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CURRICULUM FIDELITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TEACHERS AND FACTORS AFFECTING TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION AT ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES' CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This study **aimed** to explore English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers' fidelity to the designed freshman English curriculum.

A mixed **method** research design, where the quantitative data served to support the qualitative one, was used in the study. A qualitative method that enabled participants to generate their ideas as they have experienced in implementing the freshman English curriculum was used as main design in the study. One-to-one interviews, observations, and post-observation interviews were used as data collection instruments. Verbatim transcription was made for the qualitative data. Then, the relevant data was categorized and the data not relevant to the present purpose was bracketed. Categories seemed to be mutually exclusive, however, and analysis was made by making connections between or among the various categories.

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The **result** showed that ELT teachers followed the fidelity perspective by adhering to the contents of the official curriculum even in circumstances where adaptations were required. However, teachers' fidelity to the designed curriculum or to the official curriculum was offset by teachers' decision to skip certain activities. ELT teachers' adherence was imposed by different factors, including a high-stakes exam, alignment problems with instruction and assessment, the use of students' scores for placement, relevance and repetition of activities, and lack of training. Personal/teacher factors (teachers' beliefs, confidence, knowledge, and skills in improving the curriculum) and student factors (motivation and interest) also had significant influence.

It can be **concluded** that ELT teachers missed one of the significant professional roles they could play during curriculum implementation – adapting contents based on the classroom context. Professional development training should be proffered to ELT teachers. In addition, institutional needs and teachers' freedom to improve the curriculum at the classroom level need to be balanced.

KEYWORDS: Adaptation, Adherence, Fidelity, Freshman English, Implementation Approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' fidelity to the official curriculum was considered a way of ensuring effectiveness and for improving students' learning outcomes throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Cho, 1998; Dusenbury et al., 2003). However, the adaptation and enactment perspectives were developed later in the history of curriculum implementation (Snyder et al., 1992). Though fidelity of implementation (FOI) was believed to maintain effectiveness in implementation, in actual practice, a consistent FOI to the official curriculum has been found to be challenging.

There cannot be a curriculum that serves as a panacea to all problems experienced in all classroom contexts. Various motives urge teachers to adapt the prescribed activities to suit to the classroom context in which they are working. The fidelity approach emphasized the full implementation of curricular contents as intended by curriculum designers. On the contrary, the adaptation perspective allows teachers to adjust the contents of the designed curriculum based on the needs of students and the environment (Bumen et al., 2020).

Countries either follow center-periphery or bottom-up curriculum development models, depending on the political orientation of the country and professionals' theoretical beliefs. Countries that seek to bring performance similarities to various institutions develop a curriculum using the center-periphery model. They prepare and disseminate the curricular materials to all implementing institutions usually through a ministry of education or similar governing body (Graves, 2008). The practice in Ethiopian universities aligns with this center-periphery model. A group of curriculum "experts" designed the curriculum that is disseminated to all universities.

However, providing a well-designed curriculum to all implementing institutions, and ensuring its effectiveness and ability to boost student learning outcomes becomes

rather difficult. Shower (2010) argued that prioritizing the fidelity approach prioritizes organizational needs. This in turn disregards local needs and impedes the learning outcomes for students.

Moreover, focusing on fidelity hinders teachers' self-professional development and use of active learning (Shower, 2010), their creativity and thinking, and their decisions at classroom level (Cho, 1998; Shower et al., 2008; Shower et al., 2009).

Though there were criticisms to adhering to fidelity perspective, countries like Ethiopia have prepared curricular materials at the center and disseminated to implementing institutions. The ministry expected universities to implement the contents of the designed curriculum with fidelity to reduce implementation disparities among universities. Though teachers claimed to maintain fidelity, gaps existed between the official and actualized curriculums (Bumen et al., 2020; McNeill et al., 2018) as a result of motives manifested in particular contexts.

In an international context, there were studies on curriculum implementation in general, and English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers' fidelity to designed curriculum implementation specifically, using a qualitative method (interview). Locally, studies on curriculum implementation could be found using a survey method (questionnaire).

However, there was a paucity of research results conducted on ELT teachers' curriculum fidelity in an Ethiopian context. No research could also be found on motives that hinder ELT teachers' fidelity to the designed curriculum. Hence this study was meant to fill the methodological and area gaps on university ELT teachers' fidelity to a designed curriculum in teaching the freshman English curriculum at Ethiopian public universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lee et al. (2009, p. 837) defined fidelity as "the determination of how well an innovation is implemented according to its original program design or as intended." While Lee and Chue (2013, p. 2510) defined fidelity as "the closeness between the formal/perceived and the operational/experiential curricula." O'Donnell (2008, p. 34) explained fidelity as "The extent to which a user's practice matches the 'ideal' implementation of an intervention." Azano et al. (2011, p. 696), citing Mowbray et al. (2003), similarly defined fidelity as "the extent to which delivery of an intervention adheres to the protocol or program model originally developed."

The fidelity perspective of curriculum implementation, which is guided by the positivist world view, confines teachers to play the role of curriculum receivers (Shower et al., 2009). It leaves a meager role for the teacher in curriculum development at the classroom level (Shower, 2010). Fidelity also disregards differences in teachers' practices, institutional infrastructures, and students, which then influence teachers' actual practices (Cho, 1998; Ocak & Olur, 2019).

Moreover, it highly restricts teachers' flexibility in implementation (Iskandar, 2020). In a fidelity perspective, the degree of effectiveness of the curriculum can be measured by the difference between the proposed and the implemented curriculum (Ocak & Olur, 2019). The higher the percentage of fidelity, the more effective the curriculum implementation would be.

The existence of gaps between the designed and actualized curriculum could be taken as normal if it came as a result of adapting to the local context. However, because of various motives, there are teachers who try to rigidly follow the prescribed curriculum.

For example, Imran and Wyatt (2019) revealed the existence of English language teachers who implemented curricular activities irrespective of the needs and interests of their students. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) and Senechai (2020) stated that teachers who depend on the fidelity approach believe that good education comes through homogenized and standardized implementation of the designed curriculum.

On the same issue, Hongboontri and Darling (2020) emphasized the role of teachers in the fidelity approach as teachers who inflexibly follow a curriculum developed by designers. Datnow and Castellano (2000) also criticized fidelity as an approach that denied teachers' autonomy.

Moreover, Daro and Cohen-Donnelly (2001) showed the impact of sticking to the designed curriculum components in all instances. Rigidly following the designed curriculum limits consideration of environmental needs (for example, the needs of the students).

On the other hand, they also stated that too much deviation could limit the effectiveness of the curriculum. Backer (2001) unveiled the importance of adaptation as it gives ownership to teachers in curriculum development. However, Dusenbury et al. (2005) warned that deviating too much from the official curriculum may make the planned objectives unattainable to students.

Therefore, striking a balance between adoption (fidelity) to core elements of a curriculum and adaptation to local contexts becomes paramount, though how to find this balance is uncertain (James Bell Associates, 2009). Researchers use five dimensions to measure teachers' fidelity to the designed curriculum: adherence, exposure/dose/duration, quality of delivery, participant responsiveness, and program differentiation.

It is possible to study fidelity with one or more of these dimensions (Azano et al., 2011; Combs et al., 2022; James Bell Associates, 2009; Mowbray et al., 2003; O'Donnell, 2008). The adherence dimension is used here to study ELT teachers' fidelity to the freshman English curriculum.

Researchers assumed fidelity would be high during program adoption and that implementers would reproduce the innovation exactly as earlier adopters had used it (Cho, 1998; O'Donnell, 2008). This assumption was made since adopters were considered as passive acceptors and transmitters of an innovation, not as active modifiers of a new idea.

However, researchers later recognized that fidelity to a design curriculum was not always a given, rather adopters would adapt an innovation to suit their local contexts. In addition, researchers recognized that quite a lot of adaptation occurred in the classroom (O'Donnell, 2008), bringing tensions between fidelity and adaptation models around the end of 1970s (Cho, 1998). Therefore, studying teachers' fidelity to a curriculum, and the motives that hampered teachers use of fidelity would help the institution and teachers to amend the way freshman English curriculum has been affected.

Research question

The purpose of this study is to focus on teachers’ adherence to the freshman English curriculum and the motives that hinder ELT teachers’ fidelity to the curriculum, using Debre Tabor University in Ethiopia as an example. Hence, the study tried to answer the following specific research questions.

- What is the extent of ELT teachers’ fidelity to implementing freshman English curriculum?
- What are the motives that hinder ELT teachers’ fidelity to the designed curriculum?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study followed an exploratory mixed method design where the quantitative data was used to support the qualitative one. Hence, the qualitative design was taken as the main data gathering method. Since teachers’ classroom curriculum implementation approaches are influenced by the social, political, historical, and other specific local factors, taking a primarily constructivist worldview was appropriate.

Data Sources

ELT teachers were the sources of data in this study. Data was gathered from teachers who taught the freshmen English curriculum at least once at Debre Tabor University. Teaching freshman English served as an inclusion criteria for selecting teacher participants in the study. There were 14 male and 2 female (16 in total) ELT teachers who were delivering the freshman English curriculum during data collection time. It was from this population that samples for interviews and observations were selected.

Sampling of participants

Among the 16 ELT teachers, five teachers were selected based on a purposive sampling technique. Together with the department head, the five teachers were chosen based on their involvement in curriculum improvement at the department level. There was a committee known as the “curriculum improvement and assessment committee,” designated by the department. Though not all the five participants worked in the committee during the study time, they had the experience of acting in the committee before. The profiles of participants are presented in table 1 below.

Table 1

*Teacher participants. (*Names are Pseudonyms); HDP (higher diploma program) is a broad pedagogical in-service training program that was delivered to teachers chosen from any field of study*

Name*	Gender	Educational status	Years of teaching experience	on-service training/ in-service training
Paulos	M	MED TEFL	8	HDP
Seid	M	MED in ELT	12	HDP
Yared	M	MED in ELT	7	–
Rahel	F	MED in ELT	9	HDP
Dawit	M	MED in ELT & Assistance professor in ELT	15	–

From the five interviewed teachers, Paulos and Seid were chosen for observation using lottery system. The observation data helped to triangulate teachers' perceived practice with their actual classroom practices. Soon after the observation session, the teachers who were being observed participated in a brief post-observation interview.

Instruments

In the study, interviews, observations, and post-observation interviews were used as tools for data collection. Though interviews were the a primary tool, triangulating the data from interviews with observations considered to have a strong validity (Harachi et al., 1999) was also used.

– Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was chosen as data collection tool. Semi-structured interviews are widely accepted as a tool that would proffer enough flexibility in articulating participants' perceptions of their fidelity in teaching the freshman English curriculum (Gray, 2009; Jamshed, 2014). Teachers' interview questions were adapted from Shower (2010), Shower et al. (2008), and Shower et al. (2009). The main interview questions were posed and follow-up questions used only when necessary. The time and place of the interview was decided by the interviewee. The length of the interview was 24-42 minutes.

– Observation

A series of observations were conducted, which provided robust first-hand information about how the observed teachers implemented the freshman English curriculum. The observations of the two teachers took 14 sessions to finish two units of the curriculum. Teachers had two contact hours in a week where one session was with 100 minutes, and the second had 50 minutes. The observation portrayed whether teachers have done the activities exactly as planned by curriculum designers, or whether teachers adapted, supplemented, or skipped activities or parts of the activities of the curriculum.

the semi-structured observation checklist was prepared and used in order to determine teachers' fidelity to the curriculum. The observation checklist was adapted from James Bell Associates (2009) and Mowbray et al. (2003) in a way that enables the observer to record activities done as planned, adapted, supplemented, or skipped.

– Post-observation interview

A brief interview was conducted after the observed teacher dismissed the class. That is, the observed teacher had two post-observation interviews per week, each not lasting more than 10 minutes. The purpose of the post-observation interview was to understand the observed teachers' behavior. Blessing and Chakrabarti (2009) and Gray (2004) have stated that observations can provide better data if they are followed by other data gathering instruments.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

To increase the reliability and validity of the research findings, the questions were reviewed by ELT teachers teaching in the same area at another university. Modifications were made based on the feedback of experts. Careful consideration was given to the instrument's design, administration of the intended tools, analysis, and interpretation. The verbatim transcription of the interview data was also made.

Data Analysis

First the qualitative data were transcribed verbatim. Then categories were made through reading and rereading the transcribed data in the way to serve the research purpose. Together with coding the relevant data, data that was not useful or relevant to the present research problem was bracketed and reduced. Though categories seemed to be mutually exclusive, data analysis was made by making connections between or among the various categories. For the supportive quantitative data, simple descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to show fidelity vis-à-vis adapting, supplementing, or skipping activities of the designed material.

RESULTS

Results of the interview

Paulos, Seid, and Rahel confirmed that they took HDP training arranged by the university. However, they disclosed that the focus of the training was on general educational activities, not on ELT specific issues and challenges.

Moreover, the participants stated that they took the HDP training five years earlier and its impact had become obsolete. The other two participants did not take any formal in-service and/or on-service training after joining the university. Yared criticized the university for failing to set up professional development training. Dawit also disclosed that he did not participate in any formal in-service training that focused on English language teaching. In general, all teachers complained about the scarcity of relevant in-service training after they joined the university.

Concerning fidelity of ELT teachers to the freshman English curriculum, participants had similar approaches to the curriculum, of course, with varying degrees. All participants admitted that they usually adhered to the designed curriculum. They adhered to the contents/activities, sequence/order of the activities, and the assessment procedure as suggested in the curricular materials.

However, they criticized and expressed their dissatisfactions with the organization and choice of contents in the freshman English curriculum. Paulos explained that the students' language background guided how teachers adhere or adapt to the designed activities. Nevertheless, institutional motives forced him to stick to the designed activities irrespective of the needs of students. Paulos unveiled the existence of activities with less relevance to students. He added the presence of activities that took much time to deal with in the classroom.

Moreover, there were activities that were difficult to do in the existing classroom context, such as a large class size. For all such activities, Paulos stated that he used skipping as almost a sole strategy rather than adapting activities.

Seid also stated that it was the needs of students that shaped his curriculum implementation approach. He also criticized the lack of vertical and horizontal integration of contents of the freshman English curriculum with the contents students have learnt in secondary school. Seid's idea was also echoed by Dawit. Seid and Dawit believed that such contents should be adapted, but they preferred to adhere to the activities whenever possible and skipped activities that did not suit to the classroom context.

Like Paulos, Seid and Dawit used skipping as a strategy for avoiding activities that could not be done in their context. They focused on activities that they believed relevant to the current needs of students. They also disclosed the department's need as urging teachers to use the suggested activities, assessment types, and procedures. Dawit complained of the lack of student interest in doing activities other than grammar and reading. According to him, students showed greater interest in doing those activities where exams could be drawn. He went on to elaborate the presence of alignment problems between instruction and assessment.

Furthermore, Paulos, Seid, and Rahel criticized the high-stakes exam which has been used for placing students in different academic disciplines. That is, students' placement in various fields of study depended on the grade they scored in the first and second semester of their first year at the university. As a result, the same exam was prepared for students taught by different teachers. Hence, adhering to the designed activities has become the accepted norm in order to avoid students' complaints about teachers' implementation disparities.

The other institutional problem highlighted by Paulos, Seid, and Rahel was the assessment type ELT teachers follow in freshman English. They complained that assessments did not test what they taught. All the three participants stressed that students were tested on reading and grammar while the contents they taught included all language areas. According to participants, listening and writing were disregarded in the assessment.

Hence, there were alignment problems between instruction and assessment. Seid seriously condemned the institution as one that disregards the professionalism and teaching autonomy of teachers. He stated "I don't have the autonomy of assessing my students focusing on all language skills that I have taught." Rahel, on the other hand, stated that since she knew the assessment area, it helped her to revise the contents and prepare her students for the exam.

Moreover, Paulos and Seid (similar to Dawit) became aware of students' interest in doing reading and grammar activities. Both participants expressed that students were motivated to do activities on areas where assessment questions were drawn. Knowing the needs of students, Paulos and Seid tended to focus on reading and grammar activities. Paulos stated that when he did the listening activities, most of the students were not as interested as they were in reading.

Yared felt he had to follow the fidelity perspective of curriculum implementation. He went on to say:

Personally, I tried my best just to follow uh... what has been written there in the material, and there are conditions of course which force me to do so. As we know, freshman students are students who are going to compete with others to select their field of study, so personally I believe, if it is possible, all the students must learn the same topic and must be evaluated from the same content. For that purpose, uh I should adhere to the designed material. ...I do not like to act differently from other ELT teachers.

However, Yared acknowledged that he skipped some activities, particularly activities that he assumed would not to be included in students' assessment. He stressed that he did not skip reading and grammar activities because he knew that most of the questions that would appear in assessments would be from those two language areas. Though he

skipped activities, Yared believed that the curricular materials that are prepared at the center and sent to institutes have better quality than those prepared by teachers at the university.

Yared also discussed teachers' lack of enthusiasm in designing the material in addition to the personal factors that affect teachers' classroom curriculum development (the experience, skills, and knowledge on designing curriculum). He also had reservations about teachers' willingness and interest of taking time to improve the activities of prescribed curriculum.

Rahel noted accountability was related to her adherence to the prescribed curriculum. She stated:

I don't want to be accountable doing something different from what the department has set to be done. So I usually do activities and assess my students according to the guideline prepared at department level. Even if I have the uh ...freedom of improving the curriculum, I could not take the responsibility of improving it. In addition, I may not have the required knowledge and skills to improve the curriculum prepared by the selected curriculum experts. Moreover, I did not get relevant training on how curriculum is improved.

She also added that it was challenging for her to ensure the activities she designed were better than the activities in the original material. She felt good when she did activities in accordance with the suggested sequences, methods, and assessment guidelines. In a similar vein, she stated that she focused on areas where exams would be drawn, sidelining other language areas. Rahel mentioned factors such as class size, shortage of time, lack of suitable listening devices, and student interest influenced her choosing to skip activities rather than adhering to the designed material.

Dawit questioned the skills and knowledge that ELT teachers have in adapting the curriculum (similar to Yared and Rahel's idea). He had reservations about the willingness and commitment of teachers to adapt the curriculum, and the skills, knowledge, and experience teachers possess in curriculum development and improvement. As a result, he stated, it would be better to follow the curriculum as it was originally designed.

Results of the post-observation interview

The onsite data from Paulos and Seid did not provide different reasons for teachers' adherence than what they provided during the main interview. Paulos gave various reasons both for his adherence to the prescribed curriculum as well as for skipping some other activities in the post-observation interview.

Besides adherence to the designed curriculum, Paulos skipped activities that could not be applied in large classes which made giving feedback a daunting task for him. He also added students dislike listening activities and prefer reading and grammar. Students' immediate need to score good marks also urged Paulos to focus on grammar and reading activities.

Moreover, Paulos explained each unit had many activities that were difficult to finish in a given time, so he chose to skip some activities and focus on others. Paulos believed professionals could improve the curriculum, but there is a risk of complaints about a lack of accountability as a result of implementation differences among ELT teachers.

In addition, Paulos indirectly raised the issue of vertical integration of content between first and second freshman English curriculum materials. He stated, “There is no difference between the two curricular materials of freshman English both in organization and in difficulty level.”

Seid, after a listening lesson, stated, “I wanted to address all the activities, but I skipped some of the post listening questions believing that they were repetitions of the preceding activities.” Seid reiterated that he was not happy with the curriculum since there was a lack of integration with what students have learned. He also stated that the curriculum emphasized receptive skills that made him prefer to skip some activities.

Students were another reason Seid preferred to skip some activities since students were not motivated by listening activities, and, at the same time, were not up to Seid’s expectations which also led him to skip activities. He noted that students were motivated by and active with activities on grammar, not listening. Seid also attributed to class size, lack of time, and relevance of activities as other factors that led him to skip listening and writing activities.

Results of observation

Two teachers were observed while they finished two of the five curricular units. Fourteen sessions were allotted to the contents of the two units. The observed teachers taught a large class of predominantly female students. While Paulos was teaching in a classroom of 56 students (19 males and 37 females), Seid was teaching in a classroom of 58 students (24 males and 34 females).

There were 76 activities required for students to complete in the two observed units. The observation's findings demonstrated that both Paulos and Seid have completed 51 (67.11%) and 50 (65.79%) of the 76 activities of the designed curriculum as planned. Seid supplemented 3 (3.95%) activities, focusing on grammar (such as conditional sentences) and reading activities (such as using the text “Housing in Britain” for students to identify topic sentences from each paragraph).

Table 2

*Observation data. *=Names are pseudonyms; f= frequency of activities*

Strategies	Observed teachers			
	Paulos*		Seid*	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Activities that were done as suggested by curriculum designers	51	67.11%	50	65.79%
Activities that were adapted/modified	0		0	
Activities that were supplemented	0		3	3.95%
Activities that were skipped	25	32.89%	23	30.26%
Activities that were replaced	0		0	
Total activities that were observed	76		76	

As the table depicted, the percentage of ELT teachers' adherence to the designed curriculum was found to be 67.11% and 65.79% for Paulos and Seid respectively. It is also clear from the table that teachers' adherence to the curriculum contents was not as high as expected from teachers who depended on fidelity approach to curriculum implementation. The decrease in the percentages of teachers' adherence was the result of them skipping activities rather than using an adaptation strategy.

As it can be seen from the table 2, Paulos and Seid skipped a significant number of activities from the designed contents, 25(32.89%) and 23(30.26%) of activities, respectively. Teachers did not tend to replace the activities they skipped. They simply skipped activities could students' attainment of the stated objectives of the curriculum. Teachers were not seen taking time to improve the curricular activities that could accomodate the activities teachers skipped. In spite of skipping many activities, teachers were found to adhere to the sequence or order of activities and sub-activities suggested by curriculum designers.

DISCUSSION

It is important to mention the lackof formal in-service and/or on-service training opportunities at the university that enhance teachers' professional development. None of the ELT teachers received training on issues related to implementing ELT curriculum in a foreign context after joining the university. This could be one of the reasons teachers were dependent on the prescribed curriculum even in situations where the participants felt that the activities were unsuited to the classroom context. A lack of training to enable teachers to meet the demands of the moving world made teachers lean on a "teacher-proof curricula" (Cho, 1998, p. 28).

Teachers who require a designed curriculum have technical abilities and factual knowledge but were not equipped with methods of curriculum inquiry to face the challenges resulting from individual, pedagogical, and context variations.

As a result, such teachers are unlikely to improve their educational and professional growth (Cho, 1998). Suyanto (2017) also stated that in-service and/or on-service training are crucial components to enhancing teachers' knowledge and expertise in classroom curriculum adaptation. Shawer (2017) suggested the focus of the training should be on more practical aspects of curriculum implementation and on the awareness and roles of teachers that that influence classroom behavior.

Concerning fidelity, the data from all sources clearly shows that ELT teachers adhered to the officially prescribed curriculum. Though fidelity was assumed to bring effectiveness in implementation, it has many pitfalls.

Teachers who adhere to the prescribed curriculum play the role of consumers (Hongboontri and Egerton Darling, 2020; Seneechai, 2020; Shawer, 2017). Bumen et al. (2020) and Ocak and Olur (2019) argued teachers who try to maintain fidelity to the prescribed curriculum do not take into account teacher characteristics, student differences, or contextual variations in their teaching (Daro & Cohn-Donnelly, 2001); Shawer et. al argued teachers focused on mainting fidelity to a curriculum are less likely to improve student learning and motivation (Shawer, et al., 2008). Hlebowitsh (2005)

described the curriculum implemented as planned by teachers as similar to a script followed by teachers.

Teachers who adhere to the existing curriculum, ignoring the environmental dynamics, rarely adapt the curriculum to make it more relevant for students, hence they are viewed as lacking the desire for professional development (Verster et al., 2018).

According to Shaver et al. (2009), teachers who strictly followed the designed curriculum and skipped activities neither maintain the fidelity model nor modify the curriculum to suit the interest of their students. Hamdan (2015, p.104) also stated that adapting curriculum contents requires greater flexibility, creativity, expertise, and broader knowledge from not only “new teachers but also by veteran teachers.” Hence, teachers who try to adhere to the prescribed curriculum may lack all such necessary elements.

Though ELT teachers appeared to maintain fidelity, their adherence scores from observation did not reflect the high adherence score expected from teachers who follow the fidelity perspective. The decrease in adherence scores of observed teachers came as a result of skipping activities as the only strategy for dealing with activities that could not be implemented a particular classroom context. Teachers simply skipped a significant number of activities, including core activities (listening and writing) that could be vital in achieving the goals of the curriculum. Activities were skipped not because they were irrelevant, as stated by Shaver et al. (2008), but because teachers assumed those activities were difficult to do at that moment. As stated elsewhere, teachers skipped core components of the curriculum (for example, writing a paragraph with 100 words) and rarely supplement or replace the missing elements of the curriculum. This strategy would create opportunities with the missing curriculum objectives. Teachers who adhered to the designed contents and at the same time skipped activities focus on content coverage and neglect classroom dynamics (Shaver et al., 2008).

In answering the second question, many motives/factors were listed by the participants. The motives were identified by participants for both their adherence to the prescribed curriculum, as well as their connection to skipping activities. Challenges to teachers' adherence to the designed activities can be categorized as institutional/environmental, student-related, or personal/teacher-related factors (Shaver et al., 2009). Environmental concerns were found to be the main challenge for teachers in trying to adhere to the contents of the designed material. Among the institutional challenges, lack of in-service or on-service training, the assessment types, and the value attached to the exam were regarded by all participants as a main challenge to their adherence. The relevance of the activities was the second factor affecting teachers' adherence to the prescribed curriculum, followed by lack of vertical and horizontal integration of contents and then large class sizes.

In particular, the focus of the exam and the value of students' scores for placement were mentioned by all interviewees as challenges to adherence to the curriculum contents and activities. In situations where institutional exams serve other purposes, learning focuses on passing the exam (Shaver et al., 2009). Shaver et al. (2009) warned that exams used for other purposes tend to urge teachers to follow the imposed curriculum. This in turn leads to students disregarding learning or at least not internalizing what is taught. Moreover, Gibbs and Habeshaw (1989, p.23) stated the consequence of

assessment on students: *On many courses students are driven by the assessment system. What is assessed is seen as what matters most. The tasks which you assess and which count towards a qualification will receive ample attention, whilst those which are not assessed will often be ignored.*

Personal/teacher factors were also mentioned by participants of the study. Experiences and the knowledge and skills participants possessed were mentioned as factors affecting teachers' fidelity to the curriculum. This is concurred with the study by Clemente et al. (2000), which stated that pedagogic and curriculum skills were constraining factors for curriculum improvement. Commitment and the willingness of teachers to adapt the curriculum were seen as attributes of ELT teachers lack. Shaver et al. (2009, p.136) also pointed out that teacher-related factors "might have been working behind the scene" Though they are crucial, teachers' experiences and level of education might not be able to help teachers adapt curriculum. In addition, student-factors, such as students' needs, interest, and motivation, played their own roles in making teachers skip activities that did not suit to the context.

Concerning the challenges, Carroll et al. (2007), Durlak and DuPre (2008), James Bell Associates (2009), Hill et al. (2007), and Pankratz et al. (2006) demonstrated that the institution was responsible for adjusting the challenges that inhibit effective implementation of curriculum. They also noted that institutions have to work towards correcting problems that came as a result of characteristics of implementers (teachers), students, and the support system (training and technical assistance) that affect teachers' fidelity. Smylie (1988) underlined that professional development training, which also included observation and support, was known to augment the capacity of teachers' curriculum implementation.

As clearly observed from the discussion, teachers were found to criticize the official curriculum material. However, they did not adapt the official curriculum to suit the material to the context of the classroom. Though this seemed paradoxical, it was the motives of the institution, coupled with other factors (teachers and student-related factors) that forced teachers to adhere to the designed contents. Teachers were also forced to use the skipping strategy as their main alternative for activities that they could not do in a particular context.

CONCLUSION

Though teachers have a similar educational background, they vary in their teaching experiences. However, the difference in teaching experiences did not yield differences in teachers' curriculum implementation since all participants tended to show fidelity to the curriculum. Teachers who opt to maintain fidelity are unlikely to be up to date to overcome the challenges of the fast changing world. This in turn led teachers be ignorant of their students' needs and interest. Teachers try to stick to the prescribed activities in order to avoid risks of any kind coming from anyone (students, institutions and colleagues).

Teachers' fidelity to the curriculum was affected by teachers' use of the skipping strategy. That means teachers did not adapt contents that they could not put into practice. Rather, skipping was used as the sole strategy of adjusting the curriculum to

the classroom context. This showed that teachers were characterized as curriculum transmitters.

Prescribing teachers on what to teach and how to teach impeded teachers from thinking critically. Giving priority to the institution and other authorities made teachers fixed to the designed curriculum material. Hence they lack flexibility and creativity in the dynamics of the classroom. Sticking to the ready-made materials sidelined teachers to the strategy of adaptation. This again made teachers ignore the professional role they could play in improving the curriculum. Moreover, teachers are preoccupied with improving students' scores or preparing students for examination. This encouraged student interest in activities where they understood the pattern that the department followed for assessment.

Attaining the objectives stated in freshman English curriculum was challenged because of the focus ELT teachers gave to some skills (reading and grammar) while ignoring or at least disregarding others, such as listening and writing activities. The implementation also reflected the problem of alignment between the intended instruction and the assessment used in the university. What should be implemented needs to be implemented, and what should be implemented should be assessed.

The attribution of institutional, personal, and student factors to ELT teachers behavior should be taken into account. Institutional needs must be carefully crafted and adjusted in ways that do not affect teachers' autonomy. Personal/teacher factors can be eliminated or at least be reduced by updating teachers using formal professional development trainings. Professional development trainings enable teachers to evaluate each activity of the curriculum for its practicality. Such trainings can equip teachers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to adapt the material.

This study has implications for the teacher training mechanisms the institution uses. The knowledge and skills obtained at one time would eventually become obsolete. Therefore, teachers need to be kept up to date with need-based professional development training. This would help teachers to meet the current needs of their students. Teachers' autonomy must also be noted.

Teachers' freedom to improving the curriculum needs to be guaranteed without violating the core interests of the institution. Teachers do not need to take the department's guideline as a fixed rule in exercising classroom curriculum improvement. Institutional leaders (administrators at different levels) have to adjust the interest of the institution to the interest of teachers and the needs of students.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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АНОТАЦІЯ / ABSTRACT [in Ukrainian]:

**ВІДНОШЕННЯ ДО НАВЧАЛЬНОЇ ПРОГРАМИ І ФАКТОРИ ЇЇ
ВПРОВАДЖЕННЯ ВИКЛАДАЧАМИ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В
ДЕРЖАВНИХ УНІВЕРСИТЕТАХ ЕФІОПІЇ**

Це дослідження мало на **меті** вивчити відношення викладачів англійської мови до розробленої програми для першокурсників.

У дослідженні використовувався змішаний **метод**, де кількісні дані слугували для підтримки якісних. Якісний метод, який дозволив викладачам генерувати свої ідеї, які вони отримали під час реалізації навчальної програми з англійської мови для першокурсників, був використаний як основний дизайн дослідження. В якості інструментів збору даних використовувалися індивідуальне інтерв'ю, спостереження та інтерв'ю після спостереження. Для якісних даних зроблено дослівне цитування. Потім було зроблено класифікацію відповідних даних і виділення в дужках даних, які не стосуються цієї мети. Категорії могли бути взаємовиключними, однак аналіз проводився шляхом встановлення зв'язків між різними категоріями.

Результати показали, що викладачі англійської мови дотримувалися впровадження змісту навчальної програми навіть за обставин, коли програма потребувала адаптації. Однак дотримання викладачами адаптованої навчальної програми або офіційної навчальної програми було корельовано з різними факторами. Фактори, які вплинули на викладачів, включають такі інституційні чинники, як іспит з високими балами, проблема узгодження навчання та оцінювання, використання балів для студентів при розміщенні, відповідності і повторюваності завдань, а також відсутність підготовки з боку студентів. Особисті/викладацькі фактори (переконання викладачів, впевненість, знання та навички щодо вдосконалення навчальної програми) та студентські фактори (мотивація та інтерес) також мали значний вплив.

Можна дійти **висновку**, що викладачі упустили одну зі важливих професійних функцій, яку вони могли б задіяти під час реалізації навчальної програми – адаптація змісту з урахуванням конкретної групи чи курсу. Викладачам англійської мови слід запропонувати додаткове навчання щодо професійного розвитку. Крім того, необхідно збалансувати інституційні потреби та свободу викладачів щодо вдосконалення навчальної програми на рівні групи чи курсу.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: адаптація, прихильність, відношення, англійська мова у першокурсників, підходи до впровадження.

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