A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON THE NEW TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL (TVET) PROGRAM AND ITS ACTORS: THE ETHIOPIAN CASE

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Abstract- The Ethiopian Ministry of Education has devised a national TVET program strategy in 2009. The aim was to create a competent, motivated, adaptable, and innovative workforce mainly to unearth the roots of poverty and prosper social and economic development in the country. To that effect, the national TVET program has been launched across the country to train students who score a failing result in the grade 10 National Examination. The program was organized first on year based certification and later on competence based certification. The certification comprises the possession and application of a set of skills needed in the immediate market of the nation by way of being a productive and adaptive entrepreneur, or an employee, or self employed professional. On the journey to these platforms, new emerging discourses are on the rise. This research attempts to critically demystifying these emerging social realities of the national TVET program. To that end, analysis of memos, graffiti, conversations, and documents, structured and unstructured interviews with practitioners of TVET program, students of TVET program and hiring companies are conducted. The findings of the study show that the MoE policy on the national TVET program and its practitioners do not seem to be in the same move. A lot of diverging gaps need to be bridged for the realization of the Ethiopians industry renaissance.

Key words- Critical discourse analysis, Technical and vocational and educational Training (TVET)

I. INTRODUCTION

In Ethiopia, modern technical and vocational education was started in 1942. Because of the less attention given to the area, its contributions have not been significantly felt. TVET has been the most neglected program for so long (Daddi 2014) After the downfall of the “Derg” government, EPDRF endorsed the national TVET strategy in 2009. Since then the program has embraced massive trainees to address the country’s vocational and technical demand. Still however, the TVET program lacks the relevance and capacity to the work place reality. This study attempts to root out the emerging and existing realities via critical discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is the analysis of language as it is used to construct activities perspectives and identities (Gee, 1999 and Calero, 2005). When we speak or write we do not merely produce words one after the other. That is we always take a particular perspective on what the “world” is like. Similarly, we negotiate our identity here and now (Gee, 1999). Activities are the specific social acts in which the participants are engaging in different social context (Gee, 1999 and Middleton, 1997). Critical discourse analysis, taking a step further, is a means to explore the socially constructed realities of abuse, dominance, inequalities and resistance in a given context. According to Fairclough (1997), for a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a text/discourse can be analyzed on the basis of how a society constructs/represents those social realities.

II. POWER AND DISCOURSE

One of the critical discourse concerns is power as it is used to maintain or enact dominance of any kind in a given social context. The effects could also be producing or reproducing social and/or political dominance on a given society. Wodak (2002: 11), one of the leading critical discourse analysis theorists, also takes power as “about relations of power and particularly about the effects of power in social structure.” To this end, language use or discourse plays an essential role in indexing and imposing power. Critical discourse analysis can decipher, de-stabilize, expose or root out from the daily social interaction because CDA sees “language as social practice”(Wodak, 2002), and it considers the context of language use to be crucial (Wodak, 2002):” CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of ‘social practice’. Discourse as social practice therefore manifests among other things a power relationship that exists between particular social events. Thus, “critical discourse analysis” as Krings (Krings et al., 1998, 808) argues, is the exploration of the link between power and dominance in the attempt to sustain, produce and reproduce the social and political status quo. It is also an essential tool to unmask the existing social realities enacted through power.

Research questions
The following are the research questions the study attempts to answer.
How does the society construct TVET program?
How do students construct being TVET trainees?
How do teachers construct being a trainer in the TVET program?
How do employers construct TVET trainees?
III. DATA SOURCES

I draw on three types of data largely collected from three private higher institutions and one public institution in Addis Ababa, the capital. The emerging and existing discourses of the TVET program from the trainers, trainees, and employees are drawn through interview observation, and unstructured discussion to shed light on my prior understandings and insights. Memos, the TVET policy, documents, circulars and graffiti’s are analyzed using grounded theory. The linguistic indicators such as words, phrases are cautiously used to unpack power - dominance relationship in the existing situation. The emerging, and existing discourses are generalized as students’ employers’ and trainers’ constructs.

IV. THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS

Needless to say, media have a lot to do with enacting social reality. Among many other resources that define the social reality base of a group or an institution, access to or control over public media and communication is an important “symbolic” resource, as is the case for knowledge and information (Van Dijk 1996). Specifically, media enact social reality discourses that dictate or challenge the ideology, perception and understanding of the public. As Van Dijk (1993) put it, media play a significant role in the production and reproduction of social reality. Needless to say, TVET program deserves the public media for its mainstreaming. However, the national TV as well as the radio has had little or no coverage of TVET program as it is a new discourse in the country’s educational academia. Addis Zemen, one of the national Newspapers, has on its pages some successful institutions with their successful stories of their trainees rarely. This is done only when the newspaper reporters or editors are informed informally.

TVET program has been on the active move for more than five years. People who have involving teen age children have better information than those who have not. Their information, however, is often patternless or unorganized. The following vintage can substantiate the premise.

It is a training given to students who failed grade 10. Those who were not able to pass to the university preparatory class are made to join the TVET schools (Unstructured interview).

It is a technical and vocational training for those who can’t join university.
Only those students who can’t join the university preparatory class are assigned in the vocational training. (Unstructured interview)

Two of my sons failed the national exam and now they are in the TVET program. We have tried all out best for them to succeed…. I am poor and …(Attendee’s comment in a local meeting)
To all TVET institutions
It is strictly forbidden to register students before the cut off is officially announced (Circular from Ministry of Education)

None of the subjects knew or said that the vocational training is open to those who are interested irrespective of their grade 10 National exam result. Their construct is joining TVET program requires students to fail in the grade 10 National Examination. The program is also equated with failure because the circular from the Ministry of Education warns the institutions to wait until the failing scores are officially announced.

V. TRAINERS’ CONSTRUCTS

To begin with, many trainers are complaining about over-engagement. Their numbers are very few as compared to the number of trainees. No higher education institution now graduates TVET trainers. Adama Science and Technology University graduated two batches and quit for reasons unclear. Only those two batches of graduates are stretching over the country.
The training hours are very unbearable. The program is a direct copy of German TVET program and has not been contextualized. The teaching load along with its meagre income frustrates the trainers.

Intensification refers to the aspects of over-stretching somebody beyond what that person is intellectually, emotionally, and socially capable of delivering (Ballet et al 2006, 211). This over engagement and over utilization manifests in the trainers social and professional reality. They have less or no time for socialization, such as time for family, peer groups, religious affiliations. They are separated from the family and community. I quote from what is revealed by one of my respondents:

Teaching in the TVET program now is very difficult. You need to prepare TTLM (Teaching Training Learning Manual), a progressive chart to all the trainees you train, you need to in the compound for more than 8 hours a day without any extra payment. The trainees are not motivating…(Staff from a public TVET college).

….it is damaging my social and family life. Let me give you more cases. Since I am engaged in all day in training I have little time to chat with my kids.(Staff from Private TVET College).
As argued by Ballet et al (2006, 218), heavy work load is highly related with negative feelings of stress, insecurity, and guilt. Reluctance and favoritism are other characteristic features of the trend. Graffitis in the rest rooms justify the situation.
No one can take my C at the end even if I die like X (A trainee called X died at the beginning of the training but the trainer submitted a C result which means competent at the end of the training)

Females it is not you but your …that is competent (Trainees are accused of favoring female trainees)

Training, trainees management, TTLM preparation, examination administration and grade processing have increasingly over tasked the trainers. They have become exhaustively engaged in routines rather than creative and intellectual engagements.

“Peripheralization” is another characteristics of the trend. It refers to the silent pushing away of the TVET trainers from engaging them in decision making process. Such practices manifest in the following ways. Silencing, sidestepping, and under-crediting the efforts of the trainers are some to name a few.

A good case in point is the exclusion of these TVET trainers from being members of committees, task forces, meetings, workshops that have fringe benefits of any kind. Taking the autonomy and traditional responsibilities from the trainers have caused a lot of stress in their professional endeavor. The consequence might be stated as follows:

The lack of participation in decision making process has emerged as a critical factor in maintaining worker morale, motivation, enthusiasm, self-esteem, and overall job satisfaction… (Ballet et al 2006, 215).

Another characteristics of trainers reality is de-skilling. It refers to the process of losing, as well as not getting more of, one’s professional knowledge, skills and attitudes. The training module is not holistic. Trainers are assigned based on the need not on their specialization and interest. They (trainers) are no longer given credits for being skilled at all, as the very definition of what counts as a skill is further altered to include only that which is technical and based on a process ‘which places emphasis on performance, monitoring and subject-centered instructions’ (Apple & Jungck 1996, 26).

A good case in point is that the TVET program requires trainers to take COC (Certificate of Competence) assessment to train. In the same way the trainees are required to sit for the same COC assessment to get the certification of the level they are trained. Both the trainers with BA, MA, and even medical doctors and their trainees usually queue on the same line at the center to sit for the assessment. They need to go in the same procedure.

In 20 newspapers of job adverts, none of the employers used the right nomenclature of the TVET credentials. The nomenclatures such as “Diploma” or “10+1, 10+2, 10+3, 10+4” existed some five years ago. The implication of which is that the hiring companies need either those who were trained before or do not want to hire the new TVET graduates. Now those TVET trainees are awarded with Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV certification. The table shows only two or less than 1% of the companies gave recognition to the “Level” nomenclature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>Relevant experience in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary/cashier</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time keeper</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Commercial arm</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitor</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>TVET Diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrician</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>TVET Diploma</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchaser</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone operator</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multipurpose Tech.</td>
<td>10-2</td>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life savor</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spa Attendant</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General mechanics</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shift Leader</td>
<td>10-3</td>
<td>Electricity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store Keeper</td>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Supply management</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior mechanic</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Automechanic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptionist</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanic I</td>
<td>10-3 or Level 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Secretary</td>
<td>10-3 or Level 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salesman</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Teller</td>
<td>Diploma or Level 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel manager</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sheff</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
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Employees constructs
The employers’ reality is reflected in different contexts. They never hire from employees from TVET and for that they have been consistently accused of not hiring the workforce from TVET. The following are some of their reasons.

The work force from the TVET program are incapable, unfit, and far from work discipline. (Production Manager)

They are teenagers who have no interest even to learn something. (A secretary).

Some of the employers that have a high demand of technical work force announce the vacancy announcement but they hired no one. The following table justifies the premise.
Some HRM officers of different companies often complain about the trainees' efficiency when the students are sent for a one month internship. One Shift manager said the following.

The trainees cannot do anything. They are children and do not understand what a job is. They also do nothing and cannot be given a responsibility except letting them see things or do what they are not trained for.

Many companies do not want them in their offices or workshops. Some of them even say “no” for internship with lame excuses. When they are asked why one of the coordinator said the following.

Quite often we encourage them have the paper at the end of their term without coming to the office regularly just because they add nothing but problems to our working environment.

Trainees construct

The trainees are assigned to the TVET program as soon as the Ministry of Education announces the cut off score for university preparatory program. Thus those who failed to score above the cut off score will automatically join the TVET program. As a result, the students who come to the TVET program have little or no orientation. Most of them come ill prepared or under prepared. This trend has the following consequences.

The trainees have no interest at all. There is even no one trainee with a relative interest, motivation, and excitement …. (Staff from public TVET college)

Such trainer-trainee relationship “induce feelings of guilt in trainers…the technical and instrumental nature of the relationship with the trainees lacks the ‘pedagogic’ qualities and makes trainers feel like they are not doing justice to students’ needs”(Hargreaves 1994 cited in Ballet et al 2006, 214).

TVET is a training given to students who are not able to join the preparatory class because their score is less than the cut off in their grade 10 national examination. They are assigned because of their poor results.

Significant number of these students join the private institutions and get the training of their choices. Almost all of them are very much unprepared for vocational and technical training. Their graffitiis, and their discussions are full of fun. They name each other by the technical tools they are introduced. They joined the TVET program totally unoriented and uninformed. Some of them are overwhelmed by the psychology of failure. Because of which they were consistently constructing excuses for their being in the TVET program. Two of the trainees said the following.

I was sick during the day of the exam and was not able to finish all the questions. All my friends are in the preparatory class.

I studied in regions so I was not properly helped. Many of the classes were not covered because there were no teachers. …

They totally attribute their failure to them and to the program. Some trainers attribute the trainees’ failure to the program. They describe the trainees as silent, very passive in the class, and detached from training modules physically and emotionally. A trainer said the following.

The trainees listen to me with no interest. Some of them even play games in their mobile phones. Some of them talk to each other with their eyes on me. Many of them come without school materials. They ask a pen from other trainees even from me. Two of the trainees said the following.

Nothing is more boring for me than coming to class. It is because I do not want to disappoint my mother that I regularly go to class.

I never imagined I would be here now. Unless I go out of Ethiopia, I have nothing to do except coming here. …

VI. SUMMARY

The analysis has shown that the major actors namely the trainers, trainees and employees have resisted the TVET program. The power dominance relationship is vividly seen. The government, being very exclusionist has used its power to dominate the actors and do what it wants them to do.

The major consequence is resistant. Trainees resist the program by rebelling. They do not play their role as desired. The trainers are overwhelmed by complaints of many kind. As a result they produce inefficient work force to the industry. The employers advertise the vacant position but hire no one from the TVET program. The program is serving no one though the government keeps budgeting.

REFERENCES


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