

Chapter 17

Technological Adaptability in the Ethiopian Education System

Getnet Bitew
Goshen College, USA

ABSTRACT

Ethiopia has been using live “plasma” TV as a major mode of instructional delivery in the government secondary schools since 2004/2005 academic year. Since then, some improvements have been observed in terms of students’ listening skill. However, many students, teachers and parents argued that students are becoming mere listeners of the TV. They were not active in the learning process due to the large amount of instructional time taken by the live transmission. The “plasma” TV was also too fast to understand, pre-programmed, non-rewindable, and non-repeatable in character. This mode of instructional delivery should be assessed in terms of, among other criteria, its appropriateness (benefit for students’ learning); level of sophistication for the students (with respect to their language skill, etc); cost effectiveness; and availability and technical quality. Unfortunately, the current “plasma” TV was not effective in light of the above criteria. This study indicates that the “plasma” TV lessons shall be distributed on CDs to every school and teacher, and used as a supplementary instructional aid. The current “plasma” mode of instruction shall not continue in the way it is if we are genuinely intending to help our students develop their creativity, problem solving and critical skills. Teachers and students should get enough instructional time in the classrooms for discussion.

INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a developing country located in the Northeast part of Africa, commonly known as the Horn of Africa. It has an area of 1.13 million sq km and its population is about 83 million (2008 estimate). It is Africa’s oldest independent country.

It has never been colonized except a five-year occupation by Italy during the World War II. Ethiopian economy is highly dependent on agriculture which is sometimes affected by drought and poor administration. The country’s per capita income using Atlas method is \$220 where \$574 is regarded as low income and \$37,572 is high income. The World’s average per capita income is \$7,995. Ethiopia is

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ranked as the 205th country (out of 209 countries in descending order) in its per capita income (The World Bank, 2008).

Modern education in Ethiopia has started just a century ago. The structure of the current Ethiopian education system is 4 + 4 + 2 + 2 + . Kindergarten education is from four to six years of age which is not a necessary condition to enter elementary school for most children of the rural areas. The 4 + 4 indicates eight years of elementary education which is subdivided into four years of basic education (grade 1 to grade 4) and four years of general education (grade 5 to grade 8). 2 + 2 represents a four years of secondary education which is subdivided into two years of general secondary education (grades 9 and 10) and two years of preparatory senior secondary education (grades 11 and 12) that prepares students for tertiary level or higher education (Transitional Government of Ethiopia /TGE/, 1994). Despite the recent introduction of the modern education, Ethiopian students and parents give high value to education. This is because the students and the society in general considered education as the only means for a better life in the future. This helped students to develop high motivation for learning (Bitew, 2008). Despite the students' motivation for learning, recent research findings (ibid.) showed that the students, parents and teachers are highly concerned about the methods of teaching currently being used in all the government secondary schools of the country.

As in other countries, several technological media (e.g. radio, television) have been used to support the formal and informal education system of Ethiopia (Tilson & Bekele, 2000). In addition, the country introduced the use of a new "plasma" TV since 2004/2005 academic year as a major means of transmission of the lessons in the Government secondary schools (grade nine and above). These transmissions were prepared in the Republic of South Africa and sent to the Ethiopian Educational Media Agency where they were transmitted to all government secondary schools via satellite connections. A Satellite

Educational Project located in Johannesburg was responsible for the production of the "plasma" TV instructional programs. Most of the subject experts who have been preparing the programs were South Africans. The project was also called "Memar TV" which the Ethiopian government signed a contract agreement with a joint venture between two South African companies - Kagiso Educational TV (KET) and Sasani Ltd. The companies claimed of producing "the equivalent of 45 hours of quality television, accompanied by educationally sound teacher and student guides" per week (Kagiso TV, 2007: 1). They added "due to the time constraints and extensive educational material required, we had to deliver at an average rate of seventy half hour programs" per week. One of the major problems, according to one of the companies, was related to the difficulty of building "long distance relationships with counterparts in Ethiopia" (ibid). The project was financed by a loan obtained from The World Bank.

For most of the subjects of the secondary school curriculum (e.g. Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, English, Civics), thirty-five of the forty-five minutes of each lesson was spent by these "plasma" transmissions, leaving just ten minutes for class transition, student-student and student-teacher interactions, note-taking and other relevant classroom activities. Hence, the aim of this article is to discuss about the adaptability of the different technological media, and especially the "plasma" TV, in the Ethiopian classroom situation.

BACKGROUND

This article is primarily based on a comparative research which I conducted on "Using 'Plasma TV' Broadcasts in Ethiopian Secondary Schools" (Bitew, 2008). The comparison was made between the school experiences of students who have been attending the government and the Catholic schools. The government schools have

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