

## THE ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ETHIOPIA

Gene S. Jacobsen

If the school program of any country is to be effective, it seems only reasonable to assume that the organization for administering the schools will be established in such a way that those people involved in all aspects of the program can work to the extent of their abilities to achieve the objectives of that organization. The purpose of this paper is to describe the organization for administration of the schools in Ethiopia, to evaluate this organization, and to make recommendations for organizational improvement.

In their textbook, *Educational Administration*, Morphet, Johns and Reller list a number of commonly accepted principles of organization and administration.<sup>1</sup> These are not the only criteria for evaluating the organization under consideration, but they were readily available and quite appropriate. From the list of eighteen principles which they provide, I have, for the sake of brevity, chosen to apply only the first eight.

Using these principles as criteria, let us turn our attention to the organization for the administration of public education in Ethiopia.

**Principle 1: An organizational structure is necessary when any group has a common task.**

Responsibility for the schools of Ethiopia rests with the Imperial Ethiopian Government. At the head of this government sits His Imperial Majesty, Haile Sellassie I. Next in line is the Prime Minister, who is the Chief Executive officer of the Council of Ministers. Among the Council of Ministers is the Minister of Education who is appointed by the Prime Minister with the approval of His Imperial Majesty.

The Ministry of Education is the official organization for administering the schools of Ethiopia and is divided into four separate divisions, each headed by an Assistant Minister and coordinated by a Vice-Minister who is next in line of authority to the Minister himself. One of these four divisions is responsible for administrative services, a second for educational operations, a third division for fine arts and culture, and a fourth division for program planning and research.

In each of the major divisions are sub-divisions headed by director-generals. These sub-divisions, in most instances, are further divided into sections, administered by directors.

The Ethiopian Empire is divided into fifteen provinces. (For educational purposes the City of Addis Ababa is considered as a province.) At the head of the educational program in each province is a provincial education officer.

The provinces are further sub-divided into awrajas, each of which is headed by an awraja educational officer. The awrajas are actually districts within the provinces. There are approximately one hundred of these within Ethiopia. The awraja educational officer has the responsibility for the administration of all of the elementary schools within his district and, in some instances, also the secondary schools.

1. Morphet, Edgar L., R. L. Johns and Theodore L. Reller, *Educational Administration: Concepts Practices and Issues*, Prentice-Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1959.

Each of the secondary schools and the elementary schools in the Empire is headed by a school director who is responsible either to the district educational officer or to the provincial education officer.

Ethiopia, then, does have a clearly defined organization for administering its schools. When one carefully examines this organization, however, he may be inclined to question whether or not it is the best to accomplish the task.

While the organization is characterized by a certain amount of decentralization, it is primarily centralized with most of the ultimate responsibility for conducting schools resting in the Ministry of Education itself which is situated in the city of Addis Ababa.

Ethiopia covers a land area of 475,800 square miles. It is 975 miles in length from north to south and 925 miles across. Within the fifteen provinces of the country are approximately 60 secondary and 1,000 elementary schools. While some of these schools are located in larger cities connected by all-weather roads, an efficient airline system, and telephone communication, a great number of the schools are not accessible by automobile or airline and have no telephone service. Effective communication, then, becomes almost impossible.

The results are that the schools which are most readily accessible to the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa are favored in regard to teaching staff, instructional facilities, and supervisory and instructional assistance.

When one explores the alternative, that of greater decentralization of responsibility and authority, however, he immediately runs head-on into a major obstacle—that of identifying capable administrators in numbers large enough to provide needed leadership in the many areas involved. What then is the solution?

It appears that centralization of authority and responsibility must be maintained for some time. At the same time, however, greater efforts must be made to select and train competent administrators and to prepare people at the district levels to assume increased responsibility for education. There is no reason why pilot efforts to decentralize the administration could not be made in a few selected areas where competent administrative leadership exists. In fact, now that Order No. 43 of 1966, an Order to Establish Local Self-Administration, has been created, it is more desirable than ever that pilot studies be conducted in several selected districts to help prepare the way for full implementation of the Order at a later date.

**Principle 2: The purposes and objectives of an organization must be determined and understood.**

The Ministry of Education does have some stated objectives for the schools of Ethiopia. The purposes of the public schools of Ethiopia as determined by the Ministry are to be found in the *Handbook for the Elementary Schools* and in the various curriculum guides published by the Ministry of Education.

There are, however, numerous questions which might wisely be raised concerning basic goals of the Empire regarding education. Some of these are: How many children are going to be accommodated in the public schools and for what period of time? Is the goal universal education through grades six or eight, and if so, is this realistic in terms of the ability of the Empire to support education? Is education to be free, or is only part of the education to be provided without cost to the pupils? What is the goal of the Empire concerning the quality of instruction and of educational facilities and equipment? Does the present curriculum best meet the needs of the students in terms of their future activities and responsibilities? These and other such questions should be answered.

The manner in which the objectives are determined is also important. The best minds in the Nation should be brought to focus on this matter. Neither can organizational leadership determine goals and then successfully impose them upon members within the organization. No matter how carefully planned or how realistic or desirable objectives are, if they are not understood and enthusiastically accepted by those who are to implement them, they may never be achieved.

Ethiopian education is presently suffering from too much advice from too many sources. There are many pet theories of education in the minds of people, and there are always those who are willing to be the expert and dispense advice freely. It seems past time for the Ethiopians to quit jumping from one idea to another and approach education in a much more scientific manner. Through careful research procedures, conclusions as to how the public can best be served with the educational funds available can be reached. I am not suggesting that there is no place for experimentation, because there is, just as there are bound to be changes in emphasis. What I am saying is that attention should be firmly fixed on reasonable and achievable goals and then diligent efforts towards achieving these goals should be made.

**Principle 3: Every organization should have a single executive head.**

The Ethiopian School Organization does provide for a single administrative head, the Minister of Education. While he does have many administrators working under him, he is responsible for coordinating all of the activities relating to education in Ethiopia. This responsibility is an enormous one because of the size of the school system, which must be carefully administered. There are nearly 12,000 people working in public education in Ethiopia.

**Principle 4: The necessary authority to accomplish a task should be delegated at the same time that the responsibility of a task is assigned. Every person in the same organization should know to whom and for what he is responsible, and no individual in the organization should be required to take direct orders from more than one person.**

The Ministry of Education chart shows the organizational plan for administering the schools of Ethiopia to be quite simple. When one has the opportunity to become involved in the actual working operations of the organization, however, he finds it to be most complex in many respects.

In the Ministry of Education, located in Addis Ababa, are more than 400 employees, ranging from the Minister down to the most simple clerk and office boy. There are also (as was mentioned earlier) the Provincial and District Education Offices and the local school offices. While no attempt will be made here to carefully describe the activities of the Ministry of Education, it might be stated at this point that there is some evidence to indicate that there may not be a clearly defined delegation of responsibility and authority in some aspects of the organization. Neither is this problem confined alone to the central Ministry of Education. The provincial education officers, for example, are responsible to each of the four Assistant Ministers, depending upon the matter under consideration. No one person in the Ministry seems to have the specific responsibility for the provincial education officers nor is any one person coordinating the activities of these people.

The relationship between the district governors and judges and the school people is not clear. Do the governors and judges have the authority to direct the provincial and district education officers and the school directors? Whether they have this authority or not, they are in some instances, assuming that they do.

Much work needs to be done on this matter of responsibility and authority. Job descriptions for administrators at all levels must be prepared and these must as carefully and completely as possible assign responsibility and authority. If people are to be given a job to do, they must also be given the necessary tools for accomplishing the task.

**Principle 5: Personnel policies should include selecting the competent, training the inexperienced, eliminating the incompetent, and providing incentives for all members of the organization.**

There is no doubt but what the organization for the administration of the schools of Ethiopia falls way short regarding this principle. In truth, the Ministry of Education does have some policies concerning the many aspects of personnel administration, but these policies are vague and general and for perhaps a variety of reasons are not strictly implemented. While there are in key administrative positions in Ethiopia some competent school administrators, many other equally strategic positions are occupied by men who do not have the qualifications necessary for providing the proper kind of leadership which the schools so badly need. The Ministry of Education needs to develop a long-range plan for recruiting, screening, selecting, and training school administrators and supervisors at all levels. Then these positions must be made attractive enough to keep competent people on the job. Educators are moved around at random, and rarely does a person have the opportunity to remain in a position long enough to be very effective. This tends to further create instability in the organizational structure.

The Haile Sellassie I University has a major responsibility for preparing secondary school teachers, teachers for the teacher training institutes, and elementary school directors and supervisors. There is, however, no organization within Ethiopia assigned the responsibility for preparing the key administrators for the secondary schools and other top echelon positions. To date, the Ministry has to recruit these administrators from those who have received training abroad or who have had little or no formal education to help prepare them become capable leaders.

It seems clear that the Haile Sellassie I University, as the major University in Ethiopia, has an immediate responsibility to provide an educational program to fill this gap. No longer can the Ministry of Education be expected to rely on the present system for securing administrators. A carefully prepared program designed to screen, select, and train the capable must be implemented.

In the Ethiopian organization for the administration of education, elimination of a person because of incompetency is an almost unheard-of practice. Interestingly enough, the Ethiopians abhor, regret, and even condemn incompetency, but at the same time seem not to have the technique of dismissing from the ranks those people who are not capable of carrying out their roles in a satisfactory manner.

Once an incompetent person is identified, the practice is generally to transfer him to another position in hopes that the change will perform some sort of miracle, and he will see the error of his ways and change accordingly. In effect, however, what actually happens is that the person who is transferred becomes increasingly frustrated and, instead of receiving some benefit from the transfer, often regresses further.

Until those in responsible positions are willing to carefully and regularly evaluate staff members at all levels in the educational organization and replace those who are ineffective and incompetent, there can be little hope of improving and strengthening the educational system. Probably the number one complaint of teachers and lower echelon administrators is the lack of strong administrative leadership in many of the important administrative positions.

If a person is to grow professionally in service, the organization in which he works must provide incentives which will encourage this individual growth. There are a variety of incentives which can be made available to the employee. The most common, of course, is that of a regular means of providing a salary increment. Another is promotion; another, public recognition; a fourth is the opportunity for additional professional preparation.

At the present time the Ethiopian education system is almost completely lacking in providing incentives for the average staff member, yet there are considerable opportunities in education in Ethiopia. A school system which is growing as rapidly in all areas as is the one in this Empire cannot help but provide a great number of job opportunities for capable people. There are hundreds of schools which need to be staffed by competent teachers and school directors. There is a great demand for qualified school supervisors at each of the three levels. There are administrative and supervisory positions at the district, provincial, and other upper levels which are either unfilled or which are occupied by people in temporary assignments. A major problem arises out of the fact that to this date the Ministry of Education has implemented no organized system of providing incentives for members of the organization.

As is noted above, there are a great number of opportunities available to capable people. These opportunities must be clearly identified and must be made known. A considerable amount of importance must be placed upon these positions, and a system must be devised whereby employees in the ranks have the opportunity to work towards achieving those positions which should carry with them increased salary, additional status in rank, and greater opportunity for service.

**Principle 6: Each individual in the organization should have a feeling of security.**

Whenever a discussion of the needs of the employees is entered into, one of the most important needs immediately identified is that of job security. If a person is to work effectively and faithfully, then he must be assured that he is going to have security in position as long as his work is satisfactory. In some countries school organizations have adopted the policy of providing tenure to teachers who have served successfully during a two- or three-year probationary period. At the end of the probationary period, once tenure is granted, an employer can dismiss an employee only for serious and clearly specified reasons.

While tenure has provided a much needed feeling of security to many people, it has also opened the door for a considerable number of practices which are generally not acceptable to management.

It occurs to me that one of our greatest problems at present is that there is too much of a feeling of job security among public school educators in Ethiopia. If there was a little less, perhaps we would get a better quality of performance from those assigned to work with the public schools. The need for educators is so great at the present time that those employing teachers and administrators have not been able to be as selective as they wish. If employees had to depend upon quality performance for retention of positions, then my prediction is that greater effort would be made to do the job well. The attitude seems to be that teaching jobs are easy to obtain and easier to retain, so why work hard. The results of this attitude are visible to anyone who visits the public schools throughout Ethiopia.

What we should be striving for is a system which provides security to the industrious and the competent, counsel to those who need help, and dismissal to those who are incompetent and who are not capable or desirous of self-improvement.

**Principle 7: Coordination of functions, activities, interest, and assignment is necessary for successful accomplishment of results.**

While effort is made to coordinate the functions, activities, interests, and assignments in the educational system of this nation, desired results are not being fully achieved, partly because, as has been indicated earlier, of the great size of the school system and the impossibility at present of effective communication between these various echelons.

While the lack of appropriate communication facilities can, in some part, be blamed for poor coordination, increased effort must be made to improve the coordination at levels where this is possible. Too many individuals are operating in a quasi-legal way with little or no reference to Ministry policies or, for other reasons, are not coordinating their efforts with others with whom they work and are not implementing Ministry rules and regulations. When rules and responsibilities become more clearly defined and better-qualified people are placed in key positions, then one can expect considerable improvement in the area of coordination of effort.

**Principle 8: Continuity of policy and program until results can be evaluated is a prerequisite to good management.**

The Ethiopian school system is characterized by anything except the continuity of policy and program. As many changes in personnel probably take place in Ethiopian educational circles as anywhere else in the world. Staff members are moved from one position to another almost at random, and there is practically no continuity of policy and program.

Continuity of program is also difficult because of the dependence of Ethiopia on a great number and variety of foreign technical advisors. These advisors come from many parts of the world, have a great variety of educational philosophies, have had a variety of educational experiences, and often have pet theories and programs which they attempt to impose upon the Ethiopian scene. Often these programs are unrealistic, costly, and soon abandoned.

A third problem is the lack of a well-developed plan of program evaluation covering the entire scope of Ethiopian education. Many problems are not anticipated and planned for, and major efforts are directed to solving one crisis after another as they arise.

For these and other reasons, the total organization seems to be characterized more by instability and disorganization than anything else.

#### **Summary**

If Ethiopia is to effectively achieve established educational goals and those that will be developed in the future, the organization for administering the schools must be strengthened considerably. To accomplish this will require vision, determination, and the cooperation of many. Until improvements are made, education will not be attractive as a profession, the full value of the educational dollar will not be received, and children will not benefit from the quality educational program hoped for.