

# An Exploration into the Practice of Traditional Church Education in Ethiopia: Zema-bet Education in Focus

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this study was to explore the practice of traditional church education specifically Zema-Bet education in the three selected Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido churches found in Bahir Dar city. In doing so, a mixed-method research approach with the convergent parallel design was employed. To achieve the purpose of the study, all the three churches of Zema-Bet education teachers, 90 learners, and three leaders were included in the study by using comprehensive, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques, respectively. An open-ended questionnaire, observation, semi-structured interview, and document analysis were employed for data collection. The collected data were analyzed via descriptive analysis technique and data driven word-by-word thematic narrations. The obtained results confirmed that Zema-Bet education learners usually learn by themselves, and sometimes through peer-led groups under the tree shade. The findings further revealed that some of the principles of adult learning (like practical oriented, motivation to learn, self-directed learning, etc.) are applied in Zema-Bet education. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the government should build a teaching-learning center like what has been done in modern education to resolve the absence of well-furnished buildings and teaching-learning places. Moreover, the government, private agencies, and non-government organizations should support Zema-Bet learners by funding and providing learning materials. Attendant offices of the ministry of education should give attention and recognize traditional church education as one basic education modality and center for adult learning.

**Index Terms:** Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Traditional Church Education, practice, Zema-Bet education

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

Education in Ethiopia was started in the six century B.C. when the Sabeen alphabet was introduced along with Christianity by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church education (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Chaillot, [8]). Ethiopia has and had her own finger print on Egyptian and Greek civilization, which indirectly provided high contribution for centuries (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]). It was taken and written by different scholars in the area that traditional education was introduced to Ethiopia since the 4<sup>th</sup> century of Christianity and the 7<sup>th</sup> century of Islam ((Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Alemayehu & Lasser, [3]).

At that time, it was not a traditional education that was imported to Ethiopia, the land of Cush, but rather the dogma of religious education of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church and Islam, respectively (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]). The main focus of traditional education was to preserve as church teachings/ religious teachings or purposes (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Shemley, [22]).

As a result, before the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> C., the Ethiopian school system had been dominated by religious teachings (Solomon, [24]). During this time, Ethiopian Orthodox Church (here after EOC) and the Mosque were the dominant providers of traditional educations in Ethiopia (Solomon, [24]; Teshome, [26]). The education system of the church and mosque, then focused on preparing peoples for religious purposes, served as a base for formal education in Ethiopia

(Geteye, [16]). The church continues to dominate the education system in Ethiopia until modern education was introduced in 1908 (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]).

The Ethiopia Orthodox Church (EOC) is one of the oldest churches in the world. This church is also dominant in Ethiopia with more than 40 million followers, which is approximately 40-50% of the total population (Gebreselassie, [14]). As a result, it is not surprising to see the impacts of EOC in almost all aspects of the country's history and present image as it played and continued to play an important role in the social, economic, cultural, educational and political life of the country (Gebreselassie, [14]).

The church school system has been used as an instrument in preserving the traditional wisdom of Ethiopia and conveyed it faithfully to succeeding generations (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]). The priests and Church scholars who have been the bearers and propagators of traditional learning have themselves been formed in the church school system and contributed a lot in Church schools, which are still playing an active role in the Ethiopian education system (Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Haile, [17]).

In the traditional church education system, various programs, namely; Nebab-Bet, Zema-Bet, Qedase-Bet, Aquaquam-Bet, Qene-Bet, and Metshafit-Bet have been offered. Nebab-Bet (school of reading) deals with the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic; Qedasse-Bet (school of liturgy) deals with the kind of prayer during a mass service; Qene-Bet (school of poetry) deals with highly elaborated, strict, and multiplied form of 'geez' poetry, and Zema-Bet (school of hymn or music) deals with the hymn of St. Yared (the renowned church education composer), his musical notations and the 3R's (reading, writing, and arithmetic's). The program that deals with the chanting of St. Yared with its typical kinds of dance and musical instruments is known as Aquaquam-Bet (school of swaying and chanting), and the stage where one learns about details of Old Testament, New Testament, Liqawnt, and Menekosati is known as Metsahft-Bet (school of books). After passing through these entire educational levels, one becomes a master of one specific school (Mezmur, [20]; Haile, [17]).

In the context of modern education in Ethiopia, the Education Sector Development Program III (2005/2006 – 2010/2011) in its national action plan on education, specifically discussed the adult and non-formal education program and defined it to include a range of basic education and training components for out-of-school children and adults. The action plan defined the content of the adult and non-formal education that included literacy, numeracy and the development of skills that enable learners to solve problems and to change their lives (Aselchi, [5]).

The non-formal education program focuses on literacy, numeracy and the environmental awareness to enable learners to develop problem-solving abilities and change their mode of life. It defines some of these life skills as skills useful for other aspects of life, like civic education, cultural education, literature, wisdom etc. (MOE, [21]). From the proceeding explanations, one can imply that Church education is one type of non-formal education that is directed towards providing education for adult literacy.

At present, there are a number of learners in monasteries (churches) that can be used as authentic sources to study the traditional church education, which can also be considered as one basic type of education that provide education for learners (Chaillot, [8]). In addition to teaching people basic education/skills (the 3R's, i.e., reading, writing, and numeracy), it enables them to identify their own identity, history, religion, historical background, wisdom, and culture (Solomon, [24]; Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Taddess, [25]).

In this study, the researchers selected Zema-Bet among the different levels of the education system of the traditional church education so as to examine the practices of Ethiopian orthodox Tewahido church education in line with the general education practices and adult learning principles borrowed from modern education. Zema-Bet is one basic requirement to get to know not only what to sing but how and when to sing as well. To illustrate, a typical church song has got a purpose. It serves and usually is performed on some identified dates and occasions, according to the church's creed (Shelemay, [22]). This study is, therefore, aimed at investigating the practices of traditional church education at Zema-Bet education in Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church at Bahir Dar city.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

With regards to the traditional church education in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido church, several studies have been conducted in focus of its various dimensions. These studies in the area employed qualitative research design and all the researchers focused on the general traditional education system (e.g., Solomon, [24]; Solomon, [23]; Alemayehu & Solomon, [4]; Aselefech, [5]; Chaillot, [8]; Haile, [17]; Kumelachew, [19]; Debashu, [13]). Besides, none of these researches conducted so far has mentioned only the practice of Zema-Bet education. Different from the above researches conducted so far on the church education, the current study focuses on only the practices of Zema-Bet education and uses mixed method research design thereby to off shot the weakness of one design by the other design.

To the best knowledge of the researchers, therefore, there is hardly any research conducted on the practice of traditional church education in focus of Zema-Bet level. The one conducted on Zema-Bet by Debashu [13] focused on the strengths, weakness, quality, and effects of Zema-Bet, and this researcher employed qualitative research approach in his study. Though this study focused on Zema-Bet level education, the study is different from the current research as the latter focuses on the practice of Zema-Bet level education and employed mixed methods design.

The researchers prioritized conducting this study on Zema-Bet level education based on the following rational. On one hand, in spite of the fact that a large number of learners' attained traditional church education, no researcher in

Ethiopia has done his/her research on the actual practice of traditional church education specific to Zema-Bet level. On the other hand, the researchers are curious to know the motivating factors and methods of teaching that make large numbers of learners attend Zema-Bet level education in Ethiopia. Thirdly, the researchers are interested to see if the general practice of Zema-Bet level education is in line with the principles of adult learning as these issues are not so far studied by other researchers.

To this end, the researchers seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What does the practice of traditional Church education look like at Zema-Bet level education?
  - 1.1 What are the teaching methodologies employed at Zema-Bet level education?
  - 1.2 What types of education are offered in Zema-Bet level education?
  - 1.3 What kinds of assessment methods are used in Zema-Bet level education?
2. What are the motivating factors for learners to attend Zema-Bet level education?
3. How far adult learning principles suggested in the modern education are applicable in Zema-Bet level education?

## 2. Methodology

Based on the nature of the research questions, pragmatism as a paradigm was followed as a guiding framework for this study. Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality (Creswell, [10]). This applies mixed method research involving both qualitative and quantitative assumptions when they engage in the research (Creswell, [11]). Since the participants' views and experiences are important for the researchers to develop the understanding of the events or situations, both qualitative and quantitative data provide the best understanding of the research problem (Creswell, [10]). In strengthening the points raised before, Creswell [11] once noted that, *"pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis"* (p. 40) for the researchers guided by mixed method approaches. Mixed research approaches, therefore, were employed to enable the researchers to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches so as to providing a more complete understanding of the research problem. Turner [27] further asserted that mixed research approach provides more comprehensive evidence for a research problem and opportunity to answer questions that cannot be answered by using either qualitative or quantitative approaches alone.

### 2.1 Research Design

The researchers used mixed research approach. A mixed methods research approach is *"a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and 'mixing' both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem"* (Creswell, Plano, & Clark, 2011 as cited in Creswell, [10]). Creswell [10, 11] divided mixed methods research into six designs; convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, embedded, transformative, and multiphase. For this study, convergent parallel mixed method design was employed. This is due to the fact that the researchers proposed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously and both types of data have equal value in understanding the research problem. In supporting this justification, Creswell [10] stated that *"the basic assumption of convergent parallel design is simultaneously collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem"* (p.535). The researchers value both quantitative and qualitative data and see them as approximately equal sources of information in the study; collects both the quantitative and qualitative data concurrently or simultaneously during the study. Moreover, the researchers used multiple data gathering instruments including interview, focus group discussion, observation, document analysis and questionnaires. The data were also analyzed through mixed methods of analysis.

### 2.2 Place, Population, sample, and sampling techniques

Table 1. Place, Population, Sample size and Sampling technique

Name of schools or place	Teachers		Learners		Leaders		Total
	Compressive sampling technique		sampling –random sampling technique		Purposive sampling technique		
	Population	Sample size	Population	Sample size	Population	Sample size	Total sample size
Gordema Gebreal Zema-Bet	1	1	100	30	1	1	32

Selamargiw Kedeste Mariyam Zema-Bet	1	1	120	30	1	1	32
D/M Kideste KidanMihiret Zema-Bet	1	1	115	30	1	1	31

Table 1 shows the research areas and schools, population, sample size and sampling techniques used by the researchers in the current study.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Practice of Zema-Bet Level Education in Ethiopia

##### 3.1.1 Selection Criteria of Zema-Bet Education Teachers

The researchers raised an interview question related to Zema-Bet level education teachers' selection criteria to the informants. They noted that there were no formal criteria for selecting Zema-Bet level education teachers previously as there were no large numbers of certified applicants. However, the informants asserted that these days three things were used as the basic criteria, evaluated and checked to recruit an individual as Zema-Bet level education teacher; firstly, on-the-job evaluation of discipline/ethics of the applicants for three-months; second, extent of mastery of their own profession received through oral and practical tests; third, checking recognition letters they received from church leaders. To be hired as Zema-Bet level education teacher, therefore, one should be able to fulfill the above mentioned criteria (Yenta, Y2).

Now a days, yenta (a Gordema Gebreal church leader) disclosed that teacher selection criteria is set similar to what is being done for those who attended modern education in Ethiopia and are made to be employed in different organizations. He further pointed out that for a person to become a Zema-Bet level education teacher, s/he needs to submit the application letter, identification card, evidence of revealing that s/he is unemployed, and evidence of mastery to be hired as a teacher at the level of Zema-Bet education, and take both oral and written exams. In line with this, Mezmur [20] stated that the traditional church education teachers have been selected and employed depending on the church rules and regulations.

##### 3.1.2 Zema-Bet Level Education Learners' Entry Criteria

The researchers interviewed the informants regarding entry criteria of the Zema learners. The informants explained the absence of Zema-Bet level education learners' entry criteria. To strengthen this point, the direct words of one of the Zema-Bet teacher (Yenta, (Y1)) noted that: *"I did not ask learners regarding their academic level when admitting them, but students should be committed to learning everything in this Gubae-Bet (the place where Zema-Bet level learning is practiced), that is all"*. With very slight difference, the second informant also noted that one's academic level does not affect students to be admitted in Gubae-Bet but they must fulfill some criteria including properly managing themselves, bring Woreda identification card and present patron (Y2).

The researchers raised a follow-up question related to why the identification card is required as a criterion to the informants. One of the teachers (yenta) explained that during earlier times the learners were not asked to bring identification card; however, nowadays learners occasionally do illegal acts in and outside the church area. Following the occurrence of these kinds of problems, the church leaders recommended that new entry learners should bring those cards to be admitted in the Gubae-Bet. Another Yenta explained what other issues are required for learners' entry to the level. He pointed out that *"There is no written exam, but we ask oral questions to know what the aims of the learners are; we also get the chance to tell the learners what we want them to learn from this Gubae-Bet"* (Y3).

The researchers asked the informants about things learners should know before starting Zema-Bet level education. One of the Yenta (Y2) informed us that before learners start Zema-Bet level education, they should attend Nebab-Bet level education, however, since they may not access Nebab-Bet level education in different churches, most of the time they learn Nebabe-Bet level contents in Zema-Bet by themselves without the support of teachers by asking previous friends, in groups or with assigned senior students by the Gubae leaders. Supporting this point, Haile (1970) noted that learners who wish to join Zema-Bet should attend Nebab-Bet contents as Zema-Bet education is the second higher level. All the yentas agreed that in order to start Zema education, in addition to Nebab-Bet level education, the learners should complete Wodasie Mariam, Numbers, Melke Mariam (Angel Madonna), Anketse Berhan and Melke Eyesus (Angel Jesus).

This shows that as in the case in formal education, church education is not provided haphazardly rather it has its own levels, which starts from identifying letters and sounds to a higher level of church education (Commentary level). Contradicting this practice at church education, Chaillot [8] argues that *"students should not attend Zema-Bet level education in the first time as it is the major factor for reducing Nebabe-Bet level schools"* (p. 30). However, one



can understand from the literature that students should be admitted first to Nebabe-Bet rather than immediately joining Zema-Bet just to improve their reading skill before attending Zema-Bet.

### 3.1.3 Zema-Bet Level Education Learners Living Condition

As the researchers' personal observations confirmed, learners usually live in huts. Therefore, the researchers asked the informants about the reason behind why the Zema (church music) education learners live in the hut. One of the informants (Y1) expressed two reasons: first, even if they want to change their house, it's not economically affordable. Secondly, hut/small grass house is the rest place of previous religious leaders, the sign of church education like that of the Ethiopian flag, and the characteristics of Ethiopian Orthodox church education. Comparing the two reasons, Yeneta further noted that students live in small grass house basically because of economic problem than tradition. He said:

*The Gubae cannot construct a standardized house. Therefore, the learners construct their own house themselves. Moreover, living in the grass house is not basically related to culture/tradition or religion, but it mainly depends upon economic problem. He further noted that: “ድሃ ስዎቹ ሳር ቤት ይሰራሉ ሃብታም ሰዎች ፎቅ ይሰራሉ”.* Its literal meaning in English is that it is known that poor people construct huts while the wealthiest people build apartments.

In Zema-Bet level education, it usually happens that from 4 to 6 learners' live together in one small hut. Even in this context, one of the Yentas (Y3) asserted that they face shortage of rooms for many learners. He said: *“in a month, more than ten new students request to be enrolled but I usually do not accept due to lack of living rooms”*. Learners living place is a major problem in the traditional church education in Ethiopia.

From the researchers' experiences and observations, it can be confirmed that learners collect their food by begging home-to-home in the nearby community. As a result, we asked the informants about **the reasons behind the students' begging food around the respective community they are in**. Yenta (Y2) expressed that entirety of food started during the period of Ahmed Geraign (the then leader of Muslim opposition campaign against church education). Starting from that period on wards; it has become a tradition in the churches as a commemoration of the hard time. At that time, different churches were destroyed and church economy was highly deteriorated and, heritages were destroyed as well. As a result, those people living in the then churches were migrating in different unknown areas and were begging food to live. Another yenta (Y1) also expresses that the reason of the students' begging food is due to the recommendation on the bible that church learners should eat food to summon the name of saint Merry as the learners beg as *“በእንተ ሰማ ለማርያም ስለ እምብርሃን”* (its literal English translation could be ‘I beg in the name of Merry- the mother of light). This begging, in addition to calling the name of Merry, is assumed to teach them be obedient too.

From the foregoing discussion, one can imply that learners' begging food and living in a small grass house has religious implication beyond economic problems of the students. Aselefechi [5] found out the fact that learners' livelihood in church education is highly determined by the willingness of the society, who provides their daily bread for the learners while they are begging and live in a Hut (small grass house). The community knows that these students are migrants for the purpose of education and provide their bread on daily basis. Moreover, Ashenafi [6] stated that traditional church education learners (Ye-kolo temari) are living in the hut and beg food from the respective community as they choose exertion rather than comfort. This view is in-line with one of the pedagogical views of modern education, which reads learning is a function of amount of invested mental effort.



Fig.1. Learners' living condition

### 3.1.4 Learners' Reasons for Pursuing Zema-Bet Level Education

Solomon [23] noted that studying at Zema-Bet level is useful not only for those preparing for a career in the church, but also worthwhile inherently exquisite art, as a thing of beauty. Moreover, it can provide very useful background for those who compose secular tunes like war songs, funeral dirges, and Begena (Ethiopian lyre) composition. The reasons behind their preference to Zema-Bet level education among other levels of church education are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 2. Mean and standard-deviations of learners' preference to attending Zema education (N=90)

Descriptive Statistics				
No	Motivating factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	It is simple from other types of church education	90	2.76	1.211
2	It is the base of other types of church education	90	4.89	.350
3	I am interested to learn Zema-Bet education	90	4.80	.502
4	The content and teaching places are suitable	90	3.68	1.207
5	It is very important for the future	90	4.87	.373
6	Zema-Bet education contents relates to my personal talent	90	4.24	.987
7	There is no support from family to attend modern education	90	3.27	1.535
8	My community encouraged me to attend Zema-Bet education	90	4.36	1.063
9	Zema-Bet education does not require much money and facilities	90	3.88	1.130

In table 1, factors disclosed in question numbers 1, 4, 7, and 9 indicate moderate motivating factors for the students to attend Zema-Bet level education, whereas factors listed in question numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8 were found highly motivating factors for learners to attend Zema-Bet level education.

In addition to the quantitative data, the researchers interviewed the informants regarding the reason behind learners' engagement into Zema-Bet level education. One of the yentas (Y2) pointed out that: “የሰውሆዱ የወፍ ወንዶች ማን ያወቃል የሰውፈጣሪ የተለያይ ነው”. He meant that each individual learner may have different targets and it is hard to know exactly what motivates them to take part in this level of traditional church education. However, he listed areas that could be possible reasons for the students' engagement to education in the respective level, among which are Zema-Bet education is the base for other types of church education, to serve in the church, to know geez language and enhance their ability to communicate effectively. But, it is also noted that majority of traditional church education students attend this education as they cannot afford to attend formal education as most are coming from poor family backgrounds.

### 3.1.5 Teaching-Learning Places of Zema-Bet Education

The place where Zema-Bet education is practiced was one of the dimensions explored in this study. The researchers frequently observed learners learning and teaching each other in groups under the tree shade. On this background, we asked the informants the reason behind learners' place of learning. In this regard, one of them (Y3) reflected that learners learn on the fields, under tree shade because of economic problems. Therefore, this implies that Zema-Bet education contents are provided to the learners in open field where students are usually made to sit on the stone and this was due to lack of money and resources to build halls serving such kinds of purposes. Similarly, the previous result also showed that the Ethiopian Orthodox church school systems, which have in all its probability existed for more than thousand years, are attached to the individual churches and monasteries, and big trees, and big halls (Shamely, [22]; Woubie, [28]).



Fig.2. Learning places in Zema-Bet Level Education

### 3.1.6 Duration of Zema-Bet Level Education

The researchers also asked the informants the appropriate time of the day required to learn Zema-Bet level education. In this regard, 90 (100%) of the informants noted that Zema-Bet level education can be taught in every time of the day and the night. In this regard, one of the yentas (Y3) explained that Zema-Bet level education is offered in every time as it is very difficult and need reading and every day attendance. Accordingly, he said:

*Every day is scheduled to do different activities including starting from 9 to 11:30 AM, learning evening content of Zema education (Mearf), then from 11:30- 2:00 o'clock PM learners serve as church, especially in the fast time, i.e., learners apply daily contents of Zema education through actual practice at the respective churches, then, 2:30-7:00 AM teach their own Gubae-Bet Digwa and Tsome-Digwa and students learn each other, and then starting from 7:00 up to 8:30 AM the students beg food and also reserved as a mealtime (Y1).*

With regards to this emphasis, another interviewee leader (L3) stated that in the Gubae-Bet all days and almost every hour in each day is spent learning from Yentas or with each other. He further disclosed that except familiar holidays there is always Zema education. In his words: “በጥም ከባድ ባልል ከሆነ ወንበር አይዘርጋም”. He meant that in the familiar holidays, teachers did not teach in the Gubae-Bet. He explained the reason **why their teacher does not teach in the Gubae-Bet in the familiar holidays**. He described that as all students and teachers provide service to the respective church and students are required to observe the practices undertaken in the churches, those days are usually considered as break days.

From the responses of the informants, therefore, we learned that traditional church education at the Zema-Bet level is offered every day except familiar holidays. Supporting this finding, Dabashu [13] identified that traditional church education learners learn every time, even in the malt time they simply talk about the contents of education. Therefore, traditional church education learners are spending their time for learning other than the time elapsed for begging and meal time break.

### 3.1.7 Who Decides the Schedule and Contents of Zema-Bet Education?

The researchers tried much to know who determines learning schedule and content in Zema-Bet level education. In this regard, 72 (80%) of the participants stated that they negotiate the schedule between students and teachers, some of them (18(20%)) explained that they bargain among the leaders, teachers, and learners and by the Zema education teacher. In addition to this, one yenta (Y3) reflected that:

*I did not decide learning schedule. Most of the time, learning schedule is decided via negotiations between students and Gubae leaders... [Pause]... Because I do not know what is there in Gubae-Bet, even if a problem happened, it is communicated first to the leader but not for me. After having communicated to the leader, they tried to negotiate among themselves and what is communicated to me is what they have agreed on or failed to do that.*

Therefore, the schedules of Zema-Bet education are very participatory as all the stakeholders take part in the process, share their own ideas and assumptions. So, the schedules of Zema-Bet education are usually changeable, not rigid. With regards to the content of education, all the informants elaborated that Zema education contents are not subject to change because it is led by Kiduse-Yared, the founder of Zema and Qene books. Hence, the order and steps are predetermined. So, learners learn Zema education contents regardless of their personal needs and interests because of its rigid and predetermined nature in EOTC education.

In this regard, yenta (Y1) explains that:

*The contents of church education do not need negotiation or decision about which shall come first or second and the like because of the fact that students in the traditional church education got taught and learn starting from page one up to its end. We are not able to jump one topic and move towards the other topic.*

Therefore, it could be learned that while the learners have a say in deciding the schedule of learning time, no one can decide on the contents of education in church education as it is predetermined. The objective of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church education was religious where the curriculum is largely unchanged and uncontested, i.e., the contents considered true, everlasting and worthwhile (Abbink, [1]).

### 3.1.8 Levels of Zema-Bet Education

In Zema-Bet education, there are different sub-levels where different education contents have been provided. From the interview, survey and document analysis, the researchers gained a lot of information regarding this point. Zema-Bet has its own education system, teaching-learning method, and evaluation mechanisms. As to yenta (interviewee, (Y2)),



there are four major levels of Zema-Bet level education including Meraf, Tsome-Digwa, Digwa, and Zemmarie and Mewasite.

He further noted that Zemmarie and Mewasite could not be practiced in all Zema-Bet level education sub-levels because of Zemmarie and Mewasite do have their own explicit Gubae-Bets. Yenta (Y3) expresses his views regarding the reason behind Zemmarie and Mewasite were not practiced in different Gubae-Bets unlike other levels of education. He disclosed that:

*Other levels of Zema-Bet education are studied integratively with others [meaning one level supports the other level] but this level of education is studied independently after completing three major levels of Zema-Bet education. For example, one student starts Zema education at the night time and learns and teaches Meraf and in the daytime he teaches and learns Tsome-Digwa but he is unable to teach and learn Zemmarie and Mewasite (Interview with Y3).*

Therefore, the four major sub-levels of education in the Zema-Bet educations are briefly discussed below.

#### *Mearaf (ምዕራፍ)*

The researchers asked the informants about the concept of Mearaf and the contents of education offered within this level of Zema-Bet education. One of the Yentas (Y2) conceptualized Mearaf as an education that starts from all Selam Liekie up to completing Ye-Tsome-Merap contents. Another Yenta (Y1) reflected the presence of two types of Mearaf. Those are Ye-Tsome Mearaf and Ye-Zewotre Mearaf (chat for every day and fasting time) but all are parts of Mearaf. Ye-Tsome Mearaf means it serves during the time of fasting whereas ye-Zewotre Mearaf serves as all days in a year depending on their time and programs. Another yenta (Y2) also noted that Mearaf service provisions are given without any kind of materials like drums, sistrum, and the like. He further stated that these types of education are studied by oral and voice, word by word. Moreover, the students learn and teach contents of this sub-level during the nighttime.

Moreover, Yenta (Y1) listed down the contents addressed in this level of education. He asserted that ወዳሴ ማርያም (Wudasie Mariyam Zema), ማስተጋበሪ (Mestegabea), አርባዕት (Arebaet), አርያም (Areiam), ሠለሰት (Seleste), መወደስ (Mewodes), ከስተት (Kestete), አንቀጽ ብርሀን ና ትምህርተ ጎበክት (Anketsie Berhan and Timeherte Habuate) are the basic contents covered in Zema-Bet education of this sub-level. The first level of education may take two to three years for the students to complete school of Zema though variations may occur depending upon the competence of the respective student (Y3). Therefore, fast learners may take two years to complete this level of education.

#### *Tsome-digwa (ጸም ድጎ)*

The second level of Zema education is, *Tsome-Digwa, which refers to a prayer and chanting during fasting seasons* (yenta (Y1)). He further reflected that Tsome- Digwa is composed of eight types of chanting including Ze-Worde (1<sup>st</sup> week), Ze-Qedeste (2<sup>nd</sup> week), Ze-Mekurabe (3<sup>rd</sup> week), Ze-Mstgabe (4<sup>th</sup> week), Ze-Debr Ziyet (5<sup>th</sup> week), Ze-Gebrhire (6<sup>th</sup> week), Ze-Nikodemose (7<sup>th</sup> week) and Ze-Hosaena (8<sup>th</sup> week) that means 8 weeks for 40 days fasting seasons.

Another yenta (Y3) also expressed that Tsome-Digwa is the daytime text predominantly of Mezemura-Dawit together with some excerpts. He explains that students' learn and teach Tsome-Digwa in the daytime because of the fact that the students see and memorize different kinds of signs in the notations of Yared's song. In the second level of Zema education, students are memorizing each sign, symbols and words to connect with chanting styles. Students can produce vocals and voices depending on those symbols. The different chants are assigned names that fully described the range, scale, and depth of the Zema. He listed some of the sign and symbols as: Difat ድፋት, Hidet: ሂደት, Kenat : ቅናት, Yezet: ይዘት, Qurt: ቁርጢ, Chiret: ቁረት, Rekerek: ርከርከ : Deret: ደረት and Anber: አንብር. Those are also the sign and symbols the students teach and learn in the second level of Zema-Bet education.

Researchers tried to ask about the significance behind those symbols. Yenta (Y3) described that the basic importance of Tsome-Digwa signs are to help learners shape their own voices and memorize each as Zema education is shaped by three kinds of chanting styles. Those are: - Geez, Ezel and Araray. The time required to complete the second level of education is from three to four years (Y2). Therefore, one talented and brilliant student may complete this level of Zema education efficiently and effectively in three years. It takes nearly the same time as in the case in completing First Degree educational program in the modern education system in Ethiopia.

#### *Digwa (ድጎ)*

Digwa is the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of Zema education. It is reflected that Digwa focuses on hymens that are performed at various ceremonies as assigned to various saints' days that are arranged in the Ethiopian calendar order according to the Church creed (ement) (Y1). Yenta (Y3) expressed that Digwa had various nomenclatures as Meskute-Tebeb (Mirror of Wisdom), Mezegeb (treasure), and Medebel (collection).

One interviewee (Y3) stated that learning other contents of education without completing Digwa is meaningless as the students could not be certified and recognized to serve as a church men. He further expressed that a learner shall



finish this level of education to become a Digwa teacher and be able to be employed as a Zema education teacher. Digwa, as majority of the participants (45(50%)) noted, takes three years, some of them (25(28%)) asserted that it takes four years, and also the remaining participants' (22%) pointed out that it is impossible to decide its duration as it totally depends upon individual effort.

Therefore, it clearly indicated that Digwa is the third level of Zema education and learners learn Digwa after having completed other levels of education such as Mearaf and Tsome-Digwa. Learners who completed this level of education and recognized and certified by their own teachers and other Zema professionals are able to become Zema education teachers and completing the sub-level education usually takes more than three years.

#### *Zemmarie and Mewasit (ዝማጃ እና መዋሲት)*

This is the fourth level of Zema-Bet level education. All interviewee participants' stated that Zemmarie and Mewasite can be taught independently. Yenta (Y1) asserted that Zemmarie is a church service which is chanted as a part of Qedasse. The root word of 'Zemmarie' comes from 'Zamara' which means 'praise' in Geez language. He further reflected that it is a church chant which was said to be composed of Saint Yared. Another yenta (Y3) also described that this level of educational service has five classifications including Habaset, Tsiwa, Menefs, Misesar, and Akotet. Among these, he reflected that the church choir sings Habaset, Tsiwa, and Manefs in Qene-Mahelet; while as Misesar and Akotet are songs that have to be performed by a Priest performing Qedasse.

Accordingly, in the Mewasite just like Zemmarie, all interviewee participants disclosed that the book of Mewasite is said to have been created/prepared by Saint Yared. They also noted that this Chant is usually performed at times of funeral ceremonies and during celebration dates assigned to Saints, Church, Martyrs (Semaetate) and Angeles (Melaek) according to the creed (Emnt) of the EOTC. This level of education is provided at Zur-Amba Monastery (one of the monasteries in Ethiopia), it means that the education at this level is inaccessible in the majority of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church schools. The duration of this level of education for talented and brilliant students may be from one year to two years. Regarding to this point, yenta (Y2) reflected his own experience as follows: *"I finished zemmarie and mewasite in one year at Zur-Amba monastery"*.

Different literature showed that there is variation in duration to complete this level of education. Accordingly; Gemchu [15] found that the structure of traditional education was seven years of Zema-Bet. Supporting this point, Wondemtegegn [29] asserted that the duration of Zema-Bet education level is a minimum of six years, but it is hardly possible to pinpoint the maximum years required to complete this level of education. Contradicting this point, Shamely [22] explained that it generally takes at least four years to achieve a grasp of Zema-Bet level education. During this time, the learner consolidates his knowledge of the musical system and begins to function as a teacher to beginning students. Therefore, the duration to complete Zema education depends on individuals' talent and effort. But, to complete all sub-levels of education in Zema-Bet may take about six years.

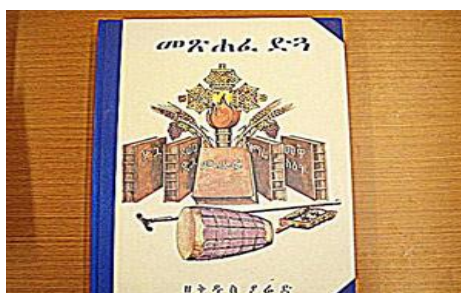


Fig. 3. Digwa textbook front page

#### *3.1.9 Seating Arrangements of Zema-Bet education Learners*

Based on the researchers' experiences and observation in all the three Gubae-Bets, the learners' seating arrangements are similar except the difference in the number of learners who have direct contact with the respective yenta/teacher. The teacher in one Gubae-Bet only reaches three learners; the second six learners and the other Gubae-Bet teach five learners. We observed that those students who have a direct contact with Yenta/teacher sit in a circle where the teacher (Yenta) sits in the middle. Due to this, the researchers asked the informants the reason behind the learners sitting in a circle. Yenta (Y2) explained that most of the time Zema education teachers teach small numbers of learners because of the fact that the learners are admitted in different time frames. As a result, the learners' level of engagement is different. So, Zema education teachers teach only the highest level of learners. The other learners learn from those learners, i.e., those learners are responsible to teach the lower level of learners.

Supporting the above finding, Berhanu [7] noted that one teacher is assigned for around more than 60 learners in one Gubae-Bet, but teachers do not directly address all rather most of the learners learn from their peers, via helping each other. Depending on the level of education, seven up to ten learners sit in a group. So, the grouping is very compact. Mezmur [16] describes that the teacher of Zema sits in the middle of his pupils, who are practicing their daily

assignment of the hymns individually or in-groups. Each group sings from a single text, the more advanced students serve as mentors to instruct the beginners. When one of the students has mastered the hymn, he goes and sings in front of the teacher. Therefore, learners seating arrangement in Zema-Bet is very attractive and all are sitting in a group. It seems like a peer lead group in a circle exercised in the current University education in Ethiopia, where the yenta sits in the middle.



Fig. 4. Seating arrangement of a teacher and students in Church Education

### 3.1.10 Teaching-Learning Process in Zema-Bet Education

The teaching-learning process and methods of Zema education in Gubae-Bet, as majority of learners (88(98%)) noted, is word-by-word expression (practicing Zema), peer lead group discussion, taught by discussion method, and question and answer methods. Similarly, all Yentas responded that they follow oral/word by word tradition, peer-lead strategies and they confirmed that group study is the most dominant method they use. Yenta (Y1) further strengthens the value of students' cooperative learning. In his direct words: *“ሀጺን ለሀጺን ይትበልሁ” / ብረት ለብረት ስታባሰሉት አባት ብልጪ ይላል*”. The lateral English translation is ‘we can create fair able metal by merging together different metals’.

Therefore, Zema-Bet education learners learn via oral tradition, group study, rote learning, and cooperative learning through peer-learning strategies. So, we can say that Zema-Bet education employs multiple teaching methods. However, the most dominant method used in Zema-Bet is group study. One of the Yenta (Y2) reflected how this group strategy works and reaches all the students by saying that:

*When I teach Tsome-Digwa for three students every morning and afternoon, these three senior and talented learners imitate Zema education after me and tell the meaning of the education to the other three groups of students. It goes on and on like this and reach all of them, ... in this case, accessing all the students depend on their levels by using peer leading strategies (Y2).*

Another Yenta (Y3) reflected that the senior learners are responsible to teach the fresh learners or it must be taught by second level learners to first level learners. Then all learners study Zema education from the senior learners. Generally, what we can understand from the informants is that Yentas are not the only teachers as their learners can take their roles (become co-teachers as it is noted in the modern education literature) to teach other learners. We usually call it acting as co-teachers in the modern pedagogy literature. As we saw it, the teaching-learning process was very attractive, and the students' understand, attend, and actively participate in every activity as it was highly engaging.

From the researchers' observation, the teaching-learning process in Zema-Bet education is very attractive than even modern education. Teachers do not teach all the learners under their jurisdiction, but their roles are facilitating, initiating, and encouraging learners to learn by themselves in the Gubae-Bet. In addition to this, we observed that all Gubae-Bet teaching- learning process is being practiced through the teachers teaching a maximum of 6 learners as the other learners are led by group leaders and all the students learn from each other. Therefore, Zema-Bet teaching methods and teaching-learning process is very attractive and properly used peer leading groups even better than modern education. Therefore, modern education should take a lesson from the traditional church education system regarding the proper application of active teaching learning methods.

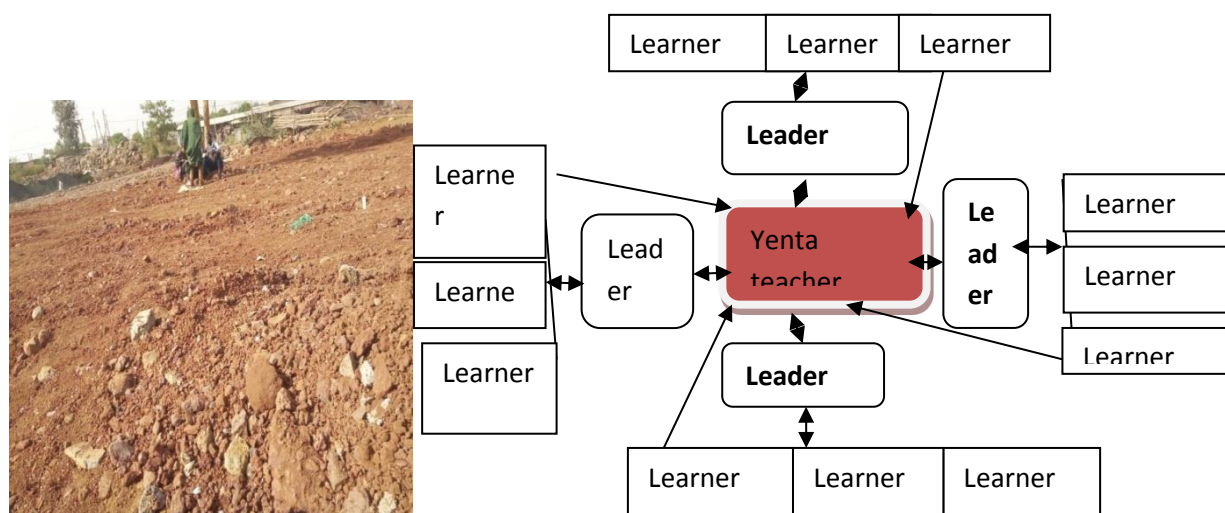


Fig 5. Peer-leading group study and the structure of teaching learning process in Church education

### 3.1.11 The Application of Adult Learning Principles in Zema-Bet education

On the basis of Knowles [18] assumption, there are four basic adult learning principles. The researchers, therefore, asked all the interviewee as to how they could apply adult learning principles in Zema-Bet education. Their responses are presented below.

#### Problem Solving

The participants in Zema-Bet education are adults who are above 15 years of age. So, depending on their age level adult learners could be made to be good problem solvers. This being the case, the researchers asked Yentas (the informants) to what extent Zema-Bet education is amenable to problem-solving. One of the Yentas (Y3) asserted that his respective learners face different kinds of problems such as lack of food, lack of money, lack of living places, and others. And they are required to solve these kinds of problems by themselves. He also disclosed that the learners solve these problems by working as a daily laborer to get some money and effectively using their break times for begging and build hut by investing little money for buying grass and wood.

Therefore, one can understand from the qualitative data motioned above that one of the principles of adult learning is applied in Zema-Bet education as learners are expected to give solution to the problems they face while they are studying Zema education. However, the content of education by itself is not problem based.

#### Motivation to Learn

As a person becomes more and more mature, the motivation to learn becomes more and more internal. In this regard, Zema-Bet education leaders were asked about the motivations of their respective learners to attend this type of education in the church. One leader (L1) mentioned that without intrinsic motivation and commitment, students will not be able to learn Zema education as church education by nature requires intrinsic motivation as there are no immediate external benefits and rewards offered as a result and there are a lot of challenges while attending it. In support of this idea, Yenta (Y2) also explains: “ተግራዊ ምሽት ትምህርቱን የሚሰጡት በጉጉት ነው፤ ምክንያቱም የእግዚአብሔር ቃል ስለሆነ” (the lateral English meaning is that ‘learners learn through enthusiastic as the lesson is closely related to the word of GOD’). He also stated that there is no one to be obliged and learners come to attend Zema education by their self-motivation. They want to dig out further knowledge without being forced by anyone.

Therefore, it could be concluded that learners who come to attend Zema education are with high personal motivation as they come to learn by their own interests and not by other bodies. So, since they come on their own and have intrinsic motivation to achieve something, even if there are challenges that can affect their participation, they have the strength to continue.

#### Practical Oriented

The researchers also interviewed teachers and leaders with regards to how far Zema education is practice-oriented. One of the Yentas (Y2) confirmed that “Zema education without practice is meaningless because by nature it depends on practice”. Similarly, another Yenta (Y1) explains that learners learn in the daytime to apply what they have learnt in the evening and at night. Learners learn during day time together with their friends and at night they usually go to the church where they can actually practice and perform what they have learnt.

In relation to this, Y3 further explains that Zema education is practically oriented even better than from other types of church educations. Other Yentas also reflected that Zema education applies all the time, specifically in the fasting days such as Tsome-eyssues/fast-Jesus, Tsome-Mariam/fasting-Mariam, during Funeral and different church ceremonies.

From what is presented above, it could be understood that Zema education is more practice oriented and also learners learn through practice.

#### *Experience Sharing*

Participants were also asked whether or not there is experience sharing opportunities in Zema education. Regarding this, Yenta (Y2) reflected that sometimes he facilitate and encourage learners to share their own experiences and other Zema-Bet learners. In relation to this, another Yenta (Y3) disclosed that:

*I usually send two or more learners for other Zem-Bets to see and observe the practices. Those learners bring and share with all of us what they saw in Gubae-Bet. There are also cases when learners come from other Gubae-Bets to ask and share experiences from my Gubae-Bet issues related to student ethics, ways of teaching, even if the general culture, chanting styles, rules, and regulations etc. are all the same among the different Gubae-Bets.*

In explaining how experience is shared among his own students, another Yenta (Y1) noted that learners share experiences among them. I assign Friday from 8:00 to 11:00 o'clock for the students to communicate with each other and share their own experiences. As a result, I did not teach Zema education in this time.

Generally, what we have understood from the above presented data is that Zema-Bet learners share previous experiences and new experiences for other learners because of the fact that adults have accumulated life experiences and it is easy to apply one kind of adult learning principle with in the Gubae-Bet.

#### *Self-directed learning*

Learners in Zema-Bet are ready to learn and to attain education effectively and efficiently without being pressurized by any person with intrinsically motivated and encouraged manner. As the interviewee (yenta (Y2)) noted, the learners do not anticipate teacher's presence in the Gubae-Bet as students from it learn and start to teach their own contents of education by peer leading groups. Therefore, learners in Zema-Bets are ready to learn at any time without teachers as they are responsible for everything.

There is no research conducted about how to apply adult learning principles in Zema-Bet level education. Therefore, it is very difficult to crosscheck the current finding with early empirical works. To the best knowledge of the researchers, however, Knowles [18] four major principles of adult learning (i.e., problem solving, internal motivation, experiences sharing, and self-directed learning) are effectively practiced in Zema-Bet education.

#### *3.1.12 Assessment Methods of Zema-Bet Education*

The survey results from 90(100%) of the respondents expressed that the assessment method in the Zema-Bet education is an oral reflection. In Zema-Bet education, written exam or test is very rare as Zema education requires to practically see the individual's performances. Generally, from the survey and qualitative information presented above, the assessment methods of Zema education is not only one method of assessment instead students are evaluated by oral reflection, made memorize all levels of education and performance-based assessment.

Oral reflection and performances-based assessment are the major assessment methods used in Zema-Bet education. In line with this, Almayehu [2] confirmed that *"the teaching-learning process and evaluation of students at this level takes place practically"* (p.46). Supporting this point, Woubie [28] stated that learners are evaluated by day to day activities, which highly depend on performances-based assessment whereas written exam is very rarely used in traditional church education schools. Therefore, the students' are assessed by oral and performance based assessment in Zema-Bet education.

The researchers tried to identify the qualification assurance exams process of learners. In this regard, one leader (L3) pointed out the fact that first tested by their own teachers by oral exam. After having passed the oral exam given by the Yenta, they should get approval or a qualification certificate from other examiners. Regarding to this, the majority of the participants responded that the place where the qualification exam is given in Debube Gonder Lay Giaynt Bethlehem Gedam by Like-likawont (elites) of Zema professions. In addition to this, all Zema education teachers responded that they failed to provide certificates and recognition papers for learners. Supporting this fact, Hailegebreal [17] noted that Zema education learners are certified and recognized in every time at Bethlehem by Zema professions (it seems like providing professorship in the case of modern education).

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusion**

Based on the basic findings of the study, the researchers made brief concluding remarks as given below.

This research confirmed that Zema-Bet education learners live in small grass house (hut) and access food by begging in the nearby community. It is also noted that the learners were expected to complete Nebab-Bet contents before attending Zema-Bet level education. Furthermore, there is no formal written exam for learners to be administered



in Zema-Bet education. Besides, learners' selection for Zema-Bet level education is the base of other types of education and learners can be selected by their own need and interests and their educational commitment to persevere education to the level without any interference. Learners also learn face to face by using group learning strategies and peer-led learning groups. Teaching is usually delivered under the tree shade. The findings further confirmed that four levels of education are provided within Zema-Bet education and adult learning principles' were practiced. The students are also assessed by oral and performance based assessment methods.

### Ways Forward

On the bases of the findings of this study and the above conclusions, the researchers have forwarded the following major recommendations:

- Considering church education as one means of reaching adults, the Governmental organizations, the non-governmental organizations, private agencies and also other education stakeholders should jointly create a conducive learning environment for Zema learners.
- The administration of the church should mobilize resources from the community members to support the Gubae-Bet and to ensure sustainability in Zema-Bet education for the future through frequent discussion forums and negotiation with the respective community.
- The church schools should create entrepreneurship activities by giving short term training and entrepreneurs' skill training for their respective learners, which can be done by the students as a part-time as there is no support from any stakeholder.
- Church leaders should not assume that church education schools are only the heritages and resources of the church rather they should consider it as the heritages and resources of all people in the country and hence, involve the community in order to discuss on the problems and progresses of church education.
- Church leaders should provide large spaces for teaching-learning and living, and build large learning and living places through the facilitation and awareness creation attempts and frequently asking the support of the respective community.
- The learners of Zema-Bet do not have a sustainable income. Hence, most of them dropout from their education and return to their homes. To resolve this problem and attract potential learners, a centralized and a nationwide management system should be developed and instituted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church.
- Adult learners are expected to attend traditional church education as a source of Geez language as the government gives due attention to Geez language. So, the government of Ethiopia and EOTC should work together to develop geez language by including some relevant courses in the curriculum of the national education system.

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