A Look at The Private Schools in Addis Ababa

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If you were a school teacher or a parent, if you listened to Radio Ethiopia's September programmes or attended a forum on education, if you drove about the city in your car or tried to make a telephone call to a school, if you rode in a taxi or went into a public bar for a bottle of beer, you could not fail to notice that Addis Ababa was in the throes of a crisis in education. If you happened to work for the Ministry of Education in any capacity, you could not have escaped asking or being asked about the examination results of grade six or grade eight students, or about the kind of schools to which the students who had chanced to pass the grade eight national examinations were assigned, or about the admission of new students to government schools.

Addis Ababa, as the capital of Ethiopia and the largest city in the Empire, has a larger student enrollment than any other province. (For purposes of educational administration Addis Ababa is treated as a province). There were 92,847 students in all kinds of schools in Addis Ababa in 1960 E.C. The corresponding figures in the same year for the four provinces of Bale, Gemu Gofa, Harargie and Sidamo were 7003, 9825, 33846 and 31153 respectively, giving a total of 81,827.

From the foregoing it is evident that Addis Ababans have better educational facilities than all the four provinces (Bale, Gemu Gofa, Harargie and Sidamo) put together. Yet a sizeable number of Addis Ababans are most unhappy about the insufficiency of the educational opportunities provided for their children.

Some parents in Addis Ababa complain because, when an educational tax is proclaimed in order to increase the revenue of the Ministry of Education, simultaneously the Ministry introduces a new policy whereby children are required to buy their textbooks. Others complain because, in spite of all they have done to get them a good education, their children have failed the national examinations. Many others have given up complaining about the impossibility of having their children accepted in government schools here and have gone to live outside Addis Ababa. Still others complain that, although they may have been lucky enough to win the approval of the school director, their children will not be admitted until an admission fee of $30.00 per classroom space levied by the parents' committee has been paid. Another group of parents complain because there is no uniform policy on admission fees: while some schools charge $30.00, others charge $25.00 or $15.00 or $10.00. And there are, of course, children who are admitted free to the very schools that demand a $30.00 fee, because the charging of admission fees is not a Ministry policy and the parents' committee has no means of checking on who has or has not paid.

There are other parents who are disappointed because, whether the shift system has any educational advantages or not, they see their children going to school for only half a day and having practically nothing to do for the other half. Another group of parents, the middle class, would like to send their children to some reputable non-government school, such as Nazreth or the English School, but admittance to these schools requires a certain amount of influence. One father sarcastically remarked that he had had his daughter registered for Nazreth School within a month of her birth but was not sure of her being admitted when she reached the age of five. Another indicated that he had used pressure from the Ministry of Education to have his daughter admitted to the Catholic Cathedral School. A third stated that he had made use of a colleague, an Englishman on the University staff, to help him have his son admitted to the English School.

Over and above all the difficulties mentioned above, there are the worries of those parents whose children attend the less privileged "private schools" (A private school, in the Ministry's definition, is "an institution privately owned by one or a group of individuals for the sake of educating the youth of the nation".[3] There is no regular support given to such schools by the government or other agency. These schools depend for their operating costs on the fees collected from the children).

It is partly because of the 34,488 children attending private schools (more than 37% of the total school population of the city) that school enrollment in Addis Ababa is higher than in any other province. These children attend non-government school for a variety of reasons. Some choose to go to the old-established private schools (such as the English School or St. Joseph's) because education standards there are considerably higher than in government schools. Others go to mission schools or church schools perhaps because of the religious background of their parents. But something like 27,000[4] (or over 78% of those in non-government schools) would have enrolled in government schools if there had been room for them.

The youngsters who have swarmed into the newly-opened private schools are the children of parents who either could not contrive to have them admitted to government schools or who did not dispose of enough money (and influence) to send them to the few prestigious private institutions.

Among the factors contributing to the rapid and dramatic growth of private schools in Addis Ababa, the following may be noted:-

(a) *The gap between the increase in school enrollment and the expansion of facilities in government schools.*

Expansion of facilities has not kept pace with the increase in the number of children seeking education. In 1955 there were 40 government schools in the capital with 669 classrooms and 29,908 students.[5] Five years later, in 1960, there were 58 government schools with 1179 classrooms and 58,359 students.[6] It is

interesting to note that while the number of schools increased by 45% and the number of classrooms by 75%, enrollment went up by 95%.

(b) *Awareness among the public of the importance of education.*

There is more demand for schooling to-day than ever before. As Prof. Mesfin puts it,

> "Within the towns themselves there are large segments of the population that are essentially rural in their comparative poverty. Since these poeple are more awakened without really being enlightened, they tend to be loud and assertive and recognize hardly any limitations that are self-imposed." [6]

Where admission is restricted to the more priviliged, the others fall back upon the private schools.

(c) *Cheap labour.*

More and more people reach grade twelve now than ever before. When these people are not successful in getting through the bottleneck of the ESLCE to enter the University, they go in search of employment. And, of course, when – but only when – no attractive job opportunities present themselves, they turn to teaching in the private schools as a last resort. "Teachers" of this kind are plentiful and cheap.

The fact that a private school requires little in the way of initial capital compared with other businesses has also contributed to the rapid growth of these enterprises. The 'buna beit', perhaps because it, too, requires little capital, is a characteristic feature of every Ethiopian town. But in Addis Ababa, it seems, opening and operating a 'buna beit' needs more effort and money than the young secondary school leaver can invest: it is easier to set up a private school.

(d) *Laissez-faire administration.*

Thanks to the absence of any controlling authority, the opening and operating of a private school in Addis Ababa has offered a way out of their problems for many secondary school leavers who have failed to obtain admission to the University and are unable to find employment in the city. The private schools have also been a source of income to people who work full-time elsewhere.

According to the law, of course, the Ministry of Education or its agency is responsible for the good education of every child.

> "The Minister of Education and Fine Arts (is authorized to) licence the operation on private educational institutions, establish minimum standards for such institutions and ensure that such standards are met..." [7]

The need for greater involvement on the part of the Ministry in the affairs of the non-governmental schools was expressed in the report of the 1956 Conference on Educational Administration:-

"The Conference in considering the rules and regulations governing government schools was concerned about the way in which these policies and practices affect the mission, private and church schools. The Conference recommends that the Ministry of Education takes steps to ensure that all non-government schools are brought in line with these policies and practices..." [8]

True, there is a Division of Non-Governmental schools in the Ministry of Education. Provision has been made in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Education for the Director-General of these non-governmental schools to "enforce the policies, rules and regulations governing... private schools (and to) assist in the development and improvement of the existing (private) educational institutions and control the establishment of such institutions to ensure their compliance with the aims and policies of the Ministry."[9]

The Office of Non-Governmental Schools published in 1962 a handbook in Amharic defining the duties and responsibilities of the owners of such private schools. There are letters written to provincial education officers expressing the "wishes" of the Ministry of Education about the operation of such private schools in the Empire.

Present-day practices in the capital, unfortunately, demonstrate that all these efforts have so far proved unavailing. Little, if anything, has been done to make the private schools meet what is expected of them.

Furthermore, the geographical awkwardness of Addis Ababa, the administrative inefficiency of the Addis Ababa Schools' Office, and the increasing pressure from parents for more schools have made it impossible for the Ministry of Education to give any leadership in helping these schools.

Despite the appallingly low educational standards prevalent in most of the private schools, the Ministry of Education encourages the opening of more of them. At the Conference of Hamle 1961, where representatives of some of these schools conferred with Ministry officials, it was reported that there were some 115 private schools in Addis Ababa, yet the Ministry representative indicated a desire to see still more opened. Thus, in Griffith's words,

"Just as a sponge can mop up extra water, so some countries (like Ethiopia) allow cheap and inefficient schools to mop up the extra demand which the government is unable to meet..." [10]

While one cannot deny the educational contribution made by some of these schools, it is not difficult to see that many of them fall very far short of fulfilling the basic requirements of ordinary schools. The problems these schools face are manifold, but this paper will limit itself to considering only some of the more tangible ones.

(a) *Plant.*

Among all the things that detract from the usefulness and dignity of the private schools in Addis Ababa, plant is a major one. The physical condition of

most of the private schools is very depressing. Shabby buildings, leaking roofs, dark classrooms, lack of water supply and absence of toilet facilities are some of the basic things that characterize these schools. The schools have no control over – and often no concern about – the 'tej' and 'tella' shops that operate next door.

Some directors, in interviews with the writer, have admitted that they deliberately worsen the condition of the buildings they have rented. Without security of tenure, any improvements they might make would serve as a pretext for an increase in rent or, if this were not paid, eviction. In these circumstances, the deterioration of the premises is the director's best guarantee against having to change the site of his school two or three times a year. The mushroom-like rapidity with which private schools appear and disappear is often accounted for by the difficulties of securing permanent premises.

Since enrollment is not easy to predict, directors err on the side of caution and rent only the most modest of buildings. Later, as enrollment increases and expansion becomes impossible within the existing facilities, the school is obliged to migrate to new premises. The largest compound that the writer saw during his school visits was only 3000 square meters in extent, and most of these schools have no playground of any kind.

Classroom space is another major problem. Some classrooms with an area of less than 20 square meters take 50 or 60 children. Seating facilities in most of the schools are deplorable. Shiferaw Ayele[11] recently reported that there were only five schools with acceptable desks. The rest had only benches or rough and ugly desks. One reason for using benches, as one honest director confessed, was to save space and make room for more children in the classroom.

(b) *Organisation and Administration.*

The organization of the private schools is not greatly different from that of the government schools. As these schools give national examinations at all three levels (six, eight and twelve) the academic organization of classes is in line with that of the government schools.

The major difference lies in the directors of the private schools being self-appointed. Functionally, the directors here are little ministers of education. Major decisions like the hiring and firing of teachers, determining teaching load and salaries, the admission of students and fixing of fees, the opening of more sections or more schools, or even their closing down are exclusively decided by directors.

There is a director and at least one assistant for each school. Some directors have their secretaries or unit leaders or senior teachers help them as assistants. In all cases, assistants work as office boys, their main duties being checking on the attendance, answering the telephone, ringing the bell and the like. There is no major authority delegated to them.

Apparently because of the financial nexus, the directors of the private schools have stronger ties and more relations with the public. They are, fur-

thermore, intimately associated with the details of their schools. There is less frustration and more execution of planned work. There is, nonetheless, a great degree of insecurity in the minds of these people.

The survival of the schools depends on the fees collected from the students, and income goes up and down with enrollment. The private schools have a very dubious future. Many of the people running them (sponsors or directors) have no definite plan. They have no guarantee of their future. Their teachers may abandon them because they have decided to open schools of their own. They may be forced to change their sites because the landlord has doubled the rent of the building or they may decide to reduce fees because another school has opened across the street at reduced fees.

(c) *School Fees.*

Needless to say, all students in the private schools pay fees. The money paid goes directly to the directors or sponsors of the schools who, in turn, are responsible for paying the rent of buildings and the salaries of teachers.

As can be seen from the table on page 25, there is no uniformity in the fees paid by students. Some schools charge as little as $1.00 per month for a child of grade one and $3.00 for a child of grade six, while others charge as much as $5.00 for a child of grade one and $8.00 for a child of grade six for the same period. There is no relation between the quality of education offered in these schools and the fees they charge their students.

Fees might be arbitrarily increased if, as a result of some of publicity, enrollment had gone up the previous year. There might be a reduction of fees, on the other hand, either because the school had encountered too much competition or perhaps because the public lost faith in it.

Changes in enrollment lead to fluctuations in income and to even greater fluctuations in profit. This leads to a sense of insecurity, and this is reflected in the pessimistic estimates of profit which owners make. However, in spite of all the other factors involved, it seems that the schools with the highest enrollments are the best off.

As was indicated earlier, securing accurate information about expenses on salaries of teachers, rent of buildings and the like was found ticklish. Schools that are close to the University have the advantage of employing University students on a part-time basis and this contributes to their financial well being.

(d) *The Teaching Staff.*

Teachers are very young. The average age is around 22 years. The academic standard of the teachers, including the directors, ranges between 5 and 12 years of schooling. As was stated before, teachers seek employment in such schools when conditions of work are not favorable in other fields.

The experience of the teachers in these private schools as compared to all

other schools is very short. To the question "How many years have you taught?", eighteen (or almost one-third of the sixty teachers that answered the question) said that they had taught for less than one year, twenty-eight of them said between one and two years and fourteen said between two and three years. There is no fixed salary scale. The majority of the teachers have a starting salary between $25.00 and $80 a month. Eleven teachers said they had got an increment of $5.00 in the period of two to three years of employment.

Thirty-six of the sixty teachers (60%) attend evening classes. Asked whether they would be interested in following a summer course with some allowances given, 55 of the 60 teachers (or over 90%) answered positively. The average teaching load these teachers carry is about the same as those teaching in the Ministry of Education (30-35 periods of 40 minutes a week).

Teachers in these schools have no desire to stay long because, if they did, their future would be jeopardized. They have no tenure, no contract, no regular salary increment, no guarantee of their monthly salary, no means for educational improvement, and no due attention.

Some teachers have left such schools either because they were not fully paid or were denied what was their due. One hundred percent of the teachers who answered the question indicated that they had stayed for less than 3 years.

Such are some of the observations made about the private schools in Addis Ababa. This tremendous growth of the private schools in the city and their anomalous situation demand immediate action. There is a need for the Government's involvement (either through the Municipality or the Addis Ababa Schools' Office) in giving leadership both to the parents of children in these schools and the owners of the schools in the matter of acquiring permanent sites. Buildings should be rented on a contract basis for at least twenty-five years. Instructional facilities should have the minimum requirements which are set for the government schools. A fair control should be introduced to check standards.

Some teachers in these private schools who have grades 11 or 12 qualifications and earn only $30.00 to $50.00 could be encouraged to study a little more. The Ministry of Education should take the lead in controlling the quality of teachers and in giving in-service training to the administrative and teaching staff of such schools. Promising teachers in these schools could be given opportunities to join the T.T.I's or other vocational schools to further their education.

It would seem necessary that the Ministry of Education assign at least one highly qualified teacher from the government schools to each of these private schools to do liaison work, to supervise instruction, and to help administer them. Such teachers should have a status similar to supervisors in the government schools.

The duties of these supervisors could be:-

(a) to interpret Ministry policies;
(b) to improve standards at least to some acceptable norm;
(c) to report on the situation to the Addis Ababa Schools Office with a view to further improvement;

(d) to motivate parents and pressure groups, including foreign agencies, to give more support to such schools (money, land, books, etc.);

(e) to inspire and help the staff of these schools to gain better academic and professional qualifications.

If Government through such an organized body does not give service to such individually-owned private schools, it would seem that it is making an unfair charge to such parents who pay both educational tax and school fees when the return these parents get is comparatively very poor.

APPENDIX I

Enrollment of Students of Some Representative Schools

No.	Schools	Enrollment per Grade								Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1	Bitwoded Wolde Gabriel	130	90	76	61	62	56	30	32	537
2	Africa Union	354	161	108	116	68	72	29	40	948
3	Dejach Hailu Tesfaye	249	91	38	23	7	4	–	–	412
4	Berhan Lenänte	168	50	50	22	13	14	–	–	317
5	John F. Kennedy	50	40	27	40	36	27	30	32	282
6	Kulubi Gabriel	58	13	16	16	5	–	–	–	108
7	Ras Mesfin	132	130	110	52	45	64	24	33	590
8	Berhane Ethiopia	69	37	31	28	30	42	35	53	325
9	Menelik I	38	17	21	16	9	18	4	11	132
10	Agazian	261	134	995	58	88	114	48	116	942
11	Kesate Berhan	26	15	16	17	7	10	–	–	91
12	Hebre Beheir	52	45	41	22	23	21	–	–	204
13	Yewquet Minch	187	80	81	75	51	36	–	–	510
14	Felegue Yordanos	229	149	119	141	13	14	–	–	665
15	Atse Naod	111	61	59	47	52	89	61	66	546
16	Atse Theodros	180	74	66	40	41	43	–	–	444
17	Ras Mulugeta	168	26	60	44	33	17	–	–	348
18	Misraq Africa	42	25	16	20	22	29	29	70	253
19	Dejach Bekele Woya	86	135	116	116	71	107	–	–	631
20	Yewquet Ber Mekfetha	117	99	50	45	37	38	–	–	386
21	Yenigat Kokeb	25	26	13	22	14	25	11	39	175
22	Firie Hiot	290	179	215	159	151	129	70	79	1272
23	Ras Abebe	342	112	89	84	85	83	61	42	898
24	Felegue Berhan	107	58	40	37	25	17	–	–	284
25	Colonel Robinson	27	35	20	13	13	20	18	5	151

APPENDIX II

Sample of Fees of Some Representative Schools per Grade per Month

S. No.	School	Rate Per Grade Per Month							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Bitwoded Wolde Gabriel	$4	5	5	6	7	8	9	10
2	Africa Union	$3	3	4	4	5	6	8	8
3	Dejach Hailu Tesfaye	$2	2	3	4	4	6	–	–
4	Berhan Lenante	$1.50	2	3	3	4	4	–	–
5	John F. Kennedy	$4	4	5	6	7	8	9	11
6	Kulubi Gabriel	$2	2.50	2.75	4	–	–	–	–
7	Ras Mesfin	$3	3	4	4	5	6	7	8
8	Berhane Ethiopia	$5	5	6	6	7	8	9	10
9	Menelik I	$3.50	4	4.50	5	6	7	8	10
10	Agazian	$3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	Hebre Beheir	$1	1.50	2	2	2.50	3	–	–
12	Kesate Berhan	$1	1.50	2	2.50	3	4	–	–
13	Yewquet Minch	$1	1.50	2	2.50	3	4	–	–
14	Felegue Yordanos	$1	1.25	1.50	2	2.50	3	–	–
15	Atse Naod	$4	4	5	5	6	7	8	10
16	Atse Theodros	$3	3.50	4	4.50	5	6	–	–
17	Ras Mulugeta	$1.50	2	2.50	3	3.50	4	–	–
18	Misraq Africa	$3	3	3.50	3.50	5	6	7	9
19	Dejach Bekele Woya	$2	2.50	3	3.50	4	4	–	–
20	Yewquet Ber Mekfecha	$1.75	1.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	3	–	–
21	Yenigat Kokeb	$3	3	4	4	6	6	7	8
22	Firie Hiot	$3.35	3.75	4	5	6	7	8.50	10
23	Ras Abebe	$1.50	3	4	4	4.50	5	7	7
24	Felegue Berhan	$1.25	2	2	3	3	4	–	–
25	Colonel Robinson	$5	5	5	5	6	6	10	10

APPENDIX III

Sample of Enrollment and Fee per Child per Month

School A

Grade	Enrollment	Section	Fee	Total $
1	125	4	$ 5	500.00
2	70	2	$ 5	350.00
3	50	1	$ 6	300.00
4	40	1	$ 6	240.00
5	50	1	$ 7	350.00
6	90	2	$ 8	720.00
7	30	1	$ 9	270.00
8	130	3	$ 10	1300.00
			Gross Total Monthly Income	$ 4030.00

School B

Grade	Enrollment	Section	Fee	Total $
1	80	2	$ 4	320.00
2	20	1	$ 5	100.00
3	20	1	$ 5	100.00
4	20	1	$ 6	120.00
5	20	1	$ 7	140.00
6	40	1	$ 8	320.00
7	20	1	$ 9	180.00
8	20	1	$ 10	200.00
	Commercial.....			1006.00
	Gross Total Monthly Income			2486.00

School C

Grade	Enrollment	Section	Fee	Total $
1	320	5	$ 3.35	$1072.00
2	198	5	$ 3.75	742.50
3	154	4	$ 4.00	616.00
4	226	5	$ 5.00	1130.00
5	153	4	$ 6.00	918.00
6	229	4	$ 7.00	1603.00
7	111	2	$ 8.00	888.00
8	135	3	$ 10.00	1350.00
	Gross Total Monthly Income			$ 8319.50

School D

Grade	Enrollment	Section	Fee	Total $
1	351	6	$1.50	526.50
2	147	3	3.00	441.00
3	76	2	4.00	304.00
4	127	2	4.00	508.00
5	92	2	4.50	414.00
6	228	5	5.00	1140.00
7	66	1	7.00	462.00
8	133	3	7.00	931.00
	Gross Total Monthly Income			$ 4726.50

FOOTNOTES

1. A paper prepared in advance for the Interdisciplinary Seminar of the Faculties of Arts and Education, Haile Selassie I University, 1970.
2. Ministry of Education and and Fine Arts, *School Census for Ethiopia Part I* (Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C.), pp. 13, 16.
3. Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. *Rules and Regulations Governing Private Schools* (Addis Ababa, 1962), p. 1.
4. Addis Ababa Schools' Office, *Annual Statistics of the Addis Ababa Schools, (Addis Ababa;* Guenbot 11, 1962), pp. 9-13.
5. Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *School Census for Ethiopia.* (Addis Ababa, 1955), pp. 8, 12, 14.
6. Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, op. cit. pp. 13-15.
7. Mesfin Wolde Mariam, "The Rural-Urban Split in Ethiopia", *Dialogue, II,* 1 (1969), p. 13.
8. Imperial Ethiopian Government, *Negarit Gazeta* 25th year, No. 23 (Addis Ababa, 20th, Hamle, 1958), p. 137.
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10. V.L. Griffiths, *Educational Planning,* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 105-6.
11. Shiferaw Ayele, *Report on Non-Government Schools in Addis Ababa,* Amharic (Addis Ababa, 1961 E.C.), p. 1.