

Technology for Empowering or Subjugating Teachers: Analysis of Ethiopia's Education Reform Discourse Practice

Dereje Tadesse Birbirso

Haramaya University, Dire Dawa, Ethiopia

Abstract

In the wake of national educational reform, the author discovered a secondary education style where all students were taught through centrally aired TV-lessons beaming from a studio in the capital city. In order to understand the motive behind the reform and its impacts on teaching, the author collected qualitative data for critical analysis. Collection of policy documents is the key method for analyzing the reform discourse. Empirical data were also collected through informal interviews held with teachers and students. Classroom observation of teaching-learning events was also conducted. Critical Discourse Analysis strategy was adopted to analyze the qualitative data. The resulting key themes spotlighted that a pragmatically necessary reform was hijacked by the states' ideological desire to control teachers and students charged with the weak philosophy of technological determinism.

Key Words: *secondary education reform; technology and education; critical discourse analysis; Ethiopia*

Background of the problem

Ethiopia has been in social reforms in the past decades. Especially, since early 1990's, the country has been reforming its education policy (TFG, 1994). The reform was necessitated by crises into which the previous education system was plunged. Among the crisis-indicators mentioned are: muddling of religious and political ideologies with education, fragility of the educational system, irrelevance of the educational practice to the lives of learners and concrete reality of the wider society, teachers' deficit professional competence and mismatches between teacher education and secondary school education practices were mentioned as the most salient ones (TFG, 1994; MOE 2002, 2003; Hailom, 1993; Negash, 1990, 1996; Birbirso 2009). Therefore, high on the reform agenda are making educational practices relevant to the contemporary social and ecological challenges of the country,

achieving the education-for-all Millennium Goal, introduction of Information Communication Technology (ICT) to schools and constructivist pedagogy (TFG, 1994). Specifically, learner-centeredness, learning by doing, collaborative learning, and continuous assessment are among the central visions of the new secondary school education policy (MOE, 2003). Indeed, experience reveal that teachers and students were apathetic towards the traditional, *de-technologized*, mere chalk-and-talk school practice where teachers were banked on the Teacher's Guide and the students on the accompanying Student's Textbook, both of which is prepared by few elites in the Ministry of Education. Besides, these 'sacred texts' were revised, on average, once in two decades. Therefore, students, teachers and parents all welcomed the new initiative to reform the education system and, especially, the idea of introducing ICT to schools. Whether the reform agenda, especially the ICT discourse, was utilized for good purpose or absurdly for evil one is the concern of this paper.

Highlights on the context of the school that followed suit the reform: where will it go?

What is at stake is that the reform agenda ended up with two-steps-forward but three-steps-backward situation. Since the year 2004, the secondary school (Grades 9 and 10) lessons have been transmitted across the country's classrooms through live TV-link from a studio in the capital city, Addis Ababa. According to Negash (2006, p.32) it is "beamed from South Africa". Customarily, this teaching mode is called *plasma*, named after the modern Panasonic flat plasma screen that decodes the lesson. Following the policy-practice guideline distributed to the teachers, out of the forty-minute nationally accorded to a lesson per a subject, thirty minutes are allotted to the screen teacher and only the remaining ten-minutes are allotted to the classroom teacher. Out of the ten minutes, the initial five minutes, also called *pre-plasma*, are used by the classroom teacher to 'introduce' the lesson. In fact, observation shows that what he/she does is re-minding what the screen teacher taught before (unusually with direct quotation) and what the latter is going to 'teach' next. Similarly, once the screen teacher ends his lesson, the last five minutes (or *post-plasma*) are the other only opportunity for the classroom teacher to have his/her voice conveyed to the students ; he/she recapitulates key points of the lesson as was broadcast by the screen teacher. In actuality these teaching acts of the classroom teacher are redundant, for the screen teacher also introduces as well as recapitulates the lesson.

So much so, complaints followed suit immediately. Secondary school teachers began to complain that they were ‘plundered off’ their profession. Indeed, only sometimes do they attend classes, for students can do this for themselves, i.e., switch on, view and switch off the TV screen. Even, some teachers argue that they are officially told off to choose between their job and questioning of the government’s policy. Parents are also as much distressed as the classroom teachers about the total overtake of classroom teaching by a screen teacher. Students also began to resist the *plasma*: they ‘could not understand the English language’ of the screen teachers; there was no time to ask the teachers (the screen or classroom teachers) for clarifications, etcetera. Some still began to question whether the expensive, brand new flat Panasonic screen installed in each school classrooms around the country is morally viable in schools deprived of basic materials for students— clean water, chairs, desks, clinics, food, etcetera let alone libraries. See Negash (2006, p.32-33) for more technical complaints such as power interruptions, unrepeatability of lessons, high pace, etcetera.

Therefore, the intent of this paper is to critically analyze and explain the contemporary Ethiopian secondary school educational reform discourse-practice and its impacts on teaching learning, teacher professionalism and the whole education system.

Theoretical framework: the discourse-knowledge-power nexus

Integral to any educational reform is how it represents learning, learner and conditions of/for effective learning. We might not yet have absolute representation of these. But, we can make rational debate and reach relatively valid representation. This view takes us to the problematics of Michel Foucault’s (Rabinow, 1994; Llyod & Thacker, 1996) social theory--the nexus among knowledge, power, ideology and discourse. Michel Foucault is one of the influential social theorists/philosophers of the past century. We owe gratitude to him for disentangling for us, among others, the intricate and complex nexus among knowledge, power, truth, and discourse. Discussing his powerful theory is beyond both the purpose and space for this paper. But, still it is possible to briefly sketch out some of the concepts that Foucault discloses: that knowledge is inseparable from power; that knowledge is related to epistemological control over ‘objects’--one of which is man himself—and; power is related to man’s control over actions of another human being.

Foucault theorizes that in the knowledge-and-power nexus, policy discourses structure and regulate what is possible to act or say and the conditions under which they are considered true or false and right or wrong. As such, discourse is a linguistic and semiotic (non-linguistic) manifest of power and knowledge. What is true or right of teaching is subject to interpretation in consideration of power relations vis-à-vis a reform agenda of the powerful—the state. Thus, both power and truth are in circular relations, i.e., one feeds to and charges from the other. Ideology, in this nexus, serves as legitimating power of the powerful group's (for instance policy makers and state agents) interpretation of what is the true knowledge and right way of teaching and learning.

In the views of Foucaultian theory, school or schooling is the device through which ideology and power/knowledge are reproduced. Wodak (2002, p.11), one of the leading critical discourse analysis theorists, takes power as “about relations of difference and particularly about the effects of differences in social structure” and language in use, or discourse, plays an essential role in imposing power. Ideology is taken as a “particular ways of representing and constructing society which reproduces unequal relations of power relations of domination and exploitation” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 275). Ideologies are deployed and employed through pedagogic discursive practices, whose media are especially curriculum, guidelines and textbooks. Giroux (1997) contends that discourse is both a medium and product of power. Thus, centrally designed or official pedagogy, including the curricula, the textbooks and other materialized forms of official knowledge, can be considered as discourses through which the state generates its effects and representations. Pedagogy, thus, cannot be neutral. From similar point of view, Bernstein (in Halsey, 1997) argues pedagogy is a symbolic control of production and distribution of not just knowledge, but also ways of behaving and identity.

Methodological framework: policy documents analysis as socio-educational analysis

In order to understand how the discourse-power-knowledge nexus referred to above operates in a concrete, particular context, a critical analysis of the educational reform discourse, as stated in policy documents, becomes essential. Foucaultian, as a philosophical concept, hardly offers practical tools yet it is unmatched for qualitative social research (Kendall &

Wickham 2007). Yet scholars such as Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 2003, 2000) have concretized many of Foucault's theory for research purposes. In his critical discourse analysis methodology (CDA), Fairclough argues policy documents envisage and (may) bring into reality a certain assumptions about the *what* (content), the *how* (classroom actions/interactions) and the *who* (identities, roles) of teaching and learning. As such, educational documents are policy discourse or texts. They comprise implicit or explicit epistemological, power-relational and methodology-strategy claims.

Fairclough sees texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles they draw upon and articulate together. His CDA enables researchers, for instance, to adapt and analyze documents in three analytical lenses, each of which is exploited in this study. Firstly, at *discourse level*, how an official document represent knowledge, construct learners and teachers and the relations between them, and how it represent/construct being a learner and a teacher. Secondly, at the *level of social practice*, how the document or text configures social fields, particularly pedagogic fields, how it constructs school and/or schooling, and how it constructs school-institutional configurations. And thirdly, at the level of *social change*, CDA enables us to disentangle: how policy text narrates educational change, what has happened and what is happening, especially change in pedagogical practice; how and to what it attributes causal power for change; and, how it justifies and legitimizes its claims. Therefore, using Faircloughnean CDA as a procedure for analysis, this paper attempts to critically analyze Ethiopia's secondary school technologization discourse-practice, focusing on the question whether it is dis-/em-powering teachers.

Research questions, relevance and data sources

Thus, the following are the specific analytical questions:

- How does the reform agenda justify substitution of classroom teachers by information communication technology? How are complexities of educational realities condensed?
- How does the reform discourse define, identify and constrain teachers and students?
- How does the reform discourse represent or portray knowledge and process of knowing? What contents are taught?

- How does the reform discourse represent or portray classroom arrangement? How it ‘practically’ does arranged classrooms? What general practices students and teachers have to follow?
- In the wake of the reform, what is the relationship between the discourse agenda and the practical realities of schools?

It is assumed that the critical discourse analysis outcomes might inform and influence policy decisions by unraveling how the intricate interrelationships among power, knowledge, discourse and ideology operate in Ethiopian context. Given the obscurities and complaints that surround reform practice, illuminating the nature and degree of coherence (or mismatch) between policy agenda and practices is essential for it might culminate in bridging the usual reform discourse-practice inconsistency.

Multiple data sources that pertain to both the reform discourse and the pragmatics of the practices were collected. On the one hand, official documents such as *Plasma Teacher Guide*, *The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia report on the development of education to the UNESCO* (FDRE, 2004) and *Education Sector Development Program III* (FDRE, 2011) were collected. These documents were essential as they offered discourse level data that pertains to justification of the reform agenda, how committed the state is to, as it claims, ‘overhauling’ reform, how knowledge, learning and teaching are represented and how being a teacher and a learner are construed. On the other hand, participant observation in its wider sense (Holliday, 2002) that involved direct observation and description of the properties and patterns of classroom events, actions, and interactions was conducted. This was during the frequent field visits for undergraduate school-practicum program and postgraduate in-service teacher training program in the year 2011.

Furthermore, part of the participant observation was formal and informal discussions with some in-service trainees (schoolteachers), school directors and their students. They were selected just based on their willingness and availability. Themes of the discussion with the teachers were roles (as a teacher and a student) and self-identification (as a teacher and a student) in the *plasma* mode of education. The questions for the school directors involved: “What is your opinion about the plasma policy?”; “What is the advantage of the plasma education over teacher-led one?”; “What do you think is the consequence of the plasma policy?” To the students, questions were addressed: “Which one do you prefer, being taught

by your teachers or the *plasma*?”; “How do teachers help you?”; “What exactly is knowledge to you?”

This paper presents the results of the data analysis below. The analysis generated seven major themes, each of which shall organize the presentation and discussion. Finally, conclusion is drawn and policy implications are suggested.

Analysis: Ethiopia’s Secondary Education Reform--Empowering or subjugating?

Justifications of the reform initiative

Any educational reform is necessitated by real socio-educational problems, and perceptions of the reality cannot be, under any circumstance, reduced to the reality itself. Earlier in this paper, we have explored the real crises that educational system of Ethiopia had plunged into before the reform was launched. Therefore, there is no doubt that reform was necessary. But, the question is: What kind of reform? Was technologization necessary—of course, yes! Let us, nonetheless, see the ‘perceptions’ of the official documents in the light of the crisis and its justifications of the motive behind the technologization-of-secondary-schools agenda. The justification goes: “To enhance the quality of education at secondary level, ICT infrastructures are provided to schools to receive satellite education transmission” (FDRE, 2011, p.15). Another official document ‘justifies’ more:

Most high schools in our country used to teach practical subjects like physics chemistry and biology theoretically without adequate support with experiments. This was due to high scarcity of laboratory equipments and chemicals...in this respect broadcasting television programs into every classroom from a center using satellite technology is indispensable to improve the quality of education (FDRE, 2004, p.8).

As it also appeared at the beginning of this text, the most commonly repeated ‘word’ in the social context of the text is “our country”. Unless very conservative, any reader of the document might feel a nostalgia of the pre-modern times when sovereignty and territorialization was top in the agenda of states and state-actors. In this postmodern time one might believe, by contrast, no one owns an impenetrable country of his/her own. Indeed, many historians on Ethiopia discuss that this term has been used for the past hundreds of years by the dominant groups in order to not only index the ‘territorial integrity’, glossing

over the transformative power of her sons and daughters (the only agents of real change), but also to impose their totalizing ideology of ‘singularity’, i.e., one country, one culture, one language, one religion and one territory that go down history of Ethiopia for centuries (Negash, 1996; Legesse, 2000). Hence, one can observe that the present assumption of one single truth that “broadcasting television programs into every classroom from a center using satellite technology is indispensable to improve the quality of education”, must have sprung from what van Dijk (1997) says *historical discursive practice*. Explication of historical background of a reform discourse is essential for it shall also illuminate the power, knowledge and ideology nexus that shapes the reform agenda more than the real problem on the ground as shall be seen below.

As in the above excerpt, the document claims that the ‘indispensable’ television programs are to be operationalized to solve practical educational problem. That is, in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, “practical subjects like physics, chemistry and biology” are envisaged to be supported “with experiment”, unlike the previous educational practice where they had been offered only “theoretically” through a classroom teacher. Thus, the reform claims to be constitutive of transition, a transition from much theory-only to practice-based. It looks solemn, seen on the surface. Yet, critical questioning of the document reveals more flaws and condensation of complex issue into single simple point. Maybe the first question raised to challenge the categorical claim is: Now that, are subjects like physics, chemistry and biology *practical now i.e., after the technology has been built into classes?* In the sense of the text, *practical* means ‘that which is experimented in laboratory rooms.’ But, classroom observations show students watch experimentation carried out by the screen teacher or student; they never do experiments themselves. Watching experiments done and doing experiments are totally different dimensions of reality.

Archeological findings of engraved and painted rock artefacts (Finneran 2007) show us that Ancient Ethiopians, whom Houston (1926) calls the Wonderful Cushites of Ancient Ethiopia (see also Diop 1975; Clark 1954), engaged on far more advanced *ontological* practices than what the official documents uphold as ‘effective’ learning for the twenty-first century: they imitated, abstracted, engraved, carved out models of nature, including the celestial bodies; they painted, sharpened, polished, crouched, delineated and depicted bovines, anthropomorphic motifs on hard rocks; they cleaved, split, cut, broke, erected as well as demolished pyramids, stele, obelisks, and so forth. These are prototypical instances of Paulo

Freire's concept of literacy—the ontological process of naming, with the **word**, and framing the **world**. In sharp contrast, naive interpretation of *practical learning* or literacy is preached in the policy texts of the 21st century Ethiopia. The documents obscures difference between 'the watching of an experiment done on screen' and 'doing the experiment' to hypothesis-test (in the sense of the great educational philosopher Donald Schön 1983). We are not saying here that children, or any one, cannot learn by watching. Laboratory experimentation basically enables learners to, by and for themselves, *empirically* or *iconically*, measure real events, things or mechanisms, or it enables them to practically trigger the events to take place by combining or steering the *real* objects, elements, or compounds and record, register, report, debate, counter-debate, confirm, reject, etc., the impact. Therefore, we are saying, here, that the document only bases itself on a blinder claim—a claim that distorts truth about laboratory experimentation.

Let us extend the meaning of practical learning beyond a laboratory room. Critical observation of the document's 'justification' discloses that it extricates the social and ecological dimension of education and science. Research indicates that Ethiopia is one of the most chemically polluted and dangerous places on the planet earth (Zinabu & Pearce, 2003). Besides, it is one of the few countries where the ecology is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Surprisingly and paradoxically, neither of these are points of school subjects, nor issues in the laboratory rooms, nor are they objects of practical research in the country's few higher education institutions, let alone secondary schools.

Identification of teachers

Official documents such as education policy construct and impose certain identities upon teachers. In this reform discourse, 'What are teachers construed as being?' is, thus, an essential identification question. To begin with, any reasonable man might ask for a burden of proof for an argument that the need for beaming lessons through satellite-TV "overcomes the shortage of laboratory equipment and chemicals" (FDRE, 2011, p.58). But, the question is: In the first place, does availability of these equipments and chemicals (alone) guarantee practice? It is only humans (the schoolteachers) that translate these to any tool of knowledge production through their agency. Nevertheless, the fetishist policy document ignores them. The document claims: "Information communication technology is introduced in [sic] the education system to strengthen the expansion of quality education" (FDRE, 2004, p.7). This

argument again portrays equipment as an agent bearing concepts. In other words, according to the text, educational change is brought into reality by introducing a technology, irrespective of the human agents, teachers. The technology “is introduced.” Although the agent, here, is not explicit, one can understand by dialoging with the title page of the article, i.e., it is “The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.” Teachers were squeezed out of discussions over their practice and, consequently, they only heard a celebration of what Latour (2002, p.21) says is a “solid importation of indisputable facts,” which otherwise could have been, to a sensible mind, a ‘hotly disputed state of affairs.’

Thus, this policy reform, by by-passing teachers, dispossesses them of not only teaching materials but also of their teaching acts--the defining character of teaching professionalism. Classroom observations indicate that pupils are turned into spectators of the TV-teacher, while the classroom teacher, if at all he/she is to self-present, is cornered or simply watches outside through the broken window. Or, the teacher is still not different than the audience—the students. For a variety, the students might get few-minutes chance to ‘hear’ the classroom teachers’ introduction and summarization of the lessons—a servitude to the screen teacher rather than to the students. The consequence is, there is no conceivable opportunity for the pupils and teachers to pause, ask, communicate or argue about the objects, contents or concepts of the lesson. A salient and recurrent event was described in an English lesson as follows:

TV-teacher says ‘Write the answers in your exercise books.’ Then a 2-minute countdown began. TV-screen displays ‘Page 154 Exercise 3 Direct Speech Reported Speech.’ Students could not do the tasks because some couldn’t understand and some have no copies of the national Student Book. The countdown completes. TV teacher resumes telling the ‘right’ answers to the verb changes. Students got confused. Teacher tries to justify why changes occur but TV-teacher goes on talking simultaneously. Teacher finds it difficult whether he should go on justifying or whether he should keep silent so that students to listen to the TV-teacher. He stops talking and begins to listen (watch?) the TV (Observation note, Wednesday, December 07, 2011).

Lastly, let us note that the policy document further dreadfully dehumanizes the corporeal, in-class teachers. It justifies that the new TV education lessons “Enable students to have access to model and competent teachers.” Two of the words by which the justification is realized catch our minds—“model” and “competent”. The former implies not just reductionist view of education as controllable and calculable. Moreover, it implies that young learners imitate and

re-live their elders. The second item, namely ‘competent’ stupidifies, at the very least, the *local* teachers. If at all they were, it means, to any logical person, that they are victims of the teacher education system that denied them development of competence.

Representation of knowledge

The document categorizes some knowledge as primary targets of the satellite transmission education:

Six subjects have already been selected to be aired via satellite. The subjects are English, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and civics and ethical education. These academic subjects above all others are the bases and bridges for higher education, teacher education and for technical and vocational education and training (FDRE, 2004, p. 8; FDRE 2011, p. 19).

Exploiting subjectless, passive syntax (have been selected), the text breaks news about selection for aired-pedagogy of six subjects configured into “above all others”, “bridges” and “bases” for tertiary level. One big contradiction can be discerned: the epistemology which underlies seems to be take-apart rather than bring-together attached to the technologization or globalized-world discourse. Automatically, learners might be forced to conceive school subjects into above versus below, bases versus ancillaries, bridges versus abyss bifurcations. Furthermore, it is a downright essentialism to confine children’s ambition to know about their world to a few fixed subjects.

The text offers high ideological reassurance that “the contents of the television lessons are all in all based on the curriculum. They [teachers] strictly follow the formal syllabus and crosscheck the learning and teaching materials to be present every lesson under each chapter by television”. This is beginning-the-question logic; it pre-empts any question about the legitimacy of the video-link pedagogy. It is, from the document’s perspective, simply truth. The official text further legitimizes the “truth” that the official syllabus and textual materials are where the best knowledge resides, for they are textured by states. Additionally, it portrays knowledge and knowing as commodity exchange; there is a knowledge called English or mathematics; we shall air to you and you shall consume it. Or, as Haberman (1991, p.293) puts it succinctly, in his renowned *pedagogy of poverty* theory, “We dispense knowledge. Bring your own container.”

Plainly, the policy document is doing its best to domesticate misrepresentations in both students and teachers. Fairclough (1999, p.77) describes such discourse as means-end or instrumental rationality that “produces general formulas for change [by] normalization, homogenization and the reduction of difference.” Fairclough further describes such a move as “crisis of the public sphere” and “closing down of the universe of discourse” (p.78).

Representation of classroom arrangement

Baptizing each of the 52-inch flat Panasonic plasma screens containing the “programs” as knowledge to be dispensed, the document breaks a success story that 458 schools are the first luckiest ones to hit advantage of the *plasma-ed* education. It adds, “Currently, 2978 television programs are ready for use. About 458 secondary grades (9-12) will be beneficiaries of the first phase of the ICT project.”

The text humanizes secondary grades and dehumanizes the humans, children in particular. One can further go to the extent of saying, it also instructs those school children to pay gratitude and possibly to deify the agent, presumably the state, that made their (the children’s) dream come reality. But, the interview with the schoolteachers indicates that frequently students stoned into pieces the plasma screens to express their grievances against it. Similarly, discussions with some students indicated that:

We pupils like the ‘plasma’ [satellite TV education] because we watch clips of English music or movies that are displayed as bridges between lessons, though it unfortunately lasts only few minutes...3 or 5 minutes (translated from originally Oromo language; Interview note, Wednesday, December 07, 2011).

Further data indicates all the children abhor the TV-education style. They, rather, prefer the traditional teacher-led pedagogy. So much so, the TV education upsets all sections of the society, including parents.

One of the idealist representations in the text claims that now “currently, 2, 978 television programs are ready for use” (FDRE, 2004, p.7) Note that, in the programs, there is knowledge residing; like the biblical “food,” the ‘magical’ ICT-knowledge is proffered to its ‘followers’. The text that follows adds, because in this:

...globalized world information communication technology is vital...we are trying to... [a] Present abstract concepts in a simplified manner... [b] Transmit uniform education to many students found in different places at the same time... [c] Enable students to have access to model and competent teachers... [e] Demonstrate laboratory equipment found in one place (classroom) to the learning classrooms (p.7).

This excerpt from the official document reveals that the technologization reform rests upon *technological determinism*—the view of reform that gives prominence to technology as effecting change, by contrast to human agency. On the surface, it claims that the main reason “we” introduce ICT into classrooms is because we are in a “globalized world.” Globalization is defined by Held, et al (1999, p.16 in Grugel 2003, p.252) as “transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the *exercise of power*” (emphasis added). Still to be justified, however, is exercise of power by *who*, on *who/what*, and *with who*, especially when it comes to pedagogy. Any responsible person should say exercise of power by the learner on his/her world, and with his/her other learners. But, these are less possible in the face of *watching* a lesson broadcast, where learner agency is diminished to taking a glimpse of ‘science’. Philosophers of science tell us that changes in science were nonetheless a consequence of the puzzle-solving activities of human agents, which must, eventually, effect perspective transformation (Kuhn, 1970). To Kuhn, one of the influential philosophers of science in the last century, texts—these include textbooks, visual graphics and hypertexts—only express a consolidated achievements of particular science to date.

Yet, the document goes on to claim that the purpose of the technology-infused reform is to “transmit uniform education to many students found in different places at the same time”. In stark contrast to the learner-centeredness vision it displays, on the one hand, this, on the other, is tantamount to squashing non-identical subjectivities of learners (their experiences, social backgrounds, learning styles and interests) into a single screen and a unidirectional communication. It is solidly established knowledge that such a transmissive pedagogy misses the fundamental meaning-making processes. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1995, p. 5) state that:

Pedagogy loses all meaning unless it reflects the intention to communicate rationally, and thus to completely rationalize the means of communication...The student’s ability to relay the message back to the teacher (for correction or information)...measures the success of the action of forming ideas and of transforming knowledge more effectively.

In watching knowledge dispensed, where is the room for learners to exercise their world-changing, or illocutionary and perlocutionary powers (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)?

The document confirms Fairclough (2003) critical discourse theory that the vast majority of policy texts commonly wield their mystifying power by condensing, reducing and over-determining social realities. Indeed, the policy document is pretty sure that uniform education is one of the key high-quality indicators of an educational practice. This totalitarian view contrasts with, for instance, enabling the learner realize his/her *particular* potential, which any reasonable man cannot but accept and/or works towards achieving.

Paradoxes of the discourse agenda and practical realities

The reform document encompasses numerous paradoxes. For instance, a statement goes:

The main activities that are accomplished in the project includes, production of Educational TV programs, installation of satellite receiving devices known as plasma display panels (PDPs) in every classroom at Secondary level, establishing a computer network system and install generators in schools which have no electricity, installation of satellite TV programs transmission system at the center Educational Media Agency.

In this text, the first paradox of relations is between the technologies namely the incommensurability of PDPs and computer network systems, on one hand, and using of generators to make these hi-techs function on the other hand. More to the point, we observe presence and absence paradox i.e., in the land of no-electricity, on-line internet links and live satellite TV programs transmission! Likewise, similar absence-presence paradox characterizes the technologization reform discourse. After reading the document, a Londoner might well imagine that Ethiopian English classrooms would have now been well-equipped with information communication technology since the launch of this reform in 2004, or that any Ethiopian teachers would have now been modern, i.e. communicative language teachers, or that any secondary-level Ethiopian child would speak fluent English, given such hi-tech classrooms so and so on. But, the reality on the ground is the converse of these. Every university teacher in Ethiopia complains ‘the ever deteriorating competence’ of students joining universities. Where I am teaching (Haramaya University) due to poor level of their skills, “basic” or secondary school level English and mathematics courses are being offered to freshman students as “bridges” to sophomore and senior courses.

Further glances at the official document reveal more paradox: “Currently, 2, 978 television programs are ready for use” in “458 secondary” schools. This is, in fact, only to the pioneering lucky users. One school director, during field work, told the author that a single such television, flat Panasonic TV-set, costs 57000 Ethiopian Birr, equivalent to USD\$7125 (one US dollar bought 8 Birr or so during the reform). He estimated that this—the cost of a single Panasonic TV—can build a sizeable library room and a decent clinic room adjacent to the library. The school director added that there are 30 such television sets, one in each of the 9th and 10th grade classrooms. It means USD\$213,750 or so is spent on the TV sets, not to mention additional expenses on installation and maintenance. What is more, for transmission of a single, 30-minute lesson, 38, 000 Birr (then, USD\$4750) is paid for the satellite-time, the school director told. In contradiction, the author captured the following commonplace phenomenon in his lesson observation:

There are over sixty students in the classroom. But, I counted only six text books. The TV-teacher directs students to go through the comprehension questions in the textbooks and find answers in the reading passage. The TV-teacher gave them only one minute; TV screen begins counting down in seconds, 59, 58, 57, etc. A group of students congregate around a single book. Some stood up tautening their muscles and legs to read the text from distance, while I see three students scrambling for a single chair precariously and almost fell off (Observation note, (Wednesday, December 07, 2011).



Fig. 1: *Prototypicals of Ethiopian Primary School: Inside and outside classrooms*

To amplify the point, today, the country's secondary schools are today completely depleted of even the basic texts, let alone science, literary or mathematics books. The observation of the so-called "Pedagogic Centers" revealed some big wooden rulers and tables, aged and, hence, unintelligible world maps, some pieces of torn-apart cotton clothes, which the schoolteachers call 'gowns'. Likewise, the author's observations of over ten practicum partner schools to the university, to which he, a staff member, revealed neither of these essential services to pupils. To add, the official document claims "all secondary schools will be networked with Internet services" (FDRE, 2011, p.58). Nevertheless, since the inception of this study (2009) and at this moment (Thursday, August 02, 2012) all the secondary schools' internet service either works at a snail-pace or totally malfunctioning. This is confirmed by the author's summer in-service teacher trainees who come from all parts of the country for their Master's studies. These relentless problems are true of even the university where the author is teaching.

Finally, equally interesting is the spatial relations paradox. So striking is the astronomical distance between the studio at the Education Media Agency (situated in Addis Ababa city), on the one hand, and the secondary schools towards the knowledge is broadcast, on the other. Informal interview question— 'What exactly is knowledge to you?'—put to some secondary school students revealed that, possibly as a result of this, some hold the belief that knowledge resides in TV-sets, and some believe that knowledge is located in the studio before it streams down to the screen and, still, some assume knowledge as, quite funny, "that which the government tells." Similar absurdity that was engendered by the TV-transmission of knowledge is that the students' assumption of the *corporeal* and the *virtual* teachers. Perhaps due to the persisting distantiation between the learners and the televising teacher, classroom teachers are construed as unimportant and disrespected. Asked 'How do teachers help you?' many students sardonically call their teachers, in their mother tongues, "the zombies" and commonly make fun out of them dubbing them "the DJs", a popular-culture term. Similar piece of text was documented by a scholar (Negash, 2006, p. 41):

The student informs his father that he has not been able to follow his studies as transmitted to him via plasma. There is no way that he can catch up with his studies; plasma lessons are of a fast pace that he has no chance of doing physics, mathematics and calculus. The problems of learning are compounded by power failures. Hence he informs his father that he should not expect old-age maintenance support from his son as his son will not be able to get a job after completion of school. Unless he manages to

become a teacher and enjoy an easy life by managing the remote control to the plasma lectures. This is unlikely however as the student in spite of trying to study is fully aware that he won't pass the tests.

More adverse consequence of the distantiating phenomenon is that *words* are disconnected not only from *referents* but also from the interpretive frames of the learners. Brook (2006) rightly witnessed this when he observed in the biology classes of the inaccessibility of issues such as genetic engineering and the associated moral questions. Rightly, more serious for him was, however, his observations of culturally irrelevant and morally irresponsible natures of some lessons such as when very young students, especially girls, were taught “about an unfaithful lady who had conceived a child and accused her man of not supporting her, and how she lost a court case that ordered a blood test of the lady” (p.76).

Plasma since and then

Since September 2012 (the beginning of Ethiopian New Year and school opening after summer break), the plasma education style has significantly stopped in many schools and while is still at work in others (as far as observations show in Eastern Ethiopia), putting teachers and students in a state of confusion. No official explanation has been given. All those hi-tech equipment built to each secondary school and each classroom is locked in and no doubt is wearing off. In 2006, a year after the plasma style education was introduced, a survey indicated “secondary school students have great difficulties to read, write and above all to listen to spoken English” (Negash, 2006, p.33). Although there are no empirical studies showing the level of numeracy and literacy across Ethiopian higher educations, the author's rich professional and lived experience, the great number of dismissal and drop-outs, and the pervasive and disparaging complaints coming from professional colleagues, all show that the numeracy and literacy competence of students, both undergraduates and graduates, is the worst level in their experience. It is yet to be empirically supported but from it can be argued that the result is a generation of young people who are denied the education they need to build their own futures and the future of their society.

Instrumental Rationalist View of Education

How the reform justifies itself and, thereby, condenses complexities of educational realities was disclosed in the data analysis. As was observed above, the document assumes teaching-learning, albeit a complex social phenomenon, as straightforward, learner as simple reactive

to stimulus gizmo, and knowledge as shibboleth and value-free information. Similarly, in his analysis of the contemporary Ethiopian educational system, Kedir (2006) observed that corporate ideology is involved in the engineering of the TV-style educational practice. He witnessed that this view figured itself in the hypertexts transmitted as contents of the classroom lessons. Fuller (1991, p.xii) also stresses that schools are notoriously “used as a stage upon which political elites enact ideologies and symbols which they hold as sacred”. The sacred, here in the official report, is nothing but the Information Communication Technology, which is presumed as accelerator of what Fuller refers to as the fragile state’s lustfulness to grow-up modern.

Meanwhile, bypassing teachers has been among the detrimental consequences of the reform practice. This kind of ‘reform’ emanates from the dualist worldview which keeps apart the human and the non-human world. It has been observed that this worldview manifests itself in what may also be called technological determinism, a view driven by corporate ideology. Santos (2001) labeled this as an *epistemology of blindness* i.e., that which misrepresents education “in ways that fit its regulatory imagination” (p.268). Indeed, later observations since data collection was completed show that, insidiously, the state occasionally uses the *plasma* for different non-educational purposes. For instance, it uses the satellite TV for teleconferencing with teachers. In a school director’s words’, in the same classrooms, teachers are “preached the ruling elites’ ideology with romanticizing concept of modern IT technology.”

Understanding how the reform constructs classroom arrangement and the general practices that students and teachers have to follow, was the other central objective of this analysis. The analysis revealed that unidirectional and transmissive arrangement of classroom practice underlay the reform vision. Pre-established categories of knowledge are transmitted through a virtual teacher. Students are doomed to being spectators and teachers are reduced to being gatekeepers of the screen teacher. The state might and *does* argue that the plasma is not meant to replace but to aid the classroom teacher. This, however, is simply denial of reality because classroom observation shows out of the forty-minute allocated to a lesson, the teacher owns only ten minutes.

As was indicated in the above analysis, a strategy that the reform discourse employs is homogenization of perspectives. That means, for instance, it took control of the school and

thereby denied the community (students, teachers, parents, and educators) forums of discussion. Consequently, it placed the reform processes and outcomes in the hands elites in the Ministry of Education and its actors in regional bureaus, each who control texts and information communication technology. For this reason, it was easy for these reform agents to narrow truth about ‘effective and efficient’ education and cut it to fit their interest. We have seen, for instance, that the document claims knowledge is classified into *key* and *peripheral*, teachers are identified as the out-of-the-country, who are *model and competent*, and the inside-the-country, who are, implicitly, execrable and incompetent, and classroom communication as transmission and consumption of monological, non-debatable information.

Presumably, due to all the anomalies observed so far, the ironies of the reformation discourse practically emerged only to keep the initial problem square up: mass education, then scarcity of resources, then greater dependency on the modern state, bureaucratization of schools for domination and perpetuation of political power, all of which generates students’ and teachers’ resistance and then regression to the origin i.e. educational crisis.

The ultimate goal of this analysis was to unravel the generative mechanism that defined the reform agenda that built aired-TV-lesson style into secondary schools in the specified socio-educational context. The mechanism can be described as instrumental rationalist view of education because the deeper, underlying motive at work is total substitution of human agents with information communication technology. The emergent themes can explain this mechanism from two perspectives: from philosophical and ideological perspectives. On the one hand, positivistic philosophy of education can explain it. Its critiques explicated that positivistic view is characterized, among many, by “The reduction of thought to a mathematical apparatus...the subjection of reason to what is directly given...to comprehend the given as such” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972 quoted in Giddens, 1995, p.176). This inference is justified by teachers’ salient comments that they have no good reason to even go to the schools since “we are deprived of our positions as teachers”, their legitimate practices, and since “our students have already ‘understood’ that they could manage switching on or off the plasma screen”, the students “need no more help from us teachers.”

On the other hand, the reform initiative built information communication technology with the belief that it is a means to high quality, efficient and effective education. Therefore, as was observed also by Kedir (2007) corporate ideology explains well this reform paradigm. For

details about the ideology that underlies the contemporary socio-political system of the country see Lata (1999). This ideology is reductionist and determinist (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1993); it assumes high quality education is that reproduces officially ordained knowledge; it is co-equivalenced to scientific gadget. Moreover, it is determinist because it views effective pedagogy as finished product and unidirectional; prominence is bestowed to technology, in converse to classroom teachers' and students' combined agency—the true *bearers* of quality education. This over-determinates the otherwise indeterminate processes of knowing, resulting in satellite TV as a medium of domination of teachers and students and as a medium of perpetuation of a single perspective on education.

Conclusion and implications

This study confirms the powerful, explanatory Foucauldian social theory, but it also suggests that this must be employed to explain and redress misrepresentations and explore *alternative* actions in concrete contexts. Fittingly, CDA was significantly employed in order to disclose that the reform discourse, which emerged in a particular socio-historical context of Ethiopia and whose premises rested upon empirical findings, was, nevertheless, hijacked by ideological interest of the ruling elites. Thus, misrepresenting and controlling the information communication technology--materialized form of power/knowledge--the reform agenda, in actuality, has put it to serve the perpetuation of the status quo.

In addition, the findings confirm the usefulness of the methodological device, namely Critical Discourse Analysis, especially in order to historicize data and immanent events. For instance, this analysis reveals that the present technological determinist reform is also the legacy of what Negash (1996, pp.34-37), a prominent historian on Ethiopia and Africa, calls the 'historical consciousness of Abyssinians.' According to Negash, the most important institution responsible, implicitly or explicitly, for the creation and perpetuation of social consciousness and the status quo, is the specified context in the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Similarly, this analysis provided evidence that the Ethiopian 'new' educational reform, which gave rise to transmissive pedagogy, is, in fact, premised upon or generated by the traditional ideologies of state absolutism and Orthodox Church dogmatism, both of which, combined, is, in the accurate words of Negash (2006, p.48) "the main pillar of nationalism" that "tend to deny the citizen any meaningful role."

The policy makers may see relevance in the findings of this study as they seek effective reform. The findings suggest that top-down, or outside-in, reform, however grounded in empirical data or embellished with discourse of technologization, cannot be successful. The findings suggest that what the author likes to describe as inside-out approach might be the viable option. A reform approach, where the real social condition of the country defines the pedagogy and where the transformative power of teachers and students is accepted, is preferred. In other words, policy makers should recognize that only when teachers are accepted as policy framers, as active citizens, and knowledge inventors, will they feel and act as responsible agents for advancement of their students' knowledge and skills. Policy has to incorporate the genuine values of teachers and students as technology has to only serve as a tool in the teachers' and learners' desire and action to disclose, understand, conceptualize, communicate and change their social and natural world. The converse is as much ethically dehumanizing as it is logically fallacious.

Finally, the author's re-construction from this study is that only with an inside-out perspective shall Ethiopia and similar African countries effectively transform their educational practice. That means that students' and teachers' co-equal debating, formulation, evaluation and revision of the reform ground, horizon, process and outcomes must be considered as the precondition for real-world change. Therefore, beyond the desire to reform and 'westernize' its education system, Ethiopia needs, in the first place, to transform its political system, respect the democratic rights of its citizens and admit that it is only the transformative power of its citizens, mainly teachers, that can change the current plights of poverty, illiteracy and living under dictatorship of few elites. Yet, there is a need to conduct inquiry regarding the influences and roles of global powers and their agencies such the World Bank and the IMF on the framing and overseeing of the Third World's education reform. Although the author partly agrees with Negash (2006), and others, that "widespread belief in Westernization through development aid largely managed by the so called development partners (i.e. donors and the World Bank)... runs the risk of sapping the initiative, creativity and enterprise of citizens of the aid receiving countries" (p. 8), the author does not, however, agree that "there is very little that Ethiopia can expect from the so called international donor community. Ethiopia, and the Ethiopians have to make it on their own" (p. 45). Never can Ethiopia and the Ethiopians alone can make it on their own, because, given the centuries-old undemocratic nature of the regimes, never has Ethiopia been 'a unified, mobilized nation' but

has always been ‘at the crossroad’ (Lata 1996). Preferably, the dialectic of inside-out and outside-in, wherein she *ingests* from outside but *digests* inside, is recommendable.

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Author’s Details

Dereje Tadesse Birbirso is an Assistant Professor at the Haramaya University, College of Social Science and Humanities, School of Language Studies, Haramaya Town, Oromia State, Ethiopia. His research interests include language learning and the social context, language and social semiosis, donation and social and educational change. His long-term research agenda is evolutionary process and pattern in social semiosis and epistemology. He may be reached at: dttdesse@yahoo.com.