
Rethinking the Existing Educational System of Higher Learning

Esayas Yosief^{*}

A Glimpse of Our Present Situation

Whether education, comparing to the past few decades, is generally deteriorating in Ethiopia or not might be debatable. But one can certainly assert that education, especially at the university level, at present time is so beset with myriads of problems that it produces graduates with lack of confidence in their skill and knowledge. In fact, no great wisdom is required to comprehend the magnitude of the predicament in which higher institutions are finding themselves now. It just suffices to look at recent graduates and evaluate their knowledge and intellectual capacity to carry out the responsibility incumbent upon them. The result, frankly speaking, quite disheartens and shatters one's hope for progress and development. We are in a country where a law graduate who, after spending half a decade in a law school, gets baffled and utterly confused when required to do some of the most rudimentary work of a lawyer. It is a country where a graduate of economics can hardly give a tenable and intellectual analysis of his country's economic policies. Even if he attempts to do so the chances are that he would be parroting his instructors' view. There is nothing, however, more saddening than to encounter a person whose most formidable problem in the whole globe is to express himself in English and who cannot speak a sentence without shaking and sweat rolling down his cheeks, but who amazingly enough is a graduate from the English department. However sour it may be, this is the naked reality of our country.

If an English graduate cannot, strictly speaking, speak and write in English and a graduate of law cannot properly do some of the elementary tasks of a lawyer, then there must be something wrong with our educational system. Our system, metaphorically speaking, is

Mekelle University.

Rethinking the Existing Educational System of Higher Learning

Esayas Yosief^{*}

A Glimpse of Our Present Situation

Whether education, comparing to the past few decades, is generally deteriorating in Ethiopia or not might be debatable. But one can certainly assert that education, especially at the university level, at present time is so beset with myriads of problems that it produces graduates with lack of confidence in their skill and knowledge. In fact, no great wisdom is required to comprehend the magnitude of the predicament in which higher institutions are finding themselves now. It just suffices to look at recent graduates and evaluate their knowledge and intellectual capacity to carry out the responsibility incumbent upon them. The result, frankly speaking, quite disheartens and shatters one's hope for progress and development. We are in a country where a law graduate who, after spending half a decade in a law school, gets baffled and utterly confused when required to do some of the most rudimentary work of a lawyer. It is a country where a graduate of economics can hardly give a tenable and intellectual analysis of his country's economic policies. Even if he attempts to do so the chances are that he would be parroting his instructors' view. There is nothing, however, more saddening than to encounter a person whose most formidable problem in the whole globe is to express himself in English and who cannot speak a sentence without shaking and sweat rolling down his cheeks, but who amazingly enough is a graduate from the English department. However sour it may be, this is the naked reality of our country.

If an English graduate cannot, strictly speaking, speak and write in English and a graduate of law cannot properly do some of the elementary tasks of a lawyer, then there must be something wrong with our educational system. Our system, metaphorically speaking, is

Mekelle University.

sick as a system can be and it needs a swift medication. Stated otherwise, we have, all of us concerned, to overhaul it immediately.

And it is, I presume, high time that we should come up with a workable strategy. Otherwise the problem gets from bad to worse each day until we get stuck in a quagmire from which rising again is hardly possible. So if we want to deal effectively with this seemingly insurmountable challenge we have, first and foremost, to probe into and identify the real problems. For this writer an archaic and obsolete mode of delivering lectures, absence of feedback and active interaction between the learners and the instructor and a curriculum so out of keeping with the existing socio-economic reality seem to be some of the culpable factors that made us find ourselves in this pathetic situation.

Following the writer will try, to the extent possible, canvass some of the major stumbling-blocks and suggest some possible solutions to the most pressing and daunting educational problems Ethiopia is confronting now.

Mode of Delivering Lectures

The way nowadays an instructor delivers his lecture is so monotonous, so unconstructive and so mechanical that it almost does not bring any behavioral change in the students. An instructor would stand in front of the class and say out whatever he crammed in his mind by way of memorization. And the students are expected to faithfully write them down. There is not, in other words, any active class interaction between the students and the instructor. Almost always he speaks and they write whatever words come out from his lips, and that way the class, almost invariably, comes to an end.

The atmosphere, therefore, in which the students are learning, does not give any room what so ever for their active participation. Our instructional system tends to make them passive and reduces them into passive spectators. This in turn has its own repercussion in the

students' future life. They tend to be timid and without confidence. They cannot propose new and noble ideas. This is so because we are not nurturing and developing that part of their brain that thinks, analyzes and interprets problems.

Types of Exams

As far as the type of exam given to students is concerned they are, without any exaggeration, the worst one. They, above every thing, require the student to memorize some dry and meaningless facts just before the exam and reproduce in the exam hall. Once the exam is over everything they "learned" vanishes into thin air. This is due to the fact that the instructor expects them to give him back at the end of the semester his 'golden words', as some instructors would like to call it. If a student, however, was courageous enough and attempted to solve the problem from his own vantage point it is highly likely that the instructor would take that as an affront. And it will become a forgone conclusion that the student will be castigated by getting a lower grade. So generally speaking our exams require memory rather than critical thinking.

To alleviate, if not to do away the whole problem completely, we need to make our instructional activities more interactive with the bid to make them livelier and constructive. Our exams should be formulated in such away as to require critical thinking.