature, its unfamiliarity among especially experienced researchers, and difficulty in reconciling conflicting results.

Even though there are different types of mixed methods (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), in this study, a concurrent triangulation design, which enables a researcher to collect, analyse, and interpret both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Rauscher and Greenfield, 2009), was employed as a core design. This design is used in this research as it enables a researcher to give equal attention to both the qualitative and the quantitative data within a single study as a strategy to verify the results of the study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The data that were collected using the close-ended items of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. To this end, since the final results of the closed-ended items of the questionnaire were found to converge mainly to the option 'disagree,' the five-point scale was reduced to a three-point scale to make the data tabulation process more intelligible in terms of presenting the results in a concise manner. Hence, the values of the alternatives 'fully disagree' and 'disagree' were combined. Similarly, the values of the alternatives 'agree' and 'fully agree' were merged whereas the values of the alternative 'undecided' were treated separately. Therefore, the tabulation, analyses, and interpretations of the quantitative data were made based on the three-point scale table.

On the other hand, the data which were collected using the open-ended items of the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis were analyzed using qualitative approach. In this regard, the data gathered via the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic approach. In other words, the data analysis process involved transcribing which included constructions from an oral conversation to a written text, coding, and sorting out the frequent issues that emanated from the collected data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). In this regard, to maintain anonymity particularly in direct quotations, the informants of the interviews were substituted by related acronyms and then followed by subsequent numbers. Hence, the four officials were represented as OF1, OF2...OF4. Similarly, the four instructors were symbolized by IN1, IN2...IN4.

Finally, summaries, conclusions, and recommendations were made based on the findings of the study. In general, the results of this study were organised on the bases of the survey results and the results obtained through the interviews as well as document analysis. Each of the results was presented and discussed in turn.

4. Results and Discussions

In this section of the study, the primary as well as secondary data collected from different sources were presented and discussed. To this end, the data collected using close-ended items of the questionnaire were presented and analysed quantitatively whereas the others were analysed via qualitative approach.

4.1 Survey results

Table 1. Instructors' opinions on the practices of HDP in their respect university

No	Questionnaire items	Proportion of instructors in each category					
		Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
1	I often use reflection as a means to improve my teaching practices.	44	62.86	8	11.43		25.71
2	I usually encourage my students to make their own notes rather than taking notes.	50	71.43	6	8.57	14	20.00
3	I very often use different assessment techniques to evaluate the performances of my students instead of using only mid-term and final examinations.	56	80.00	4	5.71	10	14.29
4	I often conduct action research and/or rigorous studies in order to solve the problems I encounter in day-to-day teaching practices.	62	88.57	2	2.86	6	8.57
5	I usually attempt to create sustainable linkages with organizations which hire the graduates of my university.	64	91.43	2	2.86	4	5.71
6	I very often try to identify my strengths and limitations with respect to my day-to-day instructional practices.	40	57.14	10	14.29	20	28.57
7	I often attempt to use students' diverse backgrounds as inputs to enrich the lessons I teach.	58	82.86	6	8.57	6	8.57
8	I regularly assess whether my students really understood my lessons or not.	50	71.43	7	10.00	13	18.57

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No	Questionnaire items	Proportion of instructors in each category					
		Disagree		Undecided		Agree	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
9	I often engage in research activities in addition to effectively teaching the lessons I am assigned to teach.	56	80.00	6	8.57	8	11.43
10	I have a keen believe that university instructors have the responsibility to create strong and sustainable link with nearby industries/organizations.	28	40.00	4	5.71	38	54.29
11	I usually discuss with my colleagues about as to how to improve our mode of lessons deliveries.	48	68.57	5	7.14	17	24.29
12	I often revise my teaching methods in order to help the students to develop a critical literacy that involves the development of analytic abilities.	58	82.86	3	4.29	9	12.86
13	I collect my students' marks regularly and use the marks as inputs to improve my teaching duties.	49	70.00	6	8.57	15	21.43
14	I often encourage students to engage in problem-solving and/or critical thinking techniques through the application of action research.	42	60.00	12	17.14	16	22.86
15	I usually try to help my students to get in-depth understanding about the relationships between universities and the nearby industries and/or	60	85.71	4	5.71	6	8.57

Brookfield (1995) argues that being critically reflective teacher increases the chance to have real and lasting impact on those students that we teach. Nevertheless, the majority (62.86%) of the instructors indicated that they do not often use reflection as a means to improve their teaching practices. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents (57.14%) said that they do not very often try to identify their strengths and limitations with respect to their day-to-day instructional practices. Similarly, most of the respondents (68.57%) indicated that they usually do not discuss with their colleagues about as to how to improve their mode of lessons deliveries. On the basis of these responses, it could be argued that the majority of the instructors are not reflective professionals.

As suggested by Ramsden (1992), the teachers' roles in the application of the student-centred teaching methods is to encourage the development of independent learning. Nevertheless, 71.43% of the respondents replied that they usually do not encourage their students to make their own notes. In addition, the majority of the respondents (82.86%) said that they do not often attempt to use students' diverse backgrounds as relevant inputs to enrich the lessons they teach. Furthermore, 82.86% of the respondents asserted that they do not often revise their teaching methods in order to help their students to develop a critical literacy that involves the development of analytic abilities. From the above responses one can deduce that the majority of the instructors of the two sample universities do not apply active learning in their day-to-day instructional practices.

Besides, 80% of the instructors had the opinion that they do not very often use different assessment techniques to evaluate the performances of their students. Similarly, 71.43% of the respondents reported that they do not regularly assess whether their students really understood their lessons or not. By the same token, 70% of the instructors indicated that they do not collect their students' marks regularly and use the marks as inputs to improve their teaching duties. From the above responses, one could infer that the majority of the respondents do not use continuous assessment while evaluating their students.

As stated by Zeichner and Noffke (2001), action research aims at improving students' academic achievement, providing opportunities for professional development and helping teachers make their practices more explicit. Nonetheless, 88.57% of the instructors confirmed the fact that they do not often

conduct action research and/or rigorous studies in order to solve the problems they encounter in day-to-day teaching practices. Similarly, the majority of the respondents (80%) reported that they do not often engage in research activities in addition to effectively teaching the lessons they are assigned to teach. Furthermore, most of the respondents (60%) asserted that they do not often encourage students to engage in problem-solving and/or critical thinking techniques through the application of action research. These responses may reveal that the majority of the respondents do not use action research as a means to improve their professional competences and thereby enhance students' academic achievements.

As pinpointed by International Institute of Education Planning (2001), university-industry linkages cover a large range of diverse activities in both teaching and research, from the more traditional activities such as student placement, staff exchanges, consultancy services, continuing professional development, joint R & D, to recent activities such as small enterprise development – the creation of spin-offs for the joint commercialization of R & D products and the development of consortia for collaborative R & D at the international level. Likewise, 65.71% of the respondents said that they have a keen believe that university instructors have the responsibility to create strong and sustainable link with nearby industries/organizations. However, 91.43% of the respondents confirmed that they do not usually attempt to create sustainable linkages with industries or organizations which hire the graduates of their university. Similarly, 85.71% of the respondents confirmed the fact that they do not usually try to help their students to get in-depth understanding about the relationships between universities and the nearby industries and/or organizations. On the bases of the above responses, one could argue that the majority of the instructors have positive dispositions about university-industry linkages but when it comes to practice they do not usually exercise this kind of relationship.

Moreover, one of the key questions raised through the open-ended items of the questionnaire to analyse the magnitude of changes brought about as a result of participating in on-job trainings such as HDP was 'could you please describe the magnitude of the changes brought about following your participations in on-job trainings organized by your current university?' In response to this question, some of the core points noted by the respondents are:

- After all, there is no regular professional development program in our institution.
- Except little training, there is no opportunity to fully engage in continuous professional development.
- As profit making institutions, private higher education institutions bother only about the credentials of the instructors they employ thereby the profit they collect. They do not care about the quality of education. Hence, there is no intention of organizing CPD programs.
- Ethiopian private higher education institutions usually want to use the potentials of academic staffs as they exist to the maximum instead of giving them regular on-job trainings.
- There is a general lack of attention given to issues related to life-long learning or continuous professional development in private higher education institutions. As a result, there is no improvement in this regard.

These responses may show the fact that the Ethiopian private higher education institutions do not have a well-organized system through which their academic staffs get relevant and sustainable need-based trainings. Under such circumstances, it is very difficult to expect quality from the education rendered by those institutions. This, in turn, suggests the fact that there are compelling conditions that force private higher education institutions of Ethiopia to offer CPD program for their academic staffs.

In addition, in response to the question ‘what do you suggest for Ethiopian private higher education institutions?’ to effectively organize life-long learning or Continuous Professional Development program for their academic staffs?’ most respondents indicated that:

- The owners of private higher education institutions must get adequate awareness and convinced about the relevance of life-long learning or CPD program.
- The Ethiopian government must press the owners of private higher education institutions to show real commitments and determinations to implement staff development programs.
- There is a need for strengthening partnership between public and private higher education institutions in order to help them share best experiences and research findings that can improve the existing trend of staff development programs.
- Well-organized and sustainable pedagogical science trainings should be given to private higher education instructors.

- Issues of staff development programs must be given due attention by the Ethiopian Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency.

These responses imply the fact that a lot of works are needed in order to organize need-based sustainable staff development trainings in the private higher education sector so as to improve the quality of education offered by those institutions. This means there is a need for giving due attention to both updating and upgrading programs in the private higher education sectors.

4.2 Results of Interviews

As noted earlier, in addition to survey, interviews were used as tools of data collection. In this regard, data were gathered from both educational leaders and instructors. In this respect, in response to the interview question ‘how is life-long learning or continuous professional development organized in your institution?’ One of the interviewees said: “Except offering certain trainings occasionally, there are no life-long learning or continuous professional development programs in our institution” (OF2). Similarly, another official who took part in the interview claimed:

As a private higher learning institution, we usually give due attention to hiring academic staffs that have good qualifications. However, we do not give keen attention to organizing and offering life-long learning or continuous professional development programs in our institution” (OF4).

From the above responses, one can realize that there are no regular and well-organized continuous professional development programs in the private higher education institutions of Ethiopia. This, in turn, implies the absence of professionalism on the part of the instructors serving in the universities under consideration.

Instructors may need support from the entire community of higher education institutions, and especially from educational administrators, to effectively produce citizens who are independent learners and critical thinkers. To do so, in the first place, the instructors themselves must get inputs that help them get the necessary knowledge and skills. In this regard, in response to the interview question ‘how often do you arrange trainings that help your instructors to get in-depth awareness about concepts such as reflection, active learning, continuous assessment, action research, and/or university-industry linkage?’ one of the official informants responded:

So far, there is no tradition of organising trainings that incorporated concepts such as reflection, active learning, continuous assessment, action

research, and/or university-industry linkage. We need the necessary plan and finance to facilitate such activities. (OF3).

By the same token, another official asserted: “I think organising and offering such trainings is difficult to practice in private higher education institutions as it incurs a lot of costs.” (OF1)

The above responses reveal the fact that there is no tradition of arranging and offering continuous professional development programs in the private higher learning institutions of Ethiopia. Under such condition, it is less likely that the instructors produce students who have inquisitive minds and critical thinkers.

To effectively produce students who have high-order thinking as well as problem-solving skills, there is a need for engaging them in activities that develop their analytic powers. To do so, in the first place, the instructors must be well versed with the knowledge and skills necessary to inculcate those concepts into students’ minds. Based on this premise, the following interview question was posed to an instructor: ‘in your view, how important is it to encourage private higher education institutions’ instructors to engage in sustainable trainings that dwell on active learning, continuous assessment, and action research?’ In response to the question, the informant noted that:

Ideally, such trainings are important in Ethiopian private higher education institutions’ contexts. But due to lack of real concern and commitments, it is very difficult to offer such trainings in the contemporary private higher education institutions’ realities (IN2).

In response to the same question, another instructor commented that:

These kinds of trainings are extremely important particularly for instructors who have applied background. However, due to lack of concern and commitment, Ethiopian private higher education institutions’ instructors mainly use the traditional method of teaching i.e., the lecture method.” (IN1)

In addition, in response to the interview question ‘how often do you create partnership with the nearby industries or organizations that most likely hire the graduates of your university?’ “Ideally, such kind of partnership is very important in the private higher education sector. But due to lack of practical knowledge, skill, and commitment, there are no such attempts in the current higher education institutions’ contexts.” (IN3)

In answering the same question, an instructor illustrated:

I think, this kind of collaboration is very important to produce students who best fit to the demands of industries and/or organizations. Nonetheless, there is no attempt of establishing this kind of partnership in the private higher education sector. (IN4)

In general, from the above responses one can deduce that both the educational leaders and the instructors are not in a position to get an in-depth awareness about issues related to being reflective instructor, active learning, continuous assessment, action research, and university-industry linkages. This, in turn, reveals that there is no HDP program in the private higher education institutions of the country.

5. Summaries, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1 Summaries and Conclusions

The central intention of this study was to investigate the role of higher diploma program in enhancing life-long learning, teachers' professional development and success in Ethiopian private higher education institutions in general and in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses in particular. To this end, the following basic research questions were posed:

- To what extent is HDP effective in terms of enhancing instructors' continuous professional development and success in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses?
- What are the opportunities related with the implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses?
- What are the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses?
- What should be done to facilitate the effective implementation of HDP in the two private higher learning institutions?

To answer the research questions, the current staff development programs that have been used by higher education institutions were critically investigated using the five dimensions (being reflective teacher, active learning, continuous assessment, action research, and university-industry linkage), encompassed in HDP, as analytical tools. In the study, a research design involving descriptive survey research method was used. Furthermore, in the study, data were collected using questionnaire, interviews, and document analysis. Mixed methods were used to analyze the data.

The findings of the study revealed that HDP is not effective in terms of enhancing instructors' continuous professional development and success in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses. In addition, with regard to the opportunities related with the implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses, the findings of the study imply that if properly implemented in the two universities, HDP can enhance instructors' continuous professional development and result in success in terms of facilitating students' academic achievements.

When it comes to the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of HDP in Rift Valley University and Unity University, Adama campuses, the study reveals that obstacles such as absence of regular professional development program in the two institutions, focus of the private universities on profits instead of the quality of education, the general lack of updating and upgrading programs were some of the major challenges that hinder the effective implementation HDP program in the two campuses.

On the basis of the above findings, although the Ethiopian government more than ever emphasizes on programs that support the improvement of education quality, it can be concluded that HDP is a missing element in the two higher education institutions. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to ensure the quality of education.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher would like to recommend the following:

- There is a need for delivering a well-organized and sustainable continuous professional development programs in the private higher learning institutions of the country. Besides, the trainings should be offered by pedagogical science specialists.
- There is a need for preparing a need-based pedagogical science package that consists of concepts such as being reflective instructor, active learning, continuous assessment, action research, and university-industry linkage that will serve as a guideline for the training.
- As part of the above package, it is important to set indicators/parameters against which the success or failure of the program could be evaluated.

- For the effective implementation of continuous professional development programs in the private higher education institutions, there is a need for raising the awareness as well as commitments of the owners of the institutions.
- As part of this recommendation, there is a need for establishing a fully-fledged as well as well-furnished training center in the respective institution. This center should offer inductive training for novice teachers as well as on-job trainings for the experienced ones.
- There is also a need for creating relevant and sustainable partnership between private and public higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of education through experience sharing and staff as well as students exchange programs.

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