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Politics of meaning about quality of education in Ethiopia

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Background: In recent years, the policymakers in Ethiopia are engaged in reforming the curriculum to address the poor quality of education in the country. The public as well as the different stakeholders have been engaged in debating on the topic. The discourse about the education policy has been intense at times.

Aim: The purpose of this study is to provide a framework for the different meanings of quality of education in Ethiopia that arise from different experiences and factors among the participants. This, in turn, can guide and shape the intense discourse among the different stakeholders.

Setting: The Ethiopian diaspora group arranged a two-part Twitter Space discussion among the Ethiopian diasporas who are engaged in the affairs of their home country to discuss the education policy of the country. The theoretical approach about politics of meaning by Ole Skovsmose was used to reflect on the discussion made by this community.

Methods: Discourse analysis has been used on audio data from the Twitter Space conversation to trace different meanings of quality of education that different stakeholders attribute within the context of Ethiopia.

Results: Seven different politics of meanings about quality of education has been identified: the good old days, decolonise, expectation, moral, foundation, opportunity and vision meaning.

Conclusion: The authors believe that these seven meanings can provide insight to the policymakers in their endeavour to improve quality. In fact, these meanings are generic to any education system, and this can be investigated further.

Contribution: Even though the authors' analysis depended on the information obtained from the Ethiopian diaspora, the findings can be generalised to the wider Ethiopian public, the origin of the informants.

Keywords: quality of education; politics of meaning; foreground; decolonise; expectation; moral; foundation; opportunity; vision meaning.

Introduction

Quality is an ambiguous word by itself. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word 'quality' as, 'peculiar and essential character, an inherent feature, degree of excellence, superiority in kind, a distinguishing attribute, social status', and so on. Hence, quality can surface as an adjective or noun. According to Alexander (2008), the confusion about quality surfaces when it is used as an adjective. For example, the term 'quality healthcare' might refer to a business promotion or a political agenda for election, whereas when one refers to quality of education (QoE), it refers to the process-oriented inherent nature of education; hence, it serves as a noun. If one uses quality as an adjective, that is, as 'quality education', it implies 'a standard or level of quality to be desired', argues Alexander (2008). That is why we have 'indicators' of QoE by different stakeholders, mostly by fund givers. The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others have had different indicator frameworks for QoE. This needs a bigger space to deal with, and readers are referred to literatures (Alexander 2008; Cheng & Tam 1997).

In 2014, UNESCO reported that QoE in schools was generally declining in many countries. Similarly, the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ethiopia has indicated the phenomenon of poor QoE (MoE 2017) for years in the country. To address this issue, the government is engaged in reforming education, and there is a new document providing a road map of education (2018–2030) (MoE 2019). In the document, one finds the phrase 'QoE' 14 times in reference to different factors, including educational facilities and materials; policy implementation; different levels of education including primary, secondary, preparatory and higher education; autonomy

of higher education institutions (HEIs); internationalisation of HEIs; practical knowledge and experiences; and international fund providers.

There are many stakeholders in any given education system. It might include policymakers, business communities, elected officials, organisations (local and international), educators, teachers, parents and students (Drew 2022). Note that by stakeholders the authors mean those who have a concern about the status of education, care for it and invest in it. These all might have different meanings for quality education in a given society (Tesfamicael 2022). This work's main aim is to highlight the different aspects of the QoE meanings. The rationale for doing so is partially to provide a framework of reference for constructive discourse on the meaning of QoE.

According to Ole Skovsmose (2016), the meaning of something is connected to some references or its uses or foregrounds. Hence, different perspectives exist on the meaning of that particular thing. That is what is called politics of meaning (PoM), and the authors adopt the term for the meanings attached to QoE in Ethiopia (Tesfamicael 2022). The emphasis of this article is on the concept of QoE in light of the foreground interpretation of it from different stakeholders of education, resulting in the PoM about QoE. As QoE is an ambiguous aspect, different stakeholders provide different meanings. As many stakeholders are participating in the discourse, there seems to be a lack of guidance on the subject, as individuals are entitled to have their own PoM on QoE. Hence, the authors tried to provide a framework for that.

Discourse about QoE could be problematic and it can disenfranchise easily (Gorostiaga & Ferreira 2012). Undoubtedly, such discourse is an appealing issue for the general public in Ethiopia. What does it mean that an education system has high or low quality? Is it possible to measure QoE? If yes, what are the units and standards? These are not easy questions, but in this article the focus is rather on the meaning of QoE as perceived by the Ethiopian diasporas. Hence, the authors asked the following questions: What type of meanings are attached to the term QoE among the different stakeholders in the Ethiopian education system? Specifically, what are the different references the Ethiopian diaspora use to construct meaning about QoE in the Ethiopian education system? To provide answers for these questions, the authors used the theoretical lens developed by Skovsmose (2016, 2018), presented briefly below.

Theoretical framework

According to Ole Skovsmose (2016), PoM refers to the social, cultural, religious and economic conditions for experiencing meaning. Focusing on the PoM in mathematics education, Ole argues that something becomes meaningful when it is constructed through layers of vison, assumptions, presumptions and preconceptions. Using a foreground interpretation of meaning, that is, by relating meaning and foregrounds, he was able to provide many examples that can be considered PoM in mathematics education (Skovsmose 2016, 2018). Some of them are *sexism and meaning*, referring to

the exclusion of women from completing further studies in technical disciplines and mathematics; *racism and meaning*, referring to the segregation of different groups of people based on their race across the world; and *critical mathematics education and meaning* in reference to mathematics education for social justice. Meanings about these aspects are not peculiar to mathematics education only, but also to education in general. For Skovsmose (2016), foreground is connected to the concept of intentionality, and he used foreground interpretation of meaning, which he defines as 'once experiences of meaning first of all emerge from relationships between the activities in which they are involved and their foregrounds' (p. 6).

Foreground interpretation of quality of education

Studies have found that QoE can be impacted by many factors, including the quality of teachers, student–teacher ratio, teacher quality, curriculum alignment and implementation, effective schools, provision of learning materials, instructional time, teacher quality, children's readiness to learn and availability of specialised classes and resources (Lockheed & Vespoor 1991; Rohit et al. 2007), as well as by the economy and fiscal status of the country (Samer et al. 2021). All these factors can shape the intentions which serve as a basic category to interpret human experiences, according to Skovsmose (2018). For him, intentionalities are sociopolitical structures formed by many factors. Well-structured sociopolitical intentionalities provide the notion of foreground (Skovsmose 2016, 2018). Hence, in connection to the QoE, stakeholders can construct foreground structures through all the different experiences and factors related to QoE. These create intense discourse among many stakeholders about QoE. Each stakeholder raises concern on different aspects of education: vision, assumptions, presumptions and preconceptions, as Ole Skovsmose stated. In turn, these lead to the construction of different meanings of QoE. This is called PoM about QoE in this piece.

Taylor (2001) included the discourses of the unhappy parent and dissatisfied employer in QoE. Parents, employers and even students, teachers, educators, national and international organisations and society at large voice their concerns and undergo formal and informal discourse. Hence, different PoMs about QoE evolve in a particular country or even continent, such as Asia or Africa and so on. This article is about the PoMs about QoE in Ethiopia.

Methods

This study was qualitative in nature. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018:288), qualitative research can provide 'in-depth, intricate and detailed understandings of meanings, actions, non-observable as well as observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors'. Regarding people as anticipatory, meaning-making beings, the authors considered the constructed meaning of the participants in the study as main data; that is, they used conversation analysis and categorised it thematically.

The data were collected among the Ethiopian diaspora who live in different continents across the globe. The term diaspora

refers to people settled far from their ancestral homelands. In the Ethiopian context, the word has been used intensively referring to the large group of people who have moved away from Ethiopia to different places all over the world. The government in Ethiopia has been engaging the diaspora for decades. Since then, anyone who lives outside of the country is called a diaspora. It has become one of the social phenomena. Hence, the diaspora is vigorously engaged in the economical, educational, technological, political and diplomatic aspects of the country, as well as justice and even security. At times, it has even become a force shaping the political and economic landscape of the country. One can observe an increase in participation in the affairs of the country via virtual or digital-based discourse, which one can take as an emergent phenomenon after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic experience. Data were gathered from such virtual discourses via Twitter Spaces called by a diaspora group. The call on the Twitter Spaces platform was explicitly titled 'discussion on educational policy of Ethiopia'. Those who were concerned and interested were allowed to participate. The discussions occurred on two consecutive Thursdays for many hours, as Part 1 and Part 2. The discussions were recorded and saved.

Sample space

The Ethiopian diaspora group organised a discussion on Twitter Spaces on QoE in Ethiopia. The discussion was open to everyone but attracted participants who are mainly Ethiopians from the diaspora community. The attendants comprised stakeholders of different backgrounds, such as teachers, educators, parents, technologists, researchers, former policymakers and employees of international organisations like UNESCO and so on (Tesfamicael 2022). The conceptualisation of QoE, as well as the meanings attached to QoE, varied among the stakeholders, attributed to their difference in backgrounds. Some of the participants were educated during the older education system, during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1974) and the Mengistu (Derg) regime (1974–1991); others are from the current education system (since 1991). Some are from rural areas, whereas others are from cities. Most of them went to public schools, and a few others went to the elite private schools mostly in the capital city, Addis Ababa. The meanings about the QoE from these diaspora community can somehow represent the PoM about the QoE in Ethiopia.

Data analysis

Discourse analysis, a qualitative research approach, was used in analysing the audio-recorded data. According to Anderson and Holloway (2020:190), discourse '… includes talk, text, and action as well as more broadly circulating narratives, sets of beliefs, and ways of seeing the world. It can thus be oriented to as a locus of both meaning and/or action, in that discourse can be treated as a vehicle for making meaning, doing things, or both'. It can be motivated by political interests, power relations, ideologies, rhetorical positioning, etc. (Anderson & Holloway 2020). The discussion among the Ethiopian diaspora about educational policy in the country lends itself to discursive exploration, as there are different meanings emanating from the perceptions and experience about QoE by these diaspora members. The coding involves assigning attributes to words, sentences or paragraphs that are important about QoE. The findings and the discussions are presented together further.

Ethical considerations

Using Twitter as a source of research data is a new phenomenon. It is somehow complex when it comes to ethics and legal issues (Gold 2020). The Ethiopian diaspora group is generally active in leading discourse on different aspects that pertain to their country of origin. This particular group has hosted space on Ethiopian education policy for 2 consecutive weeks for more than 6 h (Part 1 and Part 2 for about 4 h and 2 h, respectively). The discussion was recorded, and those who participated knew that they were being recorded. The hosts invited some of us as speakers in the space. After listening to the recorded discourse, the authors asked the hosts if they could use the data for reflection and publish it in the *Ethiopian Herald*. After getting consent from the group, they were actually grateful that the discourse would find a larger audience. Hence, some of the results were published in the news media, such as the *Ethiopian Herald* (Tesfamicael, Desta & Chala 2022), as well as *Borkena* (Tesfamicael 2022), but it was done in such a way that the majority of the public understood the essence of the discussion.

Results and discussion

In the discussion, the notion of quality was especially implied in many different contexts. There seemed to exist confusion about the meaning of QoE among the participants (Tesfamicael 2022). It sprang out from the multiple perspectives the participants have. As a result, different meanings about the QoE, also called PoM in Ethiopia, were identified. Seven different meanings were coined as a result of the discourse analysis, and these are provided as follows.

The best quality of education was in the past: The 'good old days' meaning

Some of the participants had a good understanding of the old education system, meaning the education system during Emperor Haile Selassie's regime. Most participants in this category claimed that the education system during the emperor's time was better than that of Derg's regime. One participant said that even those who completed grade four are superior to those who completed grade eight during the Derg regime and even better than those who completed high school in the present education system.

This participant meant that the learners in the time of the Emperor had better reading and writing proficiency, and better mathematics and numeracy proficiency. In addition, their scientific knowledge and understanding of the literacy at that time was better than the learners in the past 50 years (Tesfamicael 2022).

There is a general tendency of the older generation to complain about the new generation, as well as the quality of the

contemporary education system (Stillman 2019). This tendency seems to hold true in regions that are known for ancient civilisation, such as Greece. The lament by Socrates against the younger generation, that is, 'children are now tyrants', can be presented as a good example. However, there is a need to scrutinise such generalisations. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is unquestionably important. This is especially so during this era of information. It is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is on top of the global agenda (Hass, Brunvoll & Hoie 2002). In this regard, the authors ask the following questions: How inclusive and equitable was the education system during the emperor's time? Was it accessible for the masses in urban and rural areas? Was it not an education system for very few lucky ones? If yes, it is problematic to brag too much about it if the access was skewed to the few nobility and the dignitaries, with little or no access for society at large, including the labourers and farmers (Tesfamicael 2022).

Similarly, those who had been through the education system of the Derg's regime complained about the education system during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front's (EPRDF) time. They criticised the education policy implemented by the EPRDF in 1994 and 1999. Several participants, who were educated during Derg's time, raised many issues to justify their position. As summarised by the authors:

> 'The QoE in EPRDF time is inferior to the Derg's time since it introduce regional education systems that are based on ethnic cleavages, introduction of self-contained classes, as well as different mother tongue at lower class levels. As a result, pupil English proficiency became very low.'

However, research shows that if kids first learn in their mother tongue, it leads to a better understanding of the curriculum, as well as a more positive attitude towards school, which may lead to success in life too (Tesfamicael et al. 2022). It is also a basic human right. Therefore, the complaint about the introduction of more mother tongues might not be appropriate; however, the way it is implemented might be the very reason for low QoE.

The proficiency in written and spoken English was better during the emperor's time than in the Derg regime's time. This could be because of the low student–teacher ratio (Lockheed & Vespoor 1991; Rohit et al. 2007); the involvement of foreign teachers such as the Peace Corps from Canada and the United States of America (USA) at all school levels; and resources available for learning. This boosted the quality in literacy. At the same time, it has created a general perception in the population that one who speaks English was a highly educated person. On the contrary, one might have mastered reading and writing in Amharic and Ge'ez (Ethiopian languages), including writing poems, idioms and complex essays, but it is considered inferior to those who have learned how to write and speak fluent English (Tesfamicael 2022; Tesfamicael et al. 2022). It created a dichotomised belief in the inferior and superior educational systems using the pretext of modern and traditional education.

The indigenous knowledge is ignored: Decolonise meaning

Failing to Ethiopianise curricula by including indigenous knowledge in different disciplines, such as mathematics, engineering, life sciences and so on, was at the top of the agenda of the discourse. Many think that Ethiopian curricula are adopted from the West, and the textbooks lack even local examples. One participant stressed that 'in most parts of Europe monasteries laid foundations and became basis for modern educational centres'. The Emanuel College and Christ College of Cambridge University in England were presented as a showcase. There are many other examples, which were once religious centres, that have now been turned into the best colleges and universities that are globally reputable. Another participant emphasised the role of the Orthodox church on the education of the country as follows (summarised by the authors):

> 'Especially in Northern part of Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church was serving as a center of literacy for over a millennia. In many parts of the countryside Ethiopia, where kindergartens are non-existent, churches are still substituting the roles of kindergartens teaching children alphabets and basic skills of reading. In many parts of Ethiopia, the term priest is interchangeably used with the term teacher. However, the practices in several churches and monasteries were disconnected from modern education for too long and not inculcated in modern education and curricula. The indigenous knowledge and practice is ignored for too long.'

Of course, many children do not get the opportunity for kindergarten education. Instead, they attend informal preschools led by these priests and deacons. However, the knowledge, skills and wisdom from most of the communities in the land are treated as inferior to the imported Western 'modern' education (Abera 2017; Tesfamicael et al. 2021a; Tsegaye 2011; Weldeana 2016; Woldegiorgis 2020).

In the Ethiopian educational system, modernisation is equated with Westernisation, and the Western education system is considered superior (Abera 2017; Bishaw & Lasser 2012; Tesfamicael et al. 2022). That is one of the reasons why Ethiopia failed to consider laying the foundation of its curricula on the indigenous knowledge and social foundations. Although the Ethiopians fought colonialism and remained an independent nation, the education system in Ethiopia is highly Westernised, and it is time to decolonise it.

Ethiopian curricula are highly influenced by those of the United Kingdom, Germany and the USA. Many international stakeholders, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and so on, have roles in both financing and shaping curriculum designing in Ethiopia (MoE 2019). The developed countries allot a good portion of their annual budgets to their education systems, while the contrary is true for developing countries, which always seek funding from the developed nations (Al-Samarrai et al. 2021). That opens room to shape the standards, indicators and contents of the curricula (Tesfamicael 2019; Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

Therefore, these international organizations get their way to shape the education policy using the pretext of economical support. Many million dollars are donated to the country every year but remember that there is no free lunch. This gives foreigners the chance to shape the education system the way they want it to be. No one is critical of this trend, not even those at the top of the government. (n.p.)

Education has both a global and local context. Learning how education is developing at a global scale is vital for a given education system in a country. Translating that to a local scale and drawing on local contexts is equally important (Tesfamicael et al. 2021). Developing problem-solving skills, critical thinking and creativity demands understanding the local context and thus needs remarkable attention (Bishop 1988; D'Ambrosio 2006). We need to apply what we call a glocal approach in the education system (Tesfamicael et al. 2021b), an amalgam of global and local wisdom where the local takes the leadership. So there is a need to be critical to strike the balance between these two conflicts of interests, seeking budget assistance versus inclusion of indigenous knowledge and wisdom in our curricula (Tesfamicael et al. 2022).

The higher education graduates are incompetent: Expectation meaning

In the Twitter Space, many former staff who were at different higher institutions during the different regimes participated actively. They all emphasised the deterioration of education quality in the various institutes in the country. The students joining the universities and colleges have not met their expectations. Especially, those who pass through the 10 + 2 school programme have proven to be weaker than the previous students who attended 6 years (elementary) + 2 (junior) + 4 (upper secondary) school programmes. Many of these former university staff members shared the experience of dealing with fragile students who showed up at universities in huge numbers. One participant who taught at one of the largest universities before leaving for Europe said the following: 'some of the students could not write their names appropriately in English, while others could not answer short answer tasks, let alone solve more complex and critical tasks'. Another one who was a staff member at the oldest and most prestigious university, before leaving for the USA, complained 'the literacy and numeracy level is shallow and does not meet higher educators' expectations at all'.

These former university staff members mean that the QoE is measured by the quality of students admitted to the universities in the country. The idea that students must perform well after some years of schooling is somehow similar to the reason of why the international comparative study called Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA)[1] is undertaken every 3 years. Those who come to universities must have some level of competencies, and the participants shared their frustration that these are the future

1. The PISA is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics and science literacy every 3 years. See https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/

teachers, engineers, bankers, lawyers, etc., not to mention politicians who will decide on national policies. They have credible concerns (Tesfamicael et al. 2022).

Furthermore, even after graduation, if an education system produces doctors, lawyers, bankers and so on who are unable to transform their knowledge and skills into practice in their own community and country, can we say that the QoE is of good quality? One of the critiques of the Ethiopian education system is that it is too theoretical and too detached from the very local context, and it is unable to bring meaningful change and development in the country. That means the graduates are not fulfilling the expectation of society at large. The expectation meaning can be seen in light of what Cheng and Tam (1997) call the legitimacy model and the satisfaction model of QoE. While 'the legitimacy model assumes that an educational institution needs to be accepted and supported by the community in order to survive and achieve its mission' (p. 27), the satisfaction model refers to the performance of an educational institution satisfying the needs and expectations of its stakeholders (Cheng & Tam 1997).

Of course, we can challenge these expectations mentioned above somehow as follows. The university's academic staff, who complains about the students' weaknesses, can be challenged by the following questions: What do you do if you get 'weak' students in your class? How can you help these 'weak' students be successful in their studies and future careers? Do you continue to use your older assessment ways to show that your status is of high quality, way above the students or humble yourselves and try to solve the problem that you and the nation are facing? Studies have shown that academic transition from one school level to another is problematic to many, cognitively, socially and so on, let alone to transit from one system of education to another one in a short span of time (Tesfamicael et al. 2022).

The ethics of the present students are inferior: Moral meaning

These participants also discussed how low the ethics and morals of the students and graduates are compared with those students and graduates in the emperor's and Derg's time (Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

Health professionals abandon the public sector and go to economically appealing private practices; Engineers learn how to steal from the public budgeted projects; bankers cooperate with illegal business people, and so on. (n.p.)

As some reflected, the sense of serving people and the country is substituted by personal gains and profits. Several private universities were established to give degrees and diplomas to too many people who had shown less commitment to their studies.

Schools are incubators of acceptable citizens, and citizenship has not always been defined in terms of academic achievement scores but also a moral character (Noddings 1988). What can be expected from a school system that has changed civic

education to a political party agenda or from an education system that has undermined and belittled its roots and indigenous knowledge and wisdom as backward? Looking at the development pattern of the country's education system, it is highly dependent on importing foreign curricula, as they are perceived as superior (Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

> The emperors have started the game by bringing the foreign education system as superior to the country's literacy, numeracy, and social competency (MoE 2019). The 1950s and 1960s generations forcefully imposed the Marxist–Leninist theory onto society. (n.p.)

The EPDRF education system was highly influenced by the World Bank, IMF and other fund providers' policies. Hence, the generation is trained to look like others. In the process, it is being detached from its roots: the religious, elder-respecting, community-serving, law-abiding and decent generation. The authors are not saying one should not learn from others, but they are saying it should not be at the expense of losing oneself (Abera 2017; Tesfamicael et al. 2021b; Weldeana 2016; Woldegiorgis 2020). What you saw comes around. This again takes us to the other meaning of QoE.

Early childhood education is not appropriate: Foundation meaning

Another meaning implied to a low QoE in Ethiopia is related to the preschool education system in the country (Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

> Some reflected that kids waste their best time in life in vain. They refer to the fact that 80% of brain development takes place during the first 5 years of life. They blame the failure of the education system to equip and prepare children for life as one of the culprits. (n.p.)

One participant, who is still active in early childhood education in the USA, formerly working in UNESCO in Ethiopia in connection to child education, questioned the impacts of these NGOs. She questioned, 'how come these organizations do not know better?' How come they do not advise the governments to invest in this direction? Even early childhood education is covered mostly privately and informally; it is only a couple of years ago that the government started to provide preschool for only one year, called zero-class, and it planned to upgrade it for 2 years (MoE 2019).

Kids should be allowed to play in preschools, and while they play, various skills like social, cognitive, physical, ethical, language and numeracy development happen, given that they are exposed to a well-designed education system (Morrison, Woika & Breffni 2009). In elementary school, they should be trained to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, creativity, social skills, innovation skills, as well as being able to explore their environments adequately, not just putting them in the classroom to memorise facts and figures (Greenstein 2012). However, training children for life is less emphasised in the Ethiopian education system, contributing to the lower QoE in the country (Tesfamicael et al. 2022).

Unpopular, unequipped and insufficient vocational schools: Opportunity meaning

During the Twitter Space discussion, people were romanticising the old vocational schools, especially the ones in the Derg regime, which had great job opportunities as well as a massive impact on the life of the people. Some participants led the discussion on the qualities of the vocational schools. Their opinions were summarised as follows (Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

> [T]he present-day vocational schools are highly ineffective and hence unpopular since those who are trained there fail to enter into job life. One of the purposes of vocational education is to give opportunities to those students who have less interest or motivation in academia to work-life by training them in practical things. However, the result sows otherwise. Many of the pupils are not motivated. (n.p.)

The quality of the training determines the job opportunity. 'Learning by doing' is the main motto in such vocational schools. At the end of their study, students should develop tangible skills. However, as some reflected in the space, 'the majority of those who join the vocational stream fail in life. Except for a few who materialize what they want to do in life'. It might be because of the lack of opportunity: training materials, properly equipped laboratories and workshops, practice places in the job market, a lack of economic incentives to start their business, entrepreneurship training and so on (McGrath et al. 2020; MoE 2019; Tesfamicael 2022).

Nation-building as a goal of education: Vision meaning

The Ethiopian diaspora participating in the discussion about the country's education policy has also implied a meaning that can be attributed to the nation-building aspect. Some emphasised a clear understanding of the notion of nation-building, since if the meaning of nation-building is different among the citizens, it is difficult to agree on many issues concerning the QoE. In literature, low QoE is attributed to various aspects: the shortage of qualified teachers; overcrowded classrooms; poor-quality curricula; a lack of teaching materials, workshops, and laboratories; a lack of motivation in the teaching profession because of low salary; plagiarism in the higher education system and so on (MoE 2017, 2019; Tesfamicael 2022; UNESCO 2014). However, one construct comes out very clearly about QoE, namely the colossal importance of generational consensus of nation-building, which can be coined as a vision meaning.

Different participants have attributed low QoE to the lack of a clear vision for the country. This is expressed via the disappointment of the policymakers and the country's political leaders over the past few decades. In their presumptions and preconceptions, the vision of those at the helm of government is not trustable (Tesfamicael 2022):

> Many are not convinced that their leaders are committed to the true sense of nation-building and claim that they are engaged in empowering regional governments, and in that way, they are constructing many nations within a nation. That is, they have been deliberately engaged in deconstructing the nation-state

Ethiopia while fostering the formation of new nationhood arising within the country. (n.p.)

This was most common during the previous government. This could be a result of a mismatch between the intentionalities of the policymakers and the people, resulting in competing PoM about QoE (Skovsmose 2016, 2018). As compared with the Derg and the previous emperors, when it comes to education, there were no such doubts about the vision of the policymakers concerning education. To a larger extent, the former are well understood and endorsed by the people.

Conclusion

The meaning of something changes through time (Baber 2012; Skovsmose 2018). The PoM is not exceptional; as one experiences and learns new things, meanings about some things shift. These Ethiopian diaspora members have had exposure to different educational systems other than those of their home country. Their meanings about QoE in Ethiopia are not only shaped by their first-hand experience and involvement while they were in Ethiopia but also by the exposure they have had from different educational systems as they reside in different parts of the world. They have both the global and local context in their discussion (Tesfamicael 2022). Hence, they have different PoMs about QoE. The authors have managed to find seven categories using the discourse analysis method: the good old days, decolonise, expectation, moral, foundation, opportunity and vision meanings. These are not unique to the Ethiopian context but to many developing nations in Africa and Asia.

In the authors' view, the seventh meaning must be debated and discussed first if we want to see real progress in QoE. There should be a clear consensus on nationhood vision (Tesfamicael 2022). When the people agree on the issue of nation-building, then the rest will fall in place (Tesfamicael et al. 2022):

> If there is agreement on the terms of nationhood, then the different perspectives and meanings that we deliberated on will be much easier to address. This matters! As they say in the Amharic language, 'ሳይስማሙ ወደ ወንዝ አይወረድም!', meaning without agreement you do not go to the river. (n.p.)

Hopefully, the present reform that is happening in the country might consider this important aspect further.

The authors believe these seven different meanings in relation to the QoE in a country are generalisable. In different countries, such discourse about QoE (hence, PoM about QoE) exists, but the contexts for each country may vary from country to country, showing the local nature of education demanding contextualised discourse accordingly. Moreover, there is a need to engage in some historicisation of quality education in the educational discourses that have provided spaces for the contestation in the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of QoE discourses in Ethiopia. There might also be other meanings that are not covered by these seven landscapes of

meanings of QoE in Ethiopia. In addition, these meanings are the results derived from the participants' discourse and the authors' intuition to reorganise the discussion. Others might come with different categories. Furthermore, the participants in that particular Twitter Space might not represent some people with different political views. However, the authors argue that when it comes to QoE, most agree on these seven meanings. This points out the need for further investigations of QoE and its implications in Ethiopian education policy.

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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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