Modern Education in Ethiopia: Praise or Blame Worthy?

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Abstract
Societies value education as means of arriving at advanced thinking and achieving improved lifestyles. Modern education has paved extensive avenues into discerning many of the secrets of life. Being aided by information and communication technology that unprecedentedly compressed space and time, modern education has helped people's mode of life become much better than ever. The introduction of modern education to Ethiopia is only more than a turn of a century now. At its inception, it did not enjoy a warm welcome from two main circles: the church and the nobility. Skepticism was in order largely due to the grim experiences the country had faced from what was considered 'foreign'. Today, its utilitarian state of affairs is being questioned, while its initial skepticism of moral imperative has not yet faded away. The objective of this limited article is to slightly scratch the surface of the journey of our education system in historical, socioeconomic and political perspectives and pave ways for further discussions among educators, policymakers and the public to respond to current ill at ease concerns in order to set future strategies in place.
Key terms: education, modern education, knowledge, test/exam, school, educators
DOI: 10.7176/JLLL/100-04
Publication date: January 31st 2024

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the avenues for humankind to adjust their life to the changing environment. It has evolved through millennia in its contents and methodological approaches to date. The world community has developed education with the view that it promotes their social and economic developments and prosperity. In its long journey, modern education has shown greater strides to the extent of becoming the corner–stone of socioeconomic and cultural development leading to advanced human development indices. In Ethiopia, secular western type of educational system is a comparatively recent phenomenon[1]. It was introduced much later than many other countries due mainly to external and internal grips. Internally, traditions have played a major role and had been a staunch gatekeeper not to allow what was then labeled 'foreign'. Opposition and avoidance was precipitated by continuous external aggressions. In consequence, many scholars have it that the country has traditionally been one of the most educationally disadvantaged in the world where majority of its population had little access to schooling (Brown and Teshome 2007, Perham 1947, and Pankhurst1968). Hence, attempts to introduce modern education were quite challenging specifically from the church. As a result, it had to wait for a series of negotiations, as the relationship between the church and the state was totally incomprehensible.[2] This view was considerably shared by a foreign scholar (Perham 1948, 1968) as follows: *because of the unity between the state and church, the latter used to give full support and blessing to the activities of the warfare. The war of the state is simultaneously that of the church, while the state is usually in conquest and the church in conversion*[3] (emphasis added). Some scholars also identify avoidance against modern education with a complete isolation of the nation for nearly a thousand years (7th-16th centuries (Perham1968).[4] It is also recalled that attempts made to introduce some variants of modern education through war amenities, had its own cost as recoded in history. Such unintentional inhibitions made modern education schooling only available to a small portion of urban elite, even after its introduction. The system was also characterized by bureaucratic, inequitable, wasteful, rigid and not relevant to the lives of most Ethiopians. At last, however, modern education managed to get into the country in the early 20th century (1908). Emperor Minelik was said to have used mutual (dual) and artful approaches that tacitly implied somewhat a 'win-win' path towards the opposition between the state and the church.

The underlying causes for introducing modern education vary from scholars to scholars. There was, however, historical necessity for it. The emperor seemed to have understood the then unpredictable European expansion and the day's diplomacy in question. For instance, as quoted from Pankhurst by Teshome Wagaw (1979), the following was emperor Minelik's insistence to introduce modern education: *we need educated people in order to ensure our peace, reconstruct our country and to enable it exist as a great nation in the face of European… (*emphasis added). Other scholars such as Girma Amare ((1964), have it that despite the monumental victory of Adowa, the emperor was said to have felt regrets for not being versed in Italian language

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[1] Maaza Bekele (1966), p.1
[2] Maaza Bekele (1961), p.1 (511)
[3] Margery Perham (1948), p. 60
[4] Margery Perham, p.37.

which had cost him a war and the lives of many Ethiopians owing to the misinterpretation of Uchalle's Treaty. Furthermore, the issue of modern arms technology was a prickly issue in the face of European advance for scramble. These and others have contributed to the urgency of introducing modern education that we now pose to discuss.

Nevertheless, implicit and explicit rejection of modern education did not stop even after its introduction and the death of the emperor. Continued lack of acceptance has also resulted in lower student enrolment rate. In response, Empress Zewditu (daughter of the deceased emperor) had to declare a new proclamation in order to entice as well as compel the public to let their children register and send them to the new school. Alemayehu and Lasser citing Ayalew's (2000), have the following education proclamation statements put in place in 1929 in response, by the Empress and thus proceeds:

> All those who do not send their sons and daughters to school so that they can learn writing and reading skills which are necessary to identify the good and evils and develop fear of God and the king, will be punished 50 Birr. The money solicited from punishment will be given to the church for the feeding and clothing of the poor. . . All God fathers should advice their religious followers ....to send their children to school and if they refuse to do so they have to report to local authorities as they have violated the proclamation. . .All church leaders in the rural areas apart from their religious preaching should teach reading and writing (Ayalew, 2000; 159) (emphasis added).

The decree could vividly show how much things were not found smoother to implement modern education which was believed to transform the nation at stake. On the backdrop of such historical underpinnings, as of recent decades, many ranging from educated circles to general public seem to question the relevance and utilitarian efficiency of modern education in Ethiopia. While such questions have been with us for years, what makes the current queries a bit different and special may be related to what Tekeste (1990) called the '*educated unemployed*' young populations. The same question seem to incessantly resonate as though modern education turned to be its own 'victim' rather than transforming the socioeconomic structure of the country and sustain itself through job creation. Furthermore, critiques such as 'loss' of moral imperatives or 'standards' of those who passed through modern education may be considered the extension of the former. From educational governance point of view, the above fundamental questions may now seem a coincidence with the current national or university entrance students' assessment results. Consequently, it seems now that many policymakers, educators, as well as parents, students, and the mainstream media, have come out to put the country's education system to '*test',* as regards its returns to the nation and '*moral correctness'*.

This limited paper does not venture to come up with recipes or ready answers for the above paradoxical state of affairs of our modern education, nor can it list out the exact causes of popular concerns which require in-depth empirical accounts to come up with future workable strategies. Before moving to the subject of designing future course of action, however, it's worth raising few points that need reminding. First, it's essential shed some lights whether modern education that we talk of now has been consistently and steadily implemented from its inception to date as intended. Second, it's also important to ask whether education can be a '*panacea*' for all of the social ills in the country. Third and last, is to suggest what needs to be done in the near future.

2. Modern education and the obstacles it has been facing to-date

Many might think that modern education that now celebrates its 115th year has been consistently implemented without challenges and grim historical punctuations. This is not actually true. The Ethiopian education system from its early day to-date has arguably been a '*war-education'*. This has been attested by both national and foreign scholars several times. It's a record of history that the panoramic education war trajectories began immediately after two decades of the introduction of modern education, when Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia for the second time. The five-year occupation though had fierce resistance from the nation's heroic struggle and brought it to the final expulsion of the invading force, it has left almost all available education infrastructures under complete destruction; few educated nationals made to flee the country; and the remaining paid their dear lives in the struggle. In short, the infamous invasion has significantly affected the pre-war education efforts to come to a complete halt. It was in records that better education opportunities were reserved for the "nationals" (Italians) (Markakis 1974 and Seyoum 1996). That is why scholars characterized the above grim situation as the act of *nipping the young modern education in its bud* (emphasis added). A similar view was expressed by Maaza in 1968 as follows: *…it has been very slow in taking root and whatever existed at the time of invasion in 1936 was destroyed…it's fair to say that "modern education" was only formally established 25 years ago (*implying later after the invasion*)*.

The scar of war did not fade away and came to an end from the country's education program. While minor internal conflicts and popular uprisings have been common in the fifties and sixties, the war waged by Somalia against Ethiopia in mid-seventies (1976-8) for the second time, had adversarial impact on education programs particularly in the eastern and southern parts of our country. After the aggression was decisively repulsed in the east and south, the next front (civil war) was on our northern part which continued for nearly two decades (until

1991). Many argue that the civil war then not only ate up the nation's fragile economy, but also brought about the culmination of the socialist ideology that has been operating since its 'transplantation', partly as a result of Somalia's aggression. One of the causes for the failure of socialist ideology to survive was the staggering economy in addition to its loss of ground in its originating countries such as the then USSR. The economy could not carry the competing sectoral demands including that of education.

3. Policies could be not as good as their names

The military government that assumed power in mid 1970s could not implement two of its main education programs (policies): *the transitional curriculum and the General Polytechnique Education (GPE).* The *GPE* has been under pilot test for more than eight years in 70 schools across the nation. The GPE program was planned to go beyond grade 8 by replacing the transitional curriculum but was left in vein. Students in the pilot schools had to 'reintegrate' back to the transitional curriculum after such long years of expectation. The situation became untold crisis in the face of most education community, specifically teachers, students and parents. The situation could be explained plainly that *no time has there been in the history of the country's education that teachers, students and parents have lost trust on government that failed to run or implement its own program.*[1] In fact, causes for such inabilities are numerous. But the then civil war could assume its lion's share by draining the economy to the same purpose.

Furthermore, recommendations that came out after the 1986 ERGESE's nation-wide study met similar fate simply because of the precarious economy the government used to run (the war economy). This was not over. The border clash that recently took place between Ethiopia and Eritrea (1998 – 2000), too, had its own toll on the education and training programs of the country. Needless to mention the recent internal conflicts in northern parts, and that still continued to linger on western and southern parts our country thereon. The fact of the matter is that the country's education system could not get respite or breathe to-date. Wrecked by continuous and unabated conflicts and punctuated instabilities, most schooling programs, in one way or another, have been relegated to unending *'rehabilitative'* (emphasis added) schemes at least once a decade or two, which is also spiraling to the present.

There is no doubt that the aforementioned series of adversaries have negatively contributed to the under-development of various sectoral programs in the country of which the education program is a part. Though arguably a point of contention among education scholars, lack of taking-stock of what has happened to modern education sector ever since its introduction could have shown the trajectories or up-and-down turns it has gone through to arrive at its current level of development. The undeniable fact is that all the historical, socioeconomic and political forces, it passed through have contributed to the education we talk of today. If we know as to why the nation could not build a viable education system that we aspired and still keep aspiring for, we may be able to obtain partial answers for some of the questions that are continually being raised today.

4. The political terrains

Another point worth mentioning is the country's political arena. Continuous political reengineering since early 1970s up to recent years has precluded having a sustained education philosophy to operate. One may argue that change and renewal in the education system have been enormous, while almost all of them short-lived. For most senior educators, the reform waves of the education sector review (ESR) [2] of the imperial regime, the General Polytechnic Education Program (GPE) [3] and the Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia (ERGESE 1986) [4] of the military government, the Education and Training Policy (ETP 1994) of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and the current Education Development Road Map on implementation *en route*, are few showcases, all which are ridden by law of negation. While each educational reform used to come heralding their anti-thesis positions against their predecessors, each of them, however remain to stand on the graveyard of the previous round of reforms. But none of them seems to sufficiently and fundamentally come closer to solving the education problem antiquities of the nation. Feleke and Ketebo have similar views: *The problems in Ethiopia's education system were that each regime criticized the previous education system rather than building on the former's strengths and developing new policies to support the expected change. However, the education system and policy government of different regimes developed depended on the ideology they followed and the diplomatic relation they formed.*[5]

In fact, the cycle of reforms undertaken usually stand against the position of many education philosophers who hold the view that fundamental changes in students' learning behaviour (knowledge, skills and attitudes)

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[1] Dereje Terefe (2010), p. 74.
[2] Education Sector Review Study Report 1972, AA, MoE & Fine Arts
[3] General Polytechnic Education Program. Handbook on School Experiment, Curriculum Department (MoE), 1975 E.C.
[4] Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia (ERGESE): A Quality Study Summary Report. Curriculum Evaluation and Educational Research Division, MoE, May 1986.
[5] Feleke Sileshi Fufa and Ketebo Abdiyo (N.D), Challenges of Ethiopian Education, SSRN-id4254150 (not peer reviewed)

require at least half a generation time. In a similar vein, school curriculum put in place takes time to achieve the type of learners' profile envisioned by the education sector of a nation. At their initial stages, curricula are not only new to students but also equally to teachers who are the main ingredients in the educational equations. The curriculum also needs positive and constructive consent from parents and the larger society. Other members of the education community such as parent-teachers-and-students committees (PTASs), school principals and supervisors to whom we heavily count on and place our trust for the quality of educational programs are, essential partners. The moral of the story is that any abrupt reforms that take place within an average of two decades in Ethiopia may not be a solution as most of them are not based on empirical studies other than simply fulfilling the adage that, *the education button is pressed next morning to the political takeover (*Emphasis added). This is in contrast to the education objectives and student profiles that are to be acquired much more than the reforms taking place in the country. However, this view does not rule out the need for reforms and changes at any point in time based on sufficient data that urge government and society to take actions as postponing the problem to other times may lead to further disasters. The underlying issue is that in Ethiopia, the cycle of reforms and changes are not given chance for critical evaluation to arrive at consensus and take informed decision-making in the sector under discussion. Most reforms are not only lacking in sober thinking and based on public-oriented consensus but rather are circumstantially-fed.

One last point under discussion that deserves noting with regard to modern education is the fact that it has not been free from external influence particularly after the battle of Adowa and later in the 70s and 80s. Each diplomatic engagement draws its own missionary baggages and this has been more revealing in most of the education programs that the country experienced. For instance, a seasoned American education advisor to the late Emperor, Haile Sellassie I, after British influence began to wean, F. Ernest Work, cited in Tekeste (1990), had described the trying situation in which the country found itself after the 5-year occupation as follows:

> *In my work there (Addis Ababa), I found the influences the greatest hindrance to my efforts in getting any real progress under way....because of the conflicting advice and suggestions offered by these various European peoples, they (Ethiopians then) have become confused and slow to follow leadership from abroad because they have found that in most cases these foreigners have been interested in securing advantages for their respective countries rather than the good of Ethiopia* (emphasis added).[1]

5. The broad aims of education

After having had some grains of ideas about modern education and its long time challenges in Ethiopia, it is now important to say few points about the role of education. It is recalled that the basis for this article was issues that have been and still keep revolving around two roles of education: utilitarian and moral. Both can be argued for and against. Before going further, however, it may be important to shed some lights on the underlying objective of education (liberal education) in the developed West. This takes us to the Greek Philosophers such as Socrates and Plato. Western liberal education was a system education curved out for the cultivation of a free human being. Many agree that modern education, too, aimed at nurturing the complete development of personality of an individual; provides him/her with all-round development so that he/she becomes capable of facing challenges in life; and harnesses inner potential for social betterment. The American Association for the Advancement of Science describes liberal education as: "*Ideally, a liberal education produces persons who are open-minded and free from provincialism, dogma, preconception, and ideology; conscious of their opinions and judgments; reflective of their actions; and aware of their place in the social and natural worlds*."[2] (emphasis added)

Plato's idea was not much different from the above conceptualization of education. For him, education or learning becomes meaningful after one reaches the knowledge of the good. Other scholars characterize this higher stage as a 'Philosopher-King'[3], a ruler who has passed all stages of education. A Philosopher-King is expected to be a ruler so that a state would not be in a problem or get into trouble once state-persons are educated. In general, being an educated person means being able to see connections so as to make sense of the world and act within it in creative ways. All the other qualities described here–listening, reading, writing, talking, puzzle-solving, seeing through other people's eyes, empowering others, leading–every last one of them is finally about connecting.

Of the 10 qualities of an educated person by William Cronon (1996-1998), "respecting rigor, seeking truth, practicing respect and humility, tolerance and self-criticism, understanding how to get things done in the world, nurturing and empowering the people around them, fulfillment of high talent, just exercise of power, celebration of human diversity: nothing so redeems these things as the recognition that what seem like personal triumphs, are the achievements of our common humanity".[4] Perhaps, that is why education, more than anything else, by

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[1] Ernest E. Work. Journal Negro Education, Vol III, no. 1, January 1934, pp. 66-68.

[2] What is Liberal Education?" Association of American Colleges & Universities (Retrieved May 17, 2011).

[3]Philosopher king, idea according to which the best form of government is that in which philosophers rule. The ideal of a philosopher king was born in Plato's dialogue <u>Republic</u> as part of the vision of a just city.

[4] Professor William Cronon, Former Director, L&S Honors Program (1996-1998)

ancient philosophers such as Plato used to be greatly associated to "the tree of the knowledge", implying to make distinction between good and evil.

It is important to note that educational objectives since ancient times have changed considerably, and at times incredibly skewed to a utilitarian end, where every level of learning is equated to ready employment, 'blue collar' employment particularly in developing countries such as ours. But it must also be remembered that modern human beings have not only confined their knowledge to what they utilize today but also what they can gain beyond now, much far in the horizon. Had that not been the case, scientists could not have toiled to discovering other planets in the universe which had no immediate returns. Originally, liberal education or what we today call education, was aimed at 'liberating' the mind from vices of ignorance and for the knowledge about what is there in the universe. Consequently, knowledge for its own sake is important at least to serve as 'Tree of knowledge', as in the Genesis.

In consequence, the assumption that education is a 'solution' for all social ills cannot always come true for various reasons. Arguably, Ethiopia could not build the economy that can accommodate (absorb) the human capital modern education has produced or generated. Simply, to use Tekeste's (2006) expression, we are no longer in "the golden age of education", like in the 1950s and 1960s, where all the graduates from secondary education could readily be absorbed in to employment or the economy. The 'golden age' then, even did not last long as the early years of 1970s immediately began to witness as much as 25% of high school graduates were not able to get ready employment.

Another remaining bone of contention is the unparallel match made between education and social development in Ethiopia. Such conclusions lead to the belief that for each and every social ills, education to be the 'culprit'. Though economists and sociologists have their own views about this subject, it's not difficult to see that education is only one of the variables, dependent variable, to influence development. As used to be the main discourse point of development by Marxists, the economy is the base which determines the superstructure such as politics, ideology and related social norms. The simplest explanation is that, education cannot be a 'panacea' for all social, economic, political and cultural challenges, and neither can it be blamed for all of the malpractices operating in the society. It may have its proportionate role, but not all.

Taking uncritical position and concluding that modern education in the country 'had no contribution' to whatsoever will lead to hasty and unsupportive end. Modern education in Ethiopia, and elsewhere in the world, has contributed its share by producing lead scientists, economists, agricultural economists, medical scientists, historians, managers, political scientists, etc. Though limited from what may be expected of, modern education in Ethiopia, too, has produced some of the just listed human power despite its bottleneck in the base and superstructures in the country. Living examples are the staff of some of our development enterprises such us the Ethiopian airlines, banking industries, the long-serving Ethio-telecom. In particular, the military sector holds historic record of defending the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the nation from past to present. Engineers that are on historic renaissance dam site and those tirelessly working on grand highways and mega urban construction projects, are products the country's education system (universities and colleges), admittedly notwithstanding the Achilles heel that are in our education and training programs.

Some may tend to argue that all such afore-listed human power development are mere symbolic rather than material (national development). However, this position is feared to lead to self-denial as the achievements are also part of our education history deserving praise and appreciation. On the other hand, a continuous monitoring and keeping an eye on the performance of our education system is a norm rather an exception. Paradoxically enough, all of the above products have passed through stringent and dire situations. One common point that the public knows and talks of is about 'war economy', since it's immediately felt and lived with but may be reversed within short period of time. But most people do not remember or talk of 'war education' (Note: *it is not education war or for*). The latter is remembered for long with its physical destructions, debris or wreckages of school buildings and classrooms continue aching for some years to come for rehabilitation. Its deeper psychological trauma, however, is barely forgotten.

6. What should be done to revamp our education system?

There is no single magic bullet, nor a gold standard for public education. One incontestable fact, however, is that education still remains a quintessential element for human development (intellectual, psychomotor and attitudinal). At no time and space do we undermine the role of education for personal, communal and national development. We have no moral fiber to go for what Derek Bok's historic quote in the 1970s holds,   "if you think education is… try…" [1] parable. The fact that education could not directly lead to employment and does not assume related roles will not explain its 'lack of value' and importance. As renowned Anthony Giddens has it, we cannot afford to lose sight in this *runaway world*. [2] While our life is fully in unprecedented change, learning

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[1] Derek Bok (born 1930),' if you think education is expensive, try ignorance'
[2] Anthony Giddens (2002), Runaway World: How globalization is shaping our lives. London ECIR OJH www.profilebooks.com

and gaining knowledge that guarantees our success rate in this competitive and runaway world, is beyond question. Giddens' *runaway world* also succinctly warns us that there is no permanence in our knowledge as its obsolescence is in our mind's door-step. It's simply likened to our morning shadow that always recedes as we move closer and closer.

Giddens' message is also quite important for our youth population who are now expected to rise close to or more than 70% of the entire population. Despite economic austerity, education still remains to be a major equalizer in developing countries such as ours. That is why in all of our discourses, be it individual, institutional or through our media outlets, the role of education should be praised and put high on national agenda. In this fast-globalizing world, nation-states, specifically developing nations, remain only with two options: building their knowledge economy and enhance their competitive capacities more than ever. These two are only possible through education and education only. Underrating the value of education on the grounds that it has not resulted in immediate return is inadvertently signaling the closure of door for knowledge, for better or worse. In other words, there is no greater detriment for the youth populations than not failing to stress the role of education. By way of coming to conclusion, the following few hints are given as sort of 'food for thoughts', simply to consider in our education and training programs.

1. It is important to make education the concern or agenda of all walks of life of persons: from childhood to old age so that everybody would take it as their own responsibility. Along this piece of advice, it may be important to revisit our educational discourse platforms at all levels in order that they would not sound somewhat a fad that takes place only once a year. For instance, there may be a need to conduct national (federal) conferences at least twice a year bearing the cost it may incur. Similarly, other parallel discourses have to be organized by senior educators and research institution experts based on empirical findings, to feed to the national discourse platforms led by policymakers. The same measure can be applied at subnational levels so that the bell of education always keeps ringing year-round, in a bid to continuously draw the attention of the entire education community. The unique advantage of doing this is that the subject 'education' will constantly resonate in our minds and keeps us think of the way forward in addressing problems that come on the way timely. To this end, it is important to ask as to why many conferences, workshops and consultative meetings in economic, political and cultural arenas, are frequently organized and why not in the education and training programs. Such measures perhaps can serve as a key to scanning outstanding education and training problems that pave ways for their solution, provided that all are based on clear goals and objectives for change..

2. The role of parents and the community has to be further enhanced from where it's now

It has long been a recognized truism that the first school for a child is their home. Families are irreplaceable institutions for the wholesome upbringing of children. The formal and informal interactions that children make with each member of a family/parent/ is a full-package of schooling by itself that lays foundations for growth and education before they join formal schools. This scale of guardianship has to be intact and continue through the entire course of education. Contrary to this, however, today, many parents and the community seem to have abdicated their irreplaceable role to schools where there are no practically individual nursing and guidance for each child. In developing countries such as ours, rural families (due partly to limited literacy) may not play an active role in the education guardianship of their children beyond feeding and clothing. In urban centers, due mainly to modern mode of life, most parents also project their key educative responsibilities largely to schools. Knowing this missed family/community educative environment, there has to be a renewed social movement that can re-instate essential parental and community role both at home and in schools. This can particularly be done through the partnership of ministries or bureaus of social and education.

3. Examinations and tests:

It's important to note that examination or test is one of the instruments of assessing the status of student learning pace and the extent learners have achieved set profiles in knowledge, skills (creativity included), and desirable attitudes at each level thereof. The underlying need for exams or tests is, therefore, to provide feedback to students, parents, education partners and the education system itself. Two main strategies may help to achieve such major objectives. First, an educational assessment (exams or tests) has to be in-built and an integral part of the teaching-learning process. They should not be conceptualized as mere means for determining 'fail' or pass. Leaving aside the technical and art of test preparations for professional test setters and classroom teachers, there may be a need to review the objective, coverage and administration of classroom tests. In a bid to contribute to the final or 'terminal' exams, varieties of aptitude tests may be applied one or two levels earlier or before the 'terminal' exams, which may serve as a *waking-call* for both test analysts and policymakers. Furthermore, the administration of classroom tests may need to be critically revisited as to whether students who promote from level to level each year are based on their academic merits or otherwise. This may contribute to sort out the current paradoxical results between classroom and that of 'terminal' or entrance exam. Perhaps, down the line, the authenticity and viability of the on-going wholesale journey to 'terminal' test writing (exam) in our upper general education levels can be gradually discovered and may lead to solutions that may relate to revisiting our educational structures in the long run.

IISTE

In this regard, two main related points may deserve re-thinking and innovation with regard to tests or exams. First, there has to be a re-thinking that 'terminal' test or exam does not mean terminal education. They are only means to measure learning progress of the profiles set at each stage. Even the common thinking of a "terminal degree" does not mean the end of learning. It's rather a transformational and renewed advance of research for further knowledge creation and consolidation. Second, as what other countries do (e.g. OECD countries), the FDRE MoE may think of institutionalizing an assessment program (commonly at primary schools) with the countries of the Horn. Such test may be coined as *PHSA* (Program for Horn Student Assessment) whose age is 15 years old (plus or minus 8th grade). At its initial phase, Ethiopia may take the initiatives of coordinating the first two neighboring countries (Eritrea and Kenya). The rest the Horn member countries may join as soon as they find the time convenient. This initiative may add another impetus to the on-going economic integration drive which has also gained currency by the governments of the Horn as well as all members of the AU, highly emulated during the recent 36th Summit of the Head of States in Addis Ababa. The *PHSA* can help assess the level of student's knowledge and skills in certain critical subject areas such as reading, writing, computation, and language skills to provide early feedback to the education system of member countries.

4. Research-based policy decisions as norm rather than an exception

Education policy decisions are not only competing in nature but may also turn remorseful. The remorse is felt in many forms, above all, generational. Education policymakers have to be aided by empirical researches to distance themselves from shaky and unsustainable decisions which soon backfire to a state of no turn. To this end, units, departments and centers established for research should go beyond their names and start generating policy ideas. To discharge their responsibilities as desired, they may need revitalization of their human and financial resources.

5. Readiness for facing more education challenges to come

a. At this stage, no one is expected to be a harbinger. But Ethiopia's education and training programs will, sooner or later, face immense and unprecedented challenges unless the sector undertakes a soul-searching planning to tackle them. Challenges may include demographic, urbanization, distorted objectives and goals, depreciation of education credentials (diplomas) and stringent financial input (austerity). The increasing student population at all levels may be taken as a 'blessing in disguise' but makes education finance untenable for the years to come. The country's economic growth may not easily cope with consistent increasing school population because of its low base which takes some years to rebound. Though the 1950s so-called '*controlled expansion*' [1] (triggered by relative surge of enrolment with no match of generated finance after the Fascist invasion), may not seem easy to replicate it at this stage, current level of expansion definitely requires careful assessment and stringent planning in a manner that financial burden being borne by government can gradually be ameliorated.

b. Urbanization in Ethiopia has been steadily growing with unmatched infrastructures and sufficient capital investment to avail services to the impoverished segments of the urbanites. One of such affected services might be the education sector. Unless sound resource planning and structural change is made that helps to lessen public's burden and gradually empower non-governmental organizations and the private sector, government alone cannot fare both in access to and quality of education. This needs to come up with strategies that match the continued rising demand in the sector.

c. If the current plan for a 12-year general education continues to be the norm, there is a possible likelihood of distortion to come to the surface. That is, those who are unable to transit to higher education (this is in contrast to the immensely rooted-in popular beliefs), there is going to be unbearable burden to fall on the emerging poly and industrial colleges to absorb these students. This creates two unintended scenarios: psychological strains and resources impoverishment. Students who are made to suddenly join the training programs may take more time to convince themselves that this shift of area studies is truly valuable. This 'sudden policy' shift idea may also keep resonating in student parents' minds for some time and has got its own ambivalence for the training programs.

There is one more salient point with regard to students who, for various reasons, could not make a planned transition to higher education institutions. For now, a remedial program which came out of the way, if not out of blue, might seem to serve. However, a serious note should be made that this is a self-defeating policy decision unless used for a brief course of transition in the sector. It's costly in all accounts and measures to take it for granted or as 'normal.' Finally, Furthermore, enrolment at TVET or HEIs without parallel infrastructures and human power can further result in quality crisis to come to its brink and there is a need to examine the repercussions of either side of the scale before it gets too late.

d. What we used to know and read elsewhere in the 70s and 80s as it relates to the depreciation of diplomas (education credentials) is also gradually blossoming in Ethiopia, thanks to the access options made through public and private education and training institutions. Many employees, particularly in urban centers and their peripheries, as of recent, have resorted to earning two or more undergraduate and master's degrees with the assumption that 'if one misses the other hits' beliefs. While there is no

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[1] MoE and Fine Arts, A Ten-year Plan for the Controlled Expansion of Ethiopian Education (1953).

harm and limit to quenching one's thirst for education, it comes at the cost of scarce resources and quality imperatives to be achieved at all levels. All the same, the degrees earned are not reinforcing each other but simply end up in 'a jack of many…' adage. On the other hand, the country's education finance has been and still is one of the hemorrhaging factors since the time of introduction of modern education program into the country. One may recall the historic land tax [1] controversy under the church which failed to operate and become sustainable. Despite a relative dramatic increase in education share of the GDP since mid1990s, mid-term reports of almost all ESDPs have been consistent that there is a deficit in textbook-student, teacher-student and student-classroom ratios. A recent ODA Report on Ethiopia's education expansion rate and the challenge of financing shows that the problem is continuing to haunt the system:

> *...millions of school-age children still face substantial barriers to entering and remaining in school. Quality of education has also come under increased strain. Further, it is improbable that current levels of financing will be sufficient for Ethiopia to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) goals, and donors will likely have to work with the Ethiopian government to address these challenges.* [2]

Though the country has made remarkable move to achieve some of the MDGs, the sector is still struggling for the remaining through the SDGs. These all call for a proper streamlining of our education and training programs. It's, therefore, important in this regard to examine what Tekeste (2006) considers the WB advice in relation to the country's education structures that we are not yet clean-handed and the pyramid of resource allocations to be revisited at all stages.

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[1] MoE and Fine Arts, (1952)
[2] ODA Report on Ethiopian Education, 2011.