

Reflections on the rationale for the Ethiopian Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO)

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Educational reforms in Ethiopia

The first modern school in Ethiopia was established in 1908. From that time up until 1944, there was no teacher education system, and Western teachers and principals populated the schools. A teacher training system for primary schools was initiated in late 1940s and still the academicians were foreigners. This initiative matured and in the 1960s there were institutions offering certificates, diplomas and BAs.

However, early in the 1950s even the government itself sensed a general dissatisfaction with the education system of the Imperial regime. This dissatisfaction grew and the government initiated a study called the *Education Sector Review (ESR)* in 1971. While delivering a speech on the opening of the ESR on 8th July 1972, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I argued that:

... It is essential that the education given should enhance changes in attitude which should have relevance to the new callings. The educational programme, on the whole, should not emphasis only academic education but should also help the

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majority of youth to earn their livelihood and be self-sufficient. To achieve that objective education at one level should not be narrowly conceived to be a stepping-stone to another, but should encourage the youth to follow their natural inclinations and aptitudes and thereby enable them to become useful citizens (ESR, 1972: ii).

It was then suggested that the rural population be made the target of educational policy. However, this reform process was abandoned in September 1974 when The Dergue (a military group led by Mengistu Haile Mariam) began to rule the country. After closing the educational institutions for some time, the Dergue continued the training of teachers for three levels, namely elementary (1-6), junior secondary (7-8) and secondary (9-12). At the same time a significant number of untrained teachers were employed to serve as teachers. In 1982 the Dergue argued that ‘the education policy of the Imperial regime was elitist (favoring some regions and urban areas) and that the curriculum did not take into account the concrete conditions in the country’ (Negash, 1996: 107). Accordingly, that government launched a reform study called *Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia (ERGESE)* in 1983. Its influence, however, was masked by the Ten Year National Perspective Plan (1984-1994) that was launched by the government in 1984 and that set policy statements for education (Tefera, 1996). Accordingly, new curricula that reflected the new policy were developed (Engida, 2002) and the teacher educators during the Dergue regime (1974-1991) were increasingly Ethiopians rather than foreigners.

The present Ethiopian government also documented the inadequacy of the education system to prepare the learner for useful participation in the community (TGE, 1994). The government thus developed a new *Education and Training Policy (ETP)* that states, among other things, that the education system is entangled in complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity (TGE, 1994). The new ETP similarly introduced the new system by demanding the development of new curricula. New federal universities were opened and at present there are six universities that train teachers for secondary schools.

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As a case in point, a study was done on the student teaching part of the Teacher Education and Training Program of Addis Ababa University (Engida, 2000). The study revealed that the program has weaknesses with regard to its design and implementation. It also indicated that the problems are focused at three levels: the university, schools and (Science) classrooms. As an attempt to recommend some solutions, Engida supported the argument that every innovative student teaching program is the “product of a set of assumptions about knowledge, language, and expertise of school-based teachers relative to the knowledge, language, and expertise of university-based teacher educators and researchers” (Cochran-Smith, 1991: 104-105). Thus, in teacher education programs, the school-university/college relationship should be clearly defined and the factors at each of the above-mentioned three levels should be given due attention. Throughout their professional development, would-be teachers should belong not only to the university - as it is the case traditionally - but also to the schools and the classrooms in particular. The personnel involved at each level should work as mutually-constructed learning communities to help the student teachers investigate into the problems of classroom teaching. The would-be teachers should be helped at each level to contribute to the required education reform by inquiring into their own teaching in large classrooms with limited resources. However, the link should not be limited to just one month of the final study year. Rather, the 4 years of study time should also be a time for acquiring school experiences (Engida, 2000).

Now, after the introduction of the new Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia, most of the former TTIs (Teacher Training Institutes that train teachers for the elementary schools) were upgraded to a CTE (College of Teacher Education) level. At present the TTIs train teachers for the first cycle (grades 1-4) of primary schooling, the CTEs for the second cycle (5-8) of primary, and the universities (Faculty/College of Education) for secondary schooling. These teacher education institutions (TEIs) are now implementing the new *Teacher Education System Overhaul (TESO)* programme that was initiated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 2003.

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This paper thus reflects on the rationale/assumptions of TESO as an initiative to reform the teacher education program in Ethiopia. In preparing the paper I did not attempt to collect any quantitative data from teacher educators and/or persons involved in the development and/or implementation of the program. However, I was previously an Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction (Science Education) at the Addis Ababa University (Faculty of Education) and, while serving as the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs of the Faculty of Education, I played a vital role in restructuring the Faculty (now College) of Education in light of the TESO program. Despite the relevance of my academic and research background to teacher education systems in general and implementation of TESO in particular, I have written this paper simply as a personal reflection on the rationale/assumptions behind the TESO. The ideas presented here thus represent neither the views of the Addis Ababa University nor those of UNESCO-IICBA.

Analysis and discussion of the TESO programme

The TESO program was developed as part of the implementation strategies of the new Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia. The MOE (2003) argues that TESO is intended to bring about paradigm shift in the Ethiopian teacher education system. This

paradigm shift implies change in what is valued in society, and what knowledge society thinks should be learned in schools. Currently Ethiopia is striving to accommodate the development of all nations and nationalities. Teachers are essentially agents for positive social change. Those adhering to the shift in educational paradigm (that knowledge for example, depends on interpretation) can very effectively work to empower communities that endure a lack of opportunity (MOE, 2003: 33).

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There is no doubt that teachers are change agents in a society. As Fullan (1993: 104) argues, “a high quality teaching force - always learning - is the *sine qua non* of coping with dynamic complexities, i.e. of helping to produce citizens who can manage their lives and relate to those around them in a continually changing world. There are no substitutes to having better teachers.” Based on these premises, one can argue that responsible and democratic governments should invest in the teaching profession in general, and teacher education programs in particular. This is so partly because a well-prepared and well-qualified teacher educator has a multiplying effect while executing his/her regular duties and responsibilities.

The TESO program further argues that the beginning points for the paradigm shift must be the TEIs and that the present TESO proposals offer a direct challenge to TEIs in the sense of redefining their role to become active agents for change in the classroom, within their communities and ultimately within Ethiopian society (MOE, 2003: 34). In a sense, TESO is intended to highly professionalize teaching by introducing certification requirements for teachers at all levels. In this regard, the TESO document (Ibid.) explicitly states, “The Ministry of Education has set [five] competencies that teachers of all levels must exhibit.” They will guide the nature, organization and management of all pre-service programmes. They also provide a means of measuring progress towards the desired paradigm shift. These competences are for teachers to be:

- a) Competent in producing responsible citizens;
- b) Competent in the subject(s) and content of teaching;
- c) Competent in the classroom;
- d) Competent in areas relating to the school and the education system;
- e) Competent in the values, attributes, ethics and abilities essential to professionalism in upholding the professional ethics.

As strategies for implementing the above-mentioned vision, the TESO document recommended - for the pre-service teacher education programs - the introduction of practicum (intended to link the school, the TEI and the local community), professional courses and research, academic areas (the combination of content and method), assessment, certification of teachers,

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gender balance, life skills and civics courses.

Advocates of professionalism, as analyzed by Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001), argue that in order to improve the quality of life and economic opportunity for the public *writ large*, schools need, more than anything else, teachers who are fully qualified and know how to teach all students in increasingly diverse society. Analyzing data from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education in the U.S., Darling-Hammond (2000) argued that NCATE-accreditation might lead to higher overall standards for teachers because NCATE standards revisions 1988 and 1993 required higher admissions standards, evidence of greater subject matter preparation, and stronger rationales for the content of education coursework than those often emphasized by state approval systems. She then concluded: “the percentage of teachers with full certification and a major in the field is a more powerful predictor of student achievement than teachers’ education levels, e.g., master’s degree” (Darling-Hammond, 2000: 37).

For some educators, however, this is not necessarily true. Those who Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) label *deregulationists* argue that there is a need to deregulate teacher preparation; here the aim is to dismantle teacher education institutions and break up the monopoly of the profession. According to these educators (the *deregulationists*), in order to improve teaching and quality of life for the public, what schools need is the freedom and flexibility to open their doors and thus recruit, hire, and keep all teachers who can “up” students’ test scores regardless of their credentials (or lack of thereof). Professionalization, according to the deregulationists, is an ill-advised narrow approach to educational reform, designed to provide tighter “vice-like” controls that limit and “yoke” individual school leaders who, if freed up, could use their best innovative strategies and approaches to reach higher learning standards for all students (Cochran-Smith and Fries, 2001).

TESO’s proposed level of professionalization in general and certification requirements in particular put TESO proponents in the challenging position of having to prove that it can really bring about the intended change in the competencies of the teachers and the resulting social changes. Fullan (1993: 108), while advocating the idea that “making explicit and strengthening moral purpose and change agency and their connection is the key to altering the profession”, warns us that “the idea of teachers as

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moral change agents has been around a long time” and that “the earlier versions have not caught on.” He specifically mentions the Teacher Corps and the Trainers of Teacher Trainers (TTT) programs in U.S. and puts forth his views on why they failed to accomplish their missions. Some of these (relevant) reasons are (Fullan, 1993: 109-110):

- The programs were based on extremely vague conceptions. Having an ideology is not the same as having conceptions and ideas of what should be done and how it should be done.
- They ignored the knowledge and skill base that would be required. (ideology and opportunity were to be sufficient).
- To the extent they worked on change - albeit clumsily - most of the effort was directed toward the school system, not at universities. Even the TTT program, which had the latter focus, shifted most of its attention to the school milieu.

Liston and Zeichner’s (1991) analysis of traditions of reform in U.S. teacher education identified four traditions: the (1) academic, (2) social-efficiency, (3) developmentalist, and (4) social-reconstructionist traditions. In the academic tradition, teacher education mainly emphasizes the teacher’s role as a scholar and subject matter specialist. The social-efficiency tradition focuses on the scientific study of teaching to provide the basis for building a teacher education curriculum, whose major manifestation in recent years is the Competency/Performance-Based Teacher Education (C/PBTE) programs. Liston and Zeichner (2001) point out that C/PBTE was stimulated partly by applications of behaviorist psychology to the training of personnel in industry and the military during and after World War II.

The developmentalist tradition has its roots in the child study movement and assumes that the natural order of development of the learner provides the basis for determining what should be taught, both to pupils and to their teachers. This tradition has three aspects: (1) the teacher-as-naturalist, a movement that stressed the importance of skills in the observation of children’s behavior and in building a curriculum and classroom environment consistent with patterns of child development and

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children's interests; (2) the teacher-as-artist movement, in which the teacher/artist has a deep understanding of the psychology of child development, and prospective teachers are provided with a variety of experiences in dance, creative dramatics, writing, painting, and storytelling so that they are able to exemplify for their students an inquiring, creative, and open-minded attitude; and (3) the teacher-as researcher movement, which focuses on fostering the teacher's experiential attitude toward practice.

The social-reconstructionist tradition defines both schooling and teacher education as crucial elements in a movement toward a more just society. Liston and Zeichner (1991:188), as advocates of the social-reconstructionist tradition in teacher education, recommend that teacher educators should be: (1) directly involved in teacher education programs in some capacity (e.g., as a teacher or administrator); (2) engaged in political work within colleges and universities; (3) actively supportive of efforts within the public schools to create more democratic work and learning environments; (4) engaged in political work within professional associations and in relation to state educational agencies; and (5) working for democratic changes aimed at achieving greater social justice in other societal and political areas. Although the authors admit that "none of the contemporary proposals for the reform of teacher education can be understood exclusively in relation to any one tradition" (p.5), they argue that "teacher education programs, as well as proposals for reforming teacher education, reflect particular patterns of resonance with these traditions" (p. 34).

Which tradition/s are reflected in TESO's rationale/assumptions and implementation strategies? This question is difficult to answer in such a personal-reflection type of study, but some points for discussion can be presented. The authors of TESO argue that would-be teachers who join pre-service programs have sufficient content background and hence they do not need sophisticated or higher-level content/subject matter knowledge. What they need, instead, is an integrated, content-pedagogy knowledge (more commonly known as subject area methodology knowledge). Even each of the subject matter courses for students of teacher education are designed to incorporate about 30% of their contents from the school curricula that the would-be teachers are expected to teach after graduation. Seen from this point of view it is hardly possible to say that the academic tradition is

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reflected in the TESO approach.

TESO states that would-be teachers and teacher educators need to fulfill the five competencies (MOE, 2003: 34) listed earlier in this paper. However, the competencies listed are less related to subject knowledge and skills; rather, they have more of a social orientation. It can be said that the very existence of the competencies might indicate the influence of behavioral psychology and hence the social-efficiency tradition in teacher education. Further research is needed to see how these five competencies are translated into actions in the syllabi at the various levels in the education system. The more these competencies are stated in advance in the form of knowledge and skills to be mastered by would-be teachers (see MOE, 2003, pp. 40-44), and the more the criteria by which successful mastery is to be measured are made explicit, the more TESO can be considered C/PBTE.

TESO requires would-be teachers to spend a significant portion of their study in schools observing teachers, schools, classrooms, and the total school environment. For instance, would-be secondary school teachers at Ethiopian universities should devote about 22% of their total credit hours in their B.Ed. degree study to practicum courses. The practicum courses are fully school-based in the sense that from the very beginning of university study, student teachers should go out to schools and conduct specific tasks such as observing experienced teachers, studying pupils, and practicing the various skills needed by regular teachers such as lesson planning, teaching specific subjects, etc. Teacher educators also need to go out to schools with their students and do their regular job of training teachers at schools, for 22% of the total credit hours for the degree study.

Here the question is: Does the very nature of school-based training reflect the influence of the developmentalist tradition? Maybe yes, insofar as would-be teachers focus during the practicum courses on studying the developmental stages and corresponding learning strategies of children, but it is unlikely that, at least at present stage, this is so. Of course, TESO argues that there must be a shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach. If that student-centeredness is viewed as creating a democratic culture among teachers, students and the community at large, then TESO may even touch on aspects of the social-reconstructionist tradition.

Conclusions

It is difficult for the author of this paper to clearly identify TESO's ideological traditions and psychological basis. Further research is needed to identify the roots of TESO. Such research must trace the argumentation in the policy back to its origin through further analysis into areas of international influence as well as national historical contexts. Confusing and in some cases contradictory arguments have been forwarded by the authors of TESO, as illustrated by the following from the TESO document (MOE, 2003: 45):

Current theory suggests that learning takes place when the learner has to make sense of things that confront them - the idea that development comes through the individual's construction of or invention of knowledge.

If we compare this quote with the argument for setting specific competencies expected of would-be teachers and teacher educators and the resulting high-level certification requirements, we will face some epistemological difficulties. These arguments do not enable practitioners to clearly identify the assumptions of TESO, as one of the arguments lends itself to a constructivist epistemology and the other to a positivist one.

It is in this educational context that Critical Practitioner Inquiry landed and has been developed along a critical social-reconstructivist episteme.

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