

# Keynote Address

By

**Derebssa Dufera**

**Director, Institute of Educational Research, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

It gives me a great pleasure to present this keynote speech at the Symposium on “Establishing, Enhancing and Sustaining Quality Practices in Education” organized by Wollega University at a time when all stakeholders in Ethiopia: the Government at all levels, schools, Universities and colleges, students, teachers as well as parents, are worried about the quality of education.

Education is the bedrock of all forms of development (social, economic, technological and political). Development means much more than just an improvement in the economic well-being or condition of community members. Development includes the fulfillment of each person’s material, spiritual and societal needs. It is defined as: process for enlarging people’s choices. These choices primarily reflect the desire to lead a long and healthy life; acquire basic knowledge; and have an access to resources essential for a decent standard of living.

We may notice from this simple definition that development is a dynamic process. Development empowers people and promotes important changes in their lives. However, development cannot take place by itself. It requires educated, skilled and competent people. Seen from this angle, education becomes the most important factor for development as well as for empowering people. Education provides us with knowledge and information which in turn brings about desirable changes in the way we think, feel and act. Education also builds in us a strong sense of self-esteem and self-confidence. It contributes very effectively to the realization of our potential.

Therefore, education is considered as a social instrument for developing human resources and for human capital formation. Educated families tend to produce more, have limited number of children and enjoy a relatively better quality of life as compared with uneducated families. Educated people earn more and are respected by the society. It is because of its tangible contributions in changing the lives of the people that education becomes an important part of the development policy in every country.

The relationship between Education and Development is not as simple as it appears to be. In fact, the impact of education on development depends basically on what we teach and how much the learners learn. In simple words, it is the education contents and the teaching methods that make the difference. Equally important is the interaction of education with other social and economic factors. We may argue that education can only be useful and meaningful when it brings about positive changes in one’s life and empowers a person to face day-to-day challenges. On the same grounds, we may assert that education becomes meaningful when it provides knowledge and skills of problem solving and for improving the quality of life. Education, organized and oriented on these lines is certainly going to have a lasting impact on economic income, fertility rate, birth spacing, pre- and postnatal health, nutrition, knowledge, attitudes and values.

From this, it is clear that education is crucial to every aspect of social and economic development. We may also notice that education is also important for influencing social behavior. For example, education widens people's choices. It expands their perceptions and capabilities for leading a better quality of life. Adequate and good quality food (nutrition), access to safe drinking water, better health care services, relevant and quality education for children and youth constitute the core elements of one's life.

Education is increasingly recognized to be at the heart of the development process. Three dynamically interrelated factors are involved: the economic benefits of education; the impact of education on population growth, health, and social well-being; and the relationship between education and democratic society

The direct impact of education on economic benefits has been noticed in many countries. For example, it is observed that each additional year of schooling for men and women increases wages by between 10 to 20 per cent, and farm output by up to 5 per cent. In contrast, a population with a low level of education has little or no capacity to increase productivity. An educated person can make effective use of new technology, engage in entrepreneurial activity, and be responsive to market demands and changes.

Apart from the powerful direct economic benefits of education, its indirect benefits in changing human attitude and improving human welfare are equally important. A common and universal system of education is necessary for democratic society to function properly. To participate with knowledge and understanding in policy issues and decision-making processes requires knowledge of the world, and the ability to think independently based on evidence. The full impact of education is found where sustained investments in people are accompanied by respect for individual human rights and participation in democratic institutions. Following these arguments, we will certainly agree that education is very important for economic prosperity and a decent quality of life.

Education therefore is critical to the development of human capital as this is seen as the most important key to rapid economic development and the strongest weapon against poverty. For most countries of the world, including the developed ones, Education is considered the number one development challenge.

Former President of the United States of American Bill Clinton was once asked to list the three most serious problems of his country, and he was reported to have replied “**Education, Education and, Education**”. That reply is an indication of the enormity of the challenge that Education poses for a country like Ethiopia that is still struggling with development challenges.

Over the last century, there has been a steady growth in the range and extent of public education in all countries of the world. A number of forces were at work in producing this trend. For example, the increasingly complex means of production and other economic activities leading to a growing demand for a more highly trained or trainable work force, in turn increased general expectations on the education system. Similarly, the increased level of sophistication in social and cultural interaction raised the level of expectation on the performance of graduates for a better involvement in a more open and democratic society.

Education is a critical sector whose performance directly affects and even determines the quality and magnitude of Ethiopia's development. It is the most important means we have at our disposal to develop human resources, impart appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes. Education forms the basis for developing innovation, science and technology in order to harness our resources, industrialize, and participate in the global knowledge economy and for Ethiopia to take its rightful place in the global community. It is also the means by which Ethiopia will entrench a culture of peace, gender equality and positive Ethiopian values.

Benefiting from sustained growth in the decade, the Ethiopian government, in partnership with donors, has invested heavily in improving access to education. Key measures included were abolishing school fees, increasing expenditure on school construction and maintenance, hiring and training many thousands of new teachers, administrators and officials. This has been complemented by a shift to mother tongue instruction and by the gradual decentralization of the education system to progressively lower administrative levels. This has contributed to the improvement of access at all levels. *Enrollment* at all levels has increased from below 3 million in 1994/95 to more than 20 million in 2012/13.

The Ethiopian government has realized that increasing the coverage of education is only part of the battle. Most schools' performance is still wanting. Low levels of education quality remain one of the most significant challenges in improving learning outcomes. Even so, compared with other countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have experienced rapid increases in enrolment, Ethiopia has been more successful at rapidly taking appropriate measures to improve quality of Education at all levels. Considering the number of students entering the system, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the decline in quality would likely have been significantly worse had it not been strongly supported by the government and partners.

The government has recently taken steps to improve quality of education. In 2007, the MoE developed a new package of interventions to remedy identified weaknesses of education quality at all levels. This reform package, the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP), encompasses four key areas of intervention – (i) the Teacher Development Program, (ii) curriculum improvement, (iii) leadership and management, and (iv) the School Improvement Program – and two complementary packages, 'Civics and Ethical Education' and 'Information Communications Technology'.

The fact that all these efforts have not yet brought the required quality education at all levels requires us to correctly conceptualize quality in education, the factors that affect quality and how it can be measured so that all stakeholder (the government, schools/ universities/ institutions, learners, educators, researchers, parents and partners) make efforts to bring the required level of quality in our education system.

All of the well-documented benefits of education to development –poverty reduction, individual growth, economic growth, prevention of diseases and epidemics, good health, participatory democracy, sustainable use of the environment, diverse forms of equity and inclusiveness, peace, global citizenship, social cohesion, political stability etc. – are not feasible unless education is of good quality.

General education lays the foundation for quality, effective and relevant education and learning throughout life. Failure to provide quality general education at this level is tantamount to failure to realize the development impact of education and of learning. Poor education quality, therefore, stands in the way of sustainable development at the individual, national and global level, of attaining virtually all MDGs and of attaining the six EFA goals, each of which has education quality as a precondition.

The Ethiopian Government is well aware of the quality crisis and its development consequences. The recent General Education Quality Improvement program has the enhancement of quality education among key strategic objectives. Yet, the challenge persists, and the quality goals are dauntingly off track.

What seem to be lacking are systemic analysis and identification of critical constraints that prevent Ethiopia from attaining and sustaining intended levels of quality education. To analyze/diagnose and identify critical impediments that prevent the country to provide high quality education and effective learning experiences to all learners, we need to critically analyze the different dimensions of quality of education. Many of the studies so far conducted have very limited scope and longitudinal comparability, and lacks a strong system-wide tradition of diagnosing/ analyzing, improving and assuring quality. Trying to address the issue of education quality by treating separate dimensions of education quality is like forgetting the forest when looking at individual trees. To address the education quality issue holistically, we need to critically review the concept of quality in the context of education.

### **The Concept of Quality**

What does quality mean in the context of education? Many definitions of quality in education exist, testifying to the complexity and multifaceted nature of the concept. However, considerable consensus exists around the basic dimensions of quality education today which include quality learners, quality environment, quality content, quality process, and quality outcomes.

Understanding quality of education from these dimensions allows for an understanding of education as a complex system embedded in a political, cultural and economic context. It is important to keep in mind that these dimensions are interdependent, influencing each other in ways that are sometimes unforeseeable.

In reviewing the research literature related to quality in education, UNICEF (2000) takes a broader perspective and demonstrates by this analysis that programs must encompass a broader definition involving quality learners, content, processes, environments and outcomes which is elaborated as follows.

### **Quality Learners**

School systems work with the children who come into them. The quality of children's lives before beginning formal education greatly influences the kind of learners they can be. Many elements go into making a quality learner, including health, early childhood experiences and home support.

As educators, we want to nurture engaged learners who are motivated, enjoy learning, and go on to fulfill their potential. There are three key areas that we will work to make every

student an engaged learner: ignite the joy of learning, provide learning support where necessary, and design multiple pathways to suit different learning styles.

First, ignite the joy of learning. As the French philosopher Simone Weil said, “The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is to running”. It is easy to speak about the joy of learning. In practice, learning can be hard because it requires effort. Like a baby learning to walk must stumble, pick him up, and try again and again, children should also try again & again. Adults need to provide support, but not so much that we stop the baby from trying.

The joy comes from trying, from a sense of “I can do it!” It comes from having a sense of mastery; of having a pleasant moment that “I have done it!” It is a joy that comes from overcoming challenges, after trying once, twice, three times, or whatever it takes. Small successes can build on one another. They enhance a child’s natural curiosity and sense of wonder. I firmly believe that it is this sense of wonder, this perseverance, and this sense of mastery that will make each of us a lifelong learner. We must therefore help every child build confidence, as he/she progresses through more and more difficult tasks. Because each child progresses at different rates, we must have multiple pathways for them to make progress. At every stage, we must have the right amount of challenge relative to the ability of the child - not so much as to overwhelm, and not so little as to bore. Getting this balance right is very difficult.

Physically and psychosocially healthy children learn well. Healthy development in early childhood, especially during the first three years of life, plays an important role in providing the basis for a healthy life and a successful formal school experience (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Adequate nutrition is critical for normal brain development in the early years, and early detection and intervention for disabilities can give children the best chances for healthy development. Prevention of infection, disease and injury prior to school enrolment are also critical to the early development of a quality learner.

Positive early experiences and interactions are also vital to preparing a quality learner. Studies in different countries found out that effective and appropriate stimulation in a child’s early years influences the brain development necessary for emotional regulation, arousal, and behavioral management. A child who misses positive stimulation or is subject to chronic stress in the pre-school years may have difficulty with psychosocial development later in life (McCain & Mustard, 1999). A high level of quality in early childhood development programmes can be achieved when health and nutrition components are combined with structured psychosocial development in the pre-school years.

When they reach school age, research demonstrates that to achieve academically, children must attend school consistently. A child’s exposure to curriculum — his or her ‘opportunity to learn’ — significantly influences achievement, and exposure to curriculum comes from being in school (Fuller *et al.*, 1999).

Parents may not always have the tools and background to support their children’s cognitive and psychosocial development throughout their school years. Parents’ level of education, for example, has a multifaceted impact on children’s ability to learn in school. In one study, children whose parents had primary school education or less, were more than three times as

likely to have low test scores or grade repetition than children whose parents had at least some secondary schooling (Willms, 2000). Parental education not only influences parent-child interactions related to learning, but also affects parents' income and need for help in the home or field — help that often comes at the expense of keeping children in school (Carron and Chau, 1996).

The effects of schools in poor areas can often outweigh the impact of family background and practices (Fuller, et al., 1999). Further, although many constraints exist, schools can play a role in helping parents to enhance the 'home curriculum' and improve the quality of parental involvement in their children's education. Strategies include, for example, asking parents to participate in assessment of their child's progress, offering clear, regular, non-threatening communication & including parents in decision-making groups at the school (Redding, 2000).

### **Quality Learning Environments**

Another essential ingredient for a successful educational system is a quality learning environment. Learning can occur anywhere, but the positive learning outcomes generally require quality learning environments. Learning environments are made up of physical, psychosocial and service delivery elements.

#### **Physical Elements**

Physical learning environments or the places in which formal learning occurs, range from relatively modern and well-equipped buildings to open-air gathering places. The quality of school facilities seems to have an indirect effect on learning, an effect that is hard to measure. Some authors argue that empirical evidence is inconclusive as to whether the condition of school buildings is related to higher student achievement after taking into account student's background" (Fuller, 1999). Other studies, however, found out that, the quality of the learning environment was strongly correlated with pupils' achievement (Carron and Chau, 1996). Studies in Ethiopia also, concur with these latter findings.

The quality of school buildings may be related to other school quality issues, such as the presence of adequate instructional materials and textbooks, working conditions for students and teachers, and the ability of teachers to undertake certain instructional approaches. Such factors as on-site availability of lavatories and a clean water supply, classroom maintenance, space and furniture availability all have an impact on the critical learning factor of time on task. In the last two decades access to education was significantly expanded, but the building of many schools has not kept pace with the increase in the student population. In these cases, schools forced to expand class sizes, as well as the ratio of students to teachers, to accommodate large numbers of new students.

#### **Psychosocial Elements**

Within schools and classrooms, a welcoming and non-discriminatory climate is critical to creating a quality learning environment. In many areas, attitudes discouraging girls' participation in education have been significant barriers to providing quality education to all students. Once girls gain access to schools, however, they may experience both direct physical threats and more subtle assaults on their confidence, self-esteem and identity (Pigozzi, 2000). The journey to school may be unsafe, since many girls experience harassment and physical attacks either on public transportation in cities or remote paths in rural areas. At home, parents often require girls to do work while boys study or play. In some

cases, extreme physical assault, including rape, may be perpetuated against girls at school. The threats that come in the form of unequal treatment, harassment, bullying and undervaluing girls, harm them in profound and long-lasting ways.

Relative to both girls and boys, parents, educators and researchers express important concerns about teachers who create an unsafe environment for students. In some schools, male teachers sexually harass girls. When parents were asked about reasons they might withdraw their children from schools, they most often cited a lack of discipline, violence of teachers towards pupils (corporal punishment), and the risk of pregnancy due to the male teachers' behavior. These teacher behaviors' affect the quality of the learning environment since learning cannot take place when the basic needs of survival and self-protection are threatened.

Well-managed schools and classrooms contribute to educational quality. Students, teachers and administrators should agree upon school and classroom rules and policies, and these should be clear and understandable. Order, constructive discipline and reinforcement of positive behavior communicate a seriousness of purpose to students. It is important not to mistakenly interpret learner-centered learning as disorder and chaos. Policies are also needed on harassment, drug and tobacco use, and anti-discrimination with regard to disabilities, HIV/AIDS and pregnancy.

Reducing other forms of discrimination is also critical to quality improvement in learning environments. Ethiopia is currently trying to implement effective inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities. Children of ethnic and language minorities, politically or geographically disfavored groups, and groups at low socio-economic levels may also suffer from discriminatory policies and practices that hinder the advancement of quality education for all children. In general, continued restructuring of most learning environments needs to occur to improve learning opportunities for children of all abilities and backgrounds.

### **Quality Content**

High quality physical, psychosocial and service environments in schools set the stage for learning to occur. This learning begins with quality content. Quality content refers to the intended and taught curriculum of schools. National goals for education, and outcome statements that translate those goals into measurable objectives should provide the starting point for the development and implementation of curriculum (UNICEF, 2000).

Research on educational practices and projections about future needs in society contribute to current understanding of the structure of school curriculum. In general, curriculum should emphasize deep rather than broad coverage of important areas of knowledge, authentic and contextualized problems of study, and problem-solving that stresses skills development as well as knowledge acquisition. Curriculum should also provide for individual differences, closely coordinate and selectively integrate subject matter, and focus on results or standards and targets for student learning (Glatthorn and Jailall, 2000).

Curriculum structure should be gender-sensitive and inclusive of children with diverse abilities and backgrounds, and responsive to emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS and conflict resolution. In all content areas, curriculum should be based on clearly defined learning outcomes and these outcomes should be grade-level appropriate and properly sequenced.

The specific content of school curriculum depends on local and national values. Regional states tend to have a high degree of consistency in curriculum emphasis over time, but differ sharply from each other, reflecting unique historical patterns. Local level interests may also have an impact on and contribute to the quality of educational content. In all regions, however, quality content should include several pivotal areas.

### **Quality Processes**

Until recently, much discussion of educational quality centered on system inputs, such as infrastructure and pupil-teacher ratios, and on curricular content. In recent years, however, more attention has been paid to educational processes—how teachers and administrators use inputs to frame meaningful learning experiences for students. Their work represents a key factor in ensuring quality school processes.

No education system can provide quality education without having quality teachers. The highest quality teachers, those most capable of helping their students learn, have deep mastery of both their subject matter and pedagogy. Perhaps as a consequence of too little preparation before entering the profession, a number of teachers were observed to master neither the subject matter they teach nor the pedagogical skills required for good presentation of the material. This affects educational quality since student achievement depends largely on teachers' command of subject matter (Mullens, Murnance and Willett, 1996) and their ability to use that knowledge to help students learn. Whether a teacher uses traditional or more current methods of instruction, efficient use of school time has a significant impact on student learning.

A quality and caring teacher is one who believes that every child can learn, and acts on that belief. He/she should motivate the child - know the child, shape the child's values and character, help the child grow as a person and bring out the best in the child. A caring teacher is also a skilful teacher - one who masters her/his content, and is able to engage students through thoughtful planning and skilful execution (the pedagogy). But to have teachers who care, they need some who must care for them. The government, school leaders, parents and the community at large must support and care for teachers.

### **Continuing Support for Student-Centered Learning**

Teacher education, both pre-service and in-service, should help teachers develop teaching methods and skills that take new understandings of how children learn into account. Just as curriculum should be child-centered and relevant, so should instructional methods. The limited view of teaching as presentation of knowledge no longer fits with current understandings of how and what students learn. Instead, instruction should help students build on prior knowledge to develop attitudes, beliefs and cognitive skills; as well as expand their knowledge base. Teaching styles in many places, however, remain traditional, teacher-centered and fairly rigid or even authoritarian. When Ethiopian teachers were interviewed about the degree to which their teaching practices were learner-centered and relevant to student's lives, about half said they link lessons to the daily life of pupils at least once a week. Almost two-thirds, however, said they never or rarely ask pupils what their interests are, or what they would like to learn.

Good teachers are skilled not only in instructional methods, but also in evaluation and assessment practices that allow them to gauge individual student learning and adapt activities according to student needs. This process should include both performance

assessment and assessment of factual knowledge. Observations in many schools found that teachers are very poorly trained in evaluation techniques, and the reality is far from the continuous evaluation procedures recommended by official programs. Indeed, many teachers and educational systems continue to rely almost exclusively on traditional paper-and-pencil tests of factual knowledge that tend to promote rote memorization rather than higher order thinking skills.

Quality education puts students at the centre of the process; student achievement must be the school's first priority. Since schools exist because of students, this would seem self-evident. Perhaps because of the complexity of educational systems, however, teachers may not always believe in the school's ability to help all students. Many teachers had little awareness of the school's role in pupil failure and dropout. Instead, they tended to blame the pupils and their family environment. Schools committed to student learning communicate expectations clearly, give frequent and challenging assignments, monitor performance regularly, and give students the chance to participate in and take responsibility for diverse school activities (Craig, Kraft and du Plessis, 1998).

Teachers' working conditions affect their ability to provide quality education. Many aspects of school life and educational policy go into teachers' perceptions of their employment. As mentioned above, the condition of infrastructure, availability of textbooks and learning materials and class sizes all influence the teacher's experience as an educator.

Teachers' remuneration also matters. Low remuneration may lead teachers to take on another job, which hurts student learning. Effective teachers are highly committed and care about their students; they need supportive working conditions to maintain these positive attitudes.

### **Supervision and Support**

The quality of administrative support and leadership is another critical element in school processes, both for students and for teachers. At a more macro level, ensuring financial resources for education, especially for recurrent budgets is a necessity. Teachers need governments who are supportive of education systems. Organizational support for teaching and learning takes many forms, including such measures as advocating for better conditions and professional development, respecting teachers' autonomy and professionalism and developing inclusive decision-making processes. Such support has been shown to have impact on student learning.

Unfortunately, however, few head teachers and administrators in our schools have had any formal training in the leadership functions of schools, and promotions may not be based on leadership or management skills. Further, many heads of schools continue to have extensive administrative and political responsibilities in addition to their academic leadership. This leaves little time for supervision and academic support of staff.

### **Quality Outcomes**

The environment, content and processes that learners encounter in school lead to diverse results, some intended and others unintended. Quality learner outcomes are intentional, expected effects of the educational system. They include what children know and can do, as well as the attitudes and expectations they have for themselves and their societies.

Academic achievement is often used as an indicator of school quality because it is easily measurable using standardized tests, while other outcomes may be more complex and less tangible. These include education for citizenship (participating in and contributing to the community, learner confidence and self-esteem) and skills for behavioral development and change.

Academic achievement represents key educational outcomes. Teaching students to read, write and calculate is often considered the primary purpose of formal education, but students' regular attendance and attention in school does not guarantee this outcome. Many studies underscore the critical relationship between outcomes and the quality of environments, contents and processes.

Assessment of academic achievement outcomes has most often been used in a summative rather than formative way. Testing information tends to be used primarily as a screening device to decide who can continue to the next grade of level rather than as a tool to help improve educational quality for individuals and systems. An assessment tool that centered on a curriculum-based rating scale should be developed and administered to students. This could allow teachers to determine students' level of mastery of previous and current years' curricula, which would help them, determine the extent to which alternative instructional strategies and remedial content are necessary for both individuals and groups.

Parents tend to see academic achievement as closely related to the opportunity for social promotion and employment. These anticipated outcomes tend to be highly valued by families: future employment possibilities that result from education seem to be a primary factor in the demand for education. Parents tend to attach more importance to educational outcomes as a measure of school quality than students, teachers or principals.

In conclusion, developed countries have attained their present economic status mainly because of the quality of their human resources, which are results of quality education systems. In order to join the middle income group countries in the near future, we will have to move very fast towards ensuring quality education at all levels and this is the responsibility of every one of us.

No nation has ever had significant economic development without achieving a broad-based education for its population. Investment in education has been found to be the most cost-effective means of achieving poverty-related objectives such as better health and nutrition and lower fertility rates. Education is also the necessary bedrock of social, economic and political development. Education is important for creating enabling conditions for sustaining change. A well-educated populace is necessary to bring about technological innovation and to adapt and modify it in the context of local conditions and realities. Similarly, a well-educated and competitive labor force is an important factor in attracting foreign investments.

While investing in education is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient to achieve sustained economic growth. The contribution of education to economic growth depends largely on the nature of the economic system which shapes the way skills are applied and made productive. In addition, economic growth is necessary to sustain education expansion in that such growth increases revenues available to education both from the public as well as from private sources. Programs to support education development, therefore, need to be situated within a

solid macroeconomic framework. While research findings from across the world show that education does contribute to aggregate output, this linkage is less robust for less developed countries like Ethiopia--reflecting factors such as a lack of complementary inputs into education, weak institutional capacity and other obstacles that prevent full utilization of skills. Much greater attention, therefore, needs to be given not just to the quantitative expansion of education but even more importantly to inputs that raise the qualitative outcomes of education programs.

**Therefore, we should make quality of education our 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> priorities.**

Thank you and God bless you.

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