

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA: THE CASE STUDY OF FOUR PROFESSIONS

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ABSTRACT: This study bases its discussion on the assumption that professionals today face challenges related to inadequate and unsatisfactory professional training to render up-to-date and competent services in their field. This study shows that a major factor that contributes to this problem is the limited access to and participation in formal and non-formal continuing professional education (CPE) programs. In view of the dynamic nature of professions, a continuous process of professionalization through CPE is becoming mandatory. The study evaluates some possible courses of action that could be taken to improve the provision and coordination of CPE.

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive and dynamic changes in technology and society brought about new trends and patterns of work within the professions that affect the most economic procedures of effecting professional practices. Moreover, members of society claim that professionals demonstrate incompetence, inattention and lack of feeling to their clients due to various challenges and constraints. In view of this, professionals need to raise their level of competence through continuing professional education (CPE) in order to up-date and up-grade their professional practices. This implies that members of the professions must individually and collectively accept the obligation to continue to learn both due to the allegations against them as well as the dynamism of the professions.

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The importance of CPE for social, economic and cultural development of Ethiopia is recognized by the government, the professions and the providing bodies of this program. This study has been prompted by the potential significance of CPE in Ethiopia. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the provision and organization of CPE in four selected professions—teaching, educational leadership, agriculture, and engineering—with special emphasis on the methods used and delivery systems employed.

To this end, the study focuses on identifying (i) the participants of CPE and their educational needs, (ii) the type of extant opportunities for CPE, the identity of providers, and the delivery mechanisms employed, and (iii) the major problems faced by providers and participants. These issues form the basis for the presentation and analysis of data in the last section of the paper. The next part of the paper deals with conceptual and methodological issues underlying the empirical analysis.

THE CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Many writers have given different shades of meanings to the concept of a profession. One school of thought defined professions based on some trait identified as uniquely belonging to professions. Various traits were stressed based on the different characteristics of different professions and the distinct traits of the field being considered. For instance Miller (1995) notes that the defining "characteristic of a profession is generally assumed to be access to specialized and clearly defined expertise". To Collins (1990: 18-19) professions are "socially idealized occupations organized as closed-association communities".

An important weakness of this definition is its characterization of professions as "closed-association communities". This definition is untenable in view of the inherent dynamism of professions. It is noted by these authors that professions are inherently dynamic, and this dynamic

nature of permits an open system of thought based on discovery, growth and practices (Houle 1980, Jarvis 1983). This led many authors to a search for a better set of defining characteristics to describe 'a profession' in a dynamic context.

To this end, these authors focus on the conditions for the creation of professions—i.e. for the professionalization of occupations. Engles (1973) and Millerson (1973) successfully identified some essential characteristics required for successful professionalization under dynamic conditions. These factors include (i) the ability to acquire a definable basis of knowledge and practice to crystallize the activities composing the occupational task, (ii) development of self-evaluation techniques by emerging professionals, and (iii) recognition of the occupation as a profession by those outside the occupation. These definition and the associated criteria, Millerson argues, provide education a place as the central factor in the process.

Desta (1980) identified some characteristics of the professions in an Ethiopian context. These characteristics include the ability to acquire and understand general background knowledge and skills, mastery of specialized area of study, recognition of and involvement in community problems, application of knowledge and skills for human services, and organized and collective practice and performance. Desta's list of characteristics represents some of the common elements of professions and provide the initial base for an examination of the concept. However, she seems to overlook the dynamic element of professionalization, and tends to see professions only in terms of "prestige, degree of esteem, status, and level of income" (Desta 1980: 1). As we will discuss next, such outlooks manifest one of the major challenges of the professions.

Abott (1988: 17) claims that "the evolution of individual professions does not explicitly depend on that of others" and hence "professionalization can be treated case by case". Nevertheless, educational institutions, hence academic professions, are recognized as

being central to the development of other professions. Referring to what he calls the "key academic professions" Perkin (1973, cited in Altbach 1977: 9) asserts that "[U]niversity teaching has become not merely a profession but the profession towards which all the rest must look for the supply of new recruits and of new ideas on which the future of new society depends".

The professions are exposed to a number of challenges related to (i) dogmatic beliefs and values on the part of the professionals who resist and are reluctant to change, and (ii) obsolescence of professional practices, that is, lack of up-to-date knowledge and skills to cope with technological and societal demands. With particular reference to educational institutions, the academic professions have experienced much change and disruption in the last three decades as a result of the expansion of higher education. As universities became more central institutions, they began to be exposed to a number of challenges and conflicts. The public and government demanded accountability; students demanded relevance and the society charged and put pressure on higher education institutes to serve them as means of solving their social ills.

Due to this, universities faced disruptions ranging from the student turmoil of the 1960's to the massive societal demands for curriculum and other reform in universities and colleges (Altbach 1987). In Ethiopia, students in the early 1970's demanded for curriculum reform and abolition of socioeconomic injustice related to the distribution of land and resources fairly to the larger sector of society. Gradually, the University in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE) made some attempt to revise and reorganize its curriculum and objectives. With particular reference to the promotion of professional education, one of the major objectives of higher education was recognized to be "to upgrade and up-date the general knowledge and professional skills of adults through continuing education" (Ministry of Education 1977: 38-40).

This study, therefore, bases its discussion and interpretation on the assumption that professionals today face a number of challenges related to inadequate and unsatisfactory professional preparations to render up-to-date and competent services in their field of specialization. The problems that are faced in Ethiopia in particular are examined and possible solutions reviewed in the following sections.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Methodology and Source of Data

This study explores the provision and organization of CPE in four selected professions, namely, teaching, educational leadership, agriculture, and engineering. The study is restricted to these professions due to limits set by manageability. The choice of professions is based on an initial assessment which proved that these professions represent both service and productive professions. Attention is given in the analysis to common elements related to educational needs, existing educational provision, and the problems in these two aspects. Such comparative analysis of similar and common problems has been supported by the documented data. As observed by Houle (1980), professions are markedly similar in their approaches to continuing education programs. Accordingly, whether we are talking to the pedagogist, the engineer, the educational leader or the agriculturalist, the basic problems of each profession tend to be the same.

The case study approach is adopted based on a descriptive analysis of existing educational provisions and primary data collected from a questionnaire and interviews. The case study approach is chosen for this survey since it facilitates identification and analysis of relevant data and variables (such as needs, methods and constraints to CPE) as opposed to the specific properties of each profession under study. Thus, the method has provided a way of organizing and analyzing data which allows the unitary nature of the object of inquiry to remain intact. It has also

enabled the researcher to use a variety of techniques and sources of data collection.

The questionnaire has been administered on 134 lecturers from four selected higher education institutes, namely, Faculty of Education (AAU), Faculty of Technology (AAU), Bahir Dar Teacher's College (AAU), and Ambo Agricultural College. The data collection is based on selective and purposive sampling representing the four professions in the study. Before the actual field study, the designed questionnaire is refined on a pilot study conducted in two faculties (Faculty of Education and Faculty of Technology) in AAU. Structured interviews were conducted with the Dean of Continuing Education and department heads in AAU, and the dean of Ambo Agricultural College.

Profile of Selected Professional Institutes

Education. Training teachers and directors for schools was one of the earliest priorities when the University College of Addis Ababa was established in 1952. In 1962, the Faculty of Education was instituted to coordinate these programs effectively. Since then, the Faculty has played a significant role in the training of teachers, school administrators, supervisors, and librarians in various degree and diploma programs. At present, Faculty of Education has four departments—Departments of Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Administration, Educational psychology, and Business Education. The other providers of continuing education are Bahir Dar Teacher's College and Kotebe Teacher-Training College. These two colleges undertake degree and diploma programs of teacher education under various departments and disciplines.

Engineering. The College of Technology was established in 1952. At present, the Faculty of Technology has expanded its educational provisions and is giving training under six instructional departments—Civil, Electrical, Mechanical, and Chemical Engineering, and Architecture and Town Planning. The Faculty of Technology uses a

selective system of admission in its degree program in selecting students from those who have successfully completed a related freshman program.

Agriculture. Alemaya College of Agriculture was established at its present campus in Alemaya, Harrar region in 1956. The college has grown to become the only agricultural university in the country. At present, there are two other agricultural colleges in the country—Awasa Agricultural College and Ambo Agricultural College—which dominantly offer various diploma programs for middle level manpower development in agriculture.

Discussion of Empirical Results

As indicated in the introduction, this study has attempted to explore and describe the formal and non-formal aspects of CPE provision and participation. This section, therefore, focuses on the presentation and analysis of the data.

The need for CPE. All concerned agencies and clients agree that, apart from the professional competence and economic security it grants to the individual, CPE is useful for promoting socioeconomic and cultural development of the Ethiopian nation at large. This indicates the presence of a positive relation between the needs of participants and the goal of CPE (see Table 1).

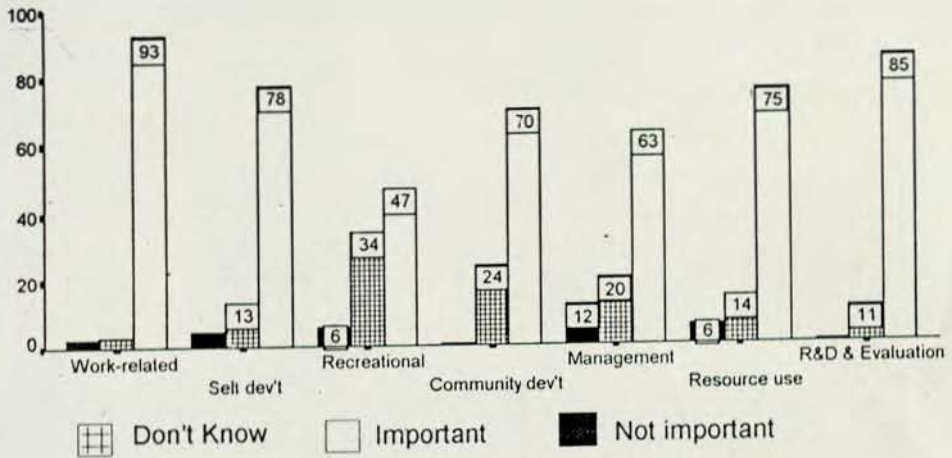
As shown in the table, nearly three-fifth of the percentage score reflect respondents desire for CPE either to enhance their personal and professional competence or to enable them to contribute to community services (see categories A, B & D). The rest two-fifths of the score is in favor of their needs for status promotion and external expectation (categories C & E).

Table 1. Comparison of Reasons for Participation

Reasons	Percent	
A. Desire for Professional Enhancement	36.7	
Specialized subject matter		12.6
New techniques and methods		13.2
General knowledge		12.7
B. Desire for Social Service	11.2	
Community service		11.2
C. Desire for Status and Economic Security	31.1	
Status and promotion		11.0
Additional salary		9.8
Diploma and degree		9.3
D. Desire to Know	10.1	
Learning for its own sake		10.1
E. External Expectations	9.9	
To comply (to meet) demands		9.9

Respondents were also asked to express their views on the educational activities. The overall pattern of responses in Figure 1 reveals that the items involved include common professional activities which are relevant for social services and development. The majority of the professionals are more interested in work-oriented, pedagogical, managerial and community-oriented courses.

Figure 1. Comparison of Educational Activities (percent)



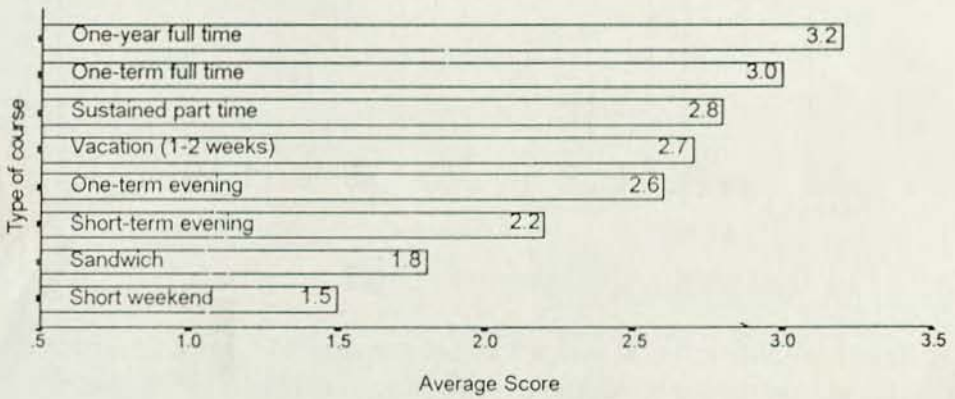
Based on this data, attempt has been made to compare educational needs of participants with the existing curriculum. It seems that professionals' strong desire for CPE for personal, social and professional enhancement correspond with their preference for educational activities related to their work, self-development, and community development. However, the existing curriculum does not seem to include most of the preferred educational activities except the work-related ones.

Forms of courses. Linked with the educational activities presented previously, the professionals in the sample were asked to rate their preference for different courses on a five-point scale. The findings support the hypothesis that participants of CPE prefer courses of longer duration since they lead to some form of qualification. As shown in Figure 2, the overall pattern of replies of all respondents reveals a strong preference on the part of all professional groups for long- and intermediate-term full-time courses.

Courses with a shorter duration were not highly rated by most professionals in the sample. A major reason for low opinion of shorter

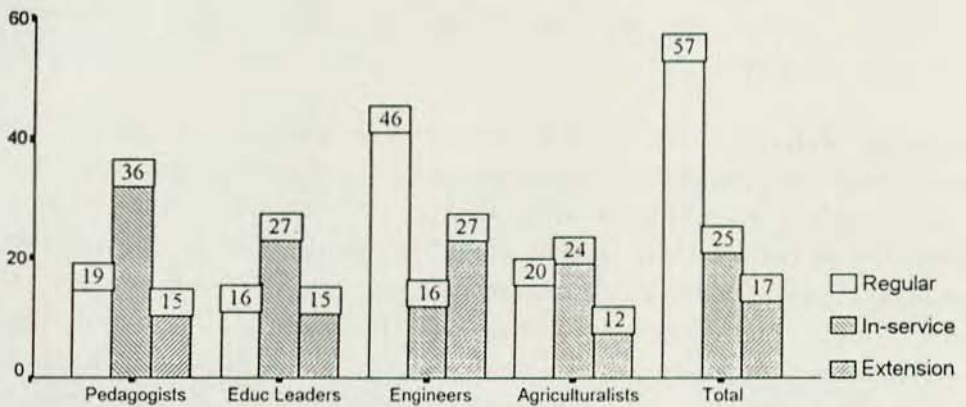
courses by participants seem to be lack of incentives in the form of qualifications and the benefits related to qualifications. Moreover, there is inadequate information on and experience of such courses.

Figure 2. Preference for Types of Courses



Program type. In connection with the forms of courses reported earlier, the professionals in the sample were asked about the type of program they preferred. Their choices are presented graphically in Figure 3. Formal (regular) programs of CPE undertaken on secondment are strongly favored by 67.4% of the respondents. This program directly relates with the strong preference of participants for full-time courses. In-service programs of CPE pursued during the summer or Easter vacations are the second-best choice in terms of participants favoring them (26.3 percent), and extension programs are the least favored (17.3 percent). The preference for the extension program corresponds with support for one-term evening courses.

Figure 3. Type of Programme Preferred by Profession (percent)



There are some variations in preference discernible when we disaggregate the data by profession. The variations in preference of different types of programs tend to be greatly influenced by physiological and social factors related to the age, family responsibility and job location of each professional group.

Table 2. Preference for Mode of Delivery by Profession (percentage of respondents showing preference)

Mode of Delivery	Teaching	Pedagogy	Engineering	Agriculture	Total
Self-directed	40.6	70.6	32.4	36.4	50.8
Attending Courses	29.3	38.2	20.6	39.4	31.9
On-the-job training	36.4	58.8	58.8	45.5	49.9
Correspondence	48.5	52.9	70.6	51.5	55.9

One of the major constraints to CPE participation is the lack of flexible calendar in the existing programs. A possible solution to this is organizing new types of learning modules which offer educational opportunities to those who are unable to attend the fixed yearly courses. In a modular approach, a course can be divided into several components each of which can be assigned one or more credit points depending on the amount of work involved. Linked with modular courses, there is the

need to develop a system of credit transfer. This can be useful to participants to validate courses taken at an earlier time in another department of the same institute or/and to transfer credit from one institute to the other.

Mode of delivery. The survey included questions regarding the participants' experience and preference for a set of methods of learning. Table 3 displays the similarity and variation between the experience and preference of respondents in educational methods. The findings show that even though 75.4% of all respondents are familiar with the lecture method, only 23.1% show preference for it. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of the respondents have strongly favored demonstration and simulation and practical sessions in spite of the small experience with these methods.

Table 3. Experience and Preference for Learning Methods
(percent of respondents)

Method of Learning	Experience	Preference
Lecture	75.4	23.1
Demonstration and simulation	23.2	58.5
Practical sessions	25.6	57.4
Study group	N/A.	57.4

In all cases but one (study group) the Engineers tended to rate all the methods below average indicating their lower preference for and interest in professional and pedagogical training as compared to the other three professional groups. The other professional groups rate all methods, except lecture, above average and as very important.

The data shows that independent but programmed modes of learning (self-directed learning and correspondence) are strongly favored by the majority (53%) of the professionals in this survey. Formal instruction (attending courses) is the least preferred (32%) by all the professional groups in the survey. The fairly equal distribution of response to self-directed learning (51%) and learning on the job (50%) suggests that

participants attach equal significance to self-instruction and work-oriented education.

Despite the interest of participants in the combined delivery system of self-learning and practical session, professionals in Ethiopia tend to depend on a series of lectures, and pay little attention to practical sessions. Self-directed learning is an important way of expanding educational opportunities for independent learners. It seems that two strategies of self-directed learning that could contribute to Ethiopian continuing education system are *learning exchange* and *learning contract*. The former will allow the learners to be linked up with those who have the skills and interest necessary to help the learner meet his needs. Learning contract is an educational contract which is a negotiated agreement between an instructor and a self-directed learner.

As observed from the findings, the teaching/learning process is dominated by a series of lectures. There is a need to employ a variety of teaching techniques such as demonstration, simulation project-method, work-shop, seminar and study-group. Such pragmatic approaches will enable adult learners to relate their theoretical knowledge to their everyday life experience and practice.

Course centers and providing bodies. As mentioned in the introduction, one of the major challenges of CPE in Ethiopia is the dearth of providing bodies and centers. The sample populations in this study were asked to express their views regarding this issue. The overall pattern of replies suggests that most of the respondents rely mainly on the provision made by higher education institutes. Yet, as documented in the literature of CPE, such limited provision cannot offer adequate educational opportunities to many professionals.

A major aspect of CPE which deserves attention is non-formal education. The need for an expansion of non-formal education is based

on the assumption that it serves as complementary or alternative to the formal system. Moreover, it is flexible and adaptable to change. Hence non-formal education provides greater educational opportunities that can be more need-related, practical and development-oriented than the formal system of CPE.

Attitudes towards current provision. Regarding the attitudes of professionals toward CPE program, the overall pattern of replies provides us with the following important information. First, about two-third of all respondents declare that participation in CPE is useful and valuable. Yet, more than 73.6% claim that CPE programs should be voluntary. Learners in Ethiopia are actually expected to attend designed courses regardless of personal interest and choice. Second, about 40% of the respondents are aware of the fact that the current CPE program are highly structured and centralized. Nearly one-fifth are in favor of cooperatively planned and organized CPE programs while 28% claim that CPE program should be left open for correspondence or self-learning. The reason for the lower interest in self-directed learning seems to be related to the lack of experience and information on such kinds of educational programs.

Barriers to CPE provision and participation. The factors which are reported to be hampering CPE participation and provision are too many and diverse. The major ones, in order of importance, are inadequate facilities and resources (86.6%), lack of systematic planning and organization (79.1), inadequate staffing (70.2%), and inadequate accommodation (69.5%).

Interviews with providers indicate that they are aware of and committed to the government's policy-directive pertaining to CPE. However, they point out the problems in the effective implementation of the policies that arise from a number of barriers related to inadequate quality and variety of educational provision. It has been noted that supportive bodies of CPE suffer from a more severe lack of resources

Institutions of higher education in Ethiopia employ rigid and selective admission criteria to maintain their traditional standards. Providing bodies need to revise and introduce flexible admission policies considering the indispensability of CPE to the successful execution of professional responsibilities. This is especially important given the huge demand for trained manpower in the country and the social responsibility of institutions of higher education to make special efforts to admit candidates from the under-privileged groups.

CONCLUSION

In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, the educational sector needs to develop community-based programs of continuing professional education that are consistent with the basic needs approach of development. The objective realities of the country require intensification of vocational and professional training for human resource development. Professionals should up-date and upgrade their professional practices and competence by undergoing a process of professionalization through continuous life-long education.

However, continuous professional education is beset by many problems. All the concerned bodies, i.e., learners, providers and government agencies, seem to be aware that most of the problems to CPE participation and provision tend to be associated with financial, institutional, and situational constraints and the need for specialized professional trainers that have a full understanding of its principles, possibilities and constraints.

The possible directions of change needed to improve provision include revision of the programs of the University and colleges to include need-related CPE curriculum, expansion of options for non-formal education and self-directed education, adoption of more flexible

than providing bodies, and that the links and cooperation between the two is very casual and often non-existent. Moreover, providers of non-formal education feel that their valuable efforts are not encouraged partly because their courses are unrecognized by the traditional school system.

CPE demands the collective efforts of both providing bodies and concerned government and non-government agencies. It would be naive to expect the university/colleges or any other single providing body of CPE to shoulder all responsibilities. Government agencies, employers, and professional associations should be involved in CPE through close cooperation with higher education institutes. At the same time, the university should assess and recognize the existing in-house training courses and should give the necessary guidance and technical support concerning accreditation of courses and the revision of curriculum. A path breaking example for this is the program of MOE, Ethiopian Air Lines, and Telecommunications Authority. These organizations have combined their efforts and resources with the University and colleges to offer CPE for their professional members.

The shortage of trained manpower is a serious constraint. In Ethiopia, there is no training program for adult educators of CPE. Success in CPE requires staff development programs for the academic and administrative personnel involved. Since most professionals in higher education lack both the pedagogical and specialized training, they find it difficult to meet the needs of experienced trainees both at graduate and undergraduate levels. This implies that, in addition to their field of specialization, professionals in higher education need to be trained in the methods and techniques of teaching and in research design and evaluation in education. There is also a need for training on the content, principles, psychology, and philosophy of adult education and the effective utilization of educational resources.

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schedules of provision, and giving priority to training of the staff of institutions of higher education.

Moreover, there is a need for a coordinating body that stems from two major factors, namely, dependency of CPE programs to the formal education system, and lack of cooperation and coordination in the provision and organization of educational activities, resources and facilities. Coordination of efforts among concerned agencies of continuing education seems to be unavoidable and very essential. In the Ethiopian context, the functions of a national coordinating body may include (i) regularizing communications and promote cooperation between concerned agencies; (ii) arousing awareness of shared purposes and avoiding needless duplication and possible neglect; and (iii) encouraging an adult education movement in which agencies of adult education would plan and work cooperatively at local, regional and national levels.

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