

Quality Primary Education in Ethiopia in the 21st Century: Issues, Problems and Strategies for Improvement

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Abstract: An essential means by which any nation can achieve optimum development is through the provision of quality education – from the primary level to the tertiary level. Primary education being the base of the formal education pyramid has often been viewed as the most crucial educational level in the formal system because any problem at this level would automatically reflect at the secondary and tertiary levels. The problem of poor quality of primary education in Ethiopia has been widely highlighted in the literature (Ministry of Education, 1994; Brown, 1998; Grisay and Mahlek, 1991 and Germay, 2001). The issue of quality primary education hinges on how efficiently and effectively the primary education system meets the goals of primary education and the national objectives. Hence, in our examination of the quality of primary education in this paper, the key indices of quality education within the realm of the inputs, processes, and products of primary education system are critically analysed. Against this background, a review of the primary education system in Ethiopia reveals glaring quality problems such as paucity of well-trained and committed teachers, low level of teacher participation in educational planning processes, lack of career development for teachers, low level professionalisation of teaching practices, inadequate participation of the stakeholders in curriculum decision-making, low enrolment of girls and poor verbal proficiency of pupils. Other problems include high level of school dropouts, inadequate teaching equipment, lack of generation of new ideas, indiscipline among teachers, low motivation and low morale, inefficient utilisation of time and other resources and poor quality of primary school graduates and ineffective school leadership. To stem these quality problems in our primary school system, the paper recommends amongst others that the entire inputs, processes and products of primary schools should be properly re-examined. The Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) and other relevant divisions of the Ministry of Education should work co-operatively to harness all the relevant human and material resources available in the country to improve primary education quality. Specifically, actions should be geared towards designing a functional curriculum that will transform primary school pupils into better products capable of fitting in properly into the wider society. Such a curriculum should be able to attract both girls and boys through a variety of relevant subjects that will form a solid base of balanced education. To effect the desirable integrated and comprehensive curriculum, it is important that the participation of all relevant stakeholders (both from public sector and organised private sector) be enlisted. Quality goals – those shared by the broad spectrum of the populace – should guide the formulation of the new curriculum so that it will be customer – oriented and learner-centered. A new strategy which provides for balanced practical education, improved teacher training, strengthening of school support systems, improved remuneration of teachers, better performance management, provision of in-service training for teachers and professionalisation of teaching is called for. Also required for the establishment of quality primary education are increased funding of primary education through the national budget, a positive change of attitude by teachers towards the efficient use of instructional time and teaching resources, continuous evaluation of pupils, proper counselling facilities for pupils, effective leadership and the creation of school environment that enhances teacher pupil interaction and team work.

Introduction

One of the processes by which a society can preserve, enrich and transmit the accumulated knowledge, skills and values of its cultural heritage and environment in order to foster the well-being of its members, is education. According to Smith (1961) education like a living biological organism has growing qualities and hence it is sensitive to time and space. The essence of the education process is to ensure the survival and development of mankind in the face of challenges and changes that are continually presented by forces of nature and man.

It is gratifying to note that Ethiopia, as a developing country, appreciates the importance of the use of education as a potent instrument for harnessing and developing all her natural and human resources for the overall transformation of her economy. An essential means by which

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Ethiopia can achieve the desired optimum development is through the provision of quality education from the primary level to the tertiary level.

Primary education (education provided at the primary school level) being the base of the formal education pyramid has often been viewed as the most crucial educational level in the formal system because any unsolved problem at this level would automatically reflect at the subsequent (secondary and tertiary) educational levels.

In this paper quality primary education denotes worthwhile knowledge, skill, concepts attitudes and values which are relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries and other stake holders in the primary education system. A quality primary education, worth its salt must be both efficient (use the right inputs process) and effective (achieve the required output / product). It should be the kind of education that makes improvements in the educational processes (planning and administration of education) so as to produce customer-oriented primary school graduates. Against this background, the objectives of this paper are to:

- examine the main issues involved in quality primary education;
- identify the problems which stand in the way of achieving quality education in the Ethiopian primary education system; and
- suggest possible strategies to achieve quality primary education in Ethiopia in the 21st century.

Quality Primary Education: Main Issues

This paper will review two main issues of quality primary education, namely, goals of primary education and the indices of primary education.

Goals of Primary Education

The goals of primary education in Ethiopia are documented by the Ministry of Education (MOE, 1996) in its Education Sector Development Program (ESDP). The main thrust of the ESDP which was designed in 1996 was to improve educational quality and expand access to education with special emphasis on primary education in rural and under-served areas as well as the promotion of girls' education. The cardinal focus of the ESDP which was launched in 1997/98 is to make primary education universal by the year 2015 and the goals for the first five years (1997/98 – 2001/2002) are stated as follows:

- More children will attend school with the enrolment expanding from 3.1 million to 7 million in 2001/02, which increases gross enrolment ratio from 30 percent to 50 percent. To accommodate the four million additional children, 2500 new primary schools will be built. Class size will also be allowed to rise from an average of 33 percent to 50 percent, so that more fund can be allocated to other teaching materials;
- More girls and rural children will attend primary school education, thereby increasing girls' participation from 38 percent to 45 percent;
- The quality of education will be improved by providing a textbook for each child in core subjects, improving educational facilities and improving teacher training;
- The curriculum will be more relevant;
- School efficiency will be improved by reducing dropout and repetition rates;
- Financing of education will be improved by increasing public spending to 19 percent of the government budget and 4.6 percent of the National output, and encouraging the private sector and community financing.

A look at the provisions of the EDSP reveals that emphasis was placed on the improvement of the level of quantity of human and material resources as well as improvement in the training of teachers. However, not much was stated in terms of the relevant skills and values to be inculcated in the training of primary school students.

For a proper examination of quality primary education, it is important to take a look at the goals of primary education as perceived by other experts outside Ethiopia. This is relevant because Ethiopia is a subsystem of the wider global environment and what is done in the country, must of necessity, reflect the germane elements of what is considered qualitative in the wider macro-environment of which Ethiopia is a part.

The issue of quality education is a dynamic and continuous process and what constitutes quality education changes from time to time in response to the demands of the clientele and the society. The idea in this paper is not to abandon our rigorous search for quality and relevant primary education but rather re-order out priorities in goal formulation, planning and administration of education.

What constitutes quality education and the goals of quality education cannot be an exhausted controversy due to the ever-changing character of the environment. A committee set up by the Educational Testing Service in America was commissioned to determine what people envisaged as adequate and quality education (Turnbull, in Bereday (ed), 1969: 207). Extensive review of the literature resulted in the formulation of the following ten goals of quality education. The goals which are relevant to the Ethiopian environment covers the personal, academic, social and civic development of primary education students. They include the fact that quality education should help the student to:

- understand himself as a member of society;
- understand and appreciate persons of other cultures and ethnic groups;
- master skills in the use of words and numbers;
- develop a positive attitude towards school and the learning process.
- acquire habits and attitudes associated with responsible citizenship.
- develop good health habits and maintain physical and emotional well – being.
- provide opportunities and encouragement to be creative.
- prepare for productive work and open opportunities for him/her to work.
- appreciate developments and achievements in the sciences, arts and humanities.
- Prepare for the challenges of a fast-changing world of science and technology.

Though the above refers to what we expect quality education to do for and to students in schools, there is no doubt that the teacher himself must be exposed to and be influenced by these quality prescriptions during his own pre-service and in-service teacher education if he is to remain relevant and accountable in the educational system.

A review of Murtgatroyd and Morgan (1993); and Yalokwu (2001:12) shows that goals of quality should be governed by the following principles:

- Participation: Representatives of the key elements of school community should participate in drawing up the goals of schools located in the community;
- Empowerment: Having established the school wide goals, the leadership empowers the staff by letting them have a say on the goals, especially by creating a connection between individual, team and overall organisational goals;
- Tackling the root causes of problems and not symptoms;
- Input and process improvements are used as prerequisites for sustainable improvements in academic performance;
- Performance management: Encourage performance management of all the staff and overall performance should not to be fixed to final results of staff performance evaluation;
- Effective communication: School leaders are to communicate the vision of school to staff and students and this will enhance the attainment of goals;
- Organisation as a system: The school is to be viewed as a social system and the people as agents for facilitating the on going process;

- **Responsibility of top management:** The leadership of primary school management corporations, *wereda* and *kebele* levels should be seen as important to the realisation of goals;

Having reviewed the goals of quality education as related to the Ethiopian primary education, it is pertinent to examine the indices of quality education in the primary school system.

Indices of Quality Primary Education

When we think of quality primary education, we are in fact, thinking of the quality of primary schools in which we educate our children and the ability of the schools to achieve the goals of education in a cost-effective way. Indices (or indicators) of quality are neither prescriptive nor static. The indicators will, however, serve to as guideposts towards the achievement of goals that are relevant to the task and mega – environments of the primary schools.

A review of Nwagwu (1984) and Yalokwu (2000:8) reveals the indicators of education in quality primary schools.

The indices of quality education are benchmarks with which we can systematically assess the quality of primary education in Ethiopia. These indices impinge on the processes of education (curriculum contents, teaching methods, qualification of teachers, physical and social infrastructure provisions, etc) as well as the personality and performance of the individual graduates in the world of work. They include;

- **A curriculum that provides for a variety of learning experiences:** A school curriculum that provides for a variety of learning experiences and skills (covering cognitive, psychomotor and affective skills) that are appropriate to the needs of the students is rated highly as a quality index. This is important especially where the curriculum provides for meaningful choices and is balanced in the variety of such learning experiences;
- **Innovations and generation of new ideas:** The school curriculum cannot afford to be stagnant for any length of time and it must be primed to respond to changes as they occur, through generation of new ideas and innovations. The ability of the school authorities to take active interest in new ideas is an indicator of quality in that worthwhile activities revitalise the learning processes and ensure that desirable experiences are shared by all;
- **Qualified teachers:** Teaching is not an all-comers job. Usually only individuals who possess the relevant qualifications and have the interest to impart the appropriate concepts, skills and values are adjudged qualified to be selected as teachers;
- **Admission of qualified students through proper selection schemes:** The admission and registration of only candidates who have the minimum requirements is one way of ensuring that, other things being equal, the students have what it takes to study and cope with rudimentary classes in the primary schools;
- When the generality of the students have the minimum entry qualifications, it is relatively easy for the teachers and the students to achieve their relevant goals;
- **Qualitative graduates:** A quality educational institution produces men and women who have the culture, functional and useable knowledge and skills. The performance of primary school graduates in the world of work or at secondary schools is an indicator of primary education quality;
- **Individualisation of instruction:** A major purpose of primary education is to promote learning. The amount of learning that is geared towards the needs of the individual learners must be rated very high in the list of priorities. In that respect individualisation of instruction is seen as the ultimate realisation of that end. An institution that plans very carefully the individual learning needs of its students taking cognisance of their preferences and interest is deemed to rate high on the scale of quality education;
- **Healthy relationship among staff and students:** The personal development of school members cannot be limited to purely academic provisions. The arrangements for staff/students, welfare and measures taken to ensure that healthy relationships exist among

staff and students are seen as pointers to a school climate that is deliberately nurtured to achieve worthwhile objectives in education;

- **High level of discipline among members:** Self-discipline which denotes self-control among teachers and students is a rare and worthy index of good quality education. The high reputation of such institutions as May Flower School, Ikenne and Faith primary school, Benin city in Nigeria, stemmed from the fact that the institutions had teachers who cultivated high codes of moral behaviours and had the courage to inculcate in their students the spirit of self-discipline, hard work and excellence;
- **Interpersonal regard within the institution:** This concerns the way teachers, students and school heads relate to one another in the process of performing their day-to-day functions. In a well managed school, both the staff and other members of the school community hold one another in high regard believing that every staff needs the other for the attainment of the overall objectives of the school. The same thing applies to students who co-operate with their fellow students, respect their teachers and carry out their learning activities in a friendly and relaxed environment;
- **Efficient utilisation of time and other resources:** Time is an irreplaceable resource, which needs to be consciously managed in order to make the best use of it. Budgets are also drawn specifying how and who should control the use of money and other resources. Any school that not only plans the efficient use of time and other resources but also ensures that there is judicious and timely implementation of planned projects and programmes is adjudged to be of good quality;
- **Team work and group activity:** Team work, interdependence and group activities tend to enhance productivity in organisations. In the schools these efforts encompass both curricular and extra-curricular activities. Where programmes are collectively accepted and executed, the quality of output would no doubt be high. Group decision-making, democratic action and group solutions of problems are responsibilities that can be utilised to foster social values and attitudes. No school can claim to impart quality education if its students and teachers are unable to live and work together in the pursuit and achievement of mutually established goals.

Problems which Hinder Quality Primary Education

There is no gainsaying the fact that formal education occupies an important position in Ethiopia's socio-economic development priorities. Particularly since 1994, the government has created a favourable environment for improving access to primary schools and good quality primary education. The major developments in the field of education which created a relatively congenial environment for feasible primary education improvements include the formulation of Education and Training Policy (1994) and the preparation of the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) for the period 1997/98 to 2001/2002. As per the objectives of the Education and Training Policy, a long-range plan was developed to engender comprehensive development of education over a twenty-year period.

Within the framework stated in the current Education and Training Policy and Strategy (ETPS) the ESDP was designed to translate policy statement into actions (Derebssa, 1999). The programme which covers the first five years of the 20 year programme envisages the expansion of education opportunities and the first step in the long-range programme is to attain universal primary education (UPE) in 2015.

It is gratifying to note that some noticeable improvements have been made in the management of primary education and in the expansion of the quantity of primary schools as well as in the overall enrolment rate in the country. The responsibility of Ministry of education is now limited to providing professional advice, regulating standards, coordinating nationwide plans and managing tertiary education while the responsibility of allocating and managing resources for primary and secondary schools rests on the *wereda* Education Office which is accountable to the Zonal Education Bureau which is in turn under the control of the Regional Education

Bureau. Despite this remarkable decentralization of authority to the grassroots and the resultant signs of improvement in enrolment of students, a host of problems which hinder quality primary education are still present in the system.

According to Brown in Amare, et.al. (1998: 11 – 12), Ethiopia has made great progress in education but enormous challenges still remain. They noted that many students drop out before they acquire minimum levels of literacy and numeracy. They noted also that only 25% of Ethiopia's girls attend school but Ethiopia has increased its educational budget from 9% to 16% of the national budget with primary education getting over half of the total budget. It is beset by problems of access, quality and equity. They concluded that improving the quality and equity of primary education in Ethiopia is not a matter of accumulation of capital, roads and technology, but rather of skills and institutions (human and social capital).

A review of the primary education performance indicators as published by the Ministry of Education (MOE: 1998) will throw some light on the enormity of the problems facing primary education quality for some time now.

The annual report of MOE's primary education performance indicators along with their corresponding figures showing the achievement and the targets for the year 2001 and 2002 (as indicated in Girmay 2001) is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Primary Education Performance Indicators vs. Achievements and Targets

Indicators	Base year (1995/6)	Status in 1999/2000	Target 2001/2002
Budget and expenditure			
• Education's share	13.7%	11.28%	19.0%
• Primary education	46.2%	NA.	NA.
Access			
• Total no. of primary schools	9,670	11,490	12,595
Quality			
• Enrolments	3,788,000	6,640,000	7,000,000
• Number of teachers	92,526	115,777	NA
• Share of qualified teachers	85%	89.6%	95%
• Number of core textbooks	2,273,000	13,643,000	51,000,000
• Grade 8 exam pass rate	61.7%	82.39%	80.0%
Efficiency			
• Student: section ratio	52	66.4%	50
• Grade 1 dropout rate	28.5%	30.3%	14.2%
• Total dropout rate	8.4%	18.9%	4.2%
• Average grade 4-8 repetition rate	16.2%	9.5%	8.1%
• Coefficient of efficiency	60%	36.64%	80.0%
Equity			
• Enrolment of the most underserved areas	16.2%	8.53%	25.0%
• Enrolment of girls	38.0%	39.2%	45.0%

The main problems facing quality education are discussed in some details below:

- **Shortage of qualified teachers:** Shortage of well trained teachers remains a crucial problem affecting quality education in primary schools. Girmay (1998) observed that despite the decentralisation of educational management, the education authorities have not been able to train and retrain sufficient teachers for primary schools. Consequently, some of the teachers in primary school lack the qualifications and skills to do justice to the imparting of relevant knowledge and skills to the students. The importance of qualified teachers cannot be overemphasised as no educational system can be higher than the educational level of its teachers.

- **Inadequate teaching and student-support facilities:** In most primary schools there is inadequate teaching facilities. Such teaching aids as charts, models of spherical objects and three-dimensional objects (for teaching mathematics and sciences) are not commonly available in schools. This problem makes the teaching of topics in mathematics and geography appear abstract. There is also the problem of lack of good toilets, first-aid and related health care and recreation facilities.
- **Low efficiency of programme:** High student dropout rate is an indicator of low efficiency of education. As shown in Table I above, the dropout rate for Grade I in 1995 / 96 was 28.5% while the total dropout was 8.4%. In 1999/2000 academic year, the drop-out rate for Grade I increased to 30.3 % and total drop-out rate also rose to 18.9%. What this implies is that primary education student wastage is increasing, rather than responding to the planned target of low drop-out rate. The repetition rate is also low indicating low efficiency of the primary education program.
- **Low enrolment of girls:** The primary education authorities planned for 45% enrolment rate by 2001/2002. But a look at table I indicates that the enrolment rates for girls were 38% and 39% for the years 1995/96 and 1999/2000 respectively. This reflects inequity in the distribution and therefore the under-representation of girls in primary schools. The implication of this is that when enrolment is lopsided against the girls, the education of future mothers is impaired. When few mothers are trained, it is a reflection of imbalance in the quality of the education of the whole populace. Another implication of low enrolment of girls in primary schools is the carry over effect it has on the low number of girls that enrol for secondary education (Woldu, 1999).
- **Inadequate counselling:** The primary schools lack qualified counsellors who are in a position to handle the counselling of maladjusted students. There are some students who have psychological and social problems which impair learning.
- **Inadequate curriculum:** The primary school curriculum is not comprehensive enough to reflect all the skills and values that students need to fit into the world of work. The scope of English language which is taught in primary school is shallow and consequently many of the graduates cannot express themselves orally in English language. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that there is a low level of participation in education planning at primary school level. For example, much of the planning of primary school curriculum is done by education officials. As a result, the outcome of such planning does not reflect the yearning of the learners and the broad spectrum of the stakeholders (such as organised private sectors, informal sector players, farmers and youth leaders) some of whom are potential employers of primary school graduates.
- **Inadequate verbal proficiency:** The verbal proficiency of primary school students is relatively low especially in terms of written expressions in the official language and another relevant second language – English language. The poor verbal proficiency in English language tend to reflect in the poor performance of students in other subjects whose medium of expression happens to be English.
- **Low teacher motivation and commitment:** There is a generally low level of teacher motivation and commitment to work. The classroom behaviour of some teachers is not student-friendly, as the instructional time of students is not efficiently used and this affects adversely the coverage of the syllabus in most subjects. Perhaps part of the reason for low motivation to work is the poor conditions of service of teachers
- **Improper placement of staff:** Improper placement of teachers in the various classes tend to affect the quality of teacher performance and, therefore, the quality of learning by students. Some teachers are placed in positions where they cannot give their best and this affects students learning.
- **Lack of managerial competence:** Some of the school managers do not have the professional competence required for pedagogical leadership and control. There is generally a low level of policy knowledge at all levels of the primary education system.
- **Curriculum that is not sufficiently customer-focused:** The primary school curriculum is largely subject-centred and teacher-centred. It has been observed that some teachers tend to resist, the new methods of teaching that would enhance students learning. Consequently

primary school graduates have little or no useful skills for the world of work. Even some of those who gain admission to secondary schools find it difficult to cope due to poor foundation received at primary school.

- **Unbalanced goals:** A look at the goals of the first 5-Year ESDP reveals that it is lopsided in favour of provision of material resources such as textbooks and provision of educational facilities. Nothing was said as to how to improve teaching and learning skills of students as well as the improvement of the sagging values in our schools. Perhaps this is why the moral ethos in our schools is fast declining.
- **Inadequate funding:** Although, government budgetary allocations to education in recent years have been relatively higher (except for defence) than most social sectors, the call for more funds to execute education programs including those of primary schools continues to ring. While government may not be in a position to starve other sectors of the economy and their own share of statutory allocations in order to favour primary education, it appears that government has not exhausted its regulatory function to create an environment for private and community agencies to improve their rate of funding primary education. A good soup as the saying goes, costs money. So if primary schools are to have good quality, it should be properly funded so that all the economic resources required can be procured.
- **Inadequate system of selecting students:** There is no common standardized method of selecting students for entry into all primary schools in Ethiopia. It is not surprising therefore, that in grade I the dropout rate of students is high. There is evidence that students who underwent nursery education tend to do well when they get into the grade I class. A system whereby every Dick and Harry who wants to undertake primary education is just admitted without proper nursery preparation leaves much to be desired.
- **Lack of staff accountability and commitment:** There is generally a low level of accountability and commitment to work by primary school staff, especially. Most teachers just come to school as a matter of routine and they show a care free attitude to their teaching assignments. They do not exhibit any sense of accountability and commitment to work, and this reflects in the quality of their output.

Strategies Towards Quality Primary Education

The following strategies are suggested to improve primary education quality:

- ◆ **Design quality goals:** - Since the goals of primary education are not balanced enough to cater for the needs of the learners and the target market for primary school graduates (the world of work and secondary education) the best action to be taken is to design quality goals that will focus on supplier-customer relationships, commitment of the organization members for continuous improvement and viewing the school as a social system which must adopt reciprocal and symbiotic relationship with its community and the wider world (Yalokwu: 2001: 504). Such goals should be learner-oriented and help the students to achieve cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills for meaningful function in society.
- ◆ **Relevant education policies and curriculum programmes:** Education policies should be workable and facilitate teaching and learning. The programmes as documented in the syllabus should be relevant to the needs of the learners with practical subjects. The overall curriculum should be integrated with the values and activities of the surrounding environment. The curriculum should embrace extended basic education (Grisay and Mahlek, 1991: 23).
- ◆ **Provide counsellors:** As a matter of policy government should make provision for professionally trained counsellors to be posted at all schools.
- ◆ **Improve teacher training:** This can be achieved by increasing the intake capacity of the teacher training colleges; amalgamating small teacher training centres into larger ones; upgrading unqualified teachers through in-service training and through correspondence courses; raising the quality of the programmes for teacher educators; and, organising in-service courses on management and pedagogical support for principals.

Strengthen the support services: The support services can be strengthened by reinforcing the inspection/supervision and advisory services for teachers. It is also important to encourage educational research, testing and examination, curriculum development and review developing better methods for assessing pupil performance, and designing remedial measures.

Quality planning of education: Quality education planning is both strategic and tactical planning. While strategic planning is long-term orientation at achieving the vision of the institution, tactical planning focuses on specific means of achieving the strategic goals (Herman and Herman, 1994: 116). Top management has the responsibility for strategic planning while middle management carries out tactical planning. In making quality plans, relevant data based on the needs of the students and the school community should be procured, analysed and synthesised for proper utilization by the school authorities. (Seyoum, 1996).

Improved teaching methods: To stem the high rate of school dropout and the repetition rate in our schools, teachers should adopt modern teaching methods which involve practical work, use of visual aids and classroom demonstrations using familiar teaching aids. If the lessons are practical and involve students participation, the students will understand better and perform better in examinations.

Community-based management: The management of primary schools will perform better if they enlist the support of key school community members who are enlightened enough to make useful inputs into the curriculum reviews and provide feedback to school authorities on how the students are benefiting or not benefiting from school activities. Every primary school should have a parent teachers association where relevant issues on the school are thrashed. By so doing the management of schools will be more democratic and it will reflect on the quality of student performance.

Primary education funding: Since government-financing sources appear overstretched, the assistance of viable private sector organizations such as caules, insurance companies, manufacturing companies should be sought for funding primary education. It might be necessary to earmark around 2% of company profits for financing primary education.

Improvisation: No primary education can perform well without adequate teaching aids and other facilities for learning. In the present circumstances, it may be extremely difficult for government to provide all the necessary aids to effective teaching. It is hereby advocated that teachers should look inwards into the school community and improvise relevant aids to make teaching interesting and effective. Through proper arrangement, the teachers can organize students to design some teaching aids through handiwork means.

Scholarship for girls: Government should provide scholarship facilities to encourage the education of girls at primary schools. This is especially necessary as it will encourage bright but poor students.

Encourage the establishment of nursery schools: There is ample evidence that children who underwent good nursery education tend to do well in the primary school. To reduce the dropout rate in schools, it is necessary to encourage organizations and high-net work individuals to establish nursery schools.

Improve the conditions of service of teachers: We are aware that the pay of primary school teachers and other conditions of service leave much to be desired. Government should find a way of improving the pay structure of teachers so as to motivate them extrinsically to perform better. If the conditions of service are improved, the primary education system attract more dedicated teachers.

Selection of dedicated individuals as school heads: The role of primary school heads cannot be overemphasized in the improvement of the quality of administration teaching and supervision of instruction (Bude, 1989). Most school heads fail to supervise instruction properly hence the poor attitude of some teachers to work. To ensure teacher and student discipline, handwork and adherence to school standards, only individuals who are seen to be dedicated to work should be appointed as school heads. All school heads should be allowed to undertake training in educational management no matter how short.

- ◆ **Performance management:** Performance management refers to the systematic approach to performance objectives and targets for programs. Primary education managers have the freedom to improve the processes to achieve the objectives and targets set. The actual level of performance against targets is measured and reported accordingly so that the information is passed on to review bodies such as legislative committee or relevant education committees or education management auditors. The reward system is to some extent tied to the achievement of targets set.

Organizational performance measures include productivity (output/input), efficiency, goal achievement, employee satisfactoriness and quality of service/product amongst others.

- ◆ **Benchmarking:** This is a useful tool for comparing performance between different organization or different units within a single organization, undertaking similar process. For instance comparisons can be used to identify the best practice so that school managers can emulate the best practice. A regular meeting of chief executives of ministries of education and school heads or their representatives, aimed at sharing up good practices could contribute in no mean way to quality improvement in school processes and products.
- ◆ **Total quality management (TQM):** TQM is a management technique whose emphasis is on high quality service and customer satisfaction. Quality is characterized by zero defect output (or at least minimal error or dissatisfaction in the product. Quality of primary education can be seen in terms of conformity to the requirements or the needs of the learners and the major stakeholders in the relevant education community.
- ◆ **Participation of the civil society:** The recognition of the role of civil society in development led to the setting up of the African charter for popular participation. In 1998 an African Centre for Civil Society (ACCS) was established in the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The centre's role is to strengthen the civil society organizations (CSOs) to promote their linkages with government and to continue to promote their access to and involvement in major development fora including those in the education sector. The participation of civil societies (e.g. women societies and youth associations) in policy making, no doubt, enhances the likelihood of effective implementation of such policies. For example, the inclusion of women and other minority groups in structuring for primary education reforms will encourage more equitable social outcomes in policy measures and the transfer of knowledge experience and skills to the public domain.

Conclusion

In the foregoing sections of this paper, we examined the concept of primary education as well as the goals and the indices of quality primary education. The problems facing primary education in Ethiopia were equally identified. While most of the problems are peculiar to many developing countries, their magnitude in Ethiopia are enormous. Some attempts have been made by the government to solve some of the problems, especially the supply of material resources but due to the enormity of the majority of the problems the government actions appear like a tip on an ice-berg.

A number of strategies have been suggested to for the management and control of the problems facing quality education in Ethiopia. The co-operation of parents, private organisations, non-governmental organisations, individuals and other stakeholders in the community is urgently enlisted to overcome the existing problems. In my view no price will be too much to pay to ensure that primary education is rescued from the woods.

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