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10 Demands and Challenges: Experiences of Ethiopian Rural School Teachers

Kati Keski-Mäenpää

Abstract

Rural schools in Ethiopia are characterized by high drop-out rates, a lack of teaching materials, and low learning achievements. This study examines the experiences of teachers who work in such schools and emphasizes that their work can make significant contributions to the development of education in Ethiopia. The paper seeks to answer a question: 'How do the teachers perceive their work situation and how could this be improved?' The findings show that according to teachers' opinion the current principal challenge is the tension between strict curriculum requirements, associated with annual testing, and follow-up, while the government insists that teaching should be more student centered.

Keywords: Rural Schools, Sub-Saharan Africa, Teacherhood

Introduction

> My first day in Kambata School: I walk through the gate to large school yard. Grass is growing high, older students play volleyball and smaller ones run by bare foot. There must be hundreds of them! They are not wearing uniforms. Later I hear that the dean and teachers have made the decision not to demand that families buy uniforms. Parents are farmers and it would be impossible for them to buy uniforms for all children. In that case they could not send all children to school. Good decision! (Diary, October 10, 2011)

Ethiopia has the most limited access to education of any country in Sub-Saharan Africa, although the situation has improved greatly over the last few years. About 90% of children start school, but only 20% achieve their primary-school certificates. There are many reasons for drop out—having to help at home, getting married, being unable to purchase a uniform, etc. (Lasonen 2005; Mulkeen 2006). Drop-out rate is slightly lower for boys than it is for girls. Concerning regional variation, the highest drop-out rate is observed in the Somali region. (MoE 2012).

Beginning in 2000, the government of Ethiopia began to spend more on education than ever before (World Bank, 2005, p. 32). The Education for All Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2012) indicated that the proportion of children not attending primary school had decreased dramatically from almost 60% (2001) to 20% (2010). Despite these achievements, there are still more than three million of out-of-school children in the primary age group that have never enrolled or that have dropped out of school (MoE 2012). The worst situation is with disabled children. For example only 2-3 % of deaf or blind children have access to school. Reasons for that are the attitudes towards disabled children and lack of suitable school services (Keski-Mäenpää, 2013; MoE 2012).

It remains difficult to get children to school at the correct age and to have them progress to completion the school. 87,6 % of boys and 82,5% of girls are at school at the age of 7 and the amount rises to 90,9% (boys) and 87,7% (girls) at the age of 8 (MoE, 2012). Starting school late correlates with drop-out and is one of the major barriers to achieving primary

education (MoE 2012). Reasons for starting school late are long distance, health and nutritional status and un-awareness of the importance of sending children to school in a timely manner. Also child labor is common both in rural and urban areas of the country. (Lasonen, 2005; Mulkeen, 2006; MoE 2012.)

The educational gap between rural and urban areas can be described as drastic. Richer city households are able to spend significantly more money on education, thereby providing children with better quality schooling. This includes private schooling or private tuition (UNESCO, 2012). Rural schools have very modest buildings (often made of clay). However, children often lack text-books and teachers lack the instructional materials. Student-teacher ratios are very high. In addition, HIV/AIDS infection is likely to increase. It will influence the already serious teacher shortage (Lasonen, 2005, p. 10). The rural population constitutes 84.4% of Ethiopia's total population (World Bank, 2012).

Many reports on rural teaching environments in Sub-Saharan Africa have appeared, but very little has been written on teacher perceptions of how such environments impact teaching and learning. Often, the analysis or statistical research does not reflect differences between urban and rural areas. Sometimes, information from rural areas is even excluded because of complications in collecting data from remote, hard to reach areas (Buckler, 2011; Mulkeen, 2006).

After living for more than six years in Ethiopia, I became interested in the teaching standards of Ethiopian teachers. I had read many articles about great improvements in access to schools, but I needed to hear about teacher experiences directly. The purpose of this paper is to present the voices, feelings, and perspectives of rural school teachers.

This paper examines the challenges in the rural schools of Ethiopia. It seeks answers to questions about major challenges in rural schools and how these challenges impact teaching and teachers' work at the schools. The paper begins by defining the conceptual framework of the research. The Ethiopian school system, a relevant new policy termed CPD (defined later), and school development theories are briefly described. Next, the research method and findings are presented. In the conclusion, I discuss the tensions between the new CPD policy and the requirements of the

strict curriculum and follow-up system, noting that this poses problems in the minds of teachers.

Contextualisation: Schooling in Ethiopia, Rural Schools' Problems

General education in Ethiopia consists of 8 years of primary education and 2 years of general secondary education, which is followed by 2 years of upper secondary education. Primary education is split into grades 1-4 (primary first cycle) and grades 5-8 (primary second cycle). Preschool education lasts for 2 years and is for children aged 4–6 years. It is not compulsory. Only 11,7% of children attend the pre-primary education and they are mostly in urban areas. The official age of entry into primary school is 7 years. Many children start school later. This often results in early drop-out and lower levels of educational attainment (MoE 2012).

Even today, not all children are sended to school. In total, 63,4% of primary aged children (age group 7-12) and 70,1% of lower secondary aged children (age group 13-16) attend the school. Drop-out is more common in rural areas. Feredes and Erulkars (2009, pp. 7–8) interviewed girls who had never been to school, and explored why this was occurring. More than half of all girls (57%) reported that their families could not afford schooling. Family disapproval (15%) was next, followed by the burden of domestic responsibilities (10%). Six percent of the girls reported that no school was within easy access of their home. Other reasons for not attending school included marriage (3%), death of parents (2%), lack of interest (2%), and illness (2%). As almost 50 % of adults work in agriculture and forestry, children are needed at home. They help parents in the fields or take care of younger siblings.

Children in rural areas are considered difficult to educate (Mulkeen, 2006) because of minimal parental encouragement, demands on their time, and the perception that the curriculum is not related to everyday life. Most parents are farmers and many are illiterate. The literacy rate of

adults aged 15 years and over is only 30% (UNICEF, 2010). Teachers report that parents often do not understand the importance of education for their children and regular attendance at school. Even when parents understand the importance of schooling, they may be unable to support their children in learning. Parents in rural areas often have low levels of education and may not value schooling. Many rural households are dependent on children for help, especially at harvest, but schools usually operate rigid schedules, both in terms of school hours and term dates (Mulkeen, 2006). Child labor is one of the major impediments that affect children´s school attendance. 42% of rural children and 29,1 of urban children tell that combining work and schooling affects their schooling (MoE 2012).

Families are vulnerable because droughts are frequent and they are thus often unable to purchase uniforms, notebooks, and pencils. Families in rural areas are big; there may be 6 to 10 children in a family. Uniform requirements inhibit attending school (Grieve, 2009, p. 159), especially in rural areas. Most schools require children to wear uniforms. The EFA report (UNESCO, 2012) found that cost was the primary reason that parents did not enroll children in school or took them out of school. Although school fees have been formally abolished in Ethiopian governmental schools, unofficial fees are still levied (UNESCO, 2012).

Rural schools are usually owned and controlled by the government. They have strict curricula and teachers make annual, weekly, and daily lesson plans. A "Woreda" advisor from the district education office visits monthly or more often.

Working as a teacher at Sub-Saharan schools is challenging. Schools are over-crowded and under-resourced, teacher housing is insufficient, and salaries are low (Buckler, 2011).

New Approach to Education: Continuous Professional Development

Many African countries, including Ethiopia, have made substantial progress towards improving access to primary education. The Ethiopian government has worked hard to attain millennium goals. Educational access has improved greatly, but quality remains a major challenge. Low levels of educational quality negatively impact learning outcomes.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoE) has emphasized the need to develop teaching quality (MoE, 2009) and launched a new approach to education, referred to as Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and is targeted at primary and secondary school teachers, leaders, and supervisors. The idea is to promote more active learning, problem-solving, and student-centered teaching, rather than rote learning and lecturing. CPD seeks to enhance student achievement (MoE, 2009). Ethiopian schools, like other schools in Sub-Saharan countries, have a long history of rote learning, copying, and lecturing. The new policy statement has raised many concerns among teachers.

It is mandatory that teachers embrace the new policy. The verbs "must" and "have to" are repeated many times in the 39 pages of the plan. The CPD framework states: "CPD is a compulsory requirement for those who teach in all Ethiopian educational establishments. It is the civic and professional duty of all educators to engage in Continuous Professional Development," (2009, p. 12) and later, "All Ethiopian schools are required to produce School Improvement Plans in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. CPD is an essential part of school improvement" (MoE, 2009, p. 14).

The overall aim of the new policy is to improve student achievement. The policy also seeks to improve classroom teacher performance. The policy emphasizes a "career-long process of improving knowledge, skills and attitudes, centered on the local context and particularly classroom practice" (MoE, 2009, pp. 15-16).

CPD methods are described in a document that is given to all schools and includes examples. The document mentions that teachers should plan

lessons together; conduct demonstration lessons, workshops, and action research; and engage in team teaching. "Woreda" (the district education office) and sub-city education officers are responsible for monitoring and evaluating the CPD activities of schools. Teachers are also required to maintain a portfolio with a record of their CPD activities (MoE, 2009, p. 39). "Each school teacher must take part in planned CPD activities for a minimum of sixty hours each year" (MoE, 2009, p. 26).

Serbessa´s (2006) research in Ethiopia showed that although policy emphasizes innovative teaching and learning, traditional lecture methods still dominate most classrooms. Rote learning and teacher centered learning methods were observed in this study. Lessons followed the same pattern. Teachers taught certain subjects by writing notes on the blackboard. Students copied the text to their note books. If the teacher asked questions, they were closed-ended; students were able to answer the questions only with one word, and only one option was correct. Open-ended questions were not used.

School Developments

Ministry of Education has worked hard to develop schools in Ethiopia. According to the goals of EFA access to schools has improved. Study books have been printed with the help of World Bank and other organizations. Still the learning achievements are remaining low.

According to Buckler (2011) not enough attention has been paid to the training needs of teachers in rural areas. Attention has been paid to improving access to schools, but training, recruiting, and retaining good quality teachers is still a major challenge in Sub-Saharan Africa. Pre-service and in-service teacher education is increasingly recognized as the key to achieving good quality education for all children. Meaningful teacher education policies are critical for developing good quality teacher education programs (Buckler, 2011), and Ethiopia has risen to face this challenge by creating the new CPD policy.

Professional development programs like CPD (Continuous Professional Development) are systematic efforts to bring change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students (Guskey, 2002). CDP has emphasized the improvement of learning outcomes as a main goal.

Often, like in Ethiopia, teachers are required to take part in professional development by government or other authority. Still most of them report that they engage in these activities because they want to become better teachers (Guskey, 2002.) Also in Kambata-school teachers were highly willing to attend all the meetings and workshops we had during my visits. For them, like teachers in Guskey's research, becoming a better teacher means enhancing student learning outcomes. They need advice on how to use active and student centered teaching methods in their day-to-day work. According to Guskey, development programs that fail to address these needs are unlikely to succeed. Knowing the theories is not enough, teachers need concrete and pragmatic advice on how to improve their students' achievements, or like in this research, how to use new teaching methods.

According to Guskey (2002) the three major goals of professional development programs are change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their attitudes and beliefs, and change in the learning outcomes of students. Significant change in teachers´ attitudes and beliefs occurs primarily after they gain evidence of improvements in student learning. The CDP program has been proposed to teachers in 2009. The theories of active teaching methods are now widely known, but they are not in practical use yet. Therefore improvements accomplished by use of active methods are not evident yet.

As a comparison, child-centered pedagogical reform has been undertaken for example in India, where government primary schools sought to reform dominant modes of textbook-based, rote-oriented, authoritarian, and didactic instruction, with the promise of more child-friendly, democratic learning environments. Research by Sriprakash (2010) showed that child-centered models do not always impact higher level learning and he questioned whether national and global development goals of providing quality education for all can be achieved through child-centered pedagogic reforms. At least methods should be contextualized to the local culture, not brought from abroad.

Method

Data for this paper has been collected during several visits at Kambata school. It was collected using group-interviews and observations in one of a rural government school in South-West Ethiopia. Kambata School (the name has been changed), had 1,400 students and 38 teachers. The teachers were 22 to 65 years of age. A few of the oldest teachers had been teaching locally since their graduation and the youngest ones had just graduated from teacher training college. One of the youngest teachers trained during the summer for a master's degree; a few teachers had bachelor degrees; most of the teachers had taken college-level training. There were 12 female teachers and 26 male teachers.

Teachers whose comments I am using in this paper are (names are changed):

Almaz – female-teacher, lower cycle
Gennet – female-teacher, upper cycle
Tekle – male-teacher, lower cycle
Dawit – male-teacher, upper cycle
Asefa – male-teacher, upper cycle
Bekele – male-teacher, upper cycle

The students are principally from agricultural families with 6 to 10 children. The area is mainly Christian. The Kambata School is typical, similar to other rural government primary schools in the area. Older buildings of Kambata School are made of clay and newer ones of cement. Newer buildings have electricity for part of the day. The school has no running water or internet connection.

All teachers from both the primary and secondary schools were interviewed in three groups using semi-structured interviews. Some themes had been predetermined, but many emerged during the interviews. Informal discussions with teachers (for example, during coffee breaks) also yielded data. The fieldwork was carried out during 2011 and 2012, with several extended visits to Kambata School (a total of three months).

Young teachers were the most willing to provide information and three of them became key contributors to this research. At first the school principal was present at most discussions because he seemed to take a particular interest in my work and probably control the issues I wanted to talk about. Usually, he either participated in the discussion or simply listened, but on one occasion, he asked me not to continue an interview because I was asking excessively sensitive questions about teacher corruption. Because I wanted to interview teachers privately, I did later interviews in school library, and the principal did not attend them.

All interviews and group discussions were recorded. Most discussions were in Amharic, but some were in English. Some discussions in homes or classrooms were not recorded, but I made field notes. I also took field notes during lessons.

A participatory ethnographic method was used in this research. It includes participant observation, which means observing subjects and establishing a place in natural setting in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw; 2010, 352). Becoming a participant inquires considerable time in the field, doing what the subjects do, eating what the subjects eat, noting, recording, thinking, learning and gaining trust (Rock, 2010, 32). My aim was to understand the reality where rural school teachers work and live. I needed to become one of the community and an active participant of the school, and this method was suitable for that. I wanted to put myself in my "participants' shoes" and one way to do that was to work as a substitute teacher at the Kambata school.

> On of the teacher was sick today and I substituted him... There were 64 students in the class room (8th grade) and I had to teach math for them. Content of the lesson was very challenging, all of the students did not have their own books and all I could use was a black board and a chalk. But they were listening silently, behaving really nicely and answering my questions. But yes, I missed calculators and teacher guidance book a lot! (diary 13.1.2014)

Observation and participation are characteristic features of the ethnographic approach (Rock, 2010, 4) and through participation I got infor-

mation I could not have found only through interviews. I visited teachers´ homes, went to see newborn babies and lunch several times with the teachers. I saw that ethnographic research is not passive or neutral. It is interactive and creative, selective and interpretive (Rock, 2010, 30). When I arrived to Kambata school I never knew what kind of data I would get and in what kind of situations. Would it be interview in the rest room or conversation outside middle of students?

One aim of ethnographic research is to produce descriptions that explain the world that has been researched to others (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2010, p. 352). The Ethiopian and European contexts differ greatly. Here, I will try to bring some insights and feelings of the Ethiopian context to readers by referring to my field diaries. This will hopefully afford a deeper understanding of the issues. Field notes are always selective. I chose to include notes that seemed significant at the time and omitted other matters that did not seem significant (Emerson, 2010, p. 353).

The analysis is based on ethnographic content analysis and consist of interviews, field-notes and discussions. Analysis happened in all stages of research. Pre-analysis has happened on the field already while I was doing fieldnotes and discussing with teachers. It continued in Finland while I was reading and coding the data. I had also a chance to discuss with Ethiopian colleagues in Finland and I could ask their opinions about my analysis. It deepened my understanding of the issue. I also discussed about my analysis with the Kambata school teachers. According to Rock (2010; 37) it is good to present the analysis to one´s subjects because it is their lives that one is reporting and one may have got things wrong.

Analysing has not been linear, but more like a cycle and a long, slowly developing and deepening process. Ethnographic research is more a continuation of fieldwork rather than a transparent record of past experiences in the field. The experiences and feelings of the researcher are connected with an area of knowledge and cultural analysis. (Tedlock 2000, 455.) My feelings and thoughts are part of data as well as interview material. I was lucky to be able to return back to the school many times. When I read the data at home, new questions emerged from it and I could continue the discussion later. I made the questions for the data, but also questions emerged from these data.

Ethnographers´ lives are embedded within their field experiences in such a way that all of their interactions involve moral choices. (Tedlock 2000, 455.) I reflected my role at the school in all stages of research. Often it was not clear whether I was a researcher or a friend. When I started my research my role was clear, I was someone from abroad conducting research. All teachers were told about the research and how data would be collected. They knew I was a researcher, but during the weeks and months of contact, I became more like a colleague and resource person, often asked to provide feedback on lessons and describe the Finnish mode of teaching. The present research was later transformed into action research and I became more of a supervisor or advisor. I always felt very welcome. One teacher told me,

> When you are here, we become better teachers. We try to plan better lessons and we are more active. You give us feedback and also we give feedback to each other's more than before. I feel we are developing professionally during those weeks when you are here. (Almaz)

In the analysis I coded different themes and tried to find connections between them. I saw that the culture and demands of it are linked with many challenges at school. This became central founding in the analysis. Themes emerging from the data were:
1) *Classroom challenges*
2) *Working environment*
3) *Status challenges*
4) *Expectations of the government.* This was indicated to currently be the most challenging issue. I will present these challenges in subsequent sections.

Results

Classroom Challenges

> Class-room walls are made of brown clay; the floor is dust. The front wall has a chalk-board but there are no posters or other material on the walls. There is one small window. There is no electricity; is the light adequate for children with poor eyesight? Are there any such children here? Children sit incredibly close to each other; there are 78 in all. Each group of five seems to share a book. The children are silent and wait for the teacher to begin the lesson. (Diary 11.10.2011)

During the first weeks of observation, it became obvious that the lack of teaching material poses great challenges for both teachers and students. This was also the most common issue mentioned in teacher interviews. The student-book ratio is 5:1. The only teaching materials used in class-rooms are a black-board and chalk. Lack of teaching materials affects student achievement. When five students share a book and take it home in turns, they cannot effectively study at home after school. In Ethiopia, most of the families in rural areas do not have books or computers.

The teachers remark that lack of teaching materials is a constant and major problem. Teaching without proper material is difficult:

> We have shortages of books. What we have here are outdated books. It is impossible to get books for students and teachers. The number of text books and the students is very different. Teachers are struggling and doing their best to use the limited source. (Gennet).

If there were books, they were not always suitable for rural schools. "The books are prepared for the urban students. But the rural students don't even spell. So the book content is far from their capacity. And this is causing problems on the teaching process" (Gennet).

Lack of teaching materials in combination with high student numbers promotes use of one-sided teaching methods. The use of methods involving student activity is challenging because schools do not have any extra material wherein students could find information by themselves. They do

not have access to the internet. Kambata School has a library with a few dozen books, but they are mostly old school text books.

The World Bank has become aware of the lack of teaching materials and has stated that the government should ensure that schools receive the human and financial resources they need. Classroom facilities and school numbers must be consistently and routinely addressed. Vulnerable groups should receive the assistance needed to participate in schooling (World Bank, 2005, p. 29).

Working environment

Getting to school and teaching are challenging for many rural school teachers because of long distances from home to school, lack of transportation, and job exhaustion. The Kambata School is made of clay and in the dry season, classrooms are very dusty. It is usual for neither water nor electricity to be available.

> Especially in our area teachers of rural schools do not have a place for a rest. They come far away. Other office workers have a tea break at 10 o'clock. But teachers don't. They just go to their teaching directly without any rest. (Tekle).

Teaching in ill-ventilated classrooms containing 80– 100 students is exhausting. The dry season temperature is often very high. Teachers describe the teaching and learning environment as quite discouraging, especially during the afternoon shift (Negash, 2006, p. 33). Schools are overcrowded; more than 20% of government primary schools have more than 900 pupils, and about 25% of government secondary schools have more than 2,500 students (World Bank, 2005, p. 34). Rural schools are more crowded than urban schools.

> Some people come by bus from far away and half of the way they take a walk to get in to the school. The government policy command to teach the whole day, but that is too difficult to do. Some people get here even before they eat their breakfast. There is nothing provided to refresh them and the job is overloaded. (Tekle)

A previous report (Gemeda et al., 2013) found that teachers in Ethiopia felt overloaded because of long travel distances, no opportunity for rest, and long working hours. Today, policy training sessions have been added to the workload; teachers often have many non-teaching responsibilities.

Status Challenges

The salary of teachers is low compared to that of other educated groups. This affects their ability to eat adequately and dress appropriately. There are other effects:

> Teachers don't have capacity to build their own house. Because of that they are facing problem in marriage. They can't marry whom they choose. In our area someone has to have his own house to marry someone. Otherwise he is no going to be chosen by female. (Dawit).

Interviewees mentioned that previously, teachers had been viewed as professionals and had enjoyed a high status in the community. The culture had accorded respect to teachers and older people. This situation has changed due teacher poverty.

> Teachers are not respected by the community anymore. Farmers and merchants have a better capital than teachers. So people undermine them. Even the students do not respect them. Students in the class need to be superior, because they have better dresses, mobile … In this situation teachers cannot tolerate to teach here and they move to South Africa and Sudan. They can get a better life there. (Dawit)

> The rural teachers earn a salary of 100-150 euros a month depending of their education level. That money is not enough to cover the monthly house expenses. It is not enough even to by one quintal of teff (local grain). Economical problem causes stress to the teachers. The gap between teachers and other people has caused loss of confidence. (Asefa).

Expectations of the Government

Teachers felt stressed because the government unrealistically expects that they will follow-up with each student. The number of students in classes makes this impossible:

> At grade one there are 80 to 90 students. Reaching those 90 students is teachers' burden. He can't reach all those students. One teacher teaches five subjects each class. Teaching all five subjects and evaluating each student's performance is difficult. Each book has annual, monthly and weekly plans. Teacher has to finish the book at the end of the semester. Following up each student and assessing their achievements is a big stress. Actually the problem is the policy. It is difficult to apply the policy. Just for the sake of survival we have to accept the policy even if following the students is impossible. (Dawit)

Teachers were often unwilling to discuss policy or government, but mentioned the demands of government many times during the conversation: "Teachers try to satisfy the interest of the government policy and their own career" (Asefa).

Government has stressed the need to develop country-wide teaching methods that are more student-centered. Indeed, in countries such as India, child-centered education has been advocated to address low student retention and low achievement in rural government primary schools. Pedagogic renewal in Indian primary schools has sought to replace the dominant modes of textbook-based, rote-oriented instruction that are authoritarian and didactic with more child-friendly, democratic learning environments. (Sriprakash, 2010, p. 297.)

This situation raised many concerns in teachers: "I know it is a good idea, to teach children in student centered way, but I have no idea how to do it. Well, I know it in theory, but how to do it in practice?" (Dawit), and

> We have had theoretical courses about how to use Student-Centered-Teaching methods, but we have never seen anybody to really use it. It is difficult just to begin teaching in a new way. Our method is writing on the black board and students hear that and forget it after a while. (Asefa)

Teachers are teaching the same way than they have been taught in their own school time. According to Brown (2004) the most resilient teachers´ conceptions of teaching come from memories of their own schooling and observations of their own teachers. The teachers know the theory of student-centered teaching but feel that it is difficult to teach that way rather than lecturing: "Yes, I have got courses of student centered methods. It is good idea, to make students more active. We are trying to implement the idea. But it is hard" (Bekele).

According to the interviewees, one obstacle inhibiting use of student-centered teaching is the fact that the culture hinders the use of debate and questioning of teacher opinions. In Ethiopian culture, a teacher serves as an authority. Teacher-centered methods reinforce that role.

> How could I use debate or discussion as a teaching method? I should know the goal, where the discussion certainly ends. If students ask me very difficult questions, I cannot say that I don't know the answer. In our culture teacher has to have the knowledge. (Tekle)

Most teachers like the idea of student-centered teaching, but they do not know how to apply it. Some are not interested in the idea, but still feel they have to obey governmental policy. "We have to do what is told. The teacher is still working as much as he can but do not have mental freedom" (Asefa).

The Ethiopian government expects teachers to use student-centered teaching methods that were never used to teach the teachers. The curriculum lists detailed outcomes for each subject and formal annual tests are held. Test results are used to rank schools. Teachers are challenged when asked to cover the entire subject content. "We can't teach anything outside of curriculum. First, time is not enough, because we have to cover everything in the curriculum. Secondly, supervisors are following our teaching. We are not allowed to teach outside of curriculum" (Bekele).

Discussion

Ethiopian schools face many challenges, most of which are more serious in rural areas. In this research, I have related how teachers at Kambata School view the lack of teaching materials, low salary and status, workloads, and the expectations of government. These challenges are interlinked. For example, a lack of teaching materials and large class sizes hinder fulfillment of the expectations of government that student-centered pedagogy will be introduced.

Teacher-centered teaching methods have been used in Ethiopia, as well as in other Sub-Saharan countries, for decades. Figure 1 summarizes the challenges faced by rural schools. We see that the teaching context in rural areas of Ethiopia do not support child-centered teaching methods, but do support teacher-centered teaching methods.
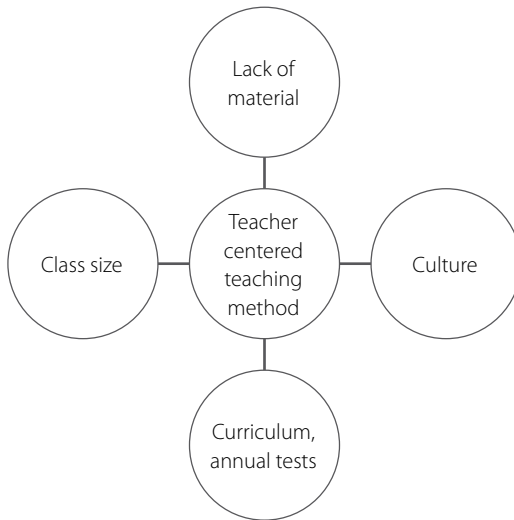
Figure 1. Summary of the challenges faced by rural schools.

Lack of material. Teaching material is often not available and students cannot get information from the internet or textbooks. It is easier to lecture than to find or make extra sources of information.

Class sizes. When almost 100 students sit in any class, it is easier for a teacher to lecture rather than to employ group work.

Culture. The teacher has traditionally been seen as a source of "correct" information. It is not appropriate to argue, debate, question, or doubt the knowledge of a teacher. If a teacher lectures, the authoritarian status is maintained.

Curriculum. The curriculum is rigid and very detailed. A teacher must "cover the content" and has little time for discussion, group work, or anything else. Teachers are not allowed to teach outside of the curriculum. They are monitored by inspectors.

Serbessa (2006) lists obstacles that must be overcome if student-centered methods are to be used in Ethiopia. These include the traditions of teaching and bringing up children. Other obstacles include the lack of resources, such as institutional and learning resources, teacher expertise, curricular materials appropriate for active learning, and student experience in actively participating in the teaching and learning processes.

Student-centered methods encourage students to be active and to debate, even to criticize. In Ethiopian culture, however, children are taught to fulfill, without question, any request made by an older person. Attainment of obedience and politeness are the overriding goals when bringing up children. The traditional forms of education and upbringing do not facilitate employment of active learning (Serbessa, 2006). In the work of Serbessa (2006), 89.2% of teachers and 89.7% of students considered that student roles were limited to listening to lectures, note-taking, and responding to questions when they were posed. Children who are brought up to be silent unless addressed, consider talking without being asked as impolite and disrespectful (Serbessa, 2006).

Gemeda, Fiorucci, and Catarci (2013) recently explored the nature of professional development in Ethiopian secondary schools from the perspective of teachers. The results were similar to those of the present work. Teachers feel they are forced to implement the governmental program. CPD had been planned at the ministerial level:

> We don't have any say in the direction and content of the programme.
> We don´t have a clear idea about the CPD. – We are simply told, "do
> it because it is useful." We don't have any option expect to accept
> it. (Gemeda et al., 2013, p. 7).

As we see, professional autonomy of teachers in Ethiopia is very low. Teachers are told what to teach, how to teach and what material they should use. They do not have freedom to choose the content of lesson, because they have to cover the content of their subjects and curricula is extremely rigid. Teachers are not allowed to discuss certain issues, such as political questions, with the students, if the teachers' views do not represent the ideology of the government. Follow-up by government is strict and constant.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, 82) restricting teachers´ autonomy drives them to compete instead of collaborate, and makes the work of teaching unappealing. Pearsons and Moormaw (2005) showed that as general teacher autonomy increased so did empowerment, professionalism and job satisfaction in all teaching levels. They claim that if teachers are seen as professionals, they should have the same kind of freedom to prescribe the best treatment for their students as doctors or lawyers do for their patients and clients. Autonomy of Ethiopian teachers is not yet researched maybe because it is one of the sensitive issues teachers and especially principals are not willing to discuss due to political reasons.

Conclusions

As we know, reasons for the poor implementation of child-centered methods in practice are large class sizes, a centrally designed curriculum, and an authoritarian culture; these do not support use of student-centered teaching methods. Before such pedagogy can be used effectively, structural changes are necessary. If student-centered teaching methods are demanded, curriculum reform is imperative. Curricular materials should be re-written to involve activities processing the new material and linking that material to what a student already knows. Tasks should be related to challenges in the real world and be contextually meaningful. They should not simply emphasize facts, but offer opportunities for self-assessment, peer discussion, and teacher feedback (Serbessa, 2006).

The overall aim of CPD is to improve achievement levels of Ethiopian students (MoE, 2008, p. 15). Teaching has but one goal: good annual test results that yield a good ranking. Does the new method simply seek to have students learn curriculum better or to develop thinking and problem-solving skills? From the example of India, we can see that child-centered pedagogical reforms do not always provide higher quality teaching (Sriprakash, 2010). Similar tensions between competence pedagogic ideals and the conditions and cultures of schooling have been reported in research beyond the Indian context (Vavrus, 2009; Barrett, 2007).

Can student-centered teaching pedagogy simply be transferred from country to country? Or would it be better to develop a more contextualized culture-based teaching method? Ethiopia, like other African countries, has vast cultural and natural resources that could be used in teaching. For example, outdoor education is still very unfamiliar in Ethiopia, but it could certainly be used in a rural context. One teacher at Kambata School had produced a leaflet about traditional ways to make food from the false banana tree. He said: "Many of our students do not know how to make our own traditional food. Now we can use this material also at schools." (male-teacher, upper level.) This is a good sample of how to use cultural context in teaching.

Smaller teacher-student ratios would enable working group discussion. Active learning requires that classrooms have enough space to allow appropriate seating arrangements. The current class size exceeds 80 students in many rural schools (Serbessa, 2006). Dialogue and discussion during class are not part of the present teaching culture because their use challenges traditional culture norms, whereby a teacher is considered to be an authority. Contextualized and applied approaches to learning and teaching, and co-designing of teaching with teachers may produce more sustainable results.

Teachers will lack commitment to student-centered pedagogy if they feel this is simply a new governmental demand that they are forced to obey. Pedagogy should be developed with input from all stakeholders in an open and transparent environment (Negash, 2006, p. 51). Teachers are torn by two disparate requirements: they are to develop new teaching skills and at the same time fulfill the demands of government. These challenges place great pressure on teachers. "The teachers try to satisfy the interest of the government policy and their own career" (Male-teacher, upper cycle). Teachers should be given appropriate training, not only on facts, but also about active learning methods. Before they can implement such methods, they should experience an active learning situation. Simply knowing a method does not mean that the method can be used without practice and guidance.

There is a need to highlight the voice of rural teachers. Ethnographic research could be a suitable tool for policy makers to provide insights into how policy might be better designed to meet the needs of all teachers, not only urban teachers. Certainly there is a need for policy makers to know more about the lives of rural teachers. (Buckler, 2011). Action research is widely known among Ethiopian teachers. It could be a suitable tool to create and test new, active and culturally contextualised teaching methods, not by foreigners or policy makers, but Ethiopian teachers themselves.

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