CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | REVIEW ARTICLE

The Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation vis-à-vis Schwab's signs of crisis in the field of curriculum

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Abstract: A well-noted scholar in curriculum Joseph Schwab claimed that the field of curriculum in the US was in a state of decline by unexamined and mistaken reliance on theory specially in the 1960s. The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the Ethiopian practical experiences of curriculum development and implementation context with respect to Schwab's curriculum theory, with a focus on the crisis and renaissance of the curriculum field. To this end, different local researches, policy documents, discussion with ministry officials, and the researchers’ lived experiences were used as the sources of data. Integrated with data collection, reflection analysis was made in narrative basis. The paper suggests that the curriculum as a field is not well articulated, the six signs of crisis are existent, and the resolutions forwarded by Schwab are not in place in the Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation scenario. Accordingly, we recommended that genuine participation of key stakeholders is necessary to realize Schwab’s deliberative curriculum development and implementation practices. To this effect, curriculum specialists should be organized and establish professional association.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the Ethiopian practical experiences of curriculum development and implementation with respect to Schwab's curriculum theory, with a focus on the crisis and renaissance of the curriculum field. To this end, different local researches, policy documents, discussion with ministry officials, and our lived experiences were used as sources of data. Integrated with data collection, reflectional analysis was made in narrative basis. The paper suggests that the curriculum as a field is not well articulated, the six signs of crisis are existent, and the resolutions forwarded by Schwab are not in place. Accordingly, we recommended that genuine participation of key stakeholders is necessary to realize Schwab’s deliberative curriculum development and implementation practices. To this effect, curriculum specialists should be organized and establish professional association aimed toward protecting the profession, safeguarding the field, providing consultation in curriculum planning, supervising school practices, and being engaged in any curriculum endeavors so that renaissance will be ensured.
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Subjects: Education Studies; Teachers & Teacher Education; Curriculum Studies

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1. Introduction
Ethiopia is one of the fastest growing countries in Africa moving toward achieving the vision of middle-level income. In order to realize this vision, an educational practice at all levels is considered as one of the central missions. Historically, the indigenous and religious education systems were the main tools used to sustain the generation in the country as curriculum being a vehicle to realize the intentions of these educational systems. Meanwhile, the western type of education system had started at the beginning of the twentieth century with the purpose to modernize the country. The education systems in the past regimes, however, were associated with problems of quality, relevance, access, and efficiency (TGE, 1994). The researchers felt that these problems were partly emanated from the ill practices of curriculum development and implementation in Ethiopia. So as to address these problems, a new education and training policy was developed and launched in 1994. The existing curriculum in Ethiopia is based on the objectives of the current education policy. This policy stressed the need for relevance and account to be taken of the profile of students. It also emphasized the importance in developing the curriculum and preparing textbooks based on international standards and local conditions.

It is obvious that the efforts of curriculum development and implementation in any country have been based upon certain philosophical assumptions, theories, and models. There are different scholars dealing with curriculum matters. The view of curriculum and its development efforts in the case of Ethiopia can be analyzed from the perspectives of the respective scholars. Among the influential figures in the world, Joseph Schwab was known for deliberative curriculum theory and was considered as pioneer of the notion of curriculum as practice. The main purpose of this paper was to analyze the Ethiopian practical experiences of curriculum development and implementation with respect to Schwab’s curriculum theory, with a focus on the crisis and renaissance of the curriculum field. To this end, different local researches, policy documents, discussion with the ministry officials, and the researchers’ lived experiences were used as the possible sources of data. Side by side with the data collection practice, the data obtained from these sources were analyzed using interpretational reflection.

The result of the paper was assumed to have significance for government officials, curriculum professionals, and other partners to ensure the presence of genuine participation of the key stakeholders in an effort to realize Schwab’s deliberative curriculum development and implementation. This article might also have a potential to inspire others to conduct studies concerning the issues thereby initiating curriculum specialists to protect the profession, safeguard the field, provide consultation in curriculum planning, supervise school practices, and so on. Here, the researchers do not mean that the current state of curriculum development and implementation in the Ethiopian context is entirely associated with factors related to Schwab’s theory; there could be other influencing factors that need further investigation. Our main concern in this paper is to analyze the curriculum development and implementation endeavors only from the perspective of the theory under consideration.

The first thing the researchers have done in this paper is to give brief explanation of the Ethiopian education system, and curriculum development and implementation practices. In the second place, a comprehensive summary of Schwab’s curriculum-related deliberative thoughts, the six signs of crisis he identified, and the alternative solutions he suggested in the field of
curriculum are presented. In the third part, the researchers’ reflective analysis on practical experiences of the Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation vis-à-vis the six signs of crisis outlined by Schwab is presented, which is followed by concluding remarks and recommendations.

1.1. Brief history of modern education and curriculum in Ethiopia

The Ethiopian education system and its curricular components were influenced by the French, Italian, British, American, and Socialist countries education systems in that order as one moves from the inception of modern education in Ethiopia to the educational systems before the current education. At the beginning, modern education was primarily for the sons of the nobility and the fundamental principle that dictated the development and implementation of its curriculum was political interest (Bishaw, 2012). Zewdie (2000), as cited by Bishaw (2012), stated that the education policymakers during the onset of modern education in Ethiopia (the Emperor, aristocracy, and foreign advisors) were interested in modernizing Ethiopia and do international communication easier. Subsequently, the aim of this French-oriented education was to master different languages such as French, Italian, English, Arabic, and Amharic. That is why the then schools of Ethiopia were blamed as mere language schools by writers and commentators of the education field in Ethiopia (Melesse, 2015).

During the Italian occupation period, there was neither uniform and standardized curriculum nor a standardized assessment method in the schools in Ethiopia. Immediately after the expulsion of Italian short-lived colonialism (nearly five years), the British government was interested to assist Ethiopia and greatly influenced the structure of education, medium of instruction, and evaluation system (Bishaw, 2012) and thereby the curriculum development and implementation practice in the country. The fundamental principle that dictated the development and implementation of school curriculum in Ethiopia until 1952 was the political agenda of the aristocracy and their foreign advisors (Zewdie, 2000 in Bishaw, 2012). From 1950s onwards, there was a gradual reduction of British influence as Americans began working in the Ministry of Education and experimental curriculum became operational up to the end of the imperial period (ibid.).

After the downfall of the then regime, Marxist–Leninist ideology became the central theme that guided the political, economic, and social life of the country. The socialist-oriented education stressed the inculcation of the ideology as the prime objective and the value of production as the main pillars (Negash, 2006). As it is commented by many scholars of the time, education was mainly conceptualized as an important means to secure political power.

In general, during the imperial and military governments, education was entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, access, and equity (TGE, 1994). The education systems and their respective curricula were designed not based on the economic, social, and cultural realities of the country. As we discussed earlier, it was adopted from the experiences of countries closer to the respective governments of the time. Similarly, the education system was divorced from practice, the contents were largely restricted to abstract book learning, and the curriculum was less capable of solving the problems of the country (MoE, 2002). The researchers felt that the respective regimes curricula were less capable of solving the problems of the country as their development and implementation practices were made by people of the highest political affiliation at the cost of the curriculum professionals of the time.

Accordingly, the present government of Ethiopia has developed a new education and training policy with 5 major and 15 specific objectives in mind. This educational policy is the third policy in the history of the country since 1945 (Negash, 2006). The major features of the policy include the reorganization of the curriculum and introduction of ethnic languages as medium of instruction, giving due emphasis to active learning methods, continuous assessment, self-contained classroom, special needs education, and so on. Following the policy, many achievements have been gained in terms of enrollment, equity, and access for education. However, the problems of quality of education in general and relevance of curriculum development and implementation (as one of the means to realize quality in education) in particular are still visible in the country’s education
system. Having understood these protracted problems, the government of Ethiopia is currently trying to reform the existing education system and its curriculum development and implementation practice in the form of roadmap that will be workable for the coming twelve years.

1.2. The current curriculum framework in Ethiopia

In the present Ethiopian education system, the curriculum is classified into different hierarchical categories (MoE, 2009). The first cycle of primary education concentrates on functional literacy and that of the second cycle on preparation for secondary education. The secondary school first cycle continues subjects taken in primary school with the purpose to provide general education that will enable the students to identify their needs, interests, and potential; to enable the students to continue further education and training; and to prepare students for the world of work. The secondary school second cycle continues the natural science and social science streams with the intention of enabling the students to choose subjects or areas of training; to prepare them for higher education and the world of work.

The government of Ethiopia in its Education Policy and Implementation Strategies (MoE, 2002) stated that the organization of the curriculum has been divided into two branches: general and specialized or vocational education. A general education fulfills the basic educational needs and includes all aspects of learning and prepares the students for pursuing subsequent specialized education. On the other hand, the special or vocational education prepares the students to engage in junior, medium or higher level vocational education and skills (MoE, 2002).

The curriculum development activities involve multistage processes of interrelated tasks such as determination of the syllabus, preparation of the instructional material and implementation of the curriculum. The preparation of the syllabus deals with specifications of program objectives, selection of contents, and decisions about teaching-learning strategies. Preparation of instructional materials involves creation of instructional materials, organization of materials into courses of study, try-out of new materials, and modification on the basis of try-out results. Curriculum or program implementation activity is related to dissemination, setting of a logistic system, teacher training, adjustment of national examination systems, and so on.

The government has continued to expand equitable access to achieve universal primary and general secondary education. In this regard, the fifth Education Sector Development Program document reported that dramatic achievement has been made (MoE, 2015). As indicated in this policy document, however, equivalent attainment to higher grades is not apparent; the efficiency and quality issues are still under question. Other local studies (e.g., Negash, 2006; Yayeh, 2017; Lemlem, 2010) as well as our experiences show that the current educational system and the corresponding curriculum development and implementation endeavors are in a state of doubt to fit for purpose. Negash (2006) has attributed to the language policy on the medium of instruction as the main cause for the crisis of education in the country, the curriculum being the vehicle to this crisis in education. He argued that the use of English language as medium of instruction starting from secondary to tertiary educational hierarchies in the curriculum development and implementation endeavors is one of the major causes for the decline of quality education in the nation. In order to alleviate such crisis which is closing to the brink of collapse, Tekeste then recommended that, among other things, major vernacular languages should be taken as medium of instruction throughout all the educational hierarchies.

On the other hand, Lemlem (2010) and Yayeh (2017) studied the Ethiopian education system, the curriculum development, and implementation endeavor being the means to realize the intentions of the education system and came to the conclusion that there is a state of decline in terms of quality in education. Lemlem attributed to factors related to curriculum development and implementation endeavors including organization, administration, provision, staff quality, evaluation system, academic freedom, and political control of the education system, and so on. According to Yayeh (2017), many educational institutions have no formal administrative unit responsible for curriculum design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Mulugeta further explained that vacant
positions which required curriculum professionals are not staffed with curriculum specialists. The
customers’ personal experiences also confirmed that low economic level of the country to fulfill
infrastructure and logistic services, poor attention given to the teaching profession by political autho-
rities, disengagement of teachers and students in respective tasks, and lack of pedagogical skills on
the part of the teachers are additional factors. Furthermore, the teacher training system is character-
ized by frequent reforms due to the global influences associated with lack of emphasis on local
contexts and absence of genuine societal participation (Kedir, 2007; Semela, 2017).

As far as the researchers’ understanding is concerned, there have been also signs of crisis in the
curriculum field in Ethiopia which can be associated with what Joseph Schwab raised regarding the
field of curriculum. Accordingly, our concern here is to evaluate the crisis of Ethiopian curriculum
against Schwab’s thoughts in general and signs of crisis in particular.

1.3. How Schwab thought about the field of curriculum

Joseph Schwab was a professor of natural sciences and education at the University of Chicago and
had lived there until getting retired in 1973. His BA degree was composite in English literature and
physics and his PhD degree was in genetics. Schwab became famous for his impact as a classroom
teacher and for his role as the principal designer of Chicago’s core curriculum in the science fields.
Schwab was not only a scientist but also a humanist who integrated all forms of knowledge toward
the goal of shaping students morally. He was the antithesis of a scientist who attempts to separate
facts from values in order to produce objective information. He was considered as pioneer of the
notion of curriculum as practice, founder of deliberative curriculum (Null, 2011).

In 1969, Schwab wrote his first Practical paper and examined the status of curriculum in U S and
identified six symptoms of crisis in the curriculum field. In his article, the author raised three concerns
about the state of curriculum in American education system. The first point is that the field of
curriculum is moribund or in a state of decline; the second point is that the curriculum field has
reached this unhappy state by unexamined and mistaken reliance on theory; and the third point is
that there will be a renaissance of the field of curriculum to contribute to the quality of education.

In his diagnosis of the state of curriculum in US, Joseph Schwab declared that curriculum inquiry is
dead at its theoretic roots and stunted in its practice. According to his statement, the role of theory had
achieved an exaggerated status in the context of the practical, leading to the pursuit of overarching
principles and procedures of curriculum development. The problem was, he added, in the way that
these theoretical formulations overwhelmed and overlooked the emergent quality of the practical
context. Schwab (1969) confidently concluded that “all theories, even the best of them in the simplest
sciences, necessarily neglect some aspects and facets of the facts of the case” (p. 109).

Finally, he provided a prescription that could cure the crisis in the field of curriculum. That
means, there should be a renaissance of the curriculum field in order to contribute to the quality of
education. The details of the signs of crisis and the corresponding resolutions as suggested by
Schwab are presented in the following sections.

2. Signs of crisis and resolutions in the curriculum field

2.1. Six signs of crisis in the curriculum field

Schwab (1369) has identified and outlined that there are usually six signs of this flight or directions
in which the flight occurs in the field of curriculum. These are flight of the field, flight upward, flight
downward, flight to the sideline, flight to perseverance, and flight to hot or caustic debates. Here,
the researchers tried to disclose what each of the flights meant.

2.1.1. Flight of the field

The flight of the field refers to a translocation of curriculum problems and solutions from curriculum
specialists to experts of other fields. According to Schwab’s observation, the increasing depletion of
psychoanalytic principles and methods was marked by the onset of contributions to its wisdom by internists, biochemists, and anthropologists. In support of this, Pinar (2004) claimed that several of the social sciences like psychology and sociology have colonized much of the field of curriculum.

2.1.2. Flight upward
As Schwab articulated it, this sign refers to a flight from discourse about the subject of the field to discourse about the discourse of the field, from use of principles and methods to talk about them, from grounded conclusions to the construction of models, from theory to meta-theory, and from meta-theory to meta-meta-theory.

2.1.3. Flight downward
The downward flight is an attempt by practitioners to return to the subject matter in a state of innocence, shorn not only of current principles but of all principles, in an effort to take a new, a pristine, and unmediated look at the curriculum field as a subject matter.

2.1.4. Flight to the sideline
According to Schwab, flight to sideline is related to a retreat of curriculum specialists to the role of observer, commentator, historian, and critic of contribution of others to the field. Curriculum experts have a tendency to take on these roles rather than to be engaged in real practical curriculum work.

2.1.5. Flight to perseveration
This sign consists of marked perseveration, a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new languages which add little or nothing to the old meanings as embodied in the older and familiar language, or repetition of old and familiar formulations by way of criticisms or minor additions and modifications. It is like the old wine in the new bottle kind of things.

2.1.6. Flight to hot, caustic debates
Flight to hot or caustic debate refers to a marked increase in frequency and intensity of the eristic, contentious, ad hominem debates. One author climaxes a series of petulancies by the remark that what he takes to be his own specialty has always been rare.

2.2. Resolutions for the crisis
Great scholars like John Dewey (1933) and Schon (1983) believed that there is no separation of thought and action. In order to avoid the crisis in the field of curriculum, Joseph Schwab suggested the method of uniting thought and action which mainly focus on problem-solving. His adoption of a problematic mode for connecting theory and practice represents a moral and intellectual choice. He recommended that possible stakeholders to the field of education should work in schools rather than talk about them, take charge of the school rather than allow others to do, build on past knowledge and not reinvent the wheel, focus more on practical than the theoretical, and avoid the entanglements of ad hominem debate (Schwab, 1969). To this end, the need for eclectic and commitment to deliberation are essential activities to be carried out by the concerned bodies.

As a resolution, Schwab claimed that deliberation is the central method curricularists should use as they do their work. For Schwab, to be a scholar in the curriculum field meant to work the ground of local practice. He summarized that curriculum inquiry is a practical undertaking concerned with the practice or inner work of schooling within the societal, institutional, and instructional contexts. Curriculum decisions made away from the classroom and the school could not capture local conditions (Schwab, 1969). In his words, “real acts, real teachers, real children are richer than and different from the theoretical representations” (p. 110).

Null (2011) clarified that Joseph Schwab has advised curriculum makers to be conscious of four commonplaces which are identified as teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu. Teachers are central force and no curriculum can be thought without a teacher. Learners are also crucial
elements in that ignoring their needs, interests, and backgrounds will not bring the expected impact. As one basic element of the commonplace, deliberators should look into subject matter but without making it predominant. Furthermore, the milieu in which a curriculum is developed and implemented should be carefully considered. Schwab finally asserted that the failure to consider any one of these factors will lead to an incomplete and ineffective curriculum. Therefore, curriculum deliberation must weigh alternatives and their costs and consequences against one another and choose not the right alternative but the best one (Schwab, 1969).

2.3. The Ethiopian curriculum vis-à-vis Schwab’s symptoms of crisis in the curriculum field

Curriculum as a field is not well articulated and theorized in the case of Ethiopia. However, when the researchers observe policy documents, practices, and opinions of professionals, there are adequate manifestations and implications about the state of curriculum field in the country. In this section, the current practices of Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation are analyzed from the perspectives of Schwab’s symptoms of crisis and corresponding resolutions about curriculum endeavors.

2.4. Flight of the field

Our intention here is to evaluate the extent to which contemporary curriculum concerns are influenced by curriculum professionals. The translocation of curriculum problems and solutions from curriculum specialists to experts of other fields is a common practice in Ethiopia. Throughout history, persons other than curricularists had been observed to take primary responsibility for solving curriculum problems. At the time of imperial period, for example, the fundamental principle that dictated the development of curriculum was political interest and the education policymakers were the kings, aristocrats, and foreign advisors (Bishaw, 2012). During the military period, curriculum assumptions and models were framed by Marxian philosophy and political ideology so as to secure political power. These clearly indicate that the curriculum field was colonized by politicians and political philosophers in the history of modern education in Ethiopia.

Similarly, the extent to which curriculum reforms influence by curriculum professors has been at a meager level in the present Ethiopian education system. It is possible to see that almost all school curricula development and implementation practices (at ministerial and regional levels) have been instituted and managed by subject-matter specialists. Curriculum issues and solutions at the policy level have been transferred to and handled by politicians and non-curricularists in Ethiopia. The process of preparation of the policy of the 1994 was largely external in that politicians were the main actors of the revision. Furthermore, curriculum experts were not genuinely engaged in the development of various training modalities such as Teacher Education System Overhaul, Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching, modularized curriculum in universities, the 30:70 placement policy (30% and 70% of students enrollment into the Arts and Science disciplines, respectively), and so on.

The researchers are also doubtful that the current reform movement entitled as the Education Roadmap has been still initiated and facilitated by curriculum professionals. The survey study and subsequent development of this reform document and the discussion made on the roadmap in the different Universities in Amhara region and beyond are cases in point to justify our feeling. As the researchers can see the team composition in the document, many of the participants in the survey process and compilation of the roadmap are non-curricularists. On top of that non-curriculum professionals were appointed to provide the orientation and facilitate the consultative conference conducted in the universities regarding this noble reform. In the universities which the researchers are familiar with, for example, position was considered as the main criteria to assign someone as a facilitator of the conference. Accordingly, professionals from law, economics, agriculture, and so on were appointed to do so. In a nutshell, less attention is given for curriculum scholars to play their part in the efforts of curriculum development and implementation in this noble curricular reform attempt in the current Ethiopia.

Having consultation with curriculum professionals at national and institutional levels is not a common practice in the Ethiopian education system. There are many high- and middle-level training institutions in agriculture, health, technology, and other non-curriculum fields in the country. However, they are not
acquainted to consult curriculum specialists in opening of new training programs, organization of curriculum experiences, preparation of instructional materials, selection of instructional strategies, and determining evaluation mechanisms. On the other hand, the curriculum organization of the present summer teacher training modality of the day is full of irregularities in that principles of logical sequences and prerequisites are not followed and redundancy of ideas on the teaching materials is common. Many higher institutions have no formal administrative unit responsible for curriculum design, development, implementation, and evaluation (Yayeh, 2017). The researchers’ lived experiences also confirmed that our respective universities’ Curriculum and Standards Committee is composed of professionals from the different disciplines but curriculum specialists are nonexistence. This clearly exemplifies that the curriculum field and curriculum professionals are not valued in the Ethiopian education system.

Another manifestation of the exclusion of curriculum professionals is the placement of experts in vacant positions that demand curriculum specialists. Despite the availability of many vacant positions for curriculum graduates, the requirements asked for these positions are open for every graduate of education and the positions are held by non-curriculum experts (Yayeh, 2017). That is, the placement of curriculum experts at the different levels of education sectors is not necessarily based on merits in terms of curriculum professionalism. People of curriculum concerns in the regional, zonal, and woreda education offices are not from curriculum specialists. For example, Higher Education Relevance and Quality Assurance Agency and Higher Education Strategy Center are staffed with experts from agriculture, technology, and business fields. Institutional educational quality assurance and curriculum relevance offices in most universities, including Amhara Region Universities, are not facilitated by curriculum professionals. As a result, prestigious universities like Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar are near to closing their graduate programs in curriculum studies, showing that there is low attention given by employing organizations which in turn leads to low attachment to the field on the part of students to be enrolled (Yayeh, 2017).

Therefore, based on the above literature and the researchers’ long years of personal experiences of the educational system of the nation, it is possible to conclude that the first sign of crisis of the curriculum field remains apparent in Ethiopia. This exclusion of curriculum experts in curriculum development assumes curriculum theory that neglects curriculum practice. This kind of exclusion in curriculum development and implementation strategies was recognized in America half a century ago and different writers had been articulating the problem since then. If we are genuine and wise, we can use these challenges as opportunity to initiate curricularists to organize themselves and struggle for professionalism. Schwab (1969) himself contended that the flight of the field itself is one of the more fruitful ways by which analogical principles are disclosed, modified, and adapted to the field in crisis. Thus, we need to take a lesson from experiences and make the necessary adjustments on professional activities and professionalism than ever done before.

2.5. The flight upward

As it is noted earlier, the second sign of crisis involves a flight from use of principles and methods to talk about them. According to Schwab, many of them are concerned less with the barriers to continued productivity in the field of curriculum than with exploitation of the exotic and the fashionable forms and models of theory and meta-theory. This sign of curriculum crisis is evident in the past and current education systems of the country. During the imperial and socialist periods, the curriculum department was heavily dominated by experts from the Western countries. In the time of socialist government, curriculum experts from East Germany were more responsible to make textbooks designed to meet the objective demands of the nation and the ideological needs of our society (Negash, 2006). These implied that there was curriculum endeavor characterized by a clear flight from the practical contexts to the unexamined theoretical directions. The fact that curriculum development was done dominantly by foreign experts implies that much consideration was not given to the practical reality of the country.

Scholars criticized consecutive Ethiopian governments for failing to incorporate Ethiopian local and traditional values in the education system (Girma, 2012). According to Atlibachew, the civilizing process is far from Ethiopian way of life, and it seems compulsory to awaken the traditional values which have
been accumulated for years in the church, mosque, and Gada systems. Furthermore, a discussion with officials of the Ministry of Education about the general education system of the country reveals that our education system is a western type ignoring the indigenous knowledge and practices. In his words, one expert speaks “Ethiopia is a country of Axum, Lalibela, Fasil, Gada System, unique music, etc; however, failing to incorporate such unique vocational, musical, architectural, and essential culture” (interview, 06/04/2019 E.C). There is less tendency of understanding the specific issues and problems facing real curriculum practice in schools or classrooms. The concern of debates (if there exists) is overinterpretations of the Tylerian objective model, Stenhouse's process model, Dewey's experiential learning, Piaget's/Vygotsky' constructivism, etc., rather than bringing constructive alternatives for curriculum action organic to the context of the country. The discourses are more of theoretical than practical.

On the other hand, the present move of theory away from the practical situation was also asserted by MoE (2002) in the document entitled “The Education and Training Policy and Its Implementation”. It reads,

...In the past, the curriculum as well as the textbooks in use were prepared and evaluated by experts in the Ministry of Education. ... ... As publishing textbooks has been the sole task of the Ministry for many years, it was not found easy to get experienced textbook writers. (p. 31)

As we can read the preceding portion of a paragraph, curriculum making was carried out by experts at the national or ministerial levels. As it is boldly written in the above vignette, this tradition had created shortage of experienced textbook writers while launching the present education and training policy. This shows that designers of the curriculum, writers of the textbooks, and evaluators of the curriculum were not to come from a diversified and wide spectrum of groups. This lack of deliberation in curriculum development intuitively indicated that there was a flight of the curriculum away from the practical contexts.

Even though the present government is seen to criticize the past regimes, the upward flight of curriculum is manifested in various ways in the present education system of Ethiopia too. In the current education and training policy, the needs and potential of the individual student as well as the demands of the society are put in the center. Following the endorsement of the policy, varied forms of innovations such as student-centered teaching methods, continuous assessment, automatic promotion, self-contained classroom organization, special needs education, multiculturalism, action research, gender responsive pedagogy, etc. have been introduced. We can find much literature dealing with elaboration of concepts, outlining of unique characteristics, explanation of merits and demerits, or forwarding implementation strategies about these innovations. There are also considerable local researches aimed at understanding the challenges, identifying the factors affecting the implementations, and suggesting possible solutions about these ideas of the policy, but remained shelved.

Different local studies and the researchers’ personal experiences show that the discourses have been more on conceptualization and interpretations rather than dealing with the practices of these progressive and constructive educational elements. Many studies conducted to assess the implementation of these educational innovations reported that their practices in classrooms have been at their lowest stages (Yayeh, 2017). Furthermore, if we consider universities in Amhara Region, continuous assessment is not authentically done, active learning methods are not in place, and action research is not part of the research culture although the universities have the intention to promote. Moreover, the researchers’ experiences of more than 20 years services (starting from high school through regional level education senior expert to the university levels) inform us that many educationalists have been in discourse (formally or informally) of educational and curricular issues; however, we are not successful in putting them into practice.

There are also considerable examples that show a great rhetoric-reality gap in the country, showing that the upward flight is evident on the other way. It is stated in the current education and training policy as follows:
... ... our country’s education was entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity. The objectives of education do not take cognizance of the society’s needs and do not adequately indicate future direction. The absence of interrelated contents and mode of presentation that can develop student’s knowledge, cognitive abilities and behavioral change by level, to adequately enrich problem-solving ability and attitude, are some of the major problems of our education system. Inadequate facilities, insufficient training of teachers, overcrowded classes are the realities of our educational system ... (TGE, 1994, p. 2)

The preceding vignette demonstrates that at the time of the endorsement of the education and training policy of the 1994, there were problems of curriculum relevance, low educational quality, poor organization of contents, inappropriateness of course delivery, low staff quality, large class size, and so on so that new policy was required. The government developed this policy and its implementation strategies by defining activities which mainly reflect the progressivism and constructivism philosophies. However, one can easily witness the actual situation in the current education system that there is no practical improvement in this regard. This argument is further strengthened by the Ministry of Education as follows:

Modern education was introduced to Ethiopia nearly a century ago. However, the education and training offered during these long years had limited positive impact on the lives of the people and national development. The education offered has not enabled to solve the problems of farmers, pastoralist, and change the lives of the overwhelming majority of the people. (MoE, 2002, p. 2)

As we can see from the preceding extract, the problems related to education are still prevalent. Our education system had limitations to come up with real problems and subsequent practical solutions. This manifests that a greater commitment is given for the talk about ideas rather than to engage in curriculum actions. This means that the second sign of curriculum crisis that was identified by Schwab is pervasive in the current education system of Ethiopia.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the crisis of curriculum with respect to upward flight is prevalent in different forms. More efforts are invested on issues inclined to abstract theories and unrealistic ideas rather than on dealing with practical realities of the country. Accordingly, it is advisable to consult principles of Schwab’s deliberative curriculum theory in order to minimize the rhetoric-reality gaps. By the same token, we should not neglect discourses and talks about principles and methods of curriculum inquiry, but with reasonable balance between the rhetoric and the practice. Schwab himself disclosed that the flight upward, to models and meta-theory, if done responsibly, becomes the proposal and test of possible new principles for the field of curriculum and its implementation.

2.6. The flight downward

As it has been discussed so far, flight downward is related to a return to the subject matter in a state of innocence, shorn not only of current principles but of all principles. This crisis will occur when there is frequent repudiation and displacement of historic principles by new theories without acknowledgment of preceding work (Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003). This sign of crisis is partly existent in Ethiopia. In this regard, by neglecting principles and practices that emerged from the historic field, politicians and policymakers are frequently observed to multiply earlier works by zero. The so-called new thoughts and practices displace established principles usually with no acknowledgment of preceding works and achievements. Negash (2006), for example, justified that the socialist regime had been criticizing the poor performance of its precedence, the Imperial system, in the field of education. Subsequently, the educational policy of the imperial regime was simply rejected as elitist and attempted to expand educational access after revolution (Negash, 2006).

Similarly, the current government started criticizing both the imperial and the socialist education systems as being limited in access and too academic in curriculum. The government is frequently seen to make severe criticism on the failures and overall denial of the entire successes in the past.
At the time of formulating the working education and training policy, the then transitional government has put the following in the introduction of the policy:

To date, it is known that our country’s education is entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility, and equity. The objectives of education do not take cognizance of the society’s needs and do not adequately indicate future direction. The absence of interrelated contents and mode of presentation that can develop student’s knowledge, cognitive abilities and behavioral change by level, to adequately enrich problem-solving ability and attitude, are some of the major problems of our education system. For this, a comprehensive education and training policy is formulated. (TGE, 1994, p. 2)

As anyone and educationalists can witness, the present government aggressively continued to expand the education sector so as to prove mistakes of the old regimes (Negash, 2006). Of course, it is undeniable that the current education and training policy has come up with new educational ideas such as self-contained classroom, instruction using mother tongue, student-centered teaching methods, action research, authentic assessment, and so on. However, any discourse of such educational ideas is at the expense of failures in the past education systems.

On the other hand, the current education system is established with the assumption that no reform attempt has been made ever in the past endeavors. For example, there were at least two remarkable reforms of education and curriculum in the preceding regimes. The Education Sector Review (hereafter ESR) of the imperial period and The Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (hereafter ERGGESE) of the socialist government were conducted in cognizant of the problems of the then education systems. If we refer the two documents, there are many aspects of similarities with the current education and training policy. Most of the recommendations forwarded by these reforms were referred and incorporated in restructuring of the educational hierarchies, national learning assessment strategies, organization of curriculum components, teacher training modalities, and so on. However, the current education and training policy document has never reflected a sort of acknowledgment to these reform initiatives. This implies that the present government seems to deny these attempts and promote itself as the originator of many educational ideas.

When we see the entire journey of the education and curriculum movement, ridiculing the past and overappreciating the present has been a common tradition in the Ethiopian education system. On the contrary, we may encounter the possibility of going back to the past practices. It is surprising that what were practiced in the past regimes have been getting renewed attention in the education roadmap which is on progress. For example, the educational structure, organization of curriculum, incorporation of vocational subjects, national assessment systems, and teacher education modalities are reconsidered in the education roadmap that will be launched in the near future (MoE, 2018). This indicates that the crisis of curriculum as a result of downward flight is evident in our country.

The above scenarios generally show that curriculum problems that enjoy a long history of analysis and resolution are approached innocent of previous works (Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003). Therefore, in an effort to resolve such kinds of crisis, the researchers are of the opinion that it is necessary to critically evaluate earlier works and modify them or replace them with the new ones rationally but not for political consumptions. Schwab (1969) himself claimed that the flight backward, to a state of innocence, is at least an effort to break the grip of old habits of thought and thus leave space for needed new ones.

2.7. The flight to the sideline
It has been discussed previously that this symptom is related to a retreat of curriculum specialists to the role of observer, commentator, historian, and critic of contribution of others to the field. This crisis is more or less related with the first and the second flights discussed above. In this regard, the Ethiopian curriculum experts have a tendency to take on the role of an observer, a commentator, or a critic rather than to be engaged in real practical curriculum work. In support of this, a discussion we made with curriculum experts in the Ministry of Education (on 6 March 2019) asserted,
Curriculum professionals are not owners of curriculum development nor are they invited for critical comments. Curriculum planning and related issues at all levels of the sector are made by non-curriculum professionals. That is why subjects are voluminous and difficult for students. And it is obvious that non-curriculum professionals are not well equipped with principles of curriculum development.

It is possible to say that all subject specialists in different fields of studies are conventionally considered to be curriculum experts. As it has been discussed earlier, it is not common to invite curriculum specialists for consultation regarding curriculum matters. Curriculum specialists have not been given significant place to contribute their expertise on the discourse as well as implementation of curriculum.

On the other hand, most curriculum professionals are engaged in doing research more on issues other than the curriculum contents (Lechisa, 2017). A survey conducted by Meskerem reveals that the curriculum field is considered as unquestioned hegemony in the case of Ethiopia. From this, the researchers can infer that there are many education professionals and curriculum specialists who seem to have less attachment with the curriculum. On the other hand, whenever they are given a chance to play as a role of commentator, our curriculum specialists (including the authors of this article) emphasize evaluation criteria mainly from the theoretical viewpoints articulated by western scholars. As a commentator, curriculum professionals are frequently observed to focus more on the current state of school curriculum and less on the generation of practical alternatives.

Furthermore, our educationalists and curriculum professionals as historians have played significant role in writing history of education and curriculum development in the country. As we have briefly presented the history of modern education in the previous section, there are many educators who have articulated the historical development of education in general and curriculum in particular. At their conclusion, they mostly close their rhetoric by criticizing and commenting the principles and trends of education and its curriculum implementation. In writing history, there is a tendency of curriculum professionals to comment on others’ works instead of searching for practical alternatives.

2.8. The flight to perseveration

As it has been articulated so far, flight to perseveration is a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new language which adds little or nothing to the old meanings as embodied in the older and familiar language. Perseveration is evident in the current Ethiopian education systems in general and curriculum development and implementation activities in particular. It is possible to argue that there are notable persons and books whose works are continuing restatements. There are many contents which were celebrated in the preceding centuries and still continued to recur regardless of the advancement of science and technology. The World Bank study result by Joshi and Verspoor (2013) reveals that many topics of the Ethiopian secondary school science subjects are outdated, unable to develop understanding, overprescriptive, and repeated over curricula years. Although secondary curricula are being revised in every five years, they are not able to keep up with rapid changes in science, technology, and economy (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013).

On the other hand, modification of the working educational principles, adaptation of foreign experiences, and making curriculum revision is not uncommon in our country. The reforms which have been made in the past and present systems are hinging on unpractical theory. The practical reality of curriculum implementation has no difference with the preceding traditions. As far as our practical experiences are concerned, the same teaching methods, assessment traditions, classroom management strategies, and school climate are still practiced in actual situations. We, therefore, feel that these recurrent practices reveal the repetition of old and familiar knowledge as good manifestations of flight to preservation.

The presence of the crisis with respect to the flight to perseveration can also be exemplified by the persistent application of the behavioral objectives theories of curriculum development and implementation. The Tylerian behavioral objectives model is predominantly advocated and...
practiced in the efforts of program building, curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation. The basic nature of ideas of Bobbitt and Tyler has been used to frame competency-based curriculum and instruction, curriculum mapping strategies, and standardization of testing mechanisms. In support of this, the curriculum framework designed in the year 2009 disclosed that it adopts the principles of a competency-based approach to education as the most flexible means to achieve the desired changes (MoE, 2009). Thus, it is possible to generalize that there is a tendency to stick ourselves with one dominant model, implying that the flight to preservation is evident.

Similarly, curriculum development processes in Ethiopia is dominantly based on content-oriented theoretical assumption. There is a focus on traditional subject disciplines, which requires more specialized and knowledgeable teachers. Usually teaching emphasizes the development of cognitive abilities based on greater emphasis upon the academic subjects. Integrated with this problem, the assessment and evaluation systems are highly dependent upon the conventional pencil-and-paper examinations (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). This implies that there is a focus on recurrently applying the prescribed and unexamined theory rather than paying attention to the dynamicity of practical and actual situations. These all indicate that the crisis of curriculum issues related to preservation is clearly manifested.

2.9. The flight to hot or caustic debates

As briefly described so far, the flight to hot or caustic debate is related to a marked increase in frequency and intensity of the eristic, contentious, ad hominem debates about curriculum. In the case of our country, we are not confident to talk about the existence of a critical and heated debate on curriculum as a field. Even though the debate is not common in the field of curriculum and its theorization, there are considerable instances of such debates on the different educational components including curriculum matters. When we talk of education and its implementation, there is a likelihood of discoursing about curriculum development and implementation.

Armed with this view, we can say that the rise in frequency and intensity of the heated and caustic debate is partially marked in Ethiopian education and curriculum efforts. This can be manifested in some heated academic debates characterized by competing paradigms or traditions. As to our opinion, we can consider the famous debates over the theoretical foundations of curriculum reforms during the three regimes of the nation. The ESR, the ERGEE, and the current Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia were major educational reform attempts in the country. In all of the cases of reforms, we can see an inclination to label the past education system as having poor quality, inequitable access, absence of relevant curriculum, inefficient implementation, etc. The present political and educational elite are characterized by criticizing the past systems and magnifying their own as best and rarely attempted so far. For instance, it is stated by MoE (2002) in the document “The Education and Training Policy and Its Implementation” that

The old educational system mostly focused on academic subjects and paid only lip service to vocational subjects. As such, the education did not help students to develop or cultivate practical and vocational skills. As the system was divorced from the practical material or cultural needs of the country, it did not instill in the student an appreciation or eagerness for knowledge. As the curriculum lacked in clear objectives, and appears to have been randomly designed with no specified target in mind, the profile and behavior of the students at the various levels was not definable ... (p. 28)

From this paragraph, we can clearly observe that the present officials harshly criticized the past education systems. The old education systems are judged as too academic in curriculum, artificial in vocational curriculum, irrelevant in the curricula, and poor organization in curricular components. The Ministry of Education officials claimed that many efforts have been made to reverse these situations. In this regard, the current education and training policy was promoted to the public as it came up with better ways of carrying out educational and curricular activities.
On the contrary, there are still sorts of criticisms on the above academic discourse of the current education system. Negash (2006) analyzed the education policies of the imperial, military, and present regimes of Ethiopia by comparing each government’s education policy and reached at a conclusion that there is a correlation between the high level of poverty and the poor education policy. The author expressed his position that the crisis within education had reached the brink of collapse especially in the current system. Tekeste further highlighted that currently there is no effective education policy to correct the ongoing problems. In support of this, there are also scholars and stakeholders who criticized the present education system as “generation killer” (Tiwulid geday in Amharic) while the policymakers are in discourse of the golden side of the education system. For example, while there are officials who have been appreciating the self-contained classroom organization, there are practitioners who have been complaining the approach as irrelevant. Despite its pedagogical merits, the self-contained unit at the primary cycle is criticized by many teachers, school principals, educational professionals, and leaders (MoE, 2002).

All of the above debates can foster a contentious, divisive climate that is not conducive to intellectual exchange. From this background, it is possible to infer that heated and caustic debate is partially evident in the Ethiopian educational system and curricular decisions. However, our position is to promote the presence of proper debates in a win–win situation recognizing the values of the other. It is advisable to hold a position that a debate is unnecessary for the deployment of hyperbolic and offensive languages (Schwab, 1969; Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003).

3. Conclusions

As far as the current state of curriculum studies is concerned, it is possible to conclude that the curriculum as a field has not been well articulated in Ethiopia. From the discussion made so far, one can contend that the six signs of crisis outlined by Joseph Schwab are existent in the Ethiopian curriculum development and implementation rhetoric and practice. The evidences of the above symptoms together implied that the field of curriculum studies is in a state of crisis. Furthermore, the resolutions suggested for the crisis of curriculum as forwarded by Joseph Schwab are not practically apparent in the curriculum development and implementation endeavors in Ethiopian. Of course, it is not easy to resolve the crisis and ensure the renaissance of the curriculum field in the current Ethiopian context. Even though the problem was recognized in the US in early 1970s, Wraga and Hlebowitsh (2003) witnessed that the US curriculum theory and development remained in a state of perpetual crisis for about 30 years after Schwab’s initiatives.

The curriculum inquiries have been criticized for the tendency to detach from the social and economic realities of Ethiopia. Ethiopia is dependent upon agricultural economy and the current government is holding an ideology of agricultural-led economic activities. However, with unknown reasons, the education system in general and the curriculum development and implementation practices in particular have totally rejected agriculture and other vocational subjects formerly offered in the primary and secondary schools in the country. On the other hand, the secondary school curriculum is designed not for the benefit of the majority but for the few who will get the chance of joining higher education (Joshi & Verspoor, 2013). In these kinds of detachments from reality, the curriculum development efforts will not be in support of problem-solving. In this regard, it is better to be committed to and exercise the viewpoints of Schwab in such a way that curriculum development and implementation practices will aim at problem-solving.

Strict focus on centralized command curriculum does not always work. At the same time, deliberative curriculum theory may not practically work without genuine participation of concerned stakeholders. Genuine participation of key stakeholders in deliberative curriculum development and implementation needs to get started. To this end, teachers are to be taken as the main participants in the deliberation processes. This demands the government to invest on preparing competent teachers. As Schwab recommends, investment should be made on attempting to local decision-making through active engagement of teachers and curriculum specialists.
When we come to the ownership of the curriculum field in particular, there is no as such strong attachment on the part of curriculum professionals. Local studies as well as the researchers experiences show that no significant research undertakings have been conducted by educational researchers. For example, a survey conducted by Lechisa (2017) justified that among the 74 studies conducted on primary education, only 8 studies dealt with curriculum/contents. She claimed that many researchers focused on issues other than the curriculum contents. At her conclusion, she expounds that curriculum is considered as unquestioned hegemony in the case of Ethiopia. In a nutshell, the area of curriculum as a field has been given less attention by the local researchers (Lechisa, 2017).

4. Recommendation

Finally, the researchers would like to recommend that curriculum specialists should be organized and establish professional association aimed toward protecting the profession, safeguarding the field, providing consultation in curriculum planning, supervising school practices, and being engaged in any curriculum endeavors. This could be possible through acting as coordinators, developers, designers, evaluators, or consultants. Schwab and his followers boldly underlined that a curriculum designed by experts far from the curriculum field is inadequate and inefficient in its implementation. Genuine participation of key stakeholders is, therefore, necessary to realize deliberative curriculum development and implementation. Therefore, Schwab’s diagnosis and prescription will be helpful for understanding the current crisis in the curriculum field and for coming up with a meaningful resolution.

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