

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
SUMMARY .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiii
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 THE CONTEXT.....	1
1.1.1 Overview of the Ethiopian education system.....	2
1.1.2 Higher education in Ethiopia.....	4
1.2 THE STUDY PROBLEM .....	7
1.3 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY .....	11
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	11
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	12
1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY .....	12
1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS.....	13
1.7.1 Approach to teaching.....	13
1.7.2 Conceptions of teaching .....	14
1.7.3 Teaching practices .....	14
1.8 THE DIVISION OF CHAPTERS .....	14
1.9 SUMMARY .....	16
CHAPTER TWO.....	17
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	17
2.1 LEARNING THEORIES .....	17
2.1.1 Behaviourism.....	18
2.1.2 Cognitivism .....	19
2.1.3 Constructivism.....	20

2.2	APPROACHES TO LEARNING .....	24
2.2.1	Surface approach to learning.....	24
2.2.2	Deep approach to learning.....	25
2.3	APPROACHES TO TEACHING .....	26
2.3.1	Teacher-centred approach to teaching.....	27
2.3.2	Student-centred approach to teaching .....	29
2.4	TENETS OF STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES .....	32
2.4.1	The balance of power in the classroom.....	32
2.4.2	The function of the course content .....	34
2.4.3	The role of the instructor .....	34
2.4.4	The responsibility for learning .....	35
2.4.5	The purpose and processes of evaluation .....	36
2.5	IMPEDIMENTS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT CENTRED INSTRUCTION .....	37
2.5.1	Student factors .....	37
2.5.2	Instructor factors.....	38
2.5.3	Administration factors.....	39
2.6	DEALING WITH THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF STUDENT-CENTRED INSTRUCTION .....	40
2.6.1	Creating a supportive environment for students.....	40
2.6.2	Creating a supportive environment for instructors.....	41
2.6.3	Administrative and physical infrastructure .....	41
2.7	REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING ....	42
2.7.1	Studies on conceptions of teaching .....	42
2.7.2	Studies on the relationship between conceptions of teaching and classroom practices.....	47
2.7.3	Studies reporting inconsistency between conceptions of teaching and classroom practices.....	49
2.7.4	Local studies on conceptions of teaching and classroom practices.....	50
2.8	RESEARCH GAP .....	53
2.9	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY .....	54

CHAPTER THREE .....	56
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	56
3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN .....	56
3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES .....	58
3.3 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS.....	60
3.3.1 Phase 1: Qualitative data collection .....	60
3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews.....	60
3.3.1.2 Classroom observations.....	61
3.3.2 Phase II: Quantitative data collection.....	62
3.3.2.1 Questionnaire for instructors .....	62
3.3.2.2 Questionnaire for students .....	63
3.4 PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION .....	64
3.5 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS.....	65
3.6 THE PILOT STUDY AND OUTCOME.....	67
3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	69
3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE FINDINGS .....	70
3.9 SUMMARY .....	70
CHAPTER FOUR .....	72
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	72
4.1 PROFILE OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS .....	72
4.1.1 Profile of instructors .....	73
4.1.2 Profile of students.....	77
4.2 INSTRUCTORS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING .....	79
4.2.1 Findings from the interviews.....	79
4.2.2 Findings from the questionnaires .....	92
4.2.2.1 Instructors' views of the teacher-centred conception of teaching .....	92
4.2.2.2 Instructors' views of the student-centred conception of teaching .....	95
4.2.2.3 Variation in conceptions of teaching among instructors .....	98

4.3	INSTRUCTORS' APPROACHES TO TEACHING .....	101
4.3.1	Findings from the interviews.....	102
4.3.2	Findings from the classroom observations .....	103
4.3.3	Findings from the questionnaires .....	110
4.3.3.1	Finding from instructors .....	110
4.3.3.2	Variation in teaching strategies among instructors .....	115
4.3.3.3	Findings from students .....	120
4.4	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTORS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES .....	124
4.5	FACTORS INFLUENCING INSTRUCTORS' IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED INSTRUCTION .....	128
4.5.1	Findings from the interviews and the classroom observations.....	128
4.5.1.1	Student factors .....	128
4.5.1.2	Instructor factors.....	132
4.5.1.3	Institutional factors .....	134
4.5.2	Findings from the questionnaires .....	137
4.5.2.1	Findings from instructors.....	137
4.5.2.2	Findings from students .....	142
4.6	DISCUSSION OF RESULTS .....	145
4.6.1	Instructors' conceptions of teaching.....	146
4.6.2	Instructors' approaches to teaching .....	151
4.6.3	The relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices .....	155
4.6.4	Factors influencing instructors' implementation of student-centred instruction .....	157
4.6.4.1	Student factors .....	158
4.6.4.2	Instructor factors.....	160
4.6.4.3	Institutional factors .....	161
4.7	SUMMARY .....	163

CHAPTER FIVE .....	165
CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .	165
5.1 CONCLUSIONS .....	166
5.1.1 Research question one .....	166
5.1.2 Research question two.....	167
5.1.3 Research question three.....	168
5.1.4 Research question four .....	169
5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	171
5.2.1 Recommendations for policy and practice .....	171
5.2.2 Recommendations for further research .....	173
5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	173
5.4 SUMMARY .....	174
REFERENCES.....	177
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	186
APPENDIX I: ETHICAL CLEARANCE.....	186
APPENDIX II: INFORMED CONSENT .....	187
APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	188
APPENDIX IV: OBSERVATION GUIDE .....	189
APPENDIX V: THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INSTRUCTORS .....	190
APPENDIX VI: THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS.....	197

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Profile of instructors involved in the first phase of the study .....	73
Table 4.2: Profile of instructors participated in the survey .....	76
Table 4.3: Profile of students participated in the survey .....	78
Table 4.4: Conceptions of teaching identified in the study .....	80
Table 4.5: Referential and structural aspects of conceptions of teaching .....	89
Table 4.6: Instructors' views of the teacher-centred conception of teaching.....	93
Table 4.7: Instructors' views of the student-centred conceptions of teaching .....	96
Table 4.8: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on gender .....	98
Table 4.9: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on discipline .....	99
Table 4.10: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on whether they have attended a pedagogical training or not .....	99
Table 4.11: ANOVA results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on level of education .....	101
Table 4.12: ANOVA results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on teaching experiences .....	101
Table 4.13: Instructors' responses on the extent they used teacher-centred strategies in teaching .....	111
Table 4.14: Instructors' responses on the extent they used student-focused strategies in teaching .....	113
Table 4.15: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on gender .....	115
Table 4.16: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on discipline of study .....	116
Table 4.17: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on whether they have attended a pedagogical training or not .....	117
Table 4.18: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on their workload.....	118

Table 4.19: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on level of education .....	119
Table 4.20: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on teaching experience.....	119
Table 4.21: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on class size.....	120
Table 4.22: Students' responses regarding the extent their instructors used teacher-focused strategies in their teaching.....	121
Table 4.23: Students' responses regarding the extent their instructors used student-focused strategies in their teaching.....	123
Table 4.24: Correlation between teaching conceptions and teaching strategies .....	125
Table 4.25: Instructors' views concerning the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching .....	138
Table 4.26: Students' views concerning the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching.....	143

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: A multiple-level categorization model of conceptions of teaching .....	44
Figure 2.2: The relationship between conceptions of teaching, classroom practices and learning outcomes.....	55
Figure 4.1: Comparison of instructors' views of the traditional and the student-centred conceptions of teaching .....	97
Figure 4.2: Comparison of instructors' reported use of instructor-focused and student-focused strategies in teaching.....	114



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

*“We should ridicule a merchant who said that he had sold a great many goods although no one had bought any. But perhaps there are teachers who think that they have done a good day’s teaching irrespective of what pupils have learned”*(Dewey, 1933:140).

This introductory chapter describes the problem and the context of the study. The first section provides a brief description of the context of the study, i.e., Ethiopia and its education system. The next section describes the study problem, its objectives and the research questions that guided the study. In addition, this chapter sets out the study’s significance, scope, definition of terms and organization.

### 1.1 THE CONTEXT

Ethiopia is situated in the Horn of Africa, bordered by Eritrea from north, Kenya from south, Somalia from east and Sudan from west. It covers an area of 1,133,380 sq km and currently has an estimated population of over 90 million people, which makes it the second most populous country in Africa next to Nigeria (Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), 2015:1-4). The majority of its population lives in the rural areas and depends on rain-fed agriculture for their livelihood. As per the existing governmental system, Ethiopia is composed of nine regional states: Afar, Amhara, Benishangul-Gumuz, Tigray, Gambella, Harari, Oromia, Somali and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples and two chartered cities: Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Addis Ababa is its capital and the largest city and is currently serving as headquarter of the African Union. Ethiopia is a diverse country in which more than 80 ethnic groups live and over 84 indigenous languages are spoken. The dominant ethnic groups are the Oromo, the Amhara and the Tigreans respectively (Tekeste, 1996:31). The widely spoken languages in the country are respectively Afan Oromo, Amharic and Tigrigna. As the language of international communication, English is taught in Ethiopia as a subject from grade one

onwards and serves as the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education (Ministry of Education (MoE), 1994:24). Regional languages serve as the medium of instruction at the primary levels.

In addition to owning a unique culture of diversity in ethnicity, religion, and language, Ethiopia also owns a unique history as it is the only African country that was never colonized by Europeans (Bloor & Wondwosen, 1996:322). Apart from the failed attempts made by the Italians during 1936-1941, Ethiopia has never surrendered itself to the colonial masters during their invasion of many African states. In spite of this, Ethiopia has been one of the world's poorest nations though it has begun recovering and going through much improvement at present. According to the World Bank report 2013, Ethiopia has registered a growth rate of 8.5% in 2013, which makes the country the 12<sup>th</sup> fastest growing economy in the world (World Bank, 2013:6).

### **1.1.1 Overview of the Ethiopian education system**

Ethiopia's history of education had been dominated by church education, which was established following the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Tekeste, 1996:37). Church education is composed of different levels which take about 10 years for completing each level and as many as 30 years for completing all the levels (Derebssa, 2006:131). Its objective is mainly to educate people for the service of the church with emphasis on religious principles and values. Though it served as the only source of educated people in the past, its contribution in the development of Ethiopia as a whole has been insignificant given its narrow objective and accessibility. Owing to this, despite the fierce resistance from the church, modern education was introduced in Ethiopia towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Officially, it began with the establishment of Menelik II School in Addis Ababa in 1908, thus becoming a landmark in the history of education in Ethiopia (Tekeste, 1990:1). Following this, many public schools that provided secular form of education were established in the different parts of the country. The momentum was, however, interrupted when the Italians invaded and briefly occupied Ethiopia from 1936-1941.

Following the defeat of the Italians in 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie strengthened the initiative interrupted to modernise Ethiopia through the expansion of modern education. In his support for this form of education, the Emperor established Ministry of Education to reorganize the education system of the country once again. During this period, education was given a high priority with the assumption that Ethiopia cannot progress without education. This momentum resulted in the opening up of primary and secondary schools in many parts of the country. Nevertheless, the education system during this time remained elitist and served only the affluent and the ruling family members at the expense of the majority of the Ethiopian population.

The Socialist system of governance known as the Derg was introduced in 1974 overtaking the imperial system that lasted from 1930-1974. The Derg Regime introduced a new education system based on the political ideology of Leninism/Marxism. During this period, along with the formal education system, non-formal education was introduced for the first time in the country to spread literacy especially in the rural areas, which were neglected during the previous governments. The effort of the communist regime to spread literacy in Ethiopia during this time has been considered by many as one of its remarkable achievements in the history of Ethiopia (Tekeste, 1990:12). However, the communist government did not achieve many of its objectives in education mainly due to the persistent war and drought it encountered during this period. More importantly, the conditions in the country during this time were exacerbated by the 1980's collapse of communism resulting in the Soviet Union's interruption of its aid to Ethiopia.

Consequently, the communist regime was overthrown in 1991 by the military power of the existing system of political governance known as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Soon after taking power, EPRDF made several considerable political, economical and social reforms in its attempts to respond to the multifaceted challenges it inherited from the previous regimes. To this effect, a new constitution was introduced, declaring education as one of the fundamental human right that is free from religious and political ideology as distinct from the previous forms of education (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), 1995:33). In addition, the constitution granted nations and nationalities the right to use, to develop and to learn in

their own languages at a primary school level (Grades 1-8) for the first time in the history of education in Ethiopia (FDRE, 1995:13; MoE, 1994:23).

In line with the new constitution, educational reforms were undertaken to respond to the problems associated with the overall education system of the country. One of these was the introduction of a national education and training policy in 1994. This national policy encompassed the overall objectives of education and strategies for implementation at all levels of education in Ethiopia. Along this, a new 4-4-2-2 educational structure was designed in place of the previous 6-2-4 educational system (MoE, 1994:14-15). This new educational structure is composed of general education, which comprises eight years of primary education and four years of secondary education. Divided into two cycles, primary education offers basic education (Grades 1-4) and general primary education (Grades 5-8). Likewise, secondary education is divided into two cycles: general secondary education (Grades 9-10) followed by two years of upper secondary (preparatory) education (Grades 11-12). Upper secondary education is offered to prepare students for higher education and for the world of work. The new educational structure also embraces Technical and Vocational Training, which is offered for students who leave school after completion of grades 10 and 12. Since this reformation, Ethiopia has observed significant progress in its education, especially in terms of the expansion of the education sector at all levels of the education system in the country.

### **1.1.2 Higher education in Ethiopia**

According to the existing education system, higher education in Ethiopia comprises undergraduate programs which run for three, four or more years depending on the field of study and postgraduate programs which run specialisation degrees such as master's and PhD degrees. Education at this level is provided by universities, university colleges and specialised institutions and is centrally controlled by the ministry of education. The beginning of higher education in Ethiopia dates back to 1950 with the establishment of the then University College of Addis Ababa and the now Addis Ababa University. Nevertheless, the sector had been much neglected in the past and, as a result, its contribution to the development of the country has been insignificant. Currently, higher education is ambitiously considered as a national strategy for addressing the development

needs of the society and the country as a whole (Teshome, 2003:1). Considering it as a centre for vital human resources that are needed for the socio-economic development of Ethiopia, the government has undertaken massive investment on the expansion of higher education. In addition to this, private sectors were encouraged to launch the provision of higher education both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Following this, the number of higher education institutions increased dramatically from two universities and eight colleges during the 1990's to thirty-one public universities and over sixty private accredited colleges in 2013.

These public universities are divided into three categories based on their duration of establishments. The first category comprises nine universities, which were considered as well established and first generation universities. The second category consists of twelve universities which were established in 2006/07 academic year and considered as emerging and second generation universities. The remaining ten were established in 2011/12 academic year and were considered as new and third generation universities. The performances and the internal strength of these universities vary according to the duration of their establishment. Relatively, the first generation universities have better facilities and resources when compared with the emerging and the new ones.

Following the establishment of these universities in various parts of the country, access to higher education has significantly improved leading to improved enrolment rate in higher education in Ethiopia. According to the 2012 annual educational statistics, 519,770 students comprising 494,110 undergraduate students and 25,660 postgraduate students were enrolled in higher institution in 2011/2012 academic year (MoE, 2012:5). This is a significant increase from 2005/2006 academic year where the total enrolment was only 180,117 students as a whole (MoE, 2010:11) and during when the number of universities in the country was only nine.

Alongside the huge investment being undertaken on the expansion of higher education in Ethiopia, the government has also focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning at this level. In the past, education in Ethiopia in general and higher education in particular has been dominated by the traditional form of instruction which is instructor-centred (Derebssa, 2006:132). At present, however, this form of instruction is widely criticized as a whole for failing to produce the quality graduates sought in the country. It

has been argued that the traditional approach to teaching is unlikely to help the country achieve its intended objective in education of preparing graduates who can work towards the betterment of their society and the country as a whole. Increasing evidence also shows that university graduates today are expected to be proactive and creative to keep pace with the 21<sup>st</sup> century world (Ackerman, Gross, & Perner, 2003: 47; Kahl & Venette, 2010:178). In order to succeed in this complex world and to become better citizens, graduates should be able to obtain not merely a university qualification but the necessary competencies and skills required in practice. Hence, in order for graduates to attain these qualities during their study, it is of paramount importance for universities to improve the quality of their teaching.

To this end, the government of Ethiopia has introduced several educational reforms over the past two decades. These educational reforms encompassed the formulation of a new education policy with the promise to ensure quality, relevance, equity and accessibility of education in Ethiopia (MoE, 1994:1-36). In addition, in its recent five-year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP), the government has once reaffirmed its top priority as improving and ensuring quality and efficiency of education at all levels (FDRE, 2010:49). In this and other subsequent policy documents, the employment of student-centred approach to teaching has been widely advocated as one of the most important strategies for enhancing the quality of education at all levels in Ethiopia (Derebssa, 2006:126). Following these changes, instructors have been under increasing pressure to improve the quality of their teaching and eventually to become more student-centred than instructor-centred in their approach to teaching.

In the light of these developments in the education system, this study investigated the extent to which the policy of student-centred approach to teaching has been well internalized and has become the culture of teaching in Ethiopian universities. Towards this end, university instructors' conceptions of teaching (ways of understanding teaching) and their actual teaching practices were explored in the light of the policy calls for the employment of student-centred approach to teaching and the support in the literature for the constructivist views of teaching. The study also examined factors that influence instructors' effective employment of student-centred instruction. The study was founded

on the premise that the policy reforms towards student-centred approach to teaching should have support from university instructors who have largely the power to influence its implementation in higher education in Ethiopia. In other words, for the claims to be fully accepted and successfully implemented, university instructors need to have a changed conception of teaching. In addition, there has to be a supportive environment that encourages them to implement their changed conceptions of teaching into their teaching practice as intended.

## **1.2 THE STUDY PROBLEM**

Higher education in Ethiopia has been undergoing through substantial reforms to align the system with the aspirations and the development needs of the country (Teshome, 2003:1). These reform efforts encompassed among others improving the quality of education at this level through the employment of innovative approaches to teaching which will eventually enable students to become competent and participate in the overall needs of the society (MoE, 1994:15). Reinforcing this, Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 reiterates *“the Curricular design, delivery, and assessment of learning outcomes in any institution shall aim at enabling the learner to acquire pertinent scientific knowledge, independent thinking skills, communication skills and professional values that together prepare him to become a competent professional”* (FDRE, 2009 : 4987). To achieve this goal, the proclamation stipulates a teaching-learning process, which is more interactive, participatory and student-centred (FDRE, 2009:5005). For the reforms to become effective, the policy demands instructors to adopt instructional strategies that reflect a more student-centred than instructor-centred towards their teaching. That is, a paradigm shift to move away from knowledge transferring perspectives to facilitating learning whereby students develop knowledge individually and with others rather than just waiting for instructors to provide them with knowledge.

Evidence from the literature also shows that quality learning is largely dependent upon the employment of student-centred approach to teaching, which is associated with the constructivist views of teaching (Aypay, 2011:21; Varnava-Marouchou, 2011:127). This approach to teaching is student-focused or learning-oriented and gives more attention to what students do in order to learn than what instructors do in order to teach. In this process, students develop a deeper approach to learning, which is desirable for high-quality learning outcomes (Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999:66).

Unfortunately, personal observations show that teaching in Ethiopian universities is still under the influence of the traditional or the teacher-centred instruction despite its ineffectiveness to help students develop meaningful learning outcomes. As an instructor in one of the universities in Ethiopia, I observed a discrepancy between what the policy claims to be and the actual teaching practices in a university context. For instance, despite the call for a paradigm shift towards student-centred approach to teaching, instructors often rely mainly on the conventional lecture method or its substitute PowerPoint Presentation, which has currently become a fashion among instructors. Students also favour and rely on the lecture notes or handouts provided by instructors more than making their own efforts in order to learn and understand the concepts taught. What is more, the teaching environment including the classroom conditions, availability of resources and instructors' views towards teaching in higher education in Ethiopia do not seem to be aligned with the innovative approaches to teaching.

Many factors might have contributed to the mismatch between the policy claims and the actual teaching practices. Nevertheless, drawing upon my own personal experiences and the literature, I felt that the disparity between the policy claims and the teaching practice emanated mainly from two complex and interrelated factors. The first factor is concerned with the conceptions of teaching held by university instructors, which according to scholars predominantly determine instructors' approach to teaching or teaching practices. As Kember and Kwan (2000:487), for instance, suggest conceptions are deep-seated beliefs about teaching; thus, instructors normally adopt an approach to teaching which is consistent with these beliefs. The second factor is concerned with the practical realities of teaching that might deter instructors from operationalizing their conceptions of teaching into teaching practice (Kember & Kwan, 2000:487; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997:34). These



factors may hold particularly true in Ethiopian context where instructors work under overwhelmingly complex conditions characterized by teaching large classes, lack of resources, poor institutional environment and limited access to continuous professional development activities.

Therefore, it was felt that there is a need for research that produces empirical evidence on instructors' conceptions of teaching and how these conceptions relate to their classroom practices. Such evidence was felt to be useful to uncover strategies to align university instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices with the government's reform efforts to improve quality of teaching and learning in higher education in Ethiopia. The assumption that guided the study was that policy reforms may not lead to intended outcomes and may remain empty promises unless instructors' conceptions of teaching are changed (Gow & Kember, 1993:31; Varnava-Marouchou, 2011:128) and/or unless the factors that impede instructors from translating their conceptions into their practices are taken into account.

Instructors' conceptions of teaching have been explored largely in Western contexts (e.g., Fox, 1983:151-163; Pratt, 1992:203-220; Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994:217-231) and to some extent in Asian contexts (e.g., Gao & Watkins, 2001:443-469; Gow & Kember, 1993:20-33; So & Watkins, 2005:525-541). However, to the knowledge of the researcher, studies that unequivocally show the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in Ethiopian context were either scanty or non-existent. As a result, it was difficult to understand how teaching was conceptualized by instructors in Ethiopian context where subject specialists commonly become instructors without having the proper understanding and training in teaching. In addition, there is also evidence that reveals conceptions of teaching may vary across contexts (Gao and Watkins, 2002:62; Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999:257). As Pratt, Kelly and Wong (1999:257) assert, "*conceptions of effective teaching are deeply rooted in specific cultural values and social norms*". Research into conceptions of teaching is, therefore, needed to indicate succinctly how teaching is understood in a particular cultural context. This was the first reason that prompted this investigation.

Furthermore, this study was different from the previous studies on conceptions and approaches to teaching in that it did not project claims regarding teaching practices based on merely what the instructors reported about their teaching practices. As Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002:184) contend many of the prominent previous works on conceptions of teaching (e.g., Fox, 1983; Gow & Kember, 1993; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Kember, Kwan, & Ledesma, 2001; Pratt, 1992; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996a, b) suffer from making unsupported claims about the relationships between instructors' conceptions and their actual teaching practices. This is because these studies explored only the conceptions of teaching held by instructors and projected claims about instructors' teaching practices without systematically observing what instructors actually do in a classroom context. As a result, these studies suffered from telling half the story as what instructors actually did practically differed from what they claimed they do for a number of reasons (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002:184). In addition, almost all of these studies, with regard to their research methodologies, relied mainly on data from interviews and questionnaires to report on instructors' conceptions of teaching and teaching practices. They failed to embrace classroom observations and/or examination of instructional materials that are considered to be legitimate to gain access to the actual practices of instructors and, as a result, the claims they made about teaching practices are likely to raise concerns. This was the second reason that prompted this study.

Therefore, in general, this study was designed to fill the methodological gaps identified in the previous studies by incorporating data that emerge from the actual teaching practices of instructors through classroom observations in addition to in-depth interviews and questionnaires. It was also intended to fill the research gap in Ethiopia by providing useful insights on conceptions of teaching from the Ethiopian instructors' perspective. Ultimately, the study was designed to help inform the design of strategies that improve instructors' conceptions of teaching and that will eventually enhance the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in higher education in Ethiopia.

### 1.3 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to explore instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in four Ethiopian universities.

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. describe the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in four Ethiopian universities;
2. examine the approaches adopted by instructors in teaching practices in these universities;
3. examine the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices; &
4. identify factors, if any, that influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in these universities.

### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To address the objectives stated above, the following main research question and sub-questions were set:

*The main research question:* What are the conceptions of teaching held by Ethiopian university instructors and how do their conceptions relate to their teaching practices?

*Sub-questions:*

1. What are the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in four Ethiopian universities?
2. What are the approaches to teaching adopted by instructors in teaching practices in these universities?
3. How do instructors' conceptions of teaching relate to their teaching practices?
4. What factors, if any, influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in these universities?

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The outcome of this study benefits different people at different levels ranging from students to policy makers. It primarily benefits university instructors for it enables them to recognize their teaching behaviours and its impact on quality learning outcomes. Understanding of their teaching behaviours helps instructors to become more reflective and to seek for opportunities to develop professionally in order to reconcile their views and approaches to teaching with the existing calls for improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education in Ethiopia. In addition, as the study outcome emphasizes improved instructional practices through the adoption of student-centred approach to teaching, students get insights on roles and responsibilities expected of them when learning is student-centred. The study also provides feedback for the policy makers and universities on the extent to which instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices are aligned with the existing policy of student-centred instruction. This information will help the policy makers and universities to put in place strategies for enhancing instructors' conceptions of teaching and for creating a supportive environment that enables instructors to translate innovative approaches into their teaching practices. The study also provides additional insights on the existing debate over the role of research on conceptions of teaching and the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. Last, but not least, the study serves as a resource material for researchers who are interested to conduct further studies in the area.

## **1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study focused on university instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in the light of the existing policy calls for the implementations of student-centred approach to teaching in higher education in Ethiopia. It was conducted in four Ethiopian universities two from the first generation (established) universities and two from among the second generation (emerging) universities. Practical reasons such as budget, time and dispersion of the universities made it difficult to include all universities in Ethiopia in the study. The four universities were selected mainly due to their

proximity to each other and to the work place of the researcher. The participants of the study were instructors and students chosen from two colleges of these universities; namely, College of Natural Sciences and College of Social Sciences. The two colleges were selected purposively with the assumption that teaching in all colleges in a particular university is more or less the same. Most importantly, since the two colleges represented hard and soft disciplines respectively, this gave the researcher the opportunity to examine the variation in conceptions of and approaches to teaching between instructors in the two colleges.

## **1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

This section provides the operational definition of key terms used in this study.

### **1.7.1 Approach to teaching**

Approach to teaching in this study refers to how instructors conduct teaching in a classroom context, i.e., the teaching strategies they use in their teaching practices. The approaches instructors adopt in their teaching are considered in this study as either teacher-centred/content-focused or student-centred/learning-focused based on Trigwell, Prosser and Taylor (1994:75-84). Teacher-centred/content-focused approach to teaching refers to a teaching approach that emphasizes knowledge transmission from instructors to students with the view that students are passive and have little to contribute to their learning. On the contrary, student-centred/learning-focused approach to teaching refers to a teaching approach that puts students at the centre of the teaching-learning process whereby the instructor facilitates active knowledge construction and application by students. In this study, the terms “student” and “learner” were interchangeable used to refer to a student enrolled in a university. In addition, the terms “teacher” and “instructor” were interchangeably used to refer to a teaching (academic) staff in a university though the former is commonly used in a school context in Ethiopia.

## **1.7.2 Conceptions of teaching**

Conceptions of teaching in this study refer to the ways in which university instructors understand and conceptualize teaching, which then act as a framework upon which they make decisions concerning what to teach and how to teach it (Devlin, 2006:112; Kember, 1997:273). Instructors' conceptions of teaching were broadly considered in this study as either teacher-centred/content-oriented or student-centred/learning-oriented based on Kember (1997:264).

## **1.7.3 Teaching practices**

Classroom (Teaching) practice in this study refers to what instructors actually do when they engage in teaching in a classroom context. Teaching practice describes instructors' "working" conceptions of teaching-what instructors actually do- in contrast to instructors' "ideal" conceptions of teaching-what instructors claim to do (Kane, Sandretto and Heath, 2002:184). Classroom practices were considered in this study as either teacher-centred/content-focused or student-centred/learning-focused.

## **1.8 THE DIVISION OF CHAPTERS**

The thesis is composed of five chapters:

### **CHAPTER 1**

This chapter deals with the overview and the background of the study. It outlines the context, the statement of the problem, the objectives and the research questions of the study. It also describes the significance and scope of the study. Definitions of terms pertinent to the study are also provided in this particular chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

Chapter two provides highlights of some theoretical and empirical literature applicable to the study. The chapter presents various concepts in teaching and learning including learning theories and approaches to teaching and learning. It also discusses the factors that influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching as one of approaches that may lead to quality learning outcomes but whose practical realities are not without challenges. This chapter also presents critical review of previous studies on conceptions of teaching and classroom practices and highlights the limitations in these studies and outlines the research gap the study fills. In addition, the chapter describes the conceptual framework of the study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

This chapter outlines the research methodology of the study. It explicates the research approach and design of the study, sample and the sampling techniques, instruments and procedures of data collection and analysis. It also elucidates the procedures pursued in seeking the informed consent of the participants of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4**

This chapter deals with the analysis the data, interpretation and discussion of the findings. It presents and discusses the findings in the light of the literature on effective teaching and learning in general and previous studies in particular.

## **CHAPTER 5**

This chapter deals the conclusions and recommendations of the study. It also presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

## **1.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter described the overview and the context of the study. The chapter briefly described the history of the Ethiopian education system that had been dominated by the traditional form of instruction in the past but currently emphasizes student-centred approach to teaching. The chapter also highlighted the attention given to improving the quality of teaching and learning at higher education in Ethiopia, considering it as a national strategy for addressing the development needs of the society and the country as a whole. In addition, the chapter provided evidence from the literature on the relationship between quality learning outcomes and the employment of student-centred approach to teaching. The objectives and the research questions of the study were also described in this chapter in the light of the developments in the education system in Ethiopia and the literature on effective teaching and learning. Among the study's significance outlined in this chapter is to serve as the feedback for the policy makers and universities so as to enable them to put in place strategies for enhancing instructors' conceptions of teaching and creating a supportive environment that enables instructors to translate innovative approaches into their teaching practices. Finally, the chapter provided the definitions of some of the key concepts used in the study. Building on this, the next chapter provides further theoretical and empirical literature on effective teaching and learning to corroborate the concepts and the ideas that guided the study.



# **CHAPTER TWO**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents theoretical and empirical literature related to the study. The chapter presents various concepts in teaching and learning including learning theories and approaches to teaching and learning. It also discusses the factors that influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching and the suggestions for curbing these factors. The chapter also presents a critical review of previous studies on conceptions of teaching and classroom practices and highlights the limitations in these studies and then outlines the research gap the study fills. In addition, it describes the conceptual framework of the study.

### **2.1 LEARNING THEORIES**

Jordan, Carlile and Stack (2008:1) contend that in general a theory provides practical insights which are useful to explain and corroborate practices. Likewise, learning theories are used to describe the process of learning and the conditions required for effective learning. As these theories are the outcomes of several years' experiences and systematic examination of facts, understanding of them helps instructors examine different views of learning and become aware of alternative views available in the field of education (Jordan et al, 2008:1). This understanding shapes instructors' thinking of learning and improves their understanding of how best students learn, which will eventually lead to better learning outcomes for students. The dominant theories of learning include: behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism. This section presents these theories and their practical implications for quality teaching and learning outcomes.

### **2.1.1 Behaviourism**

Behaviourism emerged in the 1920s and used to be a popular theory of learning until the 1950s. Its emergence was associated with the work of scholars such as Pavlov, Watson, Thorndike and Skinner. The Russian psychologist, Ivan Pavlov, is credited for the beginning of a behaviour theory based on his well-known experiment with dogs, which is known as classical conditioning. In his experiment, Pavlov demonstrated that dogs were able to salivate (response) after learning or associating a conditioned stimulus (e.g. the sound of the bell) with a primary stimulus (e.g. food). This led to the assumption that like that of animals, human behaviour can be explained based on S-R associations (Williams & Burden, 1997:8).

A modern behavioural approach to learning is associated with the work B.F Skinner who extended early behaviourist theories and introduced the principles of operant conditioning in which the organism or learner operates on the environment in a particular way due to a consequence which is either positive or negative (Tuckman & Monetti, 2011:233). According to Skinner, learning thus depends on elements in the environment and the learner's ability to elicit the desired behaviours as a response to these elements (Torenbeek, Jansen & Hofman, 2009:136; Williams & Burden, 1997:9). The desired behaviour is shaped through reinforcement or punishment, which increases or decreases the likelihood of that behaviour to occur. This means that learning happens when the instructor reinforces the desired behaviours and penalizes the undesired ones (Birzer, 2004:394). The learner will repeat the desired behaviour if positive reinforcement or motivation follows it and avoids the undesired behaviour if punishment or no motivation follows it. In general, behaviourists view learning as something that happens to the learner, with the learner being passive in the process of learning. Learning happens only when the learner elicits the desired behaviour in a measurable and observable manner. For behaviourists, it is the learner's actions but not emotions or thoughts which were the legitimate object of learning. The internal thought process of the learner was not considered as an aspect of learning (Birzer, 2004:394). What happens in the mind of the learner during the learning process was not considered with the assumption that it is neither observable nor measurable.

As one of the influential and popular theories in the past, some of the principles of behaviourism, particularly its rewarding or punishing mechanisms are still powerful in shaping human behaviour (Williams & Burden, 1997:12). However, current views on learning and instruction challenge behaviourism for a number of its limitations. One of these is that it emphasizes the traditional teacher-centred conception of teaching, which considers the learner as a black box who simply absorbs information from the instructor (Jordan et al, 2008:12; Torenbeek, et al 2009:136). The other limitation is its heavy emphasis on surface learning such as memorization and recalling of facts, which are more likely to discourage student creativity and innovation. According to Jordan et al (2008:34), a behaviourist approach may not be effective in a higher education, as it does not promote deep learning, which is associated with understanding and actively constructing meaning out of learning. Another problem with behaviourism is its total exclusion of the role of the mind in the learning process assuming that activities of the mind are difficult to observe and measure (Bruning, 1994:5).

### **2.1.2 Cognitivism**

Cognitivism emerged in the 1960s as a reaction to the limitations of behaviourism. The cognitive paradigm focused on mental structures and processes which were not considered by behaviourists who opted for emphasis on the observable and measurable behaviour (Bruning, 1994:3). As Semple (2000:23) state, many people believed that strict focus on observable behaviour at the expense of mental process is too limiting. This assumption led many to consider thinking as an object of study. This new assumption coincided with the advent of the computer in the 1960s, which was used both as a tool for exploring into human thinking processes and as a metaphor for the functioning of human mind, which is capable of receiving, processing, storing, and retrieving information as required. Supporting this, Birzer (2004:395) states, "*the human mind is not simply a passive exchange terminal system where the stimuli arrive and the appropriate response leaves*". Rather, the human mind enables the thinking person to actively process meaningful information as he/she learns. Meaningful learning, thus, occurs as the learner organizes, stores, and finds relationships between existing and new

information. The learner, therefore, is not passive in the learning process as behaviourists often thought, but is actively involved in the processing of information as required.

In a cognitive approach, learning is more effective and meaningful when the learner is exposed to well-organized and structured information and when learning takes into account students' prior knowledge. This means that information must fit to the existing knowledge structure if it is to be learnt. Thus, through making connections between the old and the new concepts, the learner builds more and more complex cognitive structures.

Cognitive learning theory has contributed some new useful insights to the field of education. One of these is the treatment of learners as rational beings who have learning goals and who can actively process meaningful information in learning rather than as programmed animals who simply respond to environmental stimuli. The theory of cognitivism also takes into account the learner's previous knowledge that helps learners make connections between the existing and the new concepts. The theory asserts that the learner does not begin learning as a tabula rasa but endowed with a capacity to learn a new experience linking it with the already existing experience. In addition, the approach emphasizes the form of learning, which is organized and structured for students to learn and process information easily. However, its heavy emphasis on lecturing (telling) approach, in which the teacher tells fixed/ structured knowledge to students makes it not as such different from the traditional instructor/content-focused approach to teaching (Birzer, 2004:395). The other limitation of the cognitive learning theory is that it views learning as something predetermined and predictable, and teaching as a matter of shaping the mind of students according to this blueprint (Fox, 1983: 154). However, learning is believed to be goal-oriented and happens as the learner engages with the world rather than passively accepting fixed or predetermined knowledge.

### **2.1.3 Constructivism**

Constructivism is believed to be a blend of multiple theories including cognitivism. According to Jordan et al (2008:55), cognitivism focuses on how students process information whereas constructivism focuses how students develop knowledge and

understanding based on this information. Constructivism maintains that knowledge is not a commodity that is transferred passively from an instructor to a learner; rather it is constructed and reconstructed by the active involvement of the learner in the learning process (Aypay, 2011:55).

The theories of Piaget and Vygotsky laid the foundations of constructivism (Aypay, 2011:21), leading to two perspectives of constructivism: cognitive and social constructivism. Cognitive or Piagetian constructivism views learning as knowledge construction and learners as active knowledge constructors in the process of learning. As Williams and Burden (1997:8) note, unlike the traditional views of learning which emphasize mere accumulation of predetermined facts and information, cognitive constructivism is guided by the assumption that individuals are actively involved in making sense of their world and experiences.

According to Piaget (1952:5), an individual adapts to constantly changing situations or experiences through the processes of accommodation and assimilation. Thus, if the experience is familiar, the individual assimilates or incorporates it into an already existing framework without losing the cognitive equilibrium. However, if the experience is a new one, cognitive disequilibrium results, and, thus, the individual adjusts the existing knowledge structure to accommodate the new experience, which leads to re-equilibrium. The implication of this perspective is that learning is dependent upon the existing knowledge structure upon which the learner attempts to build new experiences or knowledge or concepts. Therefore, the learner does not passively receive isolated facts from the instructor or from the text; rather, he/she actively constructs or reconstructs the existing cognitive structure to acquire new knowledge and understanding (Aypay, 2011:21; MacLellan & Soden, 2004:254, Mascolo, 2009:6).

The cognitive or Piagetian perspective of constructivism was later challenged for its strict emphasis on an individualistic approach to learning, failing to take into account the role of social interaction and culture in learning (Semple, 2000:24). Thus, the dissatisfaction with this perspective led to the emergence of another perspective of constructivism called social or "Vygotskian constructivism". This perspective emphasizes the role played by

the society and culture in learning more than the cognitive aspect of learning (Jordan et al, 2008:59). According to Vygotsky (1978:88), knowledge is socially constructed through interaction and discourse with others in the environment and is considered as a social process in which meaning is made dialogically.

Vygotsky asserted that social interaction plays a significant role in the process of cognitive development unlike Piaget who believed that cognitive development was dependent mainly on heredity (McMorrow, 2006:322). This perspective views learning as a social process, which happens due to the learners' interactions with fellow students and instructors and this is against the view that learning is due to cognitive development which follows biologically predetermined stages as theorized by Piaget. Vygotsky (1978: 86) also theorized that learning takes place in the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), which refers to "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*". According to Vygotsky, the actual development level defines all the activities the learner can perform on his/her own independently without the help of others whereas the level of potential development defines all the things that the learner cannot do alone as the functions for such things have not matured in the learner. These levels are determined through a problem that the learner can or cannot perform. So, if the learner can perform the problem independently, it shows the learner's actual development level whereas if he/she cannot perform it independently but only with the assistance of someone else, it shows the learner's potential development.

The zone of proximal development thus helps to define those functions which are not matured in the learner but in the process of maturation with the support of 'More Knowledgeable Others' (MKO) such as instructors and peers through a process called 'scaffolding' (McMorrow, 2006:322). This means, in order for the student to acquire new experience and knowledge, instructors or peers that are more knowledgeable should provide scaffolds for the learning experience. During the scaffolding process, the MKO acts as a facilitator who stimulates knowledge construction, not as an expert, so that students freely collaborate with others to construct new knowledge and understandings.

The scaffolding or the assistance can be withdrawn gradually when the students develop the required competence.

In general, compared to other theories, constructivism embracing both the cognitive and the social theories has valuable educational implication for the contemporary classrooms. This can be clearly observed from its important features as described by Torenbeek, Jansen & Hofman (2009:137). First, constructivism maintains that learners construct new knowledge drawing upon their pervious knowledge structures. This view is in sharp contrast to the traditional assumption that learners are *tabula rasa* and have very little knowledge to contribute to their own learning. The implication of this is that instructors should take into account learners' previous knowledge when making learning decisions (Mascolo, 2009:6). Second, constructivism asserts that learners should be encouraged to construct knowledge both individually as well as with others such as peers and instructors. This means that learning is dialogical and involves learners in interaction with others so that they learn how to give and take information from others. Third, constructivism establishes that learners should share responsibility for their learning in terms of goal setting, self-monitoring, self-assessment and feedback. In other words, they should not entirely be dependent on their instructors for their own educational processes; rather they should be encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning in terms of planning, managing and monitoring their learning. Finally, constructivism suggests that learning should be authentic or resemble real-life situations so that it stimulates learners' motivation for learning. This means learning is more motivating when it is purposeful and enables learners to deal with real-life problems.

Despite all these benefits, constructivism remains the espoused theory (ideal) more than the theory-in-use (practical) (Biggs, 1996:348). In other words, constructivism has become a popular theory in education; however, its practical applications are still far from this. This is particularly true in contexts where instructors suffer from teaching large classes, poor administrative support for teaching, centralized curricula, etc as in Ethiopian context. Nevertheless, if quality-learning outcomes are sought, constructivism seems to be the better choice. This is because students' learning is of a high quality when

they actively construct knowledge on their own rather than when knowledge is lectured to them by others.

## **2.2 APPROACHES TO LEARNING**

There is a growing literature on students' approach to learning, which refers to the intention, the learning processes, and the strategies students use in order to learn (Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven & Doch, 2010:244). Marton and Säljö (1976:4-11) were credited for their pioneering work on approaches students adopt towards learning. According to this and other subsequent studies such as Trigwell and Prosser (1991: 251), students approach their learning predominately in two qualitatively different ways: a surface approach and a deep approach to learning. This section briefly describes the two approaches and their implications for educational practice.

### **2.2.1 Surface approach to learning**

According to Trigwell and Prosser (1991: 251), a student's approach to learning is a surface approach when the student attempts to memorize the learning material in order to reproduce it as accurately as possible. As Marton and Säljö(1976:7 ) describe, such student has a "reproductive" conception of learning and a rote-learning strategy. Instead of attempting to understand the meaning of the learning material, the student relies on rote learning as a strategy for learning the material. The intention of the student when adopting this approach is instrumental or extrinsic such as passing examination with a minimum effort. As the student does not have the time or the interest to think and analyze the material learnt in detail, he/she memorizes the most important or selective elements in it in order to avoid failure and trouble as much as possible (Baeten et al, 2010:244; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991: 254). In using this approach, students focus on isolated facts, as a result, they are unable to understand the deep meaning and structure of the material taught.

Several factors encourage students to adopt this approach to learning. These include an intention to achieve a minimum requirement, which may arise due to lack of interest in the subject matter taught, insufficient time, too high a workload, anxiety, cynicism, boredom, difficulty to understand the content at a deep level and previous experiences in



using such an approach (Biggs & Tang, 2007:23; Ramsden, 2003:80). There are also factors that encourage students to adopt such an approach from the way instructors teach and assess students. Such instances include relying mainly on multiple-choice and short-answer tests, which encourage the assessment of memorized facts instead of understanding, providing insufficient time for students to read and understand the material learned, emphasizing content coverage at the expense of depth and providing poor or no feedback on progress (Biggs & Tang, 2007:23; Ramsden, 2003:80).

In general, a surface approach to learning is associated with low quality learning outcomes as it concentrates on low cognitive level activities characterized by memorization and rote learning without understanding the material learned as required (Biggs & Tang, 2007:22; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991: 263). As a result, the knowledge acquired in this way is soon forgotten before the student fully internalizes and applies it as required (Abel & Campbell, 2009: 4; Ramsden, 2003:60). As noted above, numerous factors compel students to adopt this approach from the student's side as well as from the instructor's. As Biggs and Tang (2007:24) also argue, students are less likely to adopt the intended approach under poor teaching conditions and therefore they suggest dealing with these factors as a first step to improving teaching. In this regard, instructors are thus primarily responsible to understand how students learn and encourage students to adopt the most effective approach to learning that helps them learn better.

### **2.2.2 Deep approach to learning**

According to Trigwell and Prosser (1991: 251), in a deep approach to learning, the student focuses on the meaning and content of the learning material rather than isolated facts and information as in the surface approach to learning. The student approaches the material taught not passively to rote learn it but actively to understand and make meaning out of it. Thus, the student uses high-level cognitive activities such seeking the underlying meaning of the material studied and relating it to what he/she already knows (Biggs & Tang, 2007:24). Students using such an approach have an intrinsic motivation to learn and have positive feelings towards themselves and the subject matter taught. Several factors encourage students to adopt a deep approach to learning, which include an intention to seek meaning out of learning and to approach it appropriately arising from

an intrinsic desire to do so, good background knowledge and the ability to focus on a deep level of learning (Biggs & Tang, 2007:24-25;Ramsden,2003:80).

There are also factors from the instructors' side that encourage students to adopt a deep approach to learning. These include teaching in a way that encourages depth of learning rather than breadth of coverage, making students active through questioning, presenting problems, rather than merely transmitting information, teaching based on students' prior knowledge, assessing understanding rather than isolated facts and creating a positive learning environment where students feel they can make mistakes and learn from them (Biggs & Tang, 2007:25).

In general, a deep approach to learning is highly associated with quality learning outcomes as it encourages understanding and applications of knowledge (Trigwell & Prosser, 1991: 263). Good teaching should thus encourage a deep approach as it leads to better learning outcomes rather than a surface approach which is a superficial approach leading to poorer outcomes( Ramsden,2003:84). As noted above, many factors encourage students to adopt a deep approach. Though these factors also depend on students, the instructor can do many things to encourage students to adopt a deep approach (Biggs & Tang, 2007:25). Research shows that instructors' adoption of student-centred approach to teaching encourages students to adopt a deep approach to learning whereas the adoption of an instructor-centred instruction encourages students to adopt a surface approach to learning (Trigwell, Prosser, &Waterhouse, 1999:66). Therefore, instructors should be encouraged to adopt a student-focused approach to teaching which will encourage students to adopt a deep approach towards their learning.

## **2.3 APPROACHES TO TEACHING**

As students' approach towards their learning varies, instructors' approach to teaching varies, too. Instructors' approach to teaching refers to the teaching practices/strategies instructors adopt in their teaching. Research reveals that the approaches instructors adopt in their teaching influence the approaches students adopt towards learning which will in turn influence their learning outcomes (Gow & Kember, 1993:20-33; Trigwell, Prosser,

&Waterhouse, 1999:66). Because of this, instructors are encouraged to adopt an appropriate approach to teaching that encourages students to adopt an approach that leads them to higher learning outcomes. Previous investigations generally categorize the approaches instructors adopt in their teaching into two broad categories: the instructor-focused/centred and student-focused/centred approach to teaching (Kember & Kwan 2000; Trigwell, Prosser & Taylor, 1994:75-84). In this section, these fundamental approaches and their implication for educational practice are discussed as follows.

### **2.3.1 Teacher-centred approach to teaching**

Instructor-centred instruction refers to a teaching strategy that focuses on the instructor as the main source of expertise and authority in the classroom (Mascolo, 2009:4). The approach entrusts the instructor to make all decisions of teaching and learning including what students should learn and how they should learn it. The instructor also takes the main responsibility for imparting knowledge of the subject matter to students. Based on this approach, teaching is, simply, the process whereby the instructor communicates fixed knowledge to students with little or no participation from the side of the students (Birzer, 2004:395). The goal of teaching is expounding facts and information to students while the goal of learning is accumulating these facts and information. The method of teaching emphasised by such an approach is characterized by the instructor using a lecture format as a primary means of communicating information to students (Mascolo, 2009:4).

Hancock, Bray and Nason (2002:366) describe the typical characteristics of instructor-centred instruction as follows:

The instructor (a) is the dominant leader who establishes and enforces rules in the classroom; (b) structures learning tasks and establishes the time and method for task completion; (c) states, explains and models the lesson objectives and actively maintains student on-task involvement; (d) responds to students through direct, right/wrong feedback, uses prompts and cues, and, if necessary, provides correct answers; (e) asks primarily direct, recall-recognition questions and few

inferential questions; (f) summarizes frequently during and at the conclusion of a lesson; and (g) signals transitions between lesson points and topic areas.

As this description clearly illustrates, instructor-centred instruction centres on the activities of the instructor at the expense of students, who are invisible at all in the teaching-learning process. The instructor is active from the beginning of the lesson till the end lecturing, demonstrating and explaining information to students while in any of these activities, student's role is passively waiting for instruction and direction from the instructor. In such classrooms, according to Cuban (1983, in Schuh, 2004:835), the seats are arranged in such a way that the instructor stands at the front and talks or lectures while students sit in rows, listen, watch and take notes as transmitted by the instructor. For instructors adopting this kind of approach, their responsibility is not more than knowing the subject matter well and transferring it clearly to students. If students fail to learn what they are expected to learn, it is not because of the problem with the teaching-learning process, but it is due to the student's capability, motivation and defects to learn for which the instructor does not take the blame and the responsibility to correct it (Biggs & Tang, 2007: 17).

Instructor-centred instruction is founded on the theories of behaviourism in which learning is considered as a passive process whereby the role of the learner is effortlessly to receive information from the instructor who is the architect of all the knowledge that a learner needs in order to learn. The instructor transmits fixed body of knowledge to the mind of the student without focusing on the individual learner's existing knowledge structures (Mascolo, 2009:6).

Instructor-centred approach to teaching has been criticized for its emphasis on the banking concept of education in which, according to Freire (1972:72), education becomes an act of depositing whereby the instructor becomes the depositor and the students are depositories. He states, "*Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat*" (Freire (1972:72)). Freire argues against this model stating that the banking concept of education is ineffective in that it considers students as objects and knowledge

as a commodity that is passed from instructor to students. In other words, according to Freire, the banking concept fails to consider students as rational beings who possess the ability to shape their learning through dialogue with others. Instructor-centred approach to teaching is also criticized as it leads to surface approach to learning that serves only the acquisition of lower order learning such as simple understanding and recalling of information.

### **2.3.2 Student-centred approach to teaching**

Student-focused approach to teaching entails a shift of focus from the instructor to students in contrast to the traditional instructor-centred approaches. The instructor is a facilitator of learning rather than the main source of expertise and authority in the classroom. McCombs and Whisler (1997, as cited in Kahl & Venette, 2010:179) describe student-centred learning as:

The perspective that couples a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners). This dual focus, then, informs and drives educational decision-making.

As can be deduced from the description above, student-centred approach to teaching centres on learners and their needs, experiences, backgrounds and capabilities more than the content of learning or what the instructor does in order to teach. The assumption is that learning is more meaningful when it draws on the learner's existing knowledge and experiences. It also entails a shift of focus from teaching (transmitting fixed knowledge to students) to learning (facilitating knowledge construction and conceptual change).

This approach to teaching also shifts instructional strategies from mainly lecturing to a more utilization of active learning methods. As Felder and Brent (1996:43) describe:

Student-centred instruction is a broad approach that includes substituting active learning for lectures, holding students responsible for their learning, and using self-paced and/or cooperative (team based) learning... assigning open-ended problems and those requiring critical or creative thinking, reflective writing exercises, and involving students in simulations and role-plays .

The description clearly shows that student-centred approach to teaching is an active learning approach in which students take control of their learning as opposed to the traditional teaching methods where students passively wait for the instructor to provide them with structured notes or handouts. The approach requires students to play an important role in their learning to the extent of making decisions regarding the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. According to Cuban (1983, in Schuh, 2004:836), the classroom environment in student-centred instruction encourages active learning whereby the student talks and asks questions equally or more than the instructor does and is characterized by smaller group discussions, varied instructional materials, students' taking part in making decisions about the content and structure of learning.

In its theoretical foundation, student-centred learning is deeply rooted in a constructivist theory of learning which is built on the perspective that learning is more meaningful when learners are engaged in creating new knowledge drawing upon their existing knowledge structure and through interaction with others (Mascolo, 2009:6). Constructivism also asserts that learning is more meaningful when the instructor is a facilitator of learning. This means, the instructor has to encourage students to discover or explore knowledge by themselves independently and with others. Supporting this, Mascolo (2009:7) suggests that a constructivist instructor has to abandon his/her role as the presenter or source of knowledge in the classroom.

In general, in student-centred classroom, the role of the instructor is more than the traditional lecturing and assessing of students. In addition to performing these responsibilities, the instructor is expected to create opportunities for students so that they take charge of their learning. This means, the instructor coaches while students make

efforts to construct knowledge independently and through interaction and dialogue with others. Reinforcing this, Attard, Di Iorio, Geven and Santa (2010:8) state, “*student-centred learning allows students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one*”. In a nutshell, student-centred learning entails active learning in which the focus of attention is on students as active participants in the learning process and this requires the role of the instructor to change from merely transmitting knowledge to students to supporting and guiding students in order to learn by their own (Van Eekelen, Boshuizen, & Vermunt, 2005:447).

To sum up, numerous studies suggest that the approaches instructors adopt in their teaching influence the approach students adopt towards their learning which will in turn influence their learning outcomes (Gow & Kember, 1993:20-33; Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999:66). For instance, Gow and Kember (1993:31) suggest that instructors’ adoption of transmission conception in teaching discourages students from adopting deep approaches to learning. Similarly, Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse’s (1999:66-68) study revealed that students whose instructors hold student-centred conceptions were more likely to develop a deep approach to learning than students whose instructors emphasize instructor-centred instruction. In the surface approach, students learn to mimic information for examination, whilst in the deep approach, they focus on meaning and understanding in their studies. Deep approach to learning represents the desired approach to learning and is more likely to help students develop deeper meanings and understandings of the subject matter they are studying in contrast to the surface approach to learning (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999:66-68). Therefore, instructors should be able to adopt effective approaches to teaching that will enable students to adopt effective approaches to learning, which will in turn lead to better learning outcomes for students.

## **2.4 TENETS OF STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES**

In her book, *Learner-Centred Teaching*, Weimer (2002:23-145) describes five key changes to practice when teaching becomes student-centred. Through critical reflection on her own teaching, Weimer observed that instructional practices in many classrooms including her own were extremely instructor-centred and were, therefore, against the interest of students. She described that classroom conditions featured instructor dominance and control over students irrespective of the impacts of such behaviour on student learning and motivation. She generally characterized students in this kind of classrooms as less empowered, anxious and unmotivated because of such ineffective instructional practices. Drawing upon this firsthand experience and her readings on effective teaching and learning, she suggested that instructional practice should change in five key ways in order to be student-centred. These are the balance of power in the classroom, the function of the course content, the role of the instructor, the responsibility for learning and the purpose and processes of evaluation.

### **2.4.1 The balance of power in the classroom**

Drawing on critical and feminist theories, Weimer (2002:8) argues that the power relation between instructors and students in the classroom significantly influences student motivation and their learning outcomes. Freire, in his theories of critical pedagogy which he developed as he taught illiterate peasants to read and write, asserted that education should be seen as *“the practice of freedom as opposed to education as the practice of domination”* (Freire, 1972:81). In other words, according to Freire, education is the means by which students participate in the transformation of the world rather than the means that facilitates the socialization of the student into the status quo or the culture of silence. This perspective of education supports the process of learning which involves active engagement of students in problem-solving activities through dialogue with the instructor and other students. It is in sharp contrast to the traditional views of education in which instructors are seen as authority figures and students are seen as passive objects to be filled with facts and information that will be reproduced on exams. As Weimer



(2002:9-10) notes, the feminist pedagogy is also against the traditional thinking of teaching as a means of reinforcing authoritarian instructional practices or power imbalance between students and instructors. Feminists assert that such a practice negatively influences student motivation and learning outcomes, especially for women (Weimer, 2002:9-10).

Drawing upon the feminist and critical theories, Weimer (2002:8) challenges the traditional power structures and authority in the today's classrooms and opts for the redistribution of this power. She asserts that in the traditional classrooms, the instructor has a bestowed authority to make all decisions about the course, which is exactly what students expect and want from their instructors. Hence, the instructor decides everything about learning and teaching processes including what to learn, when and how to learn it. The instructor also solely decides the forms of grading that determine the final scores of students. This approach, as Weimer (2002:23) argues, produces students who are anxious and disinterested in learning. However, when teaching becomes student-centred, she argues power is shared and resides neither with students nor with instructors. This means that instructors collaborate with students as facilitators of learning as opposed to dominators of learning, which does not mean that instructors do not make learning decisions. In student-centred classrooms, instructors still make important decisions but they make all these decisions in favour of students (Weimer, 2002:29). Students, therefore, do not passively wait for the instructor to make all decisions for them but they provide important inputs during the making of these decisions. This kind of power sharing benefits both students and instructors (Weimer, 2002:31). For students, when they are given the opportunity to express their ideas in the teaching-learning process, they exert maximum efforts into their learning, which will improve their learning outcomes. For the instructor, the fact that his/her students are eager to learn and willing to take responsibility for their own learning provides more motivation and satisfaction in teaching.

### **2.4.2 The function of the course content**

According to Weimer, the objective of teaching in traditional classrooms is just to cover the course content as the content of the course is an end in itself rather than a means to help students in their learning process. Instructors thus rush to cover the content, which students are expected to learn by heart and recall as fully as possible. This way of thinking influences students' approach to learning which in turn influences their learning outcomes leading to *“memorization rather than conceptualization, using a “binge and purge” approach to examinations”* (Wright, 2011:93).

By contrast, in student-centred classrooms, as Weimer (2002:51) notes, the content of the course is not everything in itself but serves as a means to learn how to learn. Therefore, the emphasis of the instructor is not whether to cover the content or not but rather to help students use the course content as an input to acquire more knowledge and skills in learning. The assumption is that instructors cannot teach everything that students need to learn. Rather, they use the content as an opportunity to develop students' confidence, critical thinking and repertoire of strategies to learn on their own (Weimer, 2002:51).

### **2.4.3 The role of the instructor**

In the instructor-centred instruction, the instructor is at the centre of learning and responsible for everything including lecturing, grading and managing students, whose main role is to passively receive and assimilate information (Felder & Brent, 1996:43). In such classrooms, students expect their instructor to provide them with everything they need to learn without spending any effort of their own. The consequence of this kind of learning is that having adapted to this kind of teaching, such students will become reluctant when the instructor wants to involve and engage them in the teaching-learning process. However, as Weimer (2002:74) illustrates, in student-centred classrooms, the role of the instructor changes from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side” or “fellow traveller” who helps students in their intellectual development and change. In such classrooms, the instructor plays a facilitative role and creates opportunities for students to learn independently drawing on their prior experiences and through

interaction with one another. The instructor does not dominate but collaborates with students to determine what to learn and how to learn it effectively. Instructors still play a very crucial role in student-centred classes as they do in any other classes. In different words, student-centred approach neither lessens instructors' role in teaching nor overburdens students, which is a common misconception among others. Supporting this, Weimer (2002:14-15) has the following to say:

They {Instructors} will lecture less and be much more around the classroom than in front of it. There is no sense in any of the literature that I read that this is a diminished, less essential role. Learner-centred teachers make essential contributions to the learning process. However, they are significantly different from those contributions most teachers currently make.

#### **2.4.4 The responsibility for learning**

In most classrooms, students take for granted that they are incapable of making any significant contributions to their learning. They consider themselves incapable to function properly without the instructors' guidance and control over them. As a result, they look for easy way out and heavily depend on their instructors for everything concerning their learning (Weimer, 2002:95). Such students prefer those instructors who provide lecture notes /handouts to those instructors who provide reading assignments and quizzes. In contrast, in student-centred learning, students' thinking is expected to change, as they are required to share responsibility for their learning (Weimer, 2002:95). As student-centred classroom emphasizes active learning, students with the assistance of their instructors take control of their learning endeavours. Dewey also (1933:140) argues *“Since learning is something that the pupil has to do himself and for himself, the initiative lies with the learner. The teacher is a guide and director; he steers the boat but the energy that propels it must come from those who are learning.”*

Dewey supports the approach to learning in which the learner takes charge of his/her learning rather than passively waiting for the instructor to tell him/her everything. The learner should also be able to take the responsibility for assessing his/her own progresses and that of his/her peers (Wright, 2010:95). Strengthening this, Van Eekelen, Boshuizen,

and Vermunt (2005:451) note, in student-centred learning environment, “*learners should not only have the ability to prepare and take the necessary steps in order to learn, but also have to take care of their own monitoring, motivation and feedback process during and after learning*”.

#### **2.4.5 The purpose and processes of evaluation**

Assessment practices often influence teaching. This is because students like to learn in a way they will be evaluated on a course. For example, if the purpose of evaluation is just to give final grades as in the traditional classrooms, students end up learning to get grades. As grades are so important, students focus more on memorization and recalling of facts than making efforts to understand and apply the concepts taught. This practice, thus, affects the amount and the quality of learning and ends up in lower-order learning at the expense of higher-order thinking skills, which should have been the goal of learning. Therefore, if the goal is to obtain quality learning, the purpose and the process evaluation has to change (Weimer, 2002:119).

As Weimer (2002:119) points out, in student-centred classrooms, the focus centres on learning more than teaching. As a result, the purpose of evaluation shifts from final grades to promoting learning. This does not mean that grades are not important but they are aspects of learning rather than ends of learning. In addition, the processes of evaluation shift from mainly a summative form of evaluation to formative assessment, which is an ongoing process whereby instructors and students collaboratively evaluate learning together. In this process, students learn to assess their own progress and that of their peers. This means a variety of tools such as the use of self- and peer-assessments, journal entries, presentations and portfolios are used to assess learning along with the conventional quizzes and tests. This process of evaluation minimizes test anxiety and cheating, which are the prominent features of the traditional assessment practices (Weimer, 2002:121-122). In other words, such an approach to evaluation produces positive outcomes in terms of learner motivation and satisfaction in their learning.

## **2.5 IMPEDIMENTS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT CENTRED INSTRUCTION**

Student-centred approach to teaching has strong support in the literature. As discussed in the preceding sections, the approach is often associated with high quality learning outcomes characterized by better learning and in-depth understanding of the subject of the study. However, despite its popularity, its practical realities are not without challenges which many writers characterize as natural and inevitable (Felder & Brent, 1996:43; Mascolo, 2009:3; Weimer, 2002:149). Supporting this, Johnson, Kimball, Melendez, Myers, Rhea and Travis (2009:147) reiterate that resistance is common and anticipated from multiple sources when change is introduced in a well-established routine. This means in the context where an instructor-centred approach to teaching is a tradition as in an Ethiopian context, implementation of a new approach is not smooth and straightforward. This is because as Felder and Brent (1996:43) illustrate, *“It’s not that student-centred instruction doesn’t work when done correctly-it does, as both the literature and our personal experience . . . richly attest. The problem is that although the promised benefits are real, they are neither immediate nor automatic”*. This means change happens gradually and systematically with the commitment of all the concerned. This section discusses three main sources of resistance/challenge in the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching: students, instructors and administration.

### **2.5.1 Student factors**

Student-centred approach requires students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Their role shifts from passively waiting for the instructor to provide them with knowledge to actively constructing knowledge by their own. In such an approach, students are expected to actively participate in class discussions, assess their own learning and do various forms of assignments including reading. During this time, students may find this way of learning completely different from their previous experience, which is sitting in class and receiving lectures from instructors effortlessly. Thus, they will consider the new experience as frustrating, demanding, threatening and unfamiliar, a situation that leads students to resist learning in this way. Supporting this,

Felder and Brent (1996: 42) state, “*When confronted with a need to take more responsibility for their own learning, students may grouse that they are paying tuition-to be taught, not to teach themselves*”. This is because students know from their prior learning experience that their role is to learn from the instructor who they consider responsible for such a job rather than attempting to teach themselves. That is, students expect their instructors to give them everything they need to learn effortlessly and they will be frustrated when this tradition is broken (Felder & Brent, 1996:43). As Fox (1983:160) further reveals students may consider active learning as “*a waste of time because they know that the information transferred in such procedures can be transferred much more rapidly in lectures and duplicated notes*”. This phenomenon leads students to resist openly or passively showing their preference to the way things used to be (Weimer, 2002:149). They may openly resist doing group work or taking reading assignment by providing pretexts such as lack of time, reference materials, etc. They may also become passive and refuse to participate in class discussions seeing it as a waste of time to do so. Such problems should be carefully approached; otherwise, they may frustrate and lead the instructor to teach in the way students prefer to learn (Fox, 1983:160).

### **2.5.2 Instructor factors**

In student-centred classrooms, the instructors’ role is not merely providing a well – structured lectures to students as “a sage on the stage”. Rather, they are expected to execute more sophisticated tasks of guiding and facilitating learners in their learning. As a result, instructors may find this new role as demanding and threatening as it is on students. As Weimer (2002:162) comments, student-centred approach to teaching may test the self-confidence of instructors as it requires them to assume new and unfamiliar position in their teaching. They are expected to be not only an expert in the subject matter but also an expert in facilitating learning in their classes (Johnson et al., 2009:148). Instructors may also feel awkward and frustrated when they find that their students are hostile towards student-centred learning, especially at the initial stage. As a result, they may be tempted to give up using the approach. However, according to Felder and Brent (1996:43), “*giving up is a mistake*”, rather instructors should be patient

enough until students understand the benefits of the new experience. This means instructors should be able to respond to student resistance to a new experience in a very constructive way.

### **2.5.3 Administration factors**

As described by Johnson et al. (2009:148), administration refers to *“those personnel, policies and procedures that are currently in place in a department or school {university} that establish and govern the process and direction of education”*. Resistance from students and instructors imply active resistance to change, but resistance from the administration is an indirect but an important one. In other words, for students and instructors to accept the change, institutional environment should be conducive. A good example of administrative resistance to change is in the area of curriculum or syllabus design (Johnson et al., 2009:148). If the course/curriculum is traditionally designed, it may contain many different topics to cover. As a result, instructors struggle to cover the content and have very limited time to involve students in active learning exercises. Because of this, teaching becomes content-oriented than student-focused. Another example of administration resistance to change is the lack of training opportunities for instructors (Johnson et al., 2009:148). Many instructors try to implement new methods in their teaching but they fail not because they are resistant to change but because they are not well prepared for the new experience. Furthermore, classroom conditions such as class size, sitting arrangement and availability of resources may exert their influence on instructors' implementation of a student-focused approach to teaching.

## **2.6 DEALING WITH THE PRACTICAL REALITIES OF STUDENT-CENTRED INSTRUCTION**

Resistance to a new approach is natural but what matters is to understand the nature and the sources of the resistance and to find ways to help those facing challenges with the approach. Fox (1983: 160) claims that instructors, students and academic departments may differ in their viewpoints concerning the process of teaching and learning. He states that the differences should be reconciled systematically before they lead to frustration and disappointment. In view of this, Johnson et al. (2009:149) suggest the following for overcoming possible resistances to change to student-centred approach to teaching.

### **2.6.1 Creating a supportive environment for students**

Students normally resist to anything that conflicts with their previous learning experience if they are not convinced and prepared for such a situation. This implies that a supportive environment for students is required for helping them adopt the non-traditional teaching techniques. They need support until they understand the rewards attached with taking responsibility for their own learning. The best approach for doing this, as Weimer (2002:157-158) notes, is through the instructor involving students in open and free discussion. Students need to be convinced and told regularly about the benefits they get from student-centred approach to teaching. Students should know how the method works and what merits they gain if they learn in this way. Their attempts to take responsibility for their own learning should also be rewarded by instructors. Instructors should be able to provide students constructive feedback and suggest solutions when they fail to perform tasks well. They should not be ridiculed for making mistakes. As Felder and Brent (1996:44) pinpoint, students will perform as required and take responsibility for their own learning if their instructors give them appropriate support and guidance.



## **2.6.2 Creating a supportive environment for instructors**

A supportive environment for instructors is necessary as for students for helping instructors adopt student-centred approach in their teaching. To establish this supportive environment, Johnson et al. (2009: 149) suggest collegial sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges among instructors. Instructors gain a lot if they formally or informally talk with their colleagues regarding their classroom experiences of using student-centred learning techniques in their teaching. This is because the challenge for one instructor could be a success for the other and vice versa. By doing so, instructors can support each other in dealing with their frustrations in adopting a new teaching experience in their classroom. Instructors may also visit each other's classes and provide supportive feedback for each other. Training is also suggested as another important element of supporting instructors who wish to teach in a non-traditional style. Johnson et al. (2009: 149) state that instructors should first internalize the new approach if they desire to adopt it. This means they should understand their new roles and expectations very well as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of the new approach in their context. As Kahl and Venette (2010:179-180) also argue, instructors teach the way they were taught, therefore, it is unfair and unrealistic to expect them to implement student-centred learning in their classes without providing them proper training on the approach. Training is particularly important in contexts such as Ethiopia where subject specialists are assigned to teach in higher education without having the proper background in teaching. Otherwise, they are likely to teach the way they were taught, which is often a content-based lecturing strategy of teaching.

## **2.6.3 Administrative and physical infrastructure**

The administration should be able to provide the necessary support for instructors and students so that they can effectively implement the new approach as required. Most importantly, the administration, as Johnson et al. (2009: 150) note, should primarily be willing to adopt new ideas and encourage instructors to adopt the change in their classroom context. In addition, the physical infrastructure should also be conducive for

the change. For example, the classroom conditions should be reconfigured to suit to the change (Johnson et al., 2009:151). A good instance of this is replacing desks by seats, which are movable and conducive for cooperative learning. Another way of doing this is minimizing the number of students in class so that it becomes optimal for active learning. Research also reveals that instructors are more likely to adopt student-centred teaching approach if they perceive that their class sizes are not too large and departmental support for teaching is rewarding (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997:25).

In general, if applied properly, student-centred approach has rewards for both students and instructors. It leads to better understanding of the subject of study and high motivation to learn on the part of students. It is also the source of motivation and satisfaction for instructors as students develop a great sense of responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, as Felder and Brent (1996:43) note, *“Student-centred instruction may impose steep learning curves on everyone involved... The key is to understand how the process works, take some precautionary steps to smooth out the bumps, and wait out the inevitable setbacks until the payoffs start emerging”*.

## **2.7 REVIEW OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING**

Numerous studies exist on conceptions of teaching and their associated impacts on classroom practices. These studies are critically reviewed in this section though they are scanty in Ethiopian context.

### **2.7.1 Studies on conceptions of teaching**

Different writers used different terminologies to describe how instructors experience and conceptualize teaching, including orientations, conceptions, beliefs, perspectives, metaphors, propositions and intentions. The most commonly used terminology among these is conceptions of teaching (Kember, 1997:256). Thompson (1993:130) also establishes conceptions of teaching as a more comprehensive term that encompasses

beliefs, mental images, propositions, actions, intentions, preferences and the like. Conceptions, according to Pratt (1992:204), are:

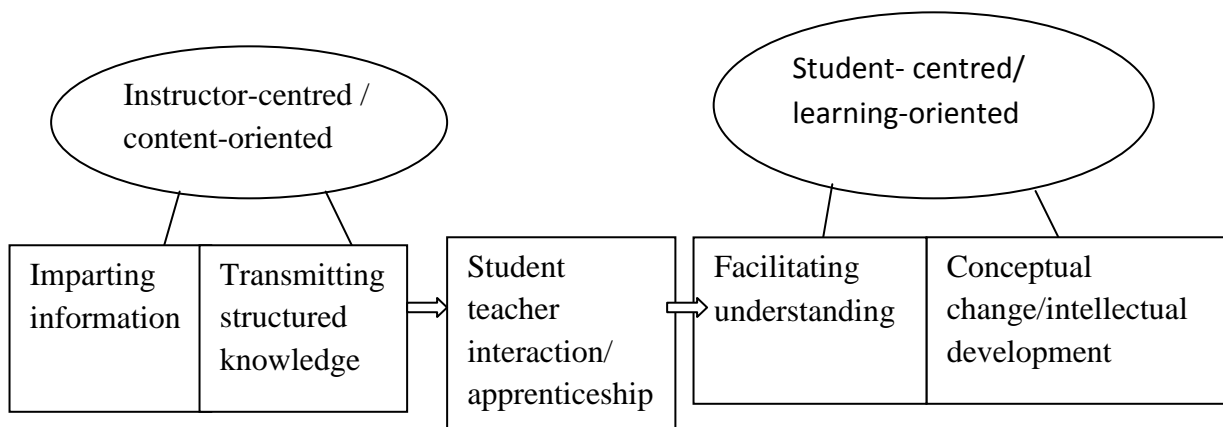
Specific meanings attached to phenomena which then mediate our response to situations involving those phenomena. We form conceptions of virtually every aspect of our perceived world, and in so doing, use those abstract representations to delimit something from, and relate it to, other aspects of our world. In effect, we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world.

According to this definition, conceptions are meanings ascribed to our perceptions and experiences of something and serve as the lenses through which we interpret and conceptualize of any aspect of the world around us. From this, conceptions of teaching can be inferred as specific meanings instructors use to describe and interpret their experiences of teaching, which then act as a framework through which they make teaching decisions, actions and behaviours (Devlin, 2006:112; Kember, 1997:273). Conceptions are also considered as the beliefs held by instructors about teaching (Kember, 1997:273) and serve as the foundation for decisions they make in their teaching practices such as the purpose and the strategies of teaching (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008:110; Virtanen & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2010:356).

In the past few years, numerous studies were conducted on conceptions of teaching and their associated impacts on approaches to teaching and quality learning outcomes. Kember (1997:255-275) reviewed 13 of these studies, which were conducted from 1983 to 1995, to discover how conceptions of teaching were categorized in these investigations. For his synthesis of these studies, Kember developed five dimensions of teaching against which he asserted teachers constructed their conceptions of teaching. These are (a) the essence of learning and teaching, (b) the roles of student and instructor, (c) the aims and expected outcome of teaching, (d) the content of teaching and (f) the preferred styles and approaches to teaching. Based on this, Kember asserted that in all the studies reviewed views of teaching in each dimension ranged from more instructor-centred to more student-centred. From this, he claimed that there is a high level of

commonality in the way the studies categorized conceptions of teaching regardless of the terminological differences they used to describe and label conceptions of teaching. He explained that, in the studies reviewed, conceptions of teaching are generally categorized on a continuum ranging from more instructor-centred/content-oriented conception to more student-centred/learning-oriented conception.

Based on his review of these studies, Kember reconceptualised a multiple-level categorization model of conceptions of teaching as depicted in Figure 2.1 below. The model has two higher-level orientations, each having two lower-level conceptions. Further, the model has a transitional category that serves as a link between the two major categories and their associated subordinates.



**Figure 2.1: A multiple-level categorization model of conceptions of teaching (Kember, 1997: 264)**

According to this model, a content-oriented/ instructor-centred conception of teaching represents the traditional view of teaching in which knowledge is predetermined by instructors or textbook writers. This conception of teaching emphasizes instructor-focused teaching strategies that encourage a process of transmitting knowledge from instructors to students, with little or no interaction between students and instructors. For an instructor holding this conception of teaching, what matters is knowledge of the subject matter and the way to impart it to students (Devlin, 2006:113). The underlying assumption is that students have no prior knowledge of the subject they study and therefore are incapable to be active in the learning process (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999:59). Their role is thus limited to accumulating information needed for

examinations. If the learning outcomes (examination results) are unsatisfactory, it is assumed that it is students' failure to learn (Gao & Watkins, 2002:71).

The instructor-centred/content-oriented orientation of teaching comprises two lower level conceptions. These are imparting information and transmitting structured knowledge. According to Kember (1997:265), imparting information represents the most teacher-centred conception and views teaching as merely passing information about the discipline to students. Students are viewed in this category as passive objects who receive whatever knowledge and skills poured to them. Similarly, the second conception which is transmitting structured knowledge views teaching as transmitting knowledge to students but instructors' holding this kind of conception aim at helping students acquire the concepts of the discipline more than merely transmitting information. The instructor structures and presents the information taught in a way that is easy for students to acquire it. However, in both conceptions, students' prior knowledge and active involvement in learning are not considered important in the teaching-learning process.

The other higher-level orientation, according to Kember's (1997) categorization, is student/learning-centred conception. This conception of teaching reflects the constructivist views of teaching and learning which is student-centred and which emphasizes self-responsible learning and active knowledge construction by students. For an instructor holding this conception what matters is what students do in order to learn more than what he/she is doing or covering (Trigwell, Prosser, & Waterhouse, 1999:58). The instructor's role is to facilitate and encourage knowledge construction and conceptual change. Students construct and reconstruct knowledge individually and through interaction and discussion with others. Their prior knowledge is also taken into account in the teaching-learning process.

Like the traditional conception of teaching, the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching comprises two lower-level conceptions: facilitating understanding and conceptual change/intellectual development. The first conception views that learning is student-focused and the role of the teacher is to create the conditions under which students are encouraged to learn. As Kember (1997:267) states, instructors who

hold this conception recognize students “*as individuals rather than as an audience to be lectured*”. Therefore, the outcome of teaching is measured in terms of the extent the students understand and apply the concepts taught rather than memorizing them.

The other conception, which is termed as conceptual change/intellectual development, is assumed as the most advanced conception of teaching. It views teaching as changing students’ existing conceptions or knowledge of the subject matter. Students are therefore expected to reconstruct their existing knowledge structure to produce new knowledge and understandings. As Kember (1997:268) explains, this conception of teaching is not easy to achieve, especially at the undergraduate level though it does not mean that it is unachievable at this level.

Kember (1997:266) further added one lower-level conception, which he labelled as student-teacher interaction to serve as a transitional category between the two major categories. In this category, the instructor is in control of what students learn but utilizes learning activities that encourage students to think when they learn. In addition, this conception of teaching recognizes the importance of interaction between teacher and student.

In general, numerous studies on conceptions of teaching suggest that quality learning is dependent on the existence of student-centred conception of teaching. The implication is that it is very rewarding to change instructors’ conceptions of teaching to bring about quality teaching which leads to quality student learning outcomes. Varnava-Marouchou (2011:128) suggests that significant changes in the quality of university teaching are less likely to happen without changes to instructors’ conceptions of teaching. Kember (2009) also suggests that instructors often resist employing student-centred learning and teaching mainly because of the conceptions they hold towards teaching.

Based on this, changing how instructors conceptualize teaching has been suggested as a prerequisite to bring changes in teaching practices and student learning (Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b:282; Varnava-Marouchou, 2011:128; Kember & Kwan, 2000:487). Trigwell and Prosser (1996b:282) on their part strongly assert that conceptualisation is a

prerequisite for good teaching practices. Therefore, they suggest the design and implementation of faculty development programs that help instructors interrogate their conceptions of teaching more than those that emphasize on changing instructors' teaching strategies. This does not mean that changing instructors' approaches to teaching is not important but it means that changing instructors' conceptions of teaching should be given a special focus and priority in all teaching development and improvement efforts. Supporting this, Windschitl (2002:143) argues "*Without such change as a priority, efforts directed at teacher development become narrowly focused on changing the kinds of attributes and skills that may be added to, subtracted from, or modified.*"

### **2.7.2 Studies on the relationship between conceptions of teaching and classroom practices**

Numerous studies report consistent relationships between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their classroom practices (e.g., Gow & Kember, 1993:20-33; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b:281; Kember & Kwan, 2000:285). These studies reveal that instructors adopt teaching strategies, which are in line with their conceptions of teaching.

For instance, in Kember and Kwan's (2000:485) study, there was consistency between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. They found that eight out of the nine instructors categorized into the traditional conceptions of teaching adopted instructor-centred/content-oriented approach to teaching while seven out of the eight instructors who viewed teaching as learning facilitation adopted student-centred/learning-oriented approach to teaching. What distinguishes student-centred instructors from the traditional ones is according to Kember & Kwan( 2000:486) is that "*they encourage students to discover knowledge on their own, deal with the needs of individual students, employ a more flexible system of assessment, make conscious attempt to remediate the weaknesses of their students, and respect and make good use of the students' experience in their teaching*".

Similarly, Gow and Kember (1993:20-33), in their study on 39 university teachers, suggested that teachers' conceptions of teaching are more likely to influence their

teaching practices. They asserted that teachers' orientations of teaching will influence their methods of teaching and assessment and the nature of learning tasks they design. Their study suggests that the course design and the teaching methods are more teacher-focused in departments where teachers have the knowledge transmission orientation unlike in departments where teachers have the learning facilitation orientation.

Furthermore, Kember, Kwan, and Ledesma (2001:393-404) interviewed 17 lecturers about their conceptions of good teaching and the methods and strategies they employed in teaching adults and full-time students. They discovered that though the teachers perceived the distinctions between adults and full-time students, they differed over how they accommodated the weaknesses and strengths of adult learners in their teaching due to their differences in conceptions of teaching they held. They suggested that those teachers holding a facilitative conception of teaching are more effective in trying to remediate the weaknesses of their students. Following these findings, Kember, Kwan, and Ledesma (2001:403) concluded *that "Attempts to influence the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes, therefore, need to be at least cognizant of the teachers' conceptions of teaching"*.

Likewise, Trigwell and Prosser (1996b:275-284) in their interviews with 24 science teachers reported strong relations between their conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. They suggested that teachers whose conceptions are more developed viewed teaching and learning differently from those teachers whose conceptions are undeveloped. They discovered that the teaching methods adopted by those lecturers whose conceptions of teaching are information transmission are teacher-centred whereas the methods of teaching of those instructors whose conceptions of teaching are helping students to develop or change their understanding of the subject matter are student-centred.



### **2.7.3 Studies reporting inconsistency between conceptions of teaching and classroom practices**

In contrast to the studies reviewed above, some studies claim that instructors' classroom practices might not be always consistent with their conceptions of teaching. For instance, Kember and Kwan (2000: 487) argued that conceptions are deep-seated beliefs about teaching; thus, instructors normally adopt the approach that is consistent with these beliefs. Nevertheless, they suggested that instructors could be constrained by contextual variables that might deter them from operationalizing their ideal conceptions of teaching (Kember & Kwan, 2000:487). They suggested that factors such as lack of supportive environment, subject and nature of students taught might influence the approaches that instructors adopt in their teaching.

Similarly, a study by Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi and Ashwin (2006: 294) implies that teaching practices could be influenced by instructors' discipline and the teaching contexts. Their findings showed that instructors from soft disciplines (Social Sciences) were more likely to report a more student-focused teaching approach than did instructors from hard disciplines (Natural Sciences). As a result, they implied that instructors might fail to implement student-focused approach to teaching because of the nature of their discipline and contextual factors. Likewise, in their study on teachers' perceptions of their teaching environment, Prosser and Trigwell (1997:33) found that there are strong relationships between teachers' perceptions of their teaching context and the approaches they are likely to adopt in their teaching. They suggested that teachers are unlikely to adopt student-focused approach to teaching if they perceive that their class sizes are too large, if there is no departmental support for teaching and if they have no control over what and how they teach. The implication is that student-centred approach to teaching is more context sensitive than instructor-centred approach. This means instructors are more likely to adopt student-centred approach to teaching when they see that the context of their teaching is convenient and rewarding. Otherwise, they are more likely to revert to the conventional approach to teaching.

In general, from the studies described above, the consistency or the inconsistency between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their classroom practices are not clear-cut. On the one hand, there are studies that suggest instructors are more likely to adopt an

approach to teaching which is consistent with their deep-seated beliefs/conceptions. On the other hand, there are also studies that reveal that instructors' approaches to teaching are highly influenced by their perceptions of their teaching context even if their conceptions of teaching are changed. Therefore, the inconsistency between these studies certainly warrants further research into the matter so that the findings could be either replicated or refuted. Some of the studies reviewed here also suggest the need for additional research to illuminate these contradictory findings (e.g., Lindblom-Ylänne et al, 2006: 295).

#### **2.7.4 Local studies on conceptions of teaching and classroom practices**

Research suggests that instructors' conceptions of teaching influence the forms of teaching they adopt in their teaching which will in turn influence the approaches students adopt towards their learning (Varnava-Marouchou, 2011:128; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b:281). There is also evidence that shows that teaching improvement depends on the existence of student- centred conception of teaching (Parpala & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2007:355; Varnava-Marouchou, 2011:127).

Nevertheless, given the importance of research on conceptions of teaching held by instructors, studies that succinctly describe the conceptions of teaching held by instructors and the relationship between their conceptions and the forms of teaching adopted by instructors in Ethiopian context are either scanty or non-existent. One exception to this is Zerihun, Beishuizen and Willem's (2011) study, which assessed the impacts of conceptions of teaching and learning on the evaluation of teaching quality. The study examined students' and instructors' approaches to teaching and learning and their conceptions of teaching in two Ethiopian universities. Their findings suggest that both students' and instructors' conceptions and practices of teaching and learning reflect the traditional instructor-centred mode of instruction. These researchers are also critical of the Instructor Evaluation Questionnaires used in Ethiopian universities as a means of evaluating teaching quality claiming that the existing questionnaire format was designed in a traditional way that focuses on instructors or instructors' effectiveness more than student learning. They argue that the questionnaire should be designed in such a way that its content reflects the student-centred conception of teaching and learning.

Zerihun, Beishuizen and Willem's (2011) investigation is different from this study in a number of ways. First, the purpose of their study appears to be mainly to appraise the system of evaluation used to evaluate teaching quality in higher education in Ethiopia. Secondly, their investigation relied mainly on a questionnaire to explore into students' and instructors' conceptions and practices in teaching and learning and the impacts on the evaluation of teaching quality. The outcome of their study would have been more valid and reliable had they used more reliable methods such as interviews for the purpose of exploring conceptions of teaching and classroom observations for the systematic understanding of teaching practices in the universities studied. Therefore, the conclusions drawn in their study regarding the conceptions of teaching held by instructors and the practices of teaching in Ethiopian universities are likely to raise some concerns given the limitation of the study in its methodology. The study also fails to explain why teaching and learning in Ethiopian higher institutions are still traditional. As a result, actions to intervene into such situations are not sufficiently suggested.

Conversely, a significant body of research exists in relation to the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching/active learning in Ethiopia. Many of these studies were conducted for study requirements at a postgraduate level for either master's or doctoral degrees. Among these studies are Tirualem (2003), Taye (2008) and Birhanu (2010) which are more relevant to this study. Taye (2008) investigated students' and instructors' perceptions and practices of active learning in Dilla University. The findings of his study revealed that students and instructors have positive perceptions towards active learning but their practices of active learning were low. The study suggests that the effective implementation of active learning was impeded by a lot of factors including instructors' and students' heavy reliance on lecture method, lack of students' interest, shortage of time, lack of instructional material and large class size. Likewise, Tirualem (2003) explored the implementation of student-centred methodology in primary schools. The findings reveal that student-centred instructions are not being implemented in schools studied. Tirualem concludes that though the teachers in these schools have positive views towards student-centred approach, they lack the necessary skills and support for applying the approach in their classrooms.

More recently, Birhanu (2010), in his doctoral thesis, explored the extent active learning approaches were implemented in mathematics classes in four Ethiopian universities in Oromia Regional State. Unlike Tirualem's (2003) and Taye's (2008) studies, Birhanu's study reveals that university lecturers have negative attitude towards active learning. However, like the above studies, his finding reveals that the utilization of active learning approaches was low. His study suggests that university lecturer's attitude towards active learning, lack of resources, the nature of the curriculum and lack of training and support impeded the effective implementation of active learning approaches in the universities studied.

An exception to the above studies is Derebssa's (2006:123-140) study, which is an article published in an international journal. In his study, Derebssa explored the extent to which innovative approaches to teaching and learning are employed under the Ethiopian tradition of teaching at primary schools. He discovered that although the education policy of Ethiopia emphasizes the employment of innovative approaches to teaching in primary schools, paradoxically the traditional lecture methods in which teachers talk and students listen dominate most Ethiopian elementary classrooms. The study further revealed that the Ethiopian tradition of teaching and child upbringing, lack of proper resources, teachers' lack of expertise, inappropriate curriculum materials and students' lack of prior experience in active learning have become obstacles in the employment of the innovative approaches to teaching in Ethiopian elementary schools.

These studies provide useful insights concerning the extent innovative approaches to teaching and learning are being implemented in Ethiopian context in general and university context in particular. They also provide useful information regarding the constraints to the implementation of student-centred approach as demanded. However, their limitation is that they examined the implementation of active learning (student-centred approach) without first examining whether the conceptions of teaching held by instructors is student-centred or not. They all blame instructors for failing to implement the approach demanded by the government without systematically studying why instructors teach the way they do. Thus, the need for research that systematically

examines instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in Ethiopian context has prompted this investigation. Such investigation is important to expose the factors that encourage or discourage the consistency between instructors' 'ideal' conceptions of teaching (espoused theories) and 'working' conceptions of teaching (theories-in-use) (Kane, Sandretto and Heath, 2002:184). More information concerning the research gap that the study envisaged to fill is provided in the next section.

## **2.8 RESEARCH GAP**

As reviewed in the preceding section, numerous studies exist on instructors' conceptions of teaching and their associated impacts on approaches to teaching and quality learning outcomes. Most of these studies were qualitative and interview-based investigations (e.g., Trigwell, Prosser, & Taylor, 1994; Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994; Fox, 1983; Pratt, 1992, Trigwell and Prosser (1996b) Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994; Kember, Kwan, & Ledesma, 2001; Kember and Kwan, 2000).

The recent investigations have also integrated quantitative approaches into their studies. In these studies, attempt was made to develop quantitative instruments mainly a questionnaire drawing upon qualitative findings. For instance, Gow and Kember (1993:20-33) first interviewed 39 instructors about their conceptions of teaching and then surveyed 170 instructors drawing upon their interview results. Likewise, based on their qualitative findings on 24 science instructors, Trigwell and Prosser (1996a) developed Approaches to Teaching Inventory (ATI), which has been widely used in various contexts as an instrument for measuring instructors' approaches to teaching. These studies suggested that their findings from the survey corroborated their qualitative findings.

However, many of these investigations made claims which are likely to lead to doubts concerning teaching practices based on the data they acquired through interviews and questionnaires. This is because what instructors claim they do in surveys could be different from what they actually do. As a result, the outcomes of their studies might not

be reliable as they failed to produce evidence from instructors' actual teaching practices through classroom observations. As Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002:184) contend, such an inquiry into the educational practices of instructors is considered to be "telling half the story" because what instructors actually do (theories in-use) may differ from what they claim to do (espoused theories).

To fill this gap, this study incorporated classroom observation which is considered to be a legitimate method of inquiry into instructors' actual classroom practices besides questionnaires and interviews. Furthermore, the study attempted to fill the existing research gap in investigating instructors' conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching in Ethiopia, which can be used as insights that could be used to compare conceptions of teaching in Ethiopia with other contexts. The assumption is that conceptions of teaching are context dependent - could be the same or different from context to context (Gao & Watkins, 2001:445; Gao & Watkins, 2002:62).

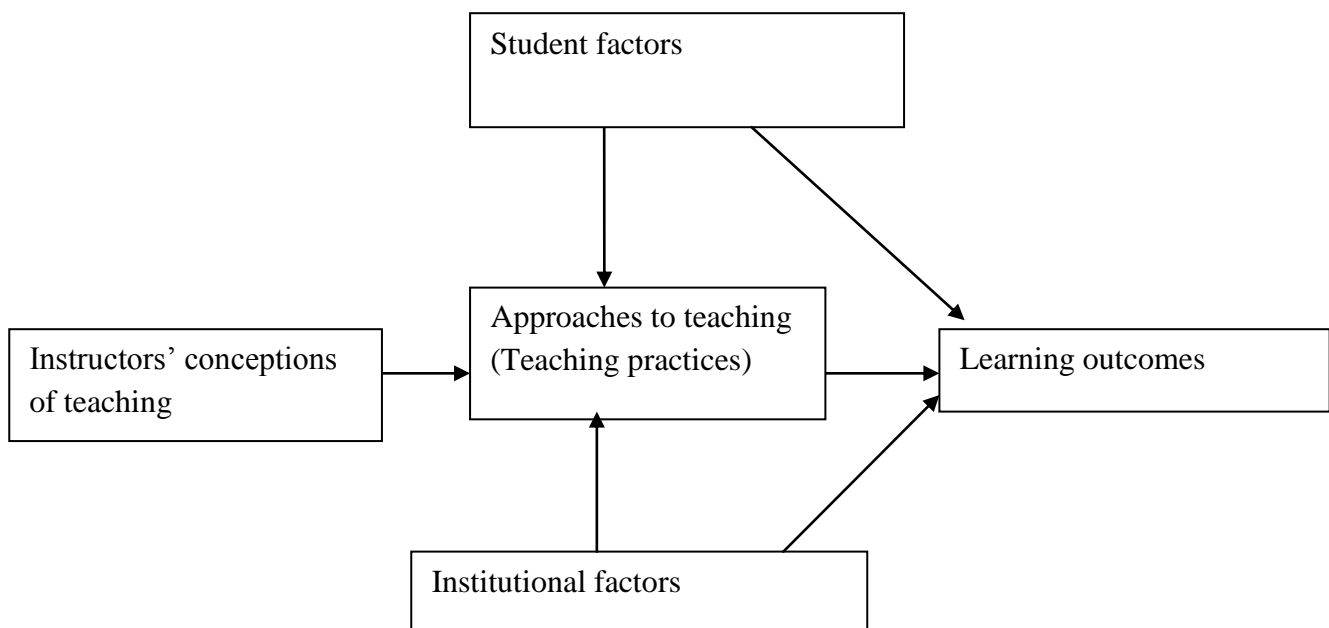
Generally, drawing upon the constructivist views of teaching and learning, this study examined instructors' conceptions of teaching and teaching practices in four Ethiopian universities. In so doing, it produced empirical data on the match or mismatch between the reality and the policy claims of student-centred instruction at higher education in Ethiopia. The study highlighted the extent of the correspondence between the policy of student-centred learning and its adoption in a classroom context.

## **2.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

The literature review above shows that teaching has to be of quality if quality-learning outcomes are aimed for students. It also shows that quality learning is associated with instructors' adoption of student-centred/learning-focused approach to teaching which is in line with the constructivist views of learning. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that instructors are unlikely to adopt such an approach in their teaching unless their conceptions are changed or expanded and unless the factors that may influence them from operationalizing their changed conceptions into their teaching practice are taken into consideration. In view of this and drawing upon Kember's (1997:269) model which

links conceptions of and approaches to teaching (teaching practices), the study seeks answer to the main question: *What are the conceptions of teaching held by instructors and how do these conceptions relate to their teaching practices?* As illustrated in Figure 2.2 below, conceptions of teaching held by instructors are assumed to influence their approaches to teaching/teaching practices. In other words, instructors are more likely to adopt teaching strategies which are aligned with their conceptions of teaching. As also illustrated in the figure below, the approaches that instructors adopt in their teaching may also be influenced by some contextual factors which are related to the institutional environment and the nature of the students taught.

In this study, each of the concepts in the figure was examined in detail using a mixed methods approach that encompassed both the qualitative and the quantitative data collection and analysis procedures. First, instructor's conceptions of teaching were explored using semi-structured interviews and then instructors' classroom practices and factors influencing their teaching practices were explored using a questionnaire and lesson observations. The next chapter explicates thoroughly these and other issues related to the research methodology of the study.



**Figure 2.2: The relationship between conceptions of teaching, classroom practices and learning outcomes (Adapted from Kember, 1997: 269)**

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the research methodology of the study. It explains the research approach and design of the study, sample and the sampling techniques, methods and procedures of data collection and analysis. It also elucidates the procedures pursued in seeking the informed consent of the participants of the study.

### **3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN**

This study was grounded on a pragmatic philosophical assumption or research paradigm. Derived from the work of C.S. Peirce, William James, John Dewey and M. Q. Patton among others, as Creswell (2003:13) notes, pragmatism offers a practical worldview compromising the methodological debate over choosing either quantitative or qualitative approaches. Along this line, rejecting a one-sided advocacy of some writers and in his support for a pragmatic view, Patton (2002:71-72) argues that a quality of research should not be judged not only in terms of its methods but also in terms of its practical utilities. This is in line with Dewey's (1931:32) account of pragmatism, which according to him, looks to the possibilities or consequences of research. Patton(2002: 71-72) further notes that being a pragmatist allows researchers to be flexible and to make their methodological decisions based on the method that is appropriate in a given situation as different methods are appropriate in different contexts. As Creswell (2012:535) on his part argues, being a pragmatist enables researchers to focus more on the problem than the methods and thereby to integrate all the approaches possible to answer the research question. Drawing on these pluralistic principles of pragmatism, this study employed a mixed methods research approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches rather than pledging to only one research approach.

The reason for choosing a mixed methods research approach for this study came out of the desire to integrate different forms of data collection and analysis in the study. It was



also chosen on the premise that the strengths in one method could help to minimise the limitations of the other method as also supported by Creswell (2012:535-536). Of the mixed methods research strategies of data collection and analysis, sequential exploratory strategy was chosen. According to Creswell (2012:543), this strategy involves two phases of data collection and analysis: qualitative data collection and analysis first and followed by quantitative data collection and analysis. Such strategy enables quantitative findings to assist the interpretation and generalisation of qualitative findings. Therefore, in this study, data were first obtained through a qualitative approach and then through a quantitative approach.

For the qualitative part of the study, a phenomenographic research design was chosen. According to Marton (1986:31), a phenomenographic research approach explores “*qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomenon in, the world around them*”. The aim of this exploration is not to describe the phenomenon or the people experiencing it as such but it is to investigate the variation in the ways in which people experience and understand the phenomenon, which Marton (1981:180) refers to as a second-order perspective. That is, the description of the phenomenon from the perspective of the respondent rather than the researcher (Pratt, 1992: 204). In many recent studies on conceptions of teaching and learning, a phenomenographic research approach has been widely utilized (e.g., Gonzalez 2011:65-80; Prosser, Trigwell & Taylor, 1994: 217–231).

Similarly, in this study, a phenomenographic approach was adopted to explore a range of university instructors’ conceptions of teaching as described, perceived and reported by the instructors themselves. To attain this objective, the study utilized interviews and classroom observations. In many phenomenographic studies, the popular method of data collection used is individual interviews. However, Marton (1994, in Trigwell & Prosser, 2004:412) suggests the possibility of using other methods besides interviews. In this study, therefore, besides the individual interviews, classroom observations were incorporated to uncover how the conceptions of teaching held by instructors were translated in their teaching practices. This was made with the assumption that what instructors say they do could be different from what they actually do practically for a

number of reasons. In addition, the data from actual teaching practices were used to substantiate the data from the individual interviews.

For the quantitative part of the study, survey research design was applied. Survey research was chosen with the premise that it enables us to describe the relationships that exist between variables. It also permits large-scale data gathering and generalizations of the data collected (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007: 206). For that reason, following a preliminary analysis of the qualitative data, a questionnaire was developed for a larger sample data gathering comprising university instructors and students.

### **3.2 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES**

The population of the study consisted of instructors and students in four public universities during the 2012/2013 academic year. During this time, there were thirty-one public universities in Ethiopia including the ten new universities launched towards the end of 2011. Because of practical reasons such as budget, time and dispersion of the universities, it was difficult to include all universities in the study. Following Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2007:100) suggestion which is to obtain data from smaller group where expenses, time and accessibility make acquiring data from the whole population impossible, four universities were selected for the study using a stratified sampling method from among twenty-one experienced universities. Following the existing categorization of these universities into the established (first generation universities) and the emerging (second generation universities), two universities from each category; namely, Haramaya and Hawassa Universities from the 1<sup>st</sup> category and Dire Dawa and Jigjiga Universities from the 2<sup>nd</sup> category were selected for the study through a convenience sampling method. The researcher selected these universities because of their proximity to his work place and with the assumption that the conditions of teaching and learning are not as such different from one university to another as long as they belong to the same category. The ten newly established ones (3<sup>rd</sup> generation universities) were deliberately excluded from the sample as they were just beginning at the time of this study.

Though the issue under consideration was pertinent to all colleges of the universities selected, two colleges were selected purposively; namely, College of Social Sciences and College of Natural Sciences. The researcher felt that the two colleges selected can represent the teaching conditions in the universities selected as teaching in all colleges in a particular university is more or less the same. In addition, since the two colleges represented soft and hard disciplines respectively, it was to use this opportunity to examine the variation that may exist in conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching in these two colleges.

Regarding the selection of instructors and students who took part in the study, different sampling techniques were applied for the qualitative and the quantitative data collection phases. For the qualitative phase of the study, a convenience sampling was applied. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:113-114), a convenience sampling involves selecting individuals who are easily accessible and available during the study. Hence, instructors who were accessible for observation and interviews during the study time were involved. As variation among the participants has to be achieved in a study involving a phenomenographic approach (Bowden, 2000:9; Gonzalez, 2011:70), care was taken to increase variation among instructors in selecting them in terms of their level of education, teaching experience, gender and discipline of study. Regarding the sample size that involves phenomenographic studies, Trigwell (2000:66) recommends 15 to 20 participants so that it is neither too small to uncover variation among the participants nor too large to manage the data. Following this recommendation, a sample of 20 instructors from various social and natural science disciplines were involved in the study.

For the quantitative phase of the study, a simple random sampling technique was followed to select a representative sample of instructors and students from the two Colleges of the four universities. Overall, 560 instructors were on duty during the 2012/2013 academic year in the two colleges of these universities. Of these, 160 (34%) of the instructors were randomly chosen for the survey including those instructors interviewed and observed during the first phase of the study. In addition to the instructors, students were also involved in the survey. The students were randomly chosen from among the classes of the instructors interviewed and volunteered for classroom observation during

the first phase of the study. Overall, 170 students (21%) out of a population of 800 students present in the classes observed were involved in the survey.

### **3.3 DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS**

As the study followed a mixed methods research approach, data were acquired through both qualitative and quantitative approaches. However, this does not mean that both forms of data were obtained concurrently. On the contrary, data were acquired phase by phase using a sequential exploratory mixed methods research strategy. This involved qualitative data collection first followed by quantitative data collection.

#### **3.3.1 Phase 1: Qualitative data collection**

The first phase of the study involved qualitative data collection through interviews and classroom observations. These methods are described below:

##### **3.3.1.1 Semi-structured interviews**

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:349), interviews enable both the interviewers and the interviewees to freely discuss and express their viewpoints and interpretations of situations. With this assumption, interviews were conducted with instructors to explore their conceptions of teaching as described, perceived and experienced by the instructors themselves. Drawing on Kember's (1997) dimensions of teaching on which instructors constructed their conceptions of teaching; semi-structured interviews comprising nine key open-ended questions were prepared to guide but not to constrain the interview process (See Appendix III). The questions focused on the essence of teaching, the roles of students and instructors in the teaching-learning process, the aims and expected outcome of teaching, content of teaching and the preferred strategy of teaching.

During the interviews, the instructors were asked to freely and openly describe their views and experiences of teaching based on their context. In addition, they were given

the opportunity to describe their teaching context including the factors that they think were influencing their educational practices, especially their employment of student-centred approach to teaching as the educational reforms in Ethiopia demand. The participants were also asked follow-up questions to provide concrete evidence and to clarify ideas when necessary. The interviews were conducted in English/Amharic based on the instructor's language preference and all were translated into English for analysis. Overall, 20 instructors were interviewed individually for 30-45 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded on consent and later transcribed for analysis.

### **3.3.1.2 Classroom observations**

As Patton(2002:262) states, direct observation of the context in which instructors work is paramount importance as what people claim they do and the reality on the ground could be different. Supporting this, Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002:195) note that what instructors report they do in surveys may not necessarily be what they actually do. Therefore, observation offers researchers the opportunity to confirm the reality of instructors' actual teaching practices. With this understanding, classroom observations were incorporated in this study to see the actual teaching practices of instructors in their respective classrooms and to examine the conditions that were influencing their teaching practices. During the classroom observations, the researcher carefully took notes of all activities in the classroom based on the observation guide developed for this purpose (See Appendix IV). The observation guide was comprised of the description of the activities of students and instructors, the teaching strategies employed by instructors, the classroom conditions (e.g., class size, availability of space, etc), instructional resources in the classroom (e.g., computers, LCDs, etc) and their utilization. After the interviews, all of the 20 instructors were observed teaching practically at least once in a two-hour class. These observations were arranged and conducted on the basis of the interest and convenience of the instructors. During the observation, still pictures were taken by the researcher with the consent of the instructors as well as the students to strengthen the observational analysis. The instructors and the students were also pre-informed about the purpose and the procedures used for conducting the classroom observations. This was made in order to establish a relaxed environment in the classrooms and not to affect the

normal classroom behaviour of the instructors and the students due to the presence of the researcher in their classrooms.

### **3.3.2 Phase II: Quantitative data collection**

The second phase of the data collection involved acquiring data through a quantitative method. This comprised a survey through questionnaires, which were completed by instructors and students. These tools were developed after the preliminary analysis of the data that were obtained during the first phase of the study and drawing upon the previous studies on conceptions and approaches to teaching, such as Trigwell, Prosser and Ginns (2005:356), Chan and Elliott (2004:826), and Gao and Watkins (2001:467-469). The purpose of the questionnaires was to assess university instructors' views and strategies of teaching from the traditional and constructivist perspectives and the factors that were influencing their implementation of student-centred approach to teaching as per the policy claims. To this effect, two forms of questionnaire were prepared: one for instructors and the other for students.

#### **3.3.2.1 Questionnaire for instructors**

The questionnaire for instructors was designed in such a way that instructors self-report their views of teaching and their approaches to teaching practices. This questionnaire has four parts which comprised mainly closed-type questions (See Appendix V). The first part consisted of thirteen items designed to generate information on the background of the instructors including their gender, teaching experience, discipline of study, qualification, workload, class size, etc. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of items designed to generate information regarding instructors' views (conceptions) of teaching. The items for this part of the questionnaire were designed based on Kember's (1997) framework that reflects two higher levels of categorisation of conceptions of teaching into instructor-centred/content-oriented and student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching. These categories were designed to comprise respectively nine and eight items that were constructed on five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). The third part of the questionnaire comprised

items which were used to investigate the range of teaching strategies instructors used in their teaching. The items for this part of the questionnaire were also designed to comprise two fundamentally different approaches to teaching, i.e., instructor-centred/content-focused and student-centred/learning-focused approach to teaching. These categories were designed to comprise respectively seven and thirteen items that were constructed on five-point Likert scale ranging from “Only Rarely” (1) to “Almost Always” (5).

The last part of the questionnaire was designed to comprise items that assessed factors that were influencing instructors’ teaching practices, particularly their employment of student-centred approach in their teaching. This part of the questionnaire comprised Likert type items with five response alternatives which ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). The questionnaire was piloted on 50 instructors randomly chosen from colleges not sampled in this study to check its clarity and relevance for the purpose intended following Cohen, Manion and Morrison’s (2007:341) suggestion that a questionnaire is better pretested and refined to increase its reliability, validity and practicability. Based on the inputs gained from the pilot study, the questionnaire was modified and administered with some assistance from colleagues in the four universities. The outcome of the pilot study is presented in Section 3.6.

### **3.3.2.2 Questionnaire for students**

The questionnaire for students was designed to crosscheck information from instructors regarding the strategies their instructors employed in their teaching. It was also designed to supplement information from the classroom observations. The students’ questionnaire was designed in such a way that students rated how often instructors used instructor-centred and student-centred teaching strategies during their teaching. The questionnaire for students has three parts (See Appendix VI). The first part included items that related to the background information of the students (gender, department, workload, etc). The remaining two parts of the questionnaire were adapted from the questionnaire for instructors and the purpose was to crosscheck the information provided by instructors about the strategies they used in their teaching and the factors that were influencing their

implementation of student-centred approach to teaching respectively. The questionnaire was written in English and filled by students in class in the presence of the researcher. This was done to clear up any possible misunderstandings students might face in responding to the questionnaire and to ensure successful return. The respondents were chosen from the classes in which the observations were conducted. Like the questionnaire for instructors, the questionnaire for students was also piloted on students not sampled in the study to refine its wording, layout, length and content.

### **3.4 PROCEDURES OF DATA COLLECTION**

Data were collected during the 2012/13 academic year. As the study utilized mixed methods research approach, the required data for the study were collected sequentially in two phases: first, qualitatively and then quantitatively. However, before collecting the data, the participants of the study were informed both in writing and orally about the purpose of the study and the procedures of data collection and then their informed consent regarding their willingness to participate in the study was obtained. After this, the first phase of data collection, which involved generating qualitative data through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations commenced. First, interviews were conducted with instructors on their conceptions of teaching and classroom behaviours. Next, classroom observations were conducted to explore more into the classroom teaching behaviours with the feeling that what instructors reported during the interviews may not be consistent with what they actually do in their classrooms.

The second phase of the study involved conducting a survey by using questionnaires for a larger population. In order to do this, first, the survey instrument was developed following the preliminary analysis of the data gathered during the first phase of the study. Then, the instrument was piloted for further refinement and revision. Next, the refined questionnaire was distributed to instructors and students with some assistance from colleagues in the selected universities and finally, they were collected by the researcher.



### 3.5 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Like the data gathering processes, data analysis in this study integrated both quantitative and qualitative procedures. For the qualitative data through the interviews, a phenomenographic data analysis approach was applied. According to Marton (1994, cited in Trigwell and Prosser, 2004: 412), phenomenographically, “*interviews are transcribed verbatim and the analysis is carried out in an iterative manner on those transcripts*”. Following this procedure, first, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and were coded 01 to 20 to maintain the anonymity of the respondents. Then, all the transcripts were read and re-read rigorously in order to understand the way the instructors described and thought about teaching. In this way, relevant statements were extracted from the transcripts. Next, the selected statements were pooled together to constitute a range of categories/themes that represented the conceptions of teaching held by the participants. This process was repeated until the final sets of categories were established. Based on this, all the transcripts were re-examined in order to assign instructors to a particular category of conception of teaching. Where the instructors articulated different conceptions of teaching, their predominant views were used to assign them to a particular category. To illustrate each category, relevant extracts from the interviews were drawn regardless of the category of conception the instructor was assigned to.

To minimize researcher subjectivity during this categorisation process, two senior instructors who were very familiar with the qualitative research and the field of education volunteered to read sample transcripts and to crosscheck them against the categories identified. Apart from some minor wording and adjustments on the naming of the categories, the two instructors fully approved the categories established by the researcher. Based on their feedback, the categories identified were further revised to ensure that they accurately reflected the views of the respondents. In addition, care was taken not to adjust the categories of conceptions established in the study to the predetermined framework apart from discussing, comparing and contrasting them along with the existing categories in the discussion part.

Likewise, for the data from the classroom observations, content analysis was applied. Like the interviews, observation lessons were described fully and coded. Then, the descriptions were examined and re-examined to understand the strategies of teaching utilized by instructors and the contexts influencing their educational practices. Then, based on the predominant strategies they used in their teaching, instructors' teaching practices were categorised as either instructor-centred/content-focused or student-centred/learning-focused.

Concerning the data from the questionnaires, a quantitative data analysis approach was applied as follows. First, the accuracy and the completeness of the responses provided for each question in the questionnaire was checked and crosschecked. Based on this, incomplete or inaccurately completed questionnaires were discarded. Next, properly completed questionnaires were coded in order to assist data entry and computer reading. Then, statistical analysis using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20 for windows, was applied for data management and analysis. Parametric analyses were applied mainly because the items were treated categorically and after making sure that the data sets conformed to a normal distribution. Based on this procedure, frequency, percentage and mean scores were used to summarise and interpret the participants' responses. Further, independent-samples test and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to measure the variation in conceptions of teaching and teaching strategies among instructors. Pearson correlation coefficient was also used to examine the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their actual teaching practices based on the survey reports. The findings were finally presented and discussed along the four research questions. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:468) state, such form of data presentation is a very useful approach to pool all data sources together and to provide an integrated answer to a research question. It also enables to verify, crosscheck and validate findings before drawing inferences.

### 3.6 THE PILOT STUDY AND OUTCOME

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:341) asserted that piloting research instruments is of paramount importance for increasing the validity and the reliability of the instruments used. Based on this, to strengthen the reliability of the instruments used for data collection, research instruments used in this study were reviewed and piloted as follows.

First, the instruments were reviewed by three senior university instructors for relevance and clarity. Following their comments and suggestions, some items in the questionnaire and interview were rewritten and some were eliminated. For instance, in the interview, Items 2 and 3 were rewritten as “How would you describe...” in instead of “What would you describe...” In addition, two items were eliminated from the interview for repetition of ideas.

Next, instructors’ questionnaires were tried out on 50 instructors randomly chosen from colleges not sampled in this study. The instructors were asked to complete the questionnaire and then to provide their comments on the length, clarity and content of the questionnaire. For this purpose, the participants were asked to answer a list of questions adapted from Chen (2010:108). The questions were:

1. Are there ambiguous or confusing items in the questionnaire? 1. Yes 2. No. If yes, please give the number and explain:\_\_\_\_\_
2. Are there missing ideas about teaching from the questionnaire? 1. Yes 2. No. If yes, please give explanation:\_\_\_\_\_
3. Are there irrelevant ideas about teaching that are included in the questionnaire? 1. Yes 2.No. If yes, please give explanation:\_\_\_\_\_
4. How long did it take you to complete the questionnaire?\_\_\_\_\_
5. Other comments(if any):\_\_\_\_\_

Accordingly, all questionnaires were collected and checked to see if they were appropriately completed by the instructors or not. It was found that all parts of the questionnaire were carefully completed. Next, the responses of the instructors to the list of questions attached were examined. The majority of the instructors indicated that the questionnaire was clearly written and did not contain irrelevant ideas. Some instructors,

however, forwarded very constructive comments for further refinement of the questionnaire. Their comments included list of vague, irrelevant and missing items. For instance, the instructors commented that Item 9 which referred to the instructors' participation on professional development activities and Item 13 which referred to the number of courses currently offered by the instructors in Part I of the questionnaire were found to be vague and should be rewritten. In addition, the instructors suggested that items in relation to qualities of a good instructor and methods of assessments were missing and should be incorporated. Based on these comments, vague items and alternative responses were rewritten, especially in the background part of the questionnaire. From the responses provided, it was also learned that the items in Part IV of the questionnaire needed modification. They were originally constructed in a very general terms as factors affecting classroom practices and found to be confusing for the respondents, as a result; they were rewritten in such a way that each item relates to factors that influenced instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching.

Regarding the time taken to complete the questionnaire, responses ranged from 15 to 60 minutes and the average answer was found to be 25 minutes. Therefore, 25 minutes were allotted to the final questionnaire. In general, following the comments and the suggestions forwarded by the participants, the questionnaire was refined in terms of its instructions, layout, structure and content.

Finally, based on the modified instructors' questionnaire, students' questionnaire was developed and piloted on 15 students who were not sampled in the study. Like in the instructors' questionnaire, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and then to provide their comments on the length, clarity and content of the questionnaire based on the list of questions adapted from Chen (2010:108).

The students carefully completed all the parts of the questionnaire and explained that the questionnaire is clearly written and comprehensive. However, from the responses of the students, one item in the last part of the questionnaire was found to be ambiguous and therefore deleted. Items 5 and 6 in the background section were also modified. Item 5

was modified as your current semester workload instead of your current learning load for this might imply the total credit hour already taken by students or the total credit hour required in the program. The options in Item 6 were written in full as undergraduate and postgraduate respectively for it was learned that UG and PG were found to be confusing for the students. Apart from some minor touching, the rest of the items did not require significant modifications. Regarding the time taken to complete the questionnaire, responses ranged from 10 to 30 minutes and the average was found to be 20 minutes. Therefore, 20 minutes were allotted to the final questionnaire.

### **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study also adhered to some of the ethical principles of a good research project. For instance, participation in this study was completely voluntary. Using Creswell's (2007:123-124) procedures, instructors and students were informed both in writing and orally the purposes of the study and the procedures used in data collection. They were assured that the information they provide is used only for a research purpose and their name, position and affiliation to their institution is highly invisible in the study. The participants were also ensured that the results would be reported in a way that maintains confidentiality. They were also told their rights to withdraw from the study at anytime if they were not comfortable with it. To this effect, a consent form was prepared and signed by the researcher as well as the participants of the study (See Appendix II). The study was also approved by the University of South Africa, College of Education Research Ethics Committee after meeting the ethical requirements specified by the college (See Appendix I).

### **3.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE FINDINGS**

In this study, validity and reliability of the findings were ensured through various methods. Primarily, the validity of the findings from the study was reinforced by employing a mixed methods research approach that enables researchers to integrate multiple data sources and methods. In this way, among the strategies suggested by Guba (1981:75-91) for ensuring credibility of the findings, two types of triangulation were incorporated in the study. These were methodological and data source triangulation. The study's methods of data collection comprised questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations and its data sources (study participants) comprised university instructors and students. In addition, part of the findings of the study were also presented and enriched on an international conference held at Haramaya University in April 2014. This conference was attended by policy makers, university instructors and researchers from all over Ethiopia.

### **3.9 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the methodological procedures followed to collect and analyse data in the study were described. As presented above, the research design employed in the study was a mixed methods research approach that comprised both the qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Data were collected sequentially: first, qualitatively using interviews and classroom observations and then, quantitatively using a questionnaire. For the qualitative phase of the study, the sample comprised twenty instructors who were interviewed on their conceptions of teaching and observed teaching practically in a classroom to examine their actual teaching practices. Data were further collected quantitatively using questionnaires from 160 instructors and 170 students chosen randomly. The methods of the data analysis procedures employed in the study were also described in this chapter. To summarise, the interviews and the classroom observations were analysed qualitatively using phenomenographic approach and content analysis respectively whereas, the questionnaires were analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20 for windows. This enabled computation of frequencies, means and percentages for each item in order to summarise

and interpret the participants' responses. In addition, independent samples test and one-way ANOVA were used to examine the differences in conceptions of and approaches to teaching among instructors. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their actual teaching practices based on the survey reports. The chapter also highlighted the outcome of the pilot study and the ethical procedures applied in seeking the informed consent of the participants of the study. In the next chapter, the outcome of the study is presented and finally discussed in line with the previous studies in the area.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study was conducted to examine university instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. Data were acquired through interviews, classroom observations and questionnaires. In this chapter, the results of the study were presented and discussed based on the research questions, which is believed to be a useful strategy to pool all data streams together to provide an integrated answer to a research question. For each research question, data were presented sequentially: the qualitative data from the interviews and the classroom observations were presented first and followed by the quantitative data from the survey except in a few cases. In this way, the results from various sources were crosschecked and validated before drawing inferences.

In general, this chapter is organised and structured as follows. First, the profile of the study participants was presented and discussed. Then, the findings on instructors' conceptions of teaching were presented and followed by the findings on teaching practices, the findings on the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices and the findings on factors that were influencing the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching, respectively. At the end, these findings were discussed in the light of prior studies in the area.

#### **4.1 PROFILE OF THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

As already discussed in the preceding chapter, the study was conducted in two phases: first qualitatively and then quantitatively. Instructors were involved in both phases while students were involved in the second phase only. Based on the information acquired during the interviews and from the survey questionnaire, the profile of the participants is presented as follows.



### 4.1.1 Profile of instructors

As explained earlier, instructors were involved in both phases of the study. In addition to all the instructors involved in the first phase, a larger sample of instructors was involved in the second phase of the study as its purpose was a large sample data gathering. The profile of these instructors is summarized in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

**Table 4.1: Profile of instructors involved in the first phase of the study**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of instructors</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	Social sciences	10
	Natural sciences	10
	Total	20
<b>Gender</b>	Male	16
	Female	4
	Total	20
<b>Level of Education</b>	PhD	4
	MA/MSc	15
	B.A/BSC	1
	Total	20
<b>Academic Status</b>	Assistant Professor & above	5
	Lecturer	14
	Graduate Assistant	1
	Total	20
<b>Teaching experience</b>	1-5yrs	4
	6-10yrs	11
	>10yrs	5
	Total	20

Table 4.1 describes the profile of the instructors involved in the first phase of the study. Overall, twenty instructors from four universities participated in the study during this phase of the study. As the table shows, ten instructors each from the disciplines of the Social Sciences (Language Studies, History, Geography, Political Science, Psychology

and Sociology) and from the disciplines of the Natural Sciences (Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Biology) participated in the study. These instructors' level of education varied from bachelor's degree to PhD, of which fifteen of them hold master's degree, which represents the majority of the instructors. Their academic ranks ranged from Graduate Assistant to Associate Professor, with the majority of them being lecturers whose level of education is equivalent to master's degree. As far as their gender is concerned, only four of them are females due to their limited number in the four universities selected, which is the case in most universities in Ethiopia. Regarding the teaching experiences of these instructors, the sample ranged from those who taught for just one year to those who taught for more than twenty years in a university context. The majority of the instructors (16) have taught for more than five years in a university context. Overall, the table shows that the variation required among the participants in a phenomenographic approach suggested by Gonzalez (2011:70) was ensured as the instructors involved in the study varied in terms of their discipline, gender, level of education, academic status and teaching experiences. In addition, the total number of the instructors involved in the study, 20, was also in line with the sample size, which is between 15 and 20, suggested for phenomenographic studies by Trigwell (2000:66). The next table presents the profile of the instructors involved in the survey.

Next to the qualitative phase of the study, a survey through a questionnaire was conducted in the four universities selected. Instructors including the ones in the first phase of the study were involved in the survey. As described in the methodology section, overall, 160 instructors were involved in the survey. Of these, 151 instructors (94.4%) have properly completed and returned the questionnaire, making the response rate high although nine instructors failed to return the questionnaire. As can be clearly seen from Table 4.2, of the 151 instructors that have properly completed the survey, 76(50.3%) of them are from the disciplines of Natural Sciences and 75(49.7%) of them are from the Social Sciences. This shows that in terms of their disciplines, the instructors were fairly represented in the study. In terms of their gender composition, 16(10.6%) are females whereas 135(89.4%) are males. The number of female instructors involved in the survey was small due to their few in number in the four universities studied, which is the case in higher education in Ethiopia. Regarding their level of education, the instructors

involved in the survey ranged from those having Bachelor's degree (8.6%) to those having PhD (8%). The majority of the instructors, i.e., 83.4% have master's degree. This shows that the majority of the instructors involved in the survey have the minimum level of education required for teaching in a higher education in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, academic staff with a PhD qualification is very small and even non-existent in some universities, especially in the disciplines of Social Sciences. This shows that there is a critical shortage of instructors with a doctoral qualification in these universities though the government is striving to have 25% PhD staff in higher education in Ethiopia in the near future.

Similarly, the academic rank of the instructors ranged from Graduate Assistant to Associate Professor. They comprised 8.6% Graduate Assistants, 82.8% Lecturers and 8.6% Assistant Professor and above. This shows that like their level of education, the majority of the instructors are lecturers in their academic rank. Teaching experiences of the participants ranged from those who taught just for one year to those instructors who taught for more than 20 years in a university context. The majority (60.3%) of the instructors have five years or less university teaching experience. However, as understood during the interviews, some of these instructors had worked in schools before teaching in higher education.

Regarding the workload of the instructors, it was found that their load ranged from three to twenty-six hours per week. The workload of the majority of the instructors (44.4%) is between seven to twelve credit hours. It is only 24.5% of the instructors whose load exceeds twelve hours, which is the maximum teaching load expected of university instructors in Ethiopia. However, the majority of the instructors (58.3%) reported that they have administrative responsibilities in addition to teaching. The administrative responsibilities mentioned by these instructors included serving as the dean of a college, head of a department, a program leader and a committee member in a number of academic activities in the respective universities. In addition, some instructors mentioned that they were engaged in research and community work as their institutions required such activities from their staff members as part of their academic duty. This shows that instructors are overloaded with a number of administrative and other related responsibilities that are likely to influence their teaching duties.

As the table also depicts, the number of students in the classes of these instructors ranged from four to one hundred. Very few instructors (14.6%) have thirty or less number of students in their classes. This is the case in the postgraduate classes and in the few Social Science undergraduate classes. The majority (58.9%) of the instructors teach in the range of 31-60 students in their classes. Yet, 26.5 % of the instructors teach very large classes which have greater than 60 students in one class. This may imply that teaching large class is still a problem in the four universities studied. Concerning their previous participation in pedagogical training, 62% of the instructors disclosed that they have attended Higher Diploma program (HDP) that is currently in place to enhance university instructors' teaching skills in higher education in Ethiopia. HDP was introduced in 2003/4 academic year to promote student-centred culture of teaching in higher education in Ethiopia. This program is one-year training on different aspects of teaching including active learning methods, student assessment, action research, etc. Though it was primarily designed for teacher educators, currently, all university instructors are involved in this kind of training. Therefore, based on the above information, it can be concluded that the majority of the instructors involved in the study had background knowledge about teaching based on the HDP training.

**Table 4.2: Profile of instructors participated in the survey**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of instructors</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	Social Sciences	75	49.7
	Natural Sciences	76	50.3
	Total	151	100
<b>Gender</b>	Female	16	10.6
	Male	135	89.4
	Total	151	100
<b>Level of education</b>	B.A/B.Ed/BSC	13	8.6
	MA/M.Ed/MSc	126	83.4
	PhD	12	8
	Total	151	100
<b>Academic Rank</b>	Graduate Assistant	13	8.6
	Lecturer	125	82.8

	Assistant Professor & above	13	8.6
	Total	151	100
<b>Teaching experience</b>	1-5yrs	91	60.3
	6-10yrs	42	27.8
	Greater than 10 yrs	18	11.9
	Total	151	100
<b>workload/week</b>	6 or less	50	33.1
	7-12	64	42.4
	Greater than 12	37	24.5
	Total	151	100
<b>Additional responsibility other than teaching</b>	Yes	88	58.3
	No	63	41.7
	Total	151	100
<b>Class size</b>	30 or less	22	14.6
	31-60	89	58.9
	Greater than 60	40	26.5
	Total	151	100
<b>Pedagogical training</b>	Yes	94	62.3
	No	57	37.7
	Total	151	100

#### 4.1.2 Profile of students

In addition to instructors, students were also involved in the survey during the second phase of the study. Students were randomly asked to respond to a questionnaire from the classes of the instructors who were observed during the first phase of the study. Overall, 170 questionnaires were distributed and collected as the questionnaires were completed in a classroom in the presence of the researcher. However, ten questionnaires, which were not properly completed, were discarded and the remaining 160 questionnaires with 94.1% response rate were used for the analysis. Table 4.3 summarizes the profile the students involved in the study as follows.

**Table 4.3: Profile of students participated in the survey**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Discipline</b>	Natural sciences	77	48.1
	Social sciences	83	51.9
	Total	160	100
<b>Gender</b>	Female	38	23.8
	Male	122	76.2
	Total	160	100
<b>Workload</b>	Less than 15 credit hrs	6	3.8
	15-18 credit hrs	66	41.2
	Greater than 18 credit hrs	88	55
	Total	160	100
<b>Class level</b>	Undergraduate	146	91.2
	Postgraduate	14	8.8
	Total	160	100
<b>Class year</b>	1st year	29	18.1
	2nd year	50	31.3
	3rd year	81	50.6
	Total	160	100

As Table 4.3 reveals, the sample comprised 48.1% Natural Science and 51.9% Social Science students. Of these, 23.8% are females and 76.3% are males. Female students were less represented in the study because they were very small in number and even non-existent in some departments and in all the postgraduate classes observed. In terms of their class level, the participants ranged from 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate to postgraduate level students. The majority of the respondents (50.6%) are 3<sup>rd</sup> year and above students which include postgraduate students. This shows that the majority of the students involved in the study were from higher classes. It was thus hoped that students at this level were experienced and matured enough to provide reliable information regarding their learning conditions. The workload of the students ranged from nine to twenty-two credit hours. The majority of the students (55%) have a maximum load, i.e., greater than 18 credit

hours, the condition which is more likely to influence students' attitude and approach to learning, which could in turn influence instructors' approach to teaching.

## **4.2 INSTRUCTORS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING**

The first objective of the study was concerned with university instructors' conceptions of teaching. To answer this, data were gathered from instructors through interviews and questionnaires. This section presents the findings of this investigation.

### **4.2.1 Findings from the interviews**

In order to explore the conceptions of teaching held by instructors, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty instructors during the first phase of the study. Using a phenomenographic approach described in the preceding chapter, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed iteratively. From the analysis, four dominant categories of instructors' conceptions of teaching were identified. These are teaching as satisfying syllabus demands, teaching as presenting structured information to students, teaching as helping students learn what they learn and teaching as guiding students towards potential development.

In addition to identifying the dominant conceptions of teaching among instructors, attempt was also made in the study to assign instructors to a particular category of conception based on their predominant views. In order to do this, the framework proposed by Kember (1997:262) was utilised to organise conceptions of teaching identified in the study along the dimensions of teaching used during the interviews. Using this framework, the dominant categories that emerged out of the transcripts were arranged on either ends of a continuum varying from a more instructor-centred/content-oriented pole to a more student-centred/learning-oriented pole as presented in Table 4.4 below. Each category and the number of instructors holding this particular conception are also explained. To illustrate and support each category, excerpts drawn from the interview transcripts were provided. Ellipses (three dots) were used to replace pauses, hesitations and irrelevances in the excerpts while extra information was provided in parenthesis {}.

**Table 4.4: Conceptions of teaching identified in the study**

Key Aspects of teaching	Categories of conceptions			
	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D
	Teaching as satisfying syllabus demands	Teaching as presenting structured information	Teaching as helping students learn	Teaching as helping students expand knowledge
Essence of teaching	Covering syllabus	Structuring & transmitting information	Helping students develop knowledge	Helping students expand knowledge
Role of instructor	transmitting syllabus information	Transmitting structured information	Facilitating learning	Facilitating learning
Role of students	Receiving information	Receiving information	Constructing knowledge	Exploring
Content of teaching	Predetermined in the syllabus	Predetermined but restructured by the instructor	Predetermined but left to the discretion of the instructor	Predetermined but left to the discretion of the instructor
Outcome of teaching	Accumulating information	Accumulating information	Developing understanding of the subject matter	Expanding knowledge
Approach to teaching	Lecture	Lecture	Interactive lecture	More interactive
Number of instructors in the category	Three	Four	Eleven	Two

**Instructor-centred/content-oriented conception** → **Student-centred/learning-oriented conception**



## Category A: Teaching as satisfying syllabus demands

As shown in Table 4.4, instructors in Category ‘A’ assume that teaching is merely delivering the required syllabus as fully and accurately as possible. They believe that because the content that needs to be taught has been fully described and predetermined in the Harmonized National Curriculum, their role is simply to understand what is required and execute it properly as prescribed in the time specified. Here are some excerpts from the interviews that illustrate this category:

*In our department, each course has its own description, objectives and content to be taught. Therefore, teaching is just understanding the subject matter and delivering it accurately as it is prescribed in the syllabus (Instructor<sub>09</sub>).*

Another instructor also expressed:

*The content of teaching in our department is part of a centrally prepared national curriculum. So, teaching is delivering it {the content} step by step as it is written in the curriculum (Instructor<sub>08</sub>).*

These illustrations reveal that teaching for instructors in this category is just covering the content in the syllabus as carefully as possible. For these instructors, time is not enough for involving students in active learning as much time is needed to cover the prescribed content. As a result, the instructors are likely to spend most of their teaching time lecturing the content while students spend most of the time listening and copying notes. In relation to this, Instructor<sub>03</sub> reported, “*My teaching is more or less teacher-dominated .... For fear that I may not cover the course contents, I often lecture*”. Similarly, Instructor<sub>20</sub> stated, “*we are afraid to apply active learning methods worrying that we cannot cover all the required contents through such methods*”.

As these excerpts reveal instructors in this category are worried more about the content coverage than active learning. This would seem to emanate from seeing the syllabus/curriculum as a master rather than as a guide to help them teach. They consider everything that is stipulated in the curriculum/syllabus important regardless of its relevance to the need and the context of their students. Therefore, as the power in the

classes of such instructors resides neither with the instructors nor with their students, the syllabus/curriculum becomes the leader. Such instructors are, thus, less empowered let alone empowering their students. They are not also as such critical of what and why they teach rather than simply executing the required content claiming that the national curriculum is untouchable.

In fact, in recent years in Ethiopia, the curriculum for most undergraduate programs are prepared and approved at a national level as part of the government's decision to harmonize the curriculum of study in public universities in Ethiopia. Though everything is predetermined, it does not mean that there is no room for modification on the content of the course during the teaching-learning process. It does not also mean that everything outlined in the syllabus should be covered fully. Supporting this, Instructor<sub>16</sub> stated the following.

*The harmonized curriculum for me is just a guide. That is, to teach a course within the range provided. I add what I feel is important for students to learn in my course.*

Similarly, another instructor explained:

*...so to encourage the students not ... with the routine of you are going to cover this and that chapter... I create a way that avoids boredom and that results in the creation of some sort of interest ... while not deviating from the {harmonized} curriculum (Instructor<sub>14</sub>).*

These excerpts reveal that though everything is predetermined in the national curriculum, there is the possibility for instructors to make slight modifications on the structure and the content of the courses in the curriculum as necessary. The implication is that though the syllabus to be taught is predetermined, it should be seen as an outline for the range of possible topics to be taught, which instructors can adapt based on the context of their teaching.

## **Category B: Teaching as presenting structured information to students**

Like the instructors in the first category, teaching for the instructors in Category 'B' is merely the process by which the instructor transmits information to students. However, as clearly seen in the above table, the difference is that instructors in this category are more concerned about how to deliver their lessons to their students in a way that is easy for students to understand the concepts taught. Even though, covering the content is required, they structure the content of their teaching in order to make it easy for students to learn it. These instructors see the syllabus as a guide to help them decide what and how to teach than a master who decides everything. Thus, the authority for making learning decisions lies in the hands of the instructors. However, students are still passive in the learning process except occasionally asking or responding to questions when the instructor authorizes. Here are some quotations that illustrate this category:

*Teaching is just transferring knowledge to your students. But to transfer knowledge, you need to get prepared and organized ahead of time.... It is not simply getting into the classroom and simply talking. ... That is not teaching totally. ... The concept you are transferring or ... the concept you are trying to convey should be conceptualized by students. At the end of the class, the student should get something that should remain in their mind (Instructor<sub>02</sub>).*

Another instructor also explained:

*Teaching should be well prepared...it should have a ... component of a good teaching.... It should have an introductory aspect... body of the knowledge and conclusion. It should also be based on basic pedagogical principles.... It should start from simple to complex, again from real... to abstract (Instructor<sub>05</sub>).*

These excerpts show that the form of teaching envisaged by instructors in this category follow some fixed pattern of organising and sequencing lessons, which involves an introduction, detailed explanation, summaries and conclusion. Detailed preparation of lecture notes ahead of time and the distribution of these notes in the form of handouts or PPP slides are essential features of effective teaching for these instructors. For instance, Instructor<sub>07</sub> expressed:

*I give my students handouts. So, they refer to the handouts for notes. I do not need to write everything on the board. I write only some key points from the handout on the blackboard when I teach. Based on the familiarity of the topic of the lesson, I ask questions before we start our discussion. Then, I start lecturing. I explain concepts and ideas. At the end, if students have questions, they ask and I respond.*

Another instructor also said:

*I teach in my classroom based on the material I prepared for my students.... For all courses I teach, I have developed my own PowerPoint presentation slides. I give this material for my students a head of time (Instructor<sub>04</sub>).*

According to these excerpts, teaching for the instructors in this category is lecture/handout oriented. These instructors are preoccupied with the preparation and execution of their lecture notes as fully as possible. They spend most of their teaching time while explaining and demonstrating from their lectures notes (handouts) and PPPs. However, students spend most of their time while listening to the instructor lecturing or talking. They rarely get the opportunity to talk in classes either with the instructor or with their fellow classmates.

The intention here is not to diminish the use of lecture methods and handouts that are still the most popular teaching strategies in most teaching contexts including Ethiopia. However, it is to note that heavy reliance on lecture methods and the use of handouts may not enable students to develop deeper understanding of the concepts taught as students often see these instructional strategies as the exclusive way of teaching and learning. As a result, instructors should use lectures and handouts systematically in a way that is not limiting students to such resources only. A good example of this form of teaching is the instructor providing lecture notes for a few minutes and then pausing for discussion and reflection on the lecture notes. Illustrating this, Instructor<sub>05</sub> described his teaching procedures as:

*First, I give some lecture notes for not more than five to ten minutes. After that, I will give them {students} questions or discussion issues. There I leave some time*

*for discussion. After this, I ask every student... to reply to the discussion question. Then, I will continue lecturing for some time .... Then, I will stop lecturing and start discussion again.*

Lecture notes/handouts can also be used effectively as an input (a guide) and to save time for class discussions as Instructor<sub>20</sub> reported:

*I have a soft copy of my lecture notes. I print this and give students as a handout. My intention is not to limit students to the lecture notes (handouts) but it is to ease my job of teaching so that I do not give long lectures in my classes. All students come to class with a copy of the lecture handouts. This handout contains detailed lectures, examples, exercises, etc. I do not waste my time writing on the blackboard during my teaching.*

Lecture notes may also serve students in the contexts where resources such as books, reference materials and internet services are limited. This is clearly seen from the response of Instructor<sub>16</sub> who expressed, “*I give short notes since students... will find it difficult to learn due to lack of reference materials in our library*”.

In general, instructors can use handouts as inputs for their teaching and as one possible resource for students. Students naturally expect their instructors to provide them lecture notes (handouts) as illustrated above, which is also the most popular approach in most teaching contexts. Nevertheless, besides this form of learning, instructors should be able to encourage their students to explore additional resources such as books and references in the library and to browse for information through the internet as much as possible. In the four universities selected for this study, the researcher observed the availability of internet facilities as the case in other universities in Ethiopia though students have limited access to such services. However, two of the four universities have launched wireless networks around library and residence areas for students. Students can thus use these resources for their academic purposes if prompted by their instructors.

### **Category C: Teaching as helping students learn what they learn**

Instructors in Category ‘C’ are student-focused more than the content of teaching. As the above table depicts they assume that their role is more of facilitating or creating a healthy learning environment for students to learn by themselves than either transmitting knowledge to students or covering the content required. Unlike the instructors in the previous categories, the instructors in this category believe that it is important for students to be active for effective learning to take place. As a result, they encourage students to learn by their own more than what the instructor does to teach. In such classes, knowledge that students are expected to acquire in the subject in question is not lectured to students; rather it is constructed by students themselves as they work on it individually and together with their peers. Here are some excerpts from the interviews that illustrate this category:

*I see teaching as a process of helping students learn. I assume that a teacher works as a facilitator, to help students learn what they learn. For me, teaching is not the process of showing how much the teacher knows about the subject matter.... A teaching process or activity is a practice of ... good quality when it engages or stimulates students to think and to do something on their own (Instructor<sub>04</sub>).*

In a similar way, another instructor reflected:

*For me, a good teaching is a kind of teaching that involves students. I believe that a classroom discussion should not be occupied by the teacher’s talk or lecture. A good teaching should be a kind of discussion with students, asking them what they already know about the topic or what they may think about the topic. A kind of teaching that a teacher stands in front of the board, writes, and explains without asking students what they think about that topic or without even asking them to brainstorm their experiences is not a good teaching (Instructor<sub>07</sub>).*

These excerpts illustrate that as in the preceding categories, instructors in this category do not deny the importance of students acquiring knowledge from the subject taught. They do not also deny the importance of teaching the concepts required in the course

they teach. However, the difference is that these instructors believe that students acquire the concepts taught better whenever they are active and involved in the teaching-learning process than when they are passively listening to series of lectures by instructors. As the quotes from the interviews show, for instructors in this category, a form of teaching, which is dominated by an instructor talk or lecture without involving students in discussion about the topic or concept taught, is inefficient. The assumption is that students learn whenever they are stimulated to think about the topic or whenever they relate the topic with what they already know.

#### **Category D: Teaching as helping students expand their knowledge**

Like the teaching in category 'C', the teaching in Category 'D' focuses on students more than the content of teaching. The instructor's role in this category is to create opportunities for students to explore new ideas and expand their knowledge besides helping them develop knowledge. Instructors in this category believe that learning should not be limited to classroom teaching. Thus, they create conditions for students to extend their understanding of the concepts taught on their own. For instance, they require student to read more to expand the knowledge they developed. Here are some quotations that illustrate this category:

*I assume in my teaching that students are capable human beings, students are intelligent, they have the potential to become ... who they want to become ...students should not be limited to what the teacher brings to the classroom... They have to use what the teacher provides ... as an input ... to make further exploration into knowledge. They have to know that what the teacher provides is a sample of large ... as well as a complex knowledge structure (Instructor<sub>05</sub>).*

Another instructor also reflected:

*Good teaching is giving more opportunities for students... They {students} have to test or explore, use their potential. Instructors should invent a place where students are able to explore their potential or use their*

*potential. Otherwise... they may simply copy {memorize} something they write on ... exam. That is not a good teaching (Instructor<sub>13</sub>).*

These illustrations reveal that instructors in Category D are more student-focused and believe that students have the potential to become who they want to become. They believe that instructors cannot provide students with all that they need and thus encourage students to explore and build broader knowledge of the discipline on their own. As a result, they consider their role as scaffolding students in their efforts to advance towards their potential development rather than providing fixed knowledge. They believe that instructors cannot provide students with all that they need and thus encourage students to explore and build knowledge on their own. For this to happen, they consider students' self-reliance and willingness to take responsibility for their own learning essential rather than depending too much on instructors. In this regard, Instructor<sub>20</sub> expressed *“the role of the instructor should be more of a facilitator; students should take responsibility for their own learning...they should develop independent learning skills such as searching for resources by their own. They should not be teacher-dependent”*.

### **Relationships between the categories**

In most phenomenographic studies, categories of conceptions were posited to be related in a hierarchy of inclusiveness based on increasing breadth of awareness from the lowest to the highest category of conception (Gonzalez 2011:76-78). In view of this, the relationships between the four categories of conceptions identified in this study were examined based on the key aspects of teaching discussed in Table 4.4 above and the referential (what of teaching) and the structural (how of teaching) aspects of teaching presented in Table 4.5.



**Table 4.5: Referential and structural aspects of conceptions of teaching**

Referential (nature of teaching )	Structural(approach to teaching )		Characteristics of the category
	Content-focused	Learning-focused	
Transmitting syllabus information	Category A		Simple , lowest, least developed
Transmitting instructor's version of the syllabus	Category B		Undeveloped
Helping students develop the required knowledge		Category C	Developed
Helping students expand their knowledge		Category D	Most developed, complex, highest

In Table 4.4, key aspects of teaching against which instructors are claimed to construct their conceptions of teaching were used to describe the similarities and differences between the categories established in the study. These are the essence of teaching, the role of a student and an instructor in teaching, the expected outcome of teaching, and approach to teaching. Based on the information in the table, each dimension presents an expanding focus from one category to another in the hierarchy from Category 'A' through Category 'D'. For instance, the role of the instructor is transmitting syllabus information in Category A whereas in Category 'B' the role of the instructor expands to include not merely transmitting syllabus information but also structuring it in a way that is easy for students to learn. In categories 'C' and 'D', the role of the instructor further expands to include focus on the learner and learning besides the information in the syllabus. Similarly, the role of the student expands from passively receiving information in Categories 'A' and 'B' to constructing and expanding knowledge in Categories 'C' and 'D'. In addition, the expected outcome of teaching is accumulating the information in the syllabus or the structured information from the instructor in Categories 'A' and 'B'. However, in Categories 'C' and 'D', the outcome of teaching expands to include teaching for helping students develop and expand knowledge. In a similar way, instructors' approach to teaching expands from merely lecturing information in Categories 'A' and 'B' to a more interactive way of learning and teaching that includes lecture in Categories 'C' and 'D'. This reveals that aspects of teaching represented in higher categories include awareness of aspects of teaching represented in lower categories based on increasing breadth of awareness.

To further explain these categories and the relationships between them, drawing on Table 4.4, a framework linking referential (what of teaching) and structural (how of teaching) aspects of teaching was developed. As can be seen in Table 4.5, four referential aspects of teaching which include transmitting syllabus information, transmitting instructors' version of the syllabus, helping students develop the required knowledge and helping students expand their knowledge emerged. In addition, two structural aspects of teaching, namely, content-focused and learning-focused perspectives emerged. Based on this framework, the four categories and their relations in the hierarchy were examined. From this, Category 'A' was found to be the lowest, simple and least developed conception category in the hierarchy as it represented the most traditional perspective of teaching which is transmitting syllabus information to students whereas category 'D' was found to be the most developed, complex and highest conception category in the hierarchy as it represented the facilitating perspective which focuses more on helping students expand their knowledge than providing information. It was also found that aspects in the later categories expand on the awareness of the aspects in the earlier categories. For instance, in Category 'A', teaching is primarily focused on covering the information in the syllabus whereas in Category 'B', it includes not only covering the information in the syllabus but also adapting or restructuring the syllabus to make it easy for students to learn. In the rest of the categories, the information in the syllabus is still recognised but the focus of teaching shifts in hierarchy to include additional aspects of effective teaching and learning, which implies that the aspects of the developed categories include the aspects of the less developed ones, but not vice versa.

Generally, the first two categories, namely, teaching as satisfying syllabus demands and teaching as presenting structured information to students refer to the instructor-centred /content-oriented conception of teaching. This is because teaching in these categories is content-oriented or instructor-centred because the instructor is preoccupied with covering the required content as stipulated in the curriculum/syllabus or the transmission of a carefully structured knowledge to students. However, the remaining ones, namely, teaching as helping students learn what they learn and teaching as helping students expand their knowledge refer to the student-centred /learning-oriented conception of teaching. This is because, in these categories, teaching is student-focused as its aim shifts from covering content or transmitting structured knowledge to helping students learn and

guiding them towards potential development whereby the instructor acts more as a facilitator of learning than information provider.

Table 4.4 also shows the number of instructors holding a particular conception. The analysis showed an individual instructor held multiple conceptions of teaching out of which one is predominant. During the interviews, instructors in the higher category expressed different views to different questions. For instance, when responding to the question, “What does teaching mean to you”, one of the instructors expressed, “*Teaching is the process of transferring knowledge from the instructor to the students*” which reflects the instructor-centred conception of teaching. However, when responding to the question, “What are the qualities of good teaching”, he expressed, “*Good teaching is giving more opportunities for students, facilitating the environment for students to ... test or explore and use their potential*” which reflects the student-centred/learning-oriented conceptions of teaching. Therefore, to reconcile these conflicting views, instructors’ dominant conceptions were used to assign them to a particular category. Following this procedure, three instructors and four instructors were assigned respectively to the first two categories of conceptions of teaching, which refer to the instructor-centred/content-oriented conception category whereas eleven and two instructors were assigned respectively to the remaining categories, which refer to the student-centred/learning-oriented conception category of teaching. This revealed that the majority of the instructors interviewed in the study dominantly hold student-centred conceptions of teaching. It also showed that the instructor-centred conception of teaching did not fade out from teaching in Ethiopian context as seven of the instructors interviewed still predominantly hold this conception of teaching.

## **4.2.2 Findings from the questionnaires**

Following the preliminary analysis of the interviews, a questionnaire was designed to explore quantitatively more into instructors' conceptions of teaching by integrating larger sample of instructors (160 instructors) into the study. A questionnaire comprising two broad categories of conceptions of teaching: student-centred and instructor-centred was designed. The instructor-centred category was designed to comprise nine items whereas the student-centred category was designed to comprise eight items in the questionnaire. All items were designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5). To analyse the items, in addition to frequency and percentage, mean score was calculated for each item out of five where a score of five indicates strong agreement, a score of three is neutral and a score of one is strong disagreement. In addition, an independent samples test and one way ANOVA were used to examine the differences in conceptions of teaching among instructors. The outcome of the analysis is presented in this section as follows.

### **4.2.2.1 Instructors' views of the teacher-centred conception of teaching**

As discussed above, nine items were included in the questionnaire to assess instructors' views of the traditional conception of teaching, which is teacher-centred/content-oriented. Table 4.6 below presents the findings.

**Table 4.6: Instructors' views of the teacher-centred conception of teaching**

Item	Views about Teaching	SD(1)		D(2)		N(3)		A(4)		SA(5)		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	The essence of teaching is mainly delivering knowledge to students.	11	7.3	29	19.2	11	7.3	76	50.3	24	15.9	3.48
3	Teaching is mainly providing students with the information they will need to pass examinations.	61	40.4	59	39.1	7	4.6	16	10.6	8	5.3	2.01
6	The role of the instructor is mainly delivering knowledge to students.	14	9.3	45	29.8	32	21.2	48	31.8	12	7.9	2.99
9	Teaching is lecturing information to students.	29	19.2	65	43.0	33	21.9	19	12.6	5	3.3	2.38
10	Teaching is giving students a set of good lecture notes.	25	16.6	78	51.7	31	20.5	9	6.0	8	5.3	2.32
12	Teaching is mainly covering the required content fully.	26	17.2	54	35.8	41	27.2	23	15.2	7	4.6	2.54
15	Students have very little to contribute to the teaching-learning process.	52	34.4	60	39.7	20	13.2	15	9.9	4	2.6	2.07
16	The primary role of the student is to receive knowledge from instructors.	45	29.8	67	44.4	19	12.6	16	10.6	4	2.6	2.12
17	It is important that a student remembers everything the instructor has taught.	32	21.2	59	39.1	40	26.5	15	9.9	5	3.3	2.35
	Overall Mean											2.47

(Scale is 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree)

Table 4.6 summarizes the analysis of the items, which were designed to assess instructors' views of the traditional conception of teaching. Based on the information that can be inferred from the mean values of these items, instructors seem to have negative views towards the teacher-centred conception of teaching. For instance, the mean values 2.01 for Item 3 which refers to the view of teaching as examination-oriented and 2.07 for Item 15 which refers to the assumption that students have little to contribute to the teaching-learning process clearly show that instructors do not support these views. Similarly, the mean values 2.11 for Item 16 which refers to the view that the role of students is to receive knowledge from instructors and 2.32 for Item 10 which refers to the view of teaching as giving a set of lecture notes clearly show that the instructors' views of these items are negative. In addition, the percentage results for these items show higher number of instructors who have either strongly disagreed or disagreed than those who have either strongly agreed or agreed. For instance, for Item 3, 40.4% of the instructors have strongly disagreed and 39.1% of them have disagreed to the view that teaching is mainly providing students with the information they will need to pass examination. Similarly, for Item 15, 73.3% of the instructors have either strongly disagreed or disagreed to the view that students have very little to contribute to the teaching-learning process.

Nevertheless, instructors' responses to some of the items may imply that instructors do not totally reject the traditional conception of teaching. For Item 1, 50.3% of the instructors have agreed and 15.9% of them have strongly agreed to the view that the essence of teaching is mainly delivering knowledge to students. In addition, for Items 6 and 12 whose mean scores are 2.99 and 2.54 respectively, the instructors' responses did not indicate strong disagreement, which may imply that delivering knowledge to students and teaching to cover the syllabus are the expected roles of instructors practically in teaching in Ethiopia. However, the instructors preferred to be neutral for they might be aware of the fact that these assumptions are traditional and ineffective in helping students learn, especially at higher education level.

In general, the overall mean score, which is 2.47, shows slight disagreement, which reveals that the instructors' views of the traditional conception of teaching were slightly negative. However, the instructors did not strongly disagree or reject such conception of

teaching, which may imply that such conception of teaching still prevails and is not yet phased out from teaching in Ethiopian context. This finding is consistent with the findings from the interviews, which revealed that 7 out of 20 instructors still predominantly hold teacher-centred/content-oriented conception of teaching.

#### **4.2.2.2 Instructors' views of the student-centred conception of teaching**

As discussed above, eight items were included in the questionnaire to assess instructors' views of the constructivist conception of teaching, which is student-centred/learning-oriented. Table 4.7 below presents the findings.

**Table 4.7: Instructors' views of the student-centred conceptions of teaching**

Item	Views about Teaching	SD(1)		D(2)		N(3)		A(4)		SA(5)		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
2	Students should be active for the teaching-learning process to be successful.	1	.7	2	1.3	4	2.6	21	13.9	123	81.5	4.74
4	Teaching is helping students develop new ways of thinking in the subject they study.			4	2.6	6	4.0	57	37.7	84	55.6	4.46
5	Teaching is helping students expand their knowledge and understanding of the topics studied.			6	4.0	10	6.6	67	44.4	68	45.0	4.30
7	It is important that the student undertake responsibility for his/her own learning.			5	3.3	7	4.6	53	35.1	86	57.0	4.46
8	Teaching is creating a positive learning environment in which students learn by themselves.	1	.7	6	4.0	12	7.9	49	32.5	83	55.0	4.37
11	The role of the instructor is to facilitate and guide students in the way of learning.	1	.7	3	2.0	3	2.0	57	37.7	87	57.6	4.50
13	Teaching is providing students with ample opportunities to explore and express their ideas.	1	.7	1	.7	11	7.3	44	29.1	94	62.3	4.52
14	Teaching is helping students construct knowledge from their learning experiences.			5	3.3	3	2.0	74	49.0	69	45.7	4.37
	Overall Mean											4.47

(Scale is 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree)



Table 4.7 presents the analysis of the items, which were designed to assess instructors' views of student-centred conception of teaching. As the mean scores in the table indicate, instructors rated all of the items positively. Their agreement to these items ranged from agreement (4.30) to strong agreement (4.74). For instance, the mean scores 4.74, 4.52 and 4.50 for Items 2, 13, and 11 respectively imply that instructors have more or less strongly agreed that students should be active for the teaching-learning process to be successful, teaching is providing students with opportunities to explore and express their ideas and the role of the instructor is to facilitate and guide students in the way of learning. The percentage results for these items also reveal higher number of instructors who have either strongly agreed or agreed than those who have either strongly disagreed or disagreed. For instance, for Item 2, 95.4% of the instructors have either strongly agreed or agreed to the view that students should be active for the teaching-learning process to be successful. For the rest of the items, the mean scores ranged from 4.3 to 4.46, which imply instructors' agreement to these items. In addition, the overall mean value, which is 4.47, also shows that instructors tend to agree to student-centred conceptions of teaching.

**Figure 4.1: Comparison of instructors' views of the traditional and the student-centred conceptions of teaching**

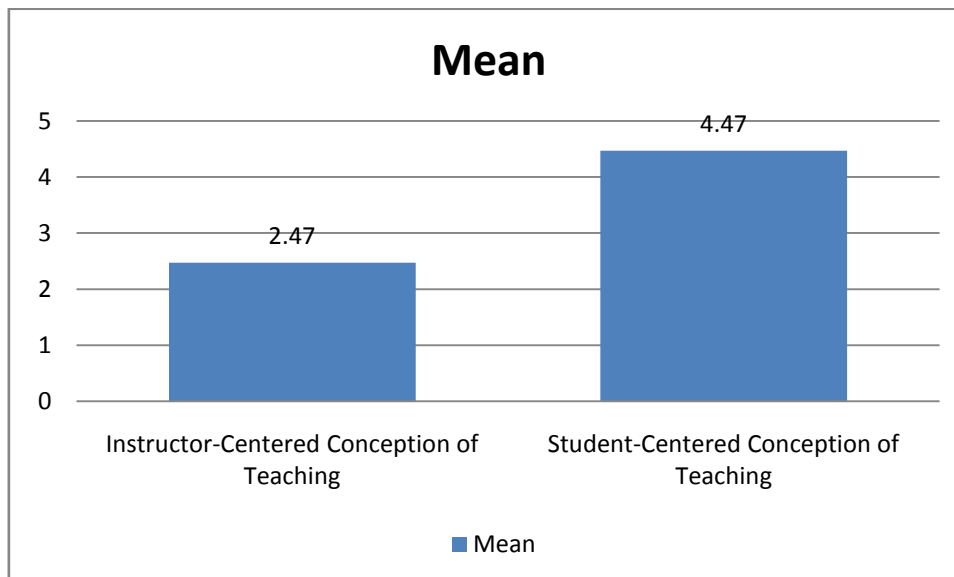


Figure 4.1 compares instructors' views of the two broad categories of conceptions of teaching. As the figure indicates, the overall mean value for student-centred conception of teaching is 4.47 which reveals that instructors strongly supported a constructivist

approach to teaching as this score is between agree and strongly agree. It also shows that the instructors slightly disagreed with the traditional conception of teaching, as its mean value is 2.47, which is between disagree and neutral. In general, from this finding, it is reasonable to conclude that instructors tended to support student-centred conception of teaching more than teacher-centred conception of teaching although they did not totally reject such conception of teaching. This finding is consistent with the finding from the interviews, which revealed that apart from 7 instructors who were categorised under the traditional conception, the majority of the instructors (13 instructors) were student-centred/learning-oriented in their conception of teaching.

#### 4.2.2.3 Variation in conceptions of teaching among instructors

Independent samples test and one-way ANOVA were used to measure the differences in conceptions of teaching that might exist among instructors based on gender, discipline, training, level of education and teaching experience. Where independent samples test was used to examine differences, equal variance was assumed as Levene's test for the variables was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ). The results of both tests are discussed as follows.

**Table 4.8: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on gender**

Category of conception of teaching	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-centred	Female	16	2.4167	.75523	-.382	.703
	Male	135	2.4807	.61876		
Student-centred	Female	16	4.5000	.39264	.341	.734
	Male	135	4.4611	.43609		

Table 4.8 reveals instructors' conceptions of teaching based on their gender. As can be seen in the table, there is no significant mean difference between instructors based on their gender in both categories of conception of teaching. Both groups have higher mean values for student-centred conception of teaching implying that male and female instructors equally favour student-centred conception of teaching more than instructor-centred conception of teaching. In addition, the test results revealed p-values (0.703 and

0.734) which are quite above the level of significance 0.05, showing that there is no statistically significant difference in instructors' views towards the teacher-centred and the student-centred conceptions of teaching based on their gender.

**Table 4.9: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on discipline**

Category of conception of teaching	Discipline	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-centred	Natural Sciences	76	2.5453	.65148	1.403	.163
	Social Sciences	75	2.4015	.60745		
Student-centred	Natural Sciences	76	4.4605	.41292	-.135	.893
	Social Sciences	75	4.4700	.45062		

Table 4.9 shows instructors views towards the two categories of conception of teaching based on their discipline. Based on the information in the table, there is no significant mean difference between Social Science (Soft discipline) and Natural Science (Hard discipline) instructors in terms of their conceptions of teaching. Both categories of instructors have higher mean values in student-centred conceptions of teaching, implying that the instructors irrespective of their discipline tend to support student-centred conception of teaching. Furthermore, the test results revealed p-values 0.163 and 0.893 respectively which are quite above the level of significance 0.05 implying that there is no statistically significant difference in instructors' views towards the teacher-centred and the student-centred conception of teaching based on their discipline.

**Table 4.10: Independent samples test results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on whether they have attended a pedagogical training or not**

Category of conception of teaching	Pedagogical training	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-centred	Attended	94	2.4	.60263	-2.995	.003
	Not attended	57	2.7	.63725		
Student-centred	Attended	94	4.5	.37564	2.485	.014
	Not attended	57	4.3	.49257		

Table 4.10 shows instructors' conceptions of teaching based on whether they have attended pedagogical training or not. As can be seen in the table, training seems to have an effect on the conceptions of teaching held by instructors. In relation to the teacher-centred conceptions of teaching, instructors who have not attended any pedagogical training have higher mean value, 2.7, than those who have attended training whose mean value is 2.4. Though both values are more or less negative, the mean difference between the two groups shows that those instructors who have attended training are more negative towards instructor-centred conception of teaching than those who have not attended training. In addition, the p-value 0.003 for this category at the level of significance 0.05 reveals there is statistically significant difference between instructors who have attended pedagogical training and who have not attended training in terms of their views towards instructor-centred conceptions of teaching.

Similarly, as the table reveals, instructors' views of student-centred conception of teaching differed based on whether they have attended training or not. The mean values are slightly higher for instructors who have attended pedagogical training than those instructors who have not. In addition, the p-value 0.014 for this category at 0.05 level of significance shows there is statistically significant differences in instructors' views of student-centred conceptions of teaching based on whether they have attended pedagogical training or not.

Furthermore, to check whether instructors' conceptions of teaching differed based on their level of education (PhD, M.A/M.SC, and B.A/B.SC) and teaching experience (1-5yrs, 6-10yrs and >10yrs), a one-way ANOVA was conducted at a significance level of 0.05. The results as can be seen in Tables 4.11 and 4.12 reveal that there is no statistically significant difference in instructors' conceptions of teaching in terms of their level of education and teaching experiences.

**Table 4.11: ANOVA results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on level of education**

Category of conception of teaching		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teacher-centred	Between Groups	1.609	2	.804	2.041	.133
	Within Groups	58.310	148	.394		
	Total	59.919	150			
Student-centred	Between Groups	.124	2	.062	.330	.719
	Within Groups	27.694	148	.187		
	Total	27.817	150			

**Table 4.12: ANOVA results of instructors' conceptions of teaching based on teaching experiences**

Category of conception of teaching		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Teacher-centred	Between Groups	1.495	2	.748	1.894	.154
	Within Groups	58.423	148	.395		
	Total	59.919	150			
Student-centred	Between Groups	.602	2	.301	1.635	.198
	Within Groups	27.216	148	.184		
	Total	27.817	150			

### 4.3 INSTRUCTORS' APPROACHES TO TEACHING

The second major objective of the study was to examine instructors' approaches to teaching (teaching practices) in the four universities selected for the study. In order to attain this objective, instructors were interviewed and their classes were observed. In addition, a survey was conducted through questionnaires. The findings from the interviews are presented first and followed by the findings from the classroom observations and the findings from the questionnaires, respectively. The findings were summarized and cross-validated at the end of the section.

### 4.3.1 Findings from the interviews

In the interviews, instructors were asked to describe their classroom practices or their teaching strategies. Analysis of these descriptions revealed two broad categories of strategies of teaching which are currently in practice in the selected universities. These are teacher-focused and student-focused approach to teaching. The following excerpts from the interviews illustrate these two fundamental teaching strategies.

To begin with the descriptions of teaching typical of the teacher-focused teaching strategy, the following excerpts from the interviews are provided. For instance, Instructor<sub>07</sub> described:

*I give my students a handout. So, they refer to the handouts for notes. I do not need to write everything on the blackboard. I write only some key points from the handout on the blackboard when I teach. Based on the familiarity of the topic of the lesson, I ask questions before we start our discussion. Then, I lecture and explain concepts and ideas in relation to the lesson. After I finish, if students have questions, they ask questions. Otherwise, I summarise the lesson and finish.*

Similarly, Instructor<sub>03</sub> described his main teaching strategy as follows:

*In my classroom, I lecture most of the time. Sometimes, I ask questions and invite students to respond to these questions.*

These descriptions are unique features the traditional form of teaching whereby the instructor dominates the teaching-learning process through lecturing and explaining the concepts taught and students are passive and attend classes merely to listen to the instructor and copy lecture notes from the blackboard. As can be inferred from the way the instructors described their teaching strategies, students were not involved in the teaching-learning process except in the rare occasions for responding to questions asked by the instructors themselves.

In contrast to the above instructors, the descriptions of a few instructors reflect a student-focused teaching strategy. Here are some excerpts illustrating this form of teaching from the interviews.

*The first thing that I do when I go to class is checking the background of the students. That is, whether they know something about the topic or not, which shows whether the topic is familiar or not. I do not assume from the outset, students are ignorant. Rather I ask questions to confirm this (Instructor<sub>13</sub>).*

Similarly, another instructor reported:

*First, I give some lecture for not more than five to ten minutes. After that, I will give them {students} questions or discussion issues. There I leave some time for discussion. After this, I ask students to take turns... to reply to the discussion questions. Then, I will continue lecturing for sometime .... Then, I will stop lecturing and start discussion again (Instructor<sub>05</sub>).*

These excerpts provide a clear description of a student-focused teaching strategy in which the instructor connects students to the teaching-learning process from the outset. These instructors elicited students' prior knowledge and understanding on the concepts taught before doing anything. Students were encouraged to discuss on issues related to the lesson by linking their prior knowledge with the new experience rather than merely attending to the lectures by the instructors as in the preceding descriptions.

### **4.3.2 Findings from the classroom observations**

Classroom observation was incorporated in this study to cross-validate the information from the interviews. Its purpose was to examine the actual teaching practices of instructors and thereby to check whether what the instructors claimed they do was consistent with what they actually do. For this reason, twenty instructors were observed at least once in a two-hour lesson. Sample observed lessons are presented and described in this section. These lessons were selected randomly to demonstrate the main instructional strategies employed by instructors from both the teacher-centred and the student-centred classes.

#### **Sample Observation Lesson I**

This observation took place for two hours in undergraduate history class. The students were first year history majors. Their number was only 17. The class was arranged in such a way that all students face their instructor (front to back seating arrangement),

which was a common arrangement in most of the classes observed. There were enough seats in the class and all were moveable. The room was neat, aerated and had sufficient light for reading and writing. The topic of the lesson was entitled “*Theological Controversy in Ethiopia during the Gondar Period (1632-1769)*”. The instructor began the class by introducing the day’s lesson. He briefly introduced the topic and asked students to open their handout to a certain page number. Students then scanned through their handout in order to find the topic on the page specified. All students had their own handouts, which might have been given to students towards the beginning of the semester. The instructor started explaining the lesson by reading out from the handout. While the instructor was doing so, students were listening and occasionally underlining the key points emphasized by the instructor. While explaining the lesson from the handout, the instructor frequently used Amharic, one of the Ethiopian languages that the majority seemed to understand. At the same time, the students were writing the Amharic equivalents of some difficult English words. The instructor occasionally wrote key ideas on the blackboard, which students copied into their exercise book even though these ideas were already available in the handout.

After a series of explanations on the lesson from the handout, the instructor paused and asked students a question on the differences among the various religious teachings in Ethiopia. However, few students raised their hands to respond to this question. The instructor did not make any attempt to put students in pairs or groups to share ideas and opinions on the issue raised. As a result, apart from mentioning the four dominant religions in Ethiopia, which are Orthodox, Islam, Protestant and Catholic, students did not dare to say much on the differences among these religions. The instructor did not also delve much into the subject rather than saying there is no such big difference among these religious teachings. But, he explained how and when these religions were introduced to Ethiopia. He stated that Orthodox Christianity was first introduced, followed by Islam, Catholic and Protestant, respectively.

Finally, the instructor summarised the lesson and asked students the common way of ending class in Ethiopia, which is “Do you have any questions?”. As it was a two-hour continuous class and as students were sitting for long hours without moving, they



refrained from asking any questions. After waiting for some time, the instructor ended the class by telling students the topic for the next class.

## **Sample Observation Lesson II**

This observation took place in a postgraduate class, taught by an instructor who has a PhD qualification in Geography. The subject taught by the instructor was “*Urban Environment Problems, Policy and Planning*”. The students were studying their postgraduate studies (M.A) in Geography and Environmental Studies. The class was a two-hour class that took place from 9:45am to 11:45am. The number of students in class was four of which one was female. This lesson was conducted in a very large undergraduate classroom as the department had no fixed classroom for its postgraduate program. Due to lack of a fixed class for the program, teaching in this subject used to take place only when there were any free classes available. During this observation, luckily a free classroom was found without wasting much time and energy. It was also fortunate that this classroom was free for two consecutive hours, which was not often possible in most of the cases due to shortage of classrooms in this university, which was a common problem in most universities in Ethiopia. The lesson taught was entitled “*Urban Environment Problems*”. Before beginning the new lesson, the instructor recapped the previous lesson on Components of the Environment. He asked the students few questions (e.g., what are the components of the environment?) on it and let them discuss on these questions in pairs for five minutes. Students paired themselves and discussed on various components of the environment (Natural, Socio-economic, etc). After five minutes, the instructor asked students to report on their discussion points. Calling students by name, the instructor gave all of them the opportunity to say something on the topic of discussion. While students were presenting their viewpoints turn by turn, the instructor was writing key information on the blackboard. Finally, by adding more concrete examples and ideas, the instructor summarized and elaborated the viewpoints from students.

Next, the instructor proceeded to the day’s topic entitled “*urban environment problems*”. He wrote the topic on the blackboard and asked students what they know about the topic.

By raising hands, students shared what they knew about the concept and the types of urban environment problems in Ethiopia. Then, the instructor dictated some notes on the topic. While doing so, the instructor also wrote some key ideas on the blackboard. After the dictation was over, the instructor distributed a picture entitled “*Urban Areas: Inputs and Outputs: Urban Resource and Environmental Problems*”. He then asked students to discuss on the picture in pairs. Students discussed the picture in pairs for five minutes. The instructor then asked students to reflect on the picture based on their discussion. Turn by turn, students reported their views on the picture. While students were reporting, the instructor was writing key points on the blackboard. He then asked others to add new ideas to the information on the blackboard. Finally, the instructor appreciated students for their efforts and summarized their viewpoints. He also provided students with practical examples from the surrounding, compared and contrasted the magnitude of the problem at urban and rural areas. In the remaining time, the instructor applied the same pattern of teaching, which was a lecture and then discussion. The class ended at 11:45am.

### **Sample Observation Lesson III**

This observation took place in a 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate Chemistry class. This class was one of the largest classes observed during the study. It consisted of more than seventy students. Because of the large number of students in the class, some students, especially female students found it very difficult to get a seat in the classroom. As a result, they were forced to bring chairs from other classrooms. Thanks to a student who left his seat for me, I was able to find a place to sit in the classroom. Due to these problems, it took several minutes for students to take seats and for the instructor to start the lesson. The topic of the lesson was entitled “*Stereo Chemistry*” and was conducted from 9:30 am to 11:30 am for two consecutive hours. The instructor wrote the topic on the blackboard and asked students if they knew anything about stereo chemistry. Students responded that they do not know anything about the concept stereo chemistry. Then, the instructor began his explanation on stereo chemistry. At the same time, he was lecturing on the blackboard. To explain his lectures, the instructor mainly used Amharic and used English to some extent. The instructor drew some diagrams and illustrated them with objects he brought from his office. The instructor continued defining and lecturing terms and

concepts related to stereo chemistry. Students were listening to the instructor and copying the notes and diagrams from the blackboard even though the instructor promised the distribution of handouts in the future.

Next, the instructor provided examples of stereo chemistry using hands and slippers of students. While he was demonstrating this, few students asked questions in Amharic. The instructor responded to these questions himself without giving any opportunity for students. After much explanation, demonstration and lecture on the lesson by the instructor, he asked the class the usual question, "Do you have any questions?" for which the students said neither "yes" nor "No". It appeared that students were tired after two hours of explanation and lecture by the instructor. Finally, the instructor summarized the main ideas of the lesson and ended the class.

#### **Sample observation Lesson IV**

This observation took place in a 1<sup>st</sup> year postgraduate Biology class. The class consisted of only three male students. The classroom for this course was different from the rest of the classrooms observed. It was a special room allocated for a postgraduate class of this particular department. It had moveable seats, computers, LCD, whiteboard, TV, OHP, white screen, etc. This class contained ample resource options to choose from for teaching purposes. The lesson observed was a PowerPoint Presentation. It was entitled "*Blood and Tissue Helminths (Parasitic)*". The class was conducted for two consecutive hours. First, the instructor recapped the previous lesson and then presented the preview of the day's lesson from his slides. Next, the instructor started reading and explaining from his slides. As students had a copy of the slides, they were simply following the presentation of the instructor and occasionally taking notes of new ideas from the presentation, if any. The PowerPoint Presentation had many illustrations, which related to the structure of parasites and their life cycle. The instructor explained some of these illustrations and left others for students to read at home. The slides of the instructor were prepared fully in a lecture format so that there was no input from the side of the students. The instructor did not stop his presentation periodically either to ask questions or to encourage students to ask questions for checking students' understanding.

Finally, the instructor explained the slide that contained the summary of the chapter about parasites. This slide was prepared in the form of a table containing the name of the organism, its transmission, its symptoms, its diagnosis and its treatment. After this summary, the instructor introduced the next chapter and ended the class.

### **Sample Observation lesson V**

This observation took place in a 2<sup>nd</sup> year undergraduate Psychology class. The instructor for the course has master's degree in psychology and served in the university for more than six years. The class consisted of more than sixty students. The lesson topic was entitled "*The Prevalence and Impacts of HIV/AIDS in the world*" and was conducted for two consecutive hours. The lesson was a continuation of the previous class where students were given a group assignment on different topics. During this particular observation, one group consisting of six members was asked to present their group assignment to the class. First, the instructor introduced the topic and invited the group members to present their viewpoints one by one. Then, the instructor left the stage for the presenters and sat at the back of the classroom. The group members then moved to the stage and started making their presentation one by one. The first speaker introduced the group members and the outline of their presentation. Based on this outline, each student made his/her presentation, mainly through reading from notes which they prepared at home. During the presentation, the instructor told the rest of the students to take notes from the presentation and think of questions, which they ask at the end of the presentation. The instructor was also taking some notes while students were making their presentation.

After the group finalized their presentation, the instructor asked the group to stay on the stage for reflection and discussion on their presentation. The instructor encouraged students to ask questions. He then took the first opportunity to present his comments and suggestions on the presentation. He appreciated the efforts of students and identified some weaknesses during the presentation. He further posed questions such as "How does education aggravate HIV/AIDS?" and "How does the construction of road aggravate HIV/AIDS?" Other students also asked few questions such as "what is the relationship between HIV/AIDS and circumcision?" and "Why is HIV/AIDS prevalence rate low in North Africa as compared to other African countries?"

Next, the instructor invited the group members to respond to these questions. He called each student by name and asked him or her to answer a particular question. Though some students managed to say few things on the questions, others kept silent. Finally, the discussion reverted to Amharic and every one of them had something to say. The students expressed their views better when they used Amharic than English. Finally, the instructor raised one question for the class as well as to the presenters, i.e., “What did you learn from this kind of presentation?” The reflections of the class centred on appreciation of the group members in particular and the group in general whereas the reflection of the presenters focused on the challenges faced during the preparation of their presentation. They indicated that they were unable to find books and had limited access to internet to prepare their assignments as required. At the end, the instructor presented his viewpoints and ended the lesson by informing the class the next presenters.

In general, the sample observation lessons presented above are typical of the conditions of teaching and learning in the four universities selected for the study. These sample lessons illustrate that both forms of teaching, i.e., student-focused and instructor-focused teaching strategies prevail in teaching in a university context in Ethiopia. In this respect, sample lessons I, III and IV are typical of the traditional teaching strategies whereas lessons II and V are typical of the student-centred teaching strategy. In lessons I, III and IV, the teaching learning process followed the traditional pattern of the instructor demonstrating, explaining and lecturing the lesson from handouts or PPPs to students whose role was passively listening and taking lecture notes. The instructors focused more on covering their lessons than involving students to express their viewpoints. However, in lessons II and V, the instructors were facilitating more than lecturing. Unlike the previous instructors, these instructors did not devote much time for lecturing as students were actively involved in the teaching-learning process, discussing and expressing their viewpoints on the lesson topics. The teaching-learning process focused more on the ideas of the students than covering the lesson. The findings from these descriptions are consistent with the findings from the interviews, which showed that teaching practices in the four universities studied comprised both the student-focused and the teacher-focused approaches to teaching. The overall finding is that the traditional approach to teaching still prevails in teaching in higher education in Ethiopia despite its ineffectiveness at this level and the call for the employment of student-centred instruction. However, it also

shows that there exists a progress towards the implementation of student-centred instruction as the teaching practices of some instructors reflect the features of such an approach to teaching.

### **4.3.3 Findings from the questionnaires**

Two forms of questionnaire were designed: one for instructors and the other for students to explore instructors' teaching practices. Twenty items that comprised the two fundamental approaches to teaching, i.e., teacher-focused and student-focused approach to teaching were incorporated in both students' and instructors' questionnaires. The questionnaires comprised seven items that refer to teacher-focused teaching strategy, and thirteen items that refer to student-focused teaching strategy. The items were constructed on five-point Likert scale ranging from Only Rarely (1) to Almost Always (5). Besides calculating percentage and frequency values for each item, mean scores were calculated out of 5 where a score of 5 indicates almost always, a score of 3 indicates about half the time and a score of 1 indicates only rarely. In addition, an independent samples test and one way ANOVA were used to examine the differences in teaching strategies that might exist among the instructors. This section thus presents the outcome of the analysis.

#### **4.3.3.1 Finding from instructors**

As discussed in the methodology chapter, instructors' questionnaire was designed in such a way that instructors rated how often they used a particular teaching strategy in their teaching. The results of this investigation are presented in Tables 4.13 and 4.14.

**Table 4.13: Instructors’ responses on the extent they used teacher-centred strategies in teaching**

Item	Teacher-focused teaching strategies	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	I require students to remember the details of knowledge taught accurately.	16	10.6	32	21.2	40	26.5	50	33.1	13	8.6	3.08
2	My teaching mainly focuses on providing students with the information they need for examination.	71	47.0	30	19.9	30	19.9	15	9.9	5	3.3	2.03
5	My teaching is mainly concerned with covering the required content fully.	42	27.8	37	24.5	36	23.8	19	12.6	17	11.3	2.55
6	I require my students to be silent most of the time and listen to my instruction in class.	49	32.5	35	23.2	29	19.2	26	17.2	12	7.9	2.45
9	I require students to focus their study mainly on the learning resources (e.g., books, handouts, etc) provided.	16	10.6	29	19.2	51	33.8	40	26.5	15	9.9	3.06
14	My teaching focuses on giving students a good set of lecture notes.	29	19.2	42	27.8	44	29.1	31	20.5	5	3.3	2.61
18	I use mainly a lecture method in my teaching.	23	15.2	43	28.5	35	23.2	42	27.8	8	5.3	2.80
	Overall Mean											2.65

(Scale is 1: Only Rarely, 2: Sometimes, 3: About half the Time, 4: Frequently, and 5: Almost Always)

Table 4.13 presents instructors' responses on the extent they used teacher-focused strategies in their teaching. The mean scores ranged from 2.03 to 3.08, which are between sometimes and about half the time. This indicates that instructors' use of instructor-focused teaching strategy ranged from sometimes to about half the time. For instance, the mean score 2.03 for Item 2 indicates instructors sometimes focused on providing students with information they need for examination purposes. However, the mean scores for the majority of the items fall in about half the time category. For instance, the mean scores 3.08 for Item 1, 3.06 for Item 9 and 2.80 for Item 18 respectively reveal that instructors required students to remember the details of knowledge taught, required students to focus their study mainly on the resources provided and used a lecture method for about half the time of their teaching.

Almost for all of the items, the percentage results are higher in the categories below frequently, which imply that instructors do not frequently use instructor-focused approach in their teaching. In addition, the overall mean value, which is 2.67, implies that instructors used this approach for about half the time of their teaching. This finding supports the findings from the interviews and classroom observations, which revealed that teacher-centred instruction still prevails in teaching in a university context in Ethiopia.



**Table 4.14: Instructors’ responses on the extent they used student-focused strategies in teaching**

Item	Student-centred teaching strategies	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
3	I encourage students to ask questions during my teaching.	1	0.7	3	2.0	8	5.3	43	28.5	96	63.6	4.52
4	I ask questions during my teaching to make sure that students have understood the topics discussed.	1	.7	5	3.3	4	2.6	56	37.1	85	56.3	4.45
7	I create a learning environment that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.	3	2.0	15	9.9	21	13.9	60	39.7	52	34.4	3.95
8	I set aside some teaching time so that students can discuss, among themselves, key concepts and ideas.	7	4.6	22	14.6	29	19.2	70	46.4	23	15.2	3.53
10	My teaching takes into account students’ prior knowledge in the subject matter.	1	.7	9	6.0	34	22.5	69	45.7	38	25.2	3.89
11	I encourage students to interact with one another in my classes.	4	2.6	11	7.3	25	16.6	61	40.4	50	33.1	3.94
12	I encourage students to find their own learning resources (books, journals, etc).	12	7.9	23	15.2	40	26.5	51	33.8	25	16.6	3.36
13	I encourage students to apply the knowledge learnt through various activities.	1	.7	13	8.6	30	19.9	66	43.7	41	27.2	3.88
15	I provide feedback to students on their learning and progresses.	5	3.3	12	7.9	33	21.9	62	41.1	39	25.8	3.78
16	I encourage students to relate new knowledge to previous knowledge and experience.	-	-	7	4.6	21	13.9	68	45.0	55	36.4	4.13
17	I encourage students to assess their strengths and weaknesses.	4	2.6	21	13.9	39	25.8	53	35.1	34	22.5	3.61
19	I encourage students more to make sense of the content taught than to attempt to memorize it.	11	7.3	20	13.2	27	17.9	61	40.4	32	21.2	3.55
20	I encourage students to generate their own notes rather than always copy mine.	23	15.2	30	19.9	38	25.2	39	25.8	21	13.9	3.03
	Overall Mean											3.82

(Scale is 1: Only Rarely, 2: Sometimes, 3: About half the Time, 4: Frequently, and 5: Almost Always)

Table 4.14 presents responses of instructors regarding their use of student-focused strategies in their teaching. As can be seen from the table, the mean values ranged from 3.02 to 4.52, which are between ‘frequently’ to ‘almost always’ with the majority falling in the frequently category. The only mean score that fell in the almost always category is 4.52, which is the value for Item 3 and for which 63.6 % of the instructors indicated that their use of this strategy is almost always. This may imply that instructors always encouraged their students to ask questions in their teaching. In addition, the mean values 3.36 for Item12 and 3.03 for Item 20 may entail that instructors encouraged students to find their own resources and to generate their own notes for about half the time of their teaching. The mean values for the rest of the strategies are 3.53 and above, which may imply that instructors used these strategies frequently in their teaching. In general, almost for all of the items, the percentage results are higher in the categories above about half the time, which imply that instructors used student-focused teaching strategies frequently in their teaching. The overall mean value, which is 3.82, also indicates that instructors tended to frequently use student-focused strategies in their teaching. This finding is partly consistent with the findings from interviews and observations, which revealed some utilisation of student-focused teaching strategies by instructors in their teaching.

**Figure 4.2: Comparison of instructors’ reported use of instructor-focused and student-focused strategies in teaching**

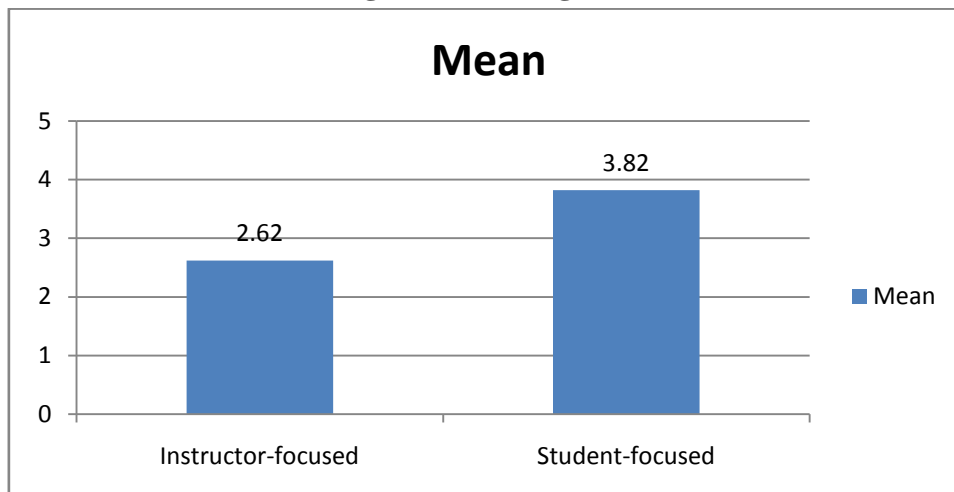


Figure 4.2 presents the overall mean values of instructors' reported use of student-focused and instructor-focused teaching strategies in teaching. The mean value for student-focused strategies is 3.82, which shows that instructors tended to use this approach frequently in their teaching. In contrast, the mean score for instructor-focused strategies is 2.62, which shows instructors tended to use this approach for about half the time of their teaching. This finding may indicate that instructors' teaching practice was more student-focused than teacher-focused though half the time of their teaching had been dominated by the traditional approach to teaching. This finding supports the findings from the interviews and classroom observations, which revealed that teaching in the four universities was under the influence of the teacher-centred instruction.

#### 4.3.3.2 Variation in teaching strategies among instructors

Independent samples test and one way ANOVA were used to measure the differences in teaching strategies that might exist between instructors based on their gender, discipline, training, teaching experience, class size and level of education. Where independent samples test was used to examine differences, equal variance was assumed as Levene's test for the variables (test of homogeneity of variances) was not significant ( $P > 0.05$ ). The results of both tests are discussed as follows

**Table 4.15: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on gender**

Teaching strategy	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-focused	Female	16	2.3482	.69785	-1.931	0.05
	Male	135	2.6889	.66363		
Student-focused	Female	16	4.0817	.47954	2.187	0.030
	Male	135	3.7858	.51536		

Table 4.15 depicts the extent to which teaching strategies differed among instructors based on their gender. In relation to instructor-focused teaching strategy, male instructors had higher mean value which is 2.6889 than female instructors whose mean value is 2.3482. This shows that male instructors favoured instructor-focused teaching strategy more than female instructors did. In addition, the p-value 0.03 is quite below the level of

significance expected, which is 0.05. This shows there is statistically significant difference in the employment of instructor-focused strategy among instructors based on their gender. This implies male instructors were more instructor-focused than female instructors.

Similarly, instructors also differed in their utilisation of a student-focused teaching strategy based on their gender. In this respect, female instructors had higher mean values than male instructors, implying that female instructors utilised this kind of strategy more than their male counterparts. In addition, the test result revealed p-value 0.05 which is exactly the level of significance expected. This shows there is statistically significant difference in the utilisation of student-focused strategy between the instructors based on their gender. This may imply that female instructors were more student-focused than male instructors.

**Table 4.16: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on discipline of study**

Teaching strategy	Discipline	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-focused	Natural Sciences	76	2.8	.62329	2.121	.036
	Social Sciences	75	2.5	.70568		
Student-focused	Natural Sciences	76	3.8	.55535	-.634	.527
	Social Sciences	75	3.8	.48005		

Table 4.16 shows how instructors' teaching strategies differed based on discipline of study. As the table depicts, instructors from Natural science disciplines had higher mean value, 2.8, than instructors from Social Science disciplines whose mean value is 2.5 in relation to instructor-focused teaching strategy. This shows instructor-focused strategy was preferred more by instructors from natural science disciplines than social science disciplines. In addition, the p-value for this category 0.036 at level of significance 0.05 shows there is statistically significant difference in instructors' utilisation of teacher-focused teaching strategy based on discipline.

Nevertheless, there are no significant mean differences in student-focused teaching strategy among instructors based on their discipline. In addition, the p-value for this category, which is 0.527, is quite above the level of significance 0.05 showing no

statistically significant difference among the instructors in their preference towards student-focused teaching strategy based on their discipline.

**Table 4.17: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on whether they have attended a pedagogical training or not**

Teaching strategy	Pedagogical training attended or not	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher-focused	Attended	94	2.6	.67428	-2.072	0.04
	Not attended	57	2.8	.65183		
Student-focused	Attended	94	3.8	.49110	.434	.665
	Not attended	57	3.8	.56399		

Table 4.17 depicts instructors' teaching strategies based on whether they have attended pedagogical training or not. The table shows instructors who had not attended pedagogical training had higher mean value than instructors who had attended training for the teacher-focused teaching strategy. This implies differences in the utilisation of this strategy among instructors based on whether they have attended training or not. In addition, the p-value 0.040 at level of significance 0.05 shows there is statistically significant difference among instructors in their utilisation of teacher-focused teaching strategy based on whether they had attended training or not. This implies instructors who had not attended training are likely to be instructor-focused more than instructors who had attended training.

However, there are no significant mean differences in student-focused teaching strategy among instructors who had attended and those who had not. In addition, the p-value 0.665, which exceeds the level of significance 0.05, shows there is no statistically significant difference between instructors in their utilisation of instructor-focused teaching strategy based on whether they had attended training or not.

**Table 4.18: Independent samples test results of instructors' teaching strategies based on their workload**

Teaching strategy	workload	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Student-focused	12 or less	114	3.8165	.52875	-0.27	0.978
	Greater than 12	37	3.8191	.49162		
Teacher-focused	12 or less	114	2.5815	.66944	-2.319	0.022
	Greater than 12	37	2.8726	.64487		

Table 4.18 describes the extent to which instructors' teaching strategies differed based on their teaching load which was categorised as the workload expected (12 hrs/week or less) and overload (greater than 12 hrs per week). From this, utilisation of student-focused teaching strategy does not seem to be dependent on instructors' teaching load as the p-value in the table is quite above the level of significance 0.05. However, teaching load seems to create differences between instructors in their utilization of instructor-focused teaching strategy. As can be seen in the table, the p-value 0.022 at level of significance 0.05 shows there is statistically significant difference between instructors in their utilisation of instructor-focused teaching strategy. That is, instructors whose load exceeds 12 hours reported more use of instructor-focused strategy than those instructors whose load is 12 hrs or less.

Furthermore, to check whether instructors' teaching strategies differed based on their level of education, teaching experience and class size, a one-way ANOVA was conducted at a significance level of 0.05. The following tables present the results.

**Table 4.19: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on level of education**

Teaching strategy		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Student-focused	Between Groups	.667	2	.334	1.246	.291
	Within Groups	39.626	148	.268		
	Total	40.293	150			
Instructor-focused	Between Groups	.143	2	.071	.156	.856
	Within Groups	67.837	148	.458		
	Total	67.980	150			

Based on their level of education, instructors in the study were categorised into those who have PhD, master's degree and bachelor's degree. From this, the ANOVA result in Table 4.19 reveals no statistically significant differences in teaching strategies between the instructors based on their level of education.

**Table 4.20: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on teaching experience**

Teaching strategy		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Student-focused	Between Groups	.037	2	.018	.067	.935
	Within Groups	40.256	148	.272		
	Total	40.293	150			
Instructor-focused	Between Groups	.978	2	.489	1.080	.342
	Within Groups	67.002	148	.453		
	Total	67.980	150			

Based on their teaching experiences, instructors were categorised into those who taught for 1-5yrs, 6-10yrs and greater than 10 yrs. However, the ANOVA result in Table 4.20 reveals no statistically significant differences in teaching strategies between the instructors based on their teaching experiences.

**Table 4.21: ANOVA results of instructors' teaching strategies based on class size**

Teaching strategy		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Student-focused	Between Groups	.022	2	.011	.040	.961
	Within Groups	40.271	148	.272		
	Total	40.293	150			
Instructor-focused	Between Groups	1.296	2	.648	1.439	.241
	Within Groups	66.684	148	.451		
	Total	67.980	150			

To see if class size influences instructors' teaching strategies, instructors were categorised based on the number of students in their class as those who have 30 or less students, 31-50 students and greater than 50 students. But, the ANOVA result in Table 4.21 reveals no statistically significant differences in teaching strategies between instructors based on class size.

### 4.3.3.3 Findings from students

Data were gathered from students to triangulate the information from instructors regarding their instructors' teaching strategies. Students were asked to report on the teaching strategies used by their instructor in teaching a particular course. Tables 4.22 and 4.23 present the outcome of the survey respectively.



**Table 4.22: Students' responses regarding the extent their instructors used teacher-focused strategies in their teaching**

Item	Teacher-focused teaching strategies	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	The instructor requires students to remember the details of knowledge taught accurately.	6	3.8	18	11.3	24	15.0	45	28.1	67	41.9	3.93
2	The instructor's teaching mainly focuses on providing information that is needed for examinations.	38	23.8	19	11.9	33	20.6	40	25.0	30	18.8	3.03
5	The instructor's teaching is mainly concerned with covering the required content fully.	6	3.8	14	8.8	36	22.5	33	20.6	71	44.4	3.93
6	The instructor requires students to be silent most of the time and listen to his/her lecture in class.	22	13.8	17	10.6	23	14.4	47	29.4	51	31.9	3.55
9	The instructor requires students to focus their study mainly on the learning resources (e.g., books, handouts, etc) he/she provides.	18	11.3	13	8.1	27	16.9	40	25.0	62	38.8	3.72
14	The instructor focuses mainly on giving students a set of lecture notes.	13	8.1	23	14.4	33	20.6	42	26.3	49	30.6	3.57
18	The instructor uses mainly a lecture method in his/her teaching.	12	7.5	13	8.1	33	20.6	48	30.0	54	33.8	3.74
	Overall Mean											<b>3.64</b>

(Scale is 1: Only Rarely, 2: Sometimes, 3: About half the Time, 4: Frequently, and 5: Almost Always)

Table 4.22 presents students' responses regarding the extent their instructors used teacher-focused strategies in their teaching. As the table shows, the responses of the students ranged from "about half the time" to "frequently" with the majority of the mean scores indicating frequent use. For instance, the mean scores 3.93, 3.93, and 3.57 for Items 1, 5 and 18 respectively show that instructors tended to use these strategies frequently in their teaching. For these items 70 %, 65% and 63.8 % of the students respectively indicated either frequently or almost always concerning their instructors' use of these strategies in teaching. This finding implies that instructors required their students to remember the details of knowledge taught, taught mainly to cover the syllabus and relied mainly on a lecture method almost always in their teaching. In addition, the overall mean 3.64, which is between about half the time and frequently, also reveals that instructors tended to use teacher-centred strategies frequently in their teaching. This finding is contradictory with the mean score 2.65, which represents the responses of the instructors concerning the extent they used teacher-focused teaching strategies. From this, instructors reported that their use of this approach is about half the time in contrast to students whose responses reveal that instructors tended to use it frequently. However, though the respondents indicated the extent of use of these strategies differently, the finding reveals that instructor-led lecture-based teaching strategy is still prominent in university classes in Ethiopia.

**Table 4.23: Students' responses regarding the extent their instructors used student-focused strategies in their teaching**

Item	Student-focused teaching strategies	1		2		3		4		5		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
3	The instructor encourages students to ask questions during his/her teaching.	7	4.4	15	9.4	17	10.6	40	25.0	81	50.6	4.08
4	The instructor asks questions during his/her teaching to make sure that students have understood the topics discussed.	10	6.3	5	3.1	29	18.1	34	21.3	82	51.3	4.08
7	The instructor creates a learning environment that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.	15	9.4	20	12.5	32	20.0	42	26.3	51	31.9	3.59
8	The instructor sets aside some teaching time so that students discuss, among themselves, key concepts and ideas.	15	9.4	16	10.0	31	19.4	47	29.4	51	31.9	3.64
10	The instructor takes into account students' prior knowledge in the subject matter.	13	8.1	16	10.0	39	24.4	44	27.5	48	30.0	3.61
11	The instructor encourages students to interact with one another in his/her teaching.	19	11.9	17	10.6	31	19.4	46	28.8	47	29.4	3.53
12	The instructor encourages students to find their own learning resources (books, journals, etc) in order to learn in this course.	22	13.8	23	14.4	27	16.9	45	28.1	43	26.9	3.40
13	The instructor encourages students to apply the knowledge learnt through various activities.	17	10.6	17	10.6	23	14.4	48	30.0	55	34.4	3.67
15	The instructor provides students with feedback on their learning and progresses.	20	12.5	19	11.9	38	23.8	42	26.3	41	25.6	3.41
16	The instructor encourages students to relate new knowledge to their previous knowledge and experience.	13	8.1	14	8.8	35	21.9	38	23.8	60	37.5	3.74
17	The instructor encourages students to assess their strengths and weaknesses in learning.	16	10.0	28	17.5	42	26.3	39	24.4	35	21.9	3.31
19	The instructor encourages students more to make sense of the content taught than to attempt to memorize it.	12	7.5	23	14.4	29	18.1	49	30.6	47	29.4	3.60
20	The instructor encourages students to produce their own notes rather than always copy his/hers.	32	20.0	21	13.1	30	18.8	34	21.3	43	26.9	3.22
	Overall Mean											<b>3.61</b>

(Scale is 1: Only Rarely, 2: Sometimes, 3: About half the Time, 4: Frequently, and 5: Almost Always)

Table 4.23 summarizes the responses of the students regarding their instructors' use of student-focused strategies in their teaching. As can be seen from the table, the mean score ranged from 3.22, which is "about half the time" to 4.08, which is "frequently" implying that instructors tend to use most of these strategies frequently in their teaching. For instance, the mean values 4.08 for Items 3 and 4, 3.74 for Item 16, and 3.67 for Item 13 clearly indicate that instructors use these strategies frequently in their teaching. The percentage results are also higher in the categories of frequently and almost always compared to other categories. This finding reveals that, according to the responses of the students, instructors tended to frequently encourage students to ask questions, check students' understanding, encourage students to relate new knowledge to the existing one and encourage students to apply new knowledge through various activities in their teaching.

Similarly, the overall mean 3.61, which is between "about half the time" and "frequently", also reveals that student-focused strategies were frequently used by instructors in teaching. This finding supports the responses of the instructors, in which the mean score is 3.82, implying that they frequently used this approach in their teaching. The finding also shows that students' rating of their instructors' use of student-centred teaching strategies and the traditional teaching strategies is more or less the same, which is 3.61 and 3.64 respectively. This may imply that instructors' approach to teaching in these universities is still under the influence of the teacher-centred approach to teaching. By the same token, it may also imply that the utilisation of student-centred approach in teaching is getting better based on the survey results.

#### **4.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTRUCTORS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES**

The third objective of the study was to examine the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. For this purpose, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was used to examine whether there is a relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching strategies based on the survey reports. In addition, evidence from the interviews and classroom

observations was presented. The results of Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis are presented in the following table.

**Table 4.24: Correlation between teaching conceptions and teaching strategies**

	Teacher-centred conception	Student-centred conception	Teacher-focused strategy	Student-focused strategy
<b>Conception of teaching</b>				
Teacher-centred conception		-.151	.497**	.077
Student-centred conception	-.151		-.177*	.316**
<b>Teaching strategies</b>				
Teacher-focused strategy	.497**	-.177*		-.120
Student-focused strategy	.077	.316**	-.120	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 4.24 reveals a significant and positive correlation between instructors' views of the traditional conception of teaching and their extent of use of the teacher/content-focused teaching strategy in their teaching ( $r = .497$ ,  $p < .000$ ). Based on the Cohen's (1988, in Donche & Petegem, 2011:214) criteria that the r-value ranging from .10 to .29 is a weak correlation, .30 to .49 is a moderate correlation and .50 and above is a strong correlation, the r-value .497 in the table indicates a moderate correlation. This means, instructors' low mean score 2.47 which shows almost disagreement to the traditional conception of teaching correlates with low mean score 2.65, which shows instructors' use of the teacher-focused teaching strategy is about half the time. This shows that the instructors' negative views of the traditional conception of teaching moderately correlated with their low use of the teacher/content-focused teaching strategy in their teaching.

Table 4.24 also shows a significant and positive correlation between instructors' views of the student-centred conception of teaching and their employment of the student-focused teaching strategy in their teaching ( $r = .316$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This shows instructors' views of the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching positively correlated with their use of the student/learning-focused teaching strategy in their teaching. Therefore, instructors' views of the student-centred conception of teaching was very positive ( $M = 4.47$ ) and likewise their use of such an approach in their teaching was high ( $M = 3.82$ ). In general, based on the survey reports, instructors' conception of teaching positively correlated with their teaching strategies. In other words, instructors' views of teaching were more student-centred and likewise were their teaching practices based on the survey results.

Similar to the survey reports, classroom observations revealed that instructors whose views of teaching were predominantly traditional were found to be more teacher-centred than student-centred in their teaching practices. For instance, instructor<sub>02</sub> indicated, *“Teaching is just transferring your knowledge to your students in a way that is easy for students to learn”*. Observation of this instructor's classroom teaching showed consistency between his views of teaching and his teaching practice (See sample Lesson IV). This instructor used a PPP to present his highly structured lecture notes to his students. His teaching-learning process followed the traditional pattern of the instructor lecturing, demonstrating and explaining lesson topic while students were passively listening and copying lecture notes. The instructor focused more on covering his slides than involving students to express their viewpoints. The only difference is that the instructor used PPP as a substitute for the traditional lecture in which the instructor provides detailed notes on the blackboard or in the form of lecture handouts. The PPP slides were prepared in detail without incorporating tasks, exercises or activities in any of the sections that would enable the students to contribute their ideas to the lesson.

However, the findings from the classroom observations reveal both consistency and inconsistency between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching strategies in relation to the practice of student-centred conception of teaching by instructors. On the one hand, there were instructors whose views of teaching were predominately

student-centred and likewise were their teaching practices. For instance, one of the instructors described his views of teaching as:

*I see teaching as a process of helping students learn. I assume that a teacher works as a facilitator, to help students learn what they are expected to learn. For me, teaching is not the process of showing how much the teacher knows about the subject matter (Instructor<sub>04</sub>).*

Likewise, observation of the classroom teaching of this instructor reflected his views of teaching (See sample Lesson II). This instructor's teaching practice was student-focused as students were actively involved in the teaching-learning process discussing and expressing their viewpoints on the lesson topics rather than passively copying lectures notes. The instructor used a lecture method not to provide detailed notes but just to give for students some inputs on the topic for subsequent discussion and reflection on it.

On the other hand, inconsistencies were observed in the actual teaching practices of instructors who claimed that their views of teaching are student-centred. For instance, *Instructor<sub>07</sub>* reported in the interviews:

*For me, a good teaching is a kind of teaching that involves students. I believe that a classroom discussion should not be occupied by the teacher's talk or lecture. A good teaching should be a kind of discussion with students, asking them what they already know about the topic or what they may think about the topic. A kind of teaching that a teacher stands in front of the board, writes, and explains without asking students what they think about that topic or without even asking them to brainstorm their experiences is not a good teaching.*

However, observation of the classroom teaching of this instructor revealed inconsistency between his views of teaching and his actual teaching practices. The instructor claimed that good teaching is student-centred which involves students in discussion, questioning and thinking of the topic taught. However, classroom observation in his classes revealed the opposite as the instructor dominated the teaching-learning process from the beginning up to the end (See sample Lesson I). Though this instructor was against a form of teaching which was lecture-based and more teacher talk, his actual teaching was not far from this. As this observation reveals, his actual teaching was handout-focused whereby

he read and explained topics from the handout more than making attempts to motivate students to share or discuss their view points. Students were passively listening to the explanation by the instructor on the information which is already available in their handout. These could be due to practical realities that impede instructors from translating student-centred/learning-oriented conceptions of teaching into their practice. Some of these factors are presented in the next section.

## **4.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING INSTRUCTORS' IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED INSTRUCTION**

The fourth objective of this study was to assess factors that may influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching. To address this objective, data were gathered through interviews, observations and questionnaires.

### **4.5.1 Findings from the interviews and the classroom observations**

The information from instructors through interviews and direct classroom observations reveals various constraining factors in the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in the four universities sampled in this study. For ease of analysis, these factors were categorised into student factors, instructor factors and institutional factors.

#### **4.5.1.1 Student factors**

As the literature suggests students may influence the implementation of new instructional practices for a number of reasons. In the same way, this study reveals several ways in which students were found influencing the proper implementation of student-centred approach to teaching. For instance, the study reveals that there was a tendency among students to highly depend on handouts and lecture notes and as a result they lacked the willingness to take responsibility for their own learning. For instance, according to *Instructor<sub>04</sub>*:

*... instead of exploring , expanding their own knowledge by themselves based on the little input that the teacher provides, there is a high tendency for them{students} to depend on your own notes even at a postgraduate level. There is a high tendency for*



*them {students} to look for handouts ... they have access to internet; they have access to other reference materials in the library.*

Similarly, *Instructor<sub>05</sub>* stated:

*Students consider student-centred learning as a waste of time. They say the teacher is doing it to save his time and energy. They do not accept it. They say the teacher is not properly prepared for teaching because they expect everything to be given by the instructor. They say a good a teacher is one who lectures from the beginning up to the end for the whole period. If a teacher lectures every time, they say that is a good teacher. Again, they want the teacher to provide them a bulky handout for them to read.*

The above excerpts reveal that students have the tendency to depend on handouts and lectures as the main resources of learning instead of finding their own learning resources even in having access to internet and other reference material. As a result of this, during the classroom observations, instructors were observed preoccupied more with providing detailed lecture notes and handouts to students. Instructors also explained that those who distribute handouts and give lecture notes were considered to be more popular among students than those instructors who involve students in various class activities and ‘take home’ assignments. They disclosed that students often considered instructors those who attempt to implement student-centred approach to teaching as if they were not doing their job or as if they were wasting time. In other words, students favour the traditional forms of teaching in which the instructor provides everything in the form of handouts/lecture notes more than the form of teaching in which the instructor provides less and the students explore more either individually or in groups..

Instructors also disclosed that students are not aware of their responsibilities in learning as one feature of student-centred instruction. For instance, they stated that students do not like to go to library and read reference books. Rather, they expect their instructors to provide everything in class. In addition, they do not like to take part in class discussions and to engage in ‘take home’ assignments whenever they are given such opportunities.

Regarding this, *Instructor<sub>11</sub>* stated:

*I tell students to go to library and read books. But without going and checking those books in the library, they say, there are no such books in the library. But when I go and check those books, they are there in the library. Students simply target to have all information to be provided in class on the blackboard or in the form of handouts. The culture of searching other resources for learning is absent among students.*

Another instructor added:

*We always beg them {students} to speak out, but they do not speak. So you stop for several minutes waiting for them... to speak. Sometimes I instruct them... if you are not doing this, you will not get this. ...You have to spend a lot of energy to stimulate students to speak. That is not the right way. ...students should know their responsibility. ... If you give some extra assignments like doing some critics or seminar work, they do not like it (Instructor<sub>02</sub>).*

From these excerpts, it appears that students do not like to take responsibilities for their own learning. This could be due to the fact that students were accustomed to passively listening to the instructor and getting everything in class with little effort as much as possible, which used to be the case in Ethiopia for years.

The other problem mentioned by instructors in relation to students was their tendency to be exam-oriented. That is, approaching learning in a way that enables them to pass examination more than in a way that helps them develop and build knowledge. This problem is evident in the following excerpts. *Instructor<sub>14</sub>* expressed:

*I expect students to learn not for sake of exams. Unfortunately, students are examination- oriented. This should not be the case. They should not learn for sake of examination or passing examination...They should be learning for the sake of gaining knowledge rather than examination only. Learning should go beyond passing examination.*

Similarly, another instructor stated:

*Education for examination is the common trend in Ethiopia. Students are not learning-focused. They do not come to class to gain knowledge but only to pass examination. To change this situation, we have to improve our methods of teaching so that students will become more motivated to learn the course regardless of the nature of the course taught (Instructor<sub>16</sub>).*

There were also instructors who indicated that their students were inhibited from participating in class discussions not because they were not willing but because their English language proficiency was low. Though English is claimed to be the medium of instruction in the secondary and tertiary levels in Ethiopia, students' proficiency in the language appears to be extremely poor. This is evident in the following excerpts.

*Another problem is they {students} do not understand English. For instance, whenever you ask them something in English, they try to answer it in a local language. That is one of the hindrances on the part of the student to play the role expected of them in class, i.e. active interaction. But when I use the local language, they participate well. Because they know the language, they try whether their answer is correct or not. They do not bother. But when you teach them in English, the majority do not participate because of the language problem (Instructor<sub>11</sub>).*

Another instructor also expressed,

*Students do not ask questions in class because of language barrier. They do not ask as many questions as ... expected. Sometimes, they follow me outside the class, and ask me questions in their mother tongue" (Instructor<sub>07</sub>)*

As these excerpts show, poor proficiency in English language seems to have become a barrier for students to interact in classes. This was also witnessed during the classroom observations. For instance, in a sample Lesson V that was presented in the preceding section, students were making group presentation and at the end of the presentation, the instructor asked them to respond to some questions. However, few students managed to respond to these questions in English as the majority of them remained silent. However,

when the discussion reverted to Amharic which is one of the predominantly spoken languages in Ethiopia, every one of them had something to say. The students expressed their view points better when they used Amharic than English though Amharic is still difficult for many. Medium of instruction problem was not unique to students. It was also a problem of instructors as observed during the classroom observations. Some instructors provided their lecture notes in English but found it difficult to explain them clearly in English. These instructors used Amharic, as if it is the medium of instruction and, more importantly, as if every student can understand Amharic, which is the second or third language for many students in university classes. In fact, students were far better in Amharic than they were in English.

Some instructors have also emphasized students' lack of prior experience in student-centred approach as the main factor influencing their implementation of the approach. In relation to this, *Instructor<sub>20</sub>* has the following to say:

*...the background of the students from the lower grade is not like this. It is difficult to introduce something new at a university level. Students may raise a concern about the new approach complaining that they were not taught in this manner from school level. Thus, students should be shaped in this manner from lower grades.*

#### **4.5.1.2 Instructor factors**

Like students, instructors on their part may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching for a number of reasons. For the successful implementation of this approach to teaching, instructors are expected to align their instructional materials, teaching and assessment methods with the approach. This problem was evident in the following excerpts from the interviews with instructors.

*... I did not prepare my course to make it suitable for active learning, which is possible to make (Instructor<sub>03</sub>).*

*...We fail to start classes on time and try to cover a large amount of information within a short time. Because of this, students develop exam-oriented approach {to*

*their learning}. They do not have sufficient time to read and grasp the knowledge required (Instructor<sub>18</sub>).*

These excerpts reveal that instructor related factors such as instructors' failure to prepare their courses in line with the principles of student-centred instruction and their failure to start classes on time were impeding their implementation of student-centred approach to teaching. As it can also be understood from the excerpts, it is possible for the instructors to prepare courses in such a way that it suits to student-centred approach to teaching though they did not do so. It is also clear from the excerpts that students developed exam-oriented approach to their learning because instructors do not start classes on time but provide students with a large content coverage usually on the eleventh hour. As a result, students lacked sufficient time to read and understand the content taught rather than simply memorizing it for examination purposes.

Another instructor related problem identified in the study was the tendency to rely too heavily on a lecture method or obsession with lecturing. Claiming that they cannot cover the content of the syllabus, instructors failed to integrate active learning approach into their teaching. Rather, they tend to lecture every time they teach or use PPP as a substitute for lecturing. This is evident in the following excerpts:

*I lecture most of the time .... My classroom is more or less teacher- dominated though I have been very much comfortable had I been able to make it more participatory. For fear that I may not cover the course contents; I often lecture (Instructor<sub>03</sub>)*

*We are afraid to apply active learning methods worrying that we cannot cover all the required contents through such methods. I believe the contents taught can be covered through using such methods if applied (Instructor<sub>20</sub>).*

### 4.5.1.3 Institutional factors

Institutional environment has to be conducive for effective teaching-learning process to take place. More importantly, instructors and students should have a supportive environment in order to implement a new approach in its proper. Among the institutional challenges faced in the implementation of student-centred approach, instructors emphasized the following. The first was lack of continuous pedagogical training (teaching improvement programs). Concerning this, one of the instructors expressed:

*Training {pedagogical training} is not continuous. I took HDP course seven years ago, but I did not get any additional training since then. I am simply updating myself in my own ways. That is not good. There should be training every two years minimum. Everything is changing {dynamic} in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Instructor<sub>05</sub>).*

Another instructor also suggested:

*...Continuous training and monitoring so that implementation of the approach will not become a fashion for some time and then forgotten (Instructor<sub>20</sub>).*

Research suggests appropriate training and support for instructors as a prerequisite for instructors to integrate a new approach into their teaching. As these excerpts also reveal, such conditions seem to be either unavailable or insufficient in the four universities studies. In Ethiopia, the teacher-dominated approach to teaching is a deep-rooted culture at all education levels in the country. Hence, it is acceptable and normal for the instructor to become a boss and for the student to become an obedient in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, to change this situation, as instructors suggested it requires much time and dedication from all concerned.

The second important factor mentioned by instructors was the additional institutional responsibilities expected of instructors in addition to teaching. This is evident in the following excerpt.

*...the administration duty takes you away from your own instructional activities. During that time, it is clear that you will affect the quality of your delivery, the*

*assessment you have to make to check whether your students are really to the expected level of understanding or performance. So as a teacher is engaged simultaneously with other things, the quality of the delivery, the quality of assessment will be affected (Instructor<sub>04</sub>).*

According to this excerpt, instructors' holding of teaching and administration position simultaneously could influence effective instructional practices. In many higher education institutions in Ethiopia, instructors hold various administrative positions including Head of the Department, a Program coordinator, Dean of the College, etc while holding classes. Because of these administrative duties, which are often routine and tedious, instructors do not only miss classes but also lack sufficient time to prepare fully for their teaching. As a result, the quality of their teaching and assessment is influenced as the excerpt above suggests.

Another additional institutional requirement that is believed to influence effective instructional practices was the existing practice of enforcing instructors to involve in research and community engagement besides working fully as an instructor. Because of these requirements, instructors often lack sufficient time to properly teach and assess their students. Concerning this problem, one of the instructors expressed, *"I was trained to teach. But my institution requires me to do research and to engage in community service for which I was not properly prepared (Instructor<sub>09</sub>).*

Another important institutional problem in the implementation of student-centred approach was lack of resources such as books, internet and laboratory facilities. Hence, instructors expressed that they found it difficult to withdraw from providing handouts and lecture notes to students as long as students lack such resources for independent learning. Concerning this, one of the instructors stated *"students complain about limited access to internet and scarcity of books whenever they are given assignments (Instructor<sub>18</sub>).*

Finally, yet importantly, some instructors indicated their concerns about class size. They disclosed that given the size of their classes, which contain 80 and more students, they

found it difficult to implement student-centred approach to teaching properly. In connection to this, one instructor expressed, “*as it is difficult to teach and to assess students in a large class, my teaching follows the traditional pattern*” (Instructor<sub>03</sub>). Though class size is often considered as one of the constraining factors in the implementation of student-centred approaches to teaching, the researcher encountered very few instructors who taught large classes during the classroom observations. Many of the classes observed contained less than forty students in one class, especially in the Social Science disciplines, where the enrolment rates are currently low. Nevertheless, in the Natural Science disciplines, instructors often teach between 70-80 students in a class.

However, in terms of their implementation of the new approach, no significant difference was observed between those instructors who taught small classes and those who taught large classes. Some instructors taught less than 30 students in their classes but their teaching approach was lecture-based. For instance, in the sample Lesson I described in the preceding section, the instructor taught only 17 students in his class. However, his approach was exclusively lecture-based. In contrast, some instructors taught more than 60 students in their classes, but their approach to teaching was interactive and active learning. A good instance here is sample Lesson V, which was taught by an instructor who had more than sixty students in class but his approach was interactive.

Nevertheless, the most challenging situation in some of the classes observed was the arrangement of the seats, which were fixed to each other and arranged front to back. As learned from the instructors, the seats were arranged in this manner by their university to prevent students from moving seats from one class to another. However, the impact of this kind of arrangement on students’ learning was not taken into consideration. As a result, it appears to be inconvenient for students to sit in small groups and interact with each other as seen during the classroom observations. It also seems to be inconvenient for instructors to move around the class and support students other than standing in front of the class as a ‘sage on the stage’.



## **4.5.2 Findings from the questionnaires**

Drawing upon the information from classroom observations and interviews, a questionnaire consisting of items that refer to the factors that may constrain instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in a university context was designed and distributed to instructors and students. These items in the questionnaire were designed with five response alternatives that ranged from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). To analyse the items, in addition to percentage, frequency and mean scores were used. The mean scores were calculated for each item out of five where a score of five indicates a serious factor, a score of three is a moderate factor and a score of one is not a serious factor.

### **4.5.2.1 Findings from instructors**

The questionnaire for instructors comprised thirteen items that were used to assess the factors that may influence their implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in their context. These factors were categorised into student factors, instructor factors and institutional factors. Table 4.25 summarizes the outcome of this investigation.

**Table 4.25: Instructors' views concerning the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching**

No	List of constraining factors	SD(1)		D(2)		N(3)		A(4)		SA(5)		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	I cannot cover the required content for my course if I implement active learning strategies.	28	18.5	33	21.9	17	11.3	46	30.5	27	17.5	3.07
2	My workload is too heavy to apply student-centred approach to teaching properly.	27	17.9	42	27.8	26	17.2	37	24.5	19	12.6	2.86
3	The number of students in my class (class size) is too large to apply student-centred teaching strategies.	28	18.5	25	16.6	8	5.3	49	32.5	41	27.2	3.33
4	The teaching strategies recommended for my course in the curriculum are more content-oriented than student-focused.	15	9.9	47	31.1	31	20.5	34	22.5	24	15.9	3.03
5	My students are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning.	12	7.9	36	23.8	27	17.9	45	29.8	31	20.5	3.31
6	My students have no adequate background in student-centred approach.	10	6.6	34	22.5	30	19.9	55	36.4	22	14.6	3.30
7	My students cannot understand the concepts taught in my course unless provided with detailed lecture notes.	10	6.6	33	21.9	35	23.2	54	35.8	19	12.6	3.26
8	My classroom (e.g., flexibility of seats, availability of space) is inconvenient for carrying out active learning methods.	13	8.6	26	17.2	15	9.9	53	35.1	44	29.1	3.59
9	I have no proper training in student-centred approach to teaching.	62	41.1	39	25.8	18	11.9	20	13.2	12	7.9	2.21
10	I have no proper facilities and resources for implementing active learning methods.	15	9.9	21	13.9	15	9.9	59	39.1	41	27.2	3.60
11	There are no continuous teaching improvement programs (e.g., workshop, training, etc) in my institution.	16	10.6	26	17.2	34	22.5	37	24.5	38	25.2	3.36
12	My institution is not committed to the implementation of a student-centred approach to teaching.	26	17.2	47	31.1	34	22.5	18	11.9	26	17.2	2.81
13	There is no collegial sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges among instructors in relation to teaching in my institution.	16	10.6	21	13.9	26	17.2	49	32.5	39	25.8	3.49

(Scale is 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree)

Table 4.25 presents instructors' views concerning the factors that might constrain their implementation of a student-centred approach to teaching in a university context. From these, Items 5, 6 and 7 refer to student factors. For item 5 which refers to students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning, 29.8% of the instructors agreed and 20.5% of them strongly agreed while 23.8% of the instructors disagreed and 7.9% of them strongly disagreed. This reveals that the majority of the instructors (50.3%) seem to agree that their students are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning, which is one of the tenets for student-centred teaching practices. Similarly, for Item 6 which refers to students' lack of adequate background in student-centred approach, higher number of instructors (51%) including those who have either agreed or strongly agreed seem to agree that students lack adequate background in student-centred approach to teaching in comparison to those instructors (29.1%) who have either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Likewise, for Item 7 which refers to their students' difficulty to understand the concepts taught unless provided lecture notes, higher number of the instructors (48.4%) including those who have either agreed or strongly agreed seem to support that their students are unable to understand the concepts taught unless provided detailed lecture notes in comparison to those instructors (28.5%) who have either disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, based the mean values 3.31, 3.30 and 3.26 for these items respectively, these factors can be considered as moderate or not as such serious in terms of their effect on the implementation of student-centred instruction.

Items 1 and 4 refer to institutional factors which relate to the way the curriculum/syllabus was designed as this may influence effective instructional practices. For Item 1 which refers to the content of the course taught, higher number of instructors (48%) including those who have either agreed or strongly agreed seem to agree that they cannot cover the required content if they implement active learning in comparison to those instructors (30.4%) who have either disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, for item 4 which refers to the teaching strategies recommended in the curriculum, higher number of the instructors (41%) including those who have either disagreed or strongly disagreed seem to oppose that the teaching strategies recommended for the courses are more content-oriented than student-focused in comparison to those instructors(28.4%) who have either agreed or strongly agreed. In addition, based on the mean scores for these items which are 3.07 and 3.03 respectively, these factors can be considered as moderate or not as such serious on the

implementation of student-centred instruction. This implies like student factors, instructors were not constrained as such by the ways the curriculum /syllabus were designed. For instance, the teaching strategies recommended in the following sample undergraduate curriculum seem to be in line with the principles of student-centred instruction:

*The mode of learning will be student centred, participatory and reflective. Students ... work individually, in pairs, and in groups and make presentations, reports and whole class discussion. The instructor designs meaningful tasks and monitors the ongoing learning process. Besides, he/she has a facilitating role during pair, group or/and whole class discussion* (Nationally Harmonized Modular Curriculum for Undergraduate Program, 2013: No page number).

Items 3 and 8 refer to institutional factors that relate to classroom conditions such as the number of students in class, availability of space and flexibility of seats. Regarding the number of students in class, in Item 3, 32.5 % of the instructors agreed and 25.2 % of them (the majority of the instructors) strongly agreed that the number of students in their classes was too large to implement student-centred approach in their teaching. It was only for 35.1% of the instructors including those who have either strongly disagreed or disagreed, the number of the students in their classes was not too large. In addition, concerning classroom conditions, in Item 8, the majority of the instructors (35.1% agreed and 29.1 % strongly agreed) that their classrooms were not convenient for implementing student-centred approach in their teaching. Only 8.6% of the instructors strongly disagreed and 17.2% of them disagreed to this item suggesting that their classes were convenient. The mean scores 3.33 and 3.59 for the two items respectively may imply that the problem of class size is a moderate factor whereas the problem of classroom condition is slightly a serious factor in terms of their effect on the implementation of student-centred instruction.

Items 2, 9 and 13 refer to factors that relate to instructors' workload, training and collegiality respectively. For item 2, 27.8 % of the instructors disagreed and 17.9 % of them strongly disagreed suggesting that their workload is not too much to apply student-centred approach whereas 24.5% of the instructors agreed and 12.6 % of them strongly agreed that their workload is too much to apply student-centred approach. This implies too much

workload is among the constraining factors as the majority of the instructors (45.7%) showed their agreement in comparison to those instructors (37.1%) who showed disagreement to this factor. Regarding training in student-centred approach, the majority of the instructors including 41.8% who strongly disagreed and 25% who disagreed expressed they have no problem of training in student-centred approach to teaching. Concerning item13, which refers to lack of collegial support in relation to teaching, the majority of the instructors (32% of the instructors who agreed and 25% of them who strongly agreed) seem to believe that there is lack of collegial support in their institution. This shows there is no culture sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges among instructors in relation to teaching in the four universities studied. In general, the mean scores 2.86, 2.21 and 4.49 for these items respectively imply that while lack of training is not a serious factor, workload and lack of collegial support are moderate and slightly serious in terms of their effect on the implementation of student-centred instruction.

Items 10, 11 and 12 refer to the support provided for instructors to implement student-centred approach in their teaching. For Item 10, which refers to the availability of facilities and resources, 39% of the instructors agreed and 27% of them strongly agreed that they have no proper facilities and resources to implement student-centred approach to teaching. The mean score 3.6 for this item suggests lack of facilities is a serious factor. For Item 11 which refers to the availability of continuous professional development programs for instructors to improve their teaching, 25.2% of the instructors strongly agreed and 24.5% of the instructors agreed implying that continuous professional development opportunities are not there in their institutions. Only 27.8% of the instructors have either strongly disagreed or disagreed showing their disagreement to the item implying that continuous professional development opportunities are there in their institutions. In fact, in many universities in Ethiopia, pedagogical training is available for newly recruited staff in the form of two-week induction training and/or a one-year Higher Diploma Program. Nevertheless, such opportunities are not there for instructors once they complete this kind of training. For Item 12, which refers to the institutional commitment to implement student-centred approach to teaching, the majority of the instructors (48.3%) including those who have either disagreed or strongly disagreed seem to oppose that their institutions are not committed to the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching. Only 29.1 % of the instructors seem to believe that their institutions are not committed to the implementation of student-

centred approach to teaching. However, the mean scores 3.36 and 2.81 for both items imply that these factors are moderate or not as such serious.

In general, from the responses of the instructors for most of the items, we can deduce that instructors were moderately constrained by factors such as students' lack of good background in student-centred approach, class size and teaching load, but they seem to be seriously influenced by lack of proper facilities for teaching, lack of collegial support and poor classroom conditions in the implementation of student-centred approach in their teaching. These findings are consistent with the findings from classroom observation and interviews, which also revealed that instructors were constrained by student-related problems, poor classroom conditions, lack of facilities and institutional support.

#### **4.5.2.2 Findings from students**

The questionnaire for students comprised nine items that were used to assess the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in a university context. These factors are related to students and institutional problems. The purpose was to cross validate the information from the instructors. Table 4.26 summarizes the outcome of this investigation.

**Table 4.26: Students' views concerning the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching**

No	List of Influencing Factors	SD(1)		D(2)		N(3)		A(4)		SA(5)		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Students are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning.	47	29.4	47	29.4	22	13.8	34	21.3	10	6.3	2.46
2	Students have no adequate background student-centred approach/active learning methods.	27	16.9	44	27.5	28	17.5	43	26.9	18	11.3	2.88
3	Students cannot understand the concepts taught unless the instructor provides detailed lecture notes.	16	10.0	31	19.4	17	10.6	59	36.9	37	23.1	3.44
4	Classroom conditions (e.g., flexibility of seats, availability of space) are inconvenient for carrying out active learning methods.	27	16.9	31	19.4	22	13.8	47	29.4	33	20.6	3.17
5	There is the lack of educational resources (e.g. books, internet facilities) for students to learn independently.	20	12.5	19	11.9	15	9.4	43	26.9	63	39.4	3.69
6	Students assume a student-centred approach to teaching adds too much workload on them.	14	8.8	29	18.1	21	13.1	63	39.4	33	20.6	3.45
7	Students view teaching as the sole responsibility of the instructor.	21	13.1	29	18.1	25	15.6	54	33.8	31	19.4	3.28
8	Students assume their role is to receive knowledge from instructors.	9	5.6	27	16.9	14	8.8	71	44.4	39	24.4	3.65
9	Students are unable to contribute anything to their own learning.	51	31.9	42	26.3	20	12.5	35	21.9	12	7.5	2.47

(Scale is 1: Strongly Disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, and 5: Strongly Agree)

Table 4.26 presents the responses of students on the factors that may influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in a university context. These factors are related to students, classroom conditions and availability of resources. Items 1, 2 and 3 refer to students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning, background in student-centred approach, and ability to understand the concepts taught respectively. For item 1, the majority of the students, that is 58.8% of them, have either strongly disagreed or disagreed that students are not willing to take responsibility for their learning. This implies students are willing to take responsibility for their own learning, which contradicts with the views of the instructors who suggested that students are not willing to take responsibilities. Similarly, for item 2, 44.4% of the students have either disagreed or strongly disagreed that students lack adequate background in student-centred approach, which is also contrary to the views of the instructors who claimed that students lack good background in this approach. Nevertheless, for item 3, 36.9% of the students agreed and 23.1% strongly agreed that students cannot understand the concepts taught unless provided with detailed lecture notes. This finding is consistent with the views of the instructors, who expressed the view that students need detailed lecture notes in order to understand the concepts taught.

Items 4 and 5 refer to classroom conditions and availability of resources respectively. For Item 4, 29.6 % of the students agreed and 20.4% of them strongly agreed that classroom conditions are not convenient for active learning methods. In addition, for Item 5, 26.9 % of the students agreed and 35 % strongly agreed that there is the lack of educational resources such as books and internet facilities for students to learn independently. The mean score 3.69 also confirms the problem of lack of educational resources is a serious matter. This finding is consistent with the responses of the instructors.

Items 6, 7, 8 and 9 are designed to assess students' views of student-centred approach, responsibility for teaching, their role and contribution in learning respectively. For item 6, 70% of the students have either strongly agreed or agreed that students assume student-centred approach to teaching adds too much workload on them. Likewise, for item 7, 53.2% of the students have either strongly agreed or agreed that students view teaching as the sole responsibility of the instructor. Similarly, for item 8, 68.8% of the students have either agreed or strongly agreed that students assume that their role is to receive knowledge from instructors. Conversely, students' responses to Item 9, which refers to students' capability to



contribute to their own learning, are inclined towards disagreement more than agreement as 58.2% of the students have either disagreed or strongly disagreed implying that students can contribute to their own learning if they are given opportunities. Based on the mean scores, among these factors, students' assumption of the student-centred instruction as demanding (3.45) and their role as receiving knowledge from instructors (3.65) seem to be serious in terms of their effect on the successful implementation of this approach to teaching.

Generally, the responses of the students are consistent with the views of the instructors in relation to factors such as lack of facilities for learning, poor classroom conditions and their views of student-centred instruction. Nevertheless, students' responses in relation to students' lack of willingness to take responsibility for their own learning and poor background in student-centred approach to teaching are contradictory with the responses of the instructors who felt that students were not willing to take responsibility and lack proper background in such an approach to teaching.

## **4.6 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

As described in the first chapter, the study was designed to examine instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in relation to student-centred approach to teaching in four Ethiopian universities. To address this objective, four research questions were formulated. These are:

1. What are the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in four Ethiopian universities?
2. What are the approaches to teaching adopted by instructors in teaching practices in these universities?
3. How do instructors' conceptions of teaching relate to their classroom practices?
4. What factors, if any, influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in these universities?

To seek answer for these questions, qualitative and quantitative data sources were utilized and the results were presented in the preceding section. This section discusses the results obtained in the light of previous studies in the area. First, the findings about instructors'

conceptions of teaching will be discussed. Next, the results found on teaching practices will be discussed. The results concerning the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices will be discussed afterwards. Finally, the factors that were influencing instructors' implementation of a student-focused approach to teaching will be discussed.

#### **4.6.1 Instructors' conceptions of teaching**

As the literature shows instructors' conceptions of teaching may influence their teaching practices which may in turn influence student learning outcomes. It is also believed that quality learning is dependent on the existence of appropriate conceptions of teaching, which instructors are unlikely to develop unless their conceptions of teaching are changed or developed. In view of this, the study examined instructors' conceptions of teaching in four Ethiopian universities. For this purpose, an interview with twenty instructors and a questionnaire survey with 160 instructors were conducted.

The analysis of the interview transcripts revealed four dominant categories of conceptions of teaching among these instructors (See Table 4.4). These are teaching as satisfying syllabus demands, teaching as presenting structured information to students, teaching as helping students learn what they learn and teaching as helping students expand their knowledge.

Conception of teaching as satisfying syllabus demands refers to the most traditional thinking of teaching whereby teaching is considered as no more than executing or covering the content required. Instructors holding such conception of teaching believe that their role is simply to understand what is required and executing it properly as it is prescribed. As this form of teaching is dominated by the instructor talk and the rush to cover the predetermined content, students are considered passive and limited to copying notes as provided by the instructors.

The second category of conception of teaching, which is taken to mean presenting structured information to students, entails another form of traditional thinking whereby

teaching is considered as merely the process by which the instructor transmits structured information to students. However, this conception of teaching is better than the preceding one in that teaching is not only covering the content required but also presenting it to students in a way that is logical and easy for students to understand the concepts taught. Instructors holding such view of teaching see the syllabus (the predetermined content) as a guide to help them decide what and how to teach than a master who decides everything. However, students are still considered passive in the teaching-learning process except responding to or asking questions occasionally whenever the instructor permits.

The third category of conception of teaching, which refers to teaching as helping students learn what they learn, entails the student-centred conception of teaching more than the content of teaching. This conception of teaching is founded on the assumption that teaching is more of facilitating or creating a healthy learning environment for students to learn by themselves than either structuring information or covering what is required. Unlike the instructors in the previous categories, the instructors in this category believe that it is important for students to be active for effective learning to take place. As a result, they encourage more student talk than what the instructor does to teach. In such classes, knowledge that students are expected to acquire in the subject in question is not lectured to students; rather it is constructed by students themselves as they work on it individually and together with their peers.

The fourth category of conception of teaching, which refers to guiding students expand their knowledge, entails the most developed or advanced conception of teaching. Like the instructors in the third category, instructors in this category focus more on students than the content of teaching. Teaching for these instructors is guiding students to explore and help them move towards their highest potential development level. Teaching in this category is characterised by the instructor creating conditions for students to explore knowledge rather than providing fixed knowledge to students.

These four categories of conceptions of teaching are similar to those found from previous studies apart from terminological differences and the number of categories identified. This study establishes the arrangement of conceptions of teaching ranging from a more

instructor-centred/content-oriented category to a more student-centred/learning-oriented category, which is in line with Kember's (1997:264) categorization model of conceptions. The instructor-centred/content-oriented category in this study comprised two subcategories of conceptions, which are teaching as satisfying the syllabus demands and teaching as presenting a structured lesson to students. Similarly, the student-centred/learning-oriented category comprised two subcategories of conceptions, which are teaching as helping students learn and teaching as helping students expand their knowledge. However, the fifth lower level transitional category, which is a student-instructor interaction category, suggested by Kember did not emerge in this study. Recent findings did not also confirm the presence of such conception of teaching among the categories identified in their study (e.g., Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2008:119; Samuelowicz & Bain, 2001: 321-322). As Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne, (2008:119) suggest based on its nature and purpose, interaction could be categorized into either of the broader categories: instructor-centred or student-centred conception of teaching rather than a separate category. In line with this view, interaction, in this study, emerged in both categories of conception of teaching, but effective interaction that facilitates student learning emerged in the student-centred conception category. In the instructor-centred category, little interaction exists, as the emphasis is more on transmitting information than promoting interaction between students and instructor or among students. Interaction is thus unidirectional with the purpose of information transmission in this category while it is multidirectional with the purpose of facilitating learning in student-centred conception category.

The outcome of this study is also consistent with the findings of previous studies such as Trigwell and Prosser (1996b:278-279), Akerlind (2003:378) and Gonzalez (2011:76-77) which pointed to the hierarchical relationships between the different categories of conceptions of teaching. The study revealed that aspects of teaching represented in a higher category included awareness of the lower category in the hierarchy but not vice versa. This does not mean that the aspects in the less developed categories are the primary focus in the developed categories. According to Akerlind (2003: 383), these aspects are in "*the background rather than the foreground of the awareness*" in the developed categories.

Hence, categories of conceptions that emerged in this study were ordered in hierarchy of inclusiveness, ranging from the simple or lowest conception, which is 'teaching as

satisfying syllabus demands' to the most developed or highest conception, which is 'teaching as helping students expand their knowledge'. These hierarchical relationships between conceptions of teaching imply that instructors whose conceptions are developed or sophisticated are aware of the lower conceptions while those instructors whose conceptions are low or least developed are not aware of the conceptions beyond their category (Gonzalez, 2011:78). This has two useful implications for teaching practice. The first is that instructors whose conceptions are developed or sophisticated are likely to translate their conceptions of teaching alternatively in their teaching practices based on their context. This claim is in line with the previous research (e.g., Lindblom-Ylänne et al, 2006:294; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997: 25; Samuelowicz & Bain 1992:109) which has shown that instructors might fail to translate student-centred conceptions of teaching into their teaching practices due to their teaching context such as class size, heavy workload, student characteristics and lack of institutional support. In such situations, instructors are likely to revert to their alternative conception, which is the instructor/content-oriented conception of teaching.

The second implication is that instructors whose conceptions are less sophisticated are unlikely to adopt developed (sophisticated) conceptions in their teaching unless their conceptions are changed or expanded. In connection to this, Trigwell and Prosser (1996b: 282) contend that instructors are unlikely to teach in a way which is beyond the sophistication of their conceptions. Kember (1997:270) also notes that instructors holding information transmission conception are likely to adopt the unidirectional lecture approach and are unlikely to adopt more interactive teaching approaches such as dialogue or role play in their teaching. Because of this, these studies suggest changing the way instructors conceive of teaching as a priority in academic development activities. This means, meaningful professional development must involve instructors to examine their assumptions and beliefs of teaching along teaching them how to use a specific teaching strategy. Supporting this, Akerlind (2008:633) argues that teaching methods should not be addressed in academic development programs in isolation from conceptions of teaching that underlie them.

In addition to identifying the dominant conceptions of teaching among instructors, attempt was also made in this study to categorize instructors to a particular category of conception (See Table 4.4). Hence, it was found that an individual instructor might hold different

conceptions of teaching out of which one is dominant. This finding is coherent with the finding of Gao and Watkins (2001:458) who suggested that instructors might express different or even conflicting views when responding to various questions during interviews. This might have emanated from the mismatch between the ideal and practical world: what teaching should be and what really it is (Gao & Watkins, 2002:74). In this study, to reconcile these conflicting views, predominant conceptions were used to assign instructors to a particular category. In this way, the study reveals that the majority of the instructors (13 out of 20 instructors) dominantly hold student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching while seven of them still dominantly hold instructor-centred/content-oriented conception of teaching.

The survey results in Tables 4.6 and 4.7 also support this finding. For instance, Table 4.7 shows that instructors strongly supported student-centred/learning-oriented conceptions of teaching. The overall mean for this category is 4.47, which indicates strong agreement of instructors for this conception of teaching. Conversely, the results in Table 4.6 revealed that instructors did not support instructor-centred/content-oriented conceptions of teaching. The overall mean for this category is 2.47, which indicates slight disagreement of instructors to this kind of conception of teaching. Nevertheless, instructors did not totally reject this conception of teaching implying that such conception still prevails in teaching in higher education in Ethiopia. Instructors did not strongly disagree to the traditional conception of teaching as the history of education in Ethiopia has been dominated by such conception of teaching. This finding has implications for Ethiopian education policy that emphasizes student-centred learning. One of these implications is that the attempts made so far to change instructors' conceptions of teaching in higher education in Ethiopia were encouraging. As also disclosed by the majority of the instructors during the interviews, teaching improvement programs, such as the Higher Diploma Program (HDP), which are currently in place in most universities in Ethiopia, seem to have helped them improve their conceptions of teaching.

The other implication of the results on conceptions of teaching is that there is a need for training to change and develop instructors' conception of teaching which is traditional or least developed. Similarly, several researchers suggest intensive and compulsory training to

change instructors' conceptions of teaching. For instance, Kember (1997:272) and Varnava-Marouchou (2011:125) suggest a one-year compulsory training as a course or action research project. They argue that instructors' conceptions of teaching are deep-seated beliefs which are difficult to change in a short time but are more likely to influence teaching practices and student learning outcomes unless changed.

Furthermore, based on the survey results, variation that might exist among instructors in relation to their conceptions of teaching was examined (See Section 4.2.2.3). For this purpose, independent samples test and a one-way ANOVA test were applied. Based on this, at the level of significance 0.05, the tests revealed no statistically significant differences in conceptions of teaching between the instructors based on their gender, discipline, level of education and experience. This is consistent with Chan and Elliott's (2004:822) study, which indicated no statistically significant difference in the conceptions about teaching and learning among their study participants in terms of gender, age and field of study. However, the test results revealed a statistically significant difference between the instructors based on whether they have attended a pedagogical training or not. This implies that instructors who have attended training are more negative towards instructor-centred conceptions of teaching than those instructors who have not attended training. In addition, they are more positive towards student-centred conceptions of teaching than those instructors who have not had a pedagogical training. The overall implication of this finding is that training has an effect on the conceptions of teaching held by instructors as also suggested by Kember (1997:272).

#### **4.6.2 Instructors' approaches to teaching**

Literature suggests that instructors' classroom practices or how instructors conduct their teaching influences students' approach to learning, which will in turn influence their learning outcomes. Teaching practices are motivating and interesting to students when they focus on depth of learning rather than breadth of coverage, making students active through questioning, presenting problems rather than merely transmitting information, teaching based on students' prior knowledge, assessing understanding rather than isolated facts and creating a positive learning environment where students can make mistakes and learn from them.

Hence, in order to understand how instructors conducted their teaching in the four universities selected for the study, data were acquired through interviews, classroom observations and a survey through a questionnaire. In the interviews, instructors were asked to describe their teaching practices or approaches to teaching. Analysis of the interviews revealed instructors who put efforts to implement student-centred approach in their teaching practices on the one hand and instructors who adhered to the traditional lecture-based approach to teaching on the other hand. According to the descriptions provided in Section 4.3.1, teaching practices of the second category of instructors reflected the traditional form of teaching in which the instructor lectures and explains concepts to students who passively listen and copy lecture notes from the blackboard. Whereas, the teaching practices of the first group of instructors reflected a student-focused approach to teaching in which the instructor connects students to the teaching-learning process from the outset. These instructors took into account students' prior knowledge and understandings of the concepts taught. In addition, they encouraged students to discuss on issues related to the lesson rather than merely attending to the lectures by the instructors.

As discussed in section 4.3.2, consistent with the findings from the interviews, classroom observations revealed two categories of instructors in terms of their teaching strategies. The first category comprised instructors who exerted their maximum efforts to implement student-centred teaching strategy. In such classes, instructors facilitated learning more than lecturing information to students so that students discussed and shared ideas on the concepts taught. The other category comprised instructors who predominantly implemented the instructor-centred approach to teaching. In these classes, instructors spent most of the teaching time while giving and explaining lecture notes with students passively sitting and copying lectures notes from the blackboard. Students were rarely involved in the teaching-learning process except in the rare occasions to respond to questions raised from instructors. These questions were more of "Do you have any questions?" types, which Gibbs and Habeshaw (1989, in Trigwell & Prosser, 1996b:283) describe as an ineffective questioning strategy as they do not often engage students in dialogue with their peers.

The survey results were also more or less consistent with the results from the interviews and classroom observations. According to the responses of the instructors in Tables 4.13 and 4.14, instructors' approaches to their teaching were student-focused more than teacher-



focused. The mean value for student-focused teaching strategy was 3.82, which shows that instructors frequently used this strategy in their teaching whereas the mean score for instructor-focused teaching strategy was 2.62, which implies that instructors used this strategy in their teaching for about half the time. However, the responses from students in Tables 4.22 & 4.23 show that both strategies of teaching are equally utilised by instructors in their teaching. The mean scores 3.61 and 3.64 for teacher-centred teaching strategies and for student-centred teaching strategies, respectively depict that the two strategies were frequently used by instructors.

In general, the overall finding is that the traditional form of teaching in which the instructor lectures and students sit passively still prevails in the universities studied despite the call for the employment of student-centred approach to teaching by the government. This finding is consistent with the findings of Birhanu (2011: 157) who disclosed that in the sample Ethiopian universities he observed, instructors mainly lectured and rarely used other forms of teaching such as the inquiry method, problem-based learning and discovery methods, which are expected to promote critical thinking and problem-solving capacity in students.

However, unlike Birhanu's (2011) study, this study showed some developments towards the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in the four universities sampled in this study. The overall results of this study imply that instructors' employment of student-centred teaching strategy is gradually improving as their dependence on the traditional form of teaching is declining. This shows as the shift from the instructor-centred instruction to student-centred instruction is a gradual process, the work done so far in higher education in Ethiopia is encouraging. However, much still needs to be done if deep learning is the goal, as it requires convincing instructors to adopt student-centred approach to teaching which is most likely to produce such an outcome. This is because inappropriate teaching and assessment methods encourage students to adopt a surface approach to learning. As Ramsden (2003:60) notes the traditional approach to teaching leads students to develop a surface approach to learning, which is less desirable and characterized by learning through memorization without understanding just for the purposes of examination. Supporting this, Jordan et al (2008:34), states that instructor-focused approach to teaching is not effective in a higher education, as it does not promote deep learning, which is associated with understanding and actively constructing meaning out of learning.

The study also shows variation in teaching strategies among the instructors involved in the survey. According to the information presented in Section 4.3.3.2, independent samples test results revealed statistically significant differences between the instructors based on their gender. At level of significance 0.05, female instructors were found to be more student-focused in their teaching strategy than male instructors, who in turn were found to be more teacher-focused than the female instructors. This may imply that female instructors are more student-focused in their teaching than male instructors. However, care must be taken in generalising from this finding since the number of female instructors in this study was too small.

The independent samples test also revealed statistically significant differences among the instructors based on their discipline of teaching, especially with respect to teacher-focused teaching strategy. Instructors from the natural (hard) sciences had higher mean values on the teacher-focused teaching strategy than instructors from the social (soft) sciences. But the test did not reveal statistically significant differences among the instructors with respect to a student-focused approach to teaching.

Furthermore, the independent samples test revealed statistically significant differences between the instructors based on whether they have attended pedagogical training or not. Though a significant difference was not observed in relation to a student-focused approach to teaching, a significant difference is observed in relation to instructor-focused teaching between the instructors who have attended pedagogical training and those who did not. From this, those instructors who did not attend any pedagogical training were found to be more instructor-focused than those instructors who attended a pedagogical training.

In addition, independent samples test revealed statistically significant differences among the instructors in relation to the teaching strategies they preferred based on their workload. The results revealed that instructors whose workload exceeds 12 hours per week were found to be more instructor-focused than those instructors whose workload is 12 or less. However, the test results did not show statistically significant difference between those instructors whose workload exceeds 12 hours and those whose workload is 12 or less in relation to a student-focused approach to teaching.

ANOVA results did not, however, reveal statistically significant differences in teaching strategies among instructors based on their level of education, teaching experience and class size. In general, with respect to a student-focused approach to teaching, the outcome of the tests in this study is related with Stes, Gijbels and Petegem's (2008:261-265) study, which revealed no relationship between instructors' implementation of student-focused approach and instructors' characteristics (gender, experience, level of education and age) and context of teaching (number of students in the classroom, discipline of teaching, students' class level). The outcome related to instructor-focused approach is consistent with the findings of Lindblom-Ylänne et al (2006: 294) which showed variation among instructors across disciplines and teaching contexts.

#### **4.6.3 The relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices**

Previous studies report contradictory findings on the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. Some studies suggest instructors' classroom behaviours and actions are dependent on their views of teaching while others suggest no clear-cut relationships between the two. In view of this, the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices was examined in this study. For this purpose, results from the survey, interviews and classroom observations were used. Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis was used to examine whether there is a relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching strategies based on the survey reports. In addition, evidence from interviews and classroom observations was presented.

The results in Table 4.24 revealed a significant and positive correlation between instructors' views of the traditional conceptions of teaching and their reported use of the associated teaching strategies in their classrooms ( $r = .497, p < .000$ ). This shows the instructors' views of the traditional conception of teaching moderately correlated with their reported use of the teacher/content-focused teaching strategy in their teaching. As a result, instructors had low mean score, which was 2.47, for the traditional conception of teaching and likewise had low

mean score 2.65 for the extent of using instructor-focused teaching strategy in their teaching. In other words, instructors' view of the traditional conception of teaching shows disagreement and likewise instructors' use of the traditional teaching strategy in teaching was low.

Table 4.24 also shows a significant and positive correlation between instructors' views of the student-centred conception of teaching and their use of the associated teaching strategy in their teaching ( $r = .316, p < .001$ ). This shows instructors' views of the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching positively correlated with their use of the student/learning-focused teaching strategy in their teaching. As a result, instructors views of the student-centred conception of teaching was very positive ( $M=4.47$ ) and likewise their use of such an approach in their teaching was high ( $M=3.82$ ). In general, based on the survey reports, instructors' conception of teaching positively correlated with their teaching strategies. This finding is consistent with the study by Trigwell and Prosser (1996b:281), which pointed to congruence in teachers' conceptions of teaching and teaching strategies.

However, the findings from the classroom observations revealed both consistent and inconsistent relationships between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their observed teaching practices. For some instructors, the classroom observations revealed consistent relationship between their conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. This is particularly true for instructors whose views of teaching were predominately traditional. These instructors' teaching practices were consistently more teacher-centred than student-focused. Such instructors' viewed teaching as the process transmitting information to students through lectures or the substitute PPP. Likewise, their teaching practices followed the traditional pattern of the instructor demonstrating and explaining the lesson to students who passively listened to and took lecture notes. The instructors focused more on covering the content than involving students to express their viewpoints. In addition, some instructors whose views of teaching were predominantly student-centred were observed using student-focused approach to teaching in their teaching practices. Such instructors described their views of teaching as the process of helping students learn whereby the instructor works as a facilitator and the student works as active participant in the teaching-learning process. Likewise, observation of the classroom teaching of these instructors reflected their views of teaching. Their teaching practice was student-focused as students were actively

involved in the teaching-learning process discussing and expressing their viewpoints on the lesson topics rather than passively copying lectures notes. The instructors used a lecture method not to provide detailed notes but just to give students some inputs on the lesson topic for the subsequent discussion and reflection on it.

However, inconsistencies were also observed between some instructors' views of teaching and their actual teaching practices, particularly in the case of using a student-focused teaching approach. These instructors expressed the view that good teaching should not be dominated by the teacher's talk or lecture. Nevertheless, observation of the classroom teaching of these instructors revealed inconsistency between their views of good teaching and their actual teaching practice, which was lectured-based and instructor-dominated.

The implication of this finding is that the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their observed classroom practices is not clear-cut. This finding supports Kember's (1997:270) assertion that the relationship between instructors' beliefs/conceptions of teaching and observable teaching approaches is not automatic. This is particularly the case for the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching which is often influenced by the practical realities of teaching. Instructors may strongly support teaching which is interactive and student-centred more than lecturing and presenting fixed information to students. On the contrary, their teaching practices could be more lecture-based and traditional which is inconsistent with their views of good teaching.

#### **4.6.4 Factors influencing instructors' implementation of student-centred instruction**

Founded on the constructivist views of teaching, student-centred approach to teaching has strong support in the literature. It has become a popular form of instruction. However, its practical realities are not without challenges though it is often associated with quality learning outcomes. With this understanding, the study examined the factors that influenced instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in four universities. To this effect, instructors were interviewed, classes were observed and surveys were conducted

with instructors and students. Results reveal that student-centred teaching practices were constrained by various factors arising from students, instructors and institutional problems.

#### **4.6.4.1 Student factors**

In relation to students, results from the interviews and surveys suggest that students tend to highly depend on lectures and handouts from the instructors more than making their own efforts to learn. As result, teaching-learning practices seem to be more or less dominated by the instructor lecturing and distributing handouts/PPP slides more than engaging students in active learning. It has become a common practice among the instructors to provide students with lecture notes and handouts containing detailed information on the content of the subject taught. As a result, as the data in Table 4.26 reveal, students viewed teaching as the sole responsibility of the instructor and their role as receiving information from the instructor. This observation is supported by the findings of other local studies. For instance, according to Birhanu (2011: 160), students viewed instructors as spoon-feeders and viewed their roles as sitting passively and listening to lecturers rather than being actively involved in activities. In a related study, Zerihun, Beishuizen and Willem (2011:159) discovered that students favoured an instructional process in which their role is passively listening to instructors more than a process that involves them in learning.

The results from the interviews and surveys also indicate that students lacked prior experience in student-centred approach from lower grades. As the history of education in Ethiopia has been dominated for long by the traditional form of instruction, student-centred instruction does not seem to be fully implemented at a school level. Though the policy supports such form of instruction in principle, the realities at a school level are too far from the policy claims. Reinforcing this, a local study by Derebssa's (2006:137) reveals that though the policy emphasizes active learning, the traditional teachers' talk and students listening dominate most primary schools throughout Ethiopia.

As a result, instructors expressed the view that students considered student-centred instruction as a waste of time and as if the instructor were not doing his/her job properly and using this kind of approach to save his/her time and energy. Students also indicated that they considered student-centred approach to teaching as demanding that adds too much workload on them (See Table 4.26). Research confirms that students' adoption of a new

approach is significantly influenced by their previous approach to learning (Baeten et al, 2010:250). This means if the students' previous approach to learning is grounded on passively receiving and memorizing information from instructors, they are less likely to adopt an approach that requires them to make efforts in order to learn. Therefore, instructors should be aware of students' prior experiences and should be able to provide appropriate support for students to adopt student-centred approach to teaching.

The results from the interviews and classroom observations also reveal that the students' English language proficiency is low and, as a result, students faced difficulty in expressing their ideas in English during class discussions. The policy claims that English is taught as a subject from Grade 1 onwards and serves as the medium of instruction at secondary and higher levels (MoE, 1994:24). However, the reality on the ground shows that students still grapple with English to express their ideas in it at higher education having learnt the language as a subject for twelve years and as a medium of instruction for four years minimum. In a related study, Hussien (2010:234) argued that learning through English has become a frustrating experience for many Ethiopian students in a university context as they were compelled to learn in English cognitively demanding content subjects. A recent study by Jha (2014:49) also reveals that Ethiopian students are neither able to participate in classroom activities nor able to comprehend what they hear or read due to their poor proficiency and suggests that English has become a medium of obstruction rather a medium of instruction in Ethiopia.

As student-centred approach to teaching is an interactive way of learning, the language students use to interact with each other matters very much. Classroom observations also support this finding. From classroom observations, it was observed that poor English language competence was not unique to students only. Instructors were also observed to have a limited competence to explain their lectures in English, as it is the second, third, or even fourth language for many instructors. This problem is observed at all levels of education in Ethiopia. For instance, in their study at lower levels, Benson, Heugh, Bogale and Gebreyohannes (2010:78) observed that teachers at lower levels have a limited competence and exposure in English and, as a result, they found it difficult to cope with the demands of teaching in English.

From this, it appears to be very artificial for students and instructors to communicate in a language they hardly understand each other and, as a result, it has become an acceptable practice for instructors and students to use local languages, predominantly Amharic in the teaching-learning process though the lecture notes are written in English. Unless this problem is curbed, it is more likely to influence teaching and learning at all levels in Ethiopia. As Prosser and Trigwell (1997:29) suggest instructors adopt the traditional approach to teaching if they perceive that their students are unable to cope with the demands of the content they teach in terms of the language and knowledge of the subject matter taught.

#### **4.6.4.2 Instructor factors**

With regard to instructors, the study reveals that there is a tendency among instructors to be completely obsessed with lecturing as an easy way out to present a large body of information to students. Nevertheless, research suggests that such practices are likely to be limiting and discouraging students from finding their own learning resources and will eventually lead them to become totally dependent on instructors. As this study shows students have the tendency to expect everything from instructors and, as a result, resisted to do anything that may require them to put efforts to learn. Supporting this, Jha (2014:51) reports the popularity of handouts among Ethiopian teachers and as a result, students became too heavily dependent on handouts and rarely think of consulting additional materials for enhancing their learning.

In the interviews, instructors blamed themselves for the failure to integrate active learning methods when preparing their course materials/lectures. Instructors indicated that they often prepared their handouts, lectures and PPPs in detail without incorporating tasks, exercises or activities for students in any of the sections/chapters. Students are thus accustomed to expecting everything from chapter to chapter and point by point from the instructors without putting any efforts in learning. However, such practices are less likely to challenge and motivate students to contribute anything to their own learning. As a result, students' approach to learning will become examination-oriented. That is, developing the habit of reading their handouts/lecture notes whenever the exam approaches just to memorise the parts they expect on examinations. As Biggs and Tang (2007: 19) also state, covering the



content required or teaching with a wider range of visual aids such as PPPs is not good enough if students do not develop the level of understandings required in the subject taught.

Another problem with instructors is the failure to start classes on time and the tendency to hurry up to cover a lot on the eleventh hour. This approach is more likely to lead students to develop exam-oriented approach to their learning because they do not have sufficient time to read and understand the content taught rather than simply memorizing it for examinations. Insufficient time and too heavy a workload are listed among the factors that encourage students to adopt a surface approach to learning according to Biggs and Tang (2007: 23). Students adopt this way of learning to avoid failure and to keep out of trouble with little effort as possible (Baeten, et al, 2010:244).

The survey results in Table 4.25 also reveal that there is no culture of sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges among instructors in relation to teaching in the four universities studied. Instructors engage in teaching as they wish in a very isolated way from their colleagues. Teaching seems to be considered among instructors as an individual or a personal activity; therefore, it is very difficult to know how one is teaching in his/her classroom. However, research suggests collegial sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges as one of the most important strategies for helping instructors adopt student-centred approach in their teaching (Johnson et al., 2009: 149). Instructors gain a lot if they formally or informally talk with their colleagues concerning their teaching as the challenge for one instructor could be a success for the other and vice versa. Instructors may also benefit from visiting each other's classes and from providing supportive feedback to each other.

#### **4.6.4.3 Institutional factors**

The study also revealed some constraining factors that are related to the institution in which the instructors work. These problems include lack of continuous professional development opportunities for instructors. The results in Table 4.2 reveal that 62.3% of the instructors have received pedagogical training in the form of HDP and Induction; however, the instructors asserted that such trainings were not sufficient and continuous so that they were not able to update their pedagogical knowledge and skills regularly. Some instructors

disclosed that they received HDP or Induction training a decade ago at the time of their employment in their respective universities; however, they have never attended any teaching related training since then. Many instructors suggested that as the teacher-dominated approach to teaching is a deep-rooted culture in Ethiopia, there should be continuous training and support for students and instructors to enable them to adopt the new approach as required.

Another institutional factor that is constraining instructors' teaching practices as indicated in the study is additional institutional responsibilities that are expected of instructors in addition to their regular teaching job. The additional activities include administrative responsibilities, research and community engagement. The study suggests that such responsibilities are taking instructors away from their regular duty of engaging students in learning. Because of these additional responsibilities, instructors are forced to miss classes and offer hurriedly planned lessons. In addition, they were forced to adopt a lecture-based approach to teaching merely to cover the syllabus more than making efforts to provide quality learning to their students. Therefore, it seems to be unfair to expect instructors to teach effectively by simultaneously requiring them to engage in administration, research and community service. In such situations, instructors are likely to give priority more to research and community engagement than teaching, as these activities are considered as a means of getting promotion and additional incentive. Supporting this, Prosser and Trigwell (1997:29) suggest instructors are less likely to adopt student-centred approach to teaching if they perceive that their workload is too much and if teaching is less valued in their institutions.

The survey results in Tables 4.25 and 4.26 also identified lack of educational resources and poor classroom conditions among the constraining factors. With regard to educational resources, the results revealed that students and instructors are constrained by lack of facilities such as internet, books and laboratory equipment and, as a result, they found it difficult to withdraw from lecturing and providing handouts. In addition, under scarcity of these resources, students are less likely to engage in an independent learning other than expecting everything from their instructors.

In relation to classroom conditions, the results show that large class is one of the impeding factors. More importantly, as the class size per section was centrally fixed in the harmonized academic policy of Ethiopian public higher education institutions (2012: 46), instructors were not in a position to do anything about it. This is mainly the case in the disciplines of natural sciences where the enrolment rate is high currently. This decision seems to be based on a lecture method as the only approach to teaching without taking into account other interactive approaches to teaching which are often inconvenient to apply in such classes. As a result, such decisions are currently influencing instructors from adopting better approaches to teaching or to provide interactive lectures, which may lead to better learning outcomes. In addition, as the information in Section 4.2.1 reveals, instructors in Ethiopia are expected to implement a harmonized curriculum and policies. As a result, they do not seem to have much authority to decide what and how to teach in their classes so that teaching and learning are more of routine activities for them as well as their students. However, as Windschitl (2002:154) argues , *“If constructivist instruction begins with what students know and is driven by meaningful interactions between the students and the teacher, it follows that there is a great deal of authority invested in the teacher to select and enact curriculum”*.

Furthermore, the arrangement of the seats in some of the classes observed seems to be very challenging for students to share their ideas and for the instructors to move around the classroom and provide support for students. In these classrooms, seats are fixed to each other to discourage students from moving seats from one class to another. However, this practice made it difficult to move seats in a class let alone moving them from class to class, which is more likely to influence the implementation of active learning. Active learning requires movement and communication among students and instructors. Hence, seats should be arranged in a way that allows this pattern of learning in a classroom.

## **4.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter dealt with the presentation and discussion of the findings of the study. The findings were presented and discussed in line with the previous studies. In summary, as

discussed in this chapter, the analysis reveals that the majority of the instructors were more student-centred/learning-oriented than instructor-centred/content-oriented in their conception of teaching. This showed the positive outcomes of the attempts made to change or expand instructors' conceptions of teaching in higher education in Ethiopia. It also showed that the traditional conception of teaching still prevails in teaching in higher education in Ethiopia regardless of the policy reforms which demand instructors to become more student-centred than instructor-centred in their teaching. Concerning teaching practices, the analysis above reveals that there is development towards the employment of student-centred approach to teaching. Nevertheless, the finding showed that the traditional form of teaching in which the instructor lectures and students passively sit still prevails in teaching practices despite its ineffectiveness to improve students' learning. The study also revealed that the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their observed teaching practices was inconsistent, particularly for the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching which appeared to be influenced by the practical realities of teaching. In view of that, numerous factors that were impeding meaningful instructional practices in the universities studied were explored. These include the poor background of the students, the instructors' obsession with lecturing and lack of supportive environment for instructors and students. The next chapter presents summary, conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings of the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

In this study, instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in four Ethiopian universities were examined in the light of the current developments towards student-centred approach to teaching in higher education in Ethiopia. Four research questions were formulated to address the objectives of the study. These are:

1. What are the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in four Ethiopian universities?
2. What are the approaches to teaching adopted by instructors in teaching practices in these universities?
3. How do instructors' conceptions of teaching relate to their teaching practices?
4. What factors, if any, influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in these universities?

Data were collected from 160 instructors and 170 students that were drawn randomly from four universities. Data were collected following a sequential exploratory mixed methods strategy through interviews, classroom observations and questionnaires. To analyse the qualitative data, phenomenographic approach and content analysis were utilized. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage and mean) and inferential statistics (independent samples test, a one-way ANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient) were used to analyse the quantitative data. In the previous chapter, the findings were presented and discussed. On the basis of these findings and the subsequent discussions made, this chapter provides conclusions and recommendations. In addition, it provides suggestion for further research. The chapter finally highlights the limitations of this study.

## 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study.

### 5.1.1 Research question one

*What are the conceptions of teaching held by instructors in four Ethiopian universities?*

In seeking answer for this research question, the results of this investigation revealed categorization and conceptualisation of conceptions that substantiate recent investigations on conceptions of teaching. First, the study supports the arrangement of conceptions of teaching from the more teacher-centred/content-oriented conception to the more student-centred/learning-oriented conception. Second, the study points to the hierarchical relationships between the different categories of conceptions of teaching. For this reason, higher level categories were found to incorporate the awareness of the lower level categories but not vice versa. This implies that instructors whose conceptions are developed (student-centred) are aware of the lower conceptions and are likely to adopt alternative conceptions in their teaching based on their context. However, instructors whose conceptions are not developed (teacher-centred) are not aware of the conceptions beyond their category and are unlikely to adopt these conceptions unless their conceptions are developed.

The survey results in Tables 4.4, 4.6 and 4.7 revealed that instructors tended to support student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching ( $M=4.47$ ) more than an instructor-centred/content-oriented conception of teaching ( $M=2.47$ ). However, instructors do not seem to totally reject instructor-centred/content-oriented conception of teaching, which could have emanated from the history of education in Ethiopia, which had been dominated by the traditional views of teaching in which the instructor is concerned with covering the content of teaching more than students or the quality of teaching/learning.

From these results, it can be concluded that instructors' conceptions of teaching in the four universities incline towards the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of

teaching, which is consistent with the policy reforms. Therefore, the attempts made so far in higher education in Ethiopia to change or expand instructors' conceptions of teaching towards student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching were encouraging. However, as instructors did not totally disapprove the teacher-centred conception of teaching, it also implies that the traditional thinking of teaching still prevails in higher education in Ethiopia regardless of the policy calls for the employment of student-centred approach to teaching and the ineffectiveness of this conception of teaching at a higher education level.

The findings also revealed variations in conception of teaching between instructors who had attended a pedagogical training and who had not. From this, it was concluded that instructors who had attended training were negative towards the instructor-centred conception of teaching but were positive towards student-centred conception of teaching than those instructors who had not attended training. This implies that training has a significant effect on changing or expanding instructors' conceptions of teaching.

### **5.1.2 Research question two**

*What are the approaches to teaching adopted by instructors in teaching practices in these universities?*

For this research question, based on the survey results (Tables 4.13 & 4.14), the majority of the instructors claimed that their teaching practices were student-centred. However, classroom observations revealed that instructors' actual approach to teaching was still under the influence of the teacher-centred instruction which was inconsistent with their claims. The observed approach to teaching was characterised by the instructor spending much time giving and explaining lecture notes with students passively sitting and copying lectures notes from the blackboard. Students in such classes were rarely involved students in the teaching-learning process except in the rare occasions to respond to questions such as "Do you have any questions?" types, which are often considered as ineffective questioning strategies as they do not engage students in learning.

One the other hand, there were also instructors whose approach teaching reflected the constructivist views of teaching in which the instructor focuses more on students than the content of teaching. These instructors encouraged students to bring their prior knowledge and experience to learning. They also encouraged students to interact with fellow students on topics related to the lesson instead of merely copying lectures from the blackboard. In such classes, most of the time was spent on discussion, debate and problem solving instead of the instructor lecturing and demonstrating information to students.

From these results, it can be concluded that instructors' approaches to teaching or teaching practices in the four universities were still under the influence of the traditional form of instruction though some progress was there towards the student-centred approach to teaching. This may imply that the shift towards the student-centred instruction is gradual in contexts like Ethiopia where the history of education has been dominated by the traditional form of teaching. It also implies that policy reforms alone are not enough unless instructors are convinced to abandon the traditional lecturing of information to students as such an approach is the way they were taught and/or the way they might have been brought up from their childhood.

### **5.1.3 Research question three**

*How do instructors' conceptions of teaching relate to their teaching practices?*

For the third research question which sought answer for the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices, Pearson's product-moment correlation analysis revealed a positive and moderate correlation between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices (See table 4.24). However, the findings from the classroom observations revealed consistency, on the one hand, and inconsistency, on the other hand, between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching strategies. The study shows consistency between conceptions of teaching and teaching practices with regard to instructors whose views of teaching were predominately traditional.



However, observed practices revealed both consistency and inconsistency with respect to instructors whose conceptions of teaching were predominantly student-centred. Some of these instructors practiced what they preached, i.e., they reported that they were more student-focused than the content of teaching in their teaching practices and likewise were observed in their classrooms. But some instructors expressed in the interviews that good teaching should not be dominated by the teacher's talk or lecture. Nevertheless, observation of their classroom teaching revealed that their views of good teaching were inconsistent with their actual teaching practices. These instructors spent most of the time of their teaching in a classroom while lecturing from their handouts or demonstrating their PPPs without involving students in discussion or problem solving activities.

From these results, it was concluded that instructors whose conceptions of teaching were traditional were content/lectured-focused in their approach to teaching consistent with their conceptions. In contrast, instructors whose conceptions of teaching were student-centred may adopt alternative approaches in their teaching practices based on their context. This implies relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and observable teaching behaviour is not straightforward, particularly for the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching which is likely to be influenced by the practical realities of teaching such as the background of students, classroom conditions and resources. It also implies that instructors are unlikely to adopt student-centred approach to teaching unless their conceptions of teaching are changed or expanded.

#### **5.1.4 Research question four**

*What factors, if any, influence instructors' implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in these universities?*

The results on the factors influencing the proper implementation of student-centred approach to teaching revealed several constraining factors arising from students, instructors and institutional problems.

The study reveals the tendency among students to heavily rely on lectures and handouts instead of making efforts to find their own learning resources. In addition, students were

observed having difficulty in expressing their ideas in English which is the medium of instruction as it is the third or even fourth language for them. This finding implies that students' limited competence in English language may obstruct their efforts to interact with their classmates as well as with their instructors as student-centred approach to teaching is an interactive way of learning,

As with students, the study revealed the tendency to be completely obsessed with lecturing among instructors as an easy way out and as a means to present a large body of information to students. It also revealed the failure to incorporate active learning methods by instructors in their course materials/lectures/PPPs when planning teaching. Instructors lacked the commitment to invest their time and energy on student-centred teaching practices as such form of teaching requires careful planning and monitoring. As a result, teaching seems to be more of rushing to cover the content required than involving students in a meaningful learning in the four universities studied.

The study also revealed some constraining factors that were characteristic of institutional problems. These included lack of continuous professional development opportunities for instructors. Though the majority of the instructors had received some form a pedagogical training via HDP and Induction programs, it was found that pedagogical trainings in these universities were neither sufficient nor continuous for the instructors to upgrade their pedagogical knowledge and skills regularly once they complete these programs.

Another important finding from the study is that the existing practices of requiring instructors to shoulder additional responsibilities such as administrative duties, research and community service besides teaching appeared to have taken instructors' attention away from their regular duty of engaging students in learning. Because of these additional responsibilities, instructors were forced to miss classes and to offer hurriedly planned lessons. From this, it was concluded that it is unfair to expect instructors to teach effectively by simultaneously requiring them to engage in administrative duties, research and community service. The results also showed that instructors and students were also constrained by lack of facilities such as fast internet connections, books, etc. As a result, instructors seem to find it difficult to withdraw from lecturing and providing handouts to students who on their part find it difficult to withdraw from expecting everything from their instructors.

From these results, it was concluded that though instructors were positive towards student-centred instruction, their implementation of it in their teaching practices was held back due to a number of constraints arising from the background of students, instructors' obsession with lecturing, and institutional problems.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study and drawing on the preceding conclusions, the following recommendations were made.

### **5.2.1 Recommendations for policy and practice**

1. The study reveals that the attempts made so far to change or expand instructors' conceptions of teaching in higher education in Ethiopia were encouraging. However, the fact that the traditional conception of teaching still prevails in teaching in higher education shows the work that remains to be done in the future. Therefore, teaching development programs that focus primarily on developing instructors' conceptions of teaching are needed. In such programs, instructors should be given the opportunity to interrogate their conceptions of teaching along teaching them how to translate specific teaching strategies into practice so that their implementation of these strategies may not be superficial.
2. Students' adoption of a new approach is significantly influenced by their previous approach to learning. This means that if the students' previous approach to learning is grounded on passively receiving and memorizing information from instructors, they are less likely to adopt an approach that requires them to make efforts in order to learn. Therefore, it is recommended for instructors to be aware of their students' prior experiences and to provide appropriate support for students to adopt student-centred approach to teaching.

3. As a result of the growing interest in student-centred approach for enhancing student learning, many universities worldwide have currently introduced a guideline that supports instructors and students in the teaching-learning process. However, in most higher education institutions in Ethiopia, there is no guideline that properly supports instructors and students to effectively teach and learn and subsequently to enhance quality learning outcomes. Because of this, teaching practices are haphazardly conducted with a great deal of variation among universities and even among instructors in a given program. Thus, there is a need for introducing a clear guideline that assists instructors and students to effectively conduct teaching and learning. Such guideline should provide information on effective teaching, learning and assessment and how instructors and students make use of this information during the teaching and learning process. This information can be effectively provided online on university's website so that students and instructors can easily access it when needed.
4. As a country whose history of education has been dominated by the traditional lectured based approach to teaching, it may take some time for teaching practices to move towards the constructivist views of teaching in Ethiopian context. Therefore, it is recommended that a supportive environment for both students and instructors should be in place in universities until the promised benefits of teaching and learning through student-centred approach are well taken. Such support should be made available in the form of, but not limited to continuous pedagogical training, lowering of workload, provision of learning and teaching materials, improving classroom conditions, etc. In addition, the class size recommended in the harmonized academic policy of Ethiopian public higher education institutions should be revisited as active learning requires movement and communication among students and instructors.
5. As student-centred approach to teaching is an interactive way of learning, the language students use to interact with each other is likely to influence their learning outcomes. Therefore, it is recommended that the government/universities take appropriate action to improve students' English language proficiency, which is

currently influencing instructors' approach to teaching as well as students' approach towards their learning.

## **5.2.2 Recommendations for further research**

Drawing on the findings of the study, the following are suggested for further research:

- As the study was limited in its sample size, future studies that encompass larger sample sizes are suggested to increase the reliability of the results and thereby to make more accurate generalisations on the conditions and realities of teaching and learning in higher education in Ethiopia.
- Future studies should also explore students' conceptions of and approaches to learning as these might also influence the quality of teaching and learning.
- Further research is also recommended to explore the conditions of teaching and learning at lower levels and how these influence teaching and learning at higher levels in the context of this study.
- Further work needs to be done to establish how the approaches instructors adopt in their teaching influence the approaches students adopt in their learning and how these in turn influence learning outcomes.

## **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There were some limitations to this study that the researcher believes may influence the generalisability of the findings to other universities in Ethiopia. First, it was limited by its small sample size. As the study focused on only four Ethiopian universities and instructors and students drawn from only two colleges of these universities, care must be taken in generalising the findings of this study to the conditions of teaching and learning in other universities in Ethiopia. The other limitation of the study was the limited number of the classroom observations conducted. Though a series of classroom

observations were planned in the beginning, it was found to be difficult to find instructors who were willing for more than a maximum of two observations. As a result, the inputs from the classroom observations on actual teaching practices were not comprehensive enough to complement the information through the surveys. To overcome this problem, data were gathered from students to triangulate the information from the instructors. Despite these limitations and challenges, the study had produced useful insights on the conditions and practical realities of teaching and learning in four universities in Ethiopia.

## **5.4 SUMMARY**

The existing education policy of Ethiopia emphasizes the implementation of student-centred instruction as one of the strategies for improving the country's debilitated quality of education. Towards this end, instructors have been under increasing pressure to improve the quality of their teaching and eventually to become more student-centred than instructor-centred in their approach to teaching. In the light of this, the study explored instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices in four Ethiopian universities. It also examined the factors that influence instructors' implementation of their developed conceptions of teaching. The study was grounded on the claim that instructors are unlikely to adopt student-centred approach to teaching unless their conceptions of teaching are changed and/or their teaching environment is supportive. The outcome of the study will help in the designing of appropriate strategies for enhancing instructors' conceptions of teaching and for creating a supportive environment that enables instructors to translate innovative approaches into their teaching practices. The study also provides additional insights into the existing debate over the role of research on conceptions of teaching and the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their classroom practices.

The data for the study were collected using a mixed methods research design that comprised both the qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Following a sequential exploratory strategy, first, qualitative data were collected through interviews

and classroom observations followed by quantitative data through questionnaires. For the qualitative phase of the study, twenty instructors were interviewed on their conceptions of teaching drawing on Kember's (1997) dimensions of teaching as described, perceived and experienced by the instructors themselves. Next, their classroom teaching practices were observed to see the consistency or inconsistency between what instructors reported they do in the interviews with what they actually do practically. For the quantitative phase of the study, drawing on the preliminary analysis of the qualitative data, data were obtained using a questionnaire from 160 instructors and 170 students who were chosen randomly. The questionnaire for instructors was designed in such a way that the instructors self-report their views of teaching and their teaching practices while the questionnaire for the students was designed to crosscheck the information from the instructors concerning the strategies their instructors employed in their teaching.

The data from the interviews and the classroom observations were analysed qualitatively using phenomenographic and content analysis approaches respectively. The data from the questionnaires were processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20 for windows. From this, frequencies, means and percentages were computed in order to summarise and interpret the participants' responses. In addition, independent samples test and one-way ANOVA were applied to examine the differences in conceptions of and approaches to teaching among instructors. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to examine the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices based on the survey reports. The study produced empirical evidence on instructors' conceptions of and approaches to teaching in four universities in Ethiopia. This evidence provides insights on the current conditions of teaching and learning in these universities and will likely help to inform future actions in higher education in Ethiopia as a whole. Regarding instructors' conceptions of teaching, the study identified four predominant categories of conceptions of teaching. These are teaching as satisfying the syllabus demands, teaching as presenting structured information to students, teaching as helping students learn what they learn and teaching as helping students expand knowledge. These conceptions were considered as related (not independent) and were hierarchically arranged based on inclusivity

(increasing breadth of awareness) from the more instructor-centred/content-oriented category to the more student-centred/learning-oriented category. Based on this categorisation, the majority of the instructors were found to be more student-centred than teacher-centred in their conception of teaching though they were also instructors whose conceptions of teaching were traditional. From this, it is concluded that the attempts made so far in higher education in Ethiopia to change or expand instructors' conceptions of teaching were encouraging. Concerning teaching practices, the study reveals that there is some progress in teaching practices towards the employment of student-centred approach to teaching in line with the policy reforms. Nevertheless, the finding shows that the traditional form of teaching in which the instructor lectures and students passively sit still prevails in university teaching despite its ineffectiveness to improve students' learning.

The study also reveals that the relationship between instructors' conceptions of teaching and their observed teaching practices was inconsistent, particularly for the student-centred/learning-oriented conception of teaching which appeared to be influenced by the practical realities of teaching. In relation to this, the finding reveals numerous factors that were impeding meaningful instructional practices in the universities studied. They include the poor background of the students, the instructors' obsession with lecturing and lack of supportive environment for instructors and students. Based on the findings, it is recommended that a supportive environment is needed for students and instructors to adopt student-centred approach to teaching and learning. This was suggested in the form of training, reconfiguring classrooms and providing resources. Finally, further studies that utilise larger sample sizes to increase the reliability of the results were suggested.



## REFERENCES

Abel, E.M. & Campbell, M. 2009. Student-Centred Learning in an Advanced Social Work Practice Course: Outcomes of a Mixed Methods Investigation, *Social Work Education. The International Journal*, 28(1): 3-17.

Ackerman, D. S., Gross, B. L., & Perner, L. 2003. Instructor, Student, and Employer Perceptions on Preparing Marketing Students for Changing Business Landscapes. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25(1): 46-56.

Akerlind, G.K. 2003. Growing and Developing as a University Teacher-Variation in Meaning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 28(4):375-390.

Akerlind, G.S. 2008. A phenomenographic approach to developing academics' understanding of the nature of teaching and learning. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 13(6): 633-44.

Aypay, A. 2011. The Adaptation of the Teaching-Learning Conceptions Questionnaire and its Relationships with Epistemological Beliefs. *Educational Sciences: theory & practice*, 11(1): 21-29.

Attard, A., Di Iorio E., Geven K., & Santa R. 2010. *Student Centred Learning: An Insight into Theory and Practice. Bucharest: Partos Timisoara.*

Baeten M., Kyndt E., Struyven K. & Doch F. 2010. Using student-centred learning environments to stimulate deep approaches to learning: Factors encouraging or discouraging their effectiveness. *Educational Research Review*, 5: 243-260.

Biggs, J. 1996. Enhancing Teaching through Constructive Alignment. *Higher Education*, 32: 347-364.

Biggs, J. & Tang, C. 2007. *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student does.* McGraw-Hill: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Birhanu Moges Alemu. 2010. *Active Learning Approaches in Mathematics Education at Universities in Oromia, Ethiopia*, unpublished DED dissertation, University of South Africa.

Birzer, M. L. 2004. Andragogy: Student centred classrooms in criminal justice programs. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, 15(2): 393-411.

Bloor, T & Wondwosen T .1996. Issues in Ethiopian Language Policy and Education. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 17(5):321-338.

Bowden, J.A. 2000. "The nature of phenomenographic research". In Bowden, J.A. & Walsh, E (Eds.) *Phenomenography*. Melbourne: RMIT University.

Bruning, R.H. 1994. The College Classroom from the Perspective of Cognitive Psychology. In Prichard, K. W. & Sawyer R.M (Eds.) *Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications*. London: Greenwood Press.

Benson, C., Heugh, K., Bogale, B. & Gebreyohannes, M.A., 2010. The Medium of Instruction in the primary schools in Ethiopia: a study and its implications for multilingual education. In Heugh, K. & Skutnabb-Kangas, T (Ed.) *Multilingual Education Works: From the Periphery to the Centre*. New Delhi: Orinted BlackSwan.

Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia (CSA). 2015. *Report presented to the Media on the current population growth of Ethiopia*. Available in Amharic at <http://www.csa.gov.et> [Accessed on 12 February 2015].

Chan, K.W., & Elliott, R. G. 2004. Relational analysis of personal epistemology and conceptions about teaching and learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20: 817-831.

Chen, J. 2010. *Teachers' Conceptions of Excellent Teaching in Chinese Middle Schools*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education, The University of Auckland.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. 2007. *Research Methods in Education*. London: Rutledge Falmer.

Creswell, J.W. 2003. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Creswell, J.W. 2007. *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among five approaches (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Creswell, J.W. 2012. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Derebssa, D. S. 2006. Tension between Traditional and Modern Teaching- Learning Approaches in Ethiopian Primary Schools. CICE Hiroshima University. *Journal of International Cooperation in Education*, 9(1): 123-140.

Dewey, J. 1931. The development of American pragmatism. In Thayer, H. S. (Ed.) (1989), *Pragmatism: The classic writings* (pp. 23-40). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.

Dewey, J. 1933. *The Later works, 1925-1953, Volume 8, Essays and How We Think, Revised Edition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Devlin, M. 2006 .Challenging Accepted Wisdom about the Place of Conceptions of Teaching in University Teaching Improvement. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 18(2):112-119.

Donche, V. & Petegem, P.V. 2011. Teacher educators' conceptions of learning to teach and related teaching strategies, *Research Papers in Education*, 26(2): 207-222.

Federal Democratic Government of Ethiopia (FDRE). 1995. Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, No. 1/1995. *Federal Negarit Gazeta, No.1*: Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). 2009. Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009. *Federal Negarit Gazeta, No.64*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.

Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). 2010. *Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/11-2014/15*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.

Felder, R.M. & Brent, R. 1996. Navigating the Bumpy Road to Student-Centred Instruction. *College Teaching*, 44(2): 43-47.

Fox, D. 1983. Personal theories of teaching, *Studies in Higher Education*, 8(2):151-163.

Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum (Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos).

Gao, L. & Watkins, D. 2001. Identifying and assessing the conceptions of teaching of secondary school physics teachers in China. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 71:443-469.

- Gao, L. & Watkins, D. 2002. Conceptions of teaching held by school science teachers in P.R. China: identification and cross-cultural comparisons, *International Journal of Science Education*, 24(1): 61-79.
- Gonzalez, C. 2011. Extending research on ‘conceptions of teaching’: commonalities and differences in recent investigations. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(1):65-80.
- Gow, L., & Kember, D. 1993. Conceptions of teaching and their relationship to student learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 63: 20-33.
- Guba, E. G. 1981. Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, (29): 75–91
- Hancock, D. R, Bray, M. & Nason, S.A. 2002. Influencing university students' achievement and motivation in a technology course. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(6):365-372.
- Harmonized Academic Policy of Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions (2012) Ethiopia: Addis Ababa.
- Hussien, J.W. 2010. English Supremacy in Ethiopia-auto ethnographic reflections. In Heugh, K. & Skutnabb-Kangas, T (Eds.) *Multilingual Education Works: From the Periphery to the Centre*. New Delhi: Orinted BlackSwan.
- Jha, S. K. 2014. An Ethnographic Insight into the Causal Factors of Degrading English Education in Ethiopia, Libya, and India. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 2(2): 44-55.
- Johnson, A., Kimball, R., Melendez, B., Myers, L., Rhea, K. & Travis, B. 2009. Breaking with Tradition: Preparing Faculty to Teach in a Student-Centred or Problem-Solving Environment, *PRIMUS*, 19(2):146-160.
- Jordan A, Carlile, O. & Stack, A. 2008. *Approaches to Learning: A Guide for Teachers*. McGraw-Hill: Open University Press.
- Kahl D.H & Venette S. 2010. To Lecture or Let Go: A Comparative Analysis of Student Speech Outlines from Teacher-Centred and Learner-Centred Classrooms. *Communication Teacher*, 24(3):178-186.

Kane R., Sandretto S. & Heath C. 2002. Telling Half the Story: A Critical Review of Research on the Teaching Beliefs and Practices of University Academics. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2): 177-228.

Kember, D. 1997. A reconceptualisation of the research into university academics' conceptions of teaching. *Learning and Instruction*, 7(3):255–275.

Kember, D. 2009. Promoting Student-Centred Forms of Learning across an Entire University. *Higher Education Journal*, 58:1-13.

Kember, D., & Kwan, K. 2000. Lecturers' approaches to teaching and their relationship to conceptions of good teaching. *Instructional Science*, 28(5):469–490.

Kember, D., Kwan, K.P. & Ledesma, J. 2001. Conceptions of good teaching and how they influence the way adults and school leavers are taught. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(5):393-404.

Lindblom-Ylänne, S., K. Trigwell, A. Nevgi, & P. Ashwin. 2006. How approaches to teaching are affected by discipline and teaching context. *Studies in Higher Education* 31(3):285–298.

Maclellan, E. & Soden, R. 2004. The Importance of Epistemic Cognition in Student-Centred Learning. *Instructional Science*, 32(3):253-268.

Marton, F & Säljö, R. 1976. On Qualitative Differences in Learning. I- Outcome and Process. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 46:4-16.

Marton, F. 1981. Phenomenography-describing conceptions of the world around us. *Instructional Science*, 10: 177-200.

Marton F. 1986. 'Phenomenography- a research approach to investigating different understandings of reality'. *Journal of Thought*, 21(3): 28-49.

Mascolo, M. 2009. Beyond student-centred and Teacher-centred pedagogy: Teaching and learning as guided participation. *Pedagogy and the Human Sciences*, 1(1) 3-27

McMorrow U. 2006. Changing practices for a global society: voices of students, teachers, principals and university teacher educators on active learning Health Services West, Galway. *Ireland Irish Educational Studies* 25(3): 321-335.

Ministry of Education (MoE).1994. *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy*. Unpublished Policy Document. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.

Ministry of Education (MoE). 2010. *Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2008-2009*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

Ministry of Education (MoE). 2012. *Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2011-2012*. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia

Nationally Harmonized Modular Curriculum for Undergraduate Program (Bachelor of Arts Degree in English Language and Literature).2013. Addis Ababa: Ethiopia.

Parpala, A. & Lindblom-Ylänne, S. 2007. University Teachers' Conceptions of Good Teaching in the Units of High-Quality Education. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 33: 355-370.

Patton, M.Q.2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Piaget, J. 1952. *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. (M. Cook, Trans.) New York: International Universities Press Inc.

Postareff, L., & Lindblom-Ylänne, S. 2008. Variation in teachers' descriptions of teaching: Broadening the understanding of teaching in higher education. *Learning and Instruction*, 18: 109-120.

Pratt, D. D. 1992. Conceptions of teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 42: 203–220.

Pratt, D. D., Kelly, M., & Wong, W. S. S. 1999. Chinese conceptions of 'effective teaching' in Hong Kong: Towards culturally sensitive evaluation of teaching. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18: 241–258.

Prosser M. & Trigwell K. 1997. Relations between perceptions of the teaching environment and approaches to teaching. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 67: 25-35.

Prosser, M., Trigwell, K. & Taylor, P. 1994. A phenomenographic study of academics' conceptions of science learning and teaching, *Learning and Instruction*, 4: 217–231.

Ramsden. P. 2003. *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*: London: Routledge Falmer.

Samuelowicz, K., & Bain, J. D. 1992. Conceptions of teaching held by academic teachers. *Higher Education*, 24: 93-111.

- Samuelowicz, K., & Bain, J.D. 2001. Revisiting academics' beliefs about teaching and learning. *Higher Education*, 41(3): 299-325.
- Schuh, K.L.2004 .Learner-centred principles in teacher-centred practices? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20: 833-846.
- Semple, A. 2000. Learning theories and their influence on the development and use of educational technologies. *Australian Science Teachers Journal*, 46(3):21-28.
- So, W. M. W., & Watkins, D. A. 2005. From beginning teacher education to professional teaching: A study of the thinking of Hong Kong primary science teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21: 525–541.
- Stes, A., Gijbels,D & Petegem,P.V. 2008. Student-focused approaches to teaching in relation to context and teacher characteristics. *Higher Education*, 55:255–267.
- Taye, G.2008. *Perceptions and practices of active learning in EFL classes of Dilla University*. Unpublished M.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University.
- Tekeste Negash. 1990. *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education: Some Implications for Nation-Building*. Uppsala, Sweden.
- Tekeste Negash.1996. *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet
- Teshome Y. 2003. Transformations in higher education: Experiences with reform and expansion in the Ethiopian higher education system. Keynote speech presented at the Africa regional training conference entitled *Improving Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Things that Work!* Accra, Ghana.
- Thompson, A. G. 1993. Teachers' beliefs and conceptions: A synthesis of the research. In Douglas A. G (Ed.) *Handbook of research on mathematics teaching and learning*. New York: Macmillan.
- Tirualem A. 2003.*The Classroom Practices of Learner-Centred Approach in Second Cycle Primary Schools of Addis Ababa*. Unpublished M.A Thesis, Addis Ababa University.
- Torenbeek, M., Jansen, E. & Hofman, A. 2009. How first year students perceive the fit between secondary and university education: the effect of teaching approaches. *Effective Education*, 1(2): 135-150.

Trigwell, K. 2000. "A phenomenographic interview on phenomenography". In Bowden, J.A. & Walsh, E. (Eds.) *Phenomenography*. Melbourne: RMIT University Press.

Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. 1991. Improving the quality of student learning: The influence of learning context and student approaches to learning on learning outcomes. (Special edition on student learning) *Higher Education*, 22: 251-266.

Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. 1996a. Congruence between intention and strategy in university science teachers' approaches to teaching. *Higher Education*, 32: 77-87.

Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. 1996b. Changing approaches to teaching: A relational perspective. *Studies in Higher Education*, 21: 275-284.

Trigwell, K. & Prosser, M. 2004. Development and Use of the Approaches to Teaching Inventory. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(4):409-424.

Trigwell K, Prosser M & Ginns P. 2005. Phenomenographic Pedagogy and A Revised Approach to Teaching Inventory. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 24(4): 349-360.

Trigwell, K., Prosser, M. & Taylor, P. 1994. Qualitative differences in approaches to teaching first year university science. *Higher Education*, 27: 75-84.

Trigwell, K., Prosser, M., & Waterhouse, F. 1999. Relations between teachers' approaches to teaching and students' approaches to learning. *Higher Education*, 37: 57-70.

Tuckman, B.W. & Monetti, D.M. 2011. *Educational Psychology*. Wadsworth: CENGAGE Learning.

Van Eekelen, I.M., Boshuizen, H.P.A & Vermunt, J.D. 2005. Self-Regulation in Higher Education Teacher Learning. *Higher Education*, 50:447-471.

Weimer, M. 2002. *Learner-Centred Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice*, San Francisco.

Williams, M & Burden, R.L. 1997. *Psychology for Language Teachers: A Social Constructivist Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



- Windschitl, M. 2002. Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(2): 131–175.
- Wright, G.B. 2011. Student-Centred Learning in Higher Education. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 23(3): 92-97.
- Varnava-Marouchou, D. 2011. Faculty Conceptions of Teaching: Implications for teacher professional development. *McGill Journal of Education*, 46(1): 123-132.
- Virtanen, V. & Lindblom-Ylännö, S. 2010. University students' and teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning in the biosciences. *Instructional Science*, 38:355–370.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1978. *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- World Bank. 2013. *Ethiopia Economic Update II: Laying the Foundation for Achieving Middle Income Status*
- Zerihun, Z. Beishuizen, J & Willem, V. O. 2011. Conceptions and practices in teaching and learning: implications for the evaluation of teaching quality. *Quality in Higher Education*, 17(2):151-161.

# LIST OF APPENDICES

## APPENDIX I: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



### Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

**Adinew Tadesse Degago [45881766]**

for a D Ed study entitled

**Conceptions of Teaching and Practices in relation to a Student-Centred Approach to Teaching in selected Ethiopian Universities**

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CS le Roux", is written over a faint, circular stamp.

Prof CS le Roux  
CEDU REC (Chairperson)  
lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za

7 June 2013

Reference number: 2013 JUNE/45881766/CSLR

## APPENDIX II: INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Instructors/Students,

The following information is provided for you to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and, therefore, you are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at anytime.

The study aims to examine conceptions of teaching and teaching practices in Ethiopian universities. The information you provide is used only for research purpose and your name, position and affiliation to your institution is highly invisible in the study. Your cooperation is requested in the study to complete a questionnaire that takes 25 minutes, to take part in 40 minutes interviews and to cooperate for classroom observations. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before participating or during the time that you are participating.

There are no harms associated with this study. You will benefit from this study in sharing and reflecting on your views and experiences of teaching. The results of the study will be published as a thesis in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at University of South Africa. A copy of the thesis will be provided to your institution so that you will benefit from reading it.

Therefore, if you wish to participate in this study, please sign your consent with full knowledge of the purpose and the procedures of the study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep. I thank you, in advance, for your valuable cooperation.

---

Name & Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Adinew Tadesse Degago

Name & Signature of the Researcher

---

Date

## **APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Dear instructors, I am conducting research on how teaching is conceived and practiced in Ethiopian Universities. You are, therefore, kindly requested to cooperate in providing me with your honest information as possible. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. The interview will be audio-recorded on your consent. The tape will be discarded after it is transcribed in full and its accuracy is confirmed by you. Please respond to each question based on your current teaching situation. There is no right and wrong answer and, therefore, please free to respond to each question.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

### **Background Information**

- University:\_\_\_\_\_ College:\_\_\_\_\_
- Department:\_\_\_\_\_ Sex:\_\_\_\_\_
- Level of Education:\_\_\_\_\_
- Academic Rank:\_\_\_\_\_
- Years of teaching experience :\_\_\_\_\_

### **About the essence of teaching**

1. What does teaching mean to you? How would you describe qualities of a good teaching?

### **About the roles of students and instructors**

2. How would you describe your main role in your teaching? Why?
3. How would you describe students' role in your teaching? Why?

### **About the aims and expected outcomes of teaching**

4. What are your aims in your teaching? Why?
5. What do you expect from your students upon the completion of your course? Why?

### **About the content of teaching**

6. How do you select the content of your teaching? Why?
7. Who decides the content of your teaching? Why?

### **About the teaching Practices**

8. How would you describe your styles or approaches to teaching in your classroom? Why?

**About the teaching context/environment**

9. What conditions are influencing your teaching practices, especially your implementation of SCL?

**APPENDIX IV: OBSERVATION GUIDE**

Name of the university: \_\_\_\_\_

Academic rank of the instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

Observation date: \_\_\_\_\_

Subject taught: \_\_\_\_\_

Department of students: \_\_\_\_\_

Class year: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic of the lesson observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Time allotted: \_\_\_\_\_

Objectives of the lesson:

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of students in the classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of the instructor's activities: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of the students' activities: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of the classroom conditions (availability of space, class size, arrangement of seats, aeration, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

Classroom resources (books, media, laboratory equipment, etc) and their utilization

\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX V: THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INSTRUCTORS**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM STUDIES  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY INSTRUCTORS**

**Dear Instructors,**

I am conducting research as a fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at University of South Africa. The research aims at exploring how teaching is conceived and practiced in Ethiopian Universities. As instructors play a key role in any educational innovations, the information you provide will help to improve teaching practices in Ethiopian universities. You, are, therefore, kindly requested to cooperate in filling this questionnaire based on **your current teaching situation**. Your honest information is highly valuable for the successful completion of the study. The questionnaire has four parts, all of which should be completed as carefully as possible. The information you provide is kept confidential and used only for a research purpose. Completing this questionnaire approximately takes 25 minutes.

**Thank you in advance for your cooperation.**

## PART I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS: This part of the questionnaire is designed to collect the background information instructors. Please, show your reaction to each item by circling the number that shows you response. Briefly state your responses to the open-ended items.

- 1) Name of your University: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) College
  - 1) Natural Sciences
  - 2) Social Sciences
- 3) Department: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Gender
  - 1) Female
  - 2) Male
- 5) Level of Education
  - 1) B.Ed/B.A/B. Sc
  - 2) M. Ed/M.A/M.Sc
  - 3) PhD
- 6) Academic rank
  - 1) Graduate Assistant/Assistant Lecturer
  - 2) Lecturer
  - 3) Assistant Professor and above
- 7) Number of years in teaching in higher education :  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Your current teaching load: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Additional responsibility other than teaching:
  - 1) Yes ( please specify ): \_\_\_\_\_
  - 2) No
- 10) Average number of students in your class: \_\_\_\_\_
- 11) Did you receive pedagogical training in teaching in higher education (e.g. HDP, induction, etc):

1) Yes(please specify):\_\_\_\_\_

2) No

12) Class Level you teach currently( you may circle more than once)

1) UG: a) 1<sup>st</sup>      b) 2<sup>nd</sup>                      c) 3rd& above

2) PG: a) 1<sup>st</sup>      b) 2<sup>nd</sup>

13) Number of courses you are currently teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART II. VIEWS ON TEACHING**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** This part of the questionnaire is designed to investigate your views of teaching. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements by circling one of the numbers that stands for the following rating scales:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

<b>No.</b>	<b>Statements about Teaching</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
1.	The essence of teaching is mainly delivering knowledge to students.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Students should be active for the teaching-learning process to be successful.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Teaching is mainly providing students with the information they will need to pass examinations.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Teaching is helping students develop new ways of thinking in the subject they study.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Teaching is helping students to expand their knowledge and understanding of the topics studied.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The role of the instructor is mainly delivering knowledge to students.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	It is important that the student undertake responsibility for his/her own learning.	1	2	3	4	5



8.	Teaching is creating a positive learning environment in which students learn by themselves.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Teaching is lecturing information to students.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Teaching is giving students a set of good lecture notes.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	The role of the instructor is to facilitate and guide students in the way of learning.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Teaching is mainly covering the required content fully.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Teaching is providing students with ample opportunities to explore and express their ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Teaching is helping students construct knowledge from their learning experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Students have very little to contribute to their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The primary role of the student is to receive knowledge from instructors.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	It is important that a student remembers everything the instructor has taught.	1	2	3	4	5

### **PART III: TEACHING PRACTICES**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** This part of the questionnaire is designed to investigate teaching strategies in a classroom context. Please rate from NEVER TO ALWAYS to show how often you do each of the following statements in your current teaching situation. Circle one of the numbers that stands for the following rating scales:

1. – this item is only rarely true for me
2. – this item is sometimes true for me
3. – this item is true for me about half the time
4. – this item is frequently true for me
5. – this item is almost always true for me

No	Statements about Teaching Practices	only rarely				almost always
1.	I require students to remember the details of knowledge taught accurately.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My teaching mainly focuses on providing students with the knowledge they will need to pass examinations.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I encourage students to ask questions during my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I ask questions during my teaching to make sure that students have understood the topics discussed.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	My teaching is mainly concerned with covering the required content fully.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I require my students to be silent most of the time and listen to my instruction in class.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I create a learning environment that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I set aside some teaching time so that students can discuss, among themselves, key concepts and ideas.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I require students to focus their study mainly on the learning resources (e.g., books, handouts, etc) provided.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My teaching takes into account students' prior knowledge in the subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I encourage students to interact with one another in my classes.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I encourage students to find their own learning resources (books, journals, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I encourage students to apply the knowledge learnt through various activities.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	My teaching mainly focuses on giving students a good set of lecture notes.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I provide feedback to students on their learning and progresses.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I encourage students to relate new knowledge to previous knowledge and experience.	1	2	3	4	5

17.	I encourage students to assess their strengths and weaknesses in learning	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I use mainly a lecture method in my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I encourage students more to make sense of the content taught than to attempt to memorize it.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I encourage students to generate their own notes rather than always copy mine.	1	2	3	4	5

#### **PART IV. FACTORS THAT MIGHT INFLUENCE STUDENT-CENTRED TEACHING PRACTICES**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** The part of the questionnaire is designed to investigate factors that might influence the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching in a university context. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements to show the factors that are influencing your implementation of the approach in your context. Provide your response by circling of one of the numbers that stands for the following rating scales:

1. STRONGLY DISAGREE (SD)
2. DISAGREE (D)
3. NEUTRAL (N)
4. AGREE (A)
5. STRONGLY AGREE (SA)

<b>No</b>	<b>Statements about Influencing Factors</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
1.	I cannot cover the required content for my course if I implement active learning strategies.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	My workload is too heavy to apply student-centred approach to teaching properly.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The number of students in my class (class size) is inappropriate to apply student-centred teaching techniques.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The teaching techniques recommended for my course in the	1	2	3	4	5

	curriculum are more content-oriented than student-focused.					
5.	My students are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	My students have no adequate background in student-centred approach.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	My students cannot understand the concepts taught in my course unless provided with detailed lecture notes.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	My classroom (e.g., flexibility of seats, availability of space) is inconvenient for carrying out active learning methods.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I have no proper training in student-centred approach to teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I have no proper facilities and resources for implementing active learning methods.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	There are no continuous teaching improvement programs (e.g., workshop, training, etc) in my institution.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	My institution is not committed to the implementation of student-centred approach to teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	There is no collegial sharing of ideas, experiences and challenges among instructors in relation to teaching in my institution	1	2	3	4	5

If there are any other influencing factors that are not included in the above list, please specify them in the space provided below.

---



---



---



---

**Thank you for your help! Your cooperation in completing this questionnaire is highly appreciated.**

## **APPENDIX VI: THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM STUDIES  
QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENTS**

**Dear Students,**

I am conducting research as a fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at University of South Africa. The research aims at exploring how teaching is conceived and practiced in Ethiopian Universities. The information you provide will help to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in Ethiopian universities. You, are, therefore, kindly requested to cooperate in filling this questionnaire based on **your current learning situation**. Your honest information is highly valuable for the successful completion of the study. The questionnaire has three parts, all of which should be completed as carefully as possible. The information you provide is kept confidential and used only for a research purpose. Completing this questionnaire approximately takes 20 minutes.

**Thank you in advance for your cooperation.**

Adinew Tadesse Degago  
Haramaya University, Ethiopia

## PART I: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INSTRUCTIONS: This part of the questionnaire is designed to collect information about your background and your institution. Please, show your reaction to each item by circling the number that shows your response. Briefly state your responses to the open-ended items.

1. Name of your University: \_\_\_\_\_
2. College
  - 3) Natural Sciences
  - 4) Social Sciences
3. Department: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender
  - 3) Female
  - 4) Male
5. Your current semester total learning load(total credit hours):  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Your class Level
  - 1) Undergraduate: a) 1<sup>st</sup>      b) 2<sup>nd</sup>              c) 3rd& above
  - 2) Postgraduate: a) 1<sup>st</sup>      b) 2<sup>nd</sup>

## PART II: TEACHING PRACTICES

INSTRUCTIONS: This part of the questionnaire is designed to investigate your instructor's teaching strategies in a classroom context. Please rate from ONLY RARELY TO ALMOST ALWAYS to show how often your instructor does each of the following statements in the course he/she teaches you currently. Circle one of the numbers that stands for the following rating scales:

1. – This item is ONLY RARELY true for this course
2. – This item is SOMETIMES true for this course
3. – This item is true for this course ABOUT HALF the time
4. – This item is FREQUENTLY true for this course
5. – This item is ALMOST ALWAYS true for this course

No	Statements about Teaching Practices	only rarely				Almost Always
1.	The instructor requires students to remember the details of knowledge taught accurately.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The instructor's teaching mainly focuses on providing the information that is needed for examinations.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The instructor encourages students to ask questions during his/her teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	The instructor asks questions during his/her teaching to make sure that students have understood the topics discussed.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The instructor's teaching is mainly concerned with covering the required content fully.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	The instructor requires students to be silent most of the time and listen to his/her lecture in class.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	The instructor creates a learning environment that encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The instructor sets aside some teaching time so that students discuss, among themselves, key concepts and ideas.	1	2	3	4	5

9.	The instructor requires students to focus their study mainly on the learning resources (e.g., books, handouts, etc) he/she provides.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	The instructor takes into account students' prior knowledge in the subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	The instructor encourages students to interact with one another in his/her teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	The instructor encourages students to find their own learning resources (books, journals, etc) in order to learn in this course.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The instructor encourages students to apply the knowledge learnt in through various activities.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	The instructor mainly focuses on giving students a set of lecture notes.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The instructor provides students with feedback on their own learning and progresses.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The instructor encourages students to relate new knowledge to their previous knowledge and experience.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	The instructor encourages students to assess their strengths and weaknesses in learning.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The instructor uses mainly a lecture method in his/her teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The instructor encourages students more to make sense of the content taught than to attempt to memorize it.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The instructor encourages students to produce their own notes rather than always copy his/hers.	1	2	3	4	5

### **PART III. VIEWS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT**

INSTRUCTIONS: This part of the questionnaire is designed to investigate your views on the implementation of student-centred approach in a university context. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements to show your views on the implementation of the approach. Provide your response by circling one of the numbers that stands for the following rating scales:



1. STRONGLY DISAGREE (SD)
2. DISAGREE (D)
3. NEUTRAL (N)
4. AGREE (A)
5. STRONGLY AGREE (SA)

No	Views on the implementation of student-centred approach	SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	Students are not willing to take responsibility for their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Students have no adequate background in student-centred approach/active learning methods.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Students cannot understand the concepts taught in this course unless the instructor provides detailed lecture notes.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Classroom conditions (e.g., flexibility of seats, availability of space) are inconvenient for carrying out active learning methods.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	There is the lack of educational resources (e.g. books, internet facilities) for students to learn independently.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Students assume that student-centred approach to teaching adds too much work on them.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Students view teaching as the sole responsibility of instructors.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Students assume that their role is to receive knowledge from instructors.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Students are unable to contribute to their own learning.	1	2	3	4	5

If there are any other issues that are not included in the above list concerning the implementation of student-centred approach in a university context, please specify them in the space provided below.

---



---



---

**Thank you for your help! Your cooperation in completing this questionnaire is highly appreciated.**