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FAILURE TO ACHIEVE DEVELOPMENT IN SPITE OF A SERIES OF REFORMS: WHAT IS WRONG WITH EFL TEACHERS' ENGLISH PROFICIENCY?

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Abstract

This study focuses on one of Ethiopia's unfading education policy problems, namely the poor English proficiency of EFL teachers and their students. Qualitative data was collected through unstructured questionnaire and participant observation from twenty-five randomly selected highly experienced EFL schoolteachers and tertiary EFL educators coming from all corners of the country. Relevant archival data were also collected. Besides, four expert informants were also involved as critical consultants for the study. The data was analyzed qualitatively with the reflective and iterative constant comparative method. The results show that for Ethiopian EFL teachers, the problem of the so-called "poor" English proficiency is actually an outcome or a result of poor socio-educational preconditions that inhibited their holistic development as dignified, full-fledged professional citizens. Particularly, meager living conditions, alienating working environments, and a totalitarian policy and practices known as "Cascade Model" are the chief stumbling blocks to their development as fully proficient EFL teachers.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Ethiopia Education, EFL proficiency, teacher development, social change, education donors, Millennium Goals.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the new millennium, Ethiopia is working hard to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of 2015 since the year 2000. The first and second phases of Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) had phased out in the years, respectively, 2000-2005 and 2005-2009. However, since 2010, what is called Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) was set by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED, 2010a) to guide the country's next Five-Year Plan (2010-2015) toward the goals of "extricating itself from poverty and becom[ing] a middle-income economy" and becoming "a country where democratic rule, good-governance and social justice reigns," in addition to achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MOFED, 2010a, pp. 4-7). Central to the GTP objectives is to "expand and ensure the qualities of education" (MOFED, 2010a, p. 7; 2010b,

pp.18-20). The government expresses its full confidence in the state controlled mass media, which asserts that Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that will achieve the Millennium Goals.

So much so is this confidence demonstrated that several educational “reform,” “transformation” or “improvement” programs or plans were launched and known by various acronyms. In 2002, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MOE), pointed to weaknesses in teacher performance as a principal factor, and the Teacher Development Program (TDP) was developed in response with a cost of €60 million (MOE, 2002; FDRE, 2008, p. 15). The TDP was funded through a pooled fund by Belgium, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2010, p. 2). The TDP consisted of three main programs. One is the Teacher Education System Overhaul, which includes the professional development of teacher educators, pre-service teacher education and continuous professional development for serving teachers. The other is the Leadership and Management Program, which aimed at training for school principals, deputies, and supervisors. And, the third is the English Language Improvement Program (ELIP), which is a training program to upgrade English language competence of all serving teachers.

In mid-2009, the Ministry of Education launched what it calls the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) with little or no different aim from the TDP (MOE, 2008), but with, according to the British Council Ethiopia (BC-E) database, an enormous fund of approximately US\$1 billion. The program comprises Teacher Development Program (TDP), Material Development (curriculum, textbooks and assessment); the School Improvement Program; the Management and Administration Program; and Program Coordination. It is run by donor fund program managed by the World Bank as well as the bilateral donors US, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands, and the UK. The World Bank document reported the following donor statistics: Education Sector Development Project (US\$100 m), Post-Secondary Education Project (US\$41.5 m); United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funds Basic Education Program (US\$15 m); and UNICEF funds Basic Education Program (2007 – 2011) focusing on Universal Primary Education and Gender Equality (US\$17 million). According to Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) report, from 2007 to 2015, the UK based DFID's actual and planned aid to Ethiopia's educational transformation plan is almost £120 million (ICAI, 2012).

A key component of the GEQIP is improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education practice, both the process (pedagogic and structural) and the product (English proficiency/competence). The British Council website/database shows that it has run English language consultancies in Ethiopia since 2009 at the cost of £40,000, central to which is English Language Teaching Improvement Program (ELTIP). It provided funds for English Language Improvement Program (ELIP) in 2000-2008 at the value of £0.5million. A United States Embassy sponsored conference document (US Embassy Ethiopia 2012) shows that under ELIP more than 150,000 teachers have already benefitted, while English Language Improvement Centers were set up at most teacher training colleges and universities. As a part of the new ELIP, 45,000 English teachers will be provided with tailor-made trainings to improve their English proficiency.

Despite all the series of plans and enormous amount of donor funds, discussions on various workshops show that the problem of Ethiopia's general education and English proficiency/literacy level, from primary to secondary, is in general “declining” (Ethiopian Academy of Science, 2012; USAID, 2012, p.11). The issue of poor English competence of

students joining higher institutions, where the medium is English, is becoming disparaging to university professors, particularly over the past decade and a half. In an ongoing study, the present author distributed a questionnaire to twenty five postgraduate (M.A. /M.Sc. and Ph.D.) theses examiners/supervisors. One of the items asked them “to what extent [they] read/encounter poor English skills (grammar/writing/speaking) as a constraint/impediment to quality of thesis/research work”. All of them uniformly rated “very much”, while none ticked the rest on the Likert scale (namely “to some extent” or “not at all”). One of the respondent professors wrote additional information worth quoting here: “In fact, this is a problem area that uncovers the real worthlessness of most of the contemporary graduates of English. Write everything for them, they cannot even copy it correctly.” What’s more embarrassing is that a subsequent study (Heugh, Benson, Bogale & Yohannes, 2007, pp. 107-109) reveals “unintended consequences” of the GEQIP-TDP/-ELTIP practices in teachers: dissipation of initially “improved proficiency” development; increasing “instrumental” rationality; “decreasing value” for classroom teaching; hopelessness; “unrealistic aspirations” about English in the country, and others.

In general, the amount of funds spent directly on changing the plight the state of English education and the agents/EFL educators is obscure. But, what is apparently clear is that the huge amount of national and international donors’ money being spent is not lessening the socio-educational evils, namely the deterioration of the bed-rock of general literacy, at large, and of EFL proficiency, in particular. This study, thus, aims at inquiring into this unfading Ethiopic question regarding the poor state of EFL teachers’ proficiency amidst a series of international donations, education reforms, and English language improvement campaigns.

The Study and Its Specific Context

The specific context that motivated this study is the ELTIP training workshop organized and certified by the MOE and the British Council Ethiopia (BC-E) on July, 9 – 23, 2012 (first phase) and August 27 through September 6, 2012 (second phase). This training workshop brought together about 80 English educators and teachers selected from various universities, teacher education colleges, and secondary schools. One among them is the present author. The workshop is called “Master Trainers Specialist Development” was organized by the BC-E staff which involved some professors of English and applied linguistics from UK universities (referred to as “Super Trainers”). They are also designers of the ELTIP-ELIP training manual called *Refresh Your English*. The aim of the workshop was to introduce and review this manual with the Ethiopian English schoolteachers and teacher educators or “Master Specialist Trainers”; who will, in turn, train and supervise selected secondary school teachers as Trainers of Trainer (TOTs). The TOTs will then, according to the echelon, train the rest of the secondary school English teachers. This model is called, in the words of the MOE-BC staff, the “Cascade Model” (see Figure 1), wherein the Ministry of Education (MOE) and its Regional Education Bureaus (REB) determine everything pertaining to the training and participants. The assumption underlying the Cascade Model is that, ultimately the *Refresh Your English* course will improve the ever deteriorating situation of English proficiency level of Ethiopian EFL schoolteachers. This improvement will then also result in the improvement of English competence of Ethiopian secondary school students.

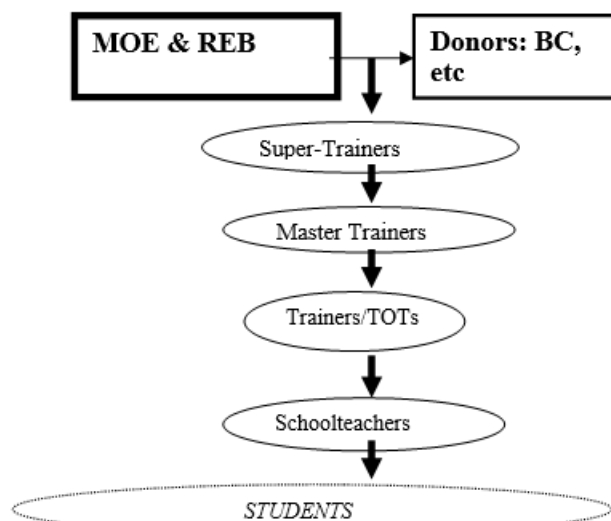


Figure 1: The Cascade Model

A great number of the workshop participants or “Master Trainers” had experience participating in ELTIP-ELIP trainings as well as similar workshops conducted jointly by the BC and the MOE. This was considered as a good opportunity to seek a deeper understanding, with these experienced English educators, as to what went wrong with the Ethiopian English teachers’ English proficiency development. Therefore, the following specific questions were constructed for analysis:

1. How do the Master Trainers see the ELTIP-ELIP program they are involved in?
2. From the Master Trainers’ perspective, who are the appropriate agents for improving the crisis of Ethiopia’s EFL education? What are the appropriate responsibilities of the agents?
3. From the Master Trainers’ perspective, who should do what in order for Ethiopian EFL schoolteachers’ proficiency to improve?
4. From the Master Trainers’ perspective what are the urgent concerns for Ethiopian EFL teachers?
5. What is the most propitious approach to changing Ethiopian EFL schoolteachers’ ‘poor’ EFL proficiency?

Methods

The author played double role as trainee-cum-researcher; hence he adopted the participant observation method of data collection as defined by Denzin. That is, it is “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (Denzin, 1989 in Flick, 2002, p. 139).

Accordingly, while playing the role of active participant-observer in the Master Trainers Specialist Development training, the author designed a questionnaire in context in order to extract context-sensitive data from the Master Trainers (see Appendix). In other words, items were informed, generated, and framed while taking part in the training workshop. For instance, informed by the context, item number 6 was deliberately designed to address the category *Lacks*

under the four themes identified in the workshop. The *Lacks* category referred to extent of English proficiency; awareness of academic knowledge about English teaching; professional autonomy; and basic conditions for living as a professional. Yet, due to spatiotemporal and resource constraints, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 out of a total of 80 Master Trainers. The 30 participants were randomly selected based on the list of names upon registration at arrival. Out of these 30 participants 25 returned completed questionnaires, while 5 did not return it at all.

Moreover, the author took narrative accounts, documented as “Personal communication”, of what was heard and seen, at times provoking more reflections on some points when necessary (Holliday, 2002). On some of the “critical data” identified as data that emerged in context that the author had to involve closer “critical friends” or experts based on their experience or academic discipline, four expert informants (their names are anonymized based on their request for confidentiality) were informally interviewed to seek their in-depth insights including validation of the emergent data during data analysis. Also, relevant official and policy documents were collected for additional relevant data.

To analyze the data, reflective and constant comparative qualitative data analysis approach generally advanced by Strauss and Corbin (1998) was adopted. To inductively generate themes and categories while being open to both the theoretical framework adopted and the possible emergence of new, alternative possibilities from the analysis.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the participants. The questionnaire guides the structure of the Results and Discussion section. Item 1 of questionnaire asked the Master Trainers to provide their background information on an optional basis. Accordingly, 6 were from different secondary schools, 9 from different colleges of teacher education, and 10 were from English Department of various universities. The majority of them had over ten years of experience as EFL teachers and/or EFL teacher educators. The lowest experience was 5 years, while the highest was 29 years. All had secondary school experience either as current EFL schoolteachers or as former (before turning college EFL teacher trainers) or university EFL teacher educators who supervised their pre-service trainees during school practice or practicum. Almost all had experience in participating in ELIP/ELTIP or similar programs sponsored by the BC or USAID jointly with the MOE.

Condition of English proficiency and relevance of the ELTIP/ ELIP training. Item 2 of the questionnaire asked the Master Trainers to describe the contemporary situation or level of English proficiency of Ethiopia’s secondary school teachers. The result generated primarily two categories of responses, which the author named *leveling* and *locating* (contextually). Some of the respondents leveled the teachers’ English proficiency as *poor*, indicated by the descriptors: “low or poor”, “very low or very poor”, or “inefficient”, whereas, others leveled it *medium*, as indicated in the descriptors: “medium”, “fair”, “not satisfactory”, “less as it should be (most of them)”, “need support”, “not dependable”, and “below what is expected of them”. Going beyond the issue of linguistic/English incompetence, one of the respondents described the current condition of EFL school teachers as, “hopeless and worried about their profession.” This response was at a deeper level, salient, although implicit on the surface, across the data as demonstrated in the sections that follow.

Only one respondent described the teachers’ proficiency level as “very good”, so this response was considered as incongruent with the other responses. In contrast, in response to Item

3, which asked the participants to describe their views on the relevance or importance of the Master Specialist Training, all responded: "very good", "good", or "helpful". The implication was that none of the respondents, appropriately, consider English proficiency level as unchangeable; rather they saw it as always developing and improving.

Urgent concerns of EFL teachers and educators. Item 5 of the questionnaire asked the Master Trainers to describe two big fears about the ELTIP-ELIP program arranged in accordance to the Cascade Model (Figure 1). The purpose was to probe the Master Trainers' thoughts regarding factors that might hinder or enable the *success* of improving the English proficiency level of the secondary teachers. Six themes emerged from the data analysis, to which we turn next.

Apathy. When teachers are neglected and, hence, lost control over their practice as they considered themselves as factory employees. Consequently, Apple (2000, p. 116) warns, "the skills that they have developed over the years atrophy ... because the skills of planning and controlling it [themselves] are no longer available." The too apathetic sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis bear witness to Michael Apple's theory:

- The discouraging behavior of the MOE (i.e., no value for teachers);
- Schoolteachers have no incentive, hence negative attitude to ELTIP;
- Lack of commitment on the part of trainers;
- Resistant culture/tradition (i.e., due to no-change-as-usual syndrome).

Paulo Freire puts this more philosophically, as he stated, "In alienated societies, men oscillate between ingenuous optimism and hopelessness" (Freire, 2005, p.10).

Unfair selection of participants. The data showed that, based upon their experience, the respondents are concerned about interference of local state agents in the ELTIP/ELIP programs, agents of the ruling party including teachers who are loyal. They would select their own agents instead of English teachers to take part in the training. Female respondents warned that consequently, few women participated in the training.

Inauthentic texts. In spite of the fact that the Master Trainers participated in editing and revising the training manual *Refresh Your English* designed by the BC staff (the Super Trainers), the questionnaire generated quite vague or conflicting responses. The respondents saw the manual as: "beyond the level" or "below the level" or "not suitable" or simply "not good" for the schoolteachers. What they meant by this is that the training manual is inauthentic because the contents and tasks are far removed from the practical reality of the schoolteachers or the tasks are insipid. In other words, it does not inspire the English trainee-teachers to, in Freirean terms, to *read* and *write* to their actual educational, social, and ecological issues. Indeed, schoolteachers need, beyond official recipes (which turned schoolteachers to implementers) to develop/practice the knowledge of inquiry. That is the type of knowledge and skills that enable them to interrogate, critically reflect and research on their own practices.

An even more "unauthenticating" factor is the pedagogic one. Considered a parallel solution to the EFL proficiency crisis, the government introduced to secondary education in 2006 a new mode of pedagogy, I-TV, whereby lessons are "beamed from South Africa" via the hi-tech Panasonic flat plasma screen (Negash, 2006, p. 32). The distant "plasma" teacher almost completely replaced the classroom teachers, reducing them to redundant and their students to simple viewers of the screen teacher (Heugh, et al., 2007, p. 59; Birbirso, 2013).

Timing. inappropriate timing during winter created a shortage of time for training because teachers were already occupied with regular classroom duties. Summer training was preferred.

Corruption of funds/resources. Inadequate resources (professional fees, per Diem, stationery, ICT, etc.) due to mismanagement and embezzlement of donors' funds was also identified as a factor hindering the effectiveness of the training.

The fragile state syndrome. As usual, it would be doomed to another discontinuous, impotent campaign. Many teachers viewed it as programming tied to particular political trends that would end as new political trends in education emerged. Leaving them with the belief that it might be better to continue with what they already practice as this programming would end with the entrance of new political players in the education field.

What roles should exist for ELTIP/ELIP training to be effective? Item 4 of the questionnaire demanded that the Master Trainers suggest what should happen in order for the Master Trainers Specialist Development training to improve in the future. In particular they were asked what the roles and duties of major agents, such as the MOE, the BC, and the Super-Trainers of the Master Trainers, should be for future programs. The respondents addressed each group in the questionnaire.

The Ministry of Education. The following are the most salient data (participant responses) pertaining to what the Ministry of Education (MOE) should do or be according to the respondent Master Trainers (in brackets are the author's additions):

- be transparent on NGO funds for training;
- provide the necessary resources, logistics [e.g. invest in education];
- pay appropriately [e.g. adequate salaries, per diems for EFL teachers and educators];
- be fair to teacher [e.g. be just];
- be visionary [e.g. address the fundamentals rather than superficial issues];
- be accommodative of our views and rights [e.g. voices];
- improve own ways of planning, organizing training [e.g. continuous and fundamental transformation rather than sporadic, shallow campaigns];
- leave roles to the professionals [e.g. decentralize power];
- should not let us down [e.g. we teachers are also equally responsible and working towards a common good].

The theme "be transparent on NGO funds for training" is worthy of further consideration as during the very beginning of the Masters Specialist Training course, the Master Trainers complained about some obscurities. One of their questions was "who their hosting institution was: MOE or the BC?" This was an important question to them as it had not only logistical implications but also symbolic significance. The general assumption was the BC was the hosting organization mainly because it was seen as the more powerful and appropriate agent for English education. The respondents viewed MOE as not the probable host because as they saw them as "the usual irresponsible MOE" that "never cares for teachers".

The most important reservation the participants identified was that against their "normal" expectations, they were provided with neither accommodation nor stationary materials. The per diem, which is paid only at the end of the whole program, a total of 28 days of intensive work, is on average 200 Birr (\$20US). This per diem could not buy a single hotel room per day due to skyrocketing prices of hotels and food. To ask for a professional fee for the intensive task of editing,

revising, and re-contextualizing the *Refresh Your English* material designed by the BC staff was described as simply “lavish”. The BC representative claimed, “We are simply contractors. Our mandate is only to ensure the quality of the course materials. We are not allowed to intervene in managerial issues. We must abide by the code of conduct set by your government” (Personal Communication, 09/27/2012). These conditions and responses to the conditions further eroded the Master Trainers’ trust of the MOE-BC relationship and roles.

The author sought additional data on these issues, which included MOE’s call for consultancy competition titled “Invitation for English Language Improvement Program Consultancy Services” was posted on May 23, 2011 on an unusual and non-MOE website (<http://www.2merkato.com>). The author talked to Addis Ababa University’s English Department, known for its TEFL PhD staff and roles in conducting MA and PhD TEFL programs, as to whether it applied for the competition. Dr. Booran (pseudonym), an EFL educator, said that the department, “competed designing a 4 million Birr proposal. Other competitors were the British Council and unusual Austrian Group. However, it was unfortunate that the British Council, which offered a 6 million Birr proposal, was made to win” (Personal Communication, 09/28/2012). Dr. Booran added that “it is commonplace in Ethiopia that the donor shows up as bidder with clandestine agreement with the government or its agents. Finally, the donor will, no doubt, grow ‘the winner’.” In sharp contrast to this practice, the MOE’s call for consultancy claims, “a consultant will be selected in accordance with the procedures set out in the World Bank’s Guidelines.” The fundamental theme underlying the respondents’ views was the totalitarian discourse practice of the central government spearheaded by the MOE.

The British Council. The noticeable message in the data as to what the British Council (BC) should do for the Master Trainers Specialist Development training to improve in the future was to stop its nontransparent “middleman” role, as reflected in the following responses:

- care for us participants as much as you do for ‘quality of the training manuals’ [i.e. do not dehumanize us];
- prepare full materials for training [e.g. texts, technologies];
- directly work with teachers;
- come and read our feelings on the actual workplace;
- directly pay more incentives to boost teachers’ motivation.

Especially, the response “care for us participants as much as you do for quality of the training manuals” needs further elaboration. As was mentioned above, the BC representative claimed in the conflict-resolution session “we abide by the code of conduct set by your government.” Later, additional data was sought as to the nature of the “code of conduct.” First, the so-called Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (FDRE, 2009) was collected. Many international NGOs and human right agencies frequently describe it as not only “constraining” but also “suppressive” (ICNL, 2009). According to the Proclamation, an institution called The Charities and Societies Agency, which “its own legal personality and as an institution of the Federal Government” has virtually unlimited authority to exercise control over the operations of a charity or society (Articles 84 – 94). Moreover, it is clear from the GEQIP’s Cascade Model applied to its “Financial Disbursement” (MOE, 2008, p. 47) system that the donors or contractors are extruded out of the educational system (see Figure 2).

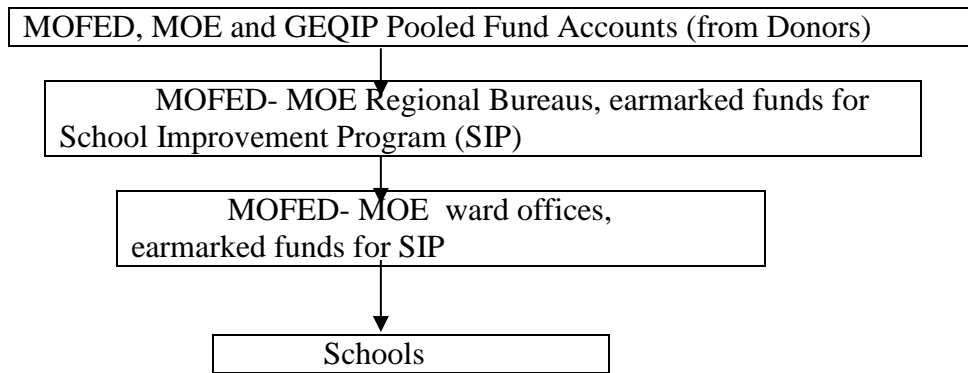


Figure 2: The Cascade Model: Funds Disbursement for GEQIP-ELTIP (based on MOE, 2008)

Mr. Tuulama (psuedonym), one of the MOE ‘supervisors’ of the GEQIP training explained: According to the new Code of Conduct international NGOs cannot have direct access to the fund it requests for training. The government receives the fund from the donors in foreign currency, drops it in its own account and then disburses itself from center down until its local agents Ethiopianizing both the currency and payment scale for Ethiopian staffs. This, however, does not apply to the foreign contractors and staffs like the BC (Personal Communication, 09/28/2012).

The Super-Trainers. According to the MOE consultancy invitation announcement posted in the website noted above, the overall objective of the consultancy was to:

- Work as part of the Teachers and Educational Leaders Development Core Process;
- Review the pedagogic design of the ELTIP cascade model to ensure quality training;
- Enable teacher educators to develop training materials which meet the needs of the target groups; and,
- Train Master Trainers, who are at the top of the Cascade Model (Figure 1) being used, to train TOTs.

Accordingly, the consultant’s “major tasks and responsibilities” included:

- Conducts a desk review of ELTIP work plan, design and documents;
- Selects competent Master Trainers;
- Prescribes training facilities;
- Facilitates a first workshop to train Master Trainers;
- Designs *Refresh Your English* modules and conducts editing
- Facilitate workshops to train Master Trainers;
- Conducts a validation of modules workshop;
- Capacity building program.

Nevertheless, as was also indicated in the official letters to the each Master Trainer, the tasks and responsibilities ascribed to the Master Trainers in the Cascade Model was only the “editing” of the *Refresh Your English* modules.

The participant Master Trainers questionnaire respondents' essential message for the BC contractors (whom the author labeled Super-Trainers due to the hierarchically upper and higher role they play) included several points. One that BC should "be directly collaborative to us [i.e. work with us rather than through the MOE or its staff]. Second they should "facilitate things in consultation with us. Third they should "involve college and university EFL educators in designing training programs and materials for ELIP/ELTIP" and their final response was "we are tired of being let down [i.e. due to the current prescriptive 'slave-master' relationship]."

Who should do what for English proficiency to improve? Given the quite interesting information generated by the respondent Master Trainers, to ask them to provide their insights as to who should carry out what kind of concrete responsibilities and tasks so that the English proficiency level they described as admix of poor-medium (above), cannot be redundant. Item 7 of the questionnaire asked the Master Trainers: Who should do what for Ethiopian secondary EFL teachers' English proficiency to improve? This is a relevant question for, the Growth and Transformation Plan's (GTP) general education objectives that include expanding "quality secondary education that will serve as a basis and bridge to produce a middle and higher level workforce"; "access to functional adult literacy to enhance the country's all round development endeavors"; "quality and efficiency"; and "providing special training to English teachers to raise their proficiency at each level per the standard set, assessment tool and skills gaps identified" (MOFED, 2010a, pp. 50-52). The collected data generated six agents with their respective (un)desirable responsibilities based on the participants' responses which are analyzed next.

The GEQIP document (MOE, 2008, p. 69) lists the roles of Ministry of Education as:

- provide overall strategic guidance for the GEQIP implementation;
- oversee the equitable distribution of the budget;
- ensure that agreed performance targets and timelines for activities are met; and,
- ensure effective program implementation.

However, the more recent GTP document allocates exclusive power to MOE in its "Education and Training" section of the Policy Matrix (MOFED, 2010b, pp. 18-20). In it the Ministry of Education and Regional Education Bureaus (to be discussed in the section that follows) is identified as the "Implementing Agency[ies]" and in the "Ministry of Education Annual Report" as "means of verification" of achievement, or otherwise, of the Goals and Objectives.

In sharp contrast to the policy discourse, the analysis of the Master Trainers' views indicates two prominent themes directed to the MOE to remove its undesirable practices. One is to stop its authoritarian role and two is to invest more on continuous professional development programs. The following responses are indicators of the MOE's authoritarian position and the Master Trainers' alternative perspective:

- we know our own problematic situations more than anyone knowing for us from the MOE [i.e. from distance];
- allow English teachers involve in designing syllabi/curricula and classroom texts/lessons;
- allow professionals/teachers re-own their roles rather than impose on them from above;
- work closely with universities, colleges [i.e. instead of external MOE-BC elite, expatriate Super-Trainers].

The need for more investment in profession development is indicated in these recurrent responses. The need to “improve salary scale in accordance to the changing market dynamics”; “to provide teachers with means of living and working, i.e. salary, professional fees, per diems, and resources that commensurate their demanding work.” They also point out the need “to arrange opportunities for travel abroad for immersion programs, workshops, and scholarships so that they experience interactions with English as Native or Second Language speakers”. In addition, there is a need for commitment to arranging consistent and continuous in-service professional development. Finally, the respondents indicated a need for MOE “not [to] create problems to NGO’s and contractors’ ambition to directly invest in EFL education, workshops, trainings, etc.” The implicit but prominent requests of the participant Master Trainers are, on the one hand, that the MOE or the state has to let NGO’s have control over their money, knowledge and relationships with teachers and schools without the mediatory role of MOE, and also stop MOE’s monopolization of/on classroom pedagogy, on the other.

Regional Education Bureaus (REB) are the educational agents within each federal state whose major role is preparing and distributing secondary school (as well as primary and junior level) student textbooks and teacher guides; both of which determine a teacher’s classroom methodology, lesson contents or tasks, and assessment. According to the GEQIP document, the REB is “responsible for the overall quality and timeliness of project implementation in their respective jurisdictions, and for allocation of program resources (i.e. school grants)” (MOE, 2008, p.70). REB has no significant role in the Master Trainers Specialist Development training except that they selected a few of the schoolteachers for training among who 6 are participants in this study. Otherwise their role is more influential in the allocation of resources, selection of the TOT’s and teacher-trainees for *Refresh Your English* course when it begins at schools following the Cascade Model.

Frequently, the participant Master Trainers mentioned the following responsibilities or tasks for REB. The REB should “collaborate with the nearest HEI rather than the MOE that controls from center, Addis Ababa” and should “listen to teachers’ voices over their profession [e.g. content, methodology and skills self-development] and life conditions [e.g. freedom, poverty, salary, etc.]” They should also “be fair on selecting teachers for training programs [i.e. instead of political affiliation criteria]”. Central to the above views is a desire for autonomy or preferential right of interpretation over classroom practices and reflection on policy discourse practices.

For Higher Education Institutions (HEI), the respondents indicated vital alternative roles for them to play in ELTP/ELTIP and similar programs. The recurrent data are compressed and presented as follows:

- arrange continuous professional development training programs so that EFL educators and schoolteachers collaboratively inquire on/in their practices;
- mobilize EFL educators to actively take part in the development of schoolteachers training manuals/texts [i.e. instead of external contractors only] because ‘they have rich experience on and with Ethiopian EFL secondary schools contexts;
- HEIs must takeover [instead of corporate-like “contractors”] the role of designing, coordinating and offering ELTIP courses as in-service continuous professional development programs [above we saw that one of their worries is *timing*];

- those who become EFL teachers [i.e. in the pre-service preparation] must be those who chose (i.e., by their own interest) to become English teachers [i.e. rather than usual placement by MOE and HEI who determine their fate].

From the data it is observable that the Master Trainers are disappointed with the campaign-like, intermittent or management-crisis approach of 'training' at work currently. Far beyond so-called language proficiency training, Ethiopian EFL schoolteachers require reflective, life-long and empowering educational system.

The following are the most salient reflections on teachers' roles and responsibilities of the participant Master Trainers, so that not only the lack of English proficiency but also the general English teaching-learning problems are overcome. They indicated that teachers "should re-own the right to take part in describing, talking about, explaining and researching the accurate status of English proficiency levels in Ethiopia" and "take hold of responsibilities for improving own proficiency." Teachers need to "design and administer classroom lessons and texts" as well as "carry out all matters pertaining to themselves and their profession." This included that they should "create their own EFL forum [networks, journals, magazines, etc.]" The participants' underlying notion is the re-owning of discourses, voices, and control over their problems, pedagogy, syllabi, and classroom lessons.

The respondents are clearly aware of schools' responsibilities or tasks for improving the poor EFL proficiency level of teachers and students. But, they need preconditions, that is, schools must regain their autonomy over their societal role as centers of knowing, debating, researching, testing and teaching freely as their teachers' and students' careers demand. Their comments are directed to the state's strict pedagogical-political controls, as they recommend the following:

- end strict control over schools as to *what* to talk, write, listen, read, teach in classrooms;
- allow freedom of expression and thoughts in schools [i.e. academic freedom];
- allow schools form free national and regional teachers' and students' associations/unions; and
- allow schools form free social communities [e.g. English and literature clubs] directly pertinent to their career.

The participant school teachers uniformly explained that if teacher associations or student clubs existed at all, the fact was that they were forced by local agents to become the propaganda tools of the ruling party. Indeed, school administrators are selected and appointed by the local ruling-party leaders, based upon, as a national rule, their membership and loyalty to the ruling party, while there are numerous cases in which teachers are fired out of their jobs, unconditionally, by these local agents.

Although the context of this study presupposes the BC or the British Government as the chief donor, the respondents, however, repeatedly mentioned also USAID due to their pre-experience with it. The data points to similar issues we saw above including the need to: "involve actively and directly" instead of through the government's impenetrable bureaucratic system; and for the donors to "come to schools as an academic agent" instead of as in a corporate- or charity-minded approach.

The urgent lack of Ethiopian EFL teachers. Item 6 of the questionnaire asked the Master Trainers taking training from the Super-Trainers to determine in their views which "lack"

they comparatively rated as High (H), Medium (M) or Never (N) when it comes to secondary English teachers among and between the following “lacks”: (a) English proficiency or competence, (b) Academic-scientific knowledge about (English) language teaching, (c) Professional autonomy to work as the academic-scientific theories demand, and (d) Conditions for living as a professional (sufficient salary, etc.). The data obtained is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: The Urgent “Lacks” of the Secondary EFL Teachers

| Lacks | High | Medium | Never |
|-----------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| English proficiency | 82.6% | 17.3% | 0% |
| Academic knowledge | 47.8% | 43.4% | 8.6% |
| Professional autonomy | 69.5% | 26% | 8.6% |
| Life conditions | 82.6% | 8.6% | 8.6% |

The data obtained shows that lack of English proficiency is almost as critical as the lack of the most basic life conditions. While, lack of each of the four essential elements is highly significant, unusually, quite contradictory to almost all research findings in Ethiopian studies, however, the data indicates that the lack of academic-scientific knowledge/skills of teaching is comparatively less significant although it is still not insignificant. More to the point, given the dominant discourse of “teachers’ poor English proficiency” and given the fact that to “speak up” (even in filling out questionnaire) about the “lack of professional autonomy” or “of basic life conditions” is barely possible in the Ethiopian context do to pressure for to conform to political “correctness”. As it stands, it is not impossible that the latter two “lacks” are the most burning issues compared to the other two elements.

The average annual salary of an Ethiopian secondary school teacher is US\$1,320. According to Dr. Matcha (pseudonym), a colleague professor of economics, this is far below the market standards, he stated that it is “only one-fifth of the fairly appropriate annual income that could have tolerably, given Ethiopia is one of the poorest nations, sustained a teacher, his wife and his single child, given the souring inflation” (Personal Communication, 09/29/2012). As if this is not enough, one of the participant schoolteachers said, to which all agreed, that “the government, inundated with the rising costs of the overambitious mega-projects, levies a series of overlapping and endless taxes on the already meager salaries” (Personal Communication, 08/27/2012).

Most propitious approach to transforming the unfading problem. Part of the response to identifying the most propitious approach to transforming the unfading problem (maintaining EFL teachers’ English Proficiency) is introspective reconstruction of the participant Master Trainers’ alternative perspective for better relationships with the international donors and the national agents of the educational system. The reconstruction points to better relationships with donors and the EFL agents (Figure 3).

As was seen in the above analysis, they would highly prize the withdrawal of the MOE’s and the REB’s strict control over pedagogy and relationships among the donors, schools, teachers and students. They also want unrestricted, direct, and reciprocal relationships among the donors, schools, higher education institutions and the schoolteachers, teacher educators, students, and academic staff of the donor agents like the British Council’s. This is indicated in Figure 3 by bi-directional and bold arrows.

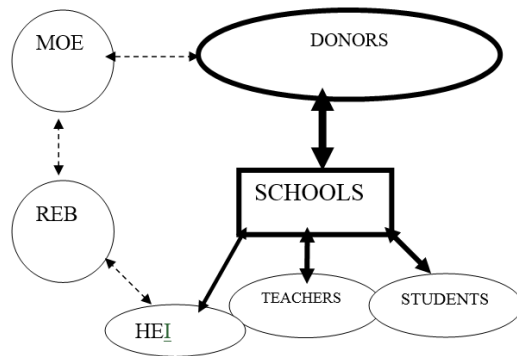


Figure 3: The Free Society Model for EFL Education

In stark contrast, the Cascade Model in use is inauspicious. It necessarily prioritizes *structure* (building the state's controlling, bureaucratic machinery) rather than the transformative *power* (agency, capacity) of humans, e.g. teachers, here. Therefore, its use pays for a top-down, one directional, strictly controlled educational system wherein relationships among the agents of education is closed and the condition for free communicative action and/or forum is vehemently insulated. The Cascade Model is reflection of the ruling party's "Revolutionary Democracy" ideology, a Leninist ideology fantasy of teaching in a "rank-and-file" formula, "feeding" a "single...established... 'scientific' truth" and as such, is impatient to any reflective questions. In particular Lata's exploration of "why a change is needed and how it does not constitute a departure from the truths originally established as scientific...[or] introducing a new idea" results in being identified as "reactionary" (1999, p. 91) or, the contemporary catchphrase, "terrorist". Indeed, in this kind of totalitarian (educational) system, international donors find themselves in in-built policy-strategy dilemmas that question whether to go on supporting the recipient schools (which in fact is reduced to service-provider to the dictatorship) or to shift to building the holistic competence and capacity of the donor agents, schools, and teachers.

Conclusion and Implications

The fundamental question that motivated this study was why the series of ELTIP/ELIP and other ambitious education policy and plans are so unyielding. Or in other terms: What is wrong with the teachers' English proficiency development? Why doesn't the so-called "poor" proficiency go?

In general, the results of this study, however limited in sample size, have shown that the so-called "poor" English proficiency problem is just criminalizing the victims. Policy makers and researchers might ascribe the problem's root causes to different factors based on their own social origins and educational and/or research paradigms. Heugh et al. (2007, p. 107) assigns the poor English proficiency of Ethiopian teachers and students to a "lack of ...exposure to English," since, unlike many African countries, English is "a foreign language" to Ethiopian teachers and learners. Further, citing the linguistic ideologues of the Leninist-Maoist Revolutionary Democracy of the ruling party by Lata (1999), Heugh et al. accuse teachers of using "ELIP training for instrumental purposes" (2007, p. 107). The origin of instrumental rationality is explained adequately by critical scholars:

The instrumentalization of reason is linked to the disappearance of opportunities in our lives for us to meet with others to discuss small and large matters of mutual concern...the loss of the public sphere, the domain in which people used to come together and explore how to organize and conduct their communal affairs (Brookfield, 2005, p. 56).

No surprise, thus, at risk of being *foreignized*, the English language, which is declared in policy as a medium of instruction in junior and senior secondary, and tertiary levels, is currently forced to appear “foreign” in a country where it is accorded a more prestigious position than arguably anywhere in Africa (Heugh et al., 2007).

In other words, it is a failure generated by an impairing socio-educational condition that denied the teachers their rights to freely teach and use English to talk, read, write, and change their world. For them, this is a fundamental precondition as well as object for practicing or exercising their right to speech act in English. As a chain reaction, the latter right becomes another precondition for not only improving their English competence, but, holistically, to realize their potential capacity to being full-fledged, empowered citizens, that is “subjects” not “objects” over their social-natural world.

The government wants English language, but, at the same time, wants the English teachers to assume no significant role as teachers and full citizens. What roles should teachers take hold of? In short the answer is: the full right to their preferential interpretation over their practices - pedagogical, political, and economic. The deficient or rather unbecoming nature of Ethiopia’s EFL proficiency is, based on this study, not because of the foreignness of English as positivist educators wrongly claim. Thanks to the free societies and, hence, their inventive learning mechanisms/conditions, English is no longer foreign to Ethiopian learners through the globalizing information technologies.

English is medium of instruction beginning from the junior secondary level. Ethiopian children and students have comparatively more positive attitude toward English than arguably anywhere in Africa (Heugh et al., 2007). The problem lies in a totalitarian regime that has long tightened its grip on any dissident voices. This problem manifested itself in the “repressive aftermath of 2005 election” (USAID, 2012; ICG, 2012). To use the words of Paulo Freire, the current Ethiopia regime “lacks faith in the student and his power to discuss, to work, to create” (Freire, 2005, p. 33). It is so vital a point that it is necessary to quote this great scholar at length:

Democracy and democratic education are founded on faith in men, on the belief that they not only can but should discuss the problems of their country, of their continent their world, their work, the problems of democracy itself. Education is an art of love, and thus an act of courage. It cannot fear the analysis of reality of, under pain of revealing itself as a farce, avoid creative discussion (Freire, p. 33).

Two major implications can be discerned. Firstly, donations of enormous amounts of money to the fragile state obsessed by what Fuller terms “growing-up modern” (1991) results in the prioritizing of structures, turning the agents or subjects (teachers and students) into objects that are dehumanized and blamed for a problem they never generated. Nor is it possible for the donors, who, as was seen in this study, are chiefly the English as Native Language (ENL) nations, to export perfect proficiency to the EFL receiver nation. The prevailing taste of spoon-feeding the fragile EFL nation and her schoolteachers in appearing-and-disappearing and

piecemeal fashion, inside “training rooms” of four or five-star hotels owned by corrupt government officials in the capital city, only reproduces the relentless problem. Finally, beyond the desire to grow-up modern, the EFL nation should primarily clean its home. That means it must democratize its socio-educational systems, following the footsteps of the “icons of growth” that is the donor ENL nations, who should in turn monitor whether their donations reach their intended recipients.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire (Abbreviated)

(1) Background:

(A) I come from (tick ✓): (i) a secondary school: _____; (ii) a college of teacher education: _____; (iii) a university's English department: _____.

(B) My experience in years: _____.

(2) I describe the English proficiency level of Ethiopia's secondary school teachers as: _____.

(3) I describe this training (of Master Specialist Trainers) as _____.

(4) In order for this Master Trainers Specialist Development training to improve in the future:

(A) The Ministry of Education should _____.

(B) The British Council should _____.

(C) The trainers of us Master Trainers (Super-Trainers) should _____.

(5) My two big fears that I think will incapacitate the success of the whole ELTIP program (the Cascade Model) are:

(A) _____

(B) _____.

(6) Which LACK do you relatively rate as High (H), Medium (M) or Never (N) when it comes to secondary English teachers (write the letters on the spaces):

(A) Lack of English proficiency _____

(B) Lack of academic/scientific awareness about English teaching methodology _____

(C) Lack of professional autonomy to work as theory of language teaching demands _____

(D) Lack of life conditions (sufficient salary, etc.) _____.

(7) Who should do what for Ethiopian secondary EFL teachers' English proficiency to improve?
