



An Assessment of Traditional Islamic Education practices and Their Implications to Modern Education

*(The Case of Hamida Hadith School in Sinana Woreda, Bale Zone,
Southeast Ethiopia)*

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Abstract

In Ethiopia traditional Islamic education system have held for long and still continue to hold a significant place in the literacy development of the country. The study was primarily intended to examine some of the educational practices of traditional Islamic education in the rural area of Bale zone from the points of view of its implication for modern education.

The findings of the study were based on an ethnographic case study of traditional *Hadith* School found in small village of Bale zone called *Hamida*. In the course of the study, information was collected from the Sheikh (teacher) and darasas (students) of the aforementioned sample school. Beside to the school members, former students and community member were included through purposeful (snowball) sampling. The necessary Information was gathered using open ended interview, focus group discussion and observation.

The findings of the study revealed that in the school, education was offered in a pedagogical design and approach that has fundamental similarities to educational practices employed in contemporary modern secular education.

Abbreviations

ETP	Education and Training Police
EQUIP	Education quality improvement program
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IER	Institute of Educational Research
MOE	Ministry of Education
SNNP	Southern Nations, Nationalities and peoples

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Traditionally the church and the mosque were the institutions that provided educations long before the introduction of modern education into Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church developed and spread a system of learning in ancient Geez language and later on in Amharic as early as the fourth century.

The traditional Islamic education, attached to and promoted by the centers of the Islamic faith, had a parallel function in spreading the reading and writing of Arabic, the study of Islam, philosophy and law, and the teaching of the Koran (MOE, 1994). The more recent phenomena of modern education (European) education could be considered as a break in the continuity of these two types traditional education systems.

The introduction of modern education into Ethiopia, on the onset, was not at all welcomed with enthusiasm by the clergy as well as by the aristocracy due to the fear that modern education could serve as a vehicle for the penetration of alien religion, (Seyoum, 1996). However; Emperor Menillik wisely overcame the challenges Pankhurst (1974). As a result, by the 1920's the opposition of the church on modern education had greatly reduced (Tekeste, 1990). Lastly, the church had a lasting effect on the political social and cultural conditions which had, in turn, influenced the education system of the country until 1974. According to Adane (1993), the religious and secular lives in Ethiopia were inseparable; the church dominated all the day-to-day activities of the people in the country. And obviously this had an adverse effect on the

growth and development of the then education of the existing religions- Catholic, Protestant (Woube, 2004).

In a similar way, this also contributes limitation in the development of the Islamic schools. Since the government favored church education for administrative purpose, Islamic education was indirectly and systematically undermined (Temam, 2005).

According to Hussein (1988), as far as the existing studies on Muslim education in Ethiopia is concerned, it is both insignificant and unsubstantive, there have been only a few early studies on the traditional Islamic schools. It is only in the 19th century that some foreign travelers (Johanson, a British visitor; Mohammed Mukhtar an Egyptian observer; Mouhntandon, a Frenchman; all mentioned in Pankhurst, 1974) wrote on the Islamic education in Ethiopia. Studies about the traditional Islamic schools, particularly about curriculum organization, pedagogical principles, teacher and student profiles, and the like have been insufficient compared to that of the Church education. Yet, for Farrant (1980), Islamic education holds the distinction for having established the oldest surviving system of formal education on the continent of Africa.

It is on the bases of these reasons that this study tries to examine and discuss some common educational practices and their implications to the teaching- learning process of the modern (schools) education. It was, therefore, launched with the spirit of getting first hand information on the educational practice of the traditional Islamic *Hadith* (saying of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, or a report about something he did) education and their implication to the modern schools.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The traditional education, though it has its own limitations, could provide basic practices to modern education. In accordance with this, the education and training policy advocates that there should be a need to encourage the improvement of the traditional education by integrating it with modern education (MOE, 1994). This shows that the traditional schooling system has got a pivotal place in the policy for the fact that it activates to provide quality education.

However, for Elleni (1995) cited in Woube (2000), there are no serious efforts that have been made to study, promote and incorporate traditional education whereas the attention of international organizations, donors and scholars has been devoted to African modern education. For education to be developed, significant work has to be done in advocating positive attitude toward the development and scaling up of the traditional trends.

As stated in Seyoum (1996), the major purpose of the educational reform is to bring about change in various aspects of the educational system such as curriculum and instructions, teacher education, educational management, etc. Likewise, nowadays a great effort has been done for adoption and adaptation of new innovations and reforms which would result educational development in Ethiopia. Despite all efforts made to facilitate innovations and reforms, it appears that no significant effort has been done to integrate the innovations and reforms with the best and related practices of the traditional education system.

Maaza (1966) cited in Tekeste (2006), argued that no country has modernized its culture and society by wholesale importation of Westernization. The writer also stated that the only way out for countries like Ethiopia is to anchor modernization in the traditional values and

beliefs of the Ethiopian people. Hence, it seems essential to assess the link between some educational innovations and the traditional educational system.

Modernizations was conceptualized in terms of conflict between traditional and modernity, not in terms of modernity going in for the revelation and enhancement of tradition (Maaza (1966) cited in Tekeste, 2006). According to Kenaw (2004), as it can be witnessed from the scanty amount of literature available on the subject, the traditional system does not seem to attract much attention for academia. For the writer, Western writers and western educated Ethiopians have failed to see the form and content as well as the spirit and elements of scholarship in traditional Ethiopian education. He added, when it comes to those traditional works, that superficially attempt to examine the field, most of the literature seems to be preoccupied with the application of the drawbacks of the system. However, in spite of their limitations and drawbacks, the traditional schools can have practices which could have positive implications to the modern education system.

Islamic education, as part of the traditional education in Ethiopia, has to be recognized in the field of education. Traditional Islamic education is one of the areas that need to be studied in order to consider those practices that have value and significance to plan for relevant education system. Hence the problem of the study is to examine some traditions of Islamic education and to discuss their implication to secular modern education.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study was primarily intended to investigate how Islamic education is offered in rural area of Bale zone (southeast Ethiopia) and what practices could be learned to modern education.

The specific Objectives of the study were:

- ❖ *To highlight some features of the schooling system of Hamida Hadith school*
- ❖ *To investigate the teaching and learning practices of the school*
- ❖ *To describe relevant experiences which could be assumed to provide better practice for modern education*

1.4 Basic questions

The following research questions were entertained in the study:

- ❖ How does the schooling system organized and managed in traditional Islamic education?
- ❖ What kind of methodology have traditional Islamic schools employed to achieve their objectives?
- ❖ What implication do the practices of traditional Islamic education have for modern education?

1.5 Significances of the study

This study aiming at presenting the tradition of Islamic education will provide an insight about the tradition and important practices of traditional Islamic education for educational policy maker, curriculum developers, educators, teachers, parents and students of Muslim society. As a result it could minimize some negative attitude toward the tradition of Islamic education. More specifically, it could have the following significance:

- ❖ It is hoped that the study will be a positive addition to future literacy research effort in the country
- ❖ It could show valuable practices which will be adopted for the development of modern education system.

- ❖ It would inform all concerned body the existence of rich experience of Islamic education in rural area of Bale Zone.
- ❖ Moreover, the study could help educators and concerned body as a spring board for further investigation of traditional education in general.

1.6 Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited only in assessing the educational practices of traditional *Hadith* School in the remote village (called Hamida) of Sinana woreda in Bale zone. The school was selected, among other reasons, for the assumption that it could still retain the real tradition.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The writer would like to state that the study has same limitations. Due to certain constraints, time in particular, he has not been able to solicit the opinions and criticism of educators and experts on muslim society. In addition, because of the heavy rain season in the area during observation and the political tension created in the area as a result of the fourth national election of the country, the researcher couldn't observe all the traditional schools found in the area before deciding the sample site. Thus, these limitations may affect the credibility of the study.

1.8 Organization of the paper

The paper is organized into five chapters. The first chapter includes the introductory part of the research. The intensive review of literatures was organized and presented under chapter two. The third chapter discusses about the research design. The findings of the study are presented and discussed in chapter four. The last chapter contains the conclusion and implication part the study.

1.9 Operational definitions of Terms and Phrases

Acceleration: Type of curriculum differentiation with some modification in the regular school program that permits gifted students to complete the program that permits gifted students to complete the program in less time or at an early age than usual.

Cooperative learning: A teaching strategy in which small group of students learn from each other to improve understanding of a subject.

Curriculum Differentiation: Process of modifying the curriculum by changing the content, method of teaching, and method of assessment to meet the individual need of learner.

Enrichment: Type of curriculum differentiation with providing of extra learning opportunity (adapting the content) for those who have achieved the required lesson objectives.

Educational Practices: what the teacher and students do in the school to teach or \and acquire knowledge.

Multi-grade classroom: A one-room building class that combines students of different ages, abilities and under the direction of one teacher.

Qur'anic School: A place where only reading and reciting of Qur'an is learned.

Traditional Education- Ethiopian religious educations (Church and Islamic) rooted in the past and still existing

Tutorial- Instruction given to a single student or group of students by a teacher advanced students, and peers.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this section, an attempt is made to collect and systematically organize the review from different sources. It is a brief discussion of the traditional Islamic education system, based on related and available literature.

2.1 A brief Discussion on Traditional Islamic Education System

Islamic education was introduced in to Ethiopia with Islamic religion in the seventh century. The religion first grows along coastal towns and the major trade routes linking the coast and the interior. it was along these routs that some of the major centers of Islamic learning emerged (Molten, 1993).

Though Muslims in Ethiopia are spread over many ethnic group and geographical regions (Molten, 1993), the religion has been more dominant in the east, south, and west of the country (Teshome, 1979). Hussein (1993) stated that the introduction and propagation of the religion in the east, seems due to the role of the Red Sea as a channel of communication and route of migration of the religion.

Among the Islamic learning centers the walled city of Harar in eastern Ethiopia and wollo in central Ethiopia are important ones. Non -formal school system was established to teach ethics and theology of Islam. Many of them were using Arabic as a medium of instruction. Like the church in Ethiopian orthodox faith the mosques in the Muslim religion had a parallel function in running Islamic education. Despite that it is highly dominated by its counterpart traditional church education. Unlike

church education, traditional Islamic schools received no state assistance; rather they were maintained by local communities.

The structure and contents of the traditional Islamic schools is similar in most regions. As stated in Hussein (1988), this similarity is based on the fact that text books that are used in Islamic education are imported from Egypt and Syria.

2.1.1 Objective of Traditional Islamic Education

The general objective have been the teaching and dissemination of Islamic dogma and practice, the training of the clerical class and the spread of literacy (Hussein, 1988). Islamic education was intended to serve as the chief medium of providing religious instruction to the faithful on the central precepts of Islam. furthermore since the essence of Islamic education is moral and character training Muslim scholars also thought the ordinary man about the nature of his relationship with God and his obligation towards him, about permissible and reprehensible behavior and action and about the laws governing his social relationship with fellow Muslims. The purpose of education is to refine students' morals, educate their spirits, propagate virtue, teach propriety and prepare them for a life full of sincerity and purity.

In general Muslim education has helped in the preservation of orthodoxy by its emphasis on conformity to the revealed law (sharia) and the precedent of the prophet and further expansion of Islamic institutions. Traditional Muslim education has also served as a recruiting ground of the *ulama* and the other professional men of the religion and as a depository of Islamic culture and tradition (Hussein, 1988).

2.1.2 Content and levels of Traditional Islamic Education

According to Yalew (1976), the content of the education had two levels: the primary level and secondary level. The primary level is where students were made to learn the Arabic alphabet and recite the Quran and the higher school where students engaged in the study of Islamic law and commentaries on the Quran. The range of subjects offered, and the nature and aims of the educational system, are similar to those of other centers of learning in the Islamic world (Hussein, 2002).

2.1.2.1 Primary Level of Traditional Islamic Education

The Qur'an education (*Lufz-al-Quran*) is the base or the primary level of the education system network where children begin to learn Islamic education. Similar to the elementary Church education, stated by Girma (1967), the large majority of Muslim peasants' children do not enter school at all, as their parents cannot spare them time from the work of the farm. Those who do go to learn are usually the sons or daughter of the relatively well-to-do and relatively devoted and educated parents. Majority of those children are enrolled in Qur'anic school (a school where only Qur'an reading is taught) at a young age, on a basis that coincides with their times of availability. Some study full time, at least during a non-farming seasons of the year. Others participate in part-time, often in the evening before and after their other duties.

The primary education, unlike to the advanced level education, does not need fixed physical plants and qualified teachers. Education can be conducted in the regular school, *Zawiya* (small Mesjid) at *Khalwa* (private service), at home, or at working places. Family members with

some level of previous instruction may carry on their own tutoring for their kin and neighbors.

When graduation (*khitmia*) is reached, with the interest of pupil's family, a big feast is prepared. The sheik's blessings (*baraka* and *du'a*) are critically recognized as having completed his elementary studies (Hussein, 1998). Here, graduation from Qur'an School is a very important event in the pupils' levels. The Sheik, students (*darasas*), relatives, friends, villagers will be invited. Parents are happy now as one member of the family can read Qur'an at every festive occasion, religious celebrations, and so on. Then different types of gifts (money, clothes, sheep, goat, cow, etc) will be presented from parents and relatives.

The curriculum of the primary level (*Lufz-al-Quran*) can be covered on average in 2-3 years, depending on the regular attendance of the teacher and the students, the quality of the teacher to motivate his students, the time duration in the school, the ability of the pupils to grasp the lesson, the availability of tutors (advanced students) and the like.

2.1.2.2 Advanced level of Traditional Islamic Education

After the primary level, few pupils join the higher schools known as "*ilm*" the opportunity to learn more knowledge (Haile Gebreal, 1976); learning which involves an intensive and thorough study (Hussein, 1988). Yet, many students would drop out before achieving this level while a few would go on for subsequent study (Temam, 2005).

In spite of the fact that very few students even reach the advanced level, this part of the student's education is considered to be the most important. The advanced level consists of learning major subjects: *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), Arabic linguistics *Nahw* (grammar) and/or *Sarf* (morphology)], and *Qur'an* and *Hadith* exegesis (*Tefsir*).

The student at advanced level begins to make sense of what he has learned. Memorization plays a less important part in the advanced level education-though the Arabic linguistics is largely learned by rote-and a good deal of the learning takes place through discussion in group. In the advanced level, a student had to master a particular subject before moving on to another subjects, that is, he begins to specialize in *Fiqh*, then *Nahw*, and finally *Tafsirs* (Hussien, 1998).

2.1.3. Multi-grade Classroom Organization in the Traditional Islamic education system

Multi- grade classroom schools are taken to be those which combine students of different ages, different abilities, and different level of study in one classroom (Thomas and Shaw, 1992). For these writers, multi-grade classes take a wide Variety of organizational forms, ranging from grouping of several formal grade divisions under the direction of one teacher to a completely non- graded learning environment.

According to Thomas and Shaw (1992:1) the multi- grade classrooms could be useful as a way to manage low enrollments and shrink budgets. In their words, “multi- grade schools fulfill an important role in improving access to primary education, and in maintaining services in light of budgetary and manpower constraints.” This indicates that the multi grade classes are efficient means of providing basic education in thinly populated areas where educational inputs, trained teachers, classrooms, and other materials are scarce.

Multi- grade classrooms have been used for variety of reasons in developing countries. In this regard, Thomas and Show (1992) reported that multi- graded classroom schools provide quality services in rural parts of Scotland, the Scandinavian countries, Canada, France, Britain and the Netherlands. Multi- grade schools have been established in small

communities in response to declining pupil intake and staff reduction. Obviously, this is conducted for more than two grades by a single teacher in one room. Multi- grade class is not a new invention for Ethiopian Islamic schools. Hussein (1988:99) stated the shift system in the traditional schools as follows:

Students who are at different levels of training are taught in a progressive pattern: beginning in the morning from the most advanced to the least advanced. After the midday prayer, pupils at introductory levels are taught first followed by those at intermediate grades. In the afternoon session the more advanced students play the role of assistant teacher since it is a means of revising material which they had studied earlier and prepares them for the teaching career.

From this explanation, the teaching practice in traditional school is conducted by a single teacher in a single room for different level (classes). Moreover, the traditional education system would be more seemly two shifts system: i.e. before and after midday

The ministry of Education in its third educational sector development program (ESDPIII) has planned as one strategy to expand access of primary education in the rural area through the expansion of multi-graded classrooms. From the report, recently Amhara and Oromia Regional Education Bureaus have piloted the modern type of multi-grade classes and have found them promising on two grounds: improving access and quality.

Hence the Ministry of Education based on domestic as well as international experiences, regions placed emphasis on the use of multi-grade classes, and especially in area where the student population is very small and constructing a four- classroom school is not necessary. This seems that the multi- grading classroom practice of the traditional Islamic schools as, one of the domestic experiences could possibly be adapted by the modern secular education.

2.1.4 Group Discussion practices in the traditional System

Various schools and policy makers have questions whether dialogue and group cooperative learning are appropriate and feasible in schools in which many students have been specialized in Qur'anic school (Boyle cited in EQUIP1, 2006). To this point different foreign and local writer the of "Islamic School" which they usually described it as " Qur'anic school", is assumed to be with no consideration for discussion and debate in learning.

In this regard, HaileGebreal (1969), in his brief description of the teaching of Arabic in traditional schools of the rural areas of Ethiopia, reported his assumption that students are supposed to memorize the whole Qur'an and as a result education ends with this memorization.

However, as stated in Hussen and Postlethwaite, (1994), at the more advanced stage of study, students may engage in discussions or debates in which they actively analyze theological and ethical issues.

Based on this view, EQUIP (2006) discussed that while many contemporary "Qur'anic schools" tend to stress memorization, it is clear that both pedagogical approaches have long and important roots in discourse among Islamic schools and education.

In this case, it seems that a much more active form of dialogue occurs in a group discussion on the topic in the advanced level of traditional schools. The specific textbooks have to be read and understood thoroughly through group discussion: since it is a common practice for a small group (sherika) of pupils to read and study a text book together (Husseini, 1988).

2.1.5 Tutorial System in the Traditional schools

Tutoring as an age old practice has a long and profound history in traditional schools of Ethiopia. Girma (1967) noted that maintaining a tutor in wealthy households, a common practice to this day, thus had its beginning for back in the history of the church. Though the researcher couldn't get to much organized written information about the situation of tutoring in traditional Islamic education, the presence of similar practice seems inevitable.

In traditional Islamic schools, the master teacher (sheikh) as a tutor instruct senior students, where as senior students give assistance for their junior ones down on the ladder in their day-to-day academic activities.

2.1.6 Assessment and promotion Activities in Traditional schools

Promotion of students from one level to another in traditional schools does not require the development of complicated quantitative tests. "A student had to first master a particular subject before moving on to another subject; that there were no written examinations." (Hussein, 1988:98). The assessment focused only on monitoring learning progress and diagnosing learning difficulties before promoting from one subject (level) to another.

Girma (1967) considered this practice of promotions and recognitions as interesting aspects of the traditional education. He stated the situation as follows:

The student is being constantly assessed by his teacher for other qualities such as honesty and personal integrity. The educated person, according to the traditional definition, is at once a good man who stands as an example to all those around him and one who is competent in his field of learning. In the world of today,

where a degree has become the sole ticket for special social recognition and respect, there is always the danger of identifying the degree-holder with the educated person (P.9).

2.1.7 The life of teachers and students in traditional Islamic school

The life of the teachers and their students has been one of hardship as they had no regular means of subsistence. According to Hussein (2001), the teachers had no salaries since their declared objective was the teaching of principles of Islam, and the students had no fend off for themselves in the course of their training. With the exception of a small class of teachers who were economically better off the overwhelming majority of scholars depended for their livelihood on the generosity of prosperous and religious cultivator and traders. The teachers and their families lived on the produce of their own plot of land which was cultivated by their students and other members of the local community.

There were essentially two categories of students from the point of view of their means of the livelihood in the course of their training (Hussein, 1988). The first group pursued their elementary studies in their localities while being supported by their own families. The second group included those who continued their areas of their residence. Some lived in the households of rich traders or farmers who provided them with their daily meals (breakfast and supper); others had to collect their daily rations from the inhabitants of the village by begging. This is similar to the practice of church students in the Christian tradition of learning.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODS OF THE STUDY

3.1 Methodological Approach

The approaches through which this study conducted were an Ethnographic-case study which is considered heavily in field work and includes observation, interviewing, and other data collecting procedures. For scholars, the basic purpose of ethnographic research is to determine the physical and social environment in which the individuals understudy live and work. For instance, Best and Khan (1993) stated, in educational research, ethnography has been used to study the culture of schools and the people who inhabit them.

A descriptive research attempts to describe systematically a situation, phenomena, and program or provide information about, say, the living conditions of a community, or describes towards attitudes and issues (Kumar, 1996). Hence, a descriptive study was conducted since it was intended to describe and interpret the educational practices of the traditional schools.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The primary consideration of the writer was to judge the participants who could provide the best information to achieve the objective of the study. The researcher, then, decided to use two Muslim scholars from Bale Robe town, who, in the researcher's opinion, were likely to have the required information and be willing to share it. Therefore, the required information which could enable the researcher to start with was collected from two informants (Muslim Scholars). These scholars, as the basis of the study were then interviewed on the following issues:

- About the current status of traditional Islamic education in rural areas of Bale zone
- About a better known traditional Muslim education center;
- About education system of the schools;
- About some existing educational practices;
- Suggestions about the steps the researcher would follow for field observation; and
- Suggestions about the individuals that would be included in the interview.

Based on the information collected from the two primary informants, the writer observed seven traditional schools that found in *Sinana* and *Dinsho* Weredas as well as *Robe* town as a pre-study field visit from March 16 to April 25, 2010. During this period, the writer was able to obtain an overall picture of the traditional education system. Through observation, and through conducting some interviews, the researcher managed to reach an in depth understanding of the curriculum, methods of teaching and school culture of different education centers.

The pre-study field visit enabled the researcher to decide that the *Hamida Hadith* education center was better representative for the study. Moreover, it facilitated the initiation of the contact with the Muslim leader (Imam) of the village, a former student of the village, who became a bridge for the smooth contact with the Sheikh.

The heavy rain during the observation forced the researcher to take more time on the first field visit and wide gap to begin the second round visit. The main field study (the second round observation) of the school took place from May 4/2010 to June 7/2010.

3.3 Sampling Procedures

The main purpose of this study was to investigate and describe some educational practices in the traditional Islamic schools which might be implied in the modern secular schools. To achieve this purpose the researcher designed an ethnographic case study in a single selected site. It was then planned and searched for better representative site and information – rich informants. Hence, this part of the study presents the methods that were employed to achieve the research objective which had been set.

3.3.1 Site Selection and its Rationale

At the first round field visit, the researcher was intended to select a representative site. As a result *Hamida Hadith* School was selected among the traditional schools observed during the first field visit. The rationales behind the selection of Hamida Hadith School were:

- ☞ The current major emphasis in traditional instruction in the rural area of Bale is on *Hadith*, sayings and practices of Prophet Muhammad.
- ☞ According to the potential informants, though learning *Hadith* is the recent phenomena than the old *Fiqh*, there is no remarkable change on the educational traditions of the area.
- ☞ The informants in the network (snowball) strategy specifically suggested it to be a representative model;
- ☞ From the first round visit, the researcher had a wider understanding of cultural suitability to conduct the study with a short time ethnographic research;

- ☞ As he had observed a better hospitality of the villagers on his first round field observation, the researcher believed to get the necessary cooperation;
- ☞ The researcher believed that the secular school teachers in the village (**The Hamida Sole Primary School teachers**) would help him as assistant observers (team group member) after a short training.

3.3.2 Selection of Participants

The participants of the research were identified and approached through a combination of the snowball method and deliberate choices. In some cases, Thus , one informant directly or indirectly led to another, but the writer also intentionally sought individual whom the writer know or assumed would provide particular information on a given topic. In the course of the study, certain key informants were identified, who were interviewed several times and who become important in cross-check information

Thus, using snowball strategy, it was discussed with different people in the community, and then selected those who have a good knowledge about the issues under study as sources of data. In this regard, the subjects (participants) of the study were the master teacher (the Sheikh), twelve students (darasas), two former students, and one known community member in the village.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The data inputs for the study were based on primary sources. Interviews, unstructured observation and focused group discussion were used as tools of primary data collection for the qualitative case study. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) argued qualitative case study evaluations need data

collected from in-personal interviews and direct observations. In addition, Wellington (1996) mentioned that focus group discussion is also a complementary technique to collect data in qualitative case studies.

3.4.1 Interviews

In a qualitative case study, interviewing is a major source of data needed for understanding the phenomena under study. The ethnographic interviews undertaken in this study were in the form of unstructured (in-depth) interview, where the researcher had the freedom to formulate questions as they came to his mind around the issue being investigated. This interview was undertaken in the form of person-to-person encounters using open-ended questions to enable respondents address matters in their own terms and words.

As to Kumar (1996) this approach of data collection is extremely useful in situations where either in-depth information is needed or little is known about the area. In addition, this was conducted with the assumption that verbatim words and phrases from the interview would be analyzed and used as data to illustrate the findings.

Before starting the interview, schedule was prepared in advance and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. An arrangement was made with the school's administrators, the sheikh and students' leaders (*Amirs*) to interview the students in the small huts (*Zawiya*) and in the school compound.

For the Purpose of ethical consideration, the informants were informed that no harm will come to them or to the school system as a result of their participation in the study.

From the proposed eight most advanced and eight lower level (total 16) students in the snow ball sampling, only twelve students have participated through the study. The interview with the three lower level students was not descriptive for that they were too shy to communicate. One advanced student was not found during observation. Eight students were interviewed separately, the rest were in pairs and groups. Accordingly, 16 formal interviews with different individuals and groups were administered.

More specifically, the researcher conducted the open -ended interviews with:

- The master teacher (*the Sheikh or Ustaz*)
- Seven most advanced students of the schools who were acting as students' leaders (*Amirs*) and permanent tutors.
- Five beginners and lower level students.
- two former students (*darasa*)
- One known community member who is considered as a potential informant in the village.

The interview of the study was conducted with an informal conversation. For McMillan and Schumacher (1997), in the informal conversation interview, the question emerges from the immediate context and is asked in the natural course of events; there is no predetermination of question topics or phrasing. For the same writer, informal conversations are an integral part of participant observation.

Here it is important to mention that the researcher himself passed through the primary level of traditional Islamic education system and he is originally from the Muslim community of the area under investigation. Thus interviews were made using the respondents' vernacular, but

colloquial language, that is informal *Afan-Oromo* expression. Some Words and phrases used in the school were *Oromo-Arabic* mixture. In line with this, McMillan and Schumacher (1997) suggested that it is crucial that the ethnographer requires the particular linguistic patterns and language variation of the individual observed to record and to interact with them.

Focus group interview was treated as a part of the data collection instrument. The purpose of the FGD was to supplement and enrich the information that was collected through observation and interview. Advocating the use of focus group discussion, Wellington (1996) stated that a focus group discussion among a number of small groups has been considered as a good instrument to get versatile information. Moreover, “focused group discussions are best suited for obtaining data on group attitudes and perceptions by initiating members for active participation” (Wamahiu and Karugu, 1995:122)

The focus group discussions were held in the school with a heterogeneous group of two former and four present day students (*darasas*) together. That is, the size of the focus group was with six informants. Dornyei (2007) suggested that the size of a focus group should be arranged between 6-10 people. For the author fewer than six people would limit the potential of the “collative wisdom”; where as too large size makes it difficult for everyone to participate. In line with this composition, the same writer pointed out that the heterogeneous sample consisting of dissimilar people could be useful in providing varied and rich data that covers all aspects of the research problems.

3.4.2 Observation

Observational data, especially participant observation, permit a researcher to understand a program or treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through

interviews (Paton, 2002). As a technique for gathering information, the observational method relies on a researcher's seeing and hearing things and recording these observations (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997)

The writer planned to visit the school in the natural setting where the investigation was taking place. As a participant observer or an insider of the research (considered himself as a *darasa*), the investigator decided to spend twenty five days observing the educational activities particularly some selected pedagogical practices in the school.

Researchers suggested that the use of multiple researchers in qualitative research is one method to enhance validity. However, the study was decided to be conducted at the time of heavy rain fall and a place of long distance where Horse cart was the only transport to be used and rural traditional life with no light and bare floors which was difficult to pass long time observation for non experienced person. Moreover, the food, and the water to be used and other problems seemed hazardous to health. Thus, the researcher decided to pursue his study alone because under these sever conditions as it was difficult to get any companion who can show such a commitment.

Finally, the investigator was forced to design another alternative. He planed and used the secular modern school teachers in the village, called **Hamida Sole primary School**, as assistant observers after giving short and brief training before hand. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) have suggested that the use of more than one researcher is handled in a prior training and discussion during field work to reach agreement on meanings

3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the study, qualitative analytical procedures were employed. It was focused on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the educational practices in the traditional school. In the field study, the researcher tried to grasp the education system, mainly the pedagogical activities through observation, interview, and focus group discussion. Interviews and focus group discussions with most participants were recorded in audiotape and to some extent in videotape, based on the consent of the participants. The recorded interview was helpful not to miss participants' ideas and interpretations to a particular issue. Of course, few students who did not show interest to be recorded and photographed were interviewed without recording.

The researcher administered a sequence of two to three interviews with the same participant, particularly with the Sheikh and three most advanced students. In line with this, Dornyei (2007) recommended that interval between the first and the second interviews allows the interviewer to prepare a more made-to-measure interview guide for the second session and it also offers the interviewee the chance to think more deeply about the experience.

The conversion of the recorded interviews (verbatim) into a written form transcription as well as the translation of all interviews were difficult due to the large volume of the data. Thus, transcription was selective depending on the use and relevance of the material. And then all the transcribed materials were carefully translated (from Afan Oromo to English) by a professional English teacher.

The research involved using open-ended data for the most part. This required asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participant. "Case study with ethnographic

research involves a detailed description of the setting or individuals, followed by analysis of the data for themes or issues” (Creswell, 2003:191). Since the responses to the open-ended questions were longer and detailed, they helped the researcher to understand in-depth experience of the informants. The extended number of interviews conducted with different informants helped the researcher on one hand, to get better chance to select information relevant to the issue.

The first step in developing the observational study was to define in precise terms what would be observed. Beginning with the research problem the variables that needed to be observed were ascertained. Since it was impossible to observe everything that occur, the researcher decided on the units of the setting that were most important and then defined the behavior so that it could be recorded objectively.

In the field visit, the researcher conducted observation for twenty five days in the school. The focus was on recording the constructed realities as demonstrated by the participants. Detailed data were recorded as field notes what occurred while the researcher was in the field. Field notes were dated and the context was identified. The field notes were written (summarized) immediately after leaving the site in the temporary residence in the village. The Main interactions and scenes observed, suggested questions and tentative interpretations were daily synthesized.

The validity of the study was maintained through *triangulation technique* among the data collection strategies. The data collected through interview and focus group discussion were analyzed with the support of the data collected from observation to find regularities in the data. Triangulation is a qualitative cross validation that assesses the sufficiency of the data according to the convergence of the multiple data collection procedures (Wiersma, 1995).

The data obtained from the groups of participants (teacher, tutor students, experienced individuals, community members, etc), through observation and interviews were analyzed and synthesized. For the analyses the researcher included his own interpretation and understanding of the data found in the research. The subjective interpretations and suggestions of the investigator were accompanied with what the literature indicated about the traditional Islamic educational practices.

The data gathered through participant observation were descriptive in nature. The description was in the form of field notes specifying some basic information pertaining to the place where the observation took place, the students (*darasas*) present during the observation, nature of the school, nature of various types of interactions, and other activities during the observation. The field notes taken during observation contained direct quotation of the people who participated in the observation.

In this paper, the real names of the respondents were used in the presentation of their responses. This was done based on the consent primarily reached with the participants during interviews.

Some local words, which do not have, probably, exact meanings in English were used in the report. Thus, terms like , *Ustaz*, *amir*, *darasa*, *mazala*, *zawiya*, *Mesjid*, etc. were seldom used instead of the teacher, students' leader, student, lecture hall, private service, Mosque, etc. respectively.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DISCUSSION ON THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section of the study the schooling system, students' profile and above all some educational practices of the *Hamida traditional Islamic school* are described. *Hamida* is a small village in Sinana Woreda (Bale zone) where the qualitative ethnographic case study was conducted. Necessary data was collected in the school through interview, discussion and observation. The data obtained from the discussion with group participations, with the Sheikh, students, former students, and community members through interviews, discussion and observation have been analyzed and synthesized.

4.1 General Review of the Schooling System of Hamida Hadith Education

4.1.1 Establishment of the School

Hamida was previously known for its Islamic *Nahwi* (Arabic Grammar) education for over more than 50 years. The new *Hadith* School was established in the village only four years ago after the previous *Nahwi* teacher (Sheikh Jewar) was retired.

According to the 67 years old informant in the village, Sheikh Sultan Hussein, the *Hadith* School was established by the community of the village. It was the society of the village that primarily had requested the Sheikh of **Chimo** village to transfer to their village (Hamida).

The former *Hadith* teacher (*Sheikh*) of **Chiimo** village, sheikh Abduljewad Yusuf thus, after detail study of the population of the surrounding villages and the interest of the people that reside in the villages, decided to transfer to the village with his 500 (five hundred) students (*darasas*). The sheik explained the reason why he transferred to this village as follow:

*It was because of two reasons that I preferred Hamida to Chiimo (his previous village). The first was, I had very large number of students and these students need food and shelter. However most of my students could not find sponsors (**Nefeqa**) in the previous village. The second reason was, some of the residents in the previous village had less interested in Hadith education. (Interview, May.5, 2010)*

From the explanation of the sheik information about the residents was an important factor before the teacher and students are made to depend on them for their food and other provisions during the study time.

As stated by the informants of the village, following the decision of the Sheikh, the school was established by the society in the compound of the previous *Qura'anic* school (Called *Abdellah Ibnu-Abbas School*) in the village.

At the beginning, the school was established with 500 students (*darasas*) who transferred with the teacher (*Sheikh*) from the previous *Chiimo* village. Though there was no students' list during observation, it was reported that the number of students were increasing from time to time.



One side of the school (photo by Muhiddin)



Some students of the school (photo by Muhiddin)

The education system has involved direct and wider community participation in the construction of the physical plant of the school and teacher's residence near the school. All members of the society were expected to participate in the construction of the school as well as in the supply of the Sheikh and the *darasas* with food and other provisions.

4.1.2 General Objective of the School

As it is reported by the master teacher of the school or the Sheikh and his students (*darasas*), the main objective of *Hadith* education in the school is to spread and diffuse the religious knowledge among the believers. For them, expanding *Hadith* education is viewed as necessary to preserve Islamic traditions and promote the faith through the Muslim society. That is, to be educated is assumed to perpetuate the Muslims' service as teachers (*Sheikhs*).

The interviewed students express their strong feelings to be *Sheikhs* (teachers) and as a result to be a moral guide and resource scholars (*Ulema*) for the Muslim community. This coincides with what Hussein (1988) stated the three principal aims of Islamic education; the teaching and dissemination of Islamic dogma and practice, the training of the clerical class and the spread of literacy.

4.1.3 Administration system of the School

There was no any higher authority which is responsible for the school administration matters except the master teacher and the students. As one of the informants, if the sheikh once gets **ijaza** (permission) to teach Hadith from his Sheikh, it is to mean he has full authority on the education System of the school. If something bad news is heard about the new Sheikh his colleagues, particularly his senior Sheikhs, will advice and correct him.

In the school though the teacher is the head master of the school, there were also students' leaders (usually advanced students) who assist the master teacher in administrative activities of the school. Students' leaders (locally called *Amir*) were selected among the students based on their personality, educational level, duration in the school and ability of leadership.

a. Academic calendar and Students' admission

Unlike the modern education system there is no rigid academic calendar in the school. The administration is simple and local, both the master teacher (*Ustaz*) and the students (*darasas*) conventionally determine school closing. As a result, there is long vacation break for two months; usually during harvesting season of the area and month of *Remedan* and three to seven days for the two religious holidays (*Eid-al-fatir* and *Eid-al-adha*) in a year as well as every Friday of the week are the known school closed days.

In the school, students can be enrolled at any time of the year. The school accepts any volunteer student at any time of the year without fee. Regarding the entry requirement, "*It is only interest of the student to learn in the school that is needed*" said the master teacher (*Ustaz*). So, all young students who appear in the school are considered as students (*darasas*) of the school, and hence teaching and learning are to be conducted just

after a short report and orientation about the rule and regulation of the school. However there was no a written document on the rule and regulation of the school during observation. The new comer is expected to report from where he came, about his family background, his educational experience, and other important information and have to show his ID card to students' leaders (Amirs).

b. Disciplinary problems and management system

Disciplinary problem is not an administrative concern in the school, because every student has to obey his teacher, students' representative, senior students, and even peers. Respectfulness, humbleness, and submission to the will of the teacher as well as senior students are characteristics of the students. In such relationship between the teacher and the students as well as between the students themselves, the need for discipline is extremely minimized, if it existed. The master teacher stated the condition as follows:

*The darasas came here with full of interest, no body forced him to come here. Hence, it is not observed such disciplinary problems. If sometimes miss behaved student came, it is the responsibility of the students' representative (specially the **Shurta**) to advice him (Interview, May.5, 2010).*

Students' leader who is responsible for disciplinary matters of the school is called *Shurta* (literally means "policeman"). Mu'azin Ahmed, who was the only *shurta* during observation, expressed the rule of the school for miss behaving students as follow:

In our rule we have different punishment system for different level students. For lower level students (immature students) we usually use physical punishment. And if higher level students miss behaved, I will report to Amirs and then the Amirs will suspend him from one or two classes as primary action. (Interview, may.13, 2010)

From the explanation of the *Shurta*, it is clear that behavior management system of the school was based on the age of the students.

4.1.4 Educational Content and Levels of the School

The Study of *Hadith* can be divided in to three distinct phases: text (*matn*) phase, Arabic grammar (*Nahw/Sarf*) phase, and commentary (*sherh*) phase. In the first phase, for about 4-6 years, the students study the four fundamental texts (*matn*) namely, ***Kitaabu-tewhid, Buluga, Riyada and Tejrída***.

The student who completes successfully the text (*matn*) is advised to learn Arabic grammar (*Nahw/Sarf*) before he directly pass to the next commentary phase. This is due to the fact that the Muslim scholars believe that a good knowledge of *Nahw* (Grammar), *Sarf* (morphology); *Mantiq* (logic deductive reasoning) and the like are base for the detail understanding of *Hadith*. In Hamida Hadith school since the master teacher had *ijaza* (permission) in Arabic morphology (*sarf*), a student can choose to learn *sarf* either along with *matn* or *sherh* courses or independently after the completion of *matn* courses.

In the traditional *Hadith* education system, the gradual development of intellect is recognized to have different levels of learning. The content of the curriculum continuously progresses over a period of time from the lowest text (*matn*) to the highest detailed commentary (*sherh*).

However, to differentiate this continuous content, the *ulema* (scholars) conventionally use to classify the stages on the base of the studies the students reached. One type of classification, for instance, is to level the students in relation to the text (*matn*) or commentary (*sherh*) the student learns or reaches. Then, the students can be named (leveled) as: "*students of Kitaabu-tewhid* ", "*students of Buluga*" etc.

Another type of classification is on the bases of intellectual development of students. In the discussion with Abdulkarim Usman about this classification, he stated the classification of *Hadith* as:

*Students at the beginning stage that includes **Kitaabu-tewhid, Buluga, Riyada and Tejrida** texts (matn) are called at the "lower level". On the other hand, those students who are at **Qur'an Tefsir** and above are called "higher level" student. Because students at this level are expected to understand and reason out ideas, assigned as regular tutors, and Amirs. They study additional subjects and to some extent apply to solve practical societal problems, (Interview May.7, 2010).*

Furthermore, Temam Abdella, the former student of the traditional *Hadith* School, explained about the lower level learner in the focus group discussion as follows:

At the lower level students learn proper reading, spelling, pronunciation and direct translation of the Arabic texts (matn). Students at this level need proper support from the advanced students. They need continuous follow up to check if they recall what they learnt before. Hence, they are said to be at the 'lower level' (FGD in Jun. 03, 2010).

The above explanations indicate that a student at the *lower level* is considered to recall and recognize terms, facts, information, etc. In the report of the informants, the *higher level* education is a continuation of the *lower level* in its broader and deeper understanding of *Hadith*. These shows, students at this level are expected to find relationships that exist between fact and concepts. The students at this level also feel much more independent in their studies.

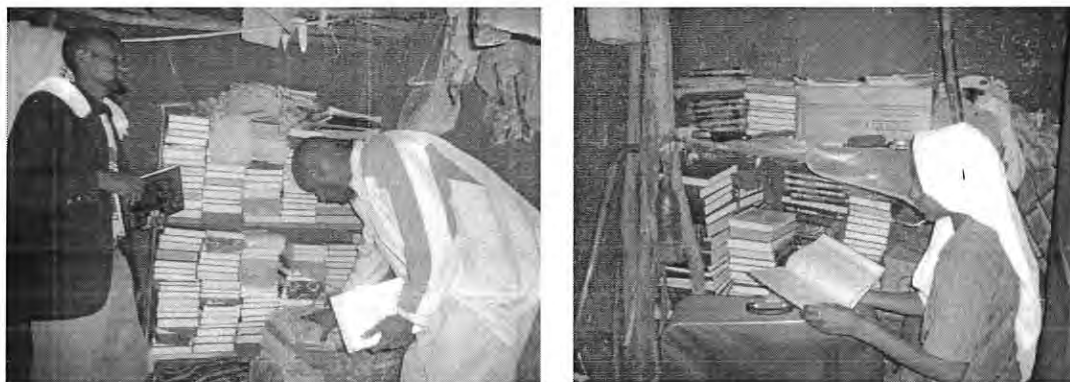
4.1.5 Teaching and learning materials

Text and reference books are the major instructional materials in the school. Text books in the school are compulsory that every student must own. Though the school could not administer or the teacher does not make any work of supervision, every student knows that it is expected to possess his own textbook. Individual student has to have his own textbook either by borrowing or buying a second-hand book from previous students. Published text books are not practically much available to buy. Thus, they are forced to use copies of hand written and to some extent photocopies. The field observation witnesses to the value that students attached to books and their eagerness to acquire evermore books (*kitab*s) for their continued education. Those who are at the intermediate and higher level students, usually talk their desire not only about the next books(*kitab*s) they need but also of the past basic *text* (*matn*) which they had not been able to have. Because in the school system, every lesson that individual learner has learned would be revised by the following (next) level student in the multi - grade classroom.

The value that students as well as their teacher attribute to books is manifested by the types and number of books (*kitab*s) that they would like to own. The higher and more advanced students, though they have great ambitions for possessing texts and reference book, they know that they could not get those books within a few years time. These old books (*kitab*s) are not easily available in the market. Even if they are found, it is unaffordable and even unimaginable to buy the books (*kitab*s).

The master teacher (*Sheikh*) usually provides some necessary and scarce reference books. All students have permission to use the Sheikh's books from students' private service (*Zawiya*), which serves also as a "mini library" (*Mekteba*). There were two *Zawiyas* that serve as mini library in

the school. The classical Arabic books (*kitab*s) of the Sheikh in the two *Zawiyas* serve as reference books for the students and the *Sheikh* himself. The books in the "mini library" are shelved in boxes and heaped on the ground in accordance with different subjects (knowledge). Students could borrow some selected books for overnight to discuss with their peers or to copy from the book.



The mini library (*Mekteba*) of the school. (Photo by muhiddin)

4.1.6 Some aspects of Students' Life in the School

In *Hamida Hadith* school, it was observed that except few students, many of the regular attending students had traveled a long distance in order to reach the school. From the discussion with the students it was noted that some even come from another region such as Amhara (wallo) and SNNP (Sidama). Some still came from Jimma, East and West Arsi and other zones of Oromia region.

According to the discussion made with the students, there were two reasons why they leave home to study in distant province. The first consideration is Hadith schools are not available everywhere. The second is the fear entertained by the students that they may not be able to devote all their time and energy to their studies because of interference from their family who want them to help with this and that. Hence, students used to sacrifice the comfort they get from home to attend their

education in a far distance village (locally called *Safar* from the Arabic word *musafir* to mean traveler).

Once the students reached the school, they are courteously received and made to feel welcome. The new comers are not immediately presented before the master teacher. As a matter of formality the Amirs inquire the purpose of their visit where they came from and, ID card. Having been cleared about their background by the Amirs, the new comers will be presented in front of the teacher to get permission.

After they get permission, they began to find sponsor. Usually Amirs assigned them to one of the mosques in the surrounding villages so that the Mosque will find sponsors (*Nefaqa*) for the new students. Once the students get sponsor, they are responsible to teach their sponsors' children at night and in the morning. There were also students who did not immediately find their own sponsors; however unlike in Wollo, as stated in Ahmed (2009) and Hussien (1988), these students are not going to round in the village for begging, rather senior students will take them to their sponsor until they get their own sponsor. Begging is forbidden in the school.



The life of students is based on humility and concern for one another's welfare. (Photo by Muhiddin)

Shelter is not problem in the school, as the students do not look for any sort of comfort. Most students sleep in the Mosque found in the surrounding villages. Some students build very small huts (*Zawiya*) that are used as shelters. Since the huts are very small, the students are forced to live under very crowded conditions. Each hut is a residence for two to four students. The huts (*zawiya*) and the Mosque are not the only places where the students live. There are darasas who lives in the private *Zawiyas* of the well-to-do farmers.



Students in Mesjid (photo by Muhiddin)



Small huts (*Zawiya*) (photo by Muhiddin)

For darasas, movement from one school to another is very natural. A darasa can change two or three, even more schools within a year. No need of clearance from the previous school or schools. He has no as such heavy load to carry when he changes his school. The *Sheikh* or the *Amirs* do not resist the movement but they advise the student to reach his final destination wherever he goes. The student makes the necessary inquires in advance about the district and the school he plans to go to, about the advantage and disadvantage of one school as against another school in terms of availability of tutors and peers, the chance to get sponsor, to build his own privet hut (*zawiya*). The students also make careful inquires about the personal characters and ability of the teacher in advance.

4.1.7 Students' graduation from the school

In the school, after the completion of the study, it is only the master teacher who has the right and responsibility to certify the learner. The community and his former sheikh have already authorized him as the teacher of the school and he is fully made responsible and accountable. For the sheikh is referred as a social model, he has the necessary authority and autonomy to decide upon the certification of the student (darasa) through avenue of the intellectual and other attributes. The certificate awarded for the new teacher is called *ijaza* (permission for teaching).

Having thoroughly mastered Hadith courses for about 10 to 12 years, and having received testimonials about his teaching skill and personality as well as blessing from the sheikh, the student departs with some students (20 to 50 darasas) to begin teaching in other province. Some of these qualified scholars may return to their native provinces to teach, while others go same where else including urban areas to get employment. There are also graduates who are assigned by the sheikh himself to some villages that have requested for new graduates in advance. Then the master teacher himself took the newly graduate sheikh to the village so as to introduce the new sheikh to the villagers.

4.2 Educational practices of the school

This section deals with the educational practices, which are composed of different activities and pedagogical design and approaches. The educational practices in school give answers to the questions, "How do students (darasas) acquire the desired knowledge?" It is to explain "What the students (darasas) perform when they are learning inside and outside the school to achieve the desired knowledge, skills and values (*i.e. the desired end results*).

4.2.1 Classroom Organization and Management practices

Instruction was regularly conducted in the sheikh's private house and a big hall (called *Mazela*). The *Mezala* was used for large class size managing purpose. It occupies more than five hundred students at once. The mosque (*mesjid*) also used for non-regular sessions.

The schooling program of the school was organized in to two regular sessions (Early Morning and Afternoon session). The early morning session is regular class for the higher level (advanced students) and tutorial program for lower level students. The afternoon Session is a regular class program for the lower level students and a revision session for higher level students.

a. Classroom Organization in the Early Morning Session

In the field visit, it was observed that the first session of the class (early morning shift) began with the sun rise, after the early morning prayers. In the morning (nearly at 6 AM), the higher level (advanced students) assembled in the sheikh's private house for the first session class. The students sat on a line on the floor closer to the sheikh. Every student held his own text book and additional commentary reference books. They knelt down and lay their arms on the ground to read their books for the

master teacher (sheikh). The sheikh became ready for translating and explaining the daily lesson.



Advanced students learning from the sheikh (photo by Muhiddin)

The early morning class was started with the two most senior students (students of *Nasa'i*). Though the method of teaching was through lecture, the interaction with the teacher (*Ustaz*) was one-to-one based instructional system. The interaction was not only restricted between the two student and the sheikh but also the junior students were also involved in the learning process. They explained that the concept which was discussed with their senior is not as such new for them. It is only the depth that differs from their lesson.

After nearly 35 minutes discussion, the two students left the class and joined the "lower level" grouped students looking for their tutorial in the school compound. Next to the most advanced student, less advanced students then followed the schooling in a group. In the early morning session four "advanced books" (*kitabata mutawalata*) which included *Nasa'i*, *Ebnu-maja*, *Bukari*, and *Abi-Dawud* were studied for 35 minutes each.

In the early morning shift, as the learning process of the higher level students ended, students who have finished their class in turn went out either for tutoring the lower level students waiting in groups or to study in group until the day session will start. The early morning shift program usually extends up to 9:30AM.

b. Classroom Organization in the afternoon session

In the consecutive daily field, observations, the learning process of the lower level students regularly started at 10:00 AM. In this session students of all levels (class) are expected to be combined in the multi-grade classroom (the *Mezala*). Students sat forming concentric semicircles (crescents) in front of the sheikh.



Students learning from the sheikh in the *Mezala* (photo by Muhiddin)

The sitting arrangement was according to their educational levels. The first group (near the sheikh) is for the least class level (beginners of *Buluga* and *kitabul-Tawhid*). The next group is for the second level class (for more advanced than the beginners). This arrangement continues until the last line where the most advanced students were sited.

In the second shift classroom organization, the sitting arrangement of students in a progressive pattern was used to teach first the beginners until the midday prayer (*Zuhr Salat*); next the highest of the lower level

learners (Students of *Riyada* and *Tejrida*), just after the midday prayer (Zuhr Salat). In spite of the fact that the day session was regular class for those lower level students, the "higher level" (those who learn in the morning session) should offer the class.

Students in the same level (called *maada*) were represented by the group leader (called *Shufera*) to read the daily lesson in front of the sheikh. In the observation days the beginners of *Buluga* course were more than 50 in number. However in the class, it was one representative who would read the text (*matn*) before the sheikh. Of course, the discussion was brief and word by word translation because the assumption was that the students had studied individually and with tutors, and supposed to discuss in their groups.

In different interviews, the students repeatedly expressed their feeling that the system is convenient for different reasons. It was also reported in the focus group discussion with the advanced students that the afternoon multi grade class would be beneficial for the following reasons.

- ✓ It assists the teacher in creating idea and information;
- ✓ Helps students in raising questions faced in group discussion and tutoring;
- ✓ Helps as a means of revision for lessons that had been studied earlier;
- ✓ Prepares advanced students for their teaching career;
- ✓ Develops a strong teacher-student relationship over time, which helps the Sheikh to assess the darasas;
- ✓ Uses for students move through the curriculum at their own pace; etc.

This shows, above others, the multi-grade school seems to promote efficiency by reducing repetition of students at the same level. Even the slow learners in this education system do not repeat the entire level. They can get chances to revise those aspects of the contents with which they have difficulty. If a student moves ahead in a lesson that needs remedial work, he will be re-integrated into the next lower (or lowest) level(s). For such reason, every advanced student is expected to possess texts that he had passed over (i.e. that he had already learned).

In the late afternoon (usually between 4-5 PM) students released to their resident villages although a few advanced students remained behind to become near for the morning session class.

However, the teacher was still in *Mezela*, on one hand, giving additional lessons for those accelerating students, reflecting his non formal assessment result about students to his assistances, and clarifying some debating issues for those who were not clear about the issue in the class. In the discussion above, the class room organization in the multi-grade system can be consider as one of the best education practice in the traditional school. However, in spite of this good practice it has also limitations to realize the real aim of the learning activities.

C. Classroom organization for non regular students

The school had also a non-regular program which was specially meant for farmers and the community member who could not attend the regular sessions. During observation, only *Qur'an tefsir* was offered for non-regular students. The non regular sessions were conducted three days a week (Tuesday, Friday and Sunday) for one hour each day [between *Megrib* (6:30PM) and *Ishai* (7:30PM) prayers]. The teaching and learning methods are the same as the regular system; the group leader (*Shuferu*)

reads, the teacher (Sheikh) gives the commentaries, translates and interprets the content.

Limitations of the classroom organization practices

Some of the drawbacks of the classroom organization and management in the multi-grade classroom are as under:

- ✓ The master teacher (sheikh) does not provide clear directions before students are released from class to work independently and in groups;
- ✓ The sheikh does not give alternative assignments that can be completed successfully with reasonable effort; it is only the next lesson (routine task) which is coincided to be a regular assignment;
- ✓ The sheikh does not circulate in the class to monitor progress and provide help.
- ✓ Students' participation, particularly at the lower level, is almost negligible. Students cannot fully challenge or question the verdict of the teacher (sheikh).
- ✓ In the classroom interaction, lecturing is the most commonly used method of teaching;
- ✓ Some of the repeated explanations in the lower level can make the higher level students boring.

4.2.2 Medium of instruction and writing alphabets

The curriculum content of *Hadith* education uses the classical Arabic as a language of instruction. Thus the learning process becomes a translation of the Arabic texts (*matn*) in to their vernacular language. The teacher directly translates the word or phrase that the student (*shufera*) reads from his text in Arabic language in to Afan-Oromo. Particularly at

the lower level, translation is word by word with brief discussions. As students become more familiar with the system, however, things naturally become easier for them. Thus the instructional medium will be changed gradually to Arabic domination as one increases his educational level. At the higher level, advanced students are engaged in learning with discussion, debate, and argument with their Sheikh referring different commentaries and reference materials with Arabic classics. Then communication with Arabic language becomes more considerable

It was observed that the school had adopted Oromo writing alphabets from Arabic letters. In the classroom instruction, while the teacher translates and explains the text, students write the translation and explanation in Oromo using Arabic letters. Some Oromo sounds that are not also found in Arabic language were adopted from Arabic letters. For example the following Oromo sounds were adopted by making some modification on Arabic letters.

Ch..... ش

Dh..... ض

From the above fact, it can be said that traditional Islamic education has great literacy value for the Oromo Muslims.

4.2.3 Cooperative learning (*Wali-qabu*) practices in the school

In the early morning students from near and far are gathered in the compound for their full time study. While higher level students were learning in the sheikh's private house, the lower level students were in the campus involved in studying the daily lesson in groups. Thus group members' usual task was either to master the content previously

presented by the teacher or to discuss the coming lesson before the next class. In the interview with a student named Abdulhafiz, he reported as:

I studied individually at home (mosque) the lesson that I learned yesterday. I discussed the concept as well as the spelling and pronunciation of the language with my tutors at night in detail. Now, we are summarizing with my group members before proceeding to the next today's lesson (Interviewed May. 17, 2010)

The lower stage students seemed to worry for spelling and pronunciation of the classical Arabic language before they reach to the Sheikh. So, they were busy not only to understand the concept but also to practice the language in their small groups. The students stated that the group interaction provides opportunity for better practice in pronouncing the Arabic language. This is similar to the suggestion of Atkins, Hailom, and Nuru (1996) that group work is the most useful form for meaningful oral communication and students perform better academically in cooperative learning programs. So, this learning strategy helps the learners to develop their communicative skill.

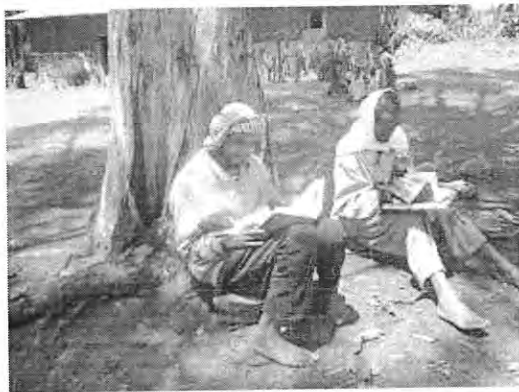
The number of groups the students form depends very much on the academic level of the students intended to undertake. Regarding the group organization, one of the advanced students Abdulkarim Usman stated as:

In lower level the group organization cannot exceed three members. Even it is better and advisable to be organized in pairs. It is believed that they can freely discuss with such limited number. When you come to the higher level it is better to be organized with more than this, even it can hold the whole class because, primarily it is suitable for better discussion. Secondly, we could use the very limited number of commentary books (kitab) together. Thirdly sometimes the Sheikh could give us problems (mes'ala) to be discussed over night in a group (Interview. May.7, 2010)

From the report of the students, unlike the lower level student, the group formation of the higher level students is preferred to be more than three or four members. Since the number of students at the lower level, for example, does not exceed three members many small groups can be formed in a given class. However, at the higher level the whole students in a given class (*maada*) can be organized in a single group. In fact, it was reported by the students the possibilities of organization of four students in a group at lower level.



Advanced students; discussing in group (photo by Muhiddin)



Lower level students; in group discussion (photo by Muhiddin)

The field observation verified that the group members were in appropriate position to participate freely in the group activities. The group formation is a long-term or permanent team group which attains the same membership for several months. As informants reported the group formation was made - up by the interest of the members. The

group formation could be on one hand, composed of different integration of students by ability (heterogeneous), on the other hand, based on similarity in abilities (homogeneous). Some students place themselves homogeneously in a group on the basis of their academic achievement. Some others also place themselves heterogeneously, without regard to their achievement (or ability) but mainly according to their friendship and interest. As a result of this, a heterogeneous and homogeneous team could be observed to be formulated in the school.

In the observation, the overall learning procedure in the school, especially at the lower level, was organized in small groups. Different units of small group (*Sherika* also called *Wahila*) in the lower stage (*kitab-tawhid* and *Buluga* students) were organized within the framework of the large group of the same class called *maada*. The group method thus calls on the learner to reorganize the class (*maada*) in to a feasible number of such smaller units. The sheikh and his students believe that there is much to be gained by arranging students to collaborate in small groups as they discuss on the lesson.

The sheikh and his students believed that there is much to be gained by arranging students to work together in small groups as they study on their activities. In the discussion on the values of group discussion, Mu'azin Ahmed stated:

It is through grouping (wali-qabu) that students (darasa) can benefit. Most of the time students cannot show improvement when they do not engage in certain forms of group learning. They have more chances to discuss with their wahila (small groups) than in the classroom (in front of the ustaz), and shy students are more likely to be free in expressing ideas and asking questions. This is why the students consider the availability of sherika or wahila as additions fact for the choice of better school (Interview, May.13, 2010)

Every member in the group was observed to help one another to achieve the individuals' learning goal (that means, to complete the assignment) by discussing and debating on the issue. This form of cooperative learning results in working together to produce a group division of responsibility among the group participants.

Each group member has dual responsibilities: to accomplish the daily lesson and to ensure that all others in their group also understood the assignment. They were all, moreover, assessed each other on what they have learned. This seems to coincide with what Aggarwal (1996:402) described, "Cooperative learning methods are likely to enhance learning outcomes if they combine group goals with individual accountability". According to Putnam (1997), in truly cooperative classroom and school communities students develop concern and caring for others. They challenge one another to do their best, and they support one another when assistance and encouragement is needed. The leadership practice in the cooperative group learning is not restricted only for some experienced learners; instead, it was observed that every member lead the groups turn by turn. This finding is, therefore, in agreement with the ideas of some scholars such as, Pounds and Garretson (1996) idea who advocates the rotation of the leadership role from member to member.

Moreover, the researcher observed that every member of the small group gets opportunity of interacting in the discussion and listen to the ideas of others. The discussion was silent and in the group activity all do not speak at once. Probably the most important ingredient for the good interaction in the groups was their mutual respect, and the best way to demonstrate respect for the other person was to listen carefully.

In the school, the patience of the advanced students (regular tutors) in following up and monitoring the lower level students seems to have contribution for the individual participation in the group. While different

groups of students were working in groups, the most advanced student usually rounded in the compound. Tahir Kedir explained the reason as follows:

We have to be near to them to solve their problems. It is also at this time that we can identify the problems and performance of the students. We can help groups or individuals who may face a problem. Sometimes, concepts and terms can be interpreted the wrong way. So, they need immediate help and correction (Interview May.06, 2010)

This indicates the advanced students are engaged in monitoring and assessing the cooperative learning activities. As a result, they help students and at the same time take immediate corrections' on the possibility of students' learning mistakes from each other. In general, members of the group in a cooperative learning spend more time interacting and there are more expressions of positive feeling for one another. The school encouraged students able to learn through small group discussion. Learners are initiated to work in group to master the content that was introduced by the tutor, discussed by the group and then summarized by the Sheik.

Limitations of cooperative learning (*Wali-qabu*) practices

Though the school has good practices, it seems to have some limitations. The main drawbacks of the practices are as follows:

- ✓ The sheikh does not prepare a plan for the cooperative learning;
- ✓ As remedial measures, the teacher (sheikh) does not clearly explain difficult topics raised in the group;
- ✓ Students are not asked to reflect the idea and views they put forward in group discussion. The sheikh cannot see everyone's participation in the group;

- ✓ The sheikh does not comment on the results of the discussion. Groups are not formally organized by the sheikh himself.

4.2.4 Tutorial Activities (*Muxaala'achu*) in the School

As it was reported by the sheikh and his students, tutorial is considered as the best means of instruction in the school. It is believed as it would yield great learning effect especially for those students at the lower level stages.

The interviewed students indicated that best school is selected on the basis of the quality of group (*wahila*) coordination and alternative tutors in the school. This indicates that students have the awareness on the tutorial system offered to meet their needs through tutorial instruction. They believe that the lecture method by the master teacher is too formal system to solve their learning problems.

During the discussion held with the present advanced students and the previous student for the question raised to explain the use of tutorial program in the school, they reported as:

Absenteeism in the school is common among students due to economic, family, health, and other problems. If students fail behind due to absenteeism, they cannot catch up their peers unless they are exhaustively helped by their teacher, every advanced (higher level) student, and their group (wahila). In addition, students cannot equally understand. Obviously, students who are slower to learn and those who become frequently absent need more individual support before and after the class, inside and outside the compound of the school (FGD, Jun.03, 2010)

This explanation indicates that tutorial activity is conducted as remedial strategy to prevent students from falling behind their peers. That is, if a

student at risk is to continue with his group, he will be diagnosed through peer and cross-age tutoring.

For the school, learners with academic (learning) difficulties require effective tutoring instruction to prevent further difficulties and to increase and support their academic development. Thus, in the school tutorial was supposed to provide additional support before and after the class within and outside the school. This seems alike to the suggestion of Elliot et al. (2000), tutorial program as a special instruction is designed to help students to catch up a desired level of academic achievement.

In the interview with two beginners, Abdulselam and Mustefa, they explained on their part about the function of tutorial from another perspective. Mustefa described the situation (from his experience) as follows:

In the school new beginners are not directly learn from the Sheikh at the beginning. This is because; it is difficult for beginners to understand the concept which is written in Arabic language. The sheikh expects that each student should read (study) the text properly. This is the way he evaluated us. Hence; beginners are assigned to one of the regular tutors from among the most advanced students to take them through the first elementary stage (called Muxaala'achu). It is after extensive reading and experience that one can properly read. Hence proper reading of the text (matn) and understanding of the concept requires the tutor's guidance beforehand. Otherwise we may face problem in reading the text before the sheik. (Interview May.27, 2008)

For the informants, extensive reading is used here as a method of organizing to study the content matter and acquire the information. The study for reading and getting assignments done is encouraged to develop working independently. The tutorial, therefore, can offer considerable scope for conducting such reading sessions to help students prepare

themselves for assessment or to acquire them with new information in to the course.



Tutoring beginners (photo by Muhiddin)

The teacher expected that the daily lesson needs to be effectively presented by the learner. Because the coming (the next) lesson is commonly understood by the teacher and the students, it is an "*assignment*" that have to be properly discussed and studied by the students beforehand. Hence, tutors should prepare students in advance, by providing guidance and feedback during the group discussion.

The tutor would also help students to acquire clear ideas about the lesson to be accomplished. The sheikh only summarizes the main ideas that help students. The Sheikh gives more attention for assessing and giving feedback and remedy, rather than detailed explanation.



Early morning (before the daily lesson) tutorial (photo by Muhiddin)

As reported by the master teacher, advanced students who want to revise the lower level courses can be assigned as group leader (*shufera*) of a given course for his junior students (*darasas*). The regular tutor of *Buluga* course Raabi stated about tutorial:

Everybody is expected to be a tutor, particularly to the lower level darasas. He should be an active participant in the tutorial activities for that he will be a teacher in the future. He would not be suffering later in his life. Thus, it is through the practice of tutor that everybody has to be ready to answer questions that come from students as well as the society (Interview, May.13, 2010)

From the above explanation, this is the first stage that the darasa is to hold the responsibility for teaching through the tutorial practice.

The involvement of the learner in the tutorial activity is considered as he holds the responsibility for the activities of the school system and he becomes the integral part of the procedure. In the group discussion, certain norms that are related to willingness remain reasonable, and respect the opinion of peers and the tutors are observed among the members of the group.

In the field visit, it was frequently observed that students in a group helped one another with discussion as they face difficulty. In the homogeneous group it was observed that the fastest students were guiding and leading the peer group in tutoring. In the mixed ability group, moreover, tutoring of slower students by faster students appears to work nearly the same as the senior students or regular tutors.

Limitations of tutorial practices

The above explanations clearly show that the tutors' role in the school is to attempt every possible ways to help students with learning difficulties.

However, the tutorial system was observed with the following limitations and drawbacks.

- ✓ Tutors do not have structured and carefully prescribed lesson format;
- ✓ The sheikh does not select tutoring content carefully and ensures that students master it;
- ✓ Frequency and duration of tutoring lessons are not given due consideration;
- ✓ Systematic training, which is essential to sustain an effective tutoring program, is not provided;
- ✓ Organized and active supervision is not conducted by the sheikh himself.

4.2.5 Assessment Technique in the School

The master teacher of the school described the situation how he assesses his students for promotion from one stage to the next as follows:

I can easily differentiate the level of understanding and the ability (performance) of my student from the questions he raises or from the statement he reads. His tutor and other advanced students are always following and evaluating him. Information can be easily gained from the advanced students (tutors) and group members (peers). Sometimes even questions (oral) can be raised to find out what the student knows and understands in the learning process. We do not give challenging questions and problems for a purpose of examination. It is only to get information and help those students who are falling behind in learning. The darasas (students) here came with full interest and hence even he can evaluate himself (Interview, May. 5, 2010).

The idea of the Sheikh indicates, in the school there is no paper-pencil type formal evaluation. The teacher does not use the summative assessment results to provide a summary that evaluates the quality of student's work, with the goal of marking. The main emphasis here is that the evaluation takes place as often as possible and without the need to wait until the end of the term or year. To cater the aspects of learning, the master teacher (sheikh) and his assistant students can use observation and oral-question tools.

The sheikh basically requires students' verbal response as an indication of their ability or performance for the purpose or promotion and recognition. The oral response could be directly and indirectly observable by the teacher and the tutors. Each student is expected to demonstrate his knowledge by explaining and interpreting individually and with his group members.

The teacher, thus, uses his own informal assessing criteria through observation to determine the learner's performance. The performance of the students can be evaluated through reading, reporting, and reasoning. Through this technique he could have a better understanding of how students are progressing. It seems that the teacher conducts continuous assessment to find out what the students know, understand, and can do. The student (*darasa*) is also being constantly assessed by his teacher, the tutors and his peers for other qualities (*adab*) such as honesty, credibility, tolerance, patience and other personal integrities.

Thus, continuous assessment is done on an on-going basis instead of at the end of the term or year so that he can find which students are not learning and help them to learn. Hence, the assessment helps the sheikh to understand the learning needs of the students.

From the Sheikh's explanation it could be noted that, unlike the secular education, the main objectives of assessment in the school is not to judge but to provide the student with maximum opportunities to learn from time to time. The Sheikh used to gain information to monitor and guide teaching and learning while learning is still in progress. The assessment also helps the student to get immediate feedback about his learning successes or difficulties in a timely manner. If the teacher finds that a student is having a problem, he formulates remedial action through extensive one-to-one tutorial or group discussion with his tutor (or tutors).

In the interview with one of the advanced students, Mohammed Amin Safi about assessment was as follows:

Everybody is evaluator at one time and being evaluated the other time. First of all, thinking what will face tomorrow in the society leads everybody to evaluate himself. Second, others such as the sheikh, the tutors, the peers and juniors are all always evaluators directly and indirectly. Everybody will tell his friend what he observes or feels (Interview May.9, 2008)

The idea of Mohammed Amin indicates that feedback is not given by the teacher only. Students are also encouraged to evaluate their own work and help to evaluate the work of their peers. In relation to this Airsan (1997) stated that assessment that focuses on pupils personal qualities is likely to come from classmates. The tutors are kin to give constructive feedback after continuous follow up. These give students more responsibility for their own learning and so they are not totally dependent on the teacher as the only resource in the school.

The assessment conducted in the school does not compare an individual to someone else. It only compares the student's progress to a learning outcome based on the information obtained in his previous performance.

Regarding this, Tahir Kedir, explained in the focus group discussion as follows:

The function of the evaluation process in the school is not similar to that of the secular schools. It is not to compare and rank students. It is to find out how students are learning, at the same time to inform the students about their progress and guide their learning (FGD, Jun.03, 2010)

Tahir's description regarding the assessment technique seems to coincide with criterion referenced assessment, but not with the norm-referenced assessment. As defined by Taylor (2003), a norm-referenced is designed so that the terms can discriminate among students, where as criterion-referenced is designed so that the assessment will describe student performance on specific learning tasks. Taylor further explained that criterion referenced assessments are particularly helpful in determining what to teach and for this reason they are frequently used to determine appropriate goals and objectives for a student.

The Sheikh evaluates his students rarely through homework and assignment to help them improve their way of reasoning and understanding. This is usually conducted, of course, for the higher level students to refer different additional materials and discuss in their group. For the lower level on the other hand, the coming lesson is commonly understood to be an assignment for the learners. The task given for assignment attempts primarily to give students practice and feedback. Observing the way students go about solving the assigned work is followed by immediate feedback. The Sheikh performs more frequent and timely feedback about the students' progress for the purposes of evaluating how well they have learned, and in making decisions.

In general, the assessment technique in the school is a formative continuous assessment undergone with the involvement of the students, tutors and the teacher. The students need to be involved both as assessors of their own learning and as resources to other students.

Limitations of assessment practices

In the above discussions, it is noted that the school does not depend on written tests. It focuses to assess overall performances of students and the learning process. Of course, this is true to assess many behavioral outcomes that require informal assessment. However, it is clear that the assessment technique conducted in the school has drawbacks.

- ✓ A student cannot get certificate for his academic performance.
- ✓ It does not acquaint parents with their children's performance
- ✓ There is no collected assessment information about learners' academic progress
- ✓ Learning outcomes that belong to the set of cognitive domain are not measured with the help of paper-and-pencil tests.

4.2.6 Teaching Gifted (*Fatina*) Students Practices

The way to assess the students' ability in the school is dominantly with observational assessment. The school teacher and his assistants (advanced students or tutors) continuously assess the background knowledge, ability, appropriateness of the education provided for the student, through informal discussion and observation. The sheikh interacting with the students can easily identify their interest, need, ability and problems. As reported by the sheikh in the informal discussion the first step he does is to identify the background, ability and interest of his students. The school recognizes that learners are different from each other to some extent.

Regarding consideration of the individual differences among students in the school, one of the assistant teachers, Tahir Kedir, reported as:

All students do not have similar achievement in their study. Sometimes even a wide gap can be observed between students of the same level. Hence they could not learn at the same rate (speed); some learn slowly, some in an intermediate way, and some still learn very fast (Interview, May. 6, 2010).

This indicates that at the first place the advanced students realize the individual difference among students in the same level. From the explanation, the difference among children may be slight, moderate or extreme in their achievement. It seems that the school considered the individual differences and identifies the desire of the learners. For teaching to be effective must cater to individual difference of children (Aggarwal, 1996).

Moreover the school seems, to identify and list variables that may have impacts on difference in learning among the student. In recognizing some dimensions in the school environment that have impact on the students' difference; again interview was conducted with the assistant sheikh and tutors, Tahir Kedir. He stated:

There are many things that cause difference among students (darasa) in the same class (maada). The difference in physical maturity among students can be one cause for their difference also difficult to survive the hardship in the school for those younger students who are far away from their family. It is usually observed that children with better background in the primary level (Qur'anic school) also better succeed in this school. Some students learn introductory Hadith course at their primary level. Then this can help them in understanding the learning activities in the school. There are also hard working students who like to study day and night, and go even beyond the daily expected assignment. Above all, there are special fast (fatina) students in the school (Interview, May.6, 2010)

Besides to the explanation of Tahir Kedir, one of the gifted students in the school, Raabi Nazir, stated his perception as follows:

For me, differences among student came from difference in hard working and internal interest. Some students may be different by the length of time for which they can pay attention continuously to their study. It is the effort that results more success for some students, on the other hand, it is the internal interest (need) of the learner that is different among the students (Interview, May.13, 2010)

Another advanced student, Mohammed Amin Tola, also continued on the issue as follows:

Most of the time students differ from their friends because of absenteeism. Long time absenteeism happens due to health or family problem. Some parents may object to send their children regularly to the school (Interview, May.14, 2010)

The description of the advanced students in the school shows their awareness of the causes of individual differences among the students. It also seems to show their awareness about differences in readiness, curiosity to learn, academic performance ability, social behavior, physical maturity, fitness, and health status of students. It is this understanding that supposes the teacher and the tutors to organize the instruction methods to meet the needs of children who vary in ability/performance in a class. In this regard, Doll (1996) explained that, to take all significant information about individual learners in to account, teachers need a comprehensive scheme for attending to individual differences. Teachers use the information on what and how to teach to differentiate various components of the curriculum so that they can take in to account student characteristics, for instance differences in abilities, interests and learning style (UNESCO, 2004).

In discussion with the master teacher, concerning the treatment conducted for the individual differences among students, particularly for very fast (gifted) student, he described as follows:

When such unique fast students faced, first, I often assign him as a head (shufer) of his class (maada) for he can enhance the condition of his group atmosphere. In deed his group would also choose and assign him as their leader and tutor. Second, I can provide him a unique problem (mes'ala), which is not present in his text (Interview, May. 5, 2010)

This seems that the master teacher attempts to challenge gifted students by providing extra responsibility and make them to perform extra reading and assignments. Additional activities in which the student engages would be provided in order to make sense of or to master the content.

This show, new learning experience is designed to remedy or to enrich the students learning experiences. It is the continuous assessment the Sheikh conducted that helps him to identify students that need enrichment. Based on this knowledge, differentiated instruction seems to be applied as a process to approach teaching and learning for students of different abilities in the same class (level). Reflecting this fact, Aggarwal (1994) asserts that enrichment insists on giving the gifted child an opportunity to go deeper or to range more widely than the average child in his intellectual, social and artistic experience.

During the interview with the master teacher about another option that the school tailors the instruction to individual student's need, he explained his experience as follows:

Another way is, after we (teacher and tutors) continuously follow up; a fast (fatin) student can be made to move fast at his pace through the content. As a result, he can complete the course in a short time or at an early age. (Interview, May. 5, 2010)

As the master teacher and the most advanced student expressed, the curriculum seems to permit some modification in the regular class program that permits gifted students to complete the program in less time or at an early age than usual. The school, in one way or the other, permits acceleration, that is, the learner proceeds at his own pace when he works (completes) his educational program through the curriculum. As stated by Santrock (2001), acceleration program moves children through the curriculum as quickly as they are able to progress. Acceleration offers opportunity for a gifted pupil to move at a pace appropriate to his ability and maturity and to complete an educational program in less than the ordinary duration.

Besides to the explanation of the master teacher about the enrichment and acceleration, one of his assistance Tahir Kedir, indicated ability grouping as a means of treatment of individual difference among students in the school as:

Sometimes students with similar intent (purpose), interest, maturity, giftedness and other can be organized in a group to proceed faster than their peers. This and other forms of groups in the school are based on the interest of the learners (Interview. May.6, 2010)

This shows that there is a practice of placing students in to groups and classes based on their ability, interests, talents or previous achievement through the same content but with different methodology. It seems although essential curricula goals may be similar for all students, methodologies employed in a classroom must be varied to suit individual needs. In the discussion with the focus group, the former students stated another method of acceleration as follows:

Not more than three interested students are to form a group to carry out the text (matn) through group discussion. Each member receives a part from the text then after exhaustive study, everybody will be responsible for teaching his area. (FGD, Jun. 03, 2010)

The school allows the set up of a small group that combines on individual effort and a cooperative structure in which members of the group must share their work in order to carry out assignments. On one hand, as stated by Schunk and Zimmerman (1998), each student in the group is presumed to benefit from participating in the group process.

Because, it is through engaging in this group verbal discussion of tasks that comprehension strategies shift from being teacher dependent to being student initiated. On the other hand, through this strategy the students can able to complete the curriculum within a short time than the average students.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusions

Different educational practices such as learning in a multi- grade classroom, continuous assessment, cooperative learning, enrichment, tutorial activities for disadvantaged students, etc. are common known school experiences and innovations now a days. They have been implemented in almost all the modern schools of the country. On implementing these invocative ideas, however, resistance were evoked and created among stokeholds, particularly among teachers. The cause of the resistance to these innovations and changes might be due to the fear of the unknown. However from this research work, it seems that these practices are not as such new in the traditional schools of Ethiopia.

Hence, from this point of view, the general findings of the study indicate on one hand, to expect other useful educational practices which may be found if wide and deep investigative researches would be conducted. On the other hand it seems to have many practical implications in the development of modern education.

In general from the study it can be concluded that in spite of their draw backs traditional schools can have good practices to be adapted (if not adopted). Hence, Modernity should going in for the reveal and enhancement of the traditional educations.

Based on the findings, therefore, the researcher has concluded the main points as follows.

- Multi- grade instruction is an actual rooted practice in the school. It can be considered as an important organizational form in providing religious educational services in the rural community.
- The Multi – grade system provides learning which is not interrupted by rigged time scheduled and ringing bell. The duration of time for every level (*maada*) depends on the students-teacher interaction and understanding of the learner.
- The school as a multi – grade school seems efficient in using to move students through the curriculum by acquiring the required competency. Slow learner in the multi – grade classroom system of the school do not repeat the entire levels, but to revise those concepts of the topics or contents with which they have difficulty with the next levels. A student that may fall behind the other will be fully re-integrated in the next lower (even in the lowest) level.
- In the school, instructional procedures are usually conducted through forms of group works (or cooperative learning). Their usual tasks are either collectively presented by the sheikh (or tutors) or to study the regular assignments (the coming lesson). Group formation in the school is organized in to a feasible number of small units. The lower level stages is usually organized with a number of three or four, or even pairs, while the higher level requires large gropes. Each group is observed studying together sitting around in circle facing each other in a ground and everyone gets a chance to participate in the discussion.
- The group formation in the school depends, primarily on the interest of students, next on the teacher or the tutors. Tutors usually, follow (observe) individual participation in the group discussion.

- A very interesting aspect of the school is the emphasis placed up on the tutorial instruction in the school, involvement of every darasa in tutorial activities is considered to be a major component of the school pedagogy. Each of them, one way or the other, is a tutor or a tutee. It is not only the teacher's (sheikh's) responsibly to teach students in the school. The foremost task of the master teacher (sheikh), particularly at the lower level, is to summarize and assess the core ideas students discussed, individuals studied and tutors instructed.
- Objective of tutorial practices in the school is to provide intensive supportive teaching geared to the learning difficulties of darasas so that they can work and progress at a rate appropriate with their abilities and peers. It is assumed that there are a lot of students (darasas) in the school who need support due to many reasons. The Sheikh and his assistants, thus, are expected to support these students with learning difficulties through tutorial activities.
- The school has the peer- tutoring (Sherika or Wahila) school culture because it is supposed that students are capable of teaching others through peer tutoring. The purpose of peer tutoring is supposed to initiate interaction, involvement and discussion among students. The tutors acquire a sense of responsibility in supporting others.
- All students at the higher level are expected to practice the teaching process through tutorial activities. However, better tutors are usually selected by the tutees themselves: seniority (experience) and commitment to support among the criteria. It is better that they are significantly older or otherwise advanced beyond the academic level of the tutees.

- In the school unlike the common way of evaluation in the modern schools, the teacher (Sheikh) does not teach for a whole year and then give one or two or three hours examination to determine whether students know the subject or not. It employs an assessment (formative) that occurs during a lesson on daily basis. The assessment is an ongoing and every day activity which is installed to instruction. It is used not for pass and fail but to provide corrective action so as to enhance learning.
- Assessment in the school is done in a relaxed way through direct and indirect observation while darasas are studying individually, discussing in groups, tutoring others, answering questions, etc. it is through this frequently gathered information that decision is made about the learners. Of course, evidences from modern schools also proved corrective actions that would help improving ongoing process of instruction and take remedial action so as to enhance learning.
- Assessment in the school takes place without paper- pencil tests. It does not required the development of complicated quantitative tests and survey instruments;
- The teacher is continuously aware of the students' level in his progress through the content units (not through grades). Information is obtained about students' performance in terms of their previous performances (criterion- referenced) rather than in relation to the performances of others (norm- referenced.)
- The school seems to provide learning activities and practical experiences to students according to their abilities and needs. It considers that each learner is different in terms of learner ability, academic standards, academic performance and each has his own

style of learning. Hence, the sheikh supports pupils who lag behind and those who are gifted, and talented.

- In the school, the content of a given level is divided into a number of topics which are then allotted to different students (not more than three) thus each section is mainly the concern and responsibility of each student to study, exercise and then to teach his share. Accordingly, the group members (or the group itself) can accelerate at least three times than the average students.

5.2 Implications

The purpose of the study was to assess the educational practices in the traditional Islamic schools and their implication to modern education. From the research findings there are certain elements of the education system of the school that could not be neglected or overlooked. Instead there are some lessons to be drawn (learned) from the practices of the traditional schools.

Multi-grade classroom for coverage of Basics Education

The multi-grade system is being used to give educational services under the direction of one teacher (sheikh) to one-room learning environment. It also provides its educational service with scarce inputs of money and manpower.

This implies, using multi-grade system, one teacher may offer a first cycle (1-4 grade) in modern schools with one classroom. Thus, this can help to create opportunities for children especially for girls by expanding schools close to home. In line with this, Thomas and Show (1992) stated that recently the incidence of such multi-grade school is rising in most European countries. Hence, Multi-grade schools may serve as a means

of addressing problems of expanding educational access in rural areas with scarce resources. That is, it may be used in the coverage of basic education services to the remotest areas or more disadvantaged sections of the population.

Implications of the cooperative learning practices to the modern education

In the present day modern schools, unequal contribution of group members in a group assignment is the common observable problem. Some students who do not contribute equal effort with others share equal marks with the others.

The cooperative learning method in the school directly involves the learner, which becomes an integral part of the process. The strategy of the group formation centers on individual learner's participation with small group or pair activity. The group discussion as a valuable education method thus provides opportunity for participation. Perhaps the small number in the groups enables all members to participate in the discussion. Of course Putnam (1997) approve that students may deliberately refuse to participate when groups are very large. Aggarwal (1996) also explain that students have more chances to talk in pairs for small groups than in whole-class activities, and shy students are more likely to feel comfortable expressing ideas in the more intimate settings. The school has likely to believe on that there is much to be gained by arranging students to collaborate in pairs or small groups as they work assignments.

It implies that setting desirable group interaction environment provides a chance for students to develop education. Learning can easily be

achieved more readily in groups of three to four members than in groups more than this. Thus curriculum planners are expected to select learning experiences that help individuals to work in smaller groups. Better social values, sense of responsibility, group interests and actions develop when students are made to work in groups than individually.

The teaching – learning process in the school is started by the regular assignment (the next lesson) posed by the sheikh to be worked mainly in groups (sharikas or wahilas). To accomplish the daily lesson it is expected to study the topic individually before every one is engaged in the cooperative learning activity. This indicates, first the learner accepts (considers) the regular assignment as his or his group's permanent task. Second it can be used to provide opportunities to the students develop habits of reading and to work independently and thereby to develop in them self-reliance and initiative. Every group member also knows he is accountable for accomplishing the learning activities (assignments) and doing his share in the group discussion. In line with this, Aggarawal (1996) stated that cooperative learning methods are most likely to enhance learning outcomes if they combine group goal with individual accountability. Thus in modern schools, teachers are required to give great attention to provide group activities which will result in great accountability and responsibility among members of the groups.

When students in the school are discussing in pairs or groups, the most advanced students move in the compound to provide any assistance and to assess the progress of individuals and groups. This has positive implication to the modern education teacher that he /she should be active and involved in the classroom activities during group work, going around and making sure that all students are actively involved.

Implication of the tutorial practices to modern education

Tutorial program is common at all levels of schooling in the traditional school from the beginner to the most senior students. Regular tutors (Advanced students) often provide corrective feedback and remediation in a one-to-one relation.

The school promotes different remedial tutorial for different individuals or groups mainly through the advanced students. This has a positive implication as an essential quality to the modern schools. Educational scholars suggested cultivating this quality in modern schools. For instance, Good and Brophy (1997) suggested that tutoring would be the optimal means of achieving most academic objective. One way to supplement instruction is to arrange students to be tutored by someone other than the teacher.

Tutors in the school seem clearly understood their roles and responsibilities, as well as the purpose, nature, and benefits of tutorial activities. This implies that the modern schools should formally recognize the helping relations among students. Storm (1979:21) suggested, "In some ways, children may be better candidates for teaching than we suppose". Thus, the modern school teacher can employ group discussion as a sub- method within the tutorial activities.

Implication of assessment and promotion techniques in the school

From the observation above, all the good functions of the teacher's and tutor's continuous assessment approach, like recalling informing from the past lesson through oral question pair and group discussion behaviour were observed in maximizing the learning activities. But some teachers in modern schools miss this part of testing because students

who were less likely to participate were not encouraged to participate in the classroom interaction.

Assessment conducted in the school to measure students' progress could, thus, have positive implication to modern education system. The informal observation of students' behaviour could be a useful procedure for collecting assessment data in the secular education system. Assessment can be conducted through informal means of continuous assessment. The informal observation method of continuous assessment can be used by teachers to teach better and to help learners to learn better. This might equally determine how well each learner has mastered the basic learning competencies described in the syllabus. In line with this Filer (1993) cited in Marsh (1997) explains that informal observations of natural situations are especially valuable for gaining information about students' interaction. The less obvious it is to students that they are being assessed; the more natural will be their behaviour.

The finding implies, if students in secular schools are given opportunities to evaluate their class mates' tasks, they can give their own ideas and opinions in evolution. This can contribute to improve assessment practices of teachers. In supporting this idea, kyrincov (1998) noticed that cooperative activities are very important in assessment method because they enable pupils to obtain greater insight in to the conduct of learning through observing the performance of their peers and sharing procedures and strategies.

A further interesting aspect of the school is its practice with regard to promotion of students. The school shows that it is through continuous informal assessment that the teacher and his students gather and interpret specific pieces of information about students' learning an achievement. The learning outcome can be monitored and remedial intervention can be given when short comings are observed. The

assessment result tells them to improve, not simply giving them a mark. If he discovers from his assessment that a student does not understand the concept, he will use this information to modify his teaching through one to one based tutorial.

The modern classrooms teacher could get lesson to learn from this technique of assessment. Although this method is subjective, their use frequently requires more time and effort than the typical testing procedures; they provide the best means available for evaluating a variety of important behaviours.

Self-reports made by the learners themselves about one's peer or oneself that could be a valuable source of information in many area of learning and development in the modern system.

The assessment in the school is based on the content of the curriculum in which the emphasis is in evaluating curricular based knowledge instead of evaluating for labelling purposes. Here learning is assumed to be personal and relative to the individual learner, with regard to what is to be learned as well as when it is learned. This seems similar to what Taylor (2003) called it curriculum-based assessment.

It is of course, too late after the traditional Islamic schools, during the past 15 years, the curriculum based assessment has received widespread attention in the area of modern education, for Taylor (2003) the interest of curriculum-based assessment is to develop as means of coping with low-achieving learners. It involves the measurement of the level of student in terms of the expected curricular outcomes of the school (Tucker, 1985 cited in Taylor, 2003).

Lesson to be learned from the acceleration and Enrichment Activities of the school

In every School (traditional or modern) all students do not learn with the same speed and achievement. Some lag behind and need remedial action. In the school the sheikh and his assistants (advanced students) play important roles in identifying student because they are in the best position to observe and assess the performance of student in the school and outside the school. Students with different problems, interest and abilities are, therefore, easily identified in the full-time self contained teaching activities through continues observations.

Modern School teachers could get lessons from the traditional schools that identification of individual difference is the first step in helping students with different learning abilities, and it must be done early to prevent the damaging effects on the learner. The classroom teachers have to understand the problems, interests and abilities of each student incorporated with the school curriculum. The teacher should also inspire the learners to fulfill his/her potentialities and as a result they can differentiate several classroom elements based on student readiness, interest or leaning profiles.

I. Enrichment practices in the school

To facilitate opportunities for talented students the school encourages additional and unique problems (mes'ala) relevant to the student or group of students. This is designed to challenge gifted students by assigning extra reading assignments and independent study to make them participate in related extracurricular activities.

Thus from the enrichment practice of the school, a lesson can be learned that the nature of contents to be treated and approach of teaching methodology employed in the process of teaching-learning should be

appropriate for individual difference among students. As there are individual learner differences in a regular class, the teacher should have to arrange extra teaching for any particular groups of students or individuals for improving their difficulties.

In a similar way, gifted and talented students in modern schools can be encouraged to study a variety of books and reference materials. Moreover provisions for a sufficient variety of activities on the co-curricular side should also exist in the school so that the student may develop various social and moral qualities.

II. Acceleration practices in the school

The school permits gifted (or interested) students to complete the program in less time or at an earlier age than the (average students). The gifted and talented student can be catered by providing enrichment opportunities through accelerative practices. The pupil works along his own mental level and at his own capacity.

III. Ability Grouping practices in the school

In the school, based on the interest of the students, there are two divisions of grouping: heterogeneous (students of different abilities) and homogenous (students of the same abilities) groups. The gifted and talented students could be placed together on the basis of their interest and ability to match instruction on the need of their group. That is they are students of high ability kept together in a separate section on the basis of their interests. Indeed, some times, the tutors could group students who are at the same level of progress together. In this organization, instruction directed toward an individual student may likely benefit other member of the group.

Afterward, different learning experiences are followed in this differently organized section. Students in the homogenous group learn very rapidly (Accelerate) or need to be provided more opportunities to go deeper than the average students. These are students of the upper end of the ability continuum who need additional help to realize their full potential. These students are called *fatina* (laterally to mean fast but equivalent to say gifted or talented.)

This practice of curriculum differentiation for different students in school seems to have positive induction to the modern schools. A topic can be divided in to a number of portions then arranged to different groups so as to present each groups its share to the class. These might, above all, result in the practice of holding responsibility among students.

This indicates that teachers in modern schools can design individualized program with intensive support to help students consolidate basic knowledge in different subject, strengthen their confidence and enhance the effectiveness of learning. Thus, throughout the teaching process, teachers should help gifted and talented students develop positive attitude toward learning. The success of students with different abilities often requires modified instruction and support from the teachers.

If scaled-up and adapted, the differentiation process in the school seems a common sense approach to addressing the needs of a wide variety of learners, promoting democratic right of individuals and equity and focusing on best practices instruction in mixed ability classrooms. By attaining self-direction, exceptional pupils, not only the gifted but also those for whom teachers previously help out little hope, can deepen their intents and increases their abilities to an unusual extent.

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Appendix A

Definition of Technical Terms Used in the School

<i>Amira</i>	- (lit. Leader) students leader who assists the teacher in administrative matters of the School
<i>Deresu</i>	- student
<i>Fanni</i>	- academic discipline
<i>Fasl</i>	- partition in text usually designed for daily lesson
<i>Ijaza</i>	- license or permission for teaching
<i>Imama</i>	- leader of the mosque
<i>Irra- naqu</i>	- translating and clarifying the text by friends
<i>Ilmi</i>	- knowledge
<i>Hadith</i>	- sayings and deeds of Prophet Mohammed
<i>Haraka</i>	- vowel
<i>Harfi</i>	- alphabet
<i>Halqa / mejlis</i>	- a place or school where traditional Islamic education is offered
<i>Hifz-al- Qura'an</i>	- reading and reciting of Qur'an
<i>Mu'azina</i>	- a man who calls for prayer in mosque
<i>Juz</i>	- (<i>pl. ajza</i>) sections
<i>Kitaaba</i>	- book
<i>Khalwa</i>	- a rest home, private service
<i>Khitmia</i>	- graduation
<i>Maada</i>	- students learning in the same level (class)

<i>Mektaba</i>	- a small hut used as library
<i>Merkeza</i>	- a place where Qur'an reading and reciting take place
<i>Mezella</i>	- a big hall used for managing large number of students
<i>Musafiar</i>	- a person out of his village
<i>Muttala'achu</i>	- learning from the tutor
<i>Muttala</i>	- tutorial
<i>Nafaqa</i>	- provider or patron of Muslim clerk and their students
<i>Nahwi</i>	- grammar
<i>Qur'an</i>	- the holly book of Islam
<i>Sarf</i>	- morphology
<i>Sheikh</i>	- (lit. scholar), clerk, nickname for the teacher and students
<i>Safar</i>	- a place far away from ones village
<i>Sura</i>	- chapter
<i>Shuferu</i>	- (lit. Driver) group leader
<i>Shurta</i>	- (lit. policeman) a student who is represented to keep order in the school
<i>Tawhid</i>	- belief in oneness of Allah
<i>Ustaz</i>	- teacher (the sheikh)
<i>Wahila (sharika)</i>	- students in the same group
<i>Wali-qabu</i>	- cooperative learning
<i>Zawiya</i>	- a small hut that is used as dormitory in the school

Appendix B

List of traditional schools visited in the first round (from March 16-April 25, 2010)

Name of the school	Subject (specialization) learned in the school	Name of the master teacher	Location	
			Woreda	Village or Town
Mejlisa sheikh Ahmed Buluga	Hadith	Sheik Ahmed hassen	Robe	Robe town
Mejlisa sheik Mohammed Reshad	Nahwi	Sheik mohammed reshid	Robe	Robe Town
Merkezas in selefia school	Hifz-al-Qur'an	Sheik Kamil Awel and Sheik Abdulkadir Ahmed	Robe	Robe town
Halqa Homa	Hadith	Sheik Safi	Dinsho	Homa
Halqa Hamida	Hadith	Sheik Abduljawad Yesuf	Sinana	Hamida
Halqa Sanbitu	Hadith	Sheik Awol	Sinana	Sanbitu
Sanbitu Qur'anic School	Arabic language and Reading Quran	Sheikh Temama	Sinana	Sanbitu

Appendix C

Photographic presentation of some activities of the researcher during the study time



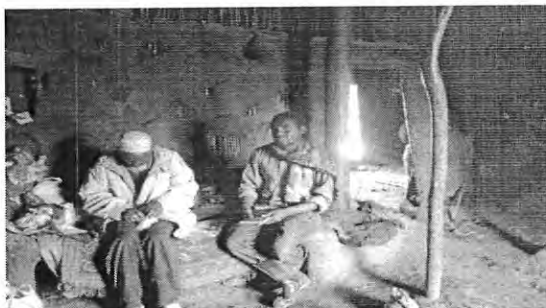
Discussion with students



Living with students



Hardship of the field trip



Discussion with community member



Appendix D

List of students involved in interview

No.	Name	Age	Date of interview	Educational level	Position	Book learned
1	Tahir kedir	28	May 6,2010	Higher level	Assisntent of the Master teacher	Ibnu-maja
2	AbdulKerim Usman	23	May 7,2010	Higher level	Second Amir	Abi Dawud
3	MohammedAmin Safi	27	May 9,2010	Higher level	student	Sahih Bukhri
4	MohammedHusien Aman	25	May 12,2010	Higher level	First Amir	Tafsir
5	Mu'azin Ahmed	26	May 13,2010	Higher level	Shurta	Tafsir
6	Raabi Naziir	25	May 13,2010	Higher level	Regular tutor	Abi Dawud
7	MohammedAmin Tola	25	May 14,2010	Higher level	Regular tutor	Sahih Bukhri
8	Abdulhafiz Hassen	20	May 17,2010	lower level	Student	Buluga
9	AbdulSelam Mohammed		May 27,2010	lower level	Student	Tejrida
10	Mustefa Bariso	19	May 27,2010	lower level	Student	Tejrida
11	AbdulRazaq Godana	15	May 28,2010	lower level	Student	Arba'ina
12	Habib Hajji	18	May 28,2010	lower level	Student	Kitabu Tawhid

Appendix E

Lists of informants involved in the focus group discussion (FGD) (Date: June 03, 2010)

No	Name	Age	Educational level	Remark
1	Temama Abdella	27	Buluga	Previous student, and Mu'azin of the mosque in school
2	Ahmed abdulra'uf	29	Abu Dawud	Previous student
3	MohammedHusien Aman	25	Tafsir	Present student
4	Tahir kedir	28	Ibnu-maja	Present student
5	AbdulKerim Usman	23	Abu Dawud	Present student
6	Mu'azin Ahmed	26	Tafsir	Present student

Appendix F

The list and sequence of books that the school was offering during observation

Phases	Main part of the study	Sub parts of the study	Years or months taken
1 st phase	Matn (text)	Kitaabu-Tawhid Bulugh Riyadh Tajriida	1 year 3 years 1-2 years 1-2 years
2 nd phase	Serf (morphology)	Eizy Merah	1-3 years 1-3 years
3 rd phase	Sherh (commentary of text)	Tefsira Sahih- muslim Sahih- bukhari Abi-Dawud Ebnu-Maja Nasa'i Muatai Tirmiziyyi San'ani	2-3 years 2-3 years 2-3 years 2-3 years 1 years 2 years 1 years 1-2 years 2-3 years

Appendix G

Guiding Interview Questions


1. Would you tell me about yourself please? (Your age, where you come from, your educational level, your duration in the school)
2. All students with different educational level are observed to be organized in one-building class. What is the function of organizing all students in one-building class? Who would get advantage from this kind of classroom organization? (The sheik, the students and the tutors),
3. Instructional procedures in the school are observed to be conducted through forms of group works. On what criteria are the members in a group organized? Who is responsible in organizing the group? How many students are preferably organized in a group (wahila)? Why?
4. Do you believe that tutorial system conducted in the school offered to meet your educational need? What is the objective of the tutorial practice in the school? Do tutors know their role and responsibilities?
5. How can a teacher make a decision about the ability performance of the learner? How can students promote from one educational level to the next? How is assessment and promotion done in the school? Who is/ are best evaluator /s in the school?
6. Does the school provide learning activities according to students' abilities and needs? How does the sheik provide learning support to those pupils who lag behind as well as those who are gifted? How does students who need enrichment and wants to accelerate treated?

The thesis, my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged

Muhiddin M. 

Researchers' Name

Signature

Arma Lemmo 

Advisors' Name

Signature