SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULAR SHIFT FROM MODERN TO POSTMODERN: STUDENTS’ VIEWS

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ABSTRACT

The basic aim of this study was to explore students’ views on knowledge, culture, value, personhood and education system regarding the two contradicting perspectives of modernist and postmodernist perspectives. Hence, the qualitative research approach is used. The data was collected by using focus group discussion from secondary school students attending a summer tutorial program at Samara University located in Afar Regional State in North-eastern Ethiopia. Abbreviated two letters from their names were assigned for each discussant orderly, and their audios were also transcribed accordingly. The data was analyzed thematically under the formed categories of knowledge, culture, system, personhood, and values. It was concluded that the views of students in the study area on knowledge, values, culture, personhood, and education system inclined towards the postmodernist view. Hence, planning and implementing the postmodern curriculum would find a fertile social environment and thinking.

Keywords: Modernism, postmodernism, secondary school curricular, students

INTRODUCTION

Education is a vital instrument in changing the life of a certain community living in an uncertain world. It helps to nurture the individual in a socially appropriate manner to enable him/her to contribute to the wellbeing of society. But questions like, the way how the individual should be nurtured, what to provide, why and where are mainly answered by the curriculum. The curriculum also focuses mainly on Knowledge, culture, values, personhood, and system in addressing issues related to nurturing and schooling of the individual. Besides, these points are important in the discourse of curriculum in particular, and in education in general. Though, there is a debate over how these issues of education can be endorsed to the pupil. The debate has been taking place between two main contrary views as Modernists and postmodernists perspectives. Modernism is linked to the “enlightenment” concept in English. Modern word built on enlightenment has been formed from Latin “modo” and means that modern chunks past and present (Aslan & Yılmaz, 2001). Likewise, modernism is instigated from European enlightenment ideology which began in the middle of 18th c (Hossain & Karim, 2013). However, the term “modern” is derivative of a Latin word “modernus”. which was firstly in late 5th c in to differentiate the current, which turns out to be formal Christianization of the Roman and pagan past (Habermas & Ben-Habib, 1981). Modernism consist of an alteration, shift to acceptable and stunning effects and confrontation. Modernization is moulded by individuals who are living relationships basis for an intellect biosphere uniformity shaped of free-thinking individuals and their institutions (Yıldırım, 2009). Through fluctuating content, the term "modern" persistently expresses the awareness of an era that narrates itself to ancient times, orderly to view itself as the consequence of a shift from the old to a new age (Habermas & Ben-Habib, 1981). For the modern view, the impetus of education is firstly to train the cognitive capacity of a child for a reason to produce an adult that function independently in the world. Whereas for postmodernism education is to take a principally unspecified and give it a social identity. Education's technique of beading is linguistic, subsequently, the language to be used is which will create a human being sensitive to its racial, sexual and class identity. Postmodern throw-out the reason and the egoism that the entire enlightenment depends upon (Hicks, 2004). In addition, this author described postmodernism as a complete imaginary and social movement, which mounts all strong arguments against all indispensable rudiments of modernism. According to Habermas & Ben-Habib (1981), as to their central reason, the exertions of enlightenment philosophers in 18thc were to advance objective knowledge, worldwide ethics, and decree, as well as an independent art. All at once, the project envisioned to statement the cognitive potentials of each of these domains to set them free from their obscure forms and utilize this build up of dedicated culture for the improvement of ordinary life or rational organization of normal communal life. On the other hand, Zufiaurre (2007) reported as a central idea of modernism that humans’ dignity is determined by their capacity to partake in the shaping of their future does not originate from God. Moreover, “Modern visions of education as...
characterized by the Tylerian rationale, behavioural lesson plans, context-free objectives, competitive and external evaluation, dualistic models that separate teacher and student, meaning and context, subjective persons and objective knowledge, body and spirit, learning and environment, and models of linear progress through value-neutral information transmission are no longer acceptable in the postmodern era” (Slattery, 1995b).

Postmodernism is a departure from modernism in 20th century characterized by a mixture of creative approaches to media and technological expressions. The concept of ‘postmodernism’ was first introduced by G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), who was challenged by the ‘German Romantic Movement’ and recognized a need to establish a system based on improved individualized insights as personalized languages of ‘instantiation’ that reproduced existing societal constructions instead of the reverse, where societal construction reflected the composite of persons (Hamid, 2006; Potter, 2008). Even though he was a first historian to use the term modernism, Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) does not coin the term postmodernism (Albright, 2004; Potter, 2008). Likewise, postmodernism gained rapid recognition in America during the analysis of social breakdown by sociologist C. Wright Mills, 1916-1962 (Azmi, 2013; Potter, 2008). However, “the term postmodernism does not come into general usage though in Britain and America until the post-war period, and it is in the 1980s that the most intense theorization and debate takes place. The ‘moment’ of postmodernism in the sense of the intersection of cultural, political and historical forces together with a heightened awareness of the movement” (Webster, 1996; 124).

Postmodern pronounces the era that followed Modernism and technically it defines numerous cultural expressions of literature, art, philosophy, economics, architecture and literary criticism (Giddens, 1991; Hossain & Karim, 2013; Potter, 2008). Postmodernism is a social net that formed its life forms. Postmodern societies do not predict the independence of mind, rather defend local culture, are formed of civil societies which have been formed of some pieces, there are relevant statement methods to their living forms (Amare, 1982). According to Fuchs (1996), postmodernism is “the thought of a “new class” of figurative labours specify in identity-denotive methods in operating symbols, imageries, and manifold coatings of characterisation. Also, postmodernism is a ‘culture’ which accentuates ‘there is a better world than the modern one’ (Charles, 1997). The word “post” includes two meanings with its English usage. It is used in the meaning of “Later” or education after bachelor’s degree (Odabagi, 2004). With the expansion of the term postmodernism, the word “post” as an affix has been defined as the determination of what has to be done to overcome modernism (Tennert, 2001). “Post” refers to the readmission of history through “anamnesis”/back again/ and to the ultimate omission of metaphysics and its results (Brann, 1992). The two periods, particularly, the 1970s and 80s marked the development of postmodern forms in literature, poetry, painting, and architecture which is a solid response to ‘formalism’ and spotless style of modernism (Hossain & Karim, 2013).

Postmodernism is a historical retro and it has been a serious paradox. In addition to individuals’ getting used to development and fluctuations in every expensate, the reason for increasing the importance of societies’ lifestyles includes social and economic developments. Because of this reason, differentiation or collapse can be lived by the individuals who live concept chaos (Kahraman, 2015). Postmodernism is an ideological and political indicator for referencing a world without stability, where knowledge is continuously altering and alteration is the only continuous (Lyotard, 1984). Modernity and post-modernity are “oppositional attitudes” that coincide typically (Foucault, 1980). Postmodernism is an age blooming on the multitude, difference and multiple accounts that regularly restore and revive themselves, that can be articulated and acknowledged. Shifting identities, remapping borders and non-synchronous memory are postmodern challenges to modernity but not limited to (Giroux, 1992). The massive realities of current that Postmodernism attempts to interpret are the fast-spreading of the academic centre, swift supersession of the contemporary and huge broadcast of the electronic image (Brann, 1992). According to Cahoone (1996), the postmodern theory adopts the five overarching themes; presence, origin, unity, renunciation of divine existence, and constitutive otherness. Hossain & Karim (2013) state that the main ideology of postmodernism highlights the societal certainties in a dissimilar mode than modernity did, and postmodernism cannot be unspoken without modernism. Standing from different perspectives, both react to the 20th century technologically advanced and automated civilization. Its introduction of reconceptualising instruction and expertise (APPLE, 1989). The postmodernist’s reaction against extreme rationality inherent in the scientific movement has certainly opened up the field to novel ideas. They have called our attention to how politics, racism, class struggles, power, equality, equity, sexism, marginalized people, and aesthetics affect teaching and learning (Glanz & Behar-Horenstein, 2000). Postmodernism expression also manifests in various disciplines: in graphic design (Drucker & McVarish, 2009), digital communication (Stahlan, 1996), language and linguistics (Burke, 2010), planning and urban design (Harvey, 1989), architectures (Nesbitt, 1996), philosophy (Deely, 1992), science of politics (Ashley & Walker, 1990), literature (Hopper, 2009), songs (Albright, 2004), and movies (Hayward, 1996).
information excess and the briefness of societal constructions (Hargreaves, 1997). Modernist culture is altogether incompatible with the moral basis of purposive rational conduct of life. In this manner, Bell places the burden of responsibility for the dissolution of the Protestant ethic (Bell, 1976). In the history of Ethiopian education, all efforts were bringing the education from its traditional base towards modernization. Despite the different changes that occurred in the country’s economic, social and political situations as a result, the problems and various needs yet remain a challenge that rooted in the features of modernism. For instance, unbending policymaking, incontrollable structures, ‘linear planning’, insensitivity to shifting societal needs, loss of meaningful senses of the community (Hargreaves, 1994). Subsequently, as modernism is on irregularities, the Ethiopian education system needs to shift to post-modernism due to a weight of disappointment for schoolchildren, educators, and bureaucratic rigidity and insensitivity to modification amongst all together participants as a consequence of modernism (Shishigu, 2015). However, to deal with the issues one may need to understand the two approaches due to their effect on the curricular discourse. Thus, the philosophies of modernism and postmodernism have a robust effect on the design of the school curriculum, can result in extensive consequences (Koo Hok-chun, 2002). The problems of the modern curriculum can be resolved by the postmodern one since its more flexible and divers (Shishigu, 2015). Likewise, the postmodernist view accepts that the unstatic and fluid goals /aims/, purposes, content, pedagogies, valuation and route of the program. However, the modernist program /curriculum/, valuation principally directed to identify the student’s temporary performance. Nevertheless, the post-modern curriculum has neither a typical standard nor principle as an orientation point at a global level. Since the coach can take an essential part in the course of evaluation nonetheless cannot be the high-quality assessor. Hence, the valuation would be shared and communicated. Then, it would serve as feedback to support pupils to advance academic and communal influences through discourse and productive critique (Doll, 1993, cited in Koo Hok-Chun, 2002). The linkage students advance amongst facts, ‘knowledge’, ‘value’, and their petites narrate individual texts that weave the net of their communal lives in and out of schools signifies the emphasis of upcoming inquiry into the fruitful design, application, and calculation of comprehensive and learner-centred programs (Boboc, 2012). For the postmodern perspective, there are no universal grounds for concrete and absolute knowledge. Both reason and experience are used subjectively and are agonizing to authenticate distinctly. In contrast, the modern perspective is akin with expressionism, invention, individuality, progress, purity, uniqueness, momentousness, etc., yet the postmodern is exhausting, hetero-genetic, cyclic, disillusionment and the demise of absolute knowledge as a notion. The post-modern curriculum perspective epitomizes a shift in focus from the disconnected to the multifaceted, from the prognostic to the interactive, and from the linear and determinant to the self-making and not determinant or recurring. Shishigu (2015) articulates the features of postmodern curriculum as ‘process-oriented instead of output alone, emphasize on the development of critical thinking /higher-order thinking/ skills and nurtures inventiveness among students, the role of teachers in the classroom shifts to facilitation, but not authority and so that support the pupil to conceptualize the knowledge. Because, knowledge does not transmit from teacher to student, and its prescription through the system is irrelevant and must inspire self-organization. Moreover, postmodernism is an aesthetic, cultural and intellectual phenomenon. It encompasses a particular set of styles, practices and cultural forms in art, literature, music, architecture, philosophy and broader intellectual discourse pastiche, collage, deconstruction, absence of linearity, the mixture of periods and styles and the like (Hargreaves, 1994).

The Aim of the Study
The debate among the philosophies would be infinite and the issues all they concern are beyond the scope and interest of this article. Although the main stakeholders that have to take part directly in this discourse are still out of the fence and, hence, this article is to explore their views on the aforementioned five pillars. Therefore, its main aim is to explore students’ views on knowledge, culture, value, personhood, and system regarding the two contradicting perspectives. These are important pillars that should receive due attention in the curricular discourse of the shift from modern to postmodern perspectives. Hence, the study attempted to address the following two questions:

- Do students appreciate the modern or postmodern curriculum?
- Do students are glad to what schools provided for them?

Students are the main constituent of the teaching-learning process, and exploring their thoughts and sayings is worth nothing especially when the issue is changing perspectives to change practice. However, in this study, not all their views are studied in the course of modern and postmodern discourse on the curriculum. Thus, this article aims to contribute to any curricular shift from modern to postmodern perspective and the effect of modern curriculum on students’ thought by providing empirical findings to the academic audiences.

METHODOLOGY
The basic aim of this study is to explore students' views on knowledge, culture, value, personhood, and system regarding the two contradicting perspectives. Hence, the qualitative research approach is used and the research design can be determined by the notion of 'fitness for purpose' and purposes of the research to determine the methodology and design of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005). The data was collected by using focus group discussion from secondary school students attending a summer tutorial program at Samara University located in Afar Regional State in Northeastern Ethiopia. The reason behind the focus-group interview is that it enables us to explore what secondary school students think and say on modern and postmodern perspectives of values, cultures, system, knowledge, and personhood. These students are a combination of all secondary schools existing in the mentioned region. The discussants were identified based on their interest to take part in the discussion as well as availability. The place and time were arranged based on the discussants' consent. The focus-group interviews took place in silent and relatively comfortable places for the participants and the statements of the participants were voice-recorded for accuracy with the permission of interviewees. The participants of this study were collaborative, willing and active respondents in their involvement. The discussion was started with school life and then indirect questions related to modern and postmodern conceptions of culture, knowledge, values, system, and personhood were rose by the researcher in the discussion. Further, abbreviated two letters from their names were assigned for each discussant orderly, and their audios were transcribed accordingly. The transliterated data was granted for the participants to assure that their words were recorded properly and categorized by themes. Finally, the data was analyzed thematically under the formed categories of knowledge, culture, system, personhood, and values.

Table 1. Background information

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As it is presented in table 1., the students are from two streams i.e. natural science and social science. Their socioeconomic levels are low and middle level.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Knowledge
Knowledge has been studied by the theory called epistemology and came up with “Truth is impossible as all our experiences are subjective.” The post-modern curriculum perspective represents a shift in focus from the disconnected to the multifaceted, from the prognostic to the interactive, and from the linear and determinant to the self-making and
indeterminant or recurring. Knowledge is contextual, not universal, truth is relative, not standard, and experience and reason are subjective and defined alone. Knowledge is multifaceted. Thus, Am, Me and Sa say:

I could gain different knowledge from school, life, elite persons and from different things I observe and meet daily. I find different information from the various places, age groups..., my thinking is a reflection of my knowledge, I add new information every day with my previous one.

This determines that knowledge is contextual and something that could be constructed instead of uniform across the globe. Also, another discussant Al added:

A person can learn from the environment; school, life, and community.

This is against the thought that assumes schools are the only places where individuals can learn. As discussant, At states:

Any of my friends cannot learn or acquire information in the way I can do, I like listening as stories but my friend is not.

This also indicates that teaching a group of people by prescribing certain method would not be effective to all as modern curriculum do. Hence, teaching and learning should be interactive rather than linear and the preference of students worth nothing to consider. In this regard, postmodern curriculum would be effective since its flexible as well as interactive and value the individual differences beyond modernism do. Moreover, knowledge is imprecise and ever-changing phenomenon through time, generation and technological advancement. The discussants Mk and Ae spoke out:

Knowledge could not be accurate because it changes as time passes with the needs of people.

It would be possible to accept that the knowledge and its importance in recent times are distinct from the ancient one because not only nature is constantly changing but the knowledge too. Besides, knowledge is something constructive, not something one can find out there. Two discussants Mo and Ad Says:

The facts are based on my earlier information. We may learn in the same way but we do not accept it at the same level.

Contrary to this, participant Al articulated:

Knowledge is truthful, can be improved but not changed.

This statement supports the modern thought that privileges the existence of absolute, objective and exact knowledge. Furthermore, knowledge is having a dedicated place; it can be measured through a certain instrument. Participant Bi states:

I learn in school, and my teachers using tests measure what I know. If I know my lesson I would pass, if not I will fail.

However, for Mo, knowledge is contextual, has no specific place to be found in and subjective. By his words:

I go to school, my brother looks after got, and my sister fetches water. We all meet the evening at our home with our parents and exchange information with them. We have a different view even on the same issue as one family member. We debate on it.

In general, most discussants incline toward postmodernist thought. Knowledge is a contextual phenomenon that can be acquired through interactive practice.

Culture

In modern perspective, cultures are teachable, and diverse ones must be unified through teaching. Culture is something students should learn about, though it can also be a blockade to learning. Training students of different cultures, in a shared language, or medium of communication before teachers can transmit knowledge to them is a necessity. Whereas, for post-modernists, all culture is important and there should be no dominant one. As the modernist goal of merging society results in colony and ill-treatment, unity is always based on the dominant culture. All cultures are not only of equal value but also they constitute equally important realities. In the Ethiopian case, the medium of instruction in schools to all grade level were English, at the time students began to acknowledge the western culture and deviate from the local norms, these behavioural changes of the pupil alerted government and parents then they decided to provide education for certain grade levels as required by the context. Teaching students by their mother tongues not only promotes their culture but also enhances the understanding of learning.

However, students are interested in entertaining diverse cultures beyond their own. This evidenced by some discussants.

Am, Me and Sa say:

Occasionally I learn culture in some subjects. I want to participate in different cultures not only to learn new things but also to share our cultures with others. I was understanding better at lower grade levels which I learned my mother tongue languages."

In this way, students would involve in other cultures by valuing their respective culture. Nevertheless, the participant Ad states:
I want to learn by my language but not. I learn about the culture in my home. I love our culture, it is magnificent and enviable, I would not substitute anything to it. It may look unpleasant for others but too beautiful for me.

Since teaching culture in order to form a new identity would create dissatisfaction of learning for individuals like ‘Ad’. Cultural beauty lies under its difference and no culture is fundamentally superior on the other. In the words of the discussant Am:

“I do not like to wear the same colour clothes, I think not only my others too, likely cultures are beautiful by their difference.”

This implies that teaching a single dominant culture would disguise students since they see cultural differences as beauty. Therefore, the modernists’ thought of assuming the difference between modern and postmodern in terms of culture is the shift from dominance and exploitation to tolerance and diversity in plurality. In this regard, the discussants’ statements support the postmodern thought.

Values

For modernism, there are universal ethical values and what to be valued is prescribed by the sender. However, the postmodernism values are also contextual that cannot be standardized. Traditional modernists believe in the fact that educators are authentic establishments on values, and consequently, they ought to train schoolchildren in prevalent values. More modernists that are liberal contend that education should be valued nonaligned. Teachers support students to explain and determine what values each student will hold. The most important values are reasonability and advancement. However, from the postmodern perspective, values are socially subjective; no group values have special importance, and education should help students to construct diverse and personally useful values in the context of their cultures. Values are contemplated to be valuable for a certain culture. However, values are neither true nor right generally. This postmodern perspective is shared by some discussants such as Am, and Sa:

“Something good for me is not for my teacher or friend, and bad is too, as well as right and wrong. For example, in my family and neighbours, females do not wear clothes that can expose their body shapes, but our teachers are wearing so. Some of my classmates try to look like her. We are Muslims and Christians, there is no individual religion so that I respect a group. I do not admire any religion however, I respect the group religion because they will respect mine too.”

Subsequently, teachers cannot circumvent installing their values and it is nothing for instructors to amenably induce their values as well as communal issues in the classroom directly or circuitously. This was also evident in the statement of two discussants Gu and Me:

“As I share my experiences, I can develop new principles of life.”

In the nurturance of the child, imperative values to teach could include motivating for assortment, open-mindedness, self-determination, inspiration, emotions, and intuition. For instance, in Ethiopia, the course “civic and ethical education” is thought at schools, and the learner is expected to develop certain values such as tolerance of diversity. To sum up, the difference in the move from modern to postmodern is shifting from universality to being contextual in terms of values.

Personhood

Modernists generally believe in a steady, intrinsic personality that can be accurately known. Besides, since human beings are supposed to have an unchanging essential nature, intelligence assessments and other similar unbiased assessments can be used to discover students’ inborn intellect. Through the delivery of mastery over the subject matter, teachers improve schoolchildren’s self-regard. However, for postmodernists, the individual has no real self. So, the students have no true self or innate essence. Rather, selves are social constructs and self-regard is a pre-condition for learning. Postmodernists understand education as a sort of reintegration. Education helps individuals construct their identities rather than discover them. Discussants stated that the modernists’ view on personhood in general and individual autonomy, in particular, is pointless and group identity is more important than the individual one. For instance, Me and Sa said:

“I develop my identity as we interact with our families and friends. Because, any human being looks like friends and families. I belong to one ethnic, language, cultural, and religious group. Since my autonomy of language, culture, religion, and ethnicity depends on the group’s autonomy, the group autonomy is more relevant than individual autonomy.”

This supports the idea that selves are social constructs as postmodernists claim. On the other hand, some discussants believe that self is innate and exists before the individual begins to interact with the outside environment. Ha, Fa and Hw said:

“Self is internal as explained by my community, (yakkuwaa Baxi carakakaabiyol yamixigge), meaning the ‘effective son is known at crawling stage. Therefore, improvement is related to norms and it is a result of interaction between the person and community.”
This statement denotes that the self is innate but can be improved as an individual interacts with the social environment. Moreover, Al and Hs stated:

As I interact with others, I may learn new things that can be proper or un proper, so that, the way I act would alter for good or bad. My linguistic and ethnic respect and independence are more important than my autonomy and character because I share these with a group, and I will be respected.

Overall, the self is a social construct; group autonomy is important rather than individual. In general, the difference in the shift from modern to postmodern on personhood is a shift from individual identity and autonomy to various sex, race, and class groups/collectivism. since students say relay on the edge of postmodernism in terms of personhood.

System

The modern education system can be seen as closed and rigid system. Whereas, in the postmodern perspective, education system is more open and flexible. The post-modernist shift in focus is from the disconnected to the interactive, and form stable, fastened systems to open, interactive systems. Hence, the education system at the curriculum and instruction-level should pave a way to explore opportunities around the school environment, the culture of the community and the students' collective potential. For example, the instruction can focus on collaborative learning, lifelong learning, cooperative learning, portfolio assessment, and thus it can let the pupil and their families participate in the process of curriculum development. Thus, participants Me and Sa claimed:

I have to participate in the activities of the school. I want to select what to learn because no one can understand my needs beyond me. But, I never participated in such issues.

Even though students have the interest to participate in curriculum and instructional planning, the practice does not let them. In addition, the interactivity in education system would have a positive effect on students' learning as the pupils Bi and Ek themselves stated:

I believe I should participate in picking what to learn in the school, because when I do something by myself, I feel more responsible and get involved, eager to see the end.

Likewise, discussants Ab and Gu stated:

I need to choose what to learn, tell my teacher how I feel and experience, but the reverse is happening.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To sum up, postmodernism opposes the modern from its essentials: natural reality anti-realism (social construct), reason, and understanding to linguistic social subjectivity. Instead of individual identity and autonomy, various sexes, races and class groups are mentioned. A call from esteeming egoism in standards, bazaar and politics to collectivism, harmony and classless life matters. Postmodernism’s concern is more persuasive and attractive than the modern way of society. However, when it comes to practice things, it is getting more complex. Hence, we need either pave the clear way and get out of utopia for postmodernism or negotiate the two adversary approaches within the curriculum. At theoretical level, the postmodernist view is appreciable but lacks practicality, and thus, the curriculum should be developed at each school level based on the needs of the community and evaluation should be portfolios.

The views of the students on knowledge, values, culture, personhood, and education system inclined towards the postmodernist view. Hence, planning, and implementing the postmodern curriculum would find a fertile social environment and thinking. It seems necessary to focus on the more comparative studies and more extensive efforts to see clearly the pros and cons of both modernism and post-modernism in developing or evaluating curriculum.

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