

Ethiopian Teacher Education System: Barriers and Contradictions

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Abstract *This research explores some contradictions, dilemmas, and chaos in Ethiopian teacher education. It illuminates how state actors have been engrossed in and obsessed with the rhetoric of system overhaul and reform, and yet continues to signal contradictory messages in their discourse and practices. The paper points up that three years after a comprehensive 'teacher education system overhaul' was declared, the state 'change agents' themselves are not yet familiar with and conversant in the metaphors and curricular concepts their overseer consultants had introduced to them. Indicators have been identified from what I term 'formalistic' documents, school observations and the author's direct experiences that show schooling and teacher preparation activities do not match in aims, practices, and conceptions. Rather, as the paper argues the mismatches and disconnects seem to reflect the depth of the confusion and the superficiality of the engagement to change and improve teacher education in Ethiopia. Finally, the paper puts forward the strong need for a revisit of the conceptual, discursive, and practical state-of-the-art.*

Introduction

Discussions of higher education need to be placed within larger processes of socio-economic and cultural restructuring. While higher education does indeed have its own specific histories and its own relatively autonomous dynamics, the entire sphere participates in and is connected in complex ways to social transformations and to struggles over power (Apple, 1998, p. 181).

This quote is chosen to illuminate the nature of my analysis. My arguments on educational activities are heavily grounded on the view of using multiple lenses that reveal Ethiopian political and power contentions in the landscape of public education; it justifies constrictions and convulsions between discourse and practice as a struggle and legitimated attempt to use education as a vehicle for controlling the hearts and minds of citizens.

At present, Ethiopian teacher education [1] is characterized as a terrain of persistent contradictions, challenges, and chaos. Engrossed in and obsessed with the rhetoric of system overhaul and reform, state actors have officially opted for a swift and sweeping change in the structure and content of teacher education since 2003. Although three years have passed, the state 'change agents' themselves are not yet familiar with and conversant in the metaphors and curricular concepts their consultants had introduced to them. Now, more and more indicators are accumulating that suggest schooling and teacher preparation activities do not match in aims, practices, and conceptions. The disparities both within and between the discourse and practice reflect the depth of the confusion and the superficiality of the engagement to change and improve teacher education in Ethiopia. In particular, practices in secondary schools and teacher preparation activities in education faculties are in a state of increasingly diverging tension and conflict.

My analytic reflection was aided by the data I gathered through classroom observations, a survey questionnaire, a *lived-in-it* experience, and faculty archive. In particular, I was able to uniquely capitalize on my personal experience since I have been directly involved [2] in drafting and standardizing secondary English teacher education curriculum as well as its implementation. In this paper, I begin with a discussion of major developments and activities in teacher education in the last few years with a hope of situating my analysis in a historical context. Second, I examine salient contradictions through multiple lenses that magnify

state-university-school activities. Third, I wish to bring to the surface the dilemmas the state is faced with in priority setting and delivering neo-liberal agendas. Next, I focus on discrete programming, the subversive modality of freshman students' enrollment, and the practicum as 'sources' of chaotic practices and behaviors. This will be exemplified by a case study focusing on practices observed at Alemaya University and the surrounding region in eastern Ethiopia.

A Glimpse of Recent Developments

Following the shift of political power in 1991 [3], one of the policy promises and discourses was to effect major change in the national education system. By issuing the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy in 1994, an official educational conviction and commitment was formulated which asserted four educational goals: quality, access, relevance and equity. More recently, a 'system overhaul' and 'paradigm shift' was promised and argued for regarding the way teachers are prepared. Among the actions taken, formal schooling has given a slightly modified apparatus or structure. Similarly, post-secondary and higher learning institutions have been restructured to effect a two-tier four cycle approach. That is First Cycle Primary (1-4), Second Cycle Primary (5-8), First Cycle Secondary (9 and 10) and Second Cycle Secondary (11 and 12).

Among the ideological and pedagogical rationales put forward to justify the need for reform is the following:

To date, it is known that our country's education is entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity. The objectives of education do not take cognizance of the society's needs and do not adequately indicate future direction. The absence of interrelated contents and mode of presentation that can develop students' knowledge, cognitive abilities and behavioural change by level, to adequately enrich problem-solving ability and attitude, are some of the major problems of our education system (Federal Democratic Republic Government of Ethiopia, 1994, p. 2)

Like all other formal education, teacher education programs have undergone structural changes; notably, a structural and curricular realignment has been made in all teacher education activities. For instance, pre-service secondary teacher education has been reduced from four years to three. Other aspects of changes have apparently been made to conform to the change in the duration of time. A prescriptive approach has been adopted to formalize and 'legitimize' rhetoric/vision as well as subsequent actions. In the same old fashion, a formalistic and homogeneistic approach has been pursued to 'address' the 'flawed' teacher education practices in Ethiopia. The formalizing of teacher education visions and actions has been pursued with the issuance of official positions which might possibly be represented as follows:

Fig. 1. The directions taken to formalize official educational discourses.

<p>Formalistic Official Document 1: Ethiopia's Training and Education Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issued in April 1994 by the Federal Democratic Ethiopia. ● General policy statements concerning national educational/training premises ● Teacher education illuminated as a priority area.
<p>Formalistic Official Document 2: The Quality and Effectiveness of Teacher Education in Ethiopia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issued in September 1999 by Ministry of Education. ● Identified problems, weaknesses and solutions. ● Specified/hinted resources and structures needed.
<p>Formalistic Official Document 3: National Framework for Teacher Education System Overhaul</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Issued in November 2002 by Ministry of Education.

- A blue print/framework concerning what has to be done, when, and how

Formalistic Official Document 4: A National Curriculum Guideline for Pre-service Teacher Education Programmes

- Issued in March 2003 by Ministry of Education.
- Program outlines and components.
- State principles, aims, nature of learning, curricular contents, course breakdown, assessment procedures, and sample procedure for practicum.

The term 'formalistic' is used here to refer to the production and dissemination of a certain policy discourse. From the diagram, it can be inferred that the discourses were produced at a central place and disseminated in a top-down fashion. For example, one of the above formalistic documents, a National Framework for Teacher Education System Overhaul (2002), is reflective of the centrally controlled orchestration of curriculum. Apparently produced by the Ministry of Education [4], this document outlines the rationales for reforms, missions, vision, and the objectives of teacher education in Ethiopia. It also outlines a set of reform tasks needed to improve the teacher education system. This document states that five sub-committees would be set up to initiate work in relation to teacher education. One of the sub-committees would review and revise the pre-service teacher education curricula of first cycle primary (Grades 1-4), second cycle primary (5 - 8 grades), and secondary (grades 9 - 12) schooling.

Members will be drawn from TEIs [Teacher Education Institutes], MOE [Ministry of Education], VSO [Voluntary Service Overseas] and the steering committee. The members will be divided into three groups: first cycle primary, second cycle primary and secondary teacher education. For the initial work, a core group will be formed consisting of the steering committee (1), VSO (2), TEIs (3) and MoE (4). Education professionals from the MoE, TEIs and REBs [Regional Education Bureaus] will work with the sub-committee (2002, p.23).

The document also identifies the need to include participants from DfID, Ireland Aid and BESO [5].

Despite the claims and positions held in the formalization of the discourses, the pathways or the discourse flow suggests the centralization or control of discourse production and decision-making processes. The discourses attempt to articulate neo-liberal epistemological foundations and agendas.

Contradictions: skilling in conflict with deskilling

Official discourses, conceptions and practices in the entire landscape of teacher education reflect mismatches, far-fetchedness, conflicts and misalignments.

One of the frequently and glaringly noticeable contradictions is what is conveyed rhetorically about the preparation of skilled/knowledgeable teachers or educators (or the improving of the skills/knowledge of practicing teachers or educators) and what is actually done in practice. On the one hand, there is a heated argument or action, to some extent, for skilling practitioners or the would-be practitioners. On the other hand, there is the opposite of skilling, i.e., deskilling. I use the word 'skilling' to refer to any implicit or explicit argument or action towards the acquisition of knowledge or skills of teaching. It includes subject matter knowledge, language skills, pedagogical skills, practical knowledge, etc. that is acquired through long-term courses or short-term training sessions and workshops. By contrast, deskilling refers to a condition that leads in the opposite direction to skilling as a consequence of lack of a self-improving situation or dehumanization.

Table 1. Skilling metalanguage, reiterations and activities.

'Skilling' Indicators
<p><i>Skilling metalanguage:</i> An array of skilling vocabulary has been reiterated in various policy documents. Exemplar 1: relevance, quality, accessibility, developing students' knowledge, cognitive abilities, competence, school experience, practicum, active learning, student-centered, participatory learning (see Ministry of Education, 2002, 2003)</p> <p><i>Skilling vision:</i> Several documents have reiterated that there would be a commitment to shift the paradigm totally in favor of a more skills-oriented pedagogy.</p> <p>Exemplar 2: "This vision presents a paradigm shift. Rote, passive learning has been replaced with a commitment to active, learner-focused education" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.2).</p> <p>Exemplar 3: The document further states that there is a need for "paradigm shift" which involves teaching for changes in ideas and people's lives, "taking the real world into the classroom and taking teachers out into the real world", and democratizing teacher education by "giving teachers, students and citizens confidence to make decisions and take initiative, to take control of their world" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.2).</p> <p>Exemplar 4: "The increase in the amount of time allowed for Practicum is in line with the paradigm shift which will emphasize the importance of teaching skills as much as academic ability for teachers in Secondary Education. The shift requires that subject content be taught in a way that enables it to be taught in schools, and that all other material delivered should also be directly related to practical realityStudents learn subject contents through real teaching and experience; have the opportunity to try and practice various teaching techniques, form of assessment, teaching aids ... " (Ministry of Education, 2003, p.57).</p> <p>Exemplar 5: "There is a fundamental need for a National Framework for Teacher Education in order to bring a cohesion and coherence to the national educational system ... to create 'learning communities' with a common sense of purpose and also contribute to an enhanced professional identity and morale"(Ministry of Education, 2002, p.1).</p> <p><i>Activities 'aligned' with skilling.</i> Without taking into account their appropriacy or genuine commitments, evidence of skilling activities might include:</p> <p>Exemplar 6: Curriculum 'reform' activities effected(at the Ministry of Education during 2003-2004)</p> <p>Exemplar 7: Teacher Development Fund obtained and availed to faculties to help them prepare course modules and build capacity in teacher preparation.</p> <p>Exemplar 8: Modules are being prepared to facilitate the provision of active learning experiences to student teachers.</p> <p>Exemplar 9: School-based teacher preparation has been implicated through heightened practicum activities (practicum constitutes 20% of the activities).</p> <p>Exemplar 10: "Teacher development" activities have been seen through on-the-job methodology trainings, in-service degree courses.</p> <p>Exemplar 11. Expansive effecting of centers of teacher education (institutes, colleges, universities).</p> <p>Exemplar 12. A big number of expatriate teaching force have been recruited to educate and advise student teachers in various colleges and universities.</p>

The exemplars identified above might be some evidence that the Ethiopian government have effected activities in the form of rhetoric and practical actions in an apparent 'commitment' to improve the skilling capacity of the state. Rhetoric/vision also indicates that skilling has been sought not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively (see Exemplar 4 and 5). It is also evident that skilling is broadly viewed at various levels:

school level (secondary students), post secondary level (secondary school teachers, practicing and pre service), and higher learning (teacher educators) (see Exemplars 6-12).

I have thus far focused on aspects that implicate or reflect 'skilling'. Turning to the opposite, I begin by identifying typical cases that indicate or result in deskilling.

Table 2. Behaviors or actions leading to deskilling

Indicators of deskilling
<p><i>Intensifying instructors' work:</i> Following the unprecedented expansion in faculty, staff workload increased almost 100%. Exemplar 1: the average workload of an instructor at Alemaya University's Faculty of Education in 2002 was 9 credits. It is now almost 15 class hours a week.</p> <p><i>Non-implementability of school experience for student teachers.</i> Exemplar 2: Although student teachers must spend a great deal of their time in secondary schools with the facilitation of a faculty advisor and cooperating teachers, at present they do so only half the amount the ministry of education without the amount of facilitation envisioned. For example, Practicum IV (Semester 1, 2005/06 academic year), spent in secondary schools only for three weeks though the curriculum stipulates a block of six weeks.</p> <p><i>Incompatible situation in secondary schools:</i> the emergent misfit between what student teachers have been prepared for and the introduction of digital TV instructional delivery. Exemplar 3. Out of the 40 class time, 30 minutes are taken by the TV lesson. The teacher's role is 'lesson introduction' and 'lesson summarizing' The student teacher has been prepared to plan, to involve students in active learning experiences, to assess, to advise, etc.</p>

It is evident from the above exemplars that the state of teacher education is in contradiction. Contrary to skilling indicators shown earlier, in Table 1, deskilling is also rampant as exemplified in Table 2. Since the cases of classroom TV programs are typically reflective of the deskilling agenda, I would expound the issue further. The state has tried to justify right from the beginning the need for televised instructional modality by identifying certain ideological, pedagogical, and economic rationales. The argument runs: "In the globalized world Information Communication technology is vital", and because of this, "installation of satellite receiving devices known as plasma display panels (PDPs) in every classroom at secondary level" are necessary. Presently, 2,978 television programs are produced to be transmitted in 458 secondary schools (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004, p. 8). Arguing further, the report identifies the following reasons for the introduction of PDP: "to present abstract concepts in a simplified manner; to transmit uniform education to many students found in different places at the same time; to enable students to have access to model and competent teachers; to demonstrate laboratory equipment found in one place (classroom) to other learning classrooms" (pp. 8-9).

Contrarily, in my opinion, the motivation is the imperialistic and capitalistic agenda of market creation and globalization. By way of refuting the pedagogical arguments put forward in the above quote, I try to show economic rationality and neo-liberal agendas behind the current information technology revolution in schools. Unlike the nature of knowledge and methods of knowledge construction echoed in the formalistic documents mentioned earlier, the latest arguments to justify plasma focus on knowledge transference. The argument trivializes knowledge production as mere concretization of 'abstract' concepts. According to the state's position, knowledge is also homogenistic and homogenizing. Through such contradictory positions, they convey to us their underpinning epistemological foundations. It is conceivable that the banking or transmission concept of knowledge permeates both in discourse and actions. Such knowledge cannot be

empowering; it cannot be helpful to those who have been denied access to educational opportunities as argued. According to Freire 1984 (cited in Keesing-Styles, 2003, p.4), education should not be about the transference of knowledge but rather the collaborative and collective production of knowledge grounded in the reality of students' lives. Banking education is domesticating. The co-production of knowledge founded in the context of students' lives is liberating or humanizing. Human life holds meaning through communication and dialogical relations at the heart of any educational experiences. PDP, or as it is widely known "plasma", denies this type of dialogical relation. It positions students only in the role of passive listening - obedience and taking orders rather than negotiating meaning. Therefore, the implicit ideology of dominant groups to perpetuate the culture of silence is apparently at work. A 'culture of silence', a concept advanced by Freire, refers to a condition "in which people are unable to distance themselves from their life activity, making it impossible for them to rise to the level of reflection and therefore unable to guide one's own destiny" (Jacobi, 1975, p. 65).

Taylor (1989) argues that creativity, values and commitments are both individual and social constructions. They are indeed 'sources of the self' and fundamental to the making of identity, but they cannot be constructed without the benefit of a social context. Here the pedagogy of a teacher working with the autonomous learner is most likely to address the issue of motivation through the careful (sometimes supportive, sometimes challenging) matching of knowledge with students' search for meaning (Bates, 2002, p. 6). Plasma denies this kind of independence and social context. Plasma regards the learner as a passive recipient, not as an active, socially constructed agent. It doesn't consider learning and literacy as creative activities through which learners can begin to analyze and interpret their own lived experiences, make connections between these experiences and those of others, and in the process, extend both consciousness and understanding. This is a negation of Freire's notion of Praxis, which refers to action with reflection or "... action that is informed and linked to certain values" (Taylor, 1993, p. 53).

Plasma favors a unitary or monolithic style of learning because of its pre-programmed, non-rewindable, non-repeatable, and auditory/visual characteristics. However, "[r]esearch by scholars like Howard Gardner at Harvard has shown that people learn through a wide range of modalities, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and that we have multiple intelligences (Freed, 2006, p. 2). The case is a "one-size-fits-all" approach to education and thus fails to cater for the diversity of students and their needs and interests. Learning theories emphasize multiple approaches and channels to cater for the diverse learning styles of students. Classrooms must adjust to students instead of students adjusting to the teacher or the technology replacing the teacher.

The national TV educational project is also an indicator of the nature of the schooling enterprise. It is an important and emergent signifier of the implicit political and cultural embeddedness of schooling. According to McLaren (1989, p. 160), schools are "cultural arenas where a heterogeneity of ideological and social forms often collide in an unquitting struggle for dominance." Plasma is a robust and unambiguous evidence to challenge the traditional view of education as a neutral process. It indicates quite glaringly that schooling is a form of cultural politics that endorses only forms of knowledge that support a particular vision of the past, present and future (p. 8). The national televised education program is an attempt to centralize knowledge and curriculum, and by doing so, to control the hearts and minds of students. It is to make the teacher powerless as a political and liberating agent.

It dehumanizes and deskills teachers. It erodes the human relationships between students and the teacher as students increasingly rely on the TV screen. The teacher becomes irrelevant. At present, nowhere is there any program to prepare teacher candidates/teachers for plasma educational programs. As a result, the disconnect between university and schools is increasing, and more importantly, the need for university-based teacher education programs is becoming questionable - a contradiction to the 'empowerment' and teacher education system overhaul rhetoric.

This is a debilitating phenomenon in which teachers have been losing control of their practice. Teachers have become simple technicians who look in to smooth broadcasts or transmissions of TV programmes. Teachers do not plan and execute what they plan. They are mere TV operators. They are simply

executioners of what others planned or wanted to happen in the classroom. This is, according to Apple (2000), characterized as *deskilling*.

As employees lose control over their own labor, the skills they have developed over the years atrophy. They are slowly lost, hereby making it even easier for management to control even more of one's job because the skills of planning and controlling it yourself are no longer available. A general principle emerges here; in one's labor, lack of use leads to loss (p.116).

Apple further explains that when individuals cease to plan and control a large portion of their own work, the skills essential to doing these tasks self-reflectively will atrophy and are forgotten (p.117).

Teacher candidates are being made to have a "school experience" in an environment where teaching is replaced by broadcasting. At schools, teacher candidates practice operating TV to fit into the existing reality. In fact, this recent development in schooling technology is symptomatic of the intrusion of the neo-liberal agenda of market. Schools are potentially large grounds where future consumers are prepared. Students are "captive audiences" (see parallels such as "Channel One" in USA schools - Apple, 1993, 1998, 2000; Molnar, 1996) who should receive TV watching skills. And then it is supposed, gradually and slowly, students get used to the 'lingua franca' of international consumerism. As a result, according to the state actors' magic calculation, students become 'skilled' viewers of a variety of satellite TV channels which broadcast Hollywood movies, commodity commercials and talk shows. In the long run, a huge media corporate will be created in which the youth's captivity consume both the hardware and the software. Obviously, Ethiopia's financial sources are mainly from the Bretton Woods' institutions, the European Union and USA in the form of direct contribution to the national budget, loans and support to various development projects. Although huge sums of money flows in to 'empower' the poor through schooling projects such as digitized instructional deliveries, the ultimate beneficiaries are to a great extent those national and international companies that take part in the establishment of the digital hardware and soft ware system the beneficiaries are, too, those state actors who expropriate their 'share' through corruption and 'legitimated' means. The beneficiaries are aggressively pushing the frontiers of the market further. A good case in point is the latest move to incorporate private schools, which so far remained resistant to plasma programs for almost a year; the government is at present threatening to close the schools unless they follow the public schools. This is demonstrably an aspect of *persistent contradictions* because it is happening in the midst of untold poverty. Secondary school students barely have textbooks; classrooms are crowded; chairs are dilapidated; libraries are impoverished. The poverty is already impacting the operation of the TV machines because of the frequent interruption of power, running errors, absence of expertise, and spare part shortages. According to Gee et al (1996), educational institutions adopt a kind of socio-technical engineering such as a new set of tools and procedures, designed to change social relations in the work place. Smyth (2001, p. 10) elaborates the effects of such a rationality by identifying three relays: (1) the culture and character of teaching corrupts, because there is a tendency to individual responsibility for delivering outcomes; 2) school administration focuses on pursuing corporate visions rather than supporting the work of teaching; and (3) teachers have to lead divided lives owing to the dislocation of their pedagogic and professional identities.

Giroux (2000, p. 85) succinctly argues that central to such a marketization agenda is the attempt to " transform public education from a public good, benefiting all students, to a private good designed to expand the profits of investors, educate students as consumers and train young people for the low paying jobs of the new global marketplace." Summing it up, Sinclair (1996, p.229) states: "The debate about the 'what' and 'why' of education is superseded by a fixation on the 'how'."

Another possible explanation for the raging adoption of media pathways and contradictory practices lies in the appeals state actors wish to make:

Contemporary changes in official educational policy are justified by appeals to the effects of the transmission of production through the application of electronic and communications technologies on the one hand (a sort of competitive panic regarding productive competence) and by concerns for social order brought about by recognition of increasing disparities and antagonisms between social groups on the other (a sort of

moral and behavioral panic regarding social cohesion). The response to these twin panics is to attempt to restructuring of educational message systems to focus on the production skills required by the 'new economy' ... (Bates, 2002, p.4).

The introduction of pre-programmed satellite TV instructions is partly initiated because it appeals to students and parents as being 'high tech' and being along those who have advanced technologically.

Dilemmas: 'Effecting' Multiple Agendas

Both in the official discourses and methods courses, there is too much claim of making lessons student-centered, truly-engaging, and real-life-like. For instance, a professional development course called Higher Diploma (to be discussed in the next section) has been running to effect student-centered and 'active learning' methodologies. Besides, as indicated before, the preparation of modules along student-centered approaches is in progress. Apparently, all these efforts are to prepare student teachers through deep approach pathways. Conversely, the schooling reality student teachers are made to experience (as a school experience or practicum) is diametrically opposed to the "deep approaches" they have been introduced to. The contradiction is ever growing because of the high mismatches that prevail between the number of student teachers that are deployed for practicum and the accommodating capacity of secondary schools where students supposedly carry out their practice. It is evident every year that the high influx of new entrants has been aggravating the teacher-centered classroom practices dominant in teacher education centers.

Obviously, with a big increase in teacher candidate intake with a slightly improved resource, class size and work load have grown significantly. Such an expansion in size and quantity inevitably makes impossible the delivery of the *system overhaul* promise. In fact, the deriving force for the massification of formal education is another national promise. The government of Ethiopia has pledged to reach Universal Primary Education before 2015 and expand higher education. In order to meet this promise, every year thousands of children go to school enjoying a "free promotion" school policy. This agenda seems in the direction of increasing educational access. Therefore, as long as there are competing goals and promises, the contradictions will continue.

According to Fuller's (1996) theory of *the fragile state*, whose explanation about third world education is always forceful, might present the Ethiopian situation picturesquely and grotesquely.

Third World governments are under enormous pressure to deliver mass opportunity and "modern progress." The rapid expansion of education and its bureaucratized form of control does signal to local peoples that modern change is on the way. But the wait for modernity's arrival is getting longer and longer in much of the developing world. Mass schooling, despite rapid expansion and attempts at centralized control, is not delivering on its promises (p. xviii).

Ethiopia has pledged Universal Primary Education (UPE) three times. The first was in 1961 at "Addis Ababa Conference on African Education" in which UPE was pledged to be reached in 1980. The second was in 1972 in which UPE was projected to be achieved before 2000 (Tekeste, 1990). The third promise was by the current government, and as stated before, UPE has been sought to be reached before 2015. This latest pledge seems to be in alignment with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Goal 2 of MDG states: "to ensure that, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling" (UNESCO, 2003, p.242).

The rush to meet international promises concerning UPE and the national TV education system, as explained earlier, might point to the agenda of 'Education for All' which grew out of the 1990 Jomeitan meeting. According to Brock-Utne (1998), no matter how noble the agenda looks, it possibly exacerbates the curriculum dependency developing states suffer from, because:

... cultural conditionality is a conditionality set up by the lender or donor which has direct implications for the content of schooling, for instance, insistence on the purchase of textbooks written and published abroad, ... adoption of 'international'(read western) standards, and the neglect of African culture, including African

languages (pp.125-126)

The situation exemplified by plasma is a good case in point as a re-colonizing agenda. As Cross wrote in *The Guardian*, "Schools already receive video lessons broadcast for eight hours a day by satellite TV. The syllabus, based on South African material, is being digitized for transmission ... (2005, p.3). The exportation of knowledge in the form of syllabus and technology in the name of embracing a digital age is a metalanguage trick to cover up another mind-colonizing agenda.

The goal of the 1990 World Conference in Thailand was far from realization, confirmed ten years later at a Dakar Conference held from April 26- 26, 2000. Among the reasons that surfaced during the conference were absence of democratized education, poor teacher preparation programs, unprofessional education policy and education system administration, the political and social marginalization of women, lack of teaching materials in native languages, insufficient participation of local people and irrelevant curriculum (Baaden, 2002). Despite such warnings the state is continuing to hang on to foreign curricula and languages to deliver formal education.

According to Fuller (1996), mass schooling is often promised on the grounds of bringing rapid economic growth and improvement of living standards; however, the truth is to mobilize ideological commitments in favor of the central state. Unlike what is often reflected in official discourses, the effects of the expansion of mass education are not what one would necessarily expect. In many nations, educational quality erodes because of the scarcity of material resources and technical expertise. This is another nagging contradiction in Ethiopian teacher education, a conflict arising out of competing agendas.

Chaos: Over-Stretching, Subversive Admissions, Contesting Programs and Practicum

Among the multiple chaotic manifestations of teacher education activities, over-stretching, interspersed/dispersed admissions, contesting programs and the insurmountability of practicum are glaringly present in almost all teacher education facilities.

To begin with over-stretching, the scale and rate of teacher candidates admission after 2003 - a year when the 'system overhaul' enacted - has been quite huge. Since then, the increase is not simply developmental or incremental, but it is rather exponential. The numerical growth is unprecedented in Ethiopian modern teacher education. Table 3 presents the enrollment and teaching staff figures for three academic years at Alemaya University [6] for comparison.

Table 3. Number of teacher candidates and instructors/educators in nine departments of the Faculty of Education in Alemaya University.

Departments	Sept 2000-June 2001		Sept 2001-June 2002		Sept 2002-June 2003	
	Teacher Candidates	Instructor/ Educators	Teacher Candidates	Instructors /Educators	Teacher Candidates	Instructors /Educators
English Language	47	9	47	13	188	15
Oromo Language	--	--	--	--	159	2
History	35	2	42	3	135	3
Geography	55	4	79	4	243	4

and Environmental Studies						
Chemistry	24	12	12	13	181	15
Physics	23	4	33	4	124	7
Mathematics	24	6	26	6	192	8
Biology	25	8	22	9	196	12
Physical Education and sports	--	3	--	3		3
Pedagogical Sciences	--	5	--	5	--	6

As the figures for the two academic years before the structural shift indicate, enrollment for all, except the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, had never been more than fifty students. Nevertheless, after the three-year B. Ed program began to be effected, in 2003/04 academic year, over a three-fold increase in enrollment was made. For example, enrollment for the Department of English Language was 47 in 2001/02 academic year. The following year, the enrollment jumped to 188. It was a 400 percent increase. The huge enrollment increase is incomparable with what had been in effect for a decade.

By comparison, the increase in the number of instructors/educators did not match the growth in student enrollment. For example, the growth of teaching force at the department of English Language was only 1.8 percent. Although politicians have been boasting up for the numerical growth, its consequence, as far as quality and relevance is concerned, two of the four educational goals envisioned in 1994, is extremely devastating. The 400 percent numerical improvement has worsened the precarious teacher-centered and domesticating pedagogy as each classroom has become crowded with hundreds of students. For courses such as General Teaching Methods, courses which cross cut all departments, students of two or more departments are lumped together in big auditoriums and lecture theaters and told through lectures how to teach. Such practices are resulting in irreparable and grave consequences. For instance, one of the expatriate teaching staff of the faculty who had a breathing difficulty was often forced to lecture to up to three hundred students in auditoriums. Since he had to speak far louder than his health allowed, his health began to deteriorate. At last, he decided to quit the job. The other consequence is the phenomenon of *intensification*. Apple (2000) explains:

Intensification is one of the most tangible ways in which the working conditions of teachers have erodedWe can see it most visibly in the chronic sense of work load that has escalated overtime. More and more has to be done; less and less time is available to do it ... (p. 119).

In the current circumstance, the work load of an instructor or teacher educator has exceeded 25 hours. As time becomes scarcer for faculty staff, teacher education becomes an activity that happens routinely and with intuition rather than reflectively. Apple further explains:

Intensification leads people to "cut corners" so that only what is "essential" to the task immediately at hand is accomplished. It forces people increasingly to rely on "experts" to tell them what to do and to begin to mistrust the expertise they may have developed over years. In the process, quality is sacrificed for quantity. Getting done is substituted for work well done. And, as time itself becomes a scarce "commodity" the task of

isolation grows, whereby both reducing the chances that interaction among participants will enable critiques and limiting the possibility that rethinking and peer teaching will naturally evolve. Collective skills are lost as "managerial skills" are gained ... (2000, p.119).

In my institution, the shortage of instructors has been compensated for by engaging instructors through an 'extra work pay' system. However, in many cases, the university top management is often reluctant to approve the extra work pay checks whenever they are submitted by department chairs. In other words, although the university legislation allows the extra work pay system, the top management often delays, and even sometimes blocks, such a pay. Despite such managerial bottleneck, faculty staff continue carrying out course offering activities beyond the official limit simply to take the financial advantage the extra commitment brings. In the long run, nevertheless, the overload has an effect of deskilling by separating educators from their professional development activities such as research, because of the intensity of work. I think this is not hidden from most of the faculty staff.

The challenge of intensification is not a matter that concerns only instructors or educators. As teacher educators are poorly prepared, it is a typical case of *dis-empowerment* for the prospective teachers. They graduate without the necessary *minimum requisite knowledge and skills*, and that will certainly erode their confidence.

As the opportunities for higher education are increasing significantly, the state seems to be effecting its hegemonic agenda of disuniting the student community by adopting a 'divide and admit' system. Universities admit students in staggered 'installments' because of the delays in construction activities. For instance, Alemaya University is admitting over 4000 freshman students during 2005/06 academic year. However, the delay in dormitory and library construction, which is expansively underway to cater for the growing number of students, is forcing the university to accept the students at three different times: two-third of the new students in early February and the remaining possibly a month later. In my opinion, following the recent election disputes, student protests and unrests have escalated in all institutions, and this is a big threat to the government. It is highly likely that unified voice further endangers the power hold up of the rulers. Therefore, the pressure to take 'pre-emptive' actions is strong and quite obvious.

An emergent challenge which has a 'deliberate dimension' is the mushrooming of programs. During the period in focus in Ethiopia, several programs have been introduced with the 'intention' of dealing with various aspects that have resonance with teacher education. As the public grows disenchanted with the *attempt-to-win-appeals* practices, the state tries to "intervene with discrete programs or administrative reforms" (Fuller, 1996, p.64).

In the short period I am assessing, among the programs introduced, the Higher Diploma Program for faculty staff, English Language Improvement Program, Pedagogical Resource Center and Teacher Development Program are visibly 'active'. These programs have significantly overlapping aims. For example, the Higher Diploma Program has the following objectives:

A program of continuous professional development ... to update themselves [teacher educators] with new outlooks, approaches and policy directions (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004, p. 11).

The Higher Diploma for faculty staff is being run by the Ministry of Education with the collaboration of Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO). In each college or university in Ethiopia, a coordinating unit has been set up largely with the help of expatriate volunteers. The unit is operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. The course, which is on-the-job, is mandatory for all faculty teaching staff, and so is attendance. The course must be attended for four hours each week for a year. Attendance must be completed with a successful completion of a module regardless of the background of participants. Technical rationality is the dominant guiding pedagogical theory in organizing learning experiences. This is evident in the module set up by the volunteering expatriates. Learning tasks encourage the largely adult participants to memorize, imitate, and implement national directives and prescriptive teaching principles. Knowledge and skill is considered as impositional. Knowledge and skill is taken for granted without taking into account contextual factors. HDP is a conduit in this regard. Despite the 'positive' outcome claimed by organizers,

participants often dropout in some cases no matter what the consequence might be.

Another program, called English Language Improvement Program (ELIP), has also been run separately from HDP although its basic objective is similar. The objective has been stated as, "The Ministry of Education devised a strategy to improve the level of English of teachers" (The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2004, p.6). For instance, three staff members from the Department of English Language attended a one-year on-the-job EFL methodology course from Alemaya University through distance learning mode in 2004/2005 academic year. A UK college offered the post graduate diploma course in which the face-to-face part of the course was carried out at a central venue near Addis Ababa bringing together all participants from the country. The national training program was initiated partly to build capacity to effect the establishment of English skill training centers, namely ELIP, in a cascading fashion in each higher education institution. During the same period, these trainees were attending the HDP course on-the-job. At Alemaya University, one of the trainees who completed the postgraduate certificate course, has been assigned to coordinate ELIP activities though it is yet to materialize.

Still another program which has a similar intention is the Pedagogical Resource Center. This is part of the macro program to control the hearts and minds of practitioners. Its aims are to develop a center where teacher educators carry out professional development programs through research and training courses. Its activities are financed by the government of the Netherlands.

Basically, the above programs have similar intentions. However, they are running in separate spaces, though geographically close to one another, to accomplish this "mission". This is an insult to a poverty-stricken country like Ethiopia where resources are scarce and in some cases unavailable. Obviously, such undesirable competition among programs with a common and shared goal incurs increasingly high cost. The degree of competition and dissonance evident among the programs is reflective of the challenge facing teacher education in Ethiopia. The situation is also reflective of a possible confusion and panic surrounding the 'reforming' actors. Fuller (1996), on the basis of his extensive field data, argues, "[e]ducation ministries throughout the world intervene with discrete programs or administrative reforms. Yet these ... often yield results that have no effect ... " (p. 64). The state's attempt to address pedagogical problems with discrete interventive programs is no more than a desperate managerial solution.

The practicum--one of the useful teacher preparation pathways--has also come with overwhelming and disconcerting activities. It has become 'infamous' in universities for 'eating up' resources and testing the managerial 'confidence' of university leadership. University and school grounds have become chaotic scenes as a consequence of over a thousand student teachers every semester commuting to nearby secondary schools to 'effect' the school experience activities as stipulated in the national curriculum. Presently, the practicum has become 'infamous' because of ideological, epistemological and managerial conspiracies: opposition from conservative faculty groups, complexity created due to an apparent managerial unwillingness and lack of proper preparation, and the disconnection of teacher educators from the curriculum.

Following the introduction of a TESO [7] guideline, on various consultative meetings and workshops, the debate over has been increasingly signaling the contestation to control power and maintain the status quo. The big numerical scale-up for the practicum component, from 2 credits to 25 credits, has brought about a new front for contestation between the 'architects' - who created the recent teacher education curriculum framework - and other staunch conservatives who have apparently been threatened by the significant reduction in subject matter (non-methodological) courses. From the early days of its inception, the opposition the practicum met has remained strong and unabated. In consequence, practicum has not been implemented with full commitment and expertise by faculties and institutes. This, coupled with a range of constraining factors, have made the practicum murky - a useful component of teacher education which could have been a praiseworthy element.

Another status-quo maintaining signal is the deliberate commitment of 'reform actors' to disconnect practitioners from the content and form of the practicum. Teacher educators have been kept aloof from the practicum from the very beginning. It was designed and 'thrown down' to them from the Ministry of Education

via the Faculty of Education as an intermediary. Although the 'new curriculum' (modified in 2003) has been in action, a significant number of teacher educators have not had sufficient acquaintance with the content and form of the practicum. I have surveyed attitudes and knowledge concerning the practicum. The survey was made on the teaching staff both at faculty and secondary schools. Moreover, faculty and school administrators were involved in the survey. Overall results appear not to be in conformity with the 'system overhaul' discourses of official discourses.

Table 4. Attitudes and knowledge concerning the practicum [8].

	Favorable Attitude (%)	Knowledge about Course Number, Objectives, and Activities (%)			
		None	Low	Medium	High
Teachers who offer courses unrelated to teaching-learning knowledge/methodology	5	5	45	48	2
Teachers who offer courses related to teaching-learning knowledge/methodology	40	0	10	60	30
Laboratory and course assistants	2	25	68	17	0
Faculty administrators	38	0	15	55	30
Partner school administrators	15	1	60	39	0
Partner school teachers	35	70	30	0	0

It is evident from the indicators obtained through the Attitude and Knowledge Survey that the attitude to practicum is terribly unfavorable, especially among faculty staff whose principal engagements are in activities that do not directly relate to teaching/learning knowledge and skills. Favorable attitude is better among teacher educators who offer courses concerning curriculum, methodology, and schooling. However, viewed as a whole, the attitude among practitioners reflects a certain degree of disapproval or unacceptable. The practitioners' attitude might also be a consequence of inadequate knowledge about the practicum. Responses to factual questions in the Attitude and Knowledge Survey were indicators of a significant gap in practicum knowledge. Paradoxically, faculty instructors and educators seemed to be unknowledgeable about practicum objectives and activities, though almost all of them were involved in supervising teacher candidates in various practicum activities. Such a gap in practicum knowledge might be because of *denial* and *dis-exposure* in the course of curriculum development and introduction. Fullan (1993) argues: "When complex change is involved, people do not and cannot change by being told to do so" (p.24). In other words, by ignoring teacher educators in the development of curriculum, improvement in the teacher education can hardly be a dream comes true. As a result of teacher educator marginalization, the knowledge-attitude-practice (KAP) gap effect is in evidence in contemporary Ethiopian teacher education. The gap in knowledge has possibly led to unfavorable attitudes which in turn have resulted in 'amateurish' implementation of the practicum.

Another source of the practicum's insurmountability relates to the inadequacy of expertise and the sheer bulk of the activities. The unprecedented increase in admission, the deprofessionalization as well as

unpreparedness in the universities have contributed to the difficulties in implementing the practicum. Placement of student teachers in nearby secondary schools has been carried out through a centralized decision-making procedure. Assessment criteria have been determined by individuals in the faculty management. The consequence is familiar: the university community gives a bad name to the practicum, along with assessment disputes, and by and large, school disorientation and reluctance to cooperate. A good case in point concerns the disputes on assessment issues. The designs of the practicum activities have also become incompatible with the traditional student grading procedure required at the faculty. As a result, it is common to find conflicts among faculty for grading disparity and disagreements. It is also common to find faculty being forced to resubmit grades.

Concluding thoughts

In light of the arguments and reflection earlier, the following conclusions might be drawn:

1. By adopting a more or less programmatic approach, the Ministry of Education embarked on a teacher education 'system overhaul'. This to date has resulted, most visibly, in temporal changes, quite apart from the deskilling, deprofessionalization, and dehumanization that followed.
2. Largely, the 'change' has been taking place through top-down approaches without taking into account change agents and agency.
3. Because of the state's multiple agendas, practices are in a state of contradiction and chaos, which as yet signal no pattern of improved educational institution-building.
4. In the name of curriculum standardizing, the state agents are maintaining the *status quo*, which largely ignores local knowledge, diversity, social justice, self-empowerment, and learning organization. For example, the case of the national secondary school educational television system illuminates the state's aim of maintaining a unitary, uniform and singular curriculum. Although the state claims curricular uniformity via a television modality made possible educational equity, the actual classroom situation does not reflect this. Because of differential socio-economic backgrounds, the learning capacity of students is significantly variable no matter how uniform the curriculum might be throughout the country. For instance, students who are from wealthy family are most likely to benefit from the plasma because their upbringing has given them the advantage of watching television, and that would help them develop TV watching skills. Therefore, when they come to the classroom and are asked to learn via TV, they are far better off than those students who are from poor economic backgrounds.

In general, educational improvement involves intricate processes. The processes are dynamically complex. They are to a certain degree unknowable in advance. Although chaos is a normal characteristic of change processes in which contradictions and complexities play themselves out coalescing into clusters and patterns (see Gleick, 1987; Stacey, 1992; Wheatley, 1992, Fullan, 1993), the situation in Ethiopia seems contradictory and conflicting.

The situation poses important challenges to teacher educators, particularly, progressive educators. Keeising-Styles (2003) contends: "Each teacher must react to the particular context in which they work and attempt, to the best of their ability, to participate in practice that promotes inclusion, engagement and empowerment ... (p. 9). Bahruth & Steiner (2000, p. 143) also argue " ... in our profession we have two choices: We can succumb to the mainstream and become programmed toward deskilling our intellect, or we can become critical pedagogues and liberate ourselves and those who choose to join in the dialogue."

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