

Reflective Opinion: Where the Challenge to Good Quality of Education in Ethiopia Lies?

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Abstract

Ensuring quality of education is among the major global concerns. Countries, irrespective of their economic and social development, are observed being tackling to ensure the quality of their education system. However, while some, especially those that balance external innovations with their internal conditions, are successful, others that rely on blind grafting the external innovations into their internal context are trapped in viscous dilemmas. Therefore, this article presents a reflective opinion emanated from my experience as educator and officer in different offices (regional bureau head and state minster for higher education) in the Ethiopian education system. In my reflective opinion, I have tried to articulate the definition for quality of education and the main challenges that trapped Ethiopia while ensuring the quality of its education. By so doing, concluding remarks on what and how democratic Ethiopia has achieved so far and, consequently, what the challenge is now for our educators and teachers are chronicled.

Keywords: Challenges, Education quality, Educators, Pedagogy, Policy, Students

Introductory Note

This paper is not a research output. It remains and is a reflective opinion. Most, virtually all, citations in the paper refer to my address at the conference in Jigjiga University (2017), in which the source for the concept of ‘metacognition’ is also duly acknowledged. Even as a reflective opinion, however, a further word of caution is necessary for the reader. It is based neither on extensive practical or intensive theoretical knowledge on the subject of quality of education. It is merely a personal reflection of the experience of an education officer who had had the privilege to serve consecutively as a bureau head (for nine years) and state minister (five years) of education (in charge of higher education) for a total of fourteen years, before retreating to a seat in the House of People’s Representatives in 2011. Retreating to a seat in parliament has not meant, it is true, either ending altogether my connections with the Ministry of Education or cessation of my interest on issues of the quality of our education. But it has certainly meant that I no longer routinely engage with them.

My knowledge of history, of which I continue to be a student, is not without its contributions. Its contribution is restricted however mainly to the historical insights in the paper. History has contributed not only to insights on the generic historical limitations of the Ethiopian secular schooling but also to the idea of a two-tier historical challenge of Ethiopia today and to conceptualising learning as a primordial characteristic, therefore an inseparable quality, of humanity.

The paper begins fundamentally with what quality of education in Ethiopia is, followed up by a discussion on the challenge to quality of education in Ethiopia. The exercise to define quality of education in general only sets the background for a discussion of these two fundamental issues. The concluding remarks reflect on what and how democratic Ethiopia has achieved so far and, consequently, what the challenge is now for our educators and teachers.

I make no distinction between quality and relevance as far as education goes. I take relevance of education as only one aspect of quality of education though pundits may claim that an education could be of high quality but still of low relevance. My argument is very simply that an education that is of good or high quality has also to be simultaneously relevant. This is plain.

What is Quality of Education in Ethiopia?

I argue that to try to define quality of education universally is a futile exercise. It is not that such a definition is impossible. One may, for instance, define it as education that is ‘fit for purpose’. Another may view it as ‘metacognition’. An education that offers the power of criticality or critical thinking could be another definition. I shall have the occasion to present a universal definition of a different nature, i.e., from a historical point of view. The point is, in social science, there are abstractions of historical scope and abstractions that have no

pegging to history. The first sets of abstractions do have meaning, but the second are simply amoebic in nature, i.e., they are predisposed to multiply.

Quality of education as a universal concept is often an abstraction of the amoebic order. Briefly put, it abstracts education not only from disciplines but also from history. While the aim has always been at solving historical, therefore concrete, challenges in education, attempts at abstract universal definition of education make us fly in the face of those challenges. It is clear that quality of education posited as an abstract concept is defined necessarily as abstractly, hardly serving as a guide to a practitioner or to beneficial action. It looks like the West's use of human rights as a political weapon. As quality of education is posited abstractly, that is, as it tries to escape from history, it cannot but try to fly endlessly with much energy, eventually clipping its wings as a result of exhaustion in this fruitless search for a universal definition of, therefore a universal, quality of education in spite of the fact that the essence of quality (also of education) is historical.

The concept 'historical' always needs guarding from abuse. It is not an apologia, behind which laziness could hide itself. What I have referred to as historical is the two-tier reality of Ethiopia: its internal socio-economic conditions (the subject of change) and its external influential context, the advanced capitalist system (the aspired). It is these two sets of historical realities in themselves and the distance between the lagging-internal social reality and the advanced-external social reality to which I refer as something historical. The distance Ethiopia has to cover so as to be competitive in international markets is thus a historical gap which must be abridged and overcome through as historical social practice. This is possible only if Ethiopia runs fast enough and its running is comprehensive. It is obviously politics, including in its role on education, that should determine how fast and comprehensively Ethiopia runs.

The technologically, or industrially, advanced section of humanity is making progress in its robot age or age of artificial intelligence (AI), which is still young at its age of some 53 years old.¹ The digital age is another description of this same age. We should not mystify that age, though. The premise of this age is industrialised societies, on whose intellectual gains it rests. The insatiable pursuit of capital for profit on one hand and the contradiction of capital and labour on the other have in the long run let to incredible progress in technology. Jumping into that age through education without the necessity of industrialisation in a country has not been tested. Most probably it is not possible. Such probabilities will not help Ethiopia, which can only consider industrialisation, though it has also to reckon with the artificial intelligence thing from the start. The point is not this, however.

The Ethiopian section of humanity still rests in the largely-wooden plough age and on the painful labour of small agriculturalists and pastoralists, in large part in a long-consummated agrarian society. The heavy weight of the technologically advanced section of humanity influences variously every other section of humanity, including the Ethiopian. Ethiopia thus

¹ Refer to "The Robot Economy," in *Newsweek*, 09.12.2016

has a double historical reality or a two-tiered historical reality: the internal and the external. Since Ethiopia cannot opt out of its external historical reality, it has to change its internal reality as fast as it is historically possible for its politics to close the gap with its external reality. This is simply given for Ethiopia as for any other country where belated capitalist development is the reality.

If attempts to define universally quality of education abstracted from history should appear to be futile exercises, one can now meaningfully first define education universally in terms of history and then as meaningfully derive a universal definition of quality of education from it. This is potentially very instructive, which I have chosen to follow here.

Social learning is a human attribute as old as humanity itself as a social being, if not as old as the first appearance of Homo sapiens. Hence, education is a social enterprise of learning or a form of social learning, while social learning is not necessarily education only. In other words, learning is coterminous with the life span of humanity, wherever humanity may be found, possibly also on some exoplanets as on Earth.

A digression is helpful here. It is a law that societies change, however much the focus may be on continuity. Changes happen continuously, so to say, involuntarily or despite the focus on continuity. Learning as a human attribute must have focussed initially, perhaps for millennia, on socially inheriting the powers of preceding generations for survival. Education, or modern schooling, which is historically a recent phenomenon, has gone a step further. The aim of learning through education is both socially inheriting the powers of preceding generations and attainment of still greater powers. One point deserves emphasis: societies change because the powers of humanity continuously grow, which in turn cause changes in relations of production and subsequently in technology, and this change in Ethiopia today is rapid and can only be expected to increase in its rapidity. This social law of change makes continuous learning one permanent attribute of humanity. Secondly, this calls forth another necessity: learning as an attribute of individual members of society is necessarily life-long. This necessity is acute in societies where social change is particularly rapid and in developed societies where technological innovations make heavy pressure on skills. One thing is, therefore, clear: learning is not an entertainment. It is a bread and butter, therefore serious, human business. It cannot be a matter of hit and miss. It has to be deliberate, purposeful and therefore disciplined.

The modern school system dates only, with the exception of China and India, from the 19th century for some countries and from the 20th century for most countries. It is not as gracefully old as learning. In the West and Japan, the industrial revolution begged for state-funded universal schooling. The dynamics of the industrial revolution further begged for college education, which together have resulted, after 1945, in a fabulous capitalist prosperity, whose success in its capitalist form now makes the going difficult everywhere in the world today. This is a development pattern that cannot be ignored, but its every step does not have to be replayed. Education, primary to college, has come ahead of industrial revolution in our case. Education begs for industrial revolution in our case, which is a consequence of the historical

gap. Our purpose is the same however: achieve the conditions necessary for industrialisation and thus achieve authentic prosperity on the basis of industrial capitalism, which would be generically similar to but not necessarily a copy of the West, when and if also through education we make the powerful processes underway in Ethiopia succeed.

Secular education as such of course is not an entirely recent phenomenon. Delivery of some intentional secular education was not absent in ancient times – in Egypt, Babylon, Persia, China, India, Greece, Rome and Aksum. Nor would I argue education had not been an enterprise all along since the ancient times in China and parts of India. The argument is that elsewhere, wherever it existed but for the Muslim world during the ascendancy of Islam, the practical norm was religious education up to the nineteenth century.

Education of the ancients was extremely limited in scope and scale. This education atrophied in the West since 476 AD, being supplanted by religious education effectively up to 1453 and increasingly less so up to the 18th century, while organised schooling funded by the state would not make its debut until the 19th century. Aksumite education sustained the same fate most probably since the sixth century and its successor states would not turn to the idea of modern schooling until the twentieth century, on which date exactly being open for debate. Veering toward secular issues may be detected in the course of the 17th century, in Ethiopia as well, but it had disappeared as quickly as it appeared.

We may now attempt a general definition of education in terms of history and consequently of quality of education. We cannot look at education other than in terms of the primordial human attribute of learning. Since education is only a form of learning, in fact, a time-bound intervention to enhance learning, education must conduce for and enhance continuous learning. The singular power of humanity has been in its ability of cognition (to figure out), or in revolutionary circumstances to sense massively, and act accordingly. This has been the most decisive endowment for its survival through success. It is this power of humanity that has to be sustained, enhanced or deepened so that humanity continually improves the conditions of its existence, social-culturally, economic-technologically, climatic-environmentally, and political-morally. It is true that *de facto*, if not *de jure*, education has become synonymous with serving capital, thus subsuming improvement of human life under the interests of capital. This, however, is only a historical form rather than the inherent mission or essence of education as a form of learning, the primordial attribute of humanity.

My general definition of quality of education derived from the essence of education is therefore the sum total of education that sustains, enhances or deepens the power of humanity to continually improve the conditions of its life. Young generations would thus learn with purpose. Learning is about faculty (thinking skills), skills to do, who-ness and relating to the other throughout the life of a person. Quality of education is, therefore, this learning done with purpose and as deliberate organisation. Education purposefully cultivates the human intellectual predisposition to learn so as to improve conditions of human life.

Quality of education may likewise be defined in terms of both the purposefulness of the education and how well the purpose is mastered by the educator in delivery and by the learner in its reception. Mastery from this two ends means that the educator is an effective carrier of the societal purpose, which in the Ethiopian case has to be so true, and the learners acquire the pertinent cognitive skills, the skills to do and constructive values that their society direly requires as it is faced with a layered-historical challenge of ceasing to be and becoming. This in effect means that to expect a good quality of education where the motivations of the educator and the student are at variance with the character of a polity and its societal aspirations, in other words with the historical reality of a polity, is naïve.

My definition of quality education as a general concept has been possible only with a sense of history. In this sense, the quality of education desired in country “A” is essentially the same as that desired in a historically different country “B”, but they do not have to be and cannot be the same in their historical characteristics. The characteristic of the quality of education desired in advanced capitalist societies today cannot be the same as that of Ethiopia today, though they share the same human purpose of learning. Where history is the decisive factor, a general definition of an abstract concept that ignores history is clearly an academic or a barren exercise. If the definition is to be realistic that definition must possess a good sense of history.

Equipped with the historically-informed general definition of quality of education, we can now turn to a definition of quality of education in Ethiopia. Ethiopia possesses a mature revolutionary politics that focuses on socially equitable and fast-track societal development. Societal transformation is the aim and the historical necessity. If it is not socially equitable the development cannot be sustainably societal; if the development is not societal it cannot be of fast-track, and if a fast-track societal development is not achieved, Ethiopia will turn out to be a hell on Earth for all its peoples. The two-tier historical challenge, a consequence of extreme belatedness to begin to industrialise, has made socially-equitable and fast-track societal development an absolute necessity for Ethiopia. Ethiopia is highly endowed in politics to achieve this although it has not been so endowed materially and in several other ways.

Any discussion of quality of education in Ethiopia, including on teacher-student motivations, has to reckon necessarily with this historical fact. Reckoning with this fact, therefore owning the historical challenge, necessarily generates the social energies (the social motivations) to teach and learn in our educators and students. It is not one or other shortfalls or deficits in learning that is of primary importance, but whether the historical-social purpose of learning in Ethiopia today drives our massive education and training systems is crucial. Given this understanding of what education ought to be in Ethiopia today, it is but an easy exercise to define what good or high quality of education in Ethiopia today ought to be.

Of course, competing definitions aiming at the same goal are possible. I may suggest such definitions. An Ethiopian education that (1) is premised on and aims at tackling the Ethiopian historical challenges, (2) supplies educators and teachers who own the Ethiopian historical

challenges, (3) is propelled by and generates Ethiopian organic intellectuals, (4) cultivates the Ethiopian mind in view of Ethiopia's historical challenges, or (5) empowers Ethiopian society and polity to negotiate successfully their way through the Ethiopian historical challenges and thus continually improve the conditions of life of Ethiopians, etc. Education as a form of learning to be good or high in Ethiopia at the current juncture in its history cannot obviously be defined other than in terms of the Ethiopian two-tier historical challenge. This is I suppose crystal clear.

I suggest my definition of a good or high quality Ethiopian education today. Ethiopian education is good or high in its quality if and only if it sustains, enhances and deepens the abilities of its Ethiopian learners as Ethiopians to learn continually in successfully negotiating their way through the Ethiopian two-tier historical challenge. It is in here that good or high quality of education in Ethiopia today inheres, irrespective of one or other deficit in its performance. This must be the mother of all Ethiopian curricula, the linchpin in the preparation and life of our educators and teachers, the source of motivations for our teachers and students, the defining feature of classroom practice including teacher-student relations, the core yardstick in all educational evaluations, the measure of performance of our education institutions and system and the role of politics in our education.

With the problem of quality of education in Ethiopia hopefully resolved theoretically, it is time to turn to the issue of pedagogy or to the subject of learning/teaching theories, which in Ethiopia appear to have been reduced to mere teaching methods. Our educators and scholars in general may still think absurdly that what the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic front- EPRDF abhors as neo-liberalism is any system of political and economic thought that emanates from the West. This of course is absurdly absurd. In fact, we cannot afford to negotiate successfully through the Ethiopian two-tier historical challenge without receiving intelligently political, economic and technological ideas that have originated and may originate in the West and the East.

What is abhorred and rejected, including by many distinguished-mainstream economists in the West, is a strand of thought that deliberately works to promote the interests of big capital worldwide and, in addition to its negative effects on all others, thus endeavours to hamstring the unindustrialised world, most of humanity, from taking up the challenge of belated industrialisation by putting the developmental (in our case democratic) state in contradiction to industrial-capitalist development through its dogmatic emphasis on an absolutely free market, or pure supply economics, or naked liberalism. This had not been the case in history, also in the pioneer United Kingdom. It is all the more implausible today unless one wishes a world replete with failed states, therefore a world in total chaos. It is this that is abhorred and rejected as neo-liberalism, the strand of prescription that aims at stunting and thus arresting the faculties of humanity. Hence, when it comes to issues of pedagogy or teaching-learning theories and ideas that emanate from the West we should read them with penchant, and digest, process and use them for our purposes. This is absolutely necessary for there is no authenticity in ignorance, but in intelligently shedding ignorance. Where there is clarity on goal, it is but an easier exercise in making the right choices of the means.

Pedagogy focuses on the how of education as an efficacious means to boost learning. If we should find a universal definition of education problematic, the how of education should not be a question that must strain our brains. This does not mean of course one universal learning theory is possible in practice. Nor does it mean that pedagogy is a pure science, without ideological impurities. History and the nature of scholars would not suggest it. But our focus is not on education as an academic issue. We focus on education as a critical element in all aspects of Ethiopian societal endeavours to achieve prosperous life. This may sound utilitarianism. It is a revolutionary reflection in view of the Ethiopian quest to cease to be and to become.

In this sense, debates on theories of learning as approaches to education have more relevance than exercises to define quality of education in general. I do not have to enumerate the teaching-learning theories that are out there for picking. Nor should I dare to propose a learning theory in view of my definition of the quality of education in Ethiopia. I hazard to suggest however that irrespective of the goal and content of education one thing is generic to those theories: achieving the best possible learning outcomes. Given our definition of the best learning outcome for Ethiopia, we should cherry-pick the most effective ideas and practices of teaching-learning and apply them innovatively to achieve the goals of Ethiopian education.

Intelligently selected ideas and practices of learning cannot be once and for all times. Nor would a faddish use and throw of ideas and practices be intelligent or beneficial. What would be intelligent and beneficial is a careful selection to start with and continually improving it in view of our own experience, which we should continually also compare with developments and best practices from elsewhere, always aiming at teasing the intelligence of our students from early on with what the Ethiopian worlds are and how the internal world could be converted into the external. This, if done persistently with conviction, should avail for Ethiopia an authentic how of education consonant with the authentic why and what of its education. Our aspiration is to arrive at the external historical reality, which is a slower but not-so-slow moving target. Our premise is the internal historical reality, with its propensity for the inertia of retardation. How well we continue to interface these two inescapable realities, i.e., conversion of the inertia of retardation to a fast motion, therefore how well to distil the kernels of theories of learning for this purpose and building on our ensuing experience, should be where we should focus. Ethiopian educators and universities who embark on this course would most certainly re-invent themselves and become competitors in the international arena of scholarship.

Where the challenge to good quality of education in Ethiopia Lies

We may now identify where the challenge to good quality of Ethiopian education lies. Ethiopia does not have yet an army of professionally-motivated educators and teachers in its classrooms. Ethiopia is poor in the history of modern education, therefore, in authentic philosophy of education and practice. It may look like an exaggeration, but teaching is viewed and approached as a mere job rather than a profession ordinarily with high social responsibility, a profession that is the mother of all other professions and scholarships. In

view of the Ethiopian two-tier historical challenge, which is extraordinary, teaching in Ethiopia is a profession with an extraordinary social responsibility.

I will further reflect soon on our historical limitation in the sphere of education. Despite that, however, fundamentals cannot escape us. Purpose-driven practice in education is a lot more an urgent necessity and more realistic for Ethiopia than it was the case for South Korea and Taiwan or even mainland China, not to say England, Germany, Japan and the United States. Given the lateness of our awakening and the historical distance we have to cover, it has become imperative that our practice in education should obviously reckon with its premise, the internal reality, but must be guided by the aspiration to catch up with the external reality. Ethiopian teachers have to doubly strain their intelligence as our students obviously should also immensely strain their brains to learn. Our historical challenge demands sharp minds second to none and able hands that should be increasingly fit for the interesting Ethiopian times of today. It is perhaps more, certainly not less, intelligence that Ethiopia requires today than what prevails in the West and Northeast Asia. The fact that it has not demonstrated it in education as in its politics so far does not mean it cannot achieve it soon enough.

The truth is Ethiopia has not been blessed yet in this regard. There is no doubt that we have had highly educated educators, who are now at least numerically in the ascendancy. My dissatisfaction with so to say myself is on one critical thing. Our foremost Ethiopian educators are draped in borrowed cloaks, with which they attempt to drape the educators they educate, thus cascading the cloaks with increasingly poorer copies down to grade one in our schools. All this is done as a practice of a universal science of education, thus with practically little inkling to, let alone reckoning with and accepting, what Ethiopia is, or what its people are, and up to at the present juncture of history. I am not engaging in name calling which is none of my intention. I am simply indicating to the defect in the origin and history of our education, which defect we have through social practice to overcome yet.

As I see it we have been seriously damaged intellectually. Perhaps the Korean adage (You can cook a frog alive) applies aptly for the misfortunes of our intellectual development so far through the school system. We have never been colonised – bar our symmetrical political seesaws within the Horn – except for the five-year Italian interlude. We rightly feel and should feel proud of this historical fact. We should be ashamed at the same time that this had not led to secular intellectual flowering for a full one-hundred years. Hence, we have to answer a pertinent question whether we have not been colonised in a subtle way – therefore, in all the more an insidious way – is a different question. We have been hit where it hurts most: intellectually. The witticisms and wisdoms encapsulated in sayings and parables, the precepts of human relations and courage to preserve one's political identity, the sense of justice and fairness, the heroism in the face of existential danger, the high spirit of independence, and the inclusive social ethos that have sustained the peoples of the Ethiopian region over the millennia have wilted in our secular intellectuals thanks to the origin and historical pattern of development of modern schooling in Ethiopia. Whether we as intellectuals have not been made intellectually a hybrid with lame legs, or whether we have not become so hyphenated that we have become intellectually too dependent, is an interesting

question. I raise this question because I think it has a bearing on quality of Ethiopian education if not as the reality that is current, which I argue it still is, then at least as a matter of history, whose legacy still lingers on.

I have been very cautious. I have not called for inventing our own theory of learning. My recommendation is for intelligent choice and as intelligent social practice. It is reformist. As such, it appears to result in a contradictory situation. To embrace all efficacious theories of learning flowing from the developed countries on one hand and decry intellectual dependence on the other hand are not contradictory though. That theory of learning which is efficacious for the historical purposes of Ethiopia requires ascertaining, proving that it does in fact mediate effectively between our layered historical realities. Proving this through thought processes and piloting the result should not be that demanding. The demand is the educators shift their focus: appreciate all that we have been doing as received is defective and simultaneously embrace the necessity that we should digest and process what we receive for use to overcome our historical challenges. This, I think, is a call for revolution in the paradigm of Ethiopian education through sustained reforms in teaching and learning. We should be able to do this, to begin with, in the education of our educators and in parallel by engaging the entire army of teachers in general education and trainers in TVET institutions. This would be a revolutionary shift, but it is very practicable and would not demand an expensive protracted process. When an apprehensive rabbit begins credibly to escape from a problematic scene every other rabbit in the scene follows suit.

I have more than adumbrated where the challenge lies, but have not said it all, yet. We begin by recalling how I have defined good or high quality of education in Ethiopia. Ethiopian education is good or high in its quality if and only if it sustains, enhances and deepens the abilities of its Ethiopian learners as Ethiopians to learn continually in successfully negotiating their way through the Ethiopian two-tier historical challenges.

As we have seen Ethiopian learners have to be makers of history in a double sense: they have to end effectively one history – to end poverty comprehensively – and usher in another history, conjure and build a prosperous and democratic Ethiopia with social justice. These are simultaneous processes, whose results must be witnessed as the defining features of Ethiopian society and polity at least by the seven-year olds in 2017 at their still virile age of 57 years.

Our education policy sees Ethiopian education as a public good. It emphasises equity or inclusiveness – irrespective of gender, class, location and disability. The education structure (8 2 2 3/ 3+) consists of an eight-year universal education and a ten-year free education, with the graduates of the ten-year education streamed overwhelmingly on academic merit either to college (degree) education or to post-secondary (five levels of) skills formation for the world of work. In considerations of both learning and formation of organic personalities, mother tongues have been a policy choice as media of instruction, wherever practicable, for the eight-year universal education. These are the policy fundamentals on the basis of which a massive system of public education (capped by 45+ universities) has been built since 1994.

As a system, this leaves little to be desired to tackle the Ethiopian historical challenge. The nettlesome issue of policy has been resolved, while it has been and remains open for further improvements in its transmissions and missing links in such areas as pre-school, special needs education, adult functional education, the weight of bands in college education, teacher education and certifications, etc. It is an admirable system, on which criterion the Ethiopian education today must be qualified as of high quality.

The challenge of quality of education in Ethiopia no longer lies in policy, or, which is the same thing, in the ruling politics. The challenge must be sought in the patterning consequences of the origin and development of schooling in Ethiopia. There is a claim that modern schooling started in Ethiopia in 1908, obviously by an emperor who knew little about it and by a polity adamantly averse to it. The further claim is that schooling in Ethiopia received further boost in 1925, when a few more schools opened by a supposedly reformer prince. The truth is schooling in Ethiopia is not even seventy-five years old.

False labour has never been labour itself. I surmise that as a system it is no greater than my age, which I should date it therefore to 1950. Modern schooling is premised on science, runs on the basis of science and is about science. By science, I mean evidence-based knowledge. However, the claimants of modern schooling in Ethiopia commencing in 1908 may justify their claims, to talk about schools premised on science, running on the basis of science and engaged with science during the period up to 1950 would be a tale of tales. In fact, even during the period 1950-1974, the height of imperial absolutism and the final period of the monarchical feature of the empire-state, science existed thinly on the margins of the state and society. The Ethiopian school system was a graft or a transplant on a political economy that was allergic to science. Science was taught in schools, alright, but in a social milieu and political environment antithetical to science. This had made Ethiopian schooling irrelevant, therefore socially of very low quality.

There is no doubt Emperor Haile Selassie I was the political author of modern schooling in Ethiopia, for which he should receive the credit, of which also he never tired off to take pride. Since it was a mere transplant however it could not develop authentically, grappling with developmental issues of the society to which it had been attached. The religious education systems, Christian and Muslim, which on the other hand have been cultivated for some two millennia co-existed, seemingly peaceably, alongside the transplant. In my opinion two fundamental processes ensued. Knowledge is foreign and has to be imported, because it could not be produced in Ethiopia, which would become habitual overtime. Transmittal of knowledge, teaching, on the other hand had to tap increasingly domestic human resources. The learners of the imported knowledge and subsequently the transmitters of that knowledge were Ethiopians. These two processes patterned the Ethiopian education system: learning is about knowledge, about accumulating raw data, about committing raw data to memory, therefore about memorisations, hence about producing men and women with bulging

memories,² but with stunted thinking skills, hence, a permanent impairment in knowledge production. No one would argue that persons who are intellectually imprisoned would behave freely.

This pattern had its corollary in teaching: the teacher as the only authoritative source of final knowledge and hence of education could engage only in one-way communication. The teacher pours out knowledge. The learner had only to receive it meekly. The religious systems had found a deformed mutated existence in the school system. The teacher poured knowledge from the pulpit virtually like in preaching, the learners took over the roles of the faithful, receiving meekly the new form of preaching. Rote teaching and learning had prevailed and linger on in Ethiopia. As the scale of changes in other spheres of society increases, this translates into an increased pressure on students to focus only on promotion and try to achieve it by hook or crook, or even acquire fake certificates, which I believe is already evident. If how we teach is not quickly revolutionised through aggressive and sustained reforms in teaching, I am afraid the consequences would be very dire. I wish this were wrong, but my purposeful observations tell me that this is true.

This historical fact of a carry-over form of learning warns us that history belies the immense surge in education Ethiopia has achieved since 1991, with some 28 million children and young people³ being in the school system today. Let there be no misunderstanding about what I try to convey thus. The system and the gains in enrolment as well as the guiding policy are laudable. But there is something that continues to militate against the huge gains, to tackle which now is the time, but of which I am doubtful if we are intelligently engaged with.

The graft school system produced scholars and educators, among many other experts, technicians and secretarial workers. This is indisputable. It is equally indisputable, however, that those scholars and educators were not, except for the emphasis on memory, of the make of Ethiopia. There was no umbilical cord linking the educated elite to the historical intellectual challenges of Ethiopia since 1950. This is to say very simply Ethiopia failed to produce its own organic intellectuals, which failure, has been so massive that even today, to a much lesser extent than in the longer past, Ethiopian intellectuals find it difficult, thanks to their intellectual birthmarks, to read and appreciate current determinant processes. They are not impoverished as such in cognitive skills, but their skills fail in the choice of the inputs of thought. Where the education had inputs other than people as determinants, for instance, the cognitive skill thus achieved would be hard put to read a process, let alone recommend a process, in which people are the determinant.

² I should tell you about one true case. A child of 12 years old was asked, during a celebration of her 12th year birth-day party, the question of how old she could be in months. She could not figure it out. But she knew discretely that $12 \times 12 = 144$ and a year consists of 12 months. When she was told that she should be 144 months old on the basis of what she already knew, she felt too bad that she could not figure it out on her own.

³ According to the Minister of Education Dr. Shiferaw, in his reply to questions from MPs arising from his nine-month performance report delivered in April 2017, a third of the Ethiopian people was enrolled in the education system in the 2016/2017 academic year.

Knowledge in the form of facts of science or scientific theories, and specifically theories of learning, do not issue out of the blue. How social practice, including research as a human social activity informed by larger social activities, and theory feed each other is now a universal common sense. Social practice is the fountain of theory; and theories would be sterile if social practice were not to demand them. Social practice in the developed countries has been producing among multiple others theories of learning, simply because practice has demanded them. In Ethiopia, the practice in education has been restricted to producing readers of those theories without the necessity to practise them. This at least was unfortunately very true. Consequently, Ethiopia succumbed to intellectual colonialism through the instrumentality of a graft school system. If knowledge should be at variance from practice in all of us Ethiopian intellectuals today, this is historical rather than accidental. Conscious efforts toward intellectual liberation are necessary to overcome this historic limitation, which limitation suggests with no need for research that what can and must be done slips through undone.

I believe a social soil, an increasingly building up social practice, suitable for secular education has become now sufficiently evident also in Ethiopia today. This reflective exercise, for instance, would not have been possible without this new stimulant for the Ethiopian intellect. I would leave to future historians to mark objectively the earliest date for the birth of the transformative processes taking place in Ethiopia. What is evident is not difficult to opine on what it implies, however. New conditions for intellectual liberation have arisen in Ethiopia. Dynamic new conditions of life, a huge education system included, are taking root in Ethiopia today. These new conditions sharply test my intellectual resilience virtually daily. Even in the hard sciences, I argue, an intellectual formation made elsewhere or as received from elsewhere does not suffice for the dynamic new conditions of life. That which had been historically absent in Ethiopia for science and technology is now increasingly abounding authentically in every branch of life. There is much social practice that demands for formulating guiding theories or calls for creative absorption of available suitable theories. Education in Ethiopia is now a practical issue. Quality of education is a practical question. What theory or cluster of theories of learning would be suitable for Ethiopia and for which level and sphere of education or training is similarly a practical issue. There are huge spheres of social practice in education, health, economy, transport and communications, construction and politics that call for organic intellectuals. Objectively, science is no longer a pariah in Ethiopia. Ethiopia had defaulted in science and technology for long. Further defaulting is not just a bad choice; Ethiopia can no longer afford it.

It is historically justified now that Ethiopian intellectuals aim at their place of scholarship in the world and eye sternly to seize it. I expect educators and teachers, as the primary intellectual parents of all other scholars and experts, to be in the forefront in aiming at, sternly eyeing and seizing their place of scholarship and/or good practice. History has made this now absolutely necessary; and necessity is rightly the mother of invention. To this extent, good quality education has made its debut in Ethiopia. There is no mystery in what this good education is: it is that which cultivates the Ethiopian intellect. In practice, this good education has not yet credibly landed in Ethiopia. The reason is historical-technical rather than political.

The challenge to good quality education no longer lies in our political history of up to 1991. All that had hamstrung politically the abilities and aptitudes of our people for far too long has been transcended. That challenge is gone for ever, although its fragments and negative by-products do still linger on. The fragments and negative by-products of that history cannot be expected to disappear altogether even with a successful consummation of societal transformation. They would only be rendered ever more innocuous, as they are rendered so they would of course try to sting ever more venomously whenever an opportunity seems to arise. While such negative influences do exist alongside the new favourable conditions for intellectual liberation, I see that the new conditions are far more potent than the fragments and by-products, of our history up to 1991, in determining the fortunes of education in Ethiopia. The dominant politics, revolutionary democracy, is a facilitative-constructive force in education as in other spheres. I know our education, as a system of a transitional society, does in some evident ways suffer from political legacies of the absolutist empire-state, from its residue or by-products. On the whole, however, I claim politics does not constitute – be it in the form of policy or otherwise – the challenge par excellence to good quality education in Ethiopia today.

The challenge does not also lie in material supplies, in scarcity or in inappropriate use or none use of available supplies, even though in some places even the period of open-air schools does not seem to have come to a close. Nor am I inclined to locate the challenge either in policy or in curricula design and curricula products such as learning materials. All or any of these may be defective, but the defects, but scarcity in material supplies, can be removed through a proper review, something which the Ministry of Education favours. The kernel of the Ethiopian policy of education and training is inherently robust.

The challenge to good or high quality education in Ethiopia today lies in how teaching-learning takes place in our classrooms. If policy has to be criticised at all, it should be only in the sphere of the approach to the teaching profession, which ultimately decides the quality of learning in a country. Systemic changes have been made in this regard as well, but, I would argue, they have been based on the best of intentions rather than by identifying that which has hurt Ethiopia most: the historical lacuna in the how of teaching-learning in Ethiopia. Even where we have made a systematic change, pursuing it comprehensively and aggressively at the level of practice seems to have suffered from lack of a disciplined persistence.

The challenge to the quality of learning in Ethiopia, therefore, lies in how Ethiopian teachers teach at all levels of the system. Teaching as a profession carries ordinarily a high social responsibility. In our extraordinary situation of being faced by a layered historical challenge, however, the teaching profession carries a historic responsibility in addition to its ordinary high social responsibility. What and how the educators teach students determine what and how well they learn. If what and for how long a teacher teaches under our system of general education has been predetermined for the teacher, the teachers still possess the most critical authority of how to teach and verify the learning outcomes. Hence, the quality of education in Ethiopia today inheres in the quality of our teachers. Learning assessments focused on how well students have learned is of extremely limited benefit, if not a sheer waste of time and

resources, without at the same time measuring how well our teachers teach. I must point out incidentally that in our universities and education colleges the educators are the authors and executives of every aspect of education.

An objective investigation into the quality of our teachers, if done comprehensively, should ipso facto tell us the state of the quality of learning in the Ethiopian school system and therefore where to focus in matters of learning theories, including in the preparation as well as conditions of life of teachers and educators as well as any other policy aspects of our education. Studying the teaching practice also from the student point of view should validate the study on the quality of our teachers. This appears to be a simple proposition, but against what yardstick and baseline to measure the teaching practice make it indeed complex, simply because the choice for a pertinent way of teaching has to be first made very firmly. This should now be possible if we agree on a definition of quality of education in Ethiopia.

There are spheres in our education system (our education colleges and in our universities) where further delays in addressing the challenge should not be countenanced. Our educators and scholars in those spheres could move quickly to re-examine and reconstruct their paradigms and habitual practices in view of the Ethiopian two-tier historical reality/challenge. To be convinced to do it institutionally is all that it takes to discover co-operatively what they in fact ought to be and how they could arrive at it. This will usher in a country-wide movement that is so authentic and powerful that not only the people of Ethiopia will immediately begin to benefit from and take pride of it, but it will also usher us in a new tradition of Ethiopian education, authentic and intellectually self-sustaining. This is not just possible. It has been kicking for a decade now for its actual delivery.

Observations

The short quarter-century (1991-2017) in Ethiopian history has been both momentous and tumultuous. Ethiopia has achieved in this so short period of its history what it had failed to achieve during the previous 136 years (1855-1991): a solid premise of societal-scale and historic proportions to transform itself comprehensively with a speed and quality so unique that it would be frivolous to compare it with other broadly similar experiences. It has not been a smooth process. The challenging tests have been many and formidable. Ethiopia has resiliently stayed the course, however, much to the pleasant surprise of those who wish it well and to the chagrin of its ill-wishers.

An insertion from outside of a revolutionary strand of thought into the school system that fabricated hybrids with lame legs has ultimately credited the Ethiopian people with new opportunities to tackle their historic challenges. Thanks to its endowment with a mature revolutionary politics, which has developed against all odds, Ethiopia has navigated successfully very rough high seas to arrive this far and still aim high. The chosen path has never been without its inherent internal challenges. Who would say after all that aiming to transform a subsistence society of small agriculturalists could be without its formidable challenges, especially in the unenviable context of its intellectuals either being heavily

dominated by neo-liberal ideas and prejudices or they being located at some distance away from the location of being Ethiopian organic intellectuals. People and their revolutionary politics so to say alone have so far been able to build the solid premise for a comprehensive transformation of society and polity. This may not seem to be true, but it is.

How well the Ethiopian intellectuals move in mass to the position of being their country's organic intellectuals is now one of the crucial challenges to achieve in full and sustain the envisaged comprehensive transformation. Hence, the question of good or high quality education in Ethiopia is in a way how well the revolutionary politics continues to conduce for it and, above all, how fast the Ethiopian teachers and educators own the challenge as their own. Ownership calls for motivated practice, which in turn insists on real solutions for real problems, and hence purposefully engaging with theories of learning and making the right choices, if not formulating even more relevant and applicable theories at system level and at the level of specific disciplines. Given this, educators and teachers would begin to occupy centre-stage in informing all or any aspect of the education and training policy.

Are we getting closer to this position? I think we are. In terms of objective conditions the evidence is huge. The evidence is not that paltry also subjectively. I would rather say the evidence on subjective conditions, including the conference in many Ethiopian universities, is too obvious to deny that we are getting ever closer to a movement of our teachers and educators. Our universities, though still leaving much to be desired in everything, are no longer where they were in 2007. The tipping point is close-by, but I should observe at the same time that we have not yet crossed the line to a movement of our teachers and educators for high quality education, as high as the current and unfolding stages of our historical circumstances potentially permit us to achieve, which potential is very high.

It should be noted none the less that achieving the tipping point is much more challenging than the journey up to it. It is awakening from mind-sets, from delusional complacency, conviction for self-renewal and to re-invent oneself, therefore to plunge oneself into further learning and continually improve the teaching-learning process, and hence to live as a professional conscious of the extraordinary social responsibility one shoulders – in other words an intellectual revolution in the self – that the tipping point demands. As soon as this tipping point has been achieved in at least most of our universities, even if Addis Ababa University (AAU) should fail to make it, which I hope not, Ethiopia will have landed for good on the landscape of high quality of education, whose realisation in high learning outcomes throughout the education system would be a matter of the necessary time for this to permeate the entire system. Ethiopia deserves to and must assert its soul also in the sphere of modern education.

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