

The Power of Indigenous Oral Narratives to Enhance Girls Empowerment through Contextualization of Literacy Practices¹

By
Tadesse Jaleta Jirata and Atsede Amsalu

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Abstract

Among the agro-pastoral communities in Ethiopia, primary education is characterized by a low literacy rate of children and poor participation of girls. Similarly, the divide between the indigenous ways of life and the formal educational practices has primarily affected girls. This article describes how the use of indigenous oral narratives can contextualize literacy education and empower schoolgirls. With its focus on a teacher education program and two primary school in the Guji Zone (in Oromia Regional State), the article presents how the indigenous oral narratives can be used as resources to interconnect literacy practices and girls' empowerment in the formal educational activities. A qualitative and participatory approach was used, and data were collected through four methods including, in-depth interviews, document analysis, focus group discussions and school classroom observations. Teacher educators from Bule Hora College of Teacher Education, trainee teachers from the college, teachers from two primary schools in Bule Hora town, and girls from the primary schools were sources of data discussed in this article. Based on the data collected through these methods, the article discusses how indigenous oral narratives can be used for contextualization of literacy education and enhancement of girls' motivation to participate in the learning activities and social practices. The analysis also elucidates how teacher education programs in Ethiopia can play the role of connecting indigenous oral narratives to literacy practices and enable pre-service trainee teachers and in-service primary school teachers to empower girls through contextualized literacy activities. The research concludes that indigenous oral narratives are effective tools for empowerment of girls and enhancement of literacy education; therefore, should be integrated in the curriculums and pedagogic practices of teacher education programs and primary school education.

1. Background

Studies show that literacy development and its use as a tool to reinforce positive changes in Sub-Saharan Africa have severe limitations (Pence and Shafer, 2006; Tigistu, 2013). The interconnection between the indigenous oral literacy practices (storytelling, riddling, and singing) and girls' and boys' quality of learning in the formal education has not been well conceptualized (Jirata, 2021). As a result, girls and boys, mainly those who live in rural and agro-pastoral societies do not have access to contextualized literacy practices connected to their formal education.

Concerning the child literacy situation in Ethiopia, the Early Reading Assessment conducted by USAID in 2018 shows that only 32 % of children in primary schools meet the minimum reading standard for their respective grades. The USAID study asserts that "A high percentage of Ethiopian students cannot read enough words within one minute to develop an understanding of what they read" (, 2018: XI). According to Jirata (2021), the tribulations in the quality of education in general and the crisis in early literacy, in particular, could be attributed to the divide between indigenous knowledge and formal education in pre-primary, primary and secondary schools. As indicated in Jirata (2017; 2018), children living among relatively indigenous societies have a high level of oral literacy as orature is part of their cultural practices and the multiple forms of oral performances and storytelling are recurrent in their everyday lives. These oral treasures have rarely been part of formal education although they are profoundly relevant for advancing girls' empowerment and ensuring gender equality (Debsu, 2009). According to Jirata (2019) and Woliye (2005), there are folktales, fairy tales, riddles and legendary narratives that embody contents and messages disapproving of gender inequality and negative attitudes towards girls' education, negative masculinity, gender-based violence and various forms of harmful practices. The story of Akko Manoye in Oromo and that of Fuura in Sidama cultures are good examples. Consequently, in communities where these indigenous oral treasures are still active and impactful, the negative attitude towards women, negative masculinity, and gender-based violence are not acceptable (Jirata, 2020; 2019). This shows the deep interconnection between the indigenous oral literacy practices and girls' empowerment in the contexts of rural communities. However, the profound literacy merit of indigenous oral narratives and the interconnection between contextualized verbal literacy, formal education, and girls' empowerment have not been developed through research and scientific investigations. This article aims to show the interconnection between contextualized literacy practices, teacher education and girls' empowerment.

More specifically, this article presents how the indigenous oral narratives can be used for the advancement of contextualized literacy practices and girls' empowerment in teacher education programs and primary schools; thus, contribute to the global debates on the New Literacy Study and to the interplay between the local and global contexts in literacy development.

2. Methodology

In this study, a qualitative and participatory approach was used and four methods of data collection including in-depth interviews, focus group discussion (FGD), classroom observation, and document analysis were employed.

2.1. In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews were done with teacher-educators, women pre-service-trainee teachers and women primary school teachers. These participants were selected for the in-depth interviews through availability and random sampling. Availability sampling was used with the teacher-educators and women primary school teachers who teach Oromo language at Bule Hora College of Teacher Education and two primary schools in Bule Hora town. In-depth interviews were done with 4 teacher educators who were teaching literacy-related courses in Oromo Language at the College, 8 teachers who were teaching Oromo language at two primary schools in Bule Hora town, and 18 women trainees teachers who were attending the three years primary school teacher education program at the college. The interviews were participatory in which the interviewees collaborated with researchers to interpret and discuss the contents of oral narratives. The trainee teachers came from rural areas where their families lived on agriculture and pastoralism. In the interview, the performed indigenous oral narratives popular in their local areas and discussed their meanings and messages. This was followed by collaborative meaning-making activities in which we generated interviewees' perspectives on the interconnection between indigenous oral narratives, literacy practices, girls' empowerment, and formal education. Interviews with the teacher educators emphasized the participatory approach in which the participants were not only information providers but also cultural interpreters and meaning-makers. They told the stories they knew, presented their meaning and message, and discussed how this could be relevant for their learning in schools. The primary school teachers who participated in this interview taught the Oromo language for students in grades 1 -6. They graduated from the College of Teachers Education with a three-year certificate in Oromo Language Teaching.

2.2. Focus Group Discussion

FGDs were conducted with two groups of primary school girls. The girls were selected from different grades randomly (grades 1-6) and discussed different issues including the tales they liked the most. The discussions focused on oral narratives that girls like the most and why they like such

folktales. The girls deliberated on oral narratives they liked the most and discussed why they liked it. They also told the oral narratives and interpreted the meanings of the oral narratives in collaboration with each other. Some of the girls narrated the tale they liked and explained why they liked it. The majority of the girls stated that they came from rural areas where they lead burdened lives. They presented that at home, they were burdened by domestic routines including fetching water and firewood from distant places, cooking food for family, cleaning houses and dishes, and making coffee for family. Before they started attending, they cooked breakfast for their family, fetched water, and made coffee. As a result, they often came to school late.

2.3. Classroom Observation

In collaboration with a primary school teacher, we used an Oral narrative for teaching literacy activities in Afan Oromo classrooms. Then, we observed how primary school students reacted to the oral narratives, how they made meanings of the narratives and the differences between boys and girls in making the meanings of the narratives. We made observations in the school classrooms to learn the pedagogic strategies that the primary school teachers used in teaching literacy skills and employ activities that empower girls. We also made observations in the school libraries to learn the kinds of resources available for students to develop their literacy skills and how girls make use of these resources.

Again, in cooperation with the teacher educators and the primary school teachers, we introduced four methods of performance of an oral narrative (storytelling) for teaching literacy as a part of the Afan Oromo subject. We encouraged and guided the students to perform an oral narrative in the four different ways and observed and documented how it affects students' motivation to learn, how it enhances girls' participation in the classroom, how it helps the children to exercise reading and writing, and how it connects the literacy activities to children's culture and everyday lives. The different performance activities we employed were telling and listening an oral narrative, interpreting and discussing the oral narrative, dramatization of the oral narrative and pictorial presentation of the oral narrative.

2.4. Document Analysis

We considered the curriculum, syllabus and course materials of native languages that the trainee teachers are taking and the primary school curriculum, syllabus, and text-books of the three native languages, and analyzed how the local/indigenous oral narratives can be connected to literacy

development lessons and how connecting these oral narratives to literacy practices empower girls. We also analyzed how the primary school curriculum, syllabus, courses, and textbooks can make use of local/ indigenous oral narratives for the empowerment of girls through literacy practices in formal education.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Contexts of Girls Everyday Life among the Guji People of Ethiopia

In the the Guji culture, childhood is characterized by normative sanctions that creates a context in which girls undergo learning through continuous supervisions and scaffolding of their mothers and grandmothers. In this context, a girl grows under socialization practices in which she learns through observing the roles of her mother or grandmother. Growing in such context, girls construct their girlhood as a state of obedience, reserved interaction, humility and covertness. A conversation with Bereket (12 years' old girl) illustrates this:

Researcher: What kind of a girl is a good one?

Bereket: a girl who is obedient to her mother and father, who is reserved, shy, respectful and humble, who is skilful at home routines is a good one.

Girls are expected to be respectful, reserved and shy in their social participation and interactions in public and school classrooms. Such cultural impositions and expectations in turn consistently impede the interactions of girls with women, men and boys in activities outside home. Because of such normative contexts, girls' motivation to ask questions, answer questions, discuss in groups and play roles in learning activities is seldom observable in the classrooms and in the public. Such context was illustrated by Barite who was 18 years old. She stated that the participation of girls in such activities is hampered by the belief that girls should be reserved, introvert, respectful and modest in their relationships with adults. Similarly, Birke (11 years old girl) stated that girlhood is different from boyhood and girls are not expected to be as overt as boys. She forwarded her view in the following conversation:

Researcher: Why do not you ask or answer questions in the classroom like the boys?

Birke: I am afraid of speaking in the class.

Researcher: Why?

Birke: Because I am a girl; I am not a boy.

According to this conversation, the norm of being silent and reserved affected not only the learning opportunities of girls but also obstructed their relationships with their teachers and male counterparts. The context made the girls reluctant to share their views with boys and ask for help from their teachers. The inability to interact with the teachers and boys in schools, in turn, has a big negative impact on the participation and success of girls in learning activities. Such realities portray how the everyday life contexts of girls impeded their participation and success in schools.

3.2. Indigenous Oral Narratives as Contexts for Empowering Girls

The Guji culture embodies rich indigenous oral narratives known in Oromo language as *duriduri*. Studies indicate that these indigenous oral narratives are popular among children and adults as contexts of learning and entertainment (Jirata, 2018, 2019). Adults perform these oral narratives with each other and with children as well as children perform them with each other and with their parents. Some of these oral narratives portray women as heroes, wise, clever, powerful, honest and resilient. Among such oral narratives is ‘Akko Manoyye’ which has been a popular oral narrative among the Guji people. This oral narrative was told and discussed in the FGDs with primary school girls. One of the girls in the FGD; namely, Barite (13 years old girl) told the oral narrative as follows.

Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time, there was a woman whose name was Akko Manoyye. She was known as an iron lady who ruled her people in absolute dictatorship. She ordered the men to perform all domestic activities and the women to manage households and make decisions. She used to enjoy troubling and challenging the men. The men lived with obedience to her dictations and accepted the superiority of women. One day, Akko Manoyye gathered all the men and ordered them to build for her a house between the earth and the sky. The men were confused by this order and consulted a wise man to give them a solution. The wise man told them to ask her to put up the poles, which according to Oromo culture, should be done by the owner of the house. When the men asked her to put up poles for the house between the earth and the sky, she could not respond. The men went back to the wise man and told him that she failed to respond. They asked the wise man to give them a lasting solution. Then, the wise man told them to dig a deep hole in the ground, cover it with animal skin and invite her to sit on the skin. The men did as the wise

man told them. When she sat on the skin, she went down the hole, during which she put a message for the women, "Pretend that you are loyal to men to live with them. Do not believe them". From then onwards, men took the power, established a patriarchal system, and declared that women should not take part in leadership practices.

The girls discussed that this oral narrative presents an Oromo queen lived and ruled in the ancient time. The girls expressed that the queen was strong, and her name has been popular among the Oromo as a strong leader who dictated the men to remain loyal to women. One of the girls the focus group discussion said, "Akko Monoye was a brilliant leader who ruled the men. She is an exemplary woman from who we can learn a lot. She was honest and did not think that men could harm her. Before she died, she left a message to all women that they should not believe men". The oral narrative portrays a context in which girls can learn that a woman can be cleverer and powerful than a man or a boy. It serves as context that helps girls to believe that a woman can command and lead a man if she builds herself through education and becomes capable and self-confident in her everyday life. This oral narrative is a witness for the fact that cultural practices have the power to emancipate women and girls from the narratives suctions that are also parts of the culture in which children live.

Another indigenous oral narrative that creates contexts through which girls can learn to be tactful was told by Sora who was 12 years old girl and a sixth-grade pupil:

Let me tell you a story. Ones upon a time, a group of ten men went to war against their enemy people. They attacked the people and confiscated their cattle and gold. While the men were traveling back home with the cattle and gold, a group of people who were armed fighters came from their behind and started attacking them. Then, the leader of the men ordered, "Leave the cattle and save the gold". The men left the cattle to the fighters, held the gold, and escaped from the enemy. After they reached their village, they wanted to check who was lost. Each of them counted nine members. They again counted and it was nine. They tried to remember one another and could not find any man lost. They were confused and called a woman to help them count. But, the woman counted ten men. Then, she told them that, when they counted others each of them forgot to include themselves. The Women were more intelligent than the men and solved their problems.

This story sends the message that women are cleverer than men and understand what men cannot do. The narrative helped the girls to understand that women are more intelligent than men and can solve problems that men cannot solve. Such narrative has the power to motivate girls to have self-confidence and emancipate themselves from cultural influences. It was also possible for the girls to note that the woman in the story can be a model for the present girls who can learn that a woman can be more intelligent than men and can do what men cannot do. Such stories have the potential to help girls become self-confident and resistant to the cultural values that empower patriarchy.

A Dursitu (20 years old girl) who was a trainee teacher at Bule Hora College of Teacher Education stated that among the Guji people, a woman plays remarkable roles as household manager and family leader. She narrated the following oral narrative to illustrate her point.

Once upon a time, there was a man who had two male children. When his children grew up he ordered each of them to build their own house so that he could be in their houses and give them blessings. Both children accepted the order and constructed their own houses. The first child constructed a big and attractive house and filled it with fine-looking furniture. The second child constructed a poor, small hut, married a wife, and put her in it. Then, both children invited their father to visit their houses. The father visited the house of the first child. He entered the house and called, "Owners of this house!" No one was there to reply. He turned his face to his child and said, "This is not a house. You have not yet built a house". The father continued visiting the house of the second child. He entered the house and called, "The owner of the house!" Then, the woman in the house replied, "We are here. Welcome." The man turned his face to his child and said, "This is a house. You have built a good house. You deserve my blessing". The man sat down and blessed the second child.

This narrative portrays to the girls the roles of women in household management and decision-making as superior and profound. In the focus group discussion, the girls underlined that such roles of women are embedded in the culture of the Guji society where women and girls are considered to be at the core of families, communities, and the society at large. They agreed that

although gender-based role division is part of the Guji culture, such role division is considered to be an order from God. The girls discussed that this narrative clarifies that the gender-based role division has been there since creation. The oral narrative has created a context through which girls can learn to become capable people who can lead families and make decisions related to their homes.

It is notable in the analysis above that the indigenous oral narratives create contexts within which girls understand that they are intelligent and powerful and become self-assertive. The oral narratives help them to see women and girls as people with superior skills, wisdom, and values that culture and everyday life contain and provide across times and places. By displaying practical and applicable forms of knowledge, the indigenous oral narratives can serve as resources to empower girls. The narratives motivate women and girls to have a positive image of themselves and become self-confident in their everyday interactions including school interactions and social relationships. The narratives can empower girls to challenge the social sanctions and normative values related to girlhoods rooted in the culture of society.

3.3. Indigenous Oral Narratives as Contexts for Enhancing Literacy

3.3.1. Enhancing Girls' Motivation for Learning Literacy Skills through Storytelling

In the Guji culture, storytelling is one of the popular cultural practices which children perform to adults and peer members. It takes place in different places and times but often at homes (in the evening), in neighborhoods and cattle herding fields during day times. During night times at home, parents/grandparents tell stories to children and children (siblings) tell each other. During day times in the neighborhoods and cattle herding fields, children tell stories to each other. Children learn stories from adults at home and share them with each other in the cattle herding fields. The performance encompasses telling and listening as well as interpreting and meaning making. In such a way, storytelling creates a context in which children interact with each other as tellers, listeners, and interpreters. Data collected through in-depth interviews with primary school girls show that girls are interested in storytelling and are as active as boys in telling and interpreting it. It was clear that the storytelling context emancipated the girls from the girlhood norms that imposes on them to remain silent, reserved and shy. The storytelling contexts enable girls to overcome the norms of girlhood and encourage them to become confident in their conversations

with boys. This shows that the storytelling context increases girls' motivation, curiosity, self-confidence and boldness to learn and express their ideas. It raises girls' enthusiasm for learning, interacting, debating, and convincing. It also creates a fun situation in which girls become free to participate, interact, and learn. Such contexts gave the girls freedom to share their views and provide their own interpretations of realities, which in turn enhances their curiosity to learn more.

In the interviews with teachers, one of the informants stated,

Students are not happy when I order them to read books or when I read textbooks for them in the classroom. However, they are very happy when I tell them folktales. When I tell them folktales, they listen to me with deep attention, both girls and boys participate actively to tell and interpret. They always want me to tell them folk tales.

According to this informant, girls' and boys' distress to read a book can be avoided by replacing the book-reading activity with storytelling as it creates a context in which girls and boys became alert and motivated to listen, interact and debate. This is because storytelling connects girls to their everyday life contexts and empowers them to become confident to listen, respond, discuss, and write. It helps girls become free to imagine their own realities and tell them to each other. Such a context helps girls acquire the context of literacy (Craig et al. (2001).

The in-depth interviews made with teacher educators, primary school teachers and the trainees' teachers and Focus group discussions conducted with primary school girls show that storytelling enhances not only girls' enthusiasm to tell and listen but also read and write. Regarding this, the interviewed teacher educators stated, "after telling and listening to folktales, students, mainly girls become motivated to read the folktale presented in written text and interested in writing about characters they heard about in the story". This statement indicates that storytelling in the classrooms increases girls' interest in reading as they want to read a story they listened to. Put in other words, a teacher can increase the reading and writing interest of girls when she tells stories to students in the class as it creates contexts that enhance girls' and boys' motivation to read and write. This shows that the storytelling in the classroom can create a situation in which girls and boys are motivated to write about the story they heard and make the portraits (drawings) of the characters in the story which in turn enhances their opportunities to write. This result supports Lockett's (1992) statement that storytelling helps students increase their reading and listening comprehension.

3.3.2. Using Indigenous Oral Narratives in the Classroom for Teaching Literacy

In cooperation with the teacher educators and the primary school teachers, the researchers used oral narratives for teaching literacy as a part of the Afan Oromo subject. The researchers used the oral narratives in different ways and observed how it may affect girl's motivation to learn, how it enhances girls' participation in the classroom, how it helps the girls to exercise reading and writing, and how it may connect the literacy activities to girls' culture and everyday lives. The activities the researchers employed were telling an oral narrative and listening to it, interpreting and discussing an oral narrative, dramatization of an oral narrative and pictorial presentation of an oral narrative and discussion of the pictorial presentation. The outcomes of these classroom activities are discussed below.

Telling and Listening: The storytelling events took place in school compounds for girls in primary school and college compounds for young trainee women. In both settings, 6-10 girls who were willing to participate in the storytelling session were engaged. Accordingly, the researchers involved girls in the storytelling and observed how they performed it and how they felt during the performance. The telling and listening interaction helped the girls exercise their speaking and listening skills with the aim of developing their interactive skills.

Interpreting and Discussing: The telling and listening performances involved verbal and emotional activities that led the girls to construct meanings and values from oral narratives. As a continuation to telling and listening, the girls were engaged in interpreting and discussing oral narratives that served as an approach to eliciting girls' perspectives on different social and cultural phenomena. This exercise indicated that telling, listening, discussing, and interpreting an oral narrative can motivate girls to express and reflect on issues in their social environment. It was noted that indigenous oral narratives ignite girls' motivations to discuss and express themselves.

Dramatization: The oral narratives contained characters that shared roles in a story. The girls replaced the characters and took up the roles. Rather than telling and listening, they played the roles of the characters. The girls converted the oral narrative into a drama and then performed the action. In the school context, the girls were divided into different groups and dramatized an oral narrative or part of an oral narrative. Multipart story drama in which girls were divided into groups and each group performed a certain part of the story was also done. Both ways gave the girls the

opportunity to exercise social skills, interactive capacity, and vocabulary power. Therefore, the girls can act out or convert an oral narrative into a drama and then perform their results. This situation allows the students to exercise self-expression and language of communication and to practice their listening skills and speaking skills.

Pictorial Presentation and Discussion: Drawing was the fourth way of presentation of oral narratives in the classroom. This way of presenting oral narratives was not initiated by the girls but was introduced to the girls by the researchers. After the girls sat in groups, we provided them with paper, pens, and pencils and asked them to draw the performed oral narrative on the paper. It did not take the girls a long time to put the pictures of the characters and their actions on paper in their logical order from the beginning to the end.

Performance through drawing allowed each girl to perform the oral narratives individually at a time in one classroom. It also permitted group work in which two or more girls could sit together and draw an oral narrative in cooperation with each other. Thus, the performance of oral narratives through drawing is suited to both individual and group-based learning activities. The drawing method of learning included a range of strategies and techniques to develop girls' personal learning and thinking skills on the storytelling approach. Presentation of the oral narrative in drawing helped the girls exercise extracting ideas from a written or oral text and reproducing it in a meaningful way. These exercises in turn enhanced girls' skills and ability to understand their lessons and reproduce them in meaningful ways.

In the focus group discussions, the primary school girls asserted that an oral narrative is more interesting when it is performed through drama than narrative because it is in a dramatic performance that oral narratives can reflect their local realities. Accordingly, it was notable that dramatic performance encourages children's creativity and interest in performing oral narratives. As it involves not only speaking but also acting (including doing and behaving), it enables the girls to easily demonstrate the actions and behaviors of characters in the story and make the oral narrative more meaningful.

Similarly, the drawing activity involved two actions for learning. One was memorizing and putting the actions in the oral narratives in their temporal order in one's mind. The second was

putting pictures of these events on paper in their temporal and spatial orders. The different forms of performance help girls make behavioral changes and develop positive attitudes about themselves and their social environment. In oral narrative activities, girls develop speaking skills, reading, and writing skills. The telling and dramatization also help them develop their critical thinking and speaking skills. Accordingly, telling, listening, dramatization, drawing and discussions create situations through which girls can develop their self-confidence, critical thinking capacity, cultural literacy, reading, and writing skills.

These exercises show that the telling-listening, interpreting-discussion, dramatization and drawing methods of performing oral narratives create contexts that help girls to exercise listening, speaking, reading comprehension and writing skills. The four ways of performance enabled the girls to be in four contexts of learning. In the first context, they were able to connect the learning environments in which they live and reflect on the social and cultural realities of their communities. Such a situation can enhance their critical thinking, understanding of their local values, and development of positive attitudes about themselves. In the second and third contexts, the girls exercised to improve their interactive skills which can help them identify themselves with positive characters and develop their cultural literacy. This situation, in turn, helps them make behavioral changes and develop positive attitudes about themselves and their social environment. In the fourth context, the girls had the opportunity to develop imaginative skills.

3.4.Using Indigenous Oral Narratives to Contextualize Teacher Education Programs and Primary School Curriculum

As presented in the analyses above, the indigenous oral narratives have the power to motivate girls overcome the cultural sanctions and become confident learners. Such power and uses of the indigenous oral narratives can be realized when educators at the levels of teacher education programs and primary school levels engage oral narratives as methods and contents of learning. When teacher education programs of the colleges of teacher education can make use of indigenous oral narratives as methods and contents of learning, they can motivate trainee teachers (trainee girls) and enhance their literacy skills. The trainee teachers, after they graduate, can have the ability to use oral narratives to empower girls and create plausible contexts for teaching literacy skills in primary schools. Accordingly, the teacher education programs have the responsibility to

contextualize their course contents and pedagogic methods by utilizing the indigenous oral narratives. As indicated by the key informants from the Bule Hora College of Teacher Education, the importance of indigenous oral narratives in contextualization of learning and enhancement of literacy education has not been recognized. As a result, the use of indigenous oral narratives for the empowerment of girls and enhancement of their literacy skills in the College of Teacher Education and primary schools is seldom observable. The data collected through in-depth interviews with teacher educators, trainee teachers, primary school teachers and primary school girls indicate that teacher educators and primary school teachers use oral narratives to a small extent.

The teacher educators, generally, stated that they had an Oromo-language teacher education program in which they train Oromo language teachers for primary school education (grades 1-6). They stated that they train teachers to teach the Oromo language to children in primary schools. They provide several relevant courses for the trainee teachers and these courses are meant to develop trainee teachers' capacities to teaching reading, writing, speaking and listening in Oromo language. The teacher-educators underlined that courses such as 'Children's Literature' aim at building the capacity of trainee teachers to use oral narratives to develop children's literacy skills. However, it was noted that teachers rarely use oral narratives. Rather, they focus on using written poems, and short stories as parts of the 'Children's Literature' course. One of the teacher educators stated:

I teach a course known as 'Children's Literature' for second-year trainee teachers at Bule Hora College of Teacher Education. In this course, literary genres such as written poems, short stories, novels and drama scripts are included. Indigenous oral narratives are not included in the course as well as in the syllabus for the course. Although our culture is rich in oral narratives, we are not using them to motivate our students and enhance the quality of our education.

Many teacher educators share this perspective, and they indicated that they are not aware of the use of indigenous oral narratives for literacy development and empowering girls. They have narrow skills and poor understanding of how to utilize the rich indigenous oral narratives as

learning resources and instructional processes that can help to empower trainee teachers and enhance their skills of teaching literacy.

It is clear that the teacher education programs have a high potential to connect indigenous oral narratives to literacy practices and enable pre-service trainee teachers and in-service primary school teachers to contextualize their teaching methods and contents. However, it appears that attention has not been given, so far, to connecting indigenous oral narratives to teacher training courses. As shown in this study, the Guji people have rich oral traditions and some of these oral traditions portray the image of women positively. Interviews with the teacher of educators indicate that these oral traditions have not been considered useful for enhancing the quality of education, connecting students to their local environment, and empowering girls to become assertive learners.

The trainee teachers, who were girls in the age range of 18 – 20 years, expressed that the teacher education programs have the responsibility to empower girls to overcome the cultural norms and livelihoods burdens deterring them from attending formal education successfully. The trainee-teachers indicated that oral narratives are not sufficiently included in their courses and are not connected to classroom instruction. Regarding this, Chaltu (23 years old girl) asserted that “Folktales are popular among our community. We used to play by performing storytelling when we were children. Everybody enjoys telling folktales and listening to storytelling. However, folktales are not performed at schools”. It is clear from these statements that the indigenous oral narratives have the power to motivate and entertain children as well as adults. Making these rich oral resources part of the teacher education curriculum and courses can help to engage trainee girls as active learners and become teachers who can contextualize school education through utilization of local resources such as indigenous oral narratives. In-depth Interviews with primary school teachers who were teaching the Afan Oromo (Oromo Language) in the two primary schools in Bule Hora town shows that contextualization of learning through utilization of indigenous oral narratives is seldom observable. According to the informants, the primary school curriculums, syllabuses, subjects and pedagogic methods have not been connected to the local cultural practices, values and ways of learning. Although we learnt from classroom observations that the use of oral narratives as method and contents of learning can motivate students and create context for teaching literacy, there is no such tradition in the primary schools. The teachers indicated that they do not

either encourage students to perform their oral narratives or tell oral narratives to their students because they do not understand that it is useful.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions

This study shows that contextualization of teacher-education programs and primary school pedagogic practices through utilization of indigenous oral narratives can help to empower girls and enhance their literacy skills. It indicates that the rich indigenous oral narratives can play the roles of motivating girls to become self-assertive, confident and curious. The study presents that these rich oral treasures have the power to empower girls in many ways. Firstly, they help girls to see the image of women who are strong leaders, wise and clever, and superior to men's productive responsibilities. This can put the girls in a context that motivates them to have confidence in themselves, be determined to take action, and curious to learn more. The oral narratives embody the image of women that can be models for girls and young women. Secondly, the oral narratives convey meanings that enlighten girls and young women on how to remain resilient in challenging situations, how to make positive social relationships, build their own social capital, and have the desire to improve themselves. Thirdly, oral narratives provide girls with locally acceptable values on which they can build their social interactions and self-characters as present children and future adults.

Such local resources can also create different contexts in which girls can exercise to develop multiple literacy skills. They can serve as useful tools for promoting motivation, skills, and knowledge as part of the learning activities in the classroom.

The performance of indigenous oral narratives has twofold pedagogic values. First, it creates authentic learning and teaching situations through which children acquire the lesson in a 'natural way' as it embodies the social and cultural realities in the immediate environments of children. Second, it enriches classroom lessons with practical knowledge of relevance for social and cultural contexts. These resources are also locally available, affordable, culturally relevant, and can engage learners through connecting them to their everyday practices and values. Therefore, contextualization of the teacher education programs and primary school subjects through

utilization of the indigenous oral narratives can help girls overcome the culturally embedded normative sanctions and enhance their active participations in learning and self-development. Contextualization through utilization of the indigenous oral narrative is a way to decolonize teacher education programs and primary school education and liberate education in the global south from the century-long influence of the Western philosophies, theories and pedagogic practices. Contextualization through utilization of the indigenous oral narrative also helps to connect formal education to indigenous knowledge and practices and make formal education rooted in the local social and cultural contexts. that serve as vehicles for intra-generational and intergenerational knowledge and value transfer. Contextualization through utilization of the indigenous oral narrative helps learners to connect knowledge from formal education to realities in their everyday lives and apply the knowledge to manage their ways of lives. Contextualization enables boys and girls to concretize knowledge and apply it to solve their problems. In general, contextualization of educational policies, programs and pedagogic practices through utilization of indigenous knowledge is an essential measure to ensure the quality of education and liberate education from the Western influences.

4.2. Recommendations

The following points are forwarded as recommendations

1. Further studies should be conducted to develop frameworks and consolidate methods for utilizing indigenous oral narratives as tools and contexts for empowering girls and enhancing their literacy skills.
2. A similar study should be conducted in different contexts to document comprehensive knowledge for influencing educational policies.
3. Findings from this study should be disseminated to the wider contexts in the country so that curriculum designers, school leaders and teachers will be familiar with Indigenous oral narratives and use them to contextualize schools' education
4. Teacher training programs should equip trainee teachers with knowledge and skills of using indigenous knowledge to contextual learning and empower girls.

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