

Conference Paper

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church Education and Important Practices to the Modern Science and Mathematics Education

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ABSTRACT

Only Ethiopia in Africa has had Christianity as its official religion for more than 1,500 years. Churches and monasteries were established as the Kingdom and Christianity spread to Ethiopia's south and southwest. The study was planned with an ethnographic, qualitative methodology. The researcher primarily collected textual data by transcribing and translating the "Amharic" version audio data using high-quality tape recorders. The data were analyzed using an inductive and thematic analytical technique. The study's findings demonstrated that for many centuries, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church School System served as the primary defender of traditional culture. Particularly, Ethiopia's Orthodox Church had preserved a highly structured and organized system of education from primary to higher school from the sixth century. It was discovered that the church education offers a variety of study fields (specializations) at various levels with amazing teaching-learning techniques. The philosophy of Perennialism and Existentialism serves as the primary foundation for Ethiopian Orthodox Church education. It had established a foundation and made a substantial contribution to the growth and construction of Modern Ethiopia. It also offers incredible teaching and learning characteristics that should be incorporated into the current system of scientific and math education.

Key words: Orthodox Church; cultural education; Abinet School; levels; categories

INTRODUCTION

Education in Ethiopia

There is a long tradition of a formal approach to education in Ethiopia. Even though modern education in Ethiopia is reported to have started in 1908 – a little over a hundred-year history, traditional religious education like the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian church

education has been in place for centuries (Molla, 2018). The foundation for this education was closely associated with the introduction of Christianity as a state religion in *the first half of the fourth century* (332 E.C.). At least by the *sixth century AD*, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was offering formal education (Destefano & Wilder, 1992). Church education primarily served for the purposes of the Church itself in preparing priests, deacons, and other Church personnel, but for long period it also provided religious education to the children of the nobility and to the sons of peasants associated with elite families.

The formal education dates to the sixth century BC when the Sabeian alphabet was used for instructional purposes (DeStefano & Wilder, 1992). In the early years of the Christian era the churches in Ethiopia developed a school system. The seventh century saw the development of Quranic (Islamic) schools. During the mid to late nineteenth century there was an occasional Christian mission school in the provinces run by Swedish or American missionaries. In Ethiopia, there were only Christian schools until the first secular school, the Minilik School, was opened in 1908 even if it was primarily a foreign language school; which remained as the only government school until 1925. In the early era, non-government schools, in Ethiopia at the primary and secondary levels, in addition to various missionary societies, were operated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (MoE, 1973). The traditional Church education system, also known as *Abinet School*, can be divided into three levels: *beginner, intermediate, and higher level* (Molla, 2018).

The beginner level is commonly referred to as *Nebab bet* (the School of Reading) where students learn letters of the Ge'ez syllabary. Instruction in the Nebab bet also includes drill in the reading of selected religious texts, commonly the Gospel of Saint John ('*ye-Yohannes Wongel*') and the Psalms of David ('*Mezmure Dawit*') (Getaye, n.d.). Before the expansion of primary schools in rural Ethiopia, Nebab bet also served as preparation for modern school entry.

The intermediate level Church education is *Zemma bet* (the School of Hymns). At *Zemma bet*, students learn religious music and dances ('*woreb*'). There are five aspects to *Zemma bet*: the study of a chant/song book (*Degwa*); hymns/chant after communion (*zemmare*) and prayers for the dead (*mawasit*); singing and movement (*aquaquam*); and the study of liturgy (*qedasse*) (Kassaye, 2005). In spite of these, to be able to carry out such roles as reading the scriptures, ritual dances, and hymns and poems, they need to attend higher-level education.

The high-level Church education covers advanced education in such areas of knowledge as theology, history, canon law (*Fetha Negest*), moral philosophy, calendar

calculation (Bahre Hasab), and arts and crafts (including calligraphy, painting, and manuscript making). This level is now equivalent to higher education in the levels of the modern education system (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013; Telila, 2010) and has clear parallels with medieval European universities. It consists of qene bet (the school of poetry) and metsehaft bet (the School of Books).

In the qene bet, students learn religious poetry and the language and grammar of Ge'ez (liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church). Mastering religious poetry includes developing 'sem' ena 'worq' ('wax' and 'gold'—that is, composing and interpreting verses with two levels of meaning: the direct meaning, sem or 'wax'; and the hidden meaning, worq or 'gold').

Lessons in the School of Books are divided into four themes: the study of (a) Old Testament (46 books), (b) New Testament (35 books), (c) Patrology (study of the book of the Church Fathers, metsehafe-liqawint), and (d) Monasticism (the study of the book of the Monks or metsehafe-menekusat). Completing all levels and mastering the religious and other fields of knowledge in the Church education system takes more than 25 years of schooling. Only few continue the long and demanding learning journey to join the *last and highest* level of the education system called metsehaft bet (also known as Literature school).

In the Church education system, advanced education is provided by monasteries specializing in one or more of the fields of study, and about *one-third* of the total Orthodox Churches in the country still offer some form of organized education. The contemporary *monasteries* are considered to be the centers of excellence for higher-level studies (Telila, 2010). Most of these learning centers are located in the central, north, and northwest parts of Ethiopia such as Shewa, Wollo, Gojam, Gonder, and Tigray areas.

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition, Monasteries such as Debre Bisrat, Waldiba, Wadladelanta, Hayq Estephanos, Washera, Gonj, Dimma, Zuramba, and Debre Abbay serve as centers of higher education. Some other centers of excellence and their study fields are: Gondar Bethelihem— Digu'a; Zur Amba—Zimare Mewast; Gondar Ba'eta—Akuakuam; and Menbere-Mengist Medhani'alem—Tirguame.

Leaners can specialize in one of the four areas of excellence such as Metsehafe Blu'yat (Old testaments), Metsehafe Hadi'sat (New testaments), Metsihafe Likawunt (intellectuals), and Metsihafe Menekosat (Monks) through personal communications with prominent Church scholars (Yebete Kirst-yan Liqawunet). And hence, a student who would like to study intermediate and higher-level education in the Church education system would

have to identify, know and travel to the specialized learning centers (or monasteries). Traditionally, women are not allowed to be priests; therefore, the participation of girls is limited only to the basic level of schooling (Reading) not allowed to the higher-level of learning. However, there are rare cases in which women have completed the highest level of the Church education and assumed a teaching position in one of the specialized schools, such as Gonji and Dimma Giorgis in Gojam province. While we have our own indigenous education system, the hegemonic domination of the modern education system made learning at stake of purpose and provision of quality education a challenge. What is it possible to link the traditional and modern education system is, thus, a timely issue that is worthy studying.

Statement of the Problem

Traditional/cultural educational system of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of the prehistoric educations that existed since the fourth century when the Orthodox Church was founded in Ethiopia. Beyond its ecclesiastical roles, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was the bedrock of the nation's social, political, and cultural fabric (Molla, 2018). In addition to its critical role in the formation of Ethiopian culture and identity, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church made the country the only African nation with its own written script, Ge'ez (also known as Ethiopic), literature, and a 13-month calendar system.

It is known that the modern education system in Ethiopia is not far more than one century. Before the adoption of modern education, Ethiopians had the knowledge and skills of writing, reading, painting, sculpturing, and the like. Orthodox Church fathers and religion followers have a strong belief that the basis of these knowledge and skills of Holy fathers, emperors, kings and kingdoms of the Ethiopians was the Orthodox cultural education that was given in the Church. Browne, Lulat, and Wagaw (as cited in Molla, 2018) stated in their own studies that Ethiopia has long been drawing its civil servants, including judges, governors, scribes, and treasurers, from this traditional scholarship.

Even though, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has such long and substantial history in the development of the country, the upcoming of the so called modern education has limited more discourses and learning to be given and transferred from one generation to other generation, and influenced the focus to be the modern education as if that is the only best way to ensure development. The surrogacy of the western education could be staged to indulge optional debate, but the belief that building one's own knowledge base and education system should be well explored is upright. Beyond these facts, the modern education system has

staggered to ensure quality of education, and thus exploring one's own system and linking both could endow mutual benefits and enshrine the provision of contextually relevant education system. This study is thus believed to have contributions to fill gaps, excel practices and extend the reforms of education in the land.

Research Objectives

General Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study was to answer the overarching question: What are the concepts of Abenet Schooling, schooling levels and teaching/learning experiences existing in the Ethiopian Orthodox cultural education systems? And how best can these be linked with the modern education system to elaborate better teacher education systems.

Specific Objectives

The study had the following specific objectives:

- To understand the basic education system in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and concepts in the 'Abenet' school of the Church;
- To explore the different levels of education in the Orthodox Church;
- To explore the teaching-learning experiences of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church cultural/traditional education system;
- To describe the certification and licensing systems which are given to Church Scholars when they graduate as Church Instructors (*Mergeta, Yeneta, or Yenta*) from the center of excellence (Monarchies); To inform the modern teacher education system with best practices from the Church education.

Research Questions

This study tried to answer the following research questions.

- What is the basic education system in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and concepts in the '*Abenet*' schooling of the Church?
- What are the levels of the cultural education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church?
- How does teaching-learning process take place in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church cultural/traditional education system?
- How are certification and licensing systems processed to Church Scholars when they are going to be certified as Church Instructors (*Mergeta, Yene-ta, or Yen-ta*) from the

center of excellence (Monarchies)?With best practices are there in the Church education that can be used in the modern teacher education?

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This section describes the setting, research paradigms, research design and procedures, data analytical strategies and techniques, and the issues of research ethics.

Settings of the Study

This study aimed to come up with the levels and experiences of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church Education/Schooling system and suggest recommendations that support linking the best practices to the modern teacher education. In the early *fourth* Century, a Syro-Greek exile, Frumentius eventually converted King Ezana to Christianity, thereby making it the official religion. As Islam made its appearance on the coast, Christians retreated into the highlands and consolidated their authority there, establishing Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as the state religion. The Ethiopia's emperors (starting from Menelik-I) claim as descendants of King Solomon of Jerusalem. The allegedly claimed Solomonic monarchy had a variable degree of political control over Ethiopia from the time of *Yekunno Amlak* in 1270 until *Haile Selassie's* dethroning in 1974. The Tewahedo Orthodox has more than 30,000 churches (Molla, 2018) distributed throughout the country, and has around 43.5% followers from the total population of the country (EFDR Population Census Commission, 2008). Both the Orthodox Church and the monarchy fostered Ethiopian nationalism (Karbo, 2013).

The Orthodox Church is still considered in many quarters and by many Orthodox Christian Ethiopians as the state religion; the Ethiopian Orthodox church is the largest Christian church in the nation (Karbo, 2013). Ethiopian Orthodox Church has played an important role in providing the establishment with the necessary ideological instrument that legitimized its domination. It should be noted that the Orthodox Church has dominated the political, social and cultural life in the highlands because it has been the official religion of the imperial government and until Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed in 1974. In its long history the Church was conducting various forms of religious education on of which was educating religious teachers/educators. It is with this context that this study tried to explore experiences of teacher education and lessons that could be learned to adapt into the recent formal teacher education in Ethiopia.

Getting Access to the Site and Related Ethical Issues

Accessing the sites and religious scholars was one key entry to the research. As we planned to study a religious related matter presenting ourselves ethically both from the concept of the religion and research was fundamental. Paying due attention to those issues we used the following ways to get access and ensued ethical procedures pre, during and after the study. These included consultations with personnel in the Church to identify as to where the areas of interest are located and to get access. Official letter from the Department of science and mathematics education was also secured to help get access. In addition gatekeepers were used through whom it was possible to get contact with the potential interviewees. In addition the intent of the study was made clear to the participants; Confidentiality and anonymity were also given due emphasis, we tried to build rapport with them; conducted debriefing, and we tried to maintain respect and keep norms and rules of indigenous societies.

Study Participants

There are various forms of schools in the Church education, but this study was delimited to Metsahaf Bet, Aqua'quam Bet, Qene'e Bet, and Nebab Bet. Accordingly, this research study used three research sites as informed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church scholars. The sites were Addis Ababa, North Shoa, and Gojam with no denouncement of the availability of potential sites in Gondar, Wollo and Tigray that could be explored further in subsequent studies. The letter of permission was given to each Haggere-Sebeket (or Head) Office. They led us into the proper data source personnel. One participant from Addis Ababa, one participant from North Shoa, and three participants from Gojam, total of five research respondents, were involved in this study who were selected purposefully by considering their field of specializations (having different field of studies) and years of experiences (more than ten-years of services).

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

As data gathering tool, this study mainly used only *formal semi-structured* interviews. *Individual* interviewing method was used than making use of *group* interview approach. The individual interview method was employing one individual at a time. All interviews were tape-recorded to be transcribed into a written or textual data. Each interview was varying in time length from 45 to 75-minutes.

Data Organizations

The high-quality tape records during interviews were carefully transcribed into textual data; these data were loaded and organized to computer files as a word file. The data were organized around different topics and themes after identifying categories and codes.

Data Analysis

The work of data analysis was started during the course of data collections in the field. However, after completion of data collection and organization of the data, the following strategies were employed for data analysis. The ethnographic notes and interviews were analyzed using *thematic analysis (data reduction method)*. Thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 1994; Braun, 2006; Sangasubana, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Using only thematic analysis meant that there was consistency in the ways that codes were developed, which were then applied and compared across each of the different data forms. An advantage of thematic analysis (data reduction) was that it is not attached to one theoretical framework; rather it is compatible with both interpretivist and realist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lamond & Platt, 2016).

To identify the themes or patterns within data an *inductive* (‘bottom up’) and *semantic* (or explicit level) methods were used rather than using a theoretical (or deductive, ‘top down’) and latent (or implicit level) methods. An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data if the data have been collected specifically via interview or focus group (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this sense, the *data-driven* forms of the thematic analysis were organized in a **six** stage process of thematic analysis/data reduction proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). See Table-1.

Table 1:

A Six Stage Process of Thematic Analysis [Adapted From Braun and Clarke, 2006:12]

Steps	Descriptions
1	Being familiarized with the data
2	Generating initial codes
3	Searching for themes
4	Reviewing themes
5	Defining and naming the themes
6	Producing the report

RESULTS

Participants' Background Information

The following shows the characteristics of participants of the study. This does not include everyone who latently involved in the study but the main informants. As one can see from Table-2, all participants have different fields of studies.

Table 2

Participants' (Prominent Church Scholars') Background Information

Participant	Sex	Year of Service	Place	Field of specialization
1	M	22	Addis Ababa	Metsehaf Bet
2	M	45	N/Shoa	Aqua'quam Bet
3	M	80	W/Gojam	Qene'e Bet
4	M	38	W/Gojam	Qedasse Bet
5	M	14	W/Gojam	Nebab Bet

Findings from the thematic Analysis

By applying thematic analysis and inductive approach, **four** overarching themes emerged. Based on this, the findings are split into four main themes. These are: The Historical and Conceptual Notions of Abenet School that presents an introduction to the nature and characteristics of cultural education in EOTC; The second theme is levels of schooling and fields of specializations that states about the different types of courses, categories and levels of education in Orthodox Church, and the interrelationship (links) between them; the third is student admission and teaching/learning process. This theme covers detail activities such as criteria required to admit spiritual students, selection of fields of study, the issues of promotion from one level to the other, learning materials, and methods of teaching and learning; The fourth theme is assessment and certification that addresses how

and when monastic students complete their education, how provided is the certification, and institution (s) that is (are) responsible for this account.

Table 3

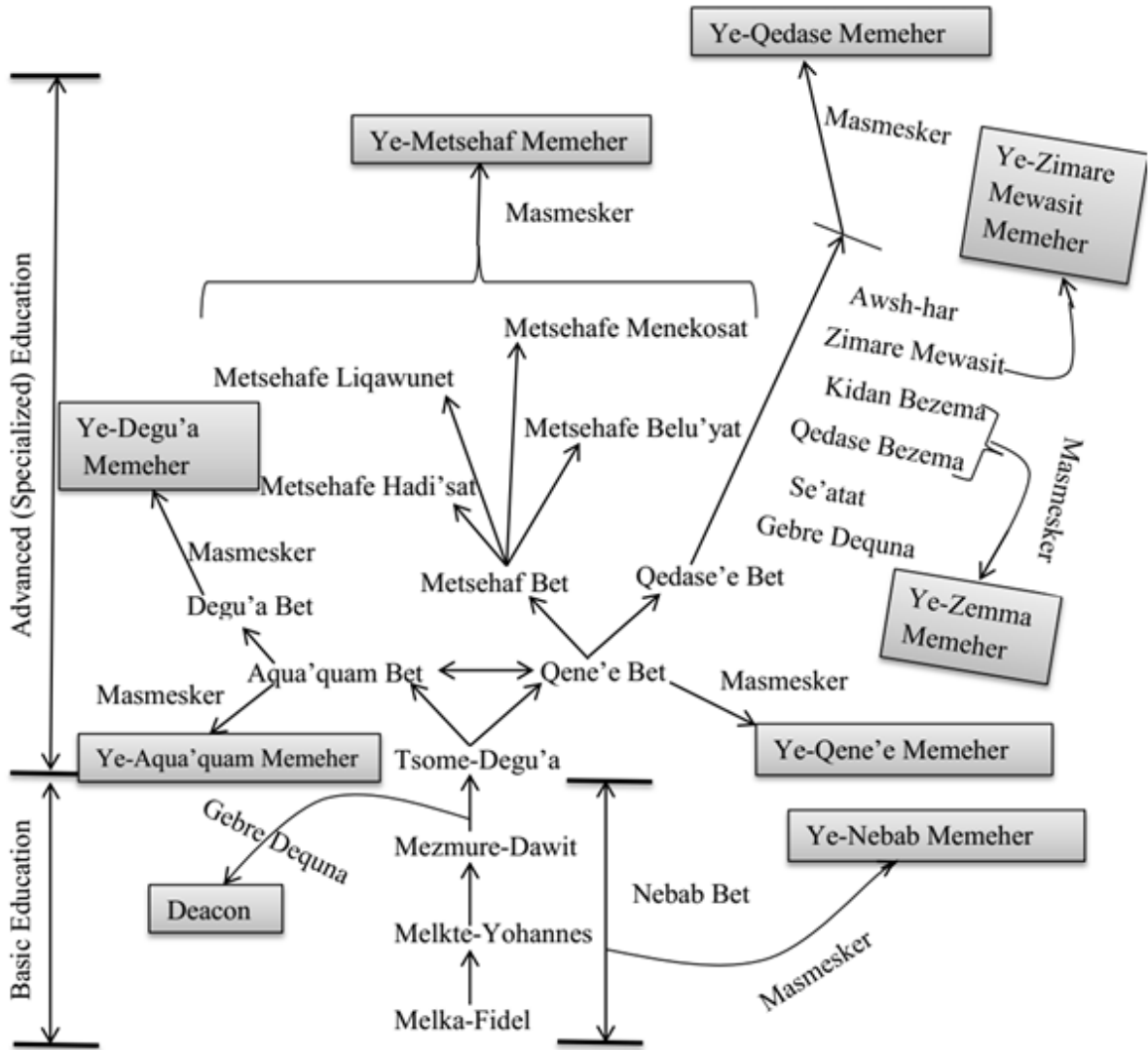
The Table with Themes and Given Responses

Theme	Interview responses
Historical and Conceptual Notions	<p>Abenet education is a type of education which has been given in Ethiopian Orthodox Church.</p> <p>The meaning, concept, levels, and features of education have never changed. Reality is spiritual, mental, perennial, and remains unchanging; Is Dogmatic and follows the most conservative educational philosophy to transfer Church Dogmas from generation to generation</p> <p>The educational system is the same in everywhere and every society.</p> <p>The goal of education is to develop the followers' intellect and moral values.</p>
Levels of Schooling and Fields of Specializations	<p>The Church education has two broad categories; namely, General (Basic) education and Advanced (Specialized) education.</p> <p>Monastic students start from the Basic education then go up to the advanced education system.</p> <p>General education has its own subcategories and levels such as Melka-Fidel, Mel-e'kte-Yohannes, and Mezmure-Dawit (hierarchical in their order)</p> <p>Advanced education has also several sub-branches like Tsome-Degu'a, Aqu'aqu'am, Qene'e, Qedase'e, Metsehaf, Degu'a, Zimare Mewasit, and the like. But Metsehaf bet is the most advanced over others.</p>
Students Admission and Teaching /Learning Process	<p>Follower (Believer) of Orthodox Tewahedo Religion is the only the criteria to be admitted.</p> <p>No difference in gender; both males and females can register and learn to any level based on their Interests. However, beginners should be virgin to be a Deacon, unless otherwise virginity is not a must to learn Church education.</p> <p>Anybody can learn regardless of his or her gender, age level and marital status.</p> <p>At the lower level, all students learn the same courses without differences, but at the higher level, there are options that students can select their own choices to be specialized on a specific field of study.</p> <p>Each advanced (higher, or special) field of study is found (or given) at different Centers of Excellences (Monasteries) in Ethiopia.</p> <p>There are textbooks available for each field of study.</p>
Assessment and Certification Process	<p>To assure and give promotion to the next level or provide certification, in most cases, oral examinations are given rather than written examinations which are given rarely.</p> <p>Certifications are given by Monastic Specialist in the name (Stamp) of Ethiopian Orthodox Church including the particular area at which the center of excellence is found and signature of the Prominent Church scholar (Monastic Specialist).</p> <p>Only certification is given to the graduate, to serve as an instructor, with no extra licensing and relicensing.</p>

The findings of the different levels (hierarchies) of the Orthodox Church education, their relations, and field of specializations for spiritual scholars (Mergeta, Yene'ta, or Memehran) are displayed on the diagram below (Figure-1).

Figure-1

Levels of Ethiopian Orthodox Church Education and Their Relationships



DISCUSSIONS

The discussion is also divided into those four main themes as they were presented in the result section.

Historical and Conceptual Notions of Abenet School

This section gives a brief introduction about the concept of ‘Abenet’ Schooling. ‘Abenet’ education (or schooling) is an education which has been given in the Ethiopian

Orthodox Church for a number of centuries. Literally, the term ‘Abenet’ refers to an ‘exemplary’. At this stage the Orthodox religion followers should learn, know, understand, and apply the asset of the religious beliefs to their lives without changes (or any amendment). The concepts and levels of education of the Orthodox religion have never been changed. It is believed that reality is spiritual, mental, perennial, and remains unchanged. It also specifies that the concept is universally true and dogmatic. The Church strongly follows the most conservative educational philosophy and to transfer Church Canons from generation to generation without time limitations. The educational system and its doctrine is the same in everywhere and every society.

ዘመናዊ ትምህርት ሳይኖር የኢትዮጵያ ሊቃውንት ያነቡና ይፀፉ ነበር። ይህን እውቀት ከየት ያመጡት ይመስላችኋል? ያን ጊዜ ዘመናዊ ትምህርት እንኳን በሀገራችን በዓለም ላይ አልነበረም፤ አገራችንም አልነበሩም (አልተፈጠሩም)። ትምህርቱን ያገኙት (የሰጣቸው) የአብነት ትምህርት ቤት ነው። ስለዚህ እንደ ኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ታሪክ በዋነኝነት መነሻ የሚሆነው የንግስተ-ሰባ ታሪክ ነው። ንግስተ-ሰባ ወደ እየሩሳሌም ሄደች፣ ከንጉስ ሶሎሞን ፀነሰች፣ ቀዳማዊ ምኒልክን ወለደች፣ ምኒልክም በ22 ዓመቱ ወደ አባቱ አገር ሄደ፣ ለሦስት ዓመታት ስርዓተ-መንግስት፣ የይብራይስጥ ቋንቋና መጽሐፍተ-ብሉይትን ተማረ፣ ወደ ኢትዮጵያ እንዲህን መጽሐፍት ይዞ ተመለሰ፣ እንዲህ መጽሐፍት ወደ ግዕዝ ቋንቋ ተተርጎመ። ይህ የሚያሳየን የአብነት ትምህርት የተጀመረው በብሉይ ኪዳን ዘመን መሆኑን ነው።

In the earlier, before modern education, Ethiopian leaders and the known people were able to write and read. During that time, all over the world, modern education was not started; even most countries, by the time, were not present. Those Ethiopians obtained their knowledge and skills from Abenet school. Queen Saba went to Jerusalem and gave birth from King Solomon; the baby was later so called Menelik I. Menelik I went back to his father’s place, Jerusalem, when he was 22. He learned state structure. Hebrew language and a number of Holy Books of the old testament written in ‘Hebrew language and came back to Ethiopia with all these books. These Books were then translated into Ge’ez language by Ethiopians. This implies that the Abinet schools in Ethiopian were started during that time.

Before the emergence of the so called modern education during Menelik II in 1908 Ethiopian emperors, kings, and/or kingdoms were able to communicate with each other

and with the international communities via letters with the skills of writing and reading they obtained from the historical Ethiopian Orthodox Church education. Abenet education was started before Saint Yared (Qedus Yared) since the early 4th century. But, starting from the inputs from Saint Yared (Qedus Yared the Ethiopia) Abenet School became advanced, strengthened, and being comprehended. For example, Qedus Yared added Qene'e and Zemema Bets from Nebab Bet; Aba Giorgis-the-Gascha (1317-1457) added Se'atat Bet; Yohannes-the-Bebru made Qene'e more advanced and comprehended. In Abenet School, courses are divided into the Day and the Night courses where students learn courses both in the day and in the night.

The goal of Church education is to develop religion followers' intellect and moral values, and ultimately to develop religious exercises to help them get alive spiritually (and get into the Heaven). The focus of Abenet education is on preserving knowledge, values, dispositions, etc of the Church from the distant and recent past to present and future generations. One of the interviewee who is specialist in the field of Metschaf Bet said:

አብነት ማለት የጥንቱ የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ቤ/ክርስቲያን ስርዓተ-ትምህርት ጉባኤ ተክሎ ወንበር ዘርግቶ የሚማሩበት ማለት ነው። የቀድሞ ሰዎች ለኋለኞች አብነት (ምሳሌ) የሚሆኑበት ማለት ነው። ቋሚ አብነት የሚባለው የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ቤ/ክርስቲያን ስርዓተ-ትምህርት ነው። ይህ ትምህርት ከቅዱስ ያሬድ ጊዜ እንዲሁም ከዚያ በፊት ጀምሮ የነበረ ነው። በዓለም ላይ ያሉ ብዙ የእምነት ትምህርቶች ወደ ዘመናዊ ትምህርት እየተቀየሩ አብነታቸውን ሲለቁ የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋህዶ እምነት ግን መሰረቱን ያልለቀቀና መንግስታት ሲቀያየሩም የማይቀየር ፀንቶ የኖረ ነው።

Abenet means a form of a curriculum that the Church conducts its teaching and learning. It means that the former become examples or role models for their follower generations. The standing Abinet is the curriculum of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Ethiopian Orthodox Church education has kept its standing where most religious educations have been changing with modernization. But the Ethiopian orthodox religion has maintained its core foundations irrespective of modernization and changes of states. It is everlasting.

The Levels of Schooling and Fields of Specializations

This part emphasizes on the various types and/or categories of fields of studies, and on the levels of schooling available in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church education. The

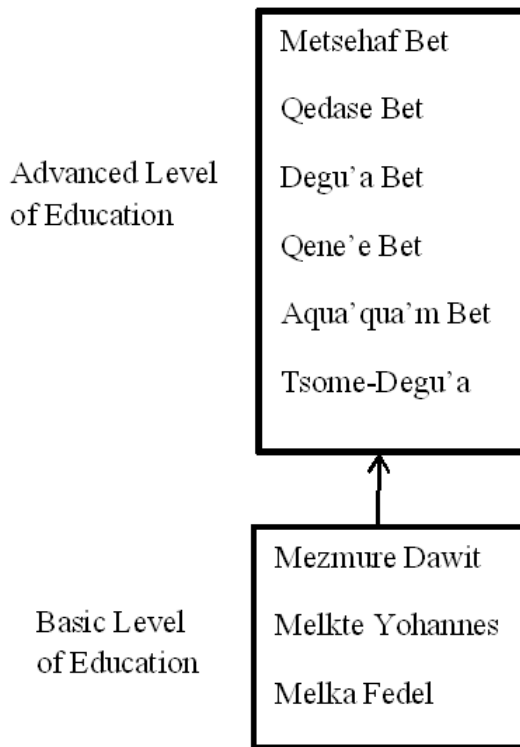
relationship between each is discussed. This section also addresses the ranks of Prominent Church Scholars (ye-Betekristian Liqawunt).

Based on their levels, the Orthodox Church education can be broadly grouped into two main categories. These are General Basic, or Nebab Bet education and advanced or specialized education. In earlier time, there were seven fields of studies available in the Church education. But two of the fields (Zemare and Mewasit Bets) were merged (integrated) to each other to be a single field of study and written as one book and offered by the same instructor (Liqawunt, Yene-ta). Hence, this time, six fields of studies (namely, Aqua'quam Bet, Qene'e Bet, Degu'a Bet, Qedasse Bet, Metsehaf Bet, and Zemare-Mewasit Bet) are available. Any novice religious learner starts his or her education from the basic (Nebab Bet) level of education then continues to the advanced level. The basic education level (also called as the Nebab Bet) has its own subcategories and sublevels. These, from lower to higher level, include Melka-Fidel, Melkte-Yohannes, and Mezmure-Dawit.

Likewise, the advanced education level has its own several sub-branches like Tsome-Degu'a, Aqu'aqu'am Bet, Qene'e Bet (the school of poetry), Qedase'e Bet, Metsehaf Bet (the school of Literature), Degu'a Bet, Zimare Mewasit Bet, Zemma Bet (School of Hymns), and Awush'har Bet (unfortunately, this field is possibly getting to be extinct in the history of Ethiopian Orthodox Church). Metsehaf bet is the most advanced level in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Education. In Qene'e Bet, there are fourteen (14) types of Qedase'yat, each has its own Zemmas which may take 6 to 7 hours to Read (Hymn) all at the same time during service giving days such as Sunday and other praying days. But to save the time of people (payers), only few of the Qedase'yat Zemma is said (Read). The Qedase Bet also includes other branch called Kidan. Kidan has nine (9) Zemmas; however, in regular time, only three of them (Zeyaleq, Mangst-Grup and Zewltu-Leke) are read. The main categories and sub-categories of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church education levels are briefly demonstrated on Figure-2 below.

Figure 1

The Main Categories and Sub-categories of Education Systems in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church



Students' Admission, and Teaching-Learning Process

This section covers the detail activities such as the criteria required to admit spiritual students, selection of fields of studies, ethical issues, the issues of promotion from one level to the other, learning materials, methods of teaching and learning, and other related issues.

As noted previously being followers of the religion of the Orthodox Church is the dominant criteria for admission the school. The status of marriage and of virginity is also another criteria considered for admission. One should be single, unmarried, and virgin to get enrolled to Abenet School. This leads to the award of a Deacon. However, it is not forbidden that one can learn after marriage if he/she passed over the Deacon status. In the Church it seemed that only males could go to the Abinet School, but this study revealed that gender difference is not considered; and both males and females can register and learn at Abinet School.

At the lower level, all students learn the same (common) courses, but at the higher level, there are options that students can select their own choices to specialize on a specific field of study. The lower level can be offered at various churches but, each advanced (higher, special) field of study is found (or given) at different but specified Centers of Excellence (Monasteries) in Ethiopia. Abenet School can be given at all the times— Day (morning and afternoon sessions) and Night, and summer and winter. For example, Tsome Degu'a and Degu'a are Day time courses and Meraf is Night time course.

Ethically, students should give high respect to their instructors (Yene-ta or Memhir - a teacher at Abenet School) and should be punctual during teaching and learning process. They should be present in the class before Yene-ta gets into the class. If a student is unable to give proper respect to his/her Yene-ta, he will be highly condemned by the norm of the society. All the study participants said that:

በመጀመሪያ ደረጃ የተማሪው ድርሻ የትምህርት ሰዓት ማክበር ነው። የትምህርትን ሰዓት ዝንፍ ማድረግ የለም። ተማሪዎች ከመምህራቸው ቀድመው በመገኘት የኔታ (የመምህሩን) መቀመጫ ወንበር ያስተካክላሉ። በአብነት ትምህርት ስርዓት መምህርን መሳደብ ቀርቶ ቀና ብሎ ማየት የነውር ነውር ነው፤ ፈጣሪውን እንደተሰደበ ይቆጠራል። የሚያሳዝነው ግን በአሁኑ ጊዜ የኢትዮጵያ ወጣት (ትውልድ) ጋጠ-ወጥ የሆነው ይህን በመሰለ የተከበር ስርዓት ወጥቶ ነው። በአሁኑ ጊዜ አገራችን ምላስ እንጂ ጭንቅላት ያለው ትውልድ አላፈራችም። መከባበር የሚባል ሓሴት ፈፀሞ ጠፍቷል።

First of all the role of a student is to respect class time. Is forbidden not to respect time. Students should first arrive to the class prior to their Yene'ta (Mergeta) and arrange a seat to him. In Abenet school insulting Mergeta (Yene'ta) is highly condemned; no one is allowed to do that. As it is considered insulting God. This is the real ethics that Ethiopian Church students (Deqe-Mezmuran) have to fulfill during learning. However, now days, the Ethiopian, generations are behaving the opposite to this; it shouldn't have been like this. It is very far from the context/culture of Ethiopian Orthodoxy Church.

Primarily, a student commences his/her religious education (Abenet School) from the first level of Nebab Bet (i.e., Melka-Fedel). Rigorous teaching and learning process is taking place by Yene'ta (the instructor). The instruction method considers the three types of learners (low, medium and fast learners). The instructor follows student-centered type of instructions. He checks each student by asking questions whether he/she masters or understands the material. A student cannot proceed to the next stage if he/she does not properly master the content. Not only Yene'ta, but also students teach to each other. Talented students, in place of the instructor, are asked to teach their peers in groups. This indicates the practice of cooperative-type of learning process and peer-education. But, it is possible for anyone to raise a question whether all students in the group are actively participating as it lacks dialogic discussion. Only the brilliant student leads the group predominantly and teaches by applying

drill and practice method of teaching. Questioning and answering, and rote learning are the common teaching-learning methods in Abenet schooling.

After learning, students are assessed by their prominent instructor (Yene'ta) to check whether they master the required material or not. Mostly, assessments are given orally. The learner can be promoted to the next level if he/she passes the oral assessment. During oral assessments, the student may be said 'Qetsil'; which means continue. In this case, the student is expected to speak the given material without missing any content, part, sentence, or word. The instructor then judges his student either to pass to the next level (Melkte-Yohannes) or stay there and repeat the past. Students who pass to Melkte-Yohannes are supposed to learn three forms of learning reading: Wurd-Nebaba, Ge'ez Nebab and Tigel Nebab which are similar to segmentation and word reading. After doing so they go to the third level of the general education (Mezmure-Dawit). Next to this, if the student is not interested to proceed to the higher (advanced) levels of education, he/she should take Gebre-Dequna course and certified as Deacon or Instructor for the Nebab Bet (Ye-Nebab Memeher) (see Figure-1 on the result section).

Secondly, if one is interested to proceed to the advanced levels, he has to start to learn Tsome Degu'a and can join to one of the two fields of specializations (either Aqua'qua'm or Qene'e Bets), or else he/she can learn both of them sequentially, turn by turn. At this point, the student may have two alternatives or pathways. (a) One path is to terminate his education there via the process of certification (Masmesker) and to be a spiritual Scholar (the so called Yene-ta, or ye-Betekristian Liqawunt) called Ye-Qene'e Memeher or Ye-Aqua'qua'm Memeher based on his/her option. (b) The second path or option is to proceed up to the next higher levels and to be certified at a certain field of study based on their interests. An interested student can be Prominent Scholar (ye-Betekristian Liqawunt) of Degu'a Bet (Ye-Degu'a Memeher) if he goes to the track of Aqua'qua'm, or can be Prominent Scholar of Metsehaf Bet in the field of Metsehaf, or the Scholar of Qedase Bet in the field of Qedase, or the Scholar of Zemare Mewasit Bet in the field of Zemare Mewasit, or the Scholar of Zemma Bet in the field of Zemma, and etc. (see Figure-1 on the result section). Zemare Mewasit is serving when the religion believers died (for Fet'hat case).

To learn or to be proficient in any of the advanced fields of studies, students (Deqe-Mezemuran) should take Qene'e course. Qene'e is considered as a prerequisite course for any advanced (specialized) field of study. Not only mastering, but real understanding of the concept of Qene'e is essential. Qene'e is a language of other courses. That is, it is a mandatory course to be successful in higher studies. Specially, Qene'e and Zemma Courses

sound more for Metsehaf Bet and Aqua'quam Bet respectively. In Metsehaf Bet, a student has a chance of choosing only one, two, three, or four of Metsehaf Bets and learns to be a specialist on that particular field. It is the decision of the learner to specialize on the few or the entire field of the Metsehaf Bet. For example, if the learner decides to be specialized in Metsehafe Blu'yat_Old testament (ye-Blukidan Metsehaf) he can learn and become Professional in this field, or if the student chooses both Metsehafe Blu'yat and Metsehafe Had'sat (New testament), he/she will be Professional in both of the fields, and so on.

In so doing learning books are not provided by the church to students; students themselves should get (or buy) the relevant books to learn. In previous centuries, there was shortage of reading books especially for learners. During that time, there were only 'leather' books made from the skin of sheep, goats, and sometimes other animals. Because of this, there was access limitation and they competed to get those books. However, nowadays, there are no shortage of Holly books and related reading materials; there are numerous textbooks available for each field of study. Some of the textbooks are listed with their field of studies.

- Fidel for Fidel Bet;
- Dawit for Melkte-Yohannes and Mezmure-Dawit;
- Zekre-Qal and Madallo (Ziq) for Aqua'quam Bet;
- Zemare-Mewasit for Zemare-Mewasit Bet;
- Ge'ez for Qene'e Bet;
- Qedasse for Qedasse Bet;
- Degu'a for Degu'a Bet; and
- Tsome-Degu'a for Tsome-Degu'a Bet

Assessment and Certification

Ideas such as how and when spiritual students complete their education, how they can be certified, who and which institution (s) is (are) responsible for this account, and others are points of focus under this section.

The common form of assessment is oral to assess progression of students. Students (Deqe-Mezamurt) are assessed either to get promoted to the next level or awarded a certificate for the level. In most cases, written form of assessments are not the commonly used methods of assessment in the Orthodox Church education systems; except for Yitbehal courses for which both written and oral examinations are possible.

Each specialized field of study has its own specific center of excellence (or Monastery) for the process of certifications. For the purpose of certification, the prospective

students should search the center of excellence that offers their field of study. Each center of excellence has Prominent Specialist (s) in the particular field of study. Except Metsehaf Bet, students should go around (search) a particular Monastery for certification. In the field of Metsehaf Bet, most Monasteries do dual activities of teaching-learning (training) and certification as they have Metsehaf Bet Specialists for both activities. Some non-exhaustive examples of center of excellence with their special field of study are listed below:

- Degu'a = Betelthem (S/Gondar);
- Qene'e = Betelthem (S/Gondar), Chegode Hana (Gojam), Washara (Gojam), Wadla (Gojam), Ba'eta LeMaryam (N/Gondar);
- Zemare-Mewasit = Tser'ha Aryam Zur Amba (S/Gondar);
- Aqu'aqu'am = (Gondar);
- Qedase = Debre-Abay (Gojam); and
- Metsehaf = Debre Libanos (N/Shoa), Tay'tane Negest (A.A.), Mota Georgis (Gojam),

Certification is usually given by a Monastic Specialist by the Name (Stamp) of Ethiopian Orthodox Church including the Name of the particular area at which the center of excellence is located. And the Prominent Church Scholar (Monastic Specialist) should put his signature. However, the issue of licensing and relicensing is not implemented in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; because, from the evidence of the research participants, it has no relevance to the context of the religion.

It is the interest of students to stop and receive their certificate at any specific level of education. This is not the same in the modern education. The length of time for completion of a certain field of study depends on the talent (i.e., the rate of learning) of the student; no specific or limited time is set for completion. Teaching is taking place in groups; but occasionally, it could be given for individual students. Specially, participant-2, 3, 4, and 5 said:

አንድ ተማሪ ትምህርቱን ተምሮ ለመጨረስ የተቀመጠ የጊዜ ገደብ የለም። የሚወስነው የራሱ የተማሪው ብርታትና ጉብዝና ነው። ይሁን እንጅ አብዛኞቹ የማስመስከሪያ ተቋማት የራሳቸው የሆነ የጊዜ ገደብ አላቸው። ምስክር ቤቶችን እንደ ዩኒቨርሲቲ አስቧቸው። በባዛት የማስመስከሪያ ገደብ አላቸው። ለምሳሌ፤- አቋቋም ለማስመስከር የገባ ተማሪ የራሱ የጊዜ ገደብ አለው። ድጓ ለማስመስከር የገባ ተማሪ የራሱ የጊዜ ገደብ አለው። ቅዳሴ ለማስመስከር የገባ ተማሪ እንዲሁ የራሱ የጊዜ ገደብ አለው። መጽሐፍ

ቤት ለማስመስከር የገባ ተማሪ የራሱ የጊዜ ገደብ አለው። መጽሐፍ ቤት ከሌሎች ማስመስከርያ ቤቶች ይለያል። ምክንያቱም መጽሐፍ ቤቶች ትምህርቱን (ስልጠናውን) እና ምስክርነቱን ሥራ እራሳቸው ስለሚሰጡ ተማሪዎች ሌላ ቦታ ለማስመስከር መሄድ አይጠበቅባቸውም፤ እዚያው ይጨርሳሉ።

In the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Schooling, no time is set or prescribed to wind up learning; there is no time bound for one to complete his or her education. It is based on the learner's activity. The one who is quite fast (fast learner), he/she finalizes sooner than the slow learner. However, there is a time limit for the process of certification. A student who is seeking to be certified in a Monastery should wind up within that restricted time bound. Metsehaf Bet differs from other types of field of specializations, because in this field, both learning and certification are given in the same Monastery.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This research study finds that the religious education system has been guided by two hybrid educational philosophies known as perennialism and existentialism. The study explores very substantial indigenous knowledge and practices in Ethiopian cultural educational systems. These may bring significant changes if properly adapted and used in the modern educational policies and structures (from pre-primary to tertiary levels). The important practices and knowledge that need to be adapted in sciences and mathematics, and modern educational system, in general, are described on Table-4 below.

Table 4

Indigenous Knowledge and Practices in Ethiopian Cultural Education Systems That Need to be Adapted in the Modern Education

Educational levels	Indigenous knowledge and practices
Pre-primary, primary and secondary educations	<i>Students' behaviours:</i> Being disciplined, ethical and respecting their teachers, peers and all other people both on and off the school compound without the limit of place and time; everywhere and every time <i>Teaching and assessment methods:</i> <i>questioning and answering; drill and practice</i> (of course, it has been already practicing in the modern education system of Ethiopia); students should need to <i>properly understand/memorize</i> the content: most, or nearly all, students should understand the preceding contents/lessons before proceeding to the next sections; <i>regular</i> assessments as well as giving proper <i>feedbacks</i> to students; using <i>Qualitative assessments</i> rather than exclusively using the quantitative method of assessments alone; and self-paced learning
Tertiary Levels	<i>Teaching and assessment methods:</i> <i>questioning-Answering; qualitative assessments</i> <i>Universities:</i> <i>centres of excellence</i> <i>Fields of specialization:</i> <i>Free choice by students</i>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations from the study indicate that the ongoing reform on education needs give proper attention to the church education and address useful educational approaches to the modern education. Curriculum developers should address this invaluable church education system to be included in the modern teacher education. It is advisable to try out the learning system on ones' own pace which seems to be successful in the church education.

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