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## Teachers and Principals' Perceptions of Quality of Education

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this research was to explore how teachers and principals view quality of education in the Ethiopian context. Ethiopia has expanded access to primary education (grades 1-8) dramatically in the last 15 years, with gross enrolment rates rising from 20 percent to more than 80 percent. There are however public cries that expanding enrolments lead to stagnating or declining quality, especially in the context of limited resources. National student assessments carried out in 2000 and 2004 at the grades, 4 and 8 levels indicated serious problems with quality, although the 2004 assessment identified a positive correlation between teacher attitudes and teacher beliefs and improved student achievement. This study examines important aspects of this relationship, focusing on perceptions and beliefs of teachers and principals regarding active-learning policies. The research took place in four of Ethiopia's regional states – Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State (SNNPRS), and Tigray. The study is primarily qualitative, exploring in depth the experiences and perceptions of a small group of grade 4 teachers and principals in each of the regional states. It is however complemented by a quantitative survey of over 100 grade 4 teachers in each regional state, which is used to triangulate the qualitative data. The findings of the study are organized as regional state case studies on each of the focal points of the study on teachers' and principals' perceptions of quality of education. Each focal point includes an inter-case analysis that compares results across the regional states and explores critical issues that emerge from the data. The results, which are highly consistent across the regional states, suggested that teachers and principals defined and discussed education quality around issues of

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educational inputs, processes, and outputs. Discussions of inputs largely focused on inadequate resources; process was seen in terms of students' participation and activities in the classroom; outputs were discussed in terms of learning outcomes, but more prominently in terms of students' personal and inter-personal characteristics. The study suggests several approaches to improving quality of education.

## **Introduction**

Some define quality in terms of educational outcomes (MOE, 2006). Quality is also viewed in terms of the framework of 'systems design' with inputs, processes and outputs (Harvey, 1994). In postmodern society, quality is viewed in terms of facilitating a user-friendly environment (Tubbs, 2005). The latter view is similar to the view that sees quality as an environment of reflection and collaborative action (Schumck, 1997). Very recent research suggests the critical role played by the *affective domain* of the brain (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Plomin et al, 2007; Grigorenko, 2007). According to the latter theory, quality is a matter of how the teacher and the students feel in the school (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). The best expression is, "We feel therefore we learn" (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007, p 2). This implies the critical role of teachers' attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, conceptions and misconceptions, in influencing the learning environment. This study, therefore, examines quality of education by focusing on perceptions of teachers and principals. It is argued that teachers' beliefs are critical to their practices in enhancing quality of education (Hargreaves and Goodson, 1996). This research was prompted by the obvious paradox of quality in the context of a government policy of expanding the educational system (Ministry of Education, 2005a) and the need for an emotionally satisfying environment (Tubbs, 2005).

Ethiopia has placed education at the center of its strategies for development and democratization, with strong policies promoting equity and quality of educational provision and rapid expansion of educational opportunity to previously underserved populations (African Union Commission, 2005;

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Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994). Ethiopia has made great strides in increasing the quantity of education available to its children by expanding gross enrolment rates in primary education from around 20 percent in the early 1990s to nearly 80 percent in 2004/2005, although gender imbalances remain a problem particularly in the higher grades (Ministry of Education 2005a). Despite these achievements, rapidly expanding enrolments have compromised quality, especially in the context of severely limited resources. The government is actively seeking strategies to improve quality of teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2005b). National student assessments carried out in 2000 and 2004 at the grades 4 and 8 levels indicated serious problems with quality, with overall low achievement in basic academic skills (National Organization of Examinations, 2000a; 2000b; 2004a; 2004b). The 2004 student assessment, however, indicated a positive correlation between teacher attitudes and student achievement, although the assessment data do not explain the nature of the relationship.

This study aims at exploring the provision of quality of education in Ethiopia by examining teacher beliefs and by taking the case of four regions, Amhara Regional State, Oromia, SNNPRS and Tigray. The research tries to answer one basic question, "How is quality of education perceived by the main actors (teachers and principals) in the four regional states of the country?" The question is intended to answer presence or absence of inter-group and inter-region differences in perception of quality. Quality is indeed difficult to define. This problem has then resulted in proliferation of perspectives and definitions.

### **Method of Study**

This study was carried by the Institute of Educational Research (IER) of Addis Ababa University with the cooperation of the USAID Educational Quality Improvement Program 1 (EQUIP1) Leader Award by the Academy for Educational Development (AED). The research was undertaken in four of Ethiopia's regional states: Amhara Regional State, Oromia, Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Regional State, and Tigray. The four

researchers from IER were involved in the data collection process (from 27 Dec 2005 to 27 Jan. 2006). Each researcher collected qualitative and quantitative data from a single regional state. All the researchers (AED and IER researchers) designed the research project and carried out the analysis.

The IER researchers interviewed and observed the teaching of six core subject teachers in each regional state, two in each of the three focus schools--two urban and one rural. The researchers also interviewed principals<sup>1</sup> in these schools and conducted focus-group discussions with eight grade 4 teachers in each school. The total sample of informants across the four regional states in the in-depth interviews, therefore, was made up of 24 core subject teachers, 12 principals, and 89 teachers in focus groups. Over 400 grade 4 teachers from each of the regional states completed a survey questionnaire. Altogether, a total of 460 teachers completed a survey questionnaire a quantitative instrument used to triangulate the qualitative data from the interviews and observations. The study, therefore, has fairly a high level of depth from the qualitative interviews and breadth from the quantitative surveys.

### **Research Findings: Perceptions of Education Quality**

The findings of the study are organized with a knowledge structure that starts with a case-by-case analysis followed by an inter-case analysis. These four case studies could be taken as regional state case studies on each of the focal points: teachers' and principals' perceptions of quality of education. Each focal point includes an inter-case analysis that compares results across the regional states and explores critical issues that emerge from the data. The data are drawn from the in-depth interviews with the core teachers and their principals, the focus-group discussions with teachers at each focus school, and the survey of a wider group of grade 4 teachers. The findings regarding perceptions of quality of education are presented first as a case

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<sup>1</sup> Principals in Ethiopia are usually called School Directors, although this paper uses the term principal.

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study for each regional state and then are drawn together in an inter-case analysis, which includes a discussion of critical issues that emerge from this part of the study.

### **1. Amhara Regional State: Teachers' Perceptions**

The Amhara regional state teachers who participated in the study focused on immediate results such as achieving the objectives of the school and delivering lessons according to plan as the main components of education quality. They also viewed resources as a necessary input for quality education, stressing the importance of appropriate and relevant education materials. Finally, teachers emphasized the broader goal of students becoming aware of their community and environment. When teachers discussed the definition of quality teaching, most of them concentrated on their own behavior in the classroom.

They believe that quality teaching means teachers' mastery of subject matter, development of good relations with students, involvement of students in the classroom, and effective lesson preparation. They thought that continuous assessment was essential. Teachers also indicated that quality teaching could take place only when teachers have the necessary qualifications, support from the school management, teaching/learning resources, conducive-work-environment, and regular teacher improvement opportunities.

The Amhara regional state teachers in the study believed that quality learning takes place when students master the subjects. Students' performance is demonstrated by their individual and group participation, doing well on exams and exercises, as well as by regularly attending class. Teachers also stressed a social component of quality learning, stating that students must respect the rules and regulations of the school and behave ethically in their own community. Despite this, teachers indicated that continuous assessment, as presently formulated, does not promote learning because it de-emphasizes the regular assessment of students' knowledge or

subject mastery and emphasizes the assessment of personal and inter-personal characteristics of the students.

**Table: Amhara Regional State Teacher Survey Responses to Perceptions of Quality (Sample size=115)<sup>2</sup>**

| Items   | Number of Responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| What does quality teaching mean?              |                     |      |
| Involving students in the classroom           | 48                  | 41.7 |
| Giving assignments to students all the time   | 25                  | 21.7 |
| Improving students' achievements              | 33                  | 28.7 |
| Having good relations with students           | 51                  | 44.3 |
| Giving good lectures                          | 6                   | 5.2  |
| Teachers' mastery of subjects                 | 51                  | 44.3 |
| What does quality student learning mean?      |                     |      |
| Active participation of students in the class | 50                  | 43.5 |
| High score in class tests                     | 17                  | 14.8 |
| High score in final examination               | 7                   | 6.1  |
| Reciting what has been said in the class      | 35                  | 30.4 |

The 115 grade 4 teachers in the Amhara Regional State who responded to the questionnaire expressed their views concerning quality of teaching and learning. According to their responses shown in Table 1, teachers believe that quality teaching is mainly related to teachers' mastery of subjects, good teacher-student relations, and student involvement in the classroom. Interestingly, improvement of students' achievements is ranked a distant fourth. This is consistent with the interview responses in which teachers discussed the importance of academic learning or cognitive achievement, but emphasized the affective aspects of learning focusing on positive relationships. Consistent with quality of teaching many teachers link quality

<sup>2</sup> The total number of responses in the tables is not equal to the sample size. The structure of the questionnaire allowed teachers to choose any number of responses. The percentages are calculated using the number of teachers who chose the multiple choices items divided by the total sample size of teachers. Because of the structure of the questionnaire the tables are most useful in providing rankings of items.

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of student learning more with active class participation than with performance on examinations and tests, again emphasizing the affective over the cognitive aspects of active learning. Teachers also emphasize the importance of reciting what has been said in class, a rote-learning, which experiences behaviorist approach. This contradicts both the education policy and how teachers said they understood active learning in the interviews.

### **Amhara Regional State Principals' Perceptions of Quality Education**

Like the teachers, the Amhara Regional State principals who participated in the study viewed quality education in terms of student achievement and good behavior. According to the principals, students should master minimum learning competencies, actively participate in class, and develop self-confidence. Necessary inputs for quality education are qualified teachers, sufficient resources, and classrooms in good condition. Principals also emphasize that quality education can improve only when there are close working relations with cluster schools, woredas, and regional education authorities.

Similar themes emerged when principals discussed their views of quality teaching. They believe that teachers who are well-qualified and well-prepared in pedagogy are the key to quality. They also focus on the interaction between teachers and students inside the classroom, stressing the importance of student-centered approach. According to one principal, however, the student-centred approach assumes the availability of resources that are not always present in the classroom. In their view, quality teaching is highly dependent on resources and conducive school environment.

The Amhara regional state principals consider students' backgrounds and socio-economic status as important determinant of student learning although they acknowledge that there is little they can do to change these factors. Despite socio-economic effects on learning, principals indicate that quality learning takes place when students can demonstrate practically what they

have learned. It also takes place when students are self-confident, and when they can express their views, and exhibit an awareness of their environment.

## **2. Oromia Regional State: Teachers' Perceptions**

The Oromia teachers in the study focused primarily on the availability of resources and the role of teachers. The teachers believed that quality education is based on the presence of adequate instructional materials and textbooks and sufficient space and furniture in the learning environment. Teachers also stressed that quality is related to teachers' subject knowledge and pedagogical skills as well as to their ability to interact with students using student-centered methodologies.

Teachers' views on quality teaching highlighted their roles inside and outside of the classroom. Although teachers emphasized that quality teaching depends on teacher preparation before entering the classroom, they said that quality teaching depends on how teachers use their subject knowledge and employ different methodologies in the classroom. Teachers discussed the importance of motivating students to be active, rather than passive learners - to participate in class discussions, ask questions, and become self-aware and self-expressive. Teachers believed that this would improve student achievement on an academic as well as a social level, and allow the students to implement what they have learned in their daily lives.

According to the interviewed Oromia teachers, quality learning is dependent on quality teaching as well as on student discipline. Teachers say that learning depends on whether or not a classroom is managed properly. They also said that students play a crucial role, through learning to take responsibility for obeying the rules of the school, being punctual, listening to the teacher, asking questions, doing their homework, and participating actively in class. According to this view, teachers and students must work together to create quality of learning.



### Oromia Teacher Survey Responses to Perceptions of Quality

Information from the 94 teacher responses in Oromia Regional State offered additional data on teachers' views of quality teaching and student learning. According to Table 2.1 teachers believe that quality teaching is dependent on involving students in the classroom. To a lesser extent, they cited the importance of having good relations with students and their own mastery of subjects. Consistent with the results in Amhara Regional State, improving students' achievements is ranked fourth. This is also consistent with the Oromia teacher interviews, which highlight the importance of students' motivation and participation over cognitive aspects of learning.

**Table 2: Quality of Teaching and Learning as Perceived by Oromia Teachers (Sample size=94)**

| Items   | Number of Responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| What does quality-teaching mean?              |                     |      |
| Involving students in the classroom           | 44                  | 46.8 |
| Giving assignments to students all the time   | 21                  | 22.3 |
| Improving students' achievements              | 14                  | 14.9 |
| Having good relations with students           | 32                  | 34.0 |
| Giving good lectures                          | 8                   | 8.5  |
| Teachers mastery of subjects                  | 30                  | 31.9 |
| What does quality student learning mean?      |                     |      |
| Active participation of students in the class | 38                  | 40.4 |
| High score in class tests                     | 9                   | 9.6  |
| High score in final examination               | 9                   | 9.6  |
| Reciting what has been said in the class      | 35                  | 37.2 |

Teacher questionnaire responses related to student learning, shown in Table 2 echo the responses in the quality of teaching. Here students' active participation in class and their reciting of what has been said are given top rankings, responses that in themselves can be seen as contradictory. However, these characteristics are ranked well over test and examination scores suggesting a lack of importance of this type of achievement over more affective, interpersonal aspects of learning.

## **Principals' Perceptions of Quality Education**

The principals interviewed in Oromia echo the views of teachers on many aspects of education quality. All principals highlighted the importance of adequate resources and facilities, naming textbooks, chairs, teaching aids, and suitable classrooms as important. According to one principal, without those resources quality education is impossible. Principals also indicated that teachers play a fundamental role in ensuring quality education. Principals believed that teachers should be well prepared, use active teaching approaches, and follow the curriculum. Lastly, principals related quality education to behavior change in students.

In the views of the Oromia principals, quality teaching depends on the characteristics of the teachers – specifically, whether teachers have mastered the subject matter and pedagogy through their pre-service and in-service programs. Most importantly, principals think that teachers must be able to utilize that knowledge flexibly in the classroom by employing appropriate teaching methods according to their circumstances and their students.

The principals' concentration on the quality of teachers was also presented in their ideas on quality learning. According to the principals, quality learning is based on a combination of teachers' preparation and motivation. Like the Amhara Regional State principals, the Oromia principals mentioned the effects external factors can have on student learning. They said family circumstances and the distance children walk to school affect children's energy level in class. When describing quality learning, principals did not focus on academic achievement. They were emphasizing behavior change in students. Lastly, they linked quality of learning with students' using of what they learn in practical ways in their daily lives.

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### **3. Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Regional State: Teachers' Perceptions of Quality**

Much like in Amhara Regional State and in Oromia, SNNP teachers in the study, related quality education to resources and the quality of teachers. The teachers referred to the lack of textbooks, large class sizes, and lack of material and financial inputs as barriers to quality. Teachers also emphasized that they must be competent and knowledgeable in their subject matter, flexible in the use of different methodologies, able to manage children's discipline, and motivate students to learn. According to two teachers, quality education refers to education that helps students change their behavior.

The teachers' views on quality teaching emphasized the importance of teachers who: are well prepared in their subject matter; adhere to school rules and the curriculum; employ student-centered approaches in the classroom; and use continuous assessment to evaluate performance. A quality teacher must be flexible and make the correct choice of methods depending on the nature of the topic. Another role of the teacher is to function as a family member, interact in children's lives outside of the classroom and consult with parents and counsel children.

While the teachers interviewed in SNNP believe that a good student-teacher relationship contributes to better learning, they also describe quality learning in terms of student achievement. Teachers stress the importance of student participation using the examples of asking and answering questions. Quality of learning is described as improved academic performance and personal behavior of the learner, including students' performance on class work and examinations as well as their ability to solve problems.

#### **SNNP Teacher Survey Responses to Perceptions of Quality**

Questionnaire responses from 120 SNNP teachers also provide information on teachers' perceptions of quality teaching and student learning. According to Table 3, teachers believe that involving students in the classroom and

having good relations with students are the most important factors of quality teaching. This information complements the interview data, which emphasizes the importance of student participation and the establishment of good relationships with students, supporting the view that teachers should have close relationships with their students, making themselves accessible both inside and outside of the classroom. The ranking of students' achievements behind inter-personal aspects of teaching and the teacher's characteristics is consistent with the results in Amhara Regional State and Oromia.

**Table 3: Quality of Teaching and Learning as perceived by SNNP Teachers (Sample Size=120)**

| Items   | Number of Responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| What does quality teaching mean?              |                     |      |
| Involving students in the classroom           | 47                  | 39.2 |
| Giving assignments to students all the time   | 24                  | 20.0 |
| Improving students' achievements              | 25                  | 20.8 |
| Having good relations with students           | 41                  | 34.2 |
| Giving good lectures                          | 8                   | 6.7  |
| Teachers mastery of subjects                  | 37                  | 30.8 |
| What does quality student learning mean?      |                     |      |
| Active participation of students in the class | 62                  | 51.7 |
| High score in class tests                     | 16                  | 13.3 |
| High score in final examination               | 12                  | 10.0 |
| Reciting what has been said in the class      | 40                  | 33.3 |

The responses of the SNNP teachers shown in Table 3 on the topic of student learning are also similar to those of Amhara and Oromia regional states teachers. Active participation of students in class is cited as the most important factor; reciting what has been said in the class is the next highest response. The focus on reciting in class may be related to the emphasis on student behavior and discipline. Teachers clearly associate active learning with students' active participation more than with academic achievement as demonstrated through tests and examination, an important result in SNNP as in the other regional states.

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### **Principals' Perceptions of Quality**

The SNNP principals in the study had perceptions of education quality that were similar to those of the teachers in their schools. The principals viewed educational inputs such as textbooks, desks, blackboards, and qualified teachers as essential to ensuring quality education. Similarly, they stressed the importance of a safe, clean, and attractive learning environment. Principals also believe in establishing a community of learning in the school and cooperation with the wider community. They indicated the need for teachers who love and respect the profession, an administration that is responsible and accountable, and a community that contributes to and participates in the life of the school.

Principals' definitions of quality teaching focused primarily on the role of the teacher in preparing good lesson plans and using a learner-centered approach, varied teaching aids, and continuous assessment. Good quality teachers strive to motivate learners and make them feel comfortably participating in class and asking questions. Principals encourage teachers to build strong relationships with students and to help students both inside and outside of the classroom.

A similar concentration on community was apparent in SNNP principals' discussion of quality of learning. They emphasized the important role of strong student-teacher relationships, collaboration of teachers and parents, and the contributions of the community as fundamental to quality learning. The principals believe that quality learning is demonstrated in the class when learners actively participate, improve their confidence levels, perform well, and are promoted to the next grade. They also view quality learning as an improvement thing in student behavior and the ability to apply what they have learned in practical life situations.

#### **4. Tigray Regional State: Teachers' Perceptions**

The Tigray teachers who participated in the interviews related quality education to good teaching and good results. They believe that this is dependent on teachers' capacity, subject knowledge, and competencies. They also emphasized the availability of resources by explaining their inability to provide sufficient education without teaching materials and an appropriate learning environment. With the necessary resources, they indicated that quality education is not only academic performance, but it is the demonstration of good conduct, linking quality explicitly with changing students' behavior.

The teachers discussed quality of teaching as the competencies of the teacher in subject matter knowledge, and the ability to communicate and transmit knowledge in the classroom. To achieve quality they stated that teachers should use lesson plans, evaluate and assess the students' progress, and motivate students to participate actively. Because of the emphasis on changing student behavior, teachers emphasized their function as role models, setting the moral standards in the class and in the school. Lastly, teachers also viewed themselves as facilitators with the community, discussing with parents and helping them to understand their children's problems.

Many of the Tigray regional state teachers described quality of learning in terms of students' improved competencies and changed behavior. They argued that active participation in class activities, regular school attendance, and engaging in class and home assignments are characteristics of quality of learning. Focusing on results, they also emphasized that examination results and winning academic competitions in between-school events are important indicators of quality of learning. Resources are another key factor in quality learning; according to teachers, quality of learning is dependent on both student motivation and the availability of books, laboratories, and other teaching materials. More resources mean more opportunities for a wide variety of experiences, which can help to stimulate the interest of the students.

### Tigray Teacher Survey Responses on Perceptions of Quality

The results of 110 questionnaires completed by grade 4 teachers in Tigray provide information on perceptions of quality from a wider group of teachers. Unlike teachers in Amhara Regional State, Oromia, and SNNPR, Table 4 reveals that Tigray teachers consider improving student achievement to be the most important factor of quality teaching, with the second highest response involving students in the classroom, which has been the most important factor in the other regional states. Although teacher interviews/focus groups suggest that student-centered learning and achievement are important, the responses below suggest that teachers prioritize student outcomes above participation. This is particularly interesting when compared to the results of the 2004 student assessment, which ranked Tigray students at the grades 1-4 level below the students of the other regional states. (National Organization for Examination, 2004)

**Table 4: Quality of Teaching**

| What does quality teaching mean?<br><i>Sample Size=110</i> | Number of Responses | %    |
|--|---------------------|------|
| Involving students in the classroom                        | 18                  | 16.4 |
| Giving assignments to students all the time                | 18                  | 16.4 |
| Improving students achievements                            | 35                  | 31.8 |
| Having good relations with students                        | 21                  | 19.1 |
| Giving good lectures                                       | 4                   | 3.6  |
| Teachers mastery of subjects                               | 14                  | 12.7 |

Teacher responses in Table 4 suggest a contradictory message. When asked to define student learning, the highest response was active participation of students in class, instead of high scores in tests or exams. Tigray regional state teachers also associate student learning with reciting what has been said in class, which is distinct from the high concentration on student-centered learning expressed in the interviews. This result raises the question of how the notion of student achievement and the notion of examination results are understood and associated in the minds of the teachers.

**Table 5: Quality of Student Learning**

| What does good student learning mean?<br><i>Sample Size=110</i> | Number of Responses | %    |
|---|---------------------|------|
| Active participation of students in the class                   | 38                  | 34.5 |
| High score in class tests                                       | 15                  | 13.6 |
| High score in final examination                                 | 10                  | 9.1  |
| Reciting what has been said in the class                        | 24                  | 21.8 |

### Principals' Perceptions of Quality of Education

The principals in the Tigray study schools viewed quality of education in terms of educational outcomes and the availability of sufficient inputs. In their opinion, resources such as sufficient teaching materials and qualified teachers are required to achieve quality education. The principals described the results of quality education primarily with reference to social outcomes. In addition to making students more knowledgeable, they referred to quality education as a change in behavior of students and increased social commitment. The principals thought that quality education should promote active citizenship, motivating students to become active members of their school and society. Lastly, principals stressed that quality is achieved when students demonstrate what they have learned in practical ways in their daily lives.

Principals' description of quality teaching concentrated mainly on the characteristics and activities of teachers. They stressed that teachers must be competent; they thought that teachers are most successful when teaching their area of competency, rather than teaching all subjects such as in the self-contained classroom. Another area of emphasis was the teacher's approach in the classroom-their preparation of lesson plans, implementation of student-centered approaches, and use of teaching materials. Here, resources were also mentioned as a necessary requirement for supporting effective teaching approaches. Lastly, principals believed that teachers must follow up the learning process with assessments, gauging results by students' performance on assignments, activities, and tests.



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Principals explained quality learning in terms of student-centered teaching, active learning, and increased student interest in learning. They suggested certain indicators of active learning such as class participation, class activities, homework assignments, and group discussions. However, they argued that students need more inducements and persuasion to motivate their attendance and participation. Instead of focusing on the responsibility of the students, principals highlighted the teachers' role of stimulating student interest in learning.

### **5. Inter-case Analysis of the Four Regional States**

The case studies in the four regional states suggest very similar patterns of teacher and principal understanding of the three concepts of quality of education, quality of teaching and quality of learning. In the analysis below, we first combine the interview results across the four regional states and discuss three important points that emerged from the data: input, process, and output factors related to education quality. Second, we summarize the results from the survey across the regional states. Lastly, we briefly discuss two critical issues that emerged from the combined results that may have an important impact on quality of education: 1) the relatively minor importance teachers place on student achievement; and 2) the inconsistency in the results of active learning and rote learning.

#### **Perceptions of Quality across the Regional States from Interviews**

*Input factors:* Teachers and principals in the four regions believed that good quality education is dependent on input factors, such as, resources, teachers, and the community. Teachers and principals emphasized the importance of sufficient resources such as textbooks, desks, teaching materials, libraries, and adequate classrooms. They believe that without these essential items, they are unable to deliver quality education. Teachers are also considered a crucial resource. Both principals and teachers stressed the need for qualified teachers who have appropriate subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. Lastly, they viewed community

involvement as a crucial determinant of quality education, including teachers' interactions with parents as well as the communities' financial input into schools. In two of the regions, Amhara Regional State and Oromia, principals mentioned another input, the external situation of the children, their socio-economic conditions and their living conditions, which can affect their ability to be receptive to quality education.

*Process factors:* Process factors of quality relate to teachers' and students' activities in the classroom. In all cases, employing a student-centered approach was evident in the responses. Teachers and principals explained quality education in terms of student participation and students asking questions and building their self-confidence level. They also referred to the importance of assessing student performance and in employing various strategies and teaching materials to motivate students. In contrast, teachers and principals also reported that teachers should function as a role model to students, upholding schools rules and following the curriculum. This concept of the teachers' role differs slightly in the cases of SNNP and Tigray. While building a strong relationship with students and communities is emphasized in all four states, in SNNP and Tigray principals and teachers believed that teachers should play an important role in children's lives.

*Output factors:* Research participants in all regions explained quality in relation to learning outcomes. Although these outcomes are expressed in terms of achieving high scores on exams, completing homework, and achieving promotion to the next grade, even more prominent is reference to affective aspects of active learning such as how students interact in the classroom, their participation level, and their self-confidence. Teachers and principals also define achievement as students' adherence to the rules and regulations of the school, their being punctual, and having good attendance. Finally, teachers and principals indicate that there is a practical purpose of education. They stressed that students have achieved quality learning when they are able to demonstrate their learning in a practical setting in their everyday lives.

### Perceptions of Quality across Regional States from the Teacher Survey

The quantitative results of the teacher questionnaires also reveal similarities across the four regions (see Figure 1 & Figure 2). Teachers in three of the four regions believe that involving students in class discussion and having good relations with students are the most important values of quality of teaching. Tigray is the only region where teachers valued most improving student achievements. This is consistent with the findings from interviews and focus groups discussions, which highlight the importance of the affective over the cognitive aspects of active learning in the three regional states.

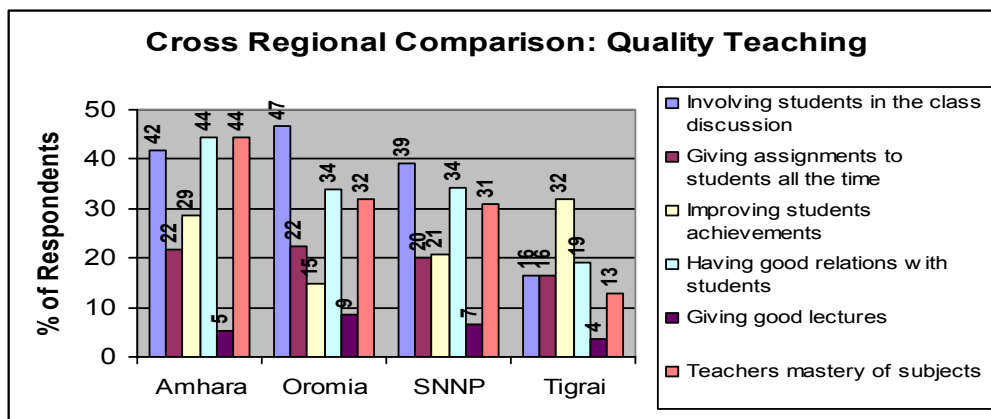


Figure 1: Cross-regional Comparison: Quality Teaching

Responses related to student learning are also consistent across regional states (see Figure 2). According to the teacher survey, active participation in class is by far the main sign of student learning, ranked more important than performance on tests and examinations. This result is somewhat at odds with the interview data in which teachers and principals talked about the importance of academic achievement, albeit with a greater emphasis on affective aspects of active learning. The importance given here to reciting in class suggests that, while active learning is the policy, teachers still depend on non-active, behaviorist practice in the classroom.

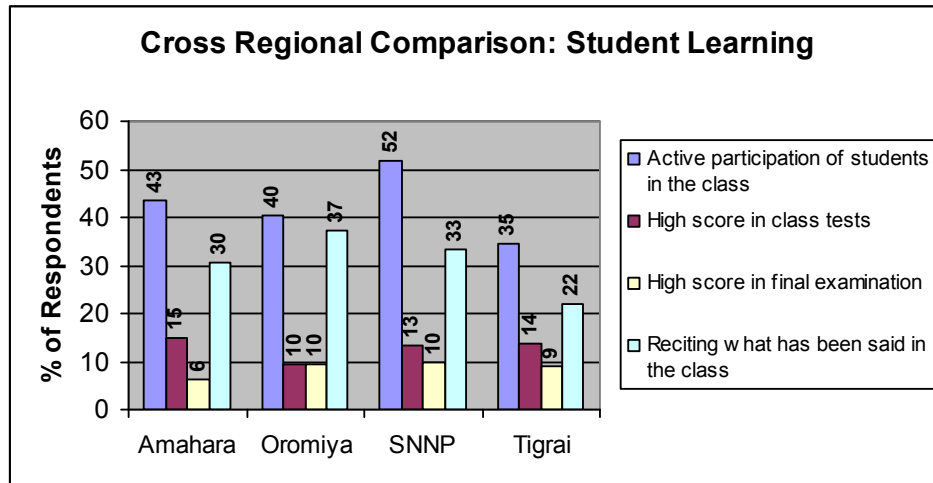


Figure 2: Cross-regional Comparison: Student Learning

## 6. Implications of the Research: Two Critical Issues in Perceptions of Quality

*1. Cognitive and affective aspects of active learning:* In the interviews, teachers and principals talk more about active participation of students in class and changes in their behavior than they do about students' academic achievement. In the survey, teachers place relatively little importance on examination and test results as compared with students' active participation in class. It is critical to understand what this tells us about teachers' interpretation and practice of active learning and how teachers work with the integrated cognitive (conceptual learning), affective (inter-personal), and psycho-motor (practical application of learning) aspects of active learning. Although these results raise more questions than they answer, the issues highlighted are highly important. They perhaps point to inconsistencies in policy and practice that constitute a roadblock to quality and to student achievement, as measured in assessments and end-of-cycle examinations. First, if class participation is seen as an end in itself, rather than a means to

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several ends which include academic achievement, then active learning is misunderstood and does not fulfill its role or potential. Second, if various aspects of active learning policies and programs are out of alignment (curriculum, textbooks, the content of CPD programs, student examinations), there may be confusion where it all comes together - at the teaching/learning level – which could lead to lowered rather than improved quality of teaching and student learning.

The results of the findings of this study suggest the urgent need for an examination of the messages that different professional development programs or supervision structures send to teachers about what defines student achievement and the role that active-learning classroom approaches play in this. It would also be important to investigate, at several levels of policy and practice, the implications of the need for flexibility in active learning approaches in relation to the relative rigidity of the curriculum and examinations. This inconsistency in policy and practice has been present and unexamined for years in Ethiopia as well as in many other countries.

*2. Combining active and rote learning:* Teachers and principals did not refer to rote learning in the interviews as an important classroom strategy. However, when confronted with a question on the survey that asked teachers to rate the importance of students' class participation and "reciting what has been said in class," the latter received almost equal importance with the former. This may relate to how teachers understood the question, but it might also relate to the issues brought up above about lack of alignment in policies and programs where active learning is promoted as classroom practice, but the curriculum remains rigid, as do the examinations. It almost certainly relates to what teachers really do in the classroom, with rote-learning approaches persisting despite the introduction of some of the forms and furniture arrangements of active learning such as discussing in groups. In addition, the data collectors have observed that students have been divided into small groups in the classrooms. Teachers-student relationships were also cordial. Yet, teaching/learning strategies still rely on absorbing fixed knowledge and giving-and-taking true/false answers.

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