

Assessing the Effects of Higher Diploma Program (HDP) Training on the Teaching Learning Process in Assossa University

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Abstract: *This study was targeted on assessing the effects of HDP training on the teaching learning process. The objectives of the study were: To evaluate the attitude of teachers towards learner oriented teaching learning method, to assess the extent to which assessment for learning was being applied in classroom, and to examine how many instructors were reflective in teaching learning process. The research design of this study was surveying type in which data collected from all colleges of the university. The experimental, control and extraneous population were already existed in the university by default. Thus, HDP graduates were considered as experimental group, while those who didn't attend an HDP graduated teachers were taken as control group. Teachers with educational /pedagogical background / were considered as extraneous variable because their background could have potential effect on the quality of the data because of which they were excluded from the sample. Students were also part of the study. To collect data, questionnaire, interview, and classroom observations were used. Accordingly, 136 questionnaires were collected and analyzed, six interviews and ten classroom observations were also made. The study finding indicated the shallow impact of HDP training on teaching learning process due to factors contributed by different entities. Thus, it was recommended that rigorous remedial action is needed to be taken by the university.*

Key words: HDP, Impact, Teaching, and Learning

1. Introduction

One of the objectives of higher education program is to prepare knowledgeable, skilled, and attitudinally mature graduates in numbers with demand-based proportional balance of fields and disciplines so that the country shall become internationally competitive (Higher Education Proclamation 650/2009). As stated in the Second Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP II) 2015), the main objective of the education sector development plan is to ensure an effective and efficient education and training system that enhances quality, relevance, equity and access. Quality

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teaching is the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. It involves the effective design of curriculum and course content, a variety of learning contexts (guided independent study, project-based learning, collaborative learning, experimentation, etc.), soliciting and using feedback, and effective assessment of learning outcomes (Fabrice et. al. 2012). Deep insight of this policy requirement, Ethiopian Ministry of Education has given due attention on pedagogical methods in teaching learning skill of teachers in higher education institutions. As a result, Higher Diploma program (HDP) training has been given for more than a decade.

The aim of the Higher Diploma Program (HDP) training for teachers is to improve the quality of education in Ethiopia that will develop the skills and professionalism of educators (HDP handbook2011). HDP is expected to encourage instructors to be reflective teachers, use active learning and student centered teaching methods .Those who took the training must themselves be of high quality, be highly competent and be efficeint for their specific role to produce better and improved students in Ethiopia (HDP handbook2011).

Aksum University has made intensive study on HDP focusing on attitudes, barriers, and implementation and then found that HDP training has improved active learning, continuous assessment and action research (Rakesh Kumar et.al 2010). Gonder University also conducted rigorous study on implementation of the HDP training in comparison with non HDP trained teachers and the finding indicates that teachers who took HDP training were found to be more reflective, had better knowledge on active learning methods and were using a variety of active learning methods compared to the non HDP trained teachers (Tadesse W/Gebreal, et.al. 2015). In both cases of studies large class size and large contents of courses were reported as challenges to HDP implementation. However, study in University of Gonder had limitation with regard to teachers with background of general teaching method as their first degree was not differentiated because this background might have affected the finding. Even though such studies on the issue have been conducted in other experienced universities, it was mandatory to assess HDP implementation in Assosa University's context to identify the level of implementation compared with previous studies; because the university has its own unique environmental setting in terms of man power, experience,

learning and administrating environment as it is a newly established institution.

Since 2014, Assossa University has been investing enormous resource in terms of time and money to train HDP candidates and was able to graduate 296 candidates within 3 years on the one side. On the other side, there have been criticisms upon the quality of education in Assossa University since its establishment, especially on teaching methods and assessment techniques (Assossa University Teachers Training on the Role of Teacher, Sept.2017 Report). The blames were reflected in different forms on different forums focusing on methodology of teaching and assessment techniques. This claim also raised the question of what has been the role of HDP training in Assossa University provide that teaching methods and assessment tools are complained. Therefore, it was indispensable to make an assessment on HDP training of Assossa University to know the extent to which it influenced the educators in the institution for taking remedial action. The specific objectives were:

- To evaluate the attitude of teachers towards learner oriented teaching learning method,
- To assess the extent to which assessment for learning is being applied in classroom,
- To examine how many instructors are reflective in teaching-learning process.
- To assess the challenges in HDP training process

2. Methodology

The research design of this study was survey type in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected from all colleges of the university. As a matter of chance, there were already the experimental, control and extraneous population in the university (Reports of College 2017). Thus, HDP graduated teachers were considered as experimental group, while non HDP graduated teachers were taken as control group. Teachers with educational/pedagogical background/ were considered as extraneous variable because their background could have potential effect on the quality of the data, therefore, they were excluded from the sample.

Questionnaires, interviews and class room observation were the tools through which data was collected from both experimental and control group

of teachers. In addition, student representatives from each department were also participants in providing data. The data was collected from both who have been HDP candidates and non-candidates through structured questionnaire, interview and classroom observation. Therefore, the qualitative and quantitative method - percentage was employed.

2.1. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

So far about 296 teachers have completed HDP in Assosa University, of whom only 127 are available currently in the university. From 8 colleges, 52 teachers were taken to participate in the random sampling. The sample size was determined to be 52 from HDP graduated teachers and 52 from non-graduates of HDP. None HDP graduates were considered for comparison purpose whether or not there is impact of HDP training. From the population, teachers were randomly selected but teachers with educational/pedagogical/ background were not considered because this background could be extraneous variable that would affect the result. Students were also part of the sample for they have direct exposure to teachers. Student representatives were purposely considered from each department because they were represented on behalf of the department students. Therefore, from 36 departments 32 students were taken into consideration. Since students could not have information about who is HDP graduated teacher or not, the questionnaire prepared for students was based on the courses that currently being taught by HDP trained teachers and non HDP graduated teachers. The information about which course the HDP trained teachers offered/ being offered / was obtained from department heads and college deans.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Questionnaires

Self- evaluating check list questionnaire (five Likert Scale) was adapted from Gonder University for HDP graduate and non-graduated instructors and for students on learning and assessment implementation of teachers. Then total of 136 questionnaires; 104 from teachers and 32 from students were collected.

2.3.1. Classroom Observation

The classroom observation was supportive source of data collection that feed this study because the knowledge, skill and attitude obtained from HDP

training was expected to be reflected mainly in the classrooms. Thus, taking into consideration the time constraints, five classroom observations for experimental and five classroom observation for control group totally ten observations were made. The observation was based on the good will of instructors but teachers were not informed priory to avoid unusual preparation that the teachers might inculcate for the purpose of the observation. Accordingly, ten observations were taken from Natural and Computational science, Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, and Engineering, Informatics and health science colleges two from each college.

2.3.2. Interview

An interview was held with two HDP leaders and purposely selected six senior HDP trained instructors from Natural and Computational Science, Social Science and Humanity, Business and Economics College, Agriculture and Natural resource Management, Engineering, and Health Science College one from each college. The interview was about active learning, assessment practices and reflective teachers.

3. Major Findings

3.1. Table1; Teachers' Attitude towards Active Learning

	Responses by HDP Graduates (%)			Responses by Non-HDP Graduates (%)		
	Strongly agree	Agree	Total	Strongly agree	Agree	Total
Enhances students' level of understanding and involves them in problem solving	67.3		90.4	59.6	30.8	90.4
Creates opportunities to share experiences and encourage friendship among students.	59.6	28.8	88.4	50	40.4	90.4
Can help to address the learners with different learning styles	59.6	26.9	86.5	40.4	46.2	86.6
Enhances self-confidence and independent learning of students	60	30	90	46.2	25	71.2
Active learning decreases work load of teachers and students	25.5	29.4	54.9	32.7	32.7	65.4
The large class size (being large number of students in a class) prevents you to implement active learning	44.2	17.3	61.5	55.8	26.9	82.7

Table 1 reveals that teachers with HDP background better believe that active learning could enhance self-confidence and independent learning of students, increases work load of teachers and possibility to implement active learning

in large size classes. On the contrary, HDP graduated teachers did not believe that active learning enhances students' level of understanding and problem solving, creates opportunity to share experience and encourage friendship among students and addresses different learning styles. Even though the majority of HDP graduated teachers have positive attitude on some aspects of active learning methods, much is expected from the university to change the attitude of 100% teacher i.e. HDP training need to be improved.

3.2. Practice of Assessment in Classrooms

Table2: Teacher Response on the Practice of Assessment

Assessment Describers	Responses by HDP Graduates (%)			Responses by Non-HDP Graduates (%)		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
The primary objective of my assessment is to support learning than grading	35.3	35.3	70.6	0	1.9	1.9
Students fully involved in assessment processes so that they understand how to improve and become independent learners.	13.1	33.1	46.2	1.9	18.5	20.4
Assessment involves both the instructor and students reviewing and reflecting on the assessment data.	38	42	80	1.9	44.2	.1
My assessment really makes a difference to my students in passing or failing the course.	25.5	41.2	66.7	1.9	25	26.9
My assessment enables to adjust teaching strategies	26.5	49	75.5	1.9	42.3	44.2
My assessment adequately evaluates academic performance relevant to the desired objectives	24.5	40.8	65.3	1.9	42.3	44.2

Regarding assessment practice, HDP training showed better result compared with those teachers response that were non HDP backgrounds (Table 2). They better understood that the objective of the assessment is mainly for supporting student than grading purpose, students' involvement in the assessment and the provision of feedback on the assessment are crucial. HDP

training also revealed superior result in that the teachers' assessment had in creating difference among low, medium, and fast learners and helpfulness of assessments in adjusting teaching strategies. In spite of that, still caution has to be taken in consolidating HDP training because significant percent of teachers were not exercising the assessment as the science needs it. Especially, active involvement of students in assessment in the university was also low due to reluctant and lose control of teachers. This is the result of how they were taught when they were at lower grades.

On the other side, the impact of HDP training effect on assessment practice was not reflected because the response of students taught by HDP graduated teachers and non HDP graduated teacher to the practice of assessment was found to be the similar. Those who have taken HDP training are expected to show difference in assessing students better.

Table 3: The response of Students on Assessment practice

Responses		I am satisfied with the current Assessment methods that Instructors are using	Assessment Methods that the teachers use are faire to	Assessment methods made difference among students	Assessment improves your learning Progress	Instructors give Feedback After Assessment	Assessment Adequately evaluates academic Performance Relevant to the	Teachers Administer Assessment
Responses of those being taught by HDP Graduates (%)	Agree	30.3	32.6	28.4	29.3	31.3	32.3	29.3
	Strongly Agree	35.6	34.8	27.6	38.3	31.3	35.3	39.1
	Total	65.9	67.4	56	67.6	62.6	67.6	68.4
Responses of those being taught by Non-HDP Graduates (%)	Agree	23	17.8	22.2	32.6	22.6	23.9	27.4
	Strongly Agree	41.5	43	33.3	39.4	41.4	42.5	42.2
	Total	64.5	60.8	55.5	72	64	66.4	69.6

The current code of assessment that is being used is taken as imposition upon teachers rather than as means to improve quality of education. The code of practice of assessment is complained because giving assessment seven (7) times and providing feedback correspondently for each student per course is

huge burden upon teachers as it consumes much time. Teachers also think that if they are not going to fulfill these, they are accountable as a result of which they aside the formative assessment that has power in improving student understanding. In addition, some students deliberately fall the tests when they are not enough ready because they know that they can take re-exam if they score below half and this again creates another pressure on teachers. This has made teachers to be reluctant to follow the principles of assessment they obtained from HDP training. In another expression, teachers are not getting prepared for the type of assessment that could improve students understanding, but boosting grade/result/ which do not reflect students' knowledge.

3.3. Teacher as Reflective

Table 3: Response of Teachers to their Reflectiveness

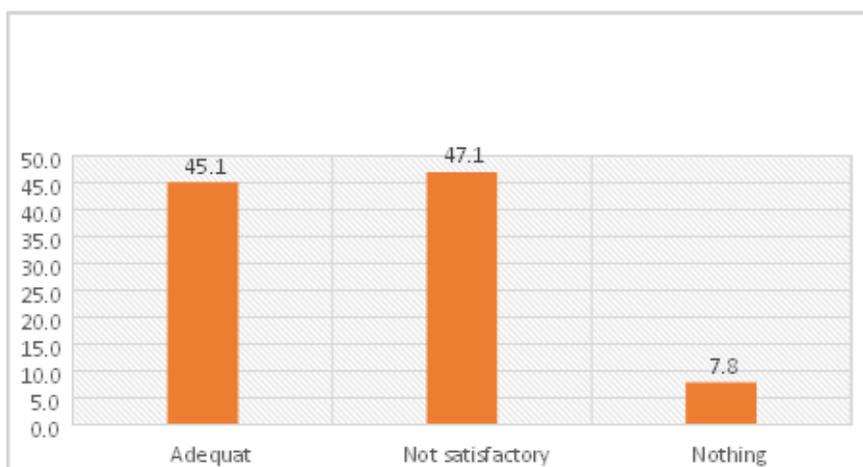
Reflective Teacher Practice	Responses by HDP Graduates (%)			Responses by Non-HDP		
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
I look forward feedback from students, colleagues to improve my teaching	39.2	45.1	84.3	36.5	38.5	75
I analyze my own lessons regularly to check for what has been done and not	40.4	44.2	84.6	34.6	42.3	76.9
I manage my time properly by planning ahead of lessons	44	32	76	43.1	35.3	78.4
I engage in research activities that expand knowledge base related to my field of study	40.4	36.5	76.9	23.5	39.2	62.7
I participate in scholarly seminars/workshops to help myself and staff update knowledge and skill	26.9	42.3	69.2	15.4	50	65.4
I understand cultural diversities in my classrooms	51	33.3	84.3	44.2	30.8	75
I believe it helpful to collaborate with colleagues in planning and teaching a course	52.1	31.3	83.4	30.4	41.3	71.7
I believe that my nonacademic personal qualities have no impact to my practice of teaching	18.8	25	43.8	20.4	18.4	38.8
I believe I should be held accountable for the failure of my students	25.5	29.8	55.3	26	44	70

As Table 3 depicts the condition of reflective practice and suggest that most of teachers, both HDP and non HDP graduated, show reflective practice in most cases. Teachers with HDP background better practice in taking

feedback from their students, analyzing their lesson regularly, engaging in research and seminars or workshop activities that expand knowledge base, cultural diversities in the classroom, collaborating with colleagues in planning and teaching a course. HDP training did not influence teachers in managing their time properly by planning ahead of lessons, believing impact of non-academic character of teacher on teaching and believing that they are accountable for the failure of their students. What has to be realized here is that the result difference i.e the difference between responses of HDP background teacher and non HDP background teachers is scant ranging from 2% to 10%. Thus, taking non HDP graduated teachers as a base line, training of HDP has changed only 2 to 10 % of teachers in reflective practice.

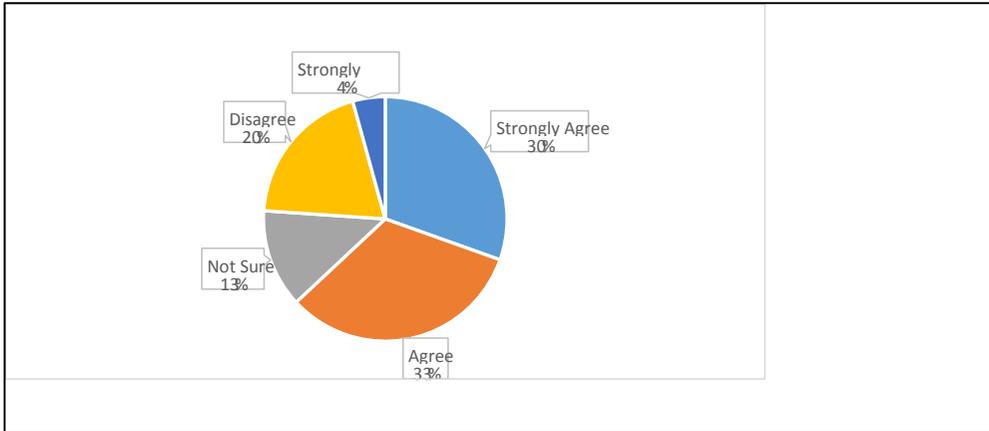
3.4. The Adequacy of HDP Training

In order to know whether teachers have obtained adequate knowledge and skill about active learning methods from HDP training an attempt has been made. It portrays that 45.1% of HDP trainees have obtained adequate knowledge and skill, whereas 47.1 % of trainees were not satisfied and 7.8 % have obtained nothing from HDP training (see Graph1 below).

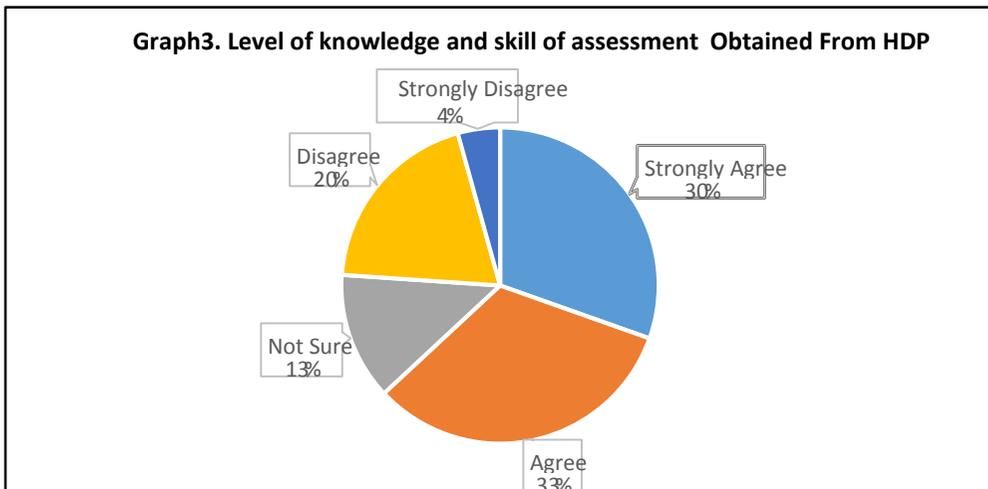


Graph1; Knowledge and Skill of active Learning method Obtained from HDP training

The knowledge and skill obtained from HDP training on assessment was also analyzed and the result shows that 63% of respondents believed that they obtained adequate knowledge and skill while the remaining 37% replied they did not obtain anything. See graph2 below.



Finally, 78.7% of teachers responded that they gained adequate skill from HDP training in reflective practice while 21.3% of them did not gain.



To triangulate, an interview was made with HDP leaders about the interest of the HDP trainees in attending the program. They responded that the majority of the HDP candidates were attending for certificate purpose than gaining knowledge and skill of teaching methodology. The candidates perceive the training as not an opportunity rather obligation that yoked up on their shoulder. Lack of firm supervision and taking strong measurement by HDP leaders upon missing of HDP sessions by candidates during the training, has its contribution in making teachers ready. So, there should be rigorous supervision during HDP training sessions.

3.5. Challenges in HDP Training

An interview made with HDP leaders and senior instructors revealed that the following issues were impediments for effective HDP training.

➤ **Deteriorated attitude of majority of teachers towards HDP training.** This is manifested by lack of showing interest in the HDP classes, coming late to classes, influencing leaders to use two hour instead of using four hour per week, copying assignment and action research from one another.

➤ **Absence of conducive environment/learning room for HDP training/.** A room was shared by four section of HDP candidates so that posts and demonstrations could not stay in HDP room for more than a day, which ought to be additional resource for HDP training.

Make up classes were not arranged and given for missed classes. Especially this problem highly pronounced from those candidates who were at position/department head, coordinator, and dean. There were occasions where such candidates missed HDP classes for a month but have graduated.

4. Conclusion

The finding indicates the shallow impact of HDP training on teaching learning process due to factors contributed by different entities. This finding contradicts with the previous studies conducted by Gonder and Aksum universities. Weak attitude of teachers towards HDP, absence of conducive environment/learning room for HDP training/ and reluctant follow up and support of HDP leaders were found to be impediments for effective HDP training.

5. Recommendations

In line with the stated objectives and the research finding the following recommendation were made to the university.

- ✓ Teachers need to be given intensive competency based training in their spare time about assessment, active learning and reflective practice focusing on contents that could bring attitudinal change.
- ✓ HDP training has to be implemented in strong supervision and serious measurement by HDP leaders
- ✓ The current code of practice for students' assessment need to be revised in which also teachers should be participants because teachers and HDP leaders believe that it loads burden up on teachers and has made students carless.

- ✓ HDP training rooms need to be conducive and equipped with the necessary materials
- ✓ Students need to be given highlight on the role of students in assessment and active learning by their respective departments.

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