

Education and Nation Building in Ethiopia: Past and Present Developments

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Abstract

Education has pivotal roles in transforming economic and social development of countries. However, the ways under which education is organized to contribute to countries' development is different and such differences have been at the center of discussion across all countries and regions. Education in Ethiopia is not an exception. Therefore, the present article chronicles the historical and present development of the Ethiopian education system and the roles it has been playing in building the nation. While the roles of education in nation building are dubious, one may infer that education has been playing instrumental roles in the social and economic transformations of Ethiopia. However, the course of education and its roles to nation building in Ethiopia was not straightforward. During the commencement periods, modern education was introduced to modernize the country. However, its latter developments incline to westernize the country at the expenses of the shortly lived effort for modernization. Consequently, education and nation building seem to be loosely coupled in Ethiopia. To curb these, the Ethiopian government has to learn from past failures and should revisit the language of instruction. Besides, commendable effort may still be important to align education with the deeply entrenched endogenous knowledge and cultural traditions of the country.

Keywords: Education, Modernization, Nation building, Westernization

Introduction

Broadly defined, education is the process and the activity that is set in motion by a community to ensure its continued survival. Hence, there is no community that does not have a functioning education system where values and skills are transmitted from one generation to the next. While the transmission of skills is indeed important, the primary aim of education is to create a ruling elite imbued with the hegemonic values of the time. Who defines the hegemonic values and the life span of such values and the conditions under which such values are either changed or transformed? These are interesting aspects but outside of the scope of this article.

The process and activity of transmission can however be disrupted in situations where one community falls victim to the violent encroachment of another community with different architecture of skills and values. This is what happened to most of African countries when Europe trampled and smashed the cultures of inferior communities during the era of colonization. The impact of such tragic encounter has been put very clearly by Karl Polanyi's (1957, p. 166) conclusion:

The greatest damage of colonial domination was the disintegration of the African cultural environment. The result is a loss of self-respect and standards, whether the unit is a people or a class, whether the process springs from so-called "culture conflict" or from a change in the position of a class within the confines of a society.

Social structures (which are the result of educational activities) are smashed under two circumstances, both of which are implied by Karl Polanyi but need further clarification. The first circumstance can be easily surmised: a foreign culture (apparently stronger) smashes an inferior culture. European colonization of the Africa and Asia was an example minutely studied by Karl Polanyi. What happens to the smashed culture is often tragic and its impact can be of long duration as we can sometimes observe in the cultural politics of the ex-colonies in the African continent. The second circumstance is the smashing of social structures, for instance, in the rural areas of Great Britain by the nobility and the uprising middle classes. In Great Britain, it was driven by a new political economy of large-scale commercial agriculture that drove the rural population in millions to the urban areas and condemned as vagrant hordes – with neither homes nor jobs. It happened in Ethiopia too. Although Ethiopia is not colonized by the Europeans, it has been continuously criticized that its educational practices were purely western in type. Thus, the role of education in developing the country's endogenous knowledge and practice and in lifting the larger public from poverty and illiteracy has been a point of discussion for ages.

Therefore, the purpose of the present article is to enlighten the role that modern education has contributed to the nation building endeavors in Ethiopia. While doing so, the article discussed the past and present educational developments in the country and ultimately drew some lesson on the contributions that education has played to nation building in Ethiopia.

The article is divided into two major sections. The first section presents the historical development of modern education in Ethiopia, while the second section deals with the concluding remarks. To solicit the concluding remarks, the author has discussed the historical development of education by classifying it into different historical epochs- these were from 1908 to 1935; from 1941 to 1974; from 1974 to 1991 and from 1991 to present. In each section, the historical development of education including the major bottlenecks are discussed.

Modern Education in Ethiopia: the contest between “westernization” and “modernization”

This section presents the introduction and development of modern education in Ethiopia. It attempts to trace the development of education in Ethiopia from 1908 to the time when modern education was begun to the recent education development in Ethiopia. While tracing such historical developments, the writer has also tried to discuss the contest between westernization and modernization of education and the likely implications of these contests to the nation building endeavors in Ethiopia. The chances that Ethiopia missed due to the contest between westernization and modernization are also discussed.

Modern Education in Ethiopia (1908-1935): from commencement to the eve of idiosyncrasy for westernization

The history of modern education is slightly more than one hundred years old; the first school opened its doors in 1908. The circumstances which led to the establishment of the modern school are fully described by Tekeste Negash (1990) and Bahru Zewde (2002). One of the challenges of sovereignty was to modernize the system of governance as Ethiopia began to participate in the world political and economic system. By 1906, Great Britain, France, Italy, Germany and Russia had permanent legations in Addis Ababa. Ethiopia was expected to develop a ministerial form of government quite distinct enough so that the foreign embassies established in Addis Ababa could easily identify who is who in the Ethiopian political establishment. Here, it has to be noted that the Ethiopian political system had quite clearly defined offices for the various affairs of the state but were not directly compatible with the system widely used in Western Europe. Advised by the French, the most privileged nation in Ethiopia in the late 19th century, the Ethiopian ruling elite reorganised itself, in 1907 with the formation of the first cabinet made up of seven ministries. Almost at the same time, the first “modern” school funded and sponsored by Emperor Menelik was established in 1908.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which up to that period had a virtual monopoly on education, strongly opposed the establishment of such school run by foreigners as it feared that it would undermine its status and position in the Ethiopian society. Emperor Menelik overcame the opposition from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church by giving in to many of its demands. The Emperor assured the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that the school would only be engaged in the teaching of foreign languages – the proficiency of which was essential for the maintenance of the country’s independence. Moreover, the teachers for the new school were

to be Copts from Egypt – a group who share the same religious dogma as that of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The ruling elite of the period (mainly Emperor Menelik and some of his advisors excluding the Ethiopian Orthodox Church) saw a close link between the independence of the country and the presence of Ethiopians fluent in communicating with the outside world.

During the first 25 years of its existence (that is up to 1935), Menelik School resembled a language institute rather than a proper school. There was no age limit for admission, but a prior knowledge of Amharic (given by the Orthodox Church) was a prerequisite. Some of the most successful graduates of Menelik School were those who joined it after having more than ten years of Church education. To a great extent, this was because the whole educative process sponsored by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was not only religious in content, but it was also highly literary. As Maaza Bekele (1964, pp. 25–26) noted,

...to be learned meant to be somewhat set apart. It meant to be possessed of great linguistic ability and a thorough understanding of the history and culture of the nation. It meant the ability to dispute subtle doctrinal points. It seems essential therefore to understand this attitude toward learning as one examines a Government system of education, the content of which is markedly different from that which is respected by clergy and the laity alike.

Maaza Bekele who wrote her thesis in the early 1960s, was fully aware of the ideological nature of modern education versus the education system managed and given by the Orthodox Church.

On the eve of Italian invasion in 1935, the two government schools in Addis Ababa might have offered some form of modern education (with emphasis on foreign languages) to not more than 2000 Ethiopians. How well did this pool of educated Ethiopians function within the Ethiopian political system? What kind of elite did the education system produce? In his path-breaking study on Ethiopian intellectuals Bahru(2002) does a wonderful job in describing the schools that existed in Ethiopia prior to 1935. Lodging and food was provided free of charge until 1932. Menelik School remained English inspired whereas Tefferi Mekonen was French inspired. There was no department of government responsible of the overall direction of education.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, it needs to be remembered, continued to teach young Ethiopians Amharic and Geez as these were pre-requisites for admission to the modern schools. There was no standard policy on such matters as curricula, textbooks and medium of instruction. Bahru (2002, pp. 32-33) cites an excellent critic on the quality of the education system that was imparted from the 1920s. The critic in the form of a comment sent to the weekly newspaper lamented that people parade as scholars with only an elementary knowledge of primary level and a smattering of a foreign language.

Bahru Zewde proceeded to study the social and collective biography of those students who went to Ethiopian schools where curricula, textbooks and medium of instruction were decided

by policies of the individual schools thus producing graduates who must have lacked the instruments of adapting and adjusting their education to the needs and realities of their country. This gap between the type of education offered and the challenges of the Ethiopian society (intellectual, social, political and economic) became even more pronounced after 1941.

Bahru Zewde divided the Ethiopian “intellectuals” in two groups: those who were educated at home and those who got their training abroad. Most of the foreign educated Ethiopians saw the civilizing/progressive sides of European colonialism (Bahru, 2002, p. 108). Moreover, most of those educated abroad either supported European colonization of Ethiopia or condemned Ethiopia for not catching up to the level of progress achieved in African territories colonised by Europe.

Although the two pioneering modern schools (Empress Menen school established in 1931 had very few girl students) did not have standardized curricula, they fulfilled the objectives set by Ras Tefferi (later Haile Selassie). The educational philosophy as expounded in the 1920s showed a keen awareness of the importance of the integration of the new modern education with that of the education system that prevailed in the country since the centuries. On the occasion of prize giving at Menelik II School in 1927, Tefferi Mekonen (later Haile Selassie) stated:

Nobody is blind to the fact that the uneducated is a curse to his father and mother while the educated is a blessing to them. Further as there is a great profit in being taught in Geez and Amharic, the learning of our country, it will be necessary for all the governors to provide this education by setting up in their respective provinces schools for reading and writing; only when the pupils have received enough education to prepare for foreign studies should they come hither. My reason for establishing this rule is that any one of us who proposes to study foreign knowledge without being versed in the learning of our country is like a man who builds a house on loose gravel.” (Pankhurst, 1962, p. 268)

Therefore, it seems that the education practice which was in place up 1935 gave due attention to the integration of the county’s cultural values and traditions and hence one may ostensibly claim that it was sound initiation to seed the country’s indigenous knowledge and practices.

The emperor encouraged the building of schools in the provinces teaching Geez and Amharic. He applied strict criteria for admission. Students were admitted to the “modern” schools only after they have received enough education in Geez and Amharic. The modern schools dealt primarily, in the words of the Emperor, with foreign studies where the acquisition of languages was the most important. I think it can also be argued that Haile Selassie was engaged in the process of modernising but not westernizing Ethiopia. During the first three decades of the 20th century (that is between 1900 and 1935) Ethiopia was being modernised but not westernized. The Emperor was capable and wise enough to see the distinction between modernization and westernization. His statement that learning a foreign knowledge without being versed in the knowledge available in the society was like building a house on loose gravel was a clear illustration of his mind.

Here it is important to define the concepts of modernization and westernization as they have been used more often as interchangeable. Westernization is a process of developing and or transforming a society along the same patterns as those used in Western Europe. The post 1941 development strategies pursued by the former colonies of Europe (that included Ethiopia as well) were based on the models of westernization. Even the development model inspired by the Soviet Union (1917-1991) during the heyday of socialism and communism was an alternative model of westernization. It is worthwhile to remember that Western Europe developed two quite distinct models of development. The liberal democratic as well as the socialist/communist models were the products of Western Europe and share several values in common; the most important is their arrogance vis a vis non-European political and economic cultures.

On the other hand, modernization, as a concept, can be defined as an internal process that a society launches in response to internal and external pressures. The classical example of a society that has modernized without being westernized is Japan. The threat of European colonialism was the most important internal factor that compelled or forced the Japanese ruling elite to launch a development strategy based on adaptation and adjustment.

Attributed to the five year's war between Ethiopia and Italy, Addis Ababa (the then capital) was captured by the Italian fascist in 1936 and thus the Emperor sought political asylum in Great Britain, where he stayed for five years. He left as a ruler convinced about the importance of Geez and Amharic before Ethiopians could study foreign languages and modern skills. The Emperor left Ethiopia as a ruler who was capable of developing an educational policy that combined the best elements of Ethiopian and the emerging modern education. However, the Emperor who returned back to Ethiopia in 1941 was not the same who left Ethiopia in 1935. He left Ethiopia as a moderniser and came back as westernizer with disastrous consequences for himself, for the imperial system and even for the country as a whole.

Modern Education in Ethiopia (1941-1974): Advent of western curriculum and marginalization of the Church

The first curriculum that was worked out in 1946 was of 6 years elementary followed by 6 years secondary. "Amharic was to be the language of instruction for all subjects during the first two years (Ayalew, 1964, pp. 19–20); there was to be a gradual transition to the use of English in grades 3 and 4 and students should be able to receive their complete instruction in English from grade five onwards with the exception, of course, of Amharic".

The first curriculum developed in 1946 was the product of British advisors who arrived with the Emperor in 1941. The British tried and to some extent succeeded to treat Ethiopia as an enemy territory with all that term implied. The British advisors of the Emperor considered Ethiopia, for obvious reasons, like any other African colony and proceeded first to implement and then to develop a curriculum for Ethiopian schools.

There were no effective steps to implement the curriculum. For instance, the secondary school syllabus was based entirely upon the London School Leaving Certificate Examination without regard to its relevance to Ethiopia (Ayalew, 1964, p. 22). In the teaching of Amharic on the elementary level, due to deference to the Christian heritage of the country and an inability to find other suitable text material, the Bible was selected as the textbook for grades 1 to 4. Yet, the Bible was a disputed text and many Ethiopians were not Christians. Besides, the teaching of English proved difficult due to lack of teachers and textbooks.

The second curriculum was introduced in 1956 and had a very short duration. The structure was based on four years elementary, four years middle or intermediate and four years secondary. Amharic became, for the first time, the medium of instruction for all subjects up to grade 4. A new curriculum was worked out in 1962 (see, Ayalew, 1964).

Up to 1962, the language of instruction from grade 4 was supposed to be English. There was neither direct continuity nor an intermediate stage between the 8 years primary and 4 years secondary curriculum. The syllabi of all subjects showed lack of relevance to Ethiopian needs. The 8+4 curriculum was criticized on a number of grounds. One of the main criticisms dealt with the fact that it provided for only one type of education. There was no diversification and/or streaming. Another often heard criticism dealt with the language problem. With pupils trying to learn both foreign language and content during their elementary years, they had difficulty grasping either. According to Ayalew (1964) the average pupil completing grade 8 retained practically nothing of what he/she should have learned in the lower grades. Elimination of the language problem would mean greater emphasis could be given to content of the various subjects taught. There is, however, no evidence that Ayalew advised his government to change its language policy.

By 1962, the Ethiopian government could boast the following figures: 220,861 students in primary schools, 12,197 in secondary schools and 1041 in institutions of higher learning. The total number of students in the country stood as 234,099. In 1941/41, there were less than 15,000 students throughout the empire. The government led by the emperor as Minister of Education succeeded to increase enrolment at the rate of more than 10 per cent per annum.

Germa Amare (1964, pp. 6–7) describes the consequence of the education system imported from western countries as follows:

In fact, no one European country monopolises the educational system in Ethiopia. Rather, various systems of education representing various European and American countries are allowed to operate independently of one another. In spite of such diversities in systems of education, however, all these systems reflect ideals and values that are different from those that are indigenous to the Ethiopian society. They all remain superimposed institutions that have no roots in the Ethiopian tradition. They function distinct and apart from other agents and institutions of the culture. They, thus, constitute islands in themselves, cut off from the great traditional current of ideas and ideals of the mainland (italics added).

Hence, the education system was the main playground for various countries that aspire to purvey their hegemony in Ethiopia and the region. The infiltration of such developments has ultimately created a tipping point of discourse among different age groups and economic classes existed in the country. Germa (1964, pp. 6–7) went on and described the contest as

A natural consequence of this situation is (*i.e., the infiltration of various countries into education*) a conflict between modern-oriented young and the traditionally motivated old. The ideas, values and general orientation of the modern remain incompatible with those held by the traditionalists of the society. Consequently, a bitter struggle between the two ensues. Being in the minority the educated modern suffers many setbacks and fails to live and think in the way he was taught in the modern schools. He, as a result, becomes frustrated, disillusioned and despaired.....In the absence of a reconciling force the gap between the two, the moderns and the traditionalists, widens. Discontent, frustration, despair and uncertainty become the order of the day (*italics added*).

Germa Amare defended his thesis in 1964 where he concluded that Ethiopian education policy was the root cause of the conflict of values that put the survival of the country at risk. The marginalization of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, an institution that historically functioned as a moderating and reconciling force between the various classes meant that conflicts were solved through violence rather than through compromise and reconciliation.

The gap between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the youth that has gone through the modern school system (Germa estimated that there were about 6000 Ethiopians with secondary and college education in the country and most of them in Addis Ababa) and the Imperial system was wide enough already in the early 1960s. The number of graduates from secondary and tertiary institutions as well as those who failed to complete their studies had grown so much after 1964 that some kind of upheaval was inevitable.

Another author who took a serious look into the education system and the formation of elites is Donald Levine, who conducted his research more or less at the same time as Germa Amare. The prime interest of Donald Levine was to trace the evolution of the new elite, those created by Haile Selassie, through the education system.

Donald Levine (1965, p. 190) defines the new secular educated elite (the intelligentsia) all those who graduated from secondary schools and those with college degrees. Like Germa before him, Donald Levine estimated the number of the secular educated elites to 6000 in 1962 about one fourth of whom had college degrees. The new secular educated elite has come into being in consequence of Haile Selassie's policy of technical modernization. The status of its members rests on their possession of secular Western education. Donald Levine believed that the new secular educated elite begun to behave as a counter-elite from 1955 onwards.

According to Donald Levine this secular system (structure) was foreign to Abyssinian tradition. The major sociological dilemma during the decade of the 1960s was the question of integration of the modern education system (the major producer of the secular elites) and the traditional social system.

The ideological aspect of this dilemma, according to Levine (1965, p. 198), was that no synthesis of traditional and modern perspectives has yet been effected which has won the adherence of a sizable number of intellectuals and which could serve to energize their transformation of the status quo. Consensus exists only with regard to a vague sense of the inadequacy of the traditional system. Here, it has to be noted that the dilemma that Donald Levine describes in great detail was created by the policies of Haile Selassie. It is most plausible that the regime led by Haile Selassie could have avoided the emergence of the dilemma if the educational policy were framed and implemented for instance along the lines suggested by Ernest Work.

Both Germa Amare and Donald Levine view the impact of modern education on the Ethiopian social fabric more or less in the same way. Germa Amare hoped that the Ethiopian government would eventually develop education policies that uplift the entire society by targeting parents rather than their children. Donald Levine (1965, p. 217) hoped that the Ethiopian Intelligentsia/elite would break out of their posture of defeatism and negativism.

They will have to abandon the delusive image implied by the intellectual who replied, when asked why he was sitting around in his office and doing no work: "I am waiting until the government changes". The burden for the breakthrough rests upon them: upon their capacity to push forward in the light of development needs and technical requirements, maintaining a sense of affinity both with the government and with the traditional masses. The chances for the success of this elite would seem to rest on its capacity for self-restraint and its effectiveness in legitimating itself through modernizing achievement, through a due respect for the claims of traditional beliefs and through its recruitment of a stratum of intellectuals of intermediate level who can reinterpret traditional beliefs, adapt them to modern needs and translate them into a modern idiom.

The sociological dilemma that Donald Levine wrote with great lucidity led to the 1974 revolution that wiped out the Imperial system and hurled the country into a new treacherous path. The Ethiopian student movement that functioned as the sole opposition party against the imperial regime of Haile Selassie achieved its goal in the 1974. Bahru Zewde's (2002) conclusion on the legacies of the Student movement is indeed worth quoting:

The country's political culture, which made the movement inevitable, also conditioned their behaviour. Dogmatic belief, rather than seasoned debate and a spirit of compromise, became the norm. This liability became manifest in the students' framing of the national question and in their organizational culture. The legacy the movement has left behind in these two spheres has been the most problematic. The country has to come to grips with and move beyond this legacy if it is to have any hope of redemption. At the same time, however, we have to understand that the students did what they did in all genuineness and sincerity. They had no hidden agenda. They were driven by what has driven youth everywhere and throughout the ages- the quest for social justice and equitable development.

It is important to contextualise the legacies of the student movement on the future trajectories of the political landscape. The national question, as it was debated within the Student

movement, considered Ethiopia as a society where the major ethnic groups found themselves in prison like conditions that they had all the right to break away. A rather logical follow up of this world view was that there was virtually nothing that Ethiopia and Ethiopians could learn from the three thousand years history- a narrative put forward by the Imperial regime and supported by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Relaying to Bahru Zewde's reflections, it seems quite worthy to accept that the students who participated in the movement were innocent and acted on the basis of the knowledge that they acquired by themselves. The responsibility for the creation of a student movement that lost a capacity of self-restraint and instead opted for a radical overhaul of the system rests on the shoulders of the Emperor and the Imperial regime he presided.

Education in Ethiopia (1974-1991): Discrediting the Past and immersion into the timely Fads of Socialist/Communist Ideology

The military/socialist regime inherited the worldview of the Ethiopian student movement but not its solution, that is, the right of Ethiopian ethnic communities to self-determination. The country had to remain united, but a new culture was required to uplift it from its backwardness and extreme poverty. This new culture would have little in common with the Ethiopian tradition and culture that was associated with the Imperial system. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church was separated from the state. The military regime accepted fully the hegemonic worldview of the student movement where Ethiopia has no cultural or political history worth saving. Although the Socialist regime accepted the description of Ethiopia as the prison of nationalities, it tried quite hard to develop an ideology that would unite all Ethiopians (former oppressors and oppressed nationalities alike). The solution was socialism and the unity of the working class.

There were two significant developments that took place during the Socialist regime in Ethiopian history. The first as extensively dealt in the author's earlier work (see, Negash, 1990) was that the denigration of Ethiopia's past was carried out on a massive scale. Ethiopian history and society is that of shame, contempt and disgust. This was very clear in the choice of history textbooks for secondary schools and the marginal importance given to Ethiopian history. The second development was the continued deterioration of the quality of education measured in the proficiency of students to follow their studies in English as it was the language of instruction from grade seven onwards.

The content and quality of education, as understood and explained by the Socialist regime, was to prepare students to meet the objective demands of the nation and the ideological needs of the society. So framed, Ethiopian secondary schools attempted to teach their students, vocational, academic and ideological courses at one go, without resources and manpower.

By the beginning of the 1980's, Ethiopian schools (from grade seven upwards) had great difficulties in using English as medium of instruction. As schools expanded at the rate of about 12 per cent per year, the number of Ethiopian teachers increased. Expatriate teachers,

who comprised up to 70 per cent of the teaching force in Ethiopian secondary schools, were all driven out by the middle of 1975. The Ethiopianization of the teaching staff was one of the most notable outcomes during the 1974-91 period.

Education in Ethiopia (1991-present): Catapult of Expansion, Obsession to Right to Session and the Thorny Challenges

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) regime that assumed power in 1991 adopted and/or inherited more fully the worldview of the Ethiopian student movement. The unconditioned right of every nation and nationality to self-determination, including the right to secession was enshrined in the Constitution of the country. Hence, Ethiopia is described as a country of nations and nationalities that freely and voluntarily adhere to it. At present Ethiopia is made up of nine federal states and two chartered cities. All member nations have the right to opt out of the federation. It has to be remembered that any citizen in the country can campaign for the secession of his ethnic community from the Ethiopian state as long as the struggle is peaceful.

The organizing principle of the EPRDF regime is the primacy of ethnic languages as medium of instruction for the first 8 years of primary education. English is officially the language of instruction in the secondary schools, but in reality, ethnic languages are used in secondary schools throughout the country. This is largely due to the weakened position of English, where it is rarely spoken. Although Amharic was to be taught throughout the country from grade three onwards, there was great reluctance among some major ethnic groups (mainly the Somali and the Oromo) to implement it.

The EPRDF regime transformed the educational landscape in several significant ways. First, it deepened and to some extent created cultural and linguistic divisions among groups that had hitherto lived together peacefully side by side. Second, it laid down the basis for ethnic entrepreneurs to harp on the differences between ethnic groups in the country. Third, making use of the economics of the Millennium Development Goals, the regime expanded primary education so as to achieve on paper a high percentage of literacy in the country. Fourth, the EPRDF regime both expanded higher education and opened the education to private providers, thus, producing yearly hundreds of thousands of college graduates.

A major consequence of the unplanned and underfinanced expansion of the education sector is the marked decline of the quality of education. The challenges pertaining the declining education quality in the country since the EPRDF took power is extensively discussed in the author's earlier publication entitled as 'Education in Ethiopia: From Crisis to the Brink of Collapse (see, Negash, 2006). For teachers and concerned parents, quality is measured by the ability of students to read and understand texts and to perform well at the work place. The EPRDF government was repeatedly accused (up to 2006) of ridiculing teachers and ignoring their complaints about quality arguing that expansion of the education sector was by itself a qualitative input.

There are two lessons that this federal government could learn from the past experiences. The first is the tendency of the education sector to produce graduates that could not be absorbed by the economy. The second lesson is to consider the relevance of English as medium of instruction.

The problem of English as a medium of instruction in Ethiopian schools is very serious indeed. English is only a language, but it is value system as well. Attending all classes in English is tantamount to the wholesale adaptation of the culture that the English language represents at the price of one's languages and the values that such language contains. If the policy of rapid expansion of educational services had a negative impact on quality, the continued use of English as medium of instructions which is differently organized among regional states (some start at grade while other at grades seven and eight) led the education sector to the brink of collapse. The continued use of English amid of considerable challenges and intermittent use of local languages would in actual fact mean the westernization of the Ethiopian society but without the necessary financial and human resources.

Concluding Remarks

Nobody can tell what the future holds. But immense strides have been made to analyse the making of the future where education has a very important role to play. We know how the present is made. It is a fusion of yesterday and our reactions to it today. Unprecedented events such a serious environmental disaster may call for a rapid and radical adjustment followed by diverse solutions. Not everything can be planned to keep the future under control. But the development of the culture of reflexivity (learning from past lessons and planning for all conceivable scenarios) appears to offer hope of taming the future for the wellbeing of its citizens. It is in promoting common values as well as the capacity for reflexivity that education becomes an important instrument. The primary goal of education, as mentioned earlier, is the transmission of values than bind a society. But it has to be made clear from the outset that this huge and important task cannot be managed by an education sector left alone. The education sector of any given country is an outcome of policy. Education is not an independent variable that can propel a society to development. The sector functions when it is closely tied to politics and policy.

However, a look into the Ethiopian experience parallel to other African countries which were under the actual colonializations, perhaps revealed that Ethiopia behaves in the same manner as a former colony in terms of introduction and development of its education. Ethiopia has by fault or design put herself in the same position as that of a former colony. The widespread belief that Ethiopia is the only country that has not been colonised by a European power is a truth that demands considerable qualification. The Ethiopian educational scene does not in any way reflect that Ethiopia has always been an independent country. So, although true, the narrative of Ethiopian independence might have a rhetoric value, but it has very little content. The most demonstrative example is the reluctance to privilege its languages and cultures as medium of instruction all along the education sector.

It seems quite convincing to subscribe to the view put out by many African scholars that it is only by replacing English with Ethiopian languages as medium of instruction that Ethiopia can achieve sustained development and social cohesion. To put it clearly, it is only when Ethiopia is in a position to provide education to its citizens in its own languages that it can embark on development and social cohesion. It is worthwhile to mention briefly two authors who perceived the link between development (as defined above) and the enhancement of indigenous languages. Ngugi (1986) argued repeatedly that there could be no African university that does not enhance African languages. The second author is Prah (1998) who has consistently maintained that the only way for African states (that includes Ethiopia as well) to deal with their inferiority complex is to switch from European to African languages.

English would remain as very important language as it is par excellence the source of most of the knowledge available in the world today. And as many people as possible ought to be encouraged to master it so as to participate in the flow of knowledge and information. Therefore, by way of conclusion, it is important to note that there are thorny challenges that impede Ethiopia to educate its citizens through the medium of English. First, as English is not even a second language in Ethiopia, it would be fruitless to carry on as before. Teachers are unable to teach in English; students would end up being uneducated and the country would lose the added-up value of a population equipped with abilities to understand concepts that are very much needed for development and social cohesion.

The success of Ethiopia would depend on the quality of its people. There is sufficient reason to give credit to Martin Wolf (2004) for his seminal work on 'Why Globalisation Works'. Wolf argued that a causal relationship between the success of the economy of any given state and the quality of its people. The quality of a people is measured by two principal indicators. These are health and education. A country that does not pay premium attention to the health of its people (by making food cheap and accessible) would not be able to exploit the best out of its population. Likewise, a nation that fails to put an education system that does not encourage learners to reflect on what they are learning would lose in getting the best out of its population. And a well-functioning education system in tune with its cultural base can produce citizens who would enhance the quality of the state and its economy. But in spite of the enormous investment on education Ethiopia is not getting the benefits (in terms of creating citizens of quality) due to uncritical adaption of curriculum and English as medium of instruction.

The second reason is that the status of English in the Ethiopian society as a whole is progressively diminishing partly due to the growth of Amharic and other Ethiopian languages. There is one country in tropical Africa that has devoted sufficient attention to the damaging effects of English as medium of instruction. It is South Africa. Since 2009, South African institutions of higher learning have intensified their efforts to introduce home language of the learners either as a learning support to the main (English) medium of instruction or as an alternative language of education. The South African case is very interesting for several reasons. English is a native language for several million South Africans. And yet, many South Africans whose native language is other than English find it difficult to follow their studies in

English. It is indeed commendable that South African institutions of higher learning have understood that the main problem was not learning difficulties but language difficulties. Ethiopia can learn quite a lot from the South African experience.

In conclusion, it seems highly desirable to abandon English in favour of Ethiopian languages. However, as the present article focuses literature review and personal reflections, it was difficult to pinpoint the language(s) that could replace English as medium of instruction in Ethiopia. As the issue is quite sensitive although not non-researchable, wider empirical research may be necessary on how English could be replaced by the Ethiopian languages. It is also essential if future research addresses whether using few languages could conveniently address the jolting issue of using mother tongue language as mercy to education quality in Ethiopia.

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