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Active-Learning Pedagogies-Policy, Professional Development and Classroom Practices- A case study of two post-conflict contexts: Afghanistan and Somaliland

Overview, Design and Summary of Findings



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*Conflicts debilitate education systems leaving them weakened, damaged and under resourced at precisely the time when communities, governments, and international agencies need them to help rebuild and transform themselves and the societies they serve.*¹ (Jean-Louis Sarbib, 2005)

1. Introduction

The damage caused by conflict is all encompassing and witnessed at different levels of the educational system. Seen as symbols of an unpopular government or as institutes that perpetuate exclusion or stereotypes, school buildings and learning facilities are particularly targeted during conflicts. Oftentimes, they are either completely destroyed or severely damaged. Because teachers represent the elite and learned in society, they are perceived to have the ability to mobilize opinions. As a result, they are often targets of violence, leading to their forced migration and sometimes even death. In Kosovo², for example, 800 schools, about two-thirds of the education facilities, were destroyed or damaged; 70% of Burundi's education facilities were destroyed in the war³; in Rwanda two-thirds of teachers were killed; and, in an extreme case, Cambodia almost no teachers remained in the post conflict scenario.⁴

Adequate numbers and training of teachers is a challenge in most post-conflict countries. There is invariably a significant lack of trained teachers to help in reconstruction of the education system. At the same time, demand for education increases significantly in a post-conflict scenario. Children, excluded from schooling during the conflict years, clamor for education, leading to a significant increase in enrollment. Returning refugees and demobilized child soldiers swell the ranks of students, creating dramatically uneven teacher-student ratios. The scenario becomes more complex as many of these children may have been physically and emotionally traumatized by their experiences during war and in need of immediate medical and psychosocial care. Conflicts also destroy sources of knowledge such as textbooks and curricula with a vengeance that is difficult to understand. Food, water and basic school supplies become scarce or non-existent. Local communities are hard pressed to finance their own schooling and the administrative structure and systems are significantly undermined.

The history of a conflict inevitably shows that it is caused by a complex interplay of numerous factors, often related to inequity and social exclusion. Divisive social and religious identities, inequitable and alien systemic structures imposed by colonial or foreign occupation, weak economies and even weaker leadership converge to fuel unrest. Post-conflict contexts inherit these complexities with ever more weakened economic and political processes. Newly formed governments have limited ability to ensure delivery of

¹ Jean-Louis Sarbib, Senior Vice President, Human Development Network, World Bank, From Reshaping the Future, Education and Post Conflict Reconstruction. (2005)

² Schools Rehabilitation in Kosovo (SRK): <http://mirror.undp.org/kosovo/Projects/SRK/srk.htm>

³ Burundi's Schools Initiative:

<http://www.facilitaid.com/projects.php?projectid=2&PHPSESSID=0521280307134fa105e0fef827a41210>

⁴ Reshaping the Future, Education and Post Conflict Reconstruction, World Bank. (2005).

basic services like education and some of the old issues continue to exert influence on recovery efforts.

Afghanistan and Somaliland are illustrative of this unfortunate reality. Both case studies show that reconstruction efforts began with a devastated education system, weak political and economic processes and simmering inter-group (inter-clan) problems.

2. Two Post-Conflict Contexts: Afghanistan and Somaliland

This study is a modest effort to understand the adoption of “active-learning pedagogy” in reconstruction efforts of two post-conflict contexts, Afghanistan and Somaliland. Both countries have witnessed conflict for more than a decade. For Afghanistan the most difficult years began with the Soviet invasion in 1979, followed by the repressive Taliban regime which, to some extent, continues to this day as the country struggles to recover in the midst of intermittent fighting. Somaliland had a period of intense repression under the Siad Barre regime followed by a civil war in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s. In the case of Somaliland, it sees itself as a separate country from Somalia, with its own government which has so far failed to get recognition from the international community. Afghanistan has a recognized national government, but violence in different parts of the country continues to simmer. Both countries are Islamic Republics and both are characterized by strong tribal and clan culture. Religious dictums and tribal norms are dominant. The education system is influenced by this reality, including the advancement of active learning pedagogy.

3. Discourse on Active Learning Pedagogy

As a result of Education for All (EFA) and international educational development efforts in general, promotion of active-learning and student-centered pedagogy has gained considerable momentum. Promoted worldwide, these techniques are believed to enhance learning and lead to improved educational outcomes (e.g. achievement, retention, attainment). Additionally, active learning pedagogies are valued because they are perceived to create more child-friendly and democratic classroom environments.⁵

Active student engagement in the learning process is increasingly perceived as one of the key indicators of quality education. Student engagement encompasses much more than traditional student behaviors of listening, reading, writing or calculating. To be actively involved, students are expected to engage in higher order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.⁶ Instead of merely receiving information, the focus in active-learning is on generating knowledge through a process of inquiry, observation, analysis and problem solving. Teachers are central to the teaching-learning process. The role of the teacher in promoting learning through active-learning pedagogy, however, differs from traditional teaching practices. The requirement here is not to transfer content or

⁵ Mark Ginsburg, ‘Challenges to Promoting Active Learning, Student Centered Pedagogies’, 2006, EQUIP1LWA

⁶ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001373/137334e.pdf>

information but to enable the students to develop concepts through different teaching-learning methods.

This is vastly different from merely transacting textbook-based information. It requires the teacher to be resourceful, organized, well versed with the subject and different learning styles of the students. In countries like Afghanistan and Somaliland this often means that the teacher has to overcome some of her own deeply entrenched beliefs stemming from her social and cultural upbringing as well as her own school experiences. Active-learning approaches are based on principles of democracy, equality and acknowledgment of the individuality of the child. Teachers from traditional societies that value subservience to age, gender, or hierarchical authority find it difficult to fully adopt such active-learning methods as they are based on democratic principles that put children and their teachers on a more equal footing. In operational terms, this means that in the process of learning, children will question, argue, differ, discuss and dialogue, thereby potentially changing the traditional classroom environment of discipline, listening, obeying, repeating and reproducing. This divergence from the familiar can be a major issue in traditional societies, especially those coming out of conflict like Afghanistan and Somaliland.

The teacher's ability to adopt active-learning is dependent on a number of systemic factors such as the nature of curriculum and learning materials available, student evaluation practices, training and support available to teachers, and the policy discourse in the country. The principles of active-learning pedagogy need to be endorsed and reflected in all these for active-learning to be integrated into classroom practices.

Apart from the systemic factors that facilitate or impede adoption of active-learning methods, a major determinant is the external environment. The dominant socio-political, religious and economic contexts of the country have a major influence on education, particularly in determining *what* is taught and *how* it is taught.

4. The Present Study

The present study is an attempt to understand efforts made by Afghanistan and Somaliland, two post-conflict contexts, in advancing active-learning pedagogy. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What were some of the key mechanisms through which active-learning pedagogy was introduced and promoted in these countries?
- What are the *structure, content, and processes* of *professional development* activities for teachers designed to promote active learning pedagogies?
- What are the classroom patterns in the classrooms? Based on their training, is there any difference amongst teaching patterns of teachers?
- What were the key opportunities and challenges in adopting active-learning pedagogy in a post-conflict context?

Methodology:

Three primary methods were used for data collection. These were: review of documents, interviews and interaction with stakeholders, and classroom observations. Local researchers were trained to collect data from schools using the School Observation Schedule, the Classroom Observation Schedule, Teacher Interviews and Children's Focus Group Discussion. Research teams in both the countries were oriented to the tools followed by field trials. Based on these trials, changes were made to the tools to suit the local context and capacities for data collection.

Review of Relevant Documents:

Three kinds of reports and documents were reviewed in both countries: 1) situation analysis and related research on the educational needs and status of the education sector; 2) policy and program documents such as national policies, strategic documents and education action plans; and 3) training related documents including in-service teacher training curriculum and training packages.

These documents helped to understand the issues surrounding education in the post-conflict scenario, the priorities and commitments of the two governments and the role of active-learning methods in the national policies. The last set of documents helped to understand the *what, how and why* of training inputs given to the teachers and role of active-learning methods within teacher training plans.

Interview/interaction with Key Stakeholders:

- Interview guides were developed to interview teachers, teacher trainers and administrators. The objectives of these interviews were to understand their perception of active-learning (child-centered methods) and to grasp the success and challenges they had experienced in training teachers to adopt active-learning pedagogy.
- Focus group discussions were conducted with children to understand what they like or dislike about school.

School and Classroom Observations:

A school observation guide was used to record basic information and condition of facilities in the selected school. A classroom observation guide was used to map teaching-learning patterns in select classrooms. The intent was to observe and record the dominant teaching-learning practices and identify evidence of active-learning methods. The classroom observation guide was comprised of three steps.

- Step one, research assistants observed the selected teachers and described teacher-student behavior as they interacted. In a given class, two 15-minute open-ended observations were recorded during a 45 minute class.
- Step two, research assistants utilized observation notes and ticked the teacher's actions on a list of 27 teaching behaviors. These 27 behaviors exemplify both traditional and child-centered teacher behavior. The list of behavior has been generated and refined from CARE's active learning teacher development material. Each behavior was rated as one of three options: behavior the teacher demonstrated *most of the time, sometimes or never*. Correspondingly, the

behaviors of the children were ticked on 23 items. The list of the teacher and child behaviors represent elements of didactic teaching and disciplinary methods as well as active-learning methods.

- Step three consisted of a set of reflective questions that the research assistants had to answer on the lesson observed.

All classroom observations were compiled as a matrix for the respective country. Simple frequencies and percentages were calculated for each of the teacher and child behavior items and plotted on a bar graph. Observations of the dominant teaching learning patterns were made on the basis of the graphs. Simple tallies were used to map the response to the reflective questions. The three steps serve to triangulate the observations of each class.

The classroom observations were undertaken more as illustrative examples rather than evidence of impact. The School and Classroom Observation Tool is an adapted version of the tool used by CARE India in its Girls' Education Program.

Sample		
	<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Somaliland</i>
Provinces	Logar and Perwan	Hargeisia
Number of schools	31 schools (21 MOE and 10 CBE ⁷)	19 MOE schools
Number of teachers observed and interviewed	61 teachers	38 teachers

Limitations of the Study:

Security Issues in Afghanistan and Somaliland had to be recognized while conducting the study. This affected the sampling design for the study. The team of local researchers could collect data only from areas that were considered relatively safe. The locations selected for the study, therefore, do not constitute a random sample representative of the national situation but can be taken as illustrative examples.

Making Tools Locally Relevant: The tools for data collection were simplified to suit local capacities and language. In the process some of the details and complexities of the field could not be captured. In addition, translation served as a constraint to expressing complex ideas and ensuring that they were fully understood by data collectors. Further the research assistants had their own views on what was acceptable child centered behaviors, this bias was difficult to overcome at times and did influence the observations.

The above are limitations inherent in the conflict and post-conflict contexts and highlight the challenges of conducting such research. They bring to the forefront the need for a larger discussion on possible research methods in these difficult circumstances.

⁷ Community-based education

5. Key Findings of the Study

Active learning pedagogy in Afghanistan and Somaliland: Mechanisms and Teacher Development

There is little information available on teacher training in the pre-conflict years in either country. As a result, it was not possible to understand the approach or treatment of active-learning pedagogy pre-conflict.

In both cases, international NGOs, such as the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children Alliance Partners, CARE, the Norwegian Refugee Committee, the Aga Khan Foundation and UN agencies (UNESCO and UNICEF), played significant roles in providing education during the years of conflict and early reconstruction. Most of these agencies provided education through non-formal options such as community schools or home-based schools. Literature reviews show that active-learning or child-centered methods were often part of these learning options. The teacher training undertaken by these agencies varied in content, duration and approach in both contexts. Inputs utilizing child-centered methods were part of many of these trainings. However, in both Afghanistan and Somaliland the trainings undertaken by the various organizations were short (ranging from 2 weeks to 2 months) and each agency had their own objectives, content and approach.

Post conflict a number of simultaneous activities were undertaken towards reconstruction of the education system by both the countries. In the context of teacher development and active-learning, both countries followed similar key steps. These were - undertaking situation analysis and relevant research, developing policies and programs, developing teacher training packages, establishing training mechanisms and training teachers. These activities were carried out by the newly formed governments in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, like UN agencies, bilateral donors, INGOs, local universities and professionals within the system. Indeed there was considerable external support and input in all the activities.

Situation analyses in both the countries showed extensive damage and destruction at all levels of the education system. Almost 80-90% of schools were damaged, few qualified teachers were available, learning material had been destroyed or damaged, communities had been displaced or traumatized and administrative structures were weakened. In the case of Somaliland, there were no education activities possible from 1991 through 1992. In the case of Afghanistan, girls' participation in schools had dropped dramatically during the Taliban years. Post conflict there was an enormous increase in demand for education in both the countries.

Post conflict there were very few qualified teachers available within the system for a variety of reasons. Because of the conflict and instability, qualified teachers in substantial numbers had either left the country, changed jobs or had been killed. In both countries, most of the teachers were secondary or primary school graduates; very few were college educated teachers. Koranic or madrassa teachers were commonly found in

both contexts. Moreover, teachers, regardless of qualifications or training are difficult to retain because of low pay.

In general, teacher training is of varying quality. Most teachers had undergone only short training workshops, largely undertaken by INGOs and UN agencies. For those who had previous training at institutes or universities, their faculty had not received updated training since the beginning of conflict either.

Differing cadres of teachers were found in the two contexts. These included formal school teachers, community school teachers and religious teachers. Overall there was poor representation of female teachers in both contexts.

In both cases, substantial efforts for teacher training were mounted by the national governments. These efforts included:

Formulation of national policies: Afghanistan came out with a National Strategic Plan for Education in 2006 and Somaliland with a National Policy of Education (NPE, May 2007). Both policy documents recognized the issue of quality in their schools and reinforced the relationship between teacher development and quality education. The policies articulated the larger national priorities in education. As such, the discourse on child-centred or active-learning methods is not as detailed at this point.

Development of teacher training plans and mechanisms: The need for large numbers of trained teachers coupled with the need to harmonize different teacher cadre determined the teacher training approach in both the countries. The vast geography and enormous number of teachers needed in the country moved Afghanistan towards the InSet training module and the cascade approach to training teachers. Somaliland prioritized its need for teacher training with building ownership and sustainability, opting for rolling out two year teacher training programs through four local universities. It closely aligned the in-service and pre-service teacher training programs, by opting for a standard curriculum, training material and flexible contact programs. Afghanistan also has larger plans of subsequently aligning the pre- and in-service training programs. The basic intent in both cases is to bring homogeneity to the diverse teacher qualifications.

Teacher qualifications: Wide ranging teacher qualifications, with many teachers being only secondary or primary school graduates, was a major factor in both contexts. The basic qualifications of the teachers determined their content knowledge which, being minimal, made teacher training a challenge. Teacher training programs had to include both content and pedagogic aspects, the balance invariably tilting towards content.

Development of teacher training packages: Development of the teacher training curriculum and material was a highly participative process in both countries. Government departments, donors, NGOs, university teachers, school teachers and international experts came together for a series of discussions and debate on the theme of active learning. The exercise was conducted under the umbrella of the new Governments' ministries of education.

Active-learning pedagogy or child-centered methods are part of the teacher training modules. The teacher training modules of Somaliland have opted for a somewhat traditional definition. It attempts to differentiate between teacher-centered and child-centered approaches under the terms – *expository and heuristic approach*. The module then proceeds to give brief descriptions of different kinds of methods, including the “discovery approach” and its related steps.

The Afghanistan teacher training module, InSet, defines active-learning as the active participation of students, both physically and mentally, in learning. It emphasizes that tasks for children should have the right degree of complexity so that the child is able to do the task but at the same time finds it challenging. Throughout the module, the ‘*different and changed*’ role of the teacher in this method is highlighted. It emphasizes that teachers must attend to individual needs, listen to the students and give them activities. Spanning nine chapters, InSet includes chapters on essential aspects of active-learning implementation. These include information relating to pedagogy, understanding the student, text and supporting material, classroom management, lesson plans, evaluation, diversity (although the term used is “variety”), new curriculum, new books and other educational issues. Learning is seen as combination of concept, skill and perception. However, the influence of strong adherence to traditions, including the traditional way of learning, is discernible throughout the module, often contradicting the new pedagogy InSet is striving hard to advance. Strong leaning to religious and cultural beliefs of the country is also evident in the policy and strategy documents of Somaliland.

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Active Learning and Emerging Classroom Practices:

Classroom observations in both the countries found that didactic teaching learning practices dominate in most cases. The most observed teacher behaviors in both cases were found to be clustered around textbook-based teaching practices such as reading from the textbook, writing textbook related information on the black board, and asking textbook related questions. Correspondingly, the student behaviors that occurred most

frequently were: listening to the teacher, repeating after the teacher, copying in notebooks, answering questions from teacher.

In context of active-learning methods, one can observe two indications of progress. First, teachers show evidences of being *child friendly* even while adopting the traditional teaching methods. Evidence of teachers paying attention to individual children, moving around the class and motivating students are seen, even when the teaching and learning is textbook centered (reading, explanation or black board writing).

Second, there is clear evidence of child-centered methods being used by teachers, albeit only occasionally. This was observed more often amongst the community-based education (CBE) teachers of Afghanistan. The frequency of student behaviors such as narrating experiences or observations in a discussion, working in pairs, working in groups, solving problems were observed more amongst the CBE school children.

When corroborated with data from the school observation schedule, teacher interviews and interviews of teacher trainers, it is evident that some of the reasons teachers have not been able to adopt the active learning pedagogy are related to poor school infrastructure. Schools are overcrowded, storage and display facilities are absent in classrooms and the general upkeep of the classrooms is poor. Teachers and students lack access to learning materials. In many cases individual children did not even have textbooks. Teachers too do not have any reference material.

The common definitions of active learning given by teachers in both countries defined active-learning as giving activities to children, dividing them into groups or as learning by doing. Although it is positive that most teachers were able to recognize active learning as a term – indicating that their training experiences had exposed them to active learning as a concept – their understandings of what this meant for their classrooms was not very deep. There were no teachers who could effectively articulate the nuance of active-learning as having dimensions of cognitive and affective processes.

Teachers and trainers expressed a number of issues related to teacher training. Overall, they clearly felt the trainings did not build their capacities for active-learning. The teacher training did not give enough hands-on experience to the teachers with regard to planning and designing active learning lessons. The issue of teacher remuneration was a major issue that complicated the situation in both contexts. Either teachers were underpaid or not paid at all. This affected teacher motivation and the system found it hard to retain teachers. Decreased teacher motivation and high teacher turn over affected the investment in experimenting with new methodologies. The concept of communities contributing to education is hardly operational and the new governments are unable to pay teacher salaries. This critical issue was mentioned by a number of teachers.

6. Observations and Conclusions

Advancing Reform amidst Reconstruction

Introducing and advancing active-learning pedagogy in post-conflict Afghanistan and Somaliland was, and continues to be, challenging. The demands of the reconstruction in terms of providing access to large numbers of children, building and restoring schools, recruiting and training teachers, and setting up systems and mechanisms became priorities for the governments.

The experience of post-conflict recovery in Cambodia and Rwanda show that advancing active-learning approaches in their reconstruction efforts was also challenging. Cambodia, which had suffered from prolonged conflict and war, attempted to integrate child-centered methods into reforms during its reconstruction. Following the formulation of the national constitution, education reform policy endorsed a number of core commitments to improvement in the education system. A number of these were aimed at quality improvement like daily hours of teaching, number of subjects to be taught, evaluation practices, etc; amongst these was a commitment to curriculum and pedagogic reform.⁸ The policy commitment was followed by a series of complementary actions that included curriculum and textbook development. For the first time in Cambodia these were supplemented by teacher guides and other learning materials.

Evaluation and research showed that the student-centered approach was insufficiently used, and textbooks were overloaded in terms of content, while teachers' manuals had too little content. Books lacked sufficient explanations and examples to clarify lessons. It was found that adopting the child-centered method was difficult for all teachers. The one week training for teachers was insufficient in time and quality and many teachers had not completed the training because of financial and time constraints. The plan of cluster-based support systems needed more time and effort for change to occur. One of the key factors in the cluster system setbacks was the poor level of content knowledge of teachers, which made it difficult for them to understand and apply new concepts. Teachers had difficulty in understanding the new textbooks and teacher manuals. The need for appropriate curriculum, teacher training and materials as part of a comprehensive system was underscored.

Obura's (2003) study analyzed and documented the process of reconstruction in Rwanda post-genocide. During the genocide in Rwanda, about 800,000 people were killed, 2 million people fled the country and a million were internally displaced. More than 60% of homes had women as heads of household. Many young women were pregnant and thousands of young children were orphaned, many of whom had participated in the violence during the genocide. Almost 65% of Rwandan schools were totally or partially damaged. Teachers in large numbers had either fled or died and only 45 percent of qualified teachers remained. The education system and processes were devastated.

⁸ <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curriculum/Asia%20Networkpdf/CAMBODIA.pdf>

During the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase the new government took courageous steps to restart schools and, with the help of aid agencies, provided supplies to the schools (including UNICEF's Teacher Emergency Package, or TEP). However, the adoption of child-centered methods was trumped by the immediate needs of reconstructing the educational system. The logistics of developing, printing and distributing textbooks and other learning material was a priority. Obura observed that "formal schooling [is] familiar to the curriculum and [teachers] prefer to go to class and start teaching" (p. 81-82).⁹ In Rwanda there was disagreement between the government and the aid agencies over difficulty in implementing reforms during the post-emergency phase. The pedagogy promoted in the TEPs, the excessive emphasis on games and the peace education components, were all areas of disagreement. The teachers simply do not want "to be distracted or stressed by innovation [,] they would like to go by the classical and dull pre-war ways of school" (p. 81-82).

In the case of Rwanda, the students, teachers, and the educational systems were devastated and traumatized. The foremost concern was to heal, unify and reconstruct the nation. The educational system in particular was seen as something which had failed the community through its divisive and biased policies. It was not surprising, therefore, that all reforms, including the advancement of child-centered methods, were approached with caution.

The challenges facing the Cambodian and Rwandan context were not unfamiliar in Afghanistan or Somaliland. The dynamics of these complexities played out in several major observations made during this study.

Socio-cultural Context

The larger social and political context is known to affect the adoption of progressive pedagogies. Adherence to Islam and strong affiliation to clan and tribe define the way of life in both Afghanistan and Somaliland. These affiliations define the social and cultural context of the two countries and pervade all aspects of life, including education and the current efforts of reconstruction. All policy documents in both countries express their commitment to Islam and propagation of Islamic values through education. This is one of the principle goals of education. This echoed in all related activities and documents that are developed, such as the school and teacher training curriculum which attempt to balance presentation of active-learning and Islamic principles. Interviews with administrators, trainers and teachers show that they, too, hold that as their primary stricture. All active learning is defined within the parameters of religion and cultural norms. For example, respect and obedience to teachers is valued and any pedagogic reforms will need to factor this in.

Some of these findings are corroborated in other traditional contexts. Serbessa's (2006)¹⁰ study in Ethiopia sought to understand active-learning practices in classrooms in relation

⁹ http://www.unesco.org/iiep/PDF/pubs/Rwanda_Neveragain.pdf

¹⁰ <http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/cice/9-1derebssa.pdf>

to traditional teaching and child rearing practices. Recognizing the importance of learning achievements and quality education, the Ethiopian government made policy commitments to quality improvement, in spite of limited resources available to them. The quality improvement policies fully endorsed adoption of active- or child-centered learning methods by schools.¹¹ It was included in all reforms initiated at national and regional levels. However, the study observed that ‘active-learning’ as a term was widely used but poorly practiced. Amongst others, two of the serious barriers in implementing active-learning were entrenched in strong cultural practices. Traditionally, children in Ethiopia are taught to be obedient and polite, respecting adult authority without questioning. This socialization inhibits children’s participation in discussion and knowledge building. Acts of inquiry and initiative could be misunderstood as defiance and misbehavior. Conversely, it is also firmly believed that knowledge is vested in older generations and should be handed down from older to younger people. Therefore it is the teacher’s job to transfer knowledge to the students. Attempts of children discovering their own knowledge is seen as teachers not doing their jobs properly.

A study of Islamic schools in Nigeria¹² showed that school environment and infrastructure, availability of learning materials, and teacher-pupil ratio are indeed factors that affect adoption of active-learning. Coupled with traditional Islamic beliefs and pedagogical approaches, the adoption of active-learning methods becomes a significant challenge, but not impossible. The study observed that participant schools had begun to strike a balance between Islamic education and secular education. Most of the teachers were rated as ‘average’ or ‘above average’ in terms of implementing child-centered teaching. Yet the teachers exhibited only a preliminary understanding of active-learning. Most had not truly grasped the ‘spirit and complexity’ of active learning methods.

The advancement of active learning in Afghanistan and Somaliland, as in the examples of Nigeria and Ethiopia, is influenced both by the socio-cultural context as well as the issues specific to post-conflict contexts.

Teacher Capacities and Working Conditions

One unfortunate result of the conflict is its impact on teachers. As with most post conflict scenarios, it was hard to find a cadre of qualified teachers in either Afghanistan or Somaliland. Qualified teachers had either been killed, dislocated or had taken up other jobs. On the other hand a number of schooling initiatives had been started by communities and NGOs during the conflict years. These were often community or religious schools. Whereas these initiatives had served to provide access in the most difficult years, it had also given rise to a situation where diversely educated and poorly qualified teachers were on board. In both countries, primary school teachers included large percentages of secondary and primary school graduates. A good number were Koranic teachers that had not been formally educated. Very few were university graduates or had pre-service teacher training. The new ministries of education are faced

¹¹ Ethiopian Education and Training Policy of 1994. (p4)

¹² <http://www.equip123.net/docs/E1-NigeriaPilotStudy.pdf>

with the dual challenge of placing trained teachers in schools on an urgent basis and of taking steps to harmonize this vastly varying cadre through training and accreditation.

The issue of teacher compensation was another major issue in both countries. There was an issue of non-payment of salary with the community-based schools in Afghanistan and with most teachers in Somaliland. The mechanism of communities contributing to teacher salaries does not seem to be working. These are poor communities with few livelihood options and paying teacher salaries is difficult. On the other hand, the governments have limited resources to compensate teachers. The donor community is reluctant to contribute towards a recurring cost like teacher salaries and sees it as the responsibility of the government. The issue of teacher salary is critical, directly impacting teacher motivation, morale and, therefore, their performance. Active-learning methods particularly suffer as they require a great deal of effort for planning and implementation.

The third issue mentioned by teachers is related to poor or absent supervisory support. Teachers in Somaliland asserted that they would gain from some sort of a guidance and support from supervisors. The issue of supervision in turn is related to the cadre of supervisors in place and, if in place, remuneration for undertaking supervisory visits. The poor infrastructure and transport makes it further difficult for supervisors to undertake these visits.

Conceptual Challenges

The issue of low teacher qualifications and corresponding poor content knowledge in various school subjects makes it difficult to advance active-learning pedagogy. The issue of teacher capacity and conceptual presentation of active-learning in teacher training is closely linked. In an effort to simplify the conceptual underpinnings of active learning and tailor it to large-scale training programs for under-qualified teachers, active learning pedagogy is too often minimized or permanently reduced to ‘activities’ and ‘group work’ methodologies. This was evident from classroom observations and teacher interviews in both contexts. While such reductionism did enable teachers to begin the process of the longer cognitive and behavioral shifts required at the core of active learning pedagogy, it is clear that a great distance on that pathway remains. Moreover there is a risk of permanent dilution of the richness and enormous cognitive and affective possibilities. This risk needs to be mitigated through appropriate policies and teacher development plans.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The dual mandate of reform and reconstruction offers both significant opportunities and enormous challenges to countries emerging from conflict. With the end of crisis and beginning of a reconstruction phase, education initiatives were launched in both Afghanistan and Somaliland. A broad focus was placed on developing educational systems, creating access and ensuring quality. Active learning as a progressive pedagogy was part of these efforts both at the policy level as well as in efforts of teacher

development. The complexities of the post conflict context at systemic and societal level, however, had a strong bearing on the way active learning is being adopted in classrooms.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge:

- 1) Expectations for active learning in post-conflict contexts should be realistic. Although the author does not advocate dismissing language about active learning from national policies or incorporating it into teacher training, it does seem that the expectation and level of effort should be calibrated to the reality of disrepair and desperation within which the society is struggling. The reality in Afghanistan and Somaliland was that active learning had not been adopted in significant ways. Perhaps a more appropriate emphasis of teacher training efforts should be around child friendly classrooms progressing towards adoption of active learning methods in an incremental way. Policies and comprehensive teacher development plans will be required to move toward active learning and to lay a pathway for change in the future.
- 2) Insisting on investment in recurrent costs and infrastructure improvement are important strategies in advancing active learning. Teachers who are paid infrequently, dilapidated buildings, inadequate teaching and learning material, and poor infrastructure and furniture are critical distractions that inhibit the ability of newly trained teachers to practice their new active learning approaches.
- 3) Teacher development and support must be addressed as a priority: In both Afghanistan and Somaliland, interviews with stakeholders at various levels pointed out that teacher development and support must receive critical attention if reform efforts are to be advanced. Critically, this includes ensuring remuneration, mechanisms for motivation, and appropriate hands-on supervision and support with new methodologies. Although this study does not have evidence to suggest that investments in teacher development will bring greater advancement to the system than investments in curriculum and textbook reform, findings do suggest that they could be a more significant leverage point for students.
- 4) Efforts to improve education systems should be accompanied by efforts to address wider socio-cultural perceptions about children's rights. The studies findings in Afghanistan showed that parts of the teacher training module were actually contradicted by cultural references in the same teacher training package. Although when harnessed effectively, the education system can infuse new ideas and thinking into society, education reform is also stifled by overarching ideas about the proper place and role of children. This must be addressed simultaneously if teachers are expected to give children opportunities to learn through exploration.

UNESCO's framework for understanding quality education sees teaching and learning as a complex interrelationship amongst various factors. These include learner characteristics, larger context issues like economic and socio-cultural context, national governance and management, and the availability of public resources. More directly, the

quality of teaching and learning is strongly dependent on physical infrastructure, quality and quantity of teaching material, school governance and human resources available in terms of number and quality of administrators, supervisors and teachers. Ginsburg clearly identifies four key challenges to adoption of active learning pedagogies in classrooms.¹³ These are the nature of the teacher preparation, the material conditions-equipment, classroom conditions, teacher-pupil ratio, inconsistency between curriculum and examinations and the cultural appropriateness.

Seen from this perspective, the conditions that would enable active learning are in fact in a dire state in Afghanistan and Somaliland. Teaching and learning is situated in a highly complex and volatile external environment; almost all the variables directly affecting teaching and learning, like teacher quality, teaching and learning materials, and physical infrastructure, are in a poor state affecting the implementation of the active-learning in classrooms.

¹³ Mark Ginsburg, 'Challenges to Promoting Active Learning, Student Centered Pedagogies', 2006, EQUIPILWA